

WILLIAM, EX-JEW, USA

Rating: 4.7

Description: How a typical American discovered Islam through the exceptional character of a close friend.

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My name is William, and I live in a large Midwestern city in the United States. I am a typical American in many ways that are reflected in both my professional and personal lives. Professionally, I am a supervisor with a major police department, and I have been in the military, both active duty and in the reserves for the majority of my adult life. Personally, I live in the suburbs with my wife and child, drive a pickup truck and occasionally wear cowboy boots. I pay my bills, treat my neighbors well, and prior to my reversion/conversion to Islam, I followed my religion in the manner in which I had been instructed. As I said, my life was that of a typical American, with my main concerns being the little details of everyday life that everyone worries about. Little did I know that my religious beliefs would take me out of the "typical" life that I lead, and that they would instead become a major factor in my life, providing me with a sense of peace and completion that only a short time before I would not have thought possible.

My journey to Islam began with my association, and later friendship, with a man named Nasir. I met Nasir through work in the late 1980's, and was impressed with his manners and the way that he treated me. I had met very few Muslims, and I was always a little uneasy around them as I was not sure how they would accept me. Besides having the appearance of a pickup-driving-shotgun-toting-redneck, I was also a Jew, and the combination often seemed to unsettle people. Nasir, however, took everything in stride, and as a result a friendship slowly bloomed. Through Nasir, I really formed my first impressions of Islam and its adherents.

Over the years I watched how Nasir dealt with different situations, and was constantly impressed with the wisdom and patience that he displayed when he was dealing with difficult people or situations. He always took the high road, even at times when I, if I had been in the same situation, would have been tempted to treat the persons differently. If I asked him why he did certain things, he would tell me a bit of wisdom which guided his actions. Most of these, (I realized later), were direct or indirect quotes from the Quran, which he told me not in a proselytizing way, but in a gentle manner as if he were teaching a child the proper way to conduct itself in the world. In fact, prior to reading the Quran, I often marveled at how one person could be so wise and knowledgeable! Little did I know that those guiding principles were written down where I

or anyone else could read them. I realize now how blessed I am that I was exposed to Islam and Muslims in such a positive way.

Around the winter of 2000, I began to have a serious interest in Islam. I read the Quran, but could not seem to fully understand it. Despite this difficulty, I continued to have a nagging feeling that I should continue, and so I studied other books about Islam. I learned a great deal, but in an academic and not in a spiritual way. Again I attempted to read and understand the Quran, and again I had difficulties. I finally resolved to ask Nasir for help, and then the 9-11 incident happened. Suddenly I had a host of new worries, and I put my questions on hold. During this time period, I had a great deal of exposure to Islam, however very little of it was put to me in a positive manner. As a police supervisor, I was constantly receiving warnings about perceived Islamic threats, and as an officer in the reserves I was around people who perceived Islam as a direct threat and Muslims as possible enemies. So, to my shame, I continued to wait and kept my studies on the Islamic world to those areas that directly influenced my professional life.

Then, in the late summer of 2004, that nagging feeling that had persisted suddenly intensified, and I finally asked Nasir for guidance. He told me about the tenets of his faith, and about the nature of the Quran. More importantly, he told me how crucial Islam was to his life, and how strongly he believed in it, not only as the word of God, but as the way in which man was meant to live. He and his brother Riyadh then provided me with booklets about Islam that had answers to many of the questions that I had. With this knowledge in hand, I again approached the Quran, and suddenly found that it was not only readable, but that it made sense! I can only think that either I was not mentally 'ready' before, or that I simply needed the extra input in order to properly understand and process the information. Either way, I read and re-read everything that I had been provided, and then double checked the facts that had been presented to me. The more I read, the more amazed I was.

I found that the information that was in the Quran would have been impossible for Mohammed, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, to have known had he not been a prophet. Not only would it have been impossible for a man of his background and geographic location to have known many of these things, it would have been impossible for anyone of his time-period to have known them. I double checked the dates of many of the modern "discoveries" that had been addressed in the Quran, and was astounded at what I found. Not only did the Quran contain information that was centuries ahead of its time, but it did so with details, many of which could not have been known until this century. I became convinced that Mohammed was indeed a prophet that had been inspired by Allah through his angel. Despite this, I still faced a dilemma. Although I now believed that Mohammed was a prophet, I still was confused about what to do. Everything that I had ever believed was suddenly turned upside down, and I was at a loss for an explanation.

That night I prayed for guidance and understanding. I only believed in one god, but I wanted to know the manner in which I should hold that belief. The prayer was simple,

but heartfelt, and I went to sleep full of hope that I would receive an understanding of the situation. When I awoke, I did so with the feeling that I had experienced an epiphany. Everything was suddenly clear, and I understood how all the things that I had practiced before were simply observances that had been contrived by man in an attempt to follow religious principles that had changed over the millennia. I did not receive any new information or beliefs, but was instead capable of understanding that which I had already learned. I felt exhilarated, happy and at peace, and that morning I said the shahada.

I told Nasir, and he took me to a nearby mosque for the Friday prayers. At the mosque I was led to the front by Nasir, and I told the assembled congregation about why I had come there. Then Nasir and the Iman helped me repeat the profession of faith in Arabic. Although I was a little nervous, the joy I felt upon doing this far outweighed any other feelings that I had. Afterwards, I was welcomed by the majority of the members in a manner that was so welcoming that I can hardly describe it. Most of the congregation shook my hand and welcomed me to Islam, and many of them offered to help me or to answer any questions that I might have. It was a wonderful experience which I will never forget.

In closing, let me say that the feeling of peace that came over me is still with me, and although I am still very early in the learning stages, I am happy and confident that I made the right decision. I am still a redneck-looking, pickup truck-driving, typical American. Only now I am a Muslim American, and with the continued guidance and assistance of people like Nasir and Riyadh, I hope to one day set as good an example for others and they have been for me.

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