

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Allah Guides Whom He Wills

The Good, The Bad, The Ugly, The Sublime: Reflections on Coming into Islam

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Introduction/Disclaimer

I would not allow my own story to be told without this brief but important introduction. Personally, I have been suspect of the glory that people receive for their personal struggles. I could never stand the deification that Olympians and other people received when they became famous because of their life. There are millions and millions who have put forth just as much effort in life but have received nothing of the worldly fame that others achieve. If hearing someone else's story is inspiring to make someone reflect and think or act differently for their own benefits, walhamdulillah. But we are all human beings, we all have a story, do not think that anyone is better just because it seems the planets are aligning in their favor or any of that drivel, because maybe Allah will make me a disbeliever tomorrow. My motive for writing this, and Allah knows best, is not for any seeking of glorification from my peers except that I have realized that my story has a tendency to inspire others and make them realize yet again the power of Allah and it is in that purpose that I have recorded the details. If for any reason other than this, then my work was in vain. I considered not signing this, but then people may have thought there was embellishment, now if anyone is curious furthermore, then can ask me, Chris Caras, if what I said is true.

The story of actually reverting to Islam is incredibly short. The only way to grasp an understanding and appreciation of its affect on my life is however much longer and hopefully worth your time to read. I will therefore mention the events and my thinking throughout. Just as how any book about Islamic history begins with stating the situation of Pagan Arabia, I will follow that example.

It was not my intention to slander anyone, so I have only used names when reasonable. And I don't want to slander Christians. I find that on the whole, practicing Christians are a sincere and loving people. Just as Allah says in the Qur'an: "...nearest among them in love to the Believers will you find those who say, 'We are Christians'. Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant." (Ma'ida 82).

I wrote this as a testimony to my spiritual progression. Some of the intricate details of particular incidents are painful to write, but I wanted to make this statement as "close to home" as possible when conveying the details leading up to my recent living. When people ask me why I came to Islam, I give them the short or medium version of the story. This is the long version. I wrote it partially for my brothers and sisters and to add

another story to the infinite uncollected group of testimonies which yield inspiration and need to be heard. I wrote it partially because I have wanted to for a long time, but now I finally had the motivation and a firm footing on my future goals. I wrote it for my family that watched it happen but may not have known what was going on in my head throughout the journey. I wrote it for anyone else curious on how I discovered the purpose of life.

When I now feel my life could either continue in strive for higher and higher virtue and good deeds or even end now in my present state of iman (faith), I can assuredly say that the single greatest thing that ever happened to me was to become a Muslim. It is the one huge event within which was a domino effect of events that put me on the straight path.

1-Background

I was born into a Christian family (predominantly Lutheran) and have lived all my life in the Midwest. My upbringing was not overbearing in any way. My folks always wanted what was best for me. Christian values and teachings weren't forced but stressed. I considered myself a "good Christian" even in the darkest days of my life. I always felt I had a faith in the teachings despite next to nil knowledge of the Bible. I never questioned the authenticity of the Bible. If I had question regarding the "sense" of it, the answer was always "the Bible is not a science book". And I accepted that.

I enjoyed going to the large youth group meetings where kids voluntarily came to worship God. I never enjoyed church and really only cared about the sermon and communion.

That is where my standing with Christianity was. It is not my intention to slam a group or person, but it is of tremendous necessity to expose my leanings with my previous faith. None of the above "grievances" (I use quotations because they never really bothered me) were a prelude to any doubt about Christianity. They were small things that made no difference to my embracing Islam.

In the middle of my freshman year at high school I begun the deep plunge into major depression, paranoid schizophrenia, psychosis, and maybe some other things. It was brought upon by the coming together of a bunch of little things that make every object, cosmic force, and many people seem like "the world is against you". Between minor high school political defeats and a tremendously frustrating golf game, I rapidly started losing control.

I was outwardly calm, but inwardly hateful. Hatism became my new doctrine. I even classified different kinds of hate and declared mine superior and I thus hated the other forms of hate. There was a lot of reckless hate which needed a stronger ideological doctrine. In this search, I discovered Adolf Hitler. I cultivated an intense love for this man and eventually **believed** he was incarnate within me. I believed that I was the

greatest and most important person alive. I wanted to rule the world with an iron fist and establish religious conversion camps all over.

I then started the search for philosophy. Though I dreadfully hated reading philosophical writings, I was still fascinated. But I refused to read anything by an atheist but still tried to center around what Hitler read (not easy).

A need for clarification: I never became an anti-Semite or neo-Nazi. I liked the Nazis, but would never associate myself with them. I admired Hitler, not so much his followers. I didn't hate the Jews, but I disliked them and had an intense grudge, but I never considered myself an anti-Semite. In fact, my psychiatrist was half Jewish. Nevertheless, in Hitler was my greatest passion in life.

Meanwhile, the onslaught of life was taking its toll. School seemed like a prison with bars of insolence. I couldn't stand the walls, the classes, even my friends. We could have no work and watch a funny movie and I would be in misery. I was well on my way to becoming the next Columbine kid. And in my mind, I had done it a thousand times.

During class one day I sat there thinking...is this the moment? What do I do? I couldn't take it, and no longer trusted myself. I decided to go to the office and call home sick. After an emotional ride home and phone conversation with my doctor I admitted myself into the adolescent psych ward that Friday night.

It was really a nice experience. Talking in a confidential group completely opening ourselves up was nice. After seeing a psychologist and psychiatrist for almost a year at my own volition, opening up to people about the deepest and strangest secrets of my life was never a problem. I even made a couple friends. I also found another Christian zealot among them. After 10 days and a few experiments with medication I was put into a partial hospitalization program (PHP) but could now live at home.

It was only apparent now that my medication still had not been tinkered to the right accommodation. The reason for my "recovery" was simply that I felt a new purpose had been found in my life. Watching the two towers fall one Tuesday morning in the psych ward filled me with what I felt I needed: purpose in life.

Within the year leading up to this I had decided to join the Marine Corps. I felt I needed pride, or at least that's what I told people and it eventually became true in my mind. Originally, I wanted to join the service so that I could die for a cause and not have to worry about the risk of temptation to suicide. My first evening home was September 17, 2001. The first place I went was the Marine Corps recruiter's office. Apparently, they had talked to my father earlier and refused to let me join since I didn't have a GED or high school diploma. The same evening I left the ward, my source of hope was crushed. I still went to PHP for two more weeks.

During this time, I quit my job at a local country club. I couldn't stand the people there. I would come home crying. This really should have been a sign that I wasn't

better, but it had been so long since I knew what “better” was. I suppose joy was a lost emotion and that I merely thought I was better.

I refused to go back to school. But on the upside, the school problem was solved via home-bound teaching. The superintendent’s wife, and the physics teacher would come to my house and give lessons. Being at home also gave me the opportunity to go to a local library quite often.

2-The Coming of Islam

I must mention, that prior to Islam, I did not drink, smoke, do drugs, or condone premarital sex. Those simple restrictions really weren’t changed by becoming Muslim. And as you’ll see, it took a while for me to really be changed by Islam.

I believe the first time I ever heard of the existence of a religion called Islam was in sixth grade in a rural Illinois grade school. Our class was later divided up into five groups each assigned to present one of the five major religions. My group was given Hinduism (and I have to add that despite the rowdy composition of our group, we did the best). Although not really learning anything about Islam, this project remained among my favorite assignments in my academic career. On a side note, that year, we “analyzed” the Israeli-Palestinian debacle in which the class divided up (I was made a Palestinian). The answer seemed pretty clear to me. ☺

It would not be until high school when my ears would hear of Islam again. This was only from hearing a brief mention by a classmate about Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) being acknowledged in Islamic books. And after those 20 seconds of mention, the subject of Islam drifted away from my sight and hearing for a little while.

President Bush assured us that Islam was a religion of peace, but newspaper editorials spoke otherwise. I was a little curious, but that interest fell to the back of my mind. Sometime in mid October I went to the library again looking for more philosophy. I should say I never got past page 20 in a book about philosophy. It gave me a headache, but I was still enveloped in it because it’s what a lot of smart people do.

I did not set out to study Islam. Despite any facets of my life that might have led to a desire to understand Islam, it never became a priority for me. Nonetheless, peering over the shelves I discovered that beautifully bound Book. “The Noble Qur’an”. At first I was confused: is there a difference between the Qur’an and the Koran? Still, I thought it would be a good conversation topic and perhaps achieve some kind of status among the intellectual community if I had read the Islamic Holy Book. So I checked it out and brought it home.

Still, I was a good and strong Christian. The first thing that fascinated me was in an introduction, emphasis was placed on the proper care of the Qur’an. I had never seen this on any Bible or textbook in my life which made me respect it immediately. So I read

the first seven ayat of the Qur'an (appropriately nicknamed by Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) "The Mother of the Qur'an"). I had never read truth summed up so majestically and simply as I had in those first seven verses. I was paralyzed with intrigue. And apparently, Muslims said this every single time they prayed. As Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said that Allah did not reveal in the Taurat or Injeel (Torah given to Moses or Gospel given to Jesus (Peace Be Upon Them)) anything like the Mother of the Qur'an (Surah Fatiha, The Opening).

I held off any further readings for a couple days, but when I returned, I read ayat after ayat of truth and power. I felt as though within my hands and before my eyes were the greatest words to have come over me. I was excited and remember reading some of it to my grandma. But it was when I read about accountability being judged after being exposed to clear truths. I felt that I had been exposed to this and did not want to live my life trying to assure myself excuses for denial.

Still, I sought the counsel of a trusted friend who had visited me while in the hospital, the Greek Orthodox priest, for deterrence on this tremendous decision. He mentioned to me they learned very little about Islam, and he told me the five pillars and that "Jesus rose, Muhammad didn't." I have always found that whenever there was some kind of problem, there was a way to quell that via some teaching or rule of Christianity. There wasn't this time, and honestly, I was satisfied with this. The day before, I had gone to the Greek Mass feeling guilt and worry over whether or not Allah would approve of it.

I came from the meeting and I believe my family may have had some prior warning to this. I speculated that maybe the Priest had called them to tell them, but it doesn't matter. I had met with the reverend a time or two before to talk about my own concerns on various things in life, but this time my parents asked what we talked about and I told them that I was intensely interested in becoming a Muslim. They *seemed* okay with this. Allah knows that it took me a lot of deliberating on how I should tell them.

My mom stressed me to do a little research before making this decision. So I read an encyclopedia article or two. My mind was already set. It did not really hit my mother until one Thursday night in which we went to a Christian college fair. I originally wanted to go to this but now only if the schools tolerated Muslims. That itself was a disagreement with mom but we went anyway. On the way home I said reiterated my reasoning for not wanting to go to a Christian college and that's when it started. A desperate and respectable appeal was made that the Nazis were Christians (debatable). I had retreated to my room for a bit and that night I eventually saw my mom crying.

That night I went downstairs with a bottle of aspirin and jug of water seeking to kill myself. I sat at a desk with a small light on thinking. I crept up by the staircase hoping to see a sign of life for help before I went down hoping never to wake. My dad came to make his nightly rounds and this was when I told him my suicide plot and the three of us had a talk.

That night, we came to terms with each other based on tolerance and accepting that it is common to “question organized religion”. But as I said before, I didn’t really question anything, simply discovered truth of the most important kind. The day after I called the Islamic Center of Peoria and Imam Abu Usama instructed me to come that Friday night and I took the shahada on October 26, 2001.

I had always liked the presence of the Christian youth at youth group meetings, but this was something else. I shook many hands that night, and then was immediately assigned a mentor to get me on my feet. I had **overwhelming** support offered by one of the higher-ups as well. I came home, took a shower, went back and learned how to pray according to the way of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

3-And So It Begins

I don’t believe you will ever here anyone say that they came to Islam and did not face hardship. And in the history of Islam, I don’t think there has ever been anyone who didn’t face hardship, more than any, Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). This is where my story *as* a Muslim really begins.

My first visit to a mosque as a Muslim was mixed. I enjoyed it, but it retrospect, my introductory speech probably sounded odd. In it, I spoke of suicide, and based on a dare, I told a Chinese racist joke and then inquired about the Bears vs. Packers game.

I had always been a likable person, even during my previous hitlerian stage in life. My friends were not very religious and were fairly open minded. I had absolutely no trouble in those relationships. However, a Jehovah’s Witness friend I met at the psych ward would not return my e-mails, nor another Catholic friend on the internet.

An accurate way of describing my relationships as of late comes with a similitude: Are Muslims ready for America OR should the question be is America ready for Muslims? If you are a friend, should you be happy that I am at peace with my endeavors and strive to meet my Creator? God forbid there exist a people whose spirituality propels them to do more than smile, shake hands, look good on camera. My only current frustrations come from being a Muslim in front of people who don’t understand the concept of true faith or have their own philosophical meanderings about God to justify their own way of life. People take offense when you follow the example of a perfect person. How could *anyone* be perfect if he doesn’t conform to *their* idea of perfection.

I don’t remember how my psychiatrist reacted; it would have been undutiful if he openly condemned my reversion. And my tutor was very surprised and found it unbelievable. She thought I was telling a joke.

My family did not tell a lot of people at first. I don't think they were embarrassed but, respectively, they did believe that my actions were part of a phase and that I would eventually leave Islam.

My problems just came from learning and understanding the various facets of Islamic life. They were small, but eventually they culminated along with my medication deficiencies.

One of the brothers who gave me frequent instruction had a questionable approach and one time I came home and cried. I think that was the only time I ever felt there was a chance I could leave Islam. I was so used to the message my former religion watered down, I never saw the other side of the coin. It took me a little bit to come to terms with it all. This is particularly speaking of the Law of Equity. I have always had, and still have the non-violent approach to personal physical harm.

However, I learned that Ali bin Talib (May Allah be pleased with him)'s baby was killed because a servant accidentally spilled boiling water on her but he forgave her without punishment. And that there is greater reward for forgiveness among others despite what is their God-prescribed right.

Another difficulty was whenever Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was described, people always said that he was the greatest this, the greatest that and it made me skeptical. After all, I still thought that the greatest speaker of all time was Adolf Hitler (he, in a small way, was still around in my life). I once said that if Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) went to a bowling alley, bowled a strike, then left, he'd be considered the greatest bowler ever. But in time, as I came to learn more about...everything, I realized that this man was in fact the greatest at everything that truly mattered in this life.

I was very determined in my early progress. However, the learning rate slowed dramatically when I had two bad car accidents. November 2001 and the end of January 2002. I totaled my white Corolla each time but without a scratch neither to my own self nor to the vehicles of my faultless victims. Some would say that I was going to the mosque both times. This is true, but I would say that I went to the mosque *all* the time. Shouldn't Allah protect me? I volunteered to go to the hospital both times for chest pains, but there wasn't a scratch or bruise. Note: optimism in your own calamities is a side-effect of Islam. That quality was only beginning to manifest, but my real worry concerning the accidents was the insurance, and being able to get to the mosque.

But another "night" crisis occurred. I had a discussion with my folks about Prophet Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) and his not dying on the cross. I ran out of information and my own lack of knowledge with going into uncharted waters like this humiliated me to an unordinary degree. It was like explaining creationism to an evolutionary biologist based on common sense and a paragraph you read. In the middle of the day, I swallowed handful after handful of aspirin. I was given a ride to the student mosque that night and had a great time. I began to regret my move, which I had told to

no one until I slipped a disturbing note declaring myself free of any blame for anything I had ever done beneath my parents' doors. At one point I entered my father's room and watched him sleep for a few minutes.

I waited in bed that night hoping to fall asleep and die, soon. I was up all night. I had actually done it this time. There were many minor attempts that I made as a sort of "cry for help" but they amounted to nothing. This one was the biggest and gutsiest. At around 6 am, my father came in my room confused and we cried together. My mother took the stern route and defended herself from my unrightful accusations. There were many things learned that morning that forego explanation. We had breakfast together. At this time, the aspirin had dulled my hearing, and we went to the hospital where I threw up a bunch. It was then that I truly regretted my attempt.

I remember in those days of dark depression, I could not think of anything else than dying. Even if not actively trying to kill myself at every turn, it is always on one's mind. In my case, I feared suicide. I was afraid that I was not ready for the ill turns of life and that if a gun or knife were near-by, I would without thought do something irrational to myself or others.

In all that anguish of depression, I had felt that I was alive for 1,000 years of misery and I wished it to end. I always frowned on the kind of suicide that was in avoiding responsibility (ironically, Hitler's reason), but championed the one in which one was just tired of existing without any real reason for leaving this life. It was the former, more despicable reason (if one could be better than the other) that I made that genuine attempt.

This second stay at 8 West was not fun. But under the guidance of new medication, my condition, more or less dramatically improved. And, shortly thereafter, Adolf Hitler took a back seat in my life. I made a few salat (not many) while up there but I did encourage my roommate to read a small book about Islam and teach him a little of my imperfect knowledge. But it's a little tough to explain how religion changes people when you just tried to kill yourself. However, anyone around my attempted suicide (family) will remember my strong statements that Islam has nothing to do with this and that it was my source of happiness and brotherhood.

4-Another New Beginning

I may have become a Muslim overnight, but I did not learn about how Islam guides every aspect of your life for a time. Coming off Hitlerism, it took a while to shake out the cobwebs of my head. At 8 West, I was pretty open in explaining my idea of conversion camps when I was a Christian. And the second time I was in 8 West, I was frustrated that everyone in the world was not a Muslim. Very soon after, things rapidly took correct form.

This visit to 8 West marked an end to the life stage of “uncertainty”. Becoming a Muslim brought about a minor stage of enlightenment and gradual abandoning of flawed doctrines. This long week in February brought about the stage of focus. I was going back to school for a WW2 class and would return full-time my senior year. I still didn’t like school, but I was much more tolerant.

-Summer of 2004

The greatest overall changes in my life came about in the summer of 2004. By the end of my first year at Knox, I had likely attended the Friday khutba and salat the most. Because of this, and that I had made my future schedule free for this, I was made the student imam despite my infancy of knowledge.

“When Allah wants good for someone, He increases them in understanding.” –Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi waSallam)

During that summer, I did a lot of reading, praying, and seeking of right guidance in my future. My parents can attest to this. During the process, I sold 5 CD’s of mine to buy a cassette converter so that I could listen to a Qur’an CD in my mother’s car (I had started driving again this summer after 2 years). Because I was going to an Islamic convention with many books and such, I sold the rest of my CD’s. I stopped listening to music, and watching movies out of my own time. I loved it. I stopped wasting time.

I had started reading again—a lot! I did this in 5th grade but stopped out of disgust for the school’s reading curriculum. But now, I would not concern myself with books of no benefit. I’m reading because I could die tomorrow. And I have not stopped reading. I take a tremendous amount of joy and satisfaction from reading anything which increases my knowledge and understanding of Islam.

And I have begun writing again. In early High School I wrote a few hundred pages of “id writings”, my own philosophical babble and fantasies on life. But I no longer write for myself. Like before, I can’t stop writing, but now it’s for the sake of others and for the sake of what I know and understand to be Truth.

That summer had begun with a month-long cloud in my head. Not quite a headache, not quite a cold. It was regarding my focusing of political efforts. Ever since junior high, I wanted to go into politics and be the president. As Islam took supremacy in my life, I needed to find a niche in politics to suit that. I couldn’t find any. I finally decided to leave politics. The cloud in my head dissipated. I then began to consider an Integrated International Studies program (international stuff, minus the politics). But recently, I have realized that my place in life is with Islam.

-Foothold of Faith

In my own observations and studies, I have come to the conclusion that Islam has an answer to everything in your life and in your world. And that every act has an explanation and origination that came over 1400 years ago and has never been modified. And that Islam is the only religion that is perfectly in cooperation with proven science (and as Muslims know, proven science has learned from Islam). And it is the only religion consistent with the other religions. I'm saying this because when I became a Muslim, I didn't have any grievances with Christianity. But understanding the inherent perfection of Islam, if I was not a Muslim, I would have to become an atheist because nothing else could ever come as close and I would thus be following an imperfect doctrine. But because of the unexplainable occurrences throughout my day and life I know that there is a God, that angels exist, that jinn exist, that there is a guidance for us from the Highest source, and I see no reason not to adhere to it.

At the time I embraced Islam, I really couldn't understand my emotions, but now it was clear to me. There is no true guidance without Allah. There are numerous psychological reasons in which I could have been led to Islam. I have considered all of them. Even if one of them was that "seed" of truth; it is foolish to believe that those emotions and feelings were not stirred up within me but by God. This is only for the cause of putting me on the long road to self-preservation via undisputable truth, wisdom, and light. For this, it really is impossible to thank Allah enough for this tremendous favor. It stirs tears in my eyes every time I consider the personal monumental scope in which He has helped me above the many others who have not received such guidance.

I am reminded of His Greatness every single day. When I look at the clouds at sunset are times I recognize more than any, His Handiwork. Through Islam, I have recognized the purpose of all creation. Even in the bees and insects, which I used to hate, I now smile when I see them go to work.

-Regarding Medication

There are no doubt people who will link my personal recovery to my medication, but I say it is to Allah, whose Will has put this medication in my path if indeed it has made a difference. And during that summer I went off one of the pills, but because of an absurd lack of sleep, I had to go back on.

I have my own testaments to the power of Faith over medication in detailed observations in the responses to my calling for Help. I will share a couple of them.

During my first year at Knox, I came home in winter and started into a depression once again. I was hungry for the prayers that I did not completely fulfill during school. After coming back to the daily salat and my sincere du'a (supplication), things changed for the better in the span of a couple of days. Then, I went back to school for winter term and without prayer and depression began again. I came home for spring break, prayed, and I was given a new prescription. Allah helps us through ways that we don't entirely comprehend, but for us believers, it is enough simply to know that He helps us.

Also, another time at school, I remember being about to do laundry and something just hit me. I was overwhelmed with an unbelievable despair for no purpose. It was a feeling I recognized from long ago. Before seeking medication, before seeking anything, I sought Allah. With sincerity, I was feeling content again in an hour. Such feelings once brought me into the psych ward from school.

When Muslims say that the du'a is the weapon of the believer, we are not saying this out of jest. Sincere prayer has this indescribable ability to change things, if not then than later. But ultimately, only Allah knows what is best. This is why some people who appear to be in the most miserable conditions in this life are the most inwardly content. When something ill happens to them, it is only said that Allah has willed it, and that it is expiation for sins. Because of this relationship, I actually feel invincible. I'm not going to do something irrational and jump in front of a train, but if something bad happens to me that I did not consciously bring about, then I am undaunted in knowing that if Allah did not intend for it to happen to me, then it would not have happened.

-More Aspirations

I have always wanted to believe that I was destined to some kind of greatness. I still have that romantic notion. I can honestly tell you, that I have achieved that kind of self-awareness to truth that is in its own right, greatness.

Life is not over, and by no means am I done with my study for Truth. My next challenge is being able to give it to others, Muslims and Non-Muslims alike.

With non-Muslims, I feel prepared, so long as they ask the questions first and with an open mind to understanding the methodology of a highly criticized, highly misunderstood, and continuously growing group of people. With Muslims, my own experiences give a kind of understanding to others. But I want to go a step further and reach a greater level of knowledge for my own self and for the benefit of those who are within this brotherhood as well.

No doubt, I want to live a long life, but only for the sake of Allah and to live as is most pleasing to Him and spread the Word and Truth. If I die this second, I am content to be firmly planted on the right path despite my infancy in this deen (way or life) and my aspirations for a future in helping others.

-Thanks For Nothing

I let Hitler go a while ago, but it was some time before I formally declared my hatred and renouncement of everything that he is, was, represented, and wrote. Not until the summer of 2004 when looking for more things of mine to sell. I came upon *Mein Kampf, Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, and *Adolf Hitler* (Toland). Ripping it apart

would be time wasted, and burning them would do to it too much honor. I had to ask my parents permission first, since; after all, they were not my books. I then threw them in the garbage to rot with the filth. Those words were poison, and wasted too much of my mind and life and I couldn't let another fall to the same.

On the greater part, it was an inward corruption rather than outward. I did the haircut and tried to grow the moustache, but I kept most of my beliefs to myself. There is no doubt some surprise about my intense love for this man. Even despite my candidness, I didn't want anyone to think I was odd.

I can't easily put into words the emotions I now have regarding Adolf Hitler (my new, more appropriate name for him). But when I came upon those books on the shelf, and glanced at all the underlines and notes I took, I was instantly saddened. In the way that I did not do this to myself, but Adolf Hitler did this to me.

In a famous movie, Forrest Gump, Forrest and Jenny are walking along the old road talking of nice things and Jenny sees her old house. It is abandoned and falling apart. She remembers the horrors that took place there and is immediately filled with a torrent of emotions of helpless regret and futile anguish. She wanted to destroy it. Unfortunately, she only had some sandals and a few rocks.

Looking back, I remember that I called myself a good Christian throughout the Hitlerian stage. I'm not sure why. I believe I once was, but when I began to mold my hate, that deteriorated, and I transformed into this hodge-podge of hate with religion as sort of a backdrop as a self-reassurance.

-Family

One last point that no doubt comes to mind of those reading is my relationship with my family. As I said, with that first night before my reversion, we reached reconciliation. My family did not completely encourage nor condemn my growth as a Muslim, respectively. A week later, they were invited to the mosque for a dinner. After meeting the people and getting to know my new friends, particularly my mentor, they were no doubt pleased that I had not fallen into a group of bad influence.

The very first time I went to the mosque, I didn't have any idea of what would be there. I did not know if it would be black supremacists, Arab supremacists, old men, angry youth. I had no idea. I came to the mosque and sat in my car for a minute. I saw a man (later learned to be an Egyptian professor of Business at Bradley University). He led his wife to one door and went into another and so I followed him. He was the first Muslim I ever knowingly met. I say knowingly, because I found out there was a Muslim at my high school I was well-acquainted with but did not know he was a Muslim. My fears were eased when I sat down and saw a small group of people of many ethnicities and "colors" line up for prayer.

My parents saw that same unity in their visit. This was the first and most important part of acceptance with my new following. The support and brotherhood in guiding me along was no doubt what followed, and seeing the manners of my brothers was a tremendous addition to this acceptance in my decision on their behalf.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, one of the 10 commandments given to Moses (Peace Be Upon Him) is to honor your parents. If you think about it, that says very little. It was not until hearing the examples of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and his guidance on this issue that I actually could grasp the meaning and practice of this decree by Allah. Until these clear cut examples by the Messenger, I didn't believe it would be possible to grasp it. The hadith, explaining the property of a man is the property of his father. Or the hadith that you should always seek to please your mother three times before your father once. The hadith showing the great duty to one's mother for bearing one in the belly. The hadith that before joining the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)'s campaigns, before asking about one's religion or experiences, they were first asked who is taking care of their parents.

But none of this means anything without the practice. And I like to think that as these great truths came to my view, and seeing the determination in my friend in obeying his mother, from naming his daughter to waiting for the second she would need help on the other side of the world is a testament to the actual realization of this commandment. Even at the mosque and I was being taught something, if I mention my folks wanted me home some time or other they told me to go though I'd rather stay. I have made an effort to honor this and hope it is sufficient, but I am not the one to ask.

I have always loved my family. I feel that my respect for them has increased at a time in one's life when others are shaky. I may be at school and hear someone say something to their parents on the phone and mean something completely different. I don't know what to say about that. I can't conceive of any valuable words of guidance to give to those people that they wouldn't scoff at or ignore. My relationship with my family never declined as a result of Islam.

Before Islam, with depression, I had grievances with my family. But this never turned into any defiance. They have always been an absolutely tremendous hold of support throughout depression and reversion to Islam. Most people can testify that when they are upset with a loved one, it stirs them inside and they eventually confront that to resolve the disagreement. It is the same in my family.

The one problem, and a big problem it was, was due to my own ignorance in knowing how to deal with the Christianity of my parents in the context of my own enlightenment. It is one thing to know the truth, but to understand its backing and how to propagate it was something I hadn't acquired by February 2002. It was never a problem until that discussion on the Christian doctrine of crucifixion.

In my further understanding of the knowledge and the conduct and observations about interfaith relations, there is no uncertainty: voluntarily exposing ill parts of another

will bring nothing better. The best way to preach Islam without an in depth dialogue is simply to reflect the manners and morals that define Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)'s example that we need to follow and the guidance of the Qur'an. "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), "to you be your religion, to me be mine" (109:6).

As a Muslim, my parents have taken a different kind of priority in my life. They have been raised up many degrees. Naturally, if they were Muslim, many other parts of our lives would come together in a never before experienced harmony. But only Allah has the power to bring people into Islam. If I am to be an instrument in doing so, then all Praise is due to Allah. But hope and prayers will never cease.

-What Attracted Me to Islam?

I have already said that the Qur'an was the sole lure that brought me into Islam without any outside advice or encouragement. And there are many psychological aspects which may have played a part which the creative mind could piece together. And that the indirect catalyst may have been September 11th. But what *kept* me as a Muslim since I entered with so little knowledge? Well... it was the way that they lived by their faith.

I had once spoken to the Greek Orthodox priest about my grievance with the fact that Christians didn't act very Christian.

When I go to the mosque, those who are there want to be there. They are all smiling, friendly, mentioning Allah a lot and competent of their religion. There may be those who don't want to be there, but this is specifically addressed in the Qur'an many times.

And when I come to a brother for advice, they don't give me some philosophical deduction based on something they inherently have little knowledge of. I could go anywhere for that. But instead is mentioned a verifiable quote and example from the life of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) which is directly applicable to the situation in question. And when Muslims don't know something, they don't fumble around thinking of what sounds right (which may be right), but they say "I don't know".

When you hear a scholar or imam give a speech, they use tons and tons of Qur'anic quotes and statements from Prophet Muhammad PBUH in a flow which reflects the general topic and how it directly applies to the smallest details of living. I have already mentioned before about "Honor Thy Parents", but that is one touch of a large multitude of examples in which Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) sheds light on how we are to obey the commandments of Allah.

The guidance is not from a friend, not from a teacher, not from a scholar, it is direct from the Messenger of God! Not as a bit of inapplicable wisdom with lots of meaning but little practice, but examples from about different interactions between the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) and the followers. When one hears the wisdom of the

other prophets (Peace Be Upon Them) or even of some ancient philosopher, it sure makes sense, but how can it really affect you without being able to visualize it.

You can get wisdom from many places, but the best and most appropriate wisdom which bears the greatest reward from its application comes from Allah and His Prophet.

This does not mean that buddy support without speaking only hadith (teachings of the Prophet) and ayat (literally “signs” or verses from the Qur’an) are the sole of discourse. Apart from my mentor, one particular example of tremendous support was from a good friend online whom I had met during the break of Christmas of 2002. This person was on the other side of the world, and the support from her cannot be added with a calculator, only the heart. Throughout the hardships, counsel was taken from and given to. Our parallel experiences testify to the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)’s sayings of “When Allah wants to do good to someone, He gives them trials”, and “The similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affliction, fellow-feeling is that of the body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches due to fever and sleeplessness.”

This kind of aspect of brotherhood...not invented by scholars, but greatly stressed in the Qur’an are what make being among Muslims different from being among any other group.

There are many other things which build someone’s faith in Islam, be it the scientific facts or hidden miracles of the Qur’an, be it the preservation of the Qur’an, be it the numerous prophecies about Prophet Muhammad PBUH in many holy books and the others which were made by him which have come to pass, or be it the tremendous “philosophy” and thought process Islam instills. But I became a Muslim without any of that, and I’m very thankful for that. Because no other book can completely revolutionize someone’s life with such a convincing manner of saying “I’m God and this is what I’m saying...” with less than 250 verses. Not even the Bible, because I believe if the Bible were read objectively, people could sort out the truth from what isn’t and come to the “Islamic Conclusion.”

However, an important thing for me to remember throughout life is despite the manner of my reversion, it does not mean I’m destined for some kind of greatness (especially since I used to be a narcissist). I hope I never forget that I can screw up anything and everything. I also fear showing off. I would like to excel in Islam, but just as Jesus says in the Bible when someone calls him good “Why call me good, there is only One that is Good, and if you will enter into life, keep the Commandments.”

-Conclusion

There are many religions out there. Each one has its own promise. Some offer ‘salvation’, others bring ‘inner peace’, others ‘world domination’ and others try to make sense of the world for your comfort. Islam is nothing like any of that. Islam pretty much says that this is the truth of the world with which you live in, you can either accept it and

strive accordingly to meet its Creator or you can be in denial and face a less favorable meeting with your Lord whether you acknowledge it or not. Whether it is arrogance that holds people back from accepting Islam or fear of ridicule, the Truth of Islam is held deep within the hearts of every human being.

By the end of the summer of 2004, I started to realize and apply all the understanding that had come to me in the last 2+ years. There is so much that can be said on this, but in short: if you find truth, you know it's truth, it survives the tests of truth, and it was meant to be followed, there is no reason not to make a sincere effort (or even lifelong quest) to attain that kind of righteousness in your own way of living.

When I think back to the tremendous scope of my depression, it really doesn't bother me, in fact I laugh about it. I am here, now. And I think this is good. Maybe it was all a training ground for the future. Without trying to be arrogant, many people go their entire lives without experiencing what I experienced in my own mind in the span of a couple of years. It was really more than I could handle. But even if I hadn't been "saved" in such a way (I use quotation marks because you'll hear "saved" stories from people who enter into *any* faith), I like to hope I'd still be trying to do what I'm trying to do in life.

As of now, I am beginning the slow but focused process of devoting myself to the knowledge and understanding of Islam so that I can implement and give the message to others. My story as a Muslim is far from over (I hope), but the story of my coming into Islam is finished.

I'm a long way from attaining that kind of perfection in my actions, but my mind is already there, which may or may not be a good thing. I have a tendency to jump headlong into something without entirely understanding. On the other hand, I know **exactly** what I'm "getting myself into" and it makes me happy. Happy to be seeking the kind of righteousness in which the greatest people who ever walked the face of this earth, the prophets and messengers of God, embodied in their thinking, speaking, and relationships with others. Though no one bore as many trials as the prophets and the pious, I feel a tremendous inner-happiness to be aspiring along that same path and so when any adversity comes to me then it is a good sign.

It would be a lie to say I knew exactly what I was getting into when I said *Ash-hadu anla ilaha ill-Alla, Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar Rasoolulah* (I bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship except Allah, I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God). But it would be a greater lie to say that I was not being rightly guided by doing so.

"O ye people! Adore your Guardian-Lord, Who created you and those who came before you, that ye may have the chance to learn righteousness..." – *Al Baqarah* (22)

This next section was done despite hesitation. The following are a very short bunch of the verses of The Qur'an which are simple and tremendous in meaning. The

only hesitation was the injustice of not including the rest of verses that make up the Qur'an, nonetheless, I present a few which may prove enlightening.

“If you backslide after clear signs have come to you, know that Allah is All Mighty and All Wise.” --Al Baqarah (209)

On World Perspective, “By time, indeed mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.” –Al Asr (1-3)

“And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognized of the truth. They say ‘Our Lord, we have believed, so register us among the witnesses.’” –Al Ma'idah (83)

“And I created not the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.” – Adh-Dhariyat (56)

Righteousness, “Verily, this is My Way, leading straight; follow it; follow not other paths; they will scatter you about from His Path; this has He instructed you, that you may become righteous.” –Al An'am (156)

Appeal to Reason, “Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them, and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?” –Al Anbiya (30)

On the Word of Allah

“We know indeed that they say, ‘It is a man that teaches him.’ The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign, while this is Arabic, pure and clear.” –An Nahl (103)

“And it is a Qur'an which we have separated [by intervals] that you might recite it to the people over a prolonged period. And We have sent it down progressively.” –Al Isra (106)

“This is no less than a Message to all the Worlds. And you shall certainly know the truth of it all after a while.” –Sad (87-88)

“Whatever a Verse do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allah is able to do all things?” –Baqarah (106)

“And it is not possible for this Qur'an to be produced by other than Allah, but it is a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of the former scripture, about which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the worlds.” –Yunus (37)

“Then, do they not reflect upon the Qur'an? If it had been from any other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.” – An-Nisa (82)

“We have without doubt sent down the Reminder; and We will assuredly guard it from corruption.” –Al Hijr (9)

“No evil ones have brought down this Revelation; it would neither suit them nor would they be able to produce it, indeed they have been removed far from even a chance of hearing it.” –Al Shu’araa (210-212)

“Then, by the Lord of heaven and earth, this is the very Truth, as much as the fact that ye can speak intelligently to each other.” –Al Zariyat (23)

Prophet Jesus PBUH, “We have sent thee an inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him. We sent inspiration to Abraham, Isma’il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.” --An Nisa (163)

“The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah—the which We have revealed to you and what we enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus—to establish the religion and be not divided therein.” --Ash Shura (13)

“And for their saying, ‘Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.’ And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but another was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise. And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in him before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness.” –An Nisa (157-159)

“O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul created at a command from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say “Three” desist—it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.” --An Nisa (171)

“And mention when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, ‘O Children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing glad tidings of a messenger to come after me whose name is Ahmad’. But when he came to them with clear evidences, they said, ‘This is obvious magic.’” --As Saff (6)

On **trials**, “No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence. That is truly easy for Allah—In order that you don’t despair over matters that pass you by.” –Al Hadeed (22-23)

“Then shall anyone who has done an atom’s weight of good, see it. And anyone who has done an atom’s weight of evil, shall see it.” –Al Zilzai (7-8)

Beauty of Islam “Alif Lam Ra. A book We revealed to you in order that you might take mankind from the depths of darkness to the light by the will of their Lord and to the path of Him, the Exalted in power, worthy of all praise” –Ibrahim (1)

“You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern of conduct for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah.” –Al Sajda (21)

And within the aya of the final revelations given to the Seal of the Prophets, Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him): “This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you **Islam** as complete way of life.” –Al Ma’idah (3)

Verily, All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, without Whose Mercy, not a single human being on earth could receive guidance.