

MARIA LUISA “MARYAM” BERNABE, EX-CATHOLIC , PHILIPPINES (PART 2 OF 2)

Rating: 2.6

Description: My baby steps towards Allah and conversion to Islam

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Allah has brought me here to Qatar for this purpose, that I may end my quest and spend the remaining days of my life worshipping Him through the ways of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him.

The ways of Allah are not our ways for He knows best. Indeed, in the turn of events in my life here in Qatar, I look back and see how magnificently He has woven the path that led me to Him.

In 2009, the company that brought me to Qatar had encountered difficulties and started laying off people and giving them options to look for other jobs. How I landed to the company where I am working now is also one of the pleasant surprises Allah had in store for me. How I transitioned from my previous company to the present one was so swift. The institution where I am working is an Islamic institution governed by Shari'a (Islamic law) and the department I belong to has given me the opportunity to land in my dream job – corporate communications. Since I am immersed in the preparation of newsletters and marketing tools, I had to be in touch with the corporate values anchored in Shari'a's guidance, that led me to deeper reading on Islam. At that point, I found myself enjoying what I have been doing and just would read anything I could get my hands on.

Early 2010, I met a Filipino Muslim. There was never any discussion regarding our religion. He knew how prayerful I was with my rosary and novena booklets. He said that in his family, they have Muslims and Christians, too. He assured me that I shouldn't feel uncomfortable about it at all. I found in him the traits that I have been looking for. His idea of a relationship is the same as mine. Hence, religion was never an issue and we both respected our faiths.

One time, I went to Fanar (Qatar Islamic cultural center) with my boss during the exhibit of calligraphic arts to purchase some items for our company. I got a copy of THE IDEAL MUSLIMAH and started reading it three months after I got the book when my fiance was not in Qatar at that time. I felt the verses of the Qur'an talking to me directly. As I read the qualities of the Ideal Muslimah (Muslim woman), I realized that my way of

life is in accordance with the teachings of Islam, after all. Then, I got a copy of the Qur'an in Tagalog and would feel a certain kind of overwhelming peace in my heart that would evoke tears. I told myself, in time I have to pursue it. I sought guidance from the Shari'a department and from my well-meaning colleagues on which reading materials I should choose. I would search the web and read everything I could. Until one day, I stopped. I ceased seeking knowledge because I wouldn't want to pursue anything as long as I see my fiance who has just arrived back from the Philippines. Though he did not raise the issue of my religion, I told myself, I had to deliberate whether I am just being influenced by his presence in my life or whether embracing Islam is coming from my own choice...from the deepest recesses of my heart and my soul.

At that time when I stopped pursuing further studies, I was undergoing crisis, too. Problems kept piling up and I was confused on how to pray. Should I pray the Rosary and devotions or should I do the salaah (prayers done by Muslims) which I did not have any clue on how to perform? For months, I was in limbo, until one night I woke up and I talked to God and said - "My God, I am confused. I no longer know how I should pray. Read my heart. I submit myself to You!" After that, I felt a certain peace.

The care of God began. My fiance went home to the Philippines earlier than planned. God gave me the time I needed for my discernment.

I didn't expect that the day when a great tsunami hit Japan would be the day I would perform my *Shahaadah* (testimony of faith pronounced to become a Muslim). I just felt my heart was very quiet. I went to Fanar with the conviction of attending classes for Basic Islam. This move had been prompted when I was finally able to answer the final questions I had for myself. First, if my fiance and I wouldn't end up together, would I be able to uphold being a Muslim? When I die, how would my family dispose of my mortal remains? And then, I saw in my mind my female Muslim colleagues and I felt a certain community spirit. I then told myself, I may lose one person, but I would gain more. Second, why are Muslim men allowed to marry up to four wives? Don't they know how painful it is for a woman to have another woman preferred over her? This question remained unanswered for several months until that day when I was preparing myself to go to Fanar. In fact, this question would always hold me back from fully accepting the readings I had done about Islam and I was hoping to get it answered once I was given the opportunity to undergo classes in Fanar. Finally, that morning when I was preparing myself for Fanar, I ran another round of questions in my mind - would the feeling of jealousy or envy be the one to pull me back from Allah? Would something so worldly refrain me from knowing Allah? I did not answer myself. Instead, I hurried up preparing myself to leave. That action alone was the answer.

Upon reaching Fanar, I had the opportunity to have one-on-one talks with two of their mentors - Sister Zarah and Sister Maryam. My heart's yearning began to unfold. Sister Maryam said that I seem to be ready. When she asked me if I would like to do the shahaadah, I only replied by saying - WOULD THERE BE ANYBODY WHO COULD ADMINISTER IT FOR ME? Again, that feeling of certainty - it's not about YES or NO, it's about the availability of someone who could administer it for me.

After I said the Shahadah, tears started welling up. When Sister Maryam embraced me and told me I am already a Muslim, I thanked her with tears. My immediate family welcomed me as a Muslimah and I thank Allah for that. Though they remain to be devout Catholics, their acceptance, support and love carry me on. As for my fiancé, he was surprised upon receiving the text message from me minutes after I converted. He did not expect to receive such news from me.

My reversion towards Islam was highlighted by the great tsunami. I symbolically look at it as Allah having totally washed me and cleansed me of my sins. What would have happened to me had I not surrendered to Him? Where would I be?

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