

Abdul-Lateef Abdullah, Ex-Protestant, USA (part 2 of 2): How Islam has changed my life!

Description: How Islam has totally changed Abdul-Lateef's life for the better and given him a clear map to this journey of life.

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Being a social scientist by trade, much of my time is spent working on and pondering over the ills and dilemmas of our society. As I learned more about Islam, I came to the conclusion that societal ills are based primarily on unhealthy, dysfunctional social behaviors. Since Islam is a lifestyle focused totally on the most healthy, positive way of conducting our lives in every setting, then it is, and will always be, the only true answer to any society's social dilemmas. With this realization, not only did I decide that Islam was relevant to my everyday life, but I began to understand why it is so different from other religions. Only Islam provides knowledge and guidance for every aspect of life. Only Islam provides a way to achieve health and happiness in every dimension of life - physical, spiritual, mental, financial, etc. Only Islam provides us with a clear life goal and purpose. And only Islam shows us how to live in and contribute to a community, not just talk about it. Islam is what everyone needs, and what so many who have not found it yet, are searching for. It is the path to purpose, meaning, health and happiness. This is because it is the straight path to the source of all the power we could ever need - God.

It was only until I actually became Muslim that I realized just how encompassing our lifestyle truly is. Literally everything we are instructed to do has one underlying purpose - to remember God. It just shows the absolute and divine brilliance of the [religion], in that there is a lifestyle that can show you how to remember your Creator in as simple an act as greeting someone, or getting dressed in the morning, or waking up from sleep. Islam shows us that by constantly remembering God, everything we do becomes focused on Him, and thus becomes an act of worship. From this, our energy, our thoughts, and our actions all become redirected away from unhealthy and useless causes, and focused on the source of all goodness. Thus, we are continuously tapping into His divine strength, mercy and grace. So, by remembering God constantly, we become stronger, better, and healthier in every aspect of our lives.

There were, and still are, aspects of Islam that have proven at least somewhat difficult for me. Nevertheless, I thank God everyday for the ease to which he has allowed me to make the necessary changes in my life so that I can continue to live in America and still be, Insha-Allah [God-willing], a good Muslim. As a white, middle-class American, many of the cultural aspects of Islam are quite different from what I, and those close to me throughout my life, have been used to. In fact, when I finally broke the news to my family that I had taken my *shahada* [testimony of faith] and become Muslim, almost all of their

questions and concerns were related to cultural differences - marriage, social life, family, etc. They were much less concerned about my general beliefs around God and religious practice. For my family, friends, and co-workers, becoming Muslim was not seen necessarily as a negative change, but it has required a great deal of education for them about Islam. In fact, as with my own education, this process of sharing the truth about Islam with them is never-ending because there is no limit to how much knowledge we can acquire, and it is the responsibility of every one of us to share whatever right knowledge we have.

Because acquiring right knowledge is such a critical component to a Muslim's development, having a teacher who has taught me how to apply Islam in everyday life that has made all the difference for me and helped me in managing whatever difficulties I have experienced from my reversion. Having someone knowledgeable you can turn to whenever you have questions is a wonderful support that every new [Muslim] should go out of their way to find. Islam is not a religion that can be rationalized, in the way that Christianity and Judaism have been over the ages. It is a clear path that must be followed exactly as God laid for us through the life of our beloved Prophet Muhammad his companions, and the scholars of Islam.

In this day and age, in this society, discerning the path can often be difficult, especially when we are constantly faced with questions and doubts from people who on the surface may not be hostile to Islam, but whose general lack of faith can have a harmful effect on someone who bases everything they do on their love for God. It is also not easy being in an environment where we are constantly bombarded with sensual temptations which are seen as ordinary, common aspects of everyday life. But when we have the support of a knowledgeable, experienced teacher, who is able to apply the universal teachings of Islam to his life, then the truth becomes clear from error, exactly how God describes in the Quran. From this, we are able to understand how to apply Islam correctly to our own lives, and thus receive God's many blessings. The ultimate test, however, of anyone who claims to have true and right knowledge, is to look at how they apply it in their own lives. If their actions support their teachings, then and only then should we look to them for guidance.

My journey to Islam, although short, has been a life-altering experience. It is one that with every passing day makes me more and more appreciative and thankful to Almighty God. The extent of His mercy can only fully be understood from the perspective of someone who prostrates themselves regularly and submits their will to that of the Creator. This is what I strive for through Islam, and part of what *jihad* is. It is the struggle that we must fight every moment of every day, but one that we love, because we know Who to turn to for support and Who is helping us along.

I look back at my life prior to Islam and reflect on the different ways I sought guidance. I think back to all the different ideas I once had of who God really is, and how we can become close to Him. I look back now and smile and perhaps even shed a tear because now I know the truth. Through Islam, I know why so many people who do not believe have so much fear inside them. Life can be very scary without God. I know,

because I once harbored that same level of fear. Now, however, I have the ultimate "self-help" program. It's the self-help program without the self. It's the path that puts everything in its proper place. Now, life makes sense. Now, life is order. Now, I know why I am here, where I want to go, what I want my life to be, how I want to live, and what is most important not just to me, but to everyone. I only hope and pray that others who have not found the path yet, can feel the same that I do. Alhamdulillah rabbil alameen. [All praise and thanks are for Allah, the Lord and Cherisher of all creation].

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