

Wildeman, Netherlands



I usually don't do this. That is, I usually don't take this much time to tell anyone how I converted to Islam, or should I say, how I came back to Islam.

See, when people find out you've become a Muslim, you always get the same questions over and over again. How did your parents react to it? Were you in love with a Muslim woman? Are you accepted within the Islamic community as a convert?

But most of all, people ask me: Why did you convert to Islam?

I found it shocking that even Muslims ask me why I converted to Islam. "Well, this is the one true religion, remember?" is my usual reply. I did not crash my car into a tree and almost die, I did not have a moment when I saw the light. I don't even know exactly when I became a Muslim.

Some people are surprised, but I wasn't even looking for God. I wasn't looking for a reason in life. I wasn't looking for a purpose.

Actually, I was just looking for a book. I walked into a bookstore not knowing what I would buy. This must have been somewhere in the year 2003 or 2004. I like to read, with a special interest in the books sold in the store somewhere between "recent history", "philosophy" and "sociology".

That's where a green book caught my eye. It was called "Islam; Values, Principles and Reality". I held it in my hand, looked at it, and realized I knew quite a few Muslims but had no idea at all what they believed in.

Meanwhile, Islam is all over the news and seems to influence both internal and foreign affairs. I decided to buy the book and see what this religion is all about. I walked to the counter and bought the book, totally unaware of the four and a half year journey I had just embarked on, which would lead straight up to my *Shahadah*(Testimony of Faith).

Before I started to read about Islam, I already had some negative associations related to this religion in mind. For example, I was wondering how a practicing Muslim could ever think he is a good pious person while at the same time he's oppressing his own wife.

Or, for instance, I would wonder why Muslims would worship a cubic stone in Makkah while statues or buildings have no power and cannot help anyone.

I could not understand why Muslims were so intolerant against other religions instead of simply saying that everybody believes in the same God. With this in mind, I started reading.

After the first book came a second one. After the second came a third, and so on. After a few years, I had read quite some books on Islam and was very surprised. I found out that almost everything that I thought was a part of Islam and which I opposed to, was actually opposed by Islam.

It turned out that the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, had said that one can see how good a believer is by the way he treats his wife. I found out that Muslims don't worship the Kabah, they rather oppose worshipping statues or the like.

I found that the Islamic civilization in all of its history — except maybe the most recent ages — was the best example of religious tolerance on the face of the planet.

I did not have to be convinced of most of the things Islam tells us to do or how to behave, since I found a lot of basic rules I already agreed upon before learning about Islam. I read my own opinion on a lot of subjects, but the books kept on saying "this is Islam".

Not much *Dawah* was done in my surroundings back then. Well, not proactive anyway. The help I got was what I asked for when talking to people around me. This doesn't say everything about how dawah is organized in the Netherlands, I just didn't have the people around me who were very much into this.

So when Ramadan came and I decided to give it a try — no book can tell you how it truly feels — I went to my Muslim co-workers and told them I would fast with them. I bought a Quran and found the 30-day schedule on the Internet.

When I told the others about reading the full Quran and fasting in Shawwal [the lunar month after Ramadan], some of them had never heard of this or done it themselves. I brought milk and dates to work and explained to them how this was a sunnah to follow.

Their mothers or wives cooked meals we ate at work, so I experienced some new food as well.

I learned a lot that Ramadan, and so did the others. And we had a lot of fun. My first Eid turned out to be a funeral, but for the rest it was a great month.

After the month of Ramadan, I went to the mosque to pay my zakah. I figured that giving money to a good cause is a correct thing to do, so not being a Muslim was no reason for me not to pay.

This is where I first met the treasurer of the mosque in my hometown. He asked me if I was a Muslim. “No sir, I am not a Muslim,” was my reply, “but I did fast the month of Ramadan.”

He told me to take it easy, take my time, and never rush into things.

As months passed, I kept reading books about Islam. Most of the books I read were from non-Muslims, like Karen Armstrong. I also took some time to read what people said that was negative towards Islam. I read about religiously motivated terrorism, about clashes between civilizations, and so on.

However, I found that for every question I could raise, Islam had a convincing answer. This did not always mean that the Muslims I spoke with had a convincing answer, but most of the information I gathered on Islam came from these books.

At the end of the next Ramadan, I went back to the mosque to pay my zakah. I met the treasurer again and he recognized me. He asked me, again, if I was a Muslim.

“No sir, I am not a Muslim,” was my reply, “but you told me to take it easy, right?”

He calmly shook his head and said, “Yes, take it easy, but don’t take it too easy!”

I now started my last year as a non-Muslim. I had already stopped drinking alcohol. I stopped smoking cigarettes. I tried to stimulate myself and others to do good, try to prevent myself and others from doing wrong.

I went to Turkey on holiday and had a look inside some of the greater mosques. With every step I took, with every day that went by, I could feel the presence of God in my life grow.

I went into nature and for the first time, I could see that what was in front of me were signs of the Creator. I tried to pray sometimes — something I had never done by myself — which obviously didn’t look much like the way I pray today. I kept reading and reading, but now also started to get information on Islam from the Internet.

On Hyves, a popular Dutch social networking website, I was approached by a Dutch Muslim revert. She asked if I was a Muslim and I told her I wasn’t a

Muslim yet. She asked me to come over to her house and meet her husband. He was a Muslim by birth, practicing, and born in Egypt.

He and I had dinner together and then talked the rest of the evening about Islam. The second time I was there, he showed me the correct way to pray (upon my request). I tried to do it as good as I could and he was watching me try. When we took a short break, he asked me the question.

“So, do you think you’re ready to do this?”

“Yes, I think I’m ready.”

I realized that I had already become a Muslim. I didn’t take my Shahadah yet, so it wasn’t official, but somewhere in the previous years I had become a Muslim. I had come to believe that there is no God to be worshiped besides the one true God, the Creator.

I had come to believe that Muhammad was His messenger, the final messenger, who had part in completing the religion. I wanted to fast, I wanted to pay zakah, I wanted to make my salah [Prayers], I still dream of the hajj every day.

My path was through books, I came through the theory. It was a rational choice, not an emotional choice. I looked at the information which was out there, compared and contemplated. Islam was the answer to every question. One or two weeks later, he and I went to the mosque in his home town. He had already talked to the imam so they all knew I was coming. My dad came along and brought a camera.

The imam said the Shahadah, bit by bit. I repeated, bit by bit.

As the imam recited a duaa [supplication], my Egyptian brother translated it into Dutch for me. I felt like I had been running for miles and miles and now reached the finish line. I mean literally, I was out of breath as if I had been running. I slowly got back my breath, I felt calm and happy.

Suddenly I realized, finally, I had become Nourdeen.

I went to the mosque in my hometown. As I entered the building, I met the treasurer. He asked me, again, if I was a Muslim.

“Yes sir, I am, and my name is Nourdeen!” I said with a smile.

“Alhamdulillah,” he replied, quickly to add: “...at last!”