

LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD

Discipleship Lessons Learned by a Believer from a Muslim Background

by Kaneez (with help from Kinza)

Kaneez is an Indian pastor's wife who has been living and working in the Arab World for 20 years. Kinza is a tentmaker who has worked alongside Kaneez and learnt a lot from her.

Advice to a New Believer

If I was to give a few words of advice to a Muslim who had newly believed in Jesus, this is what I would say: 'The way forward is to get into a Bible-believing church (if there is one), get yourself a good mentor, study the Word of God and self-feed. I have written down the important stages of my own personal journey. If you glean through it you will have an idea how it could be for a Muslim moving into the true faith of believing in Jesus. Though each person's journey is different, it will give you some idea what to expect. May you be blessed and live to tell a great story of your own.'

Muslim Roots

As one who has come from a Muslim background, I have lived within the Muslim system and tasted its fruit. Having lived on both sides of the fence, I can tell you on which side the grass is greener.

My father was a Burmese Muslim and my mother an Anglo Indian from an Anglican background. Living in India, my siblings and I were raised by my grandmother who was a staunch Muslim. She was very prayerful, very committed to social work and helping the helpless, and had a huge heart for giving. Above all, she committed her grandchildren to daily reciting the words of her book. I would come to her every day at 7 p.m. to recite to her all the prayers she taught us right from the time we were toddlers. Other teachers would also come in to teach us the language and study the book.

Oppression and Dysfunction at Home

Our home was not a happy one. I hardly saw my father, an ex-pilot, who had a compulsion for social life and gambling. He spent days in the clubs. My mother was hushed to silence, not allowed to go to church or tell us anything about her God. In fact, she knew very little herself, and to make matters worse, she committed to my father's beliefs when she married him. Money was scarce due to my father's habit of gambling and unfaithfulness. The atmosphere was grim, with much strife in the house. I went to an Anglican school, and whenever the Morning Prayer was said, at the mention of the name

of Jesus, anger rose in my spirit. I was as little as five or six-years old at the time. The spirit of antichrist comes for free when you belong to Islam. I was proud to be a Muslim.

Banners of Truth

One good thing about our home was that our compound wall was shared by a church, a strong Bible-believing church. I often used to stand on a balcony at the back of my house, watching the banner march or listening to the worship and singing. It was one of my pastimes, wiling the hours away, watching people come and go from this church. They would have retreats and many foreigners came to camp there. This would end in a banner march throughout the city. I watched this purely as entertainment, but every time they took out the banners the Word of God was being communicated, bold and black: *'Jesus Is The Saviour, Healer And Coming King'* or *'Behold The Lamb Of God Who Takes Away The Sins Of The World'*, or the names of God such as *'Jehovah Shalom – God Is My Peace'*, *'Immanuel – God Is With Us.'* Many more such banners shouted out the Word of God to me. Being about twelve-years of age, it made sense to me. One day I said out loud, 'I believe in Jesus. He is real!'

I also was strongly influenced by a teacher at school, who would announce that if anyone wanted to come during the break she would share picture stories from the Bible. I often went in my free time to hear her sharing. I enjoyed the flannel stories presented by this tiny old teacher with a great, joyful spirit.

So in these two ways, I was presented with the Word of God and made my initial response.

A Significant Dream

At fourteen-years of age I had a dramatic spiritual dream in which Jesus was passing over my house in a cloud and he was surrounded by angels. He looked into my eyes with a steady gaze and pointed to a church in the dream. He never said a word, just looked steadfastly into my eyes and pointed with his hand. It would be several years before I responded to his implicit instruction.

Meanwhile, when I was sixteen, my grandmother passed away and that was the end of my Muslim prayers and counsel. I grew up with no boundaries thereafter, in every sense. I read stuff I shouldn't, had friends who were influencing me in the wrong way, looked for love in the wrong places... in short, I was in a mess. Unhappiness, oppression and bad choices clouded my life. At the age of seventeen I got a job to cope with my needs.

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By the time I turned twenty-four, I was coming home late from the clubs and get-togethers and was very frustrated and unhappy. I was involved in dangerous things at work, having to handle illegal paperwork and finances for a boss who broke every law that ever existed. I would visit the religious shrines of every religion to try to find peace of mind. But it got worse. I started to see demons. I could barely cope with the chaos at home and within myself. My siblings were using alcohol and drugs as a life style.

The Battle is On

A group of Christian youngsters started visiting my home and were praying for my father. It soon caught my attention that they had real peace. On one occasion I prayed with them and invited Jesus into my life. Confusion gripped me almost immediately. In my confusion about God, I just added Jesus to my Muslim beliefs. After all, I told myself, Muslims did not deny Jesus, they just believed in a different way.

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During this time I had a visitation from a demonic realm asking me to give up Jesus and become famous and get a name for myself with great wealth. Following my refusal, the air was filled with great oppression.

In my next spiritual dream, I was given a passage from the Bible to read, *'Repent For the Kingdom Of Heaven Is At Hand'*. This started my journey through the Bible, a journey I will never regret. I had this burning desire to read and read the Word of God. I found a church close to my house. Fortunately the first church I tried was a born-again church. I was given instruction in the Word of God and was taken under the wings of the Pastor and his wife. For five years, I read and studied the Word, fasted and prayed, went visiting homes and hospitals and did a lot of reading of books.

Persecution

Persecution at home drove me to the Word of God and prayer. Threats on the work front drove me all the more to the Word of God and prayer. I had death treats at work. Oppression in its fullest form broke out as soon as my father found out that I had become a Christian. My brother, an alcoholic, became violent. Strangely, throughout all this I grew closer to Jesus and clung to him even more, finding true peace and joy in his presence. This lasted five full years... just me, the Word, church fellowship and Jesus.

Godly Mentors

Baptism followed in the early years of this period and there was no turning back for me. Godly mentors came along who would spend time with me, as

long as I went looking to spend that time with them. One lady from New Zealand who was a missionary led me in prayers to renounce 'the Muslim way'. She came along at the initial stage of my crossing over. I had the curses of previous generations broken off my life through prayer. I have no doubt my mentors prayed regularly for me, praying me through the difficult transition.

Mentorship can also happen through books. I dived into a number of good Christian books by authors like Watchman Nee, Derek Prince, Kenneth Hagin, Billy Graham and many others.

Yet still I emphasize 'self-feeding', because one's own initiative is vital in getting up to read the Word diligently and in getting up to find and spend time with a mentor. One needs to make this new life a priority, not fitting God in where convenient, but giving God first place.

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Confidence to face the future

So I found that sense of inner peace and security I had been looking for. It gripped me on the inside and gave me confidence to face tomorrow. I realized I had had imaginary fears, false beliefs, sin and selfishness in my life. I needed a *new mindset*. I could trust the Holy Spirit to guide me into the truth of God's Word and give me understanding.

It was therefore with confidence that I stepped out on a new journey, as I left India to go to the Middle East with my husband to start a new wedded life and to serve God.

Looking Back

It has been twenty-four years since the day I received and believed in Jesus. I have been delivered from sin and spared from death. I have had physical healings. God has been there to guide me whenever I needed it. I don't feel like an orphan any longer. I belong to a God who is unchangeable and a kingdom that is unshakable. I have served God with delight in the Middle East for twenty years now. He is all I have and all I need. He has blessed me way beyond what I deserve. I have a great husband, a real man of God and two beautiful children. He has proved to be my father, friend and faithful God.

From Seed to Fruit

So what were the factors which worked together to bring me out from my Muslim roots to the point of becoming a mature believer, well-established in the faith, rooted in God's love, and serving others?

1. Exposure to the Word of God

God initially used an unusual means, words on banners, to sow His words of truth into my life. Later he gave me such a hunger for his Word that I spent hours devouring it. There must be exposure to God's Word and subsequently a commitment to feed on it for oneself.

2. Dreams

God seems to use dreams fairly often in bringing people out of Islam to Christ. Satan can also use the same medium, so discernment is necessary.

3. The Presence of Christians

Watching the lives of Christians around me and seeing the quality of life they had drew me to want that same peace for myself. After coming to Christ, joining in fellowship with others encouraged my growth. I had mature Christian mentors who were willing to spend time with me and encouraged me to join them in various types of service.

4. The Prayers of Christians

The prayers of Christians for me and with me significantly contributed to my spiritual growth. In order to move forward as a Christian, especially when coming out of a non-Christian family background, it is important to renounce all the falsehoods that come with one's family heritage and declare one's personal choice of the truth. Prayers for the breaking of generational curses are important. In recent years I have also come to understand the importance of prayers for healing and restoration from the various abuses and traumatic experiences of the past.

5. A Willing Heart

The key thing I see in the whole process is God's drawing and my response.

God took the initiative to call me out to know him and live a life of service for him. At each stage I chose to respond to his invitation. May many others do the same and say 'yes' to God's invitation.

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