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I will say right away that I am very young. I am only 18, and that fact seems to astound most people. I think it is proof that we are never too young to begin looking for God, or to understand His truth.

I was raised Christian, nondenominational. We were never big church goers, but we always knew who our God was and what our obligation was to Him. In my living room, to this day, hangs a big velvet painting of Jesus as a black man. That left a huge imprint on me, because it made God real to me. Not only did he come to earth as a man, but he was black like me.

In my preteen years I was a crusader for Christ. I wanted to convert the world and save souls. I believed blindly 100% in everything that was given to me by the Bible and my pastor/youth leader. Then one day I ran across something in the Bible that didn't sound anything like the God who I had learned to love and obey. I thought perhaps I was just too young to understand and took it to a more knowledgeable Christian who confirmed that it was what I thought it was. My world fell apart.

I read the Bible, cover to cover, and marked along the way all of the things that were contradictory or ungodly. By the time I got to Revelations I had a large segment of the Bible marked as invalid. So, thinking maybe I needed to look at it in a historical perspective I did my history work. There I found even more hypocrisy, blasphemy, and human tampering with Holy Scriptures. What shocked me was the story of the Council of Nicea where men "divinely guided" decided which text would be in the Bible and which ones needed editing.

I also had to ask myself how God could be three and one at the same time. What happens to a good man like Ghandi when he dies without Jesus? Does Hitler get to go to heaven if he accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior? What about those who have never been exposed to Christianity? I was once told that the Trinity was part of the essence of God and that since the breadth and scope of God

is beyond my understanding I should simply believe. I couldn't worship a God I couldn't understand.

I never lost my faith in God, I just decided that Christianity was not the right path for me to travel. I felt no kinship with fellow believers. I never felt anything special while attending service except that I was doing an obligatory service to God. So I wandered faithless, looking for something to hold on to. In my search I found Wicca, the Bahai faith, and finally Islam.

I studied Islam quietly, on my own, in secret, for two years. I wanted to be able to separate fact from fiction. I did not want to confuse Islam with the cultures who claim to practice Islam while instituting things that are clearly against all that Allah has revealed to us. I wanted to make the distinction between the religion and the societies that adopted it. That took time and patience. I met a lot of helpful brothers and sisters via e-mail who answered all of my questions and opened their lives up for me to examine.

I never liked the image that I was handed as to what a woman was. In popular culture we are portrayed as very sexy, lady like, independent enough so that men have no real responsibility toward us or the children they help create, but dependant enough that we are continually in search of a new man. The average woman on the street is honked at, whistled at, has had her butt or breasts pinched, slapped, rubbed, or ogled by some strange woman. I never agreed with any of that and never found a "come on" flattering.

In Christianity I was taught that as a woman I should not teach in church or question the authority of any man in public. The picture painted of women in Christianity was one of inferiority. We were supposed to be chaste and silent with children about our feet. In Islam I found a voice, a system that gave me ultimate respect for being a mother and acknowledged the fact that I was equal to man in every way except one: physical strength. The hadith are filled with stories of women who spoke publicly and Islamic history is full of women who were leaders. It was a theology that I could respect because it respected me.

I had to ask myself if I really wanted to be like all of the people I saw around me. Who was really oppressed? The girl wearing skin tight jeans getting cat calls from boys rolling by in cars was not free. She was society's whore and she got no respect. I was thankful that my mother had never allowed me to wear such things, not that I ever wanted to, but her disapproval was an added incentive. After examining the position of the Muslim woman and what I felt to be truth in my heart, how could I deny Islam?

Six weeks ago I made the decision to convert to Islam. I did so and have not looked back since. My friends respect it because they see that it has not changed who I am and what I stand for, in fact it has backed it up. My advice to any woman out there is to ask herself these questions:

What do you want your daughter to believe about herself?

How should she allow herself to be treated?

Is she really born with evil tendencies because she is a descendant of Eve?

How do you want her to feel about her body?

What are you modeling for her?

What image of womanhood are you promoting?

How do men treat you and how do you allow yourself to be treated?