

Zainab, Ex-Christian, USA (part 1 of 2)

Description: A young girl involves herself greatly with Christianity but still feels something missing.

By Zainab

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This is a very long, detailed description of the topics I am most questioned about; my spiritual life, my conversion, my familial response to my conversion, and my future plans in Islam.

"No, a guy did not convert me"

My Spiritual Life:

I have been enamored with God since I was young. Like many children, I would stare into the clouds or stars and wonder who, what, where, why, and how was God. Trying to verify His presence, I would set up quasi-experiments to find proof. For instance, setting a glass on a table, and ask God to move it, to prove His existence. With no result, I would vary the object, time, and tried not watching (maybe God did not want me to see Him move it?). Another time, I tested different methods of prayer to see which ones "worked."

Among many other things, I tried praying on my face, on my knees, standing up, lying down, closing my eyes, having good posture, straightening my fingers, begging Him, offering a sacrifice, i.e., "God if you help me get a bicycle, I will never eat ice cream again." After a while, I realized that if God did what I asked Him to do to prove Himself to me, or if there was a prayer method that guaranteed my desired result, then I would have been God, not He.

I was raised as a Christian, and as I grew up, I would go to different church denominations and ask the ministers how they knew, for sure, that God existed. Now, I would think, that this would be the question they are asked most often, but as it turns out, they are almost never asked this question, and even more surprisingly, for the most part, they do not appear to like being asked this question. Eventually, I met a pastor who was not afraid of this question, who, in fact, loved it, and who enjoyed and appreciated the genuine honesty of a searching soul. He was an intellectual - Rice University - Suma Cum Laude, but, more importantly, he was a highly spiritual individual. He answered every question I ever had, introduced me to many spiritual theories and principles, and helped me transform my prayer life from the childish behavior of asking God for everything, as if my prayers were a holiday presents wish list, into the more mature meditative prayer and follower that listens for God's guidance and follows His direction. My life was blessed by having known both he and his wife.

I began teaching Sunday School to children when I was age sixteen. I love teaching children about God more than any other activity in the world, and believe that through

God, this is my best talent. I have many funny stories about my experiences in teaching, however, if I go into it now, this already too lengthy page will be even longer.

A year later, I was asked to begin Christian Leadership Training. It was a very valuable experience, because besides learning additional worthwhile spiritual principles, I learned what pastors are taught in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the argument for Christianity. This gives me a uniquely strong basis for arguing Islam over Christianity.

The next year, I was asked to serve on a Healing Ministries Team to aid those going through physical, spiritual, or emotional difficulty. I felt very fortunate to serve in this capacity because I was surrounded by the best people, in the best church that I had ever attended. I was much younger and inexperienced than the rest of the group and completely out of my league. Yet I stayed with it, because they possessed a knowledge that I desired. I always wanted to know "what to say," and "what not to say," to those in dire circumstances. I decide that unless the rest of the team figured out that I was in over my head, I was not going to tell them. Once again, I felt my life had been undeservedly blessed by getting to hang out and learn from those I most admired. Sometimes though, since I was not even close to their advanced level, I would look around the room and start thinking of the song from "Sesame Street,"

"One of these things is not like the others. One of these things just doesn't belong."

I also have many funny and interesting stories from working on this Healing Team, but again, it would make this much longer.

At some point, I began to consider my fellow team members - the people I thought the most spiritually elite and wise. Although they were superior to me in every way, I thought to myself that they were not where I would like to be when I reach their age. I perceived a distance from God in Christianity. I discussed this with my pastor, stating that I wanted to develop my relationship with God. He suggested I might try praying more often during the day, mentioning that Muslims pray five times daily which is suppose to aid in this matter. Of course he was not trying to peek my interest in Islam. Yet he did.

I had other difficulties with Christianity. The concept that heaven can only be obtained through having Jesus as your Savior with good and bad deeds having no relevance in the scheme of things, was an idea that always defied common sense to me. Theoretically, in Christianity, a person who sins all day, every day of his life, will go to heaven if he accepts Jesus as his Savior, one second before he dies. The man that does all good, every day of his life, who does not accept Jesus as his Savior in his lifetime, is sentenced to eternal hell. How much sense does that make? There are many additional problems with Christianity, but I will not go into them at this point.

Zainab, Ex-Christian, USA (part 2 of 2)

Description: Zainab finds more in common with Muslims friends than Christians, and finally decides to read about Islam.

By Zainab

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I was also involved in Christian Student Ministries. I always preferred having Christian to non-Christian friends because we thought more alike. And, although I had many nice Christian girlfriends, I also felt a lack of closeness with them because of a difference in opinion as to what constituted Godly living, as far as, dating, alcohol, clubbing, etc. I was constantly asked if there was something wrong with me and made fun of when I turned down invitations to clubs, drinking, etc. It made me feel terrible inside.

One day, I met several Muslim sisters, and I felt an instant kinship, unlike any I had previously held. Like myself, they did not date, swear, drink, and the long list of other common vices. It was such a great feeling to meet others, with whom I held so much agreement about so many matters. I was surprised to learn that there was any other person on the planet so similar to myself. I had no idea such a creature existed.

Since this was the second time Muslims had been brought to my attention, I decided that I should at least investigate Islam, so I called a Mosque and went to it for direction. I was given a copy of the Quran, and so I started to read. Slowly my focus began to shift from Christianity to Islam. At first I stopped teaching the "Christ as Savior" part in my Sunday School lessons, and opted for morality lessons each week. However, soon I was not able to look the children in the eyes when I taught because I felt I was a hypocrite to them and their parents, who were expecting me to be a Christian role model.

Next, during my prayer, I felt that God was guiding me to stop teaching Sunday School, and go to different churches on Sundays and study church growth. For instance, when two churches are located on the same street, why does one have 50 members, and one have 5000 members? At the time it made no sense to me to do this, but I felt strongly urged by God to do this, and I had learned that if you are sure God is guiding you in a certain direction, and you are positive it is God and not your own instinct or desire, than you had better do it if you want to have the best life. I have ignored His guidance in the past and failed too many times. (More funny stories there for another time.)

I did not discuss Islam with anybody, because I felt I was betraying all my Christian family and friends, and I did not even discuss it with my Muslim girlfriends because I did not want my decision to have any pressure applied. Slowly, without my actually realizing it, I began to shift my beliefs from Christianity and towards Islam. It was not a quick or easy transformation, because my whole foundation of life was Christian based, yet, it, nonetheless, transformed.

One day, a Muslim friend at school had asked me what I enjoyed doing when I was not at school. I told her that my very favorite activity was teaching Sunday School. She

asked me where I taught, and I told her I was not teaching anywhere. She asked, if that was my favorite thing to do, why I was not doing it? It was at this point that I realized that had changed, without my even realizing it had been taking place. I knew I would never go back to teaching Sunday School, because I was no longer Christian, but instead, maybe, possibly, Muslim. My beliefs were now solidly Islamic. It was one of the hardest things I ever had to admit to, I guess I was somehow hoping that I would eventually turn back to Christianity so that my life would be easier, but it had not. So I slowly replied to her, that I did not believe in Christianity any more, stunned and sad at this realization. It was very hard to utter those words. She asked why, so I explained that I had been reading the Quran and believed in its contents, as opposed to those contained in the Bible. She asked, "So, are you Muslim?" I said, "I do not actually know what defines someone as a Muslim." She asked me a number of questions about my beliefs, and then told me that I was a Muslim, and that I only needed to convert. I asked how a person converts, so she said you just need to repeat these words after me, and so I did. So, I experienced the death of my Christianity, and the birth of my Islam in a few minutes time. Needless to say, this moment is etched into my brain permanently, InshaAllah [God-willing].

I was so excited, but I had to be positive, that what I thought had happened actually did happen. I did not want to make a wishy-washy decision about this conversion, i.e., be Muslim one day, and Christian the next, Muslim the day after, and back to Christianity, so I made appointments with four Imams to find out exactly what it meant to be Muslim, concluding with the same realization that I was Muslim.

In the following month, I was overwhelmed with the sense that I was home. I felt that what I had been looking for all my life had been found, and for the first time I was home where I belonged. Often, I feel as though I was always a Muslim, but God decided that I best served His interest by being born into a Christian environment, as it places me in a position to serve Him from a much different angle than the born and raised Muslim. There are many things I have to learn from my Muslim brothers and sisters, yet there are many areas where Muslims can learn from those raised as Christian. InshaAllah, I hope I never forget the day that I converted, because once I did, the world suddenly looked different as if everything was suddenly in color. I know that sounds so silly, but that is the only way I know to describe the change I experienced. Things looked different, smelled different, sounded different, etc. I really cannot put it into words.

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