

Aisha Canlas, Ex-Catholic, Philippines

Description: Her journey from Philippines to Saudi Arabia.

By Aisha Canlas

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My name is Aisha Canlas. Before I came here in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I was a Catholic since my parents are also Catholic.

We went to different churches to pray to God but through man made images. During that time I was asking myself is that the real face of God? How come anyone could know what He looks like? Have they already seen Him?

There is this one place in Manila where there is a mosque. Whenever it was time for prayer and I heard the Adhan, I would close my eyes and feel serene even though I didn't know what it meant. It was like music to my heart.

No one, even I, had known that I will convert to Islam eventually. I applied for a job in Saudi Arabia to give my family a better future.

To be equipped and not to experience a culture shock, I researched things that may help me to get along well while living in a Middle Eastern country.

I researched about the culture, the country as a whole, the language and of course the religion. I really got curious about Islam, that even before I took the plane going here I read things about it.

My conversion was not done in a snap of a finger. I frequently ask my doctors about Islam. Because in my mind they will be able to help me understand more about Islam since they have lived their whole life here in the Kingdom.

It was in January 15, 2008 that I learned that there is a Madrasa or 'Islamic Teaching' in my workplace. That's when I decided to attend the class. I first attended it with my friend and roommate, who is a born Muslim, on January 17, 2008.

All eyes were on me at first, since I was new in class and the only Christian sitting among them. I listened to what our teacher was telling us about Islam, the Quran and about Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, and God.

From then on, I started to really understand Islam. After that I asked permission from my Mum who is in the Philippines to allow me to convert from Catholicism to Islam.

Alhumdullillah (praise be to God), my mother did not oppose. (My father died November of last year). She said she was just afraid that when I convert I would forget them. I said that Muslims have high regards towards parents, especially with the Mother.

It was January 24, 2008 when I made my Shahadah in front of my teacher and other

students. While I was reciting the Shahadah there was heat emanating from me. I can't explain the feeling that time.

The only thing I knew after reciting my Shahadah is that my heart felt light from burdens. At last I found the inner peace I was looking for in my life. Being in Islam is really different.

I was questioned by some colleagues why I decided to enter Islam. I said that I believe that there is no one else to be worshipped than God and one of his messengers is Prophet Muhammad.

Some Christians thought that I betrayed my faith. Yet, in my heart I know that it is not true. Alhumdulillah (praise be to God), I had also experienced Umrah. I went for Umrah last March 5, 2008 and it was really memorable and something special.

It's like I am separated from my problems, my worries and all the bad things in the world. I was really delighted and felt that I can stay there a lifetime praying to God and praising him for all the wonderful things he has done for mankind.

Never had I known that I will be able to see the Kabah in real life. I've seen it in pictures when I was young but to actually see it personally filled me with happiness; and gratefulness filled my heart.

I am attending Madrasa (Islamic Teaching) during weekends in my workplace. As time passes by, I've been learning about Islam. I feel everything will turn out alright as long as my faith with God is intact and keeps on growing stronger.

I hope and I pray to God that I will be able to convince my family to embrace Islam also. I want them to be saved from the wrath on the Day of Judgement.

In my opinion, the best thing a Muslim can do is to lead a life of goodness to be a good example. That gets non-Muslims curious and also helps them realize that the negative stereotypes about Islam are wrong.

I was a very committed Christian, who married a Muslim man. I married him because of his character, because I knew of no Christian man who so demonstrated the teachings of Christ as this Muslim did.

Still, I was determined to prove to my husband that he was on the wrong path and that he should become a Christian. All he did was ask me serious questions about my belief, such as "Where in the Bible does Christ teach that he is God?"

When I found that there is no such place, I began to search more and more. After a lot of research, I became frustrated. I read the English meaning of the Noble Quran (ironically, that my pastor had given to me) in order to better debate with my husband.

Instead, I found a text harmonious with Biblical teachings. I found comfort in the concept of One God. Thanks be to God, we are now a Muslim family.

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