

Dawood Kinney, Ex-Catholic, USA



As far back as I can remember as a child, I was always astounded by this universe in which we live; how everything works perfectly. I used to lie outside at night on my parent's lawn, staring up at the stars, just amazed at the unfathomable size of the heavens. And I also used to be amazed at how the human body just ticked along, heart beating, lungs pumping, with no help from me. And from that early time, I always in some way knew, there just had to be a Creator responsible for all this.

But then as I segued into my teens, it was much easier to succumb to peer pressure, and I lost interest in the Divine and instead devoted my time to alcohol, sex and the immature games of a young male growing up in America. Growing into young adulthood, my obsessions became money, power, a better house, a faster car, and a prettier woman--all shallow pursuits.

I lived this way for many years, slowly losing control of my life, thinking I was pursuing happiness when all I was getting was more depressed, more confused, and making more and more of a mess of my life.

At some point, my life just sort of spiraled to the bottom and I cracked. My immediate response was to turn to God, and, having been raised Catholic, it was to that church that I turned. At the time, I had been divorced and remarried and came to find out that the Catholic Church didn't want me. Hurt and angry, but also realizing a need for a spiritual order in my life, I turned to Buddhism.

The Buddhist sect I became involved with followed a Tibetan tradition, where importance is placed on gaining empowerments, which are basically blessings from various Buddhas. At some point I realized I was not really bettering myself, just running around gaining empowerments, performing elaborate rituals. All of a sudden, I realized that one of the last things the Buddha said before passing away was not to worship him. I realized this whole practice was BASED on worshipping not only "the" Buddha, but also all these other Buddhas. I became very discouraged and reverted to my old ways of indulgence in alcohol and other forbidden pleasures. And once again, I became very depressed, only this time

with emotional side effects that began to manifest in very frightening and self-destructive ways.

When I was a young man, I was very much "into" the music of Cat Stevens (now Yusuf Islam). When I heard he had embraced Islam, I was in the U.S. Navy at the time and this was during the "hostage crisis" in Iran. So, I immediately drew the conclusion that Cat Stevens has become a terrorist, and I kept that belief for many years.

A couple months or so ago, I heard he was going to be interviewed on TV, and I wanted to hear about this crazy man who had left a great life to become a terrorist. Well, needless to say, I was just floored by the interview, because he was certainly no terrorist, but a soft-spoken, articulate, peaceful man who radiated love, and patience, and intelligence. The very next day, I began researching Islam on the Internet. I came across a lecture in RealAudio by a brother, Khaled Yasin, and well, this lecture really put me over the top.

The first one by Br. Khaled is really the one that did it for me, but the other two by Br. Yusef (Cat Stevens) really speaks to those of us who did not grow up in a Muslim society.). It all made so much SENSE, the existence of God was so SIMPLE to understand! How could I have been so stupid all this time???

Well, the more I learned the more I was convinced that this was truly the path I had been searching for. It contained the discipline--physical, mental, and spiritual--that leads to true peace and happiness. But most importantly, it contains that path to God. Pronouncing my Shahada was such a CLEANSING experience, and since this time, I have often just ... cried and cried and cried. How wonderful!

I have received such a warm and embracing welcome from all Muslim brothers and sisters from around the world; I take great comfort in this, knowing that, despite any adversity or setback, I am literally surrounded by my Muslim family that will never abandon me as long as I remain Muslim. No other group of people has ever treated me in this way.

I still have a very long and arduous path ahead. Accepting the reality of Islam is the easy part, walking the Straight Path is the hard part, especially once one had firmly implanted himself in a society of unbelievers. But I pray to God every day for strength and guidance, and I just take it one day at a time, trying to improve in Islam little by little each day