

AISHA, EX-CHRISTIAN, AUSTRALIA

Rating: 4.8

Description: A spiritual humanist's journey to Islam.

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Published on: 15 Mar 2010

Last modified on: 25 Mar 2010

My name is Aisha, I am from Melbourne, Australia and here is my story.

I always found myself to be a person who liked to question things. As a little girl, I was always asking questions as children do and as I moved into my teenage years I found myself interested in philosophy and science. I wanted to understand how things work and to analyze the world we live in.

I started to question the Catholic Church and its practices at the age of 15. I started to explore other faiths and after finishing a Bachelor of Science, I traveled to Nepal and India where I was exposed to a side of humanity I had never faced in Australia: a humanity that lived amongst nature and away from the materialistic way of life we have in the modern world.

This experience changed me in a way that I felt we are all one people and that we are all equal. I felt this sense of equality amongst humankind, from talking to the holy man in India to the orphan children in Nepal, the feeling was the same: we are all equal. This is when I started to feel Islam but I didn't know what it was. It was just a feeling.

When I returned from my travels, I decided to enroll into a Social Work course. After I graduated I started working with different communities.

I worked with people who are on the margins of society, people with no voice to speak out for themselves, people who have mental illnesses, people who are disabled and young people who are at risk of criminal activity.

I felt Islam even more in this work, and I felt it stronger the more I was giving to people and helping them. I feel Islam the most when I am helping people or when people are helping me.

I then started working with the Arabic communities in Melbourne and became friends with many Muslims. However they never spoke to me about Islam. I worked with the community for 4 years and decided to travel to the Middle East to learn more.

I spent six months traveling around the Middle East and it was there that I started to read into Islam. I spoke to many people about Islam while I was traveling and it was so hard to change from my identity as a spiritual human rights person to a Muslim. This was the hardest thing. But I could not get away from it! Islam was drawing me in and in, the pull of Islam was too strong to turn my back on.

It felt so strong and so natural to me and it was what I was searching for my whole life. The thing that drew me to Islam was the equality amongst humanity and that there is no hierarchy. I also loved that there are no images and no intermediary between you and God. It is just you and Him.

I returned home from my travel to the Middle East and did not know if I would embrace Islam or not. But on August 11, 2009 I embraced Islam and it was beautiful. I said the *Shahadah* and lay in my bed with a smile on my face.

The conversion has enabled me to feel close to God. I am seeing the world now in a clearer way and everything makes sense to me. I feel I can understand any situation without being manipulated or allured into being manipulated.

I feel like a strong woman who knows what her role is. I feel intelligent and proud to be a Muslim. I wish I could wear the hijab as I love wearing it, but I am too afraid to wear it in my society... maybe in the future.

It has not all been easy. I have suffered from grief and sadness at the spiritual separation from my family and friends, and I felt social isolation especially around special times like Ramadan. This was very hard for me. My first Ramadan was very difficult, but I feel that God has guided me.

My family all reacted in their own unique way. My mum was worried that she hadn't raised me the right way, and that I would wear the scarf, which would upset her. She was also upset that men can have four wives.

My father was very angry and felt the need to protect himself and his faith, and started talking also about the oppression of women and terrorism.

My sister said that as long as it makes me happy, she is okay with it, but she was worried we might grow further apart.

At the moment, I am up and down. Everyday is different. It has been difficult, because I am now feeling like a minority. Although the Muslim sisters I am meeting are all so warm and loving, I feel I have been raised in a different way, and so I feel isolated and afraid sometimes.

But I know in my heart that God is with me and whenever I am afraid I remind myself that God led me to Islam and I say Alhamdulillah (Thankful praise be to Allah).

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