

Richard Leiman, Ex-Jew, USA

Description: How an American computer programmer found peace in practicing the religion of Islam and finally became Muslim.

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As a child, I always had access to a short-wave radio. I used to listen to the BBC World Service about the Middle East. I also loved the music from that part of the world, and I probably was listening to the Quran being recited, but did not know it at the time.

As I grew older, I continued to listen to the BBC World Service. Back then, they had a program called Words of Faith in which they had a five- to eight-minute talk given by a different religious speaker each day of the week representing all the major religions in the United Kingdom. Out of all the speakers, the Muslims were the ones I loved listening to most.

Every time the Muslim representative spoke, I wanted to find out more about Islam. My impression of the religion was that the person who practices Islam is a happy person, not like the mean people portrayed by the American media. I just refused to believe people that loved Allah so much could be like the people portrayed by the media. Because I come from a Jewish background, the thing that united me with Islam was the belief that Allah had no partners.

Work in the United Kingdom

An important time in my life came when I met a real Muslim, but did not know it yet. I was doing contracting computer programming work in New York State when I had a strong urge to visit the United Kingdom.

I visited London and loved it. During my visit, I went to several employment agencies without luck. One of the agencies gave me several trade magazines. When I arrived back in the States, I started to send more CV's to companies and other agencies listed in the magazines. I returned to the United Kingdom because one of the companies wanted to interview me. Then I started to visit more companies and agencies until I landed a position even though I was on a visitor's visa.

The company that hired me applied for a work permit for me and the Department of Employment told me that I had to leave the country in order for the paperwork to be processed. Again, I went back to the States. Another agency obtained a temporary work permit and employed me for a company called LogoTech, which, at that time, was located in Egham, Surrey.

Meeting a Real Muslim for the First Time

Some time after I started working at LogoTech, I found out that my supervisor, Anis Karim, was Muslim. I asked him if he knew how I could get a copy of the Quran. To my surprise, he obtained a copy of the Quran for me within a few days. He also asked me to pledge that I would have a bath before I read from the Quran^[1] and that I would never show it to anyone who might make blasphemous remarks about it.

The next day, I took my morning bath and made breakfast. Then, while eating breakfast, I started to read. Later I found out that "read" is what Allah had the Angel Gabriel instruct our beloved Prophet to do, even though he could not read or write!

Well, words can't describe how I felt when I read just that small portion of the world's most holy book. It took only 10 pages, when, at that point, I told myself that this religion was for me. This occurred around 1990. The more I read, the more I wanted to know, and I loved what I was reading.

At the time, I did not know anything about how to pray or any of the details of Islam. If Anis had invited me to go the masjid in London, I would have gone with him. The only thing I knew about praying to Allah was the prostration position. At the time, I knew that Muslims prayed several times a day, and so I started to do so at night before I went to bed and in the morning when I woke up.

Back to the States Again

When the work permit ran out, I had to return to the States and was unemployed for several years. I visited my father in Huntsville, Alabama, and created a database application for him. I saw that Huntsville was a high-tech cosmopolitan city and decided to try to land a programming position there. My father told me that if I did not get a position, I would have to go back to New Jersey to my mother, who had moved from New York to New Jersey. About a fortnight before I was going to go back to New Jersey, I landed a programming position at a company in Huntsville.

My First Trip to a Masjid

My sister and I were planning a trip to Indonesia because we had a pen pal on the Internet. My sister asked me if I could help her find Islamic jewelry as a gift. At that time I had no idea that there were Muslims in Huntsville.

Then Allah put things into place for me. I remembered that there was a shop called Crescent Imports, which I thought was run by Muslims. It was not. It was run by the group called Nation of Islam. Now here is the strange part that only Allah could have arranged. We spoke to the owner of the shop and told him that we wanted to find Islamic jewelry. He directed us to the Huntsville Islamic Center.

I do thank Allah for having them direct me to the masjid. We went to the building, but there was only one car parked there. I spoke to a man in the car, and he told us that we should speak to the imam about where to find the jewelry. I was still afraid to go into the

building because for me, it was such a sacred place.

At the moment, I remembered one day when I saw a lady at work wearing a hijab. I told her about accepting Islam personally and she said, "Why don't you visit the masjid in Huntsville?" I eventually went back to the masjid after I summed up enough courage to go into that sacred place.

I spoke to the imam, and he invited me to perform salah with the Muslim brothers. This was a turning point in my life. I loved it and started to visit the masjid once a week at night. Then I started to visit it several times a week at night. The urge to come more times was stronger and I now perform most of my prayers at the masjid, except `Asr and Maghrib prayers when I am at work.

I Officially Accepted Islam

In November of 1996, I publicly made Shahadah. At work, I pray Zhuhr and Asr by myself or with other Muslim brothers in a small mosque in my work place. I proudly carry my prayer rug in the hallways at my work in an attempt to get people to ask me what they are. When they do ask me about it, I tell them that I am Muslim and the mats are what I use to pray on. Also, my work area, including my computer, is decorated with Islamic artwork. My background on my computer is usually the Ka`bah or our masjid.

Now that I am a Muslim, there is no turning back to disbelief!

Endnotes:

[1] Although this is not something recommended, this Muslim happened to think so - *IslamReligion*.

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