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(part 1 of 2): Conversion Stories



Having repeatedly been asked about how I became Muslim, and why, I have decided to tell the story one last time, but this time on paper. However, I feel conversion stories are worthless unless related with the lessons learned, and it is with those lessons that I intend to begin.

No doubt, there is a certain fascination with conversion stories, and for good reason. Frequently they involve dramatic life-altering events, sufficient to shock the convert out of the materialistic world and into the spiritual. Those who experience such life dramas are brought face to face with the bigger issues of life for the first time, forcing them to ask the 'Purpose of Life' questions, such as 'Who made us?' and 'Why are we here?' But there are other common elements to 'conversion' stories, and one of them is that the convert is humbled to his or her knees at such moments, and looking back, most relate having prayed with sincerity for the first time in their lives. I have been intrigued by these commonalities, and have noted some significant lessons. The first, I would say, is that most converts who passed through these moments of trial and panic prayed directly to God, without intermediary, and without distraction. For example, even those who spent their lives believing in the Trinity, when faced with catastrophe, instinctively and reflexively prayed directly to God, and never to the other proposed elements of the Trinity.

Let me relate a story as example. A popular television evangelist once had a lady relate her 'Born Again' Christian conversion story, which revolved around a terrible boat-wreck, from which she was the sole survivor. This lady related how during her days and nights of survival against the harsh elements of the open ocean God spoke to her, God guided her, God protected her, etc. You get the idea. For maybe five to ten minutes she told her tale, which was indeed dramatic and captivating, but throughout the story she related how God did this, God did that, and seeking His favor, she prayed to God and to God Alone. However, when she was saved by a passing ship, she described

how the minute she landed on the ship's deck she threw her arms open to the heavens and yelled, "Thank you, Jesus."

Well, there is a lesson there, and it relates to sincerity. When in the panic and stress of circumstance, people instinctively pray to God directly, but when conceiving themselves safe and secure they frequently fall back into previously held beliefs, many (if not most) of which are misdirected. Now, we all know that many Christians equate Jesus with God, and for those who would like to argue the point, I just suggest they read my book on the subject, entitled *The First and Final Commandment* (Amana Publications). For all others, I would just continue by saying that the real question is 'Who truly is saved?' There are countless convert stories, all telling how the God of this or that religion saved the person in question, and all of these converts conceive themselves to be upon the truth by nature of the miracle of their salvation. But as there is only One God, and therefore only one religion of absolute truth, the fact of the matter is that only one group can be right and all others are living in delusion, with their personal miracles having confirmed them upon disbelief rather than upon truth. As God teaches in the Holy Quran:

"...God leaves astray whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]" (Quran 13:27)

...and:

"So those who believe in God and hold fast to Him – He will admit them to mercy from Himself and bounty and guide them to Himself on a straight path." (Quran 4:175)

As for those astray in disbelief, they will be left to stray, as they themselves chose.

But the strength of belief, even when misdirected, is not to be underestimated. So who is going to become Muslim based upon my conversion story? Only one person -- me. Muslims may find some encouragement in my story but others may be left empty, just as Muslims sigh and shake their heads in despair when hearing others relate the 'miracles' which followed prayers to patron saints, partners in the Trinity, or other distractions from the One True God. For if a person prays to something or someone other than our Creator, who, if not God, might be the one answering those prayers? Could it just possibly be a certain one who has a vested interest in confirming those who are astray upon their particular flavor of disbelief? One whose dedicated purpose is to lead mankind astray?

However a person chooses to answer those questions, these are issues addressed at length in *The First and Final Commandment*, and those interested can investigate. But for now, I will tell my story.

(part 2 of 2): Being True to a Promise

In the winter of 1990, when my second daughter was born, she was whisked from the birthing room to the neonatal intensive care unit, where she was diagnosed with a coarctation of the aorta. This meaning a critical narrowing in the major vessel from the heart, she was a dusky gunmetal blue from the chest to the toes, for her body simply was not getting enough blood and her tissues were suffocating. When I learned of the diagnosis, I was shattered. Being a doctor, I understood this meant emergency thoracic surgery with a poor chance of long-term survival. A consultant cardio-thoracic surgeon was called from across town at the pediatric hospital in Washington, D.C., and upon his arrival I was asked to leave the intensive care unit, for I had become overly emotional. With no companion but my fears, and no other place of comfort to which to go while awaiting the result of the consultant's examination, I went to the prayer room in the hospital and fell to my knees. For the first time in my life I prayed with sincerity and commitment. Having spent my life as an atheist, this was the first time that I even partially recognized God. I say partially, for even in this time of panic I was not fully believing, and so prayed a rather skeptical prayer in which I promised God, if, that is, there was a God, that if He would save my daughter then I would seek and follow the religion most pleasing to Him. Ten to fifteen minutes later, when I returned to the Neonatal ICU, I was shocked when the consultant told me that my daughter would be fine. And, true to his assessment, within the next two days her condition resolved without medicine or surgery, and she subsequently grew up a completely normal child.

Now, I know that there is a medical explanation for this. As I said, I am a doctor. So when the consultant explained about a patent ductus arteriosis, low oxygenation and eventual spontaneous resolution, I understood. I just didn't buy it. More significantly, neither did the Intensivist – the Neonatal ICU specialist who made the diagnosis. To this day I remember seeing him standing, blank-faced and speechless. But in the end, the consultant was right and the condition spontaneously reversed and my daughter, Hannah, left the hospital a normal baby in every respect. And here's the rub -- many who make promises to God in moments of panic find or invent excuses to escape their part of the bargain once the danger is past. As an atheist, it would have been easy to maintain my disbelief in God, assigning my daughter's recovery to the doctor's explanation rather than to God. But I couldn't. We had cardiac ultrasound taken before and after, showing the stricture one day, gone the next, and all I could think of was that God had made good on His part of the deal, and I had to make good on mine. And even if there were an adequate medical explanation, that too was under the control of Almighty God, so by whatever means God chose to effect His decree, He had answered my prayer. Period. I did not then, and I do not now, accept any other explanation.

The next few years I tried to fulfill my side of the bargain, but failed. I studied Judaism and a number of sects of Christianity, but never felt that I had found the truth. Over time I attended a wide variety of Christian churches, spending the longest period of time in Roman Catholic

congregation. However, I never embraced Christian faith. I never could, for the simple reason that I could not reconcile the biblical teachings of Jesus with the teachings of the various sects of Christianity. Eventually I just stayed home and read, and during this time I was introduced to the Holy Quran and Martin Lings' biography of the prophet, Muhammad, entitled, *Muhammad, His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*.

During my years of study, I had encountered the Jewish scriptures referencing three prophets to follow Moses. With John the Baptist and Jesus Christ being two, that left one according to the Old Testament, and in the New Testament Jesus Christ himself spoke of a final prophet to follow. Not until I found the Holy Quran teaching the oneness of God, as both Moses and Jesus Christ had taught, did I begin to consider Muhammad as the predicted final prophet, and not until I read the biography of Muhammad did I become convinced. And when I did become convinced, suddenly everything made sense. The continuity in the chain of prophethood and revelation, the One-ness of Almighty God, and the completion of revelation in the Holy Quran suddenly made perfect sense, and it was then that I became Muslim.

Pretty smart, hunh? No, not at all. For I would err greatly if I believed that I figured it out for myself. One lesson I have learned over the past ten years as a Muslim is that there are a lot of people much more intelligent than I am, but who have not been able to figure out the truth of Islam. It is not a matter of intelligence but of enlightenment, for Allah has revealed that those who disbelieve will remain upon disbelief, even if warned, for in punishment for having denied Allah, Allah in turn has denied them the treasure of His truth. As Allah teaches in the Holy Quran:

“Indeed, those who disbelieve – it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them – they will not believe. God has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil.” (Quran 2:6-7)

But, on the other hand, the good news is that...

**“...whoever believes in God – He will guide his heart”
(Quran 64:11)**

“...God chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him].” (Quran 42:13)

...and:

**“...And God guides whom He wills to a straight path.”
(Quran 24:46)**

So I thank God that He chose to guide me, and I attribute that guidance to one simple formula: recognizing God, praying to God Alone, sincerely promising to seek and follow His religion of truth, and then, once receiving His mercy of guidance, DOING IT .

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About the author:

Laurence B. Brown, MD, can be contacted at BrownL38@yahoo.com. He is the author of *The First and Final Commandment* (Amana Publications) and *Bearing True Witness* (Dar-us-Salam). Forthcoming books are a historical thriller, *The Eighth Scroll*, and a second edition of *The First and Final Commandment*, rewritten and divided into *MisGod'ed* and its sequel, *God'ed*.