

From Darkness to Light

by *Leilah K. Ibrahim*

Author webpage

<https://muslimreply.com/deborah>



The Holy Quran



Self-Published by: Leilah K. Ibrahim

©2024, Version 1

Permission is hereby granted to any individual who wishes to copy or reproduce this book in whole or in part for personal reference or for sharing the content with others.

About the Author



Mrs. Ibrahim was born in Charleston, West Virginia and grew up as a Christian. She studied at West Virginia Technical Institute and Hillsborough Community College, as well as the University of South Florida, ultimately earning her Associate Degree in Liberal Arts. At the age of 50, she traveled to Egypt and lived there for nine years. During her stay in Egypt, she taught English at the International Arab Egyptian School. She later traveled to the United Arab Emirates where she taught English Language Skills at the International Arab School in Sharjah. During her travels, she also earned her Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Management and a Master's Degree in Teaching and Learning with Technology. She was one of the first students to earn her advanced Degrees on-line through Ashley University in Clinton, Iowa while residing in Ismailia, Egypt. In 2006, she took her Shahada and became a proud and loving servant of Allah (SWT). In 2013, Mrs. Ibrahim returned to the United States and continued to teach English Language Skills via on-line to Arab students from various Middle Eastern countries. Shortly, thereafter, she retired and has dedicated her studies to learning more about Islam. In 2023, she was inspired to write her first book, *Beyond the Clouds*, and her second book, *From Darkness to Light*. Mrs. Ibrahim loves Islam and makes it her mission to serve Allah (SWT) with all her might and to share her knowledge of Islam with all those with whom she has the honor to converse.



Dedication



This book is dedicated to a dear brother in Islam who encouraged me to write it. My dream was to write it years ago, but after multiple attempts, I concluded that to take on such a task was beyond my ability. I had no experience before at authoring. So, writing a book, at all, seemed perplexing to me, especially a book about my journey to Islam. Conveying such intricate details covering years of my life appeared too overwhelming. I even surmised that the circumstances that led me to Islam would be too few or perhaps not even significant enough to fill the pages of an entire book.

However, recently, Allah (SWT) surprisingly inspired me to write my first book about a entirely different topic. Curiously, I accomplished this feat--only by the Grace of Allah (SWT). After this unexpected success, I gained confidence to seriously consider the brother's challenge. He convinced me that my journey to Islam would be especially interesting to fellow Muslims. So, I have conceded and have eagerly accepted my dear brother's challenge. I acknowledged that the potential benefit of this book to others warranted my utmost endeavor. In short, I am humbled by this brother's encouragement and his trust in me to forge ahead with this narrative. May Allah (SWT) accept this effort from me and grant me success. Ameen!

Preface



*In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious,
the Most Merciful.*

After being a Christian for most of my life, at the young age of 48 plus, I faced what appeared to me to be unsurmountable challenges. The obstacles grew more intimidating and forced me to begin a serious self-analysis from which I hoped to gain control over the huge void that strangled my spirituality. I desperately craved God's help and direction and couldn't sense even a glimpse of His intervention.

As the veil of darkness enveloped me, I began to question many discrepancies in what I had been taught. I felt terribly confused and was absorbed in thoughts of being betrayed. I realized that I had been blindly following my Christian parents, friends, and pastors. In fact, it became evident that I didn't really know the truth--at all! And, because of this growing uncertainty, searching for the truth mattered more to me than it had ever meant before. The old adage, "The truth will set you free," rang painfully loud and became forever etched in my thoughts and spurred me to action. I had no choice but to earnestly seek answers. I despairingly yearned to be rescued from the darkness and to be guided into the light.

Preface



Preface *(Cont'd)*

After considerable time, great effort, and unfathomable consternation, I slowly began to uncover truths that were undeniable—truths that would thrust me into an entirely different existence, a whole new way of life. I ultimately discerned that there is One God, whose personal name is Allah (SWT), and that there is only One religion for All mankind--Islam. Thus, I freely submitted to the will of Allah (SWT) and have served Him for over 18 years now. My life has changed incredibly for the best, for I have been blessed beyond measure--surpassing my grandest expectations. No obstacle becomes unsurmountable, nor challenge proves too great. I put my full faith in our Merciful, All Mighty Creator, Allah (SWT) and lean on Him for my every need. I am confident that He will guide and protect me and ultimately grant me Paradise if I prove to be His faithful servant.

The above life-changing revelations moved me to share them with others. I am immensely grateful to Allah (SWT) for snatching me out of the veils of darkness and for guiding me into the light. For this miracle, I humbly ask Allah (SWT) to accept this book from me as a tool to encourage all fellow Muslims to remain on the straight path in spite of their personal challenges. Also, I hope Allah (SWT) will make this narrative the means through

Preface



Preface *(Cont'd)*

which He opens the hearts and minds of others who question their own spirituality. It is my ardent desire to lead these individuals into the light and for Allah (SWT) to grant me, them and all His faithful servants the highest level of Paradise. Ameen!

On a less serious note, I must tell my dear readers that not all narratives of this type have to be long and arduous, and in some cases to be terribly boring. On the contrary, they can actually be fun and entertaining—and I love humor! As Martin Luther King, Jr. stated: “It is cheerful to God when you rejoice or laugh from the bottom of your heart.” Also, we’ve all heard the old adage “Laughter is the best medicine.” This particular quote is believed by some to have been taken from the Bible, Proverbs 17:22. So, throughout my narrative, you will find that I resort to humor or to embellishing some of the details and creating others; especially when my memory serves me poorly, the details are growing grim, or when I have simply bored myself. My aim in these instances is to incite you to have a few giggles along the way while I also maintain my sanity.

Table of Contents



Chapter 1: Pre-School Innocence.....	12
A Glimpse into the Past.....	13
Suiting Up.....	13
Taking a Slide and a Few Giggles.....	15
Off to My Play Ground.....	16
Bodies of Light.....	17
My First Glimpse at Religion.....	18
Chapter 2: School-Age Indulgence.....	19
A Secret Plot.....	20
Headed for Some Adventure.....	21
On the Way to Stardom.....	23
Preparing for Our Grand Debut.....	25
Just Before the Big Event.....	28
Center Stage.....	26
Another Lesson Learned.....	29
Chapter 3: Adolescence Mischief.....	31
That Bright Sunny Day.....	32
That Old Rusty Play House.....	32
Dared to Do It!.....	33
A Bolt of Lightning!.....	35
The Lashing of My Life.....	36
A Little Reinforcement.....	37
A Change in Attitude.....	38
An Ambush.....	40

Table of Contents



A Little More Than Drama.....	41
A Bit of a Side Show.....	42
Touched by the Spirits.....	45
Homeward Bound.....	46
More Lessons Learned.....	47
Chapter 4: Pre-Teen Disillusion.....	49
Severing the Ties.....	50
A Whole New Beginning for Three.....	52
Where Was the Lord in All of This?.....	57
Chapter 5: Teenage Confusion.....	59
Finding Our Way.....	60
Those Busy Bees.....	61
Challenging My Pride.....	63
A Time to Forgive.....	68
A Stronger Spiritual Discernment.....	70
Chapter 6: A Time to Explore.....	72
My Search Begins.....	73
An Invitation to Something New.....	76
A Different Understanding.....	78
Embracing a New Concept.....	80
Chapter 7: A Time of Confidence.....	83
Sharing My Faith.....	84

Table of Contents



An Unexpected Hurdle.....	85
A New Prospect.....	89
Slip Sliding Away.....	92
Chapter 8: An Independent Spirit.....	94
More Than Just Jobs.....	95
An Unexpected Attraction.....	97
Stifling My Spiritual Growth.....	98
Chapter 9: Middle-Age Conundrums.....	100
The Comfortable Years.....	101
Attempting to Fill the Void.....	103
A Knock at Our Door.....	104
Accepting God Back into My Life.....	107
Parting Ways.....	110
Turning Their Backs.....	112
A Commitment to Uncover the True Religion.....	115
Chapter 10: A New Life, Adventure and Insight.....	117
A New Acquaintance.....	118
A Second Encounter.....	122
Dinner for Two.....	125
A Promising Future.....	126
A Time for Adjustment.....	129
My First Trip Abroad.....	131
A Trip on the Nile.....	132
A Grand Finale.....	133

Table of Contents



Return to Life in America.....	134
Chapter 11: A Time for Spiritual Enrichment.....	136
Embracing My Spiritual Growth.....	137
That Catastrophic Event.....	138
Over the Shock.....	142
Preparation to Make My Shahadah.....	144
Learning to Pray Here and Abroad.....	145
Taking My Shahadah.....	148
A Time for Celebration.....	149
More Joy.....	150
Chapter 12: The Fruits of My Journey.....	152
The Culmination of My Research.....	153
The Book of Truth.....	154
The Only True God.....	154
The Final Instructions.....	156
The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad.....	158
Social Equality.....	165
Surpassing Science.....	168
The Holy Quran, A Miracle.....	170
Chapter 13: Facing the Opposition.....	173
Family.....	174
Friends.....	175
Acquaintances.....	176
Public Sector.....	176

Table of Contents



Attitude Matters.....	180
Chapter 14: A Relationship with Allah (SWT).....	181
The Most Essential Tool-Prayer.....	182
Respecting Others.....	188
Chapter 15: The Finale.....	193
Conclusion.....	194
Author’s Notes.....	196
Recommended Resources.....	197
References.....	198
Notes/Comments.....	199

Chapter 1



Pre-School Innocence

Pre-School Innocence



A Glimpse into the Past

While many have lost their way and have no idea how their lives have evolved over time, it becomes evidently clear to some people how the beginning of their existence has molded their present life's circumstances. In fact, with little or no consternation, many people can connect their current state of affairs to specific events that began developing at near infancy. I am such a person. After many years of overcoming various obstacles, I have reached a place in my life where the past has become my focal point for understanding where I am today and how my past shaped my attitudes, my perceptions, my actions and my goals. I am acutely aware that I have been fashioned by my earliest experiences, particularly those associated with knowledge of religion. Hence, my life's story begins here--at the approximate age of an innocent five-year old girl.

Suiting Up

Most of my life experiences at age five, I suspect, are still hidden deeply into my subconscious, but some vivid events appear as though they happened just yesterday. Such is one event that I hold most dear. This memorable occasion was



a perfect day for a young girl to take a solo trip to the local post office to be highlighted by a little extra secret fun. My Mom didn't like the cold weather, so she bribed me with a cup of hot chocolate to get me to go fetch the mail. There was no way I was going to refuse her offer, especially since I had an ulterior motive—and it all had to do with “bodies of light.”

My mom insisted that I hurry on my way. So, she quickly threw my clothes to me and helped me get dressed. After putting on my unmentionables, I reached for my wool black and red plaid skirt and my red turtleneck sweater. Once I managed to get them on, we wrestled a bit to get my spandex leggings over my toes, stretched upwards along my legs, pulled over my behind and finally with a big tug up to and around my thin waist. She grabbed my arms, one at a time, and shoved each down into the corresponding sleeve of my favorite gray carded-wool coat, adorned with big black buttons that looked like liquorish lollypops. It was a perfect fit. I was delighted because it fit snugly against my clothes underneath and forced them firmly against my slim frame, unlike my brown hooded coat that was far too loose. For sure, it would keep me warm and shield me from potential frost bite that the calm, yet persistent wind that awaited me outdoors could pose. I forced my feet down



into my black rubber, fur-lined boots whose furry edges rubbed against my Lacra-covered knobby knees when I sauntered forward. Lastly, I pulled my hand-me-down toboggan over my head and down onto and around my face and neck; then, I darted towards the door. Immediately departing, I turned back and yelled at Mom, “I’ll be back soon! Have my hot chocolate ready!”

Taking a Slide and a Few Giggles



Proceeding my launch into the snow, I cleverly slid across our front porch, stomped down the slippery steps and headed into the heavily-packed snow, blanketing our front yard. The snow reached half way up my calves, and I could feel the wet, yet white fluffy snow flakes falling onto my tender pink cheeks that were unintentionally left unprotected by my loosely-fitted toboggan. I didn’t care. In fact, I kind of liked the snow hitting my face. It felt refreshing. And, I sure wasn’t afraid of catching a cold. I enjoyed it all—even the ice that I noticed hanging from the eaves. Visions of similar dangling ice crystals crashing down upon unsuspecting guests while their eyes were fixed on the steps ahead popped into my mind. I just chuckled. Several



images of me watching people slip, slide and fall on the ice flashed across my mind, too, and made me giggle. I was young, adventurous and even a bit naughty at times. And, besides, I wasn't going to say anything to anyone about my toboggan being too big. For sure as I did, one or more of my siblings or cousins would latch onto it faster than I could shout "Shazam!" and claim it as their own.

Off to My Play Ground

With the front door key grasped tightly in my hands, protected from the cold by my red-yarn mittens that my Grandma knitted for me, I made a beeline from my front porch, through our snow-covered yard and across the road onto Big Birch Lane. Then, trudging determinedly forward I wound up on Elm Street, about a block away. Elm Street was the main street stretching from one end of our local town to the other. Once on Elm Street, I knew that I was well on my way. It was a straight shot ahead to my place of rendezvous and, of course, to the post office. I couldn't see a single soul. It was just little ole me and the snow. "Boy, aren't these perfect conditions for executing my plan!" I told myself. Then, suddenly, almost unexpectedly, I felt my heart racing with excitement as I drew





closer. Just a few more steps ahead and a sharp left turn around the corner, I would be at my eagerly anticipated play ground. A field of snow as big as a ballfield wedged its north end up against the East Bank Fire Department building and awaited me. And, it was all mine!

Bodies of Light

Facing backward, with my head down and my arms out to my side, I took a plunge into that vast land of white. I pressed my head firmly down and rolled it from side to side against the snow below. I hurriedly began waving my hands up and down towards my head and back down to ricochet off my well-padded hips and then into an upward motion. At the same time, I stretched my legs forward along the ground and aligned them with the center of my body. I rapidly thrust my legs as far outward from my body as I could spread them. In unison my arms and legs repeated their spectacular motions until I could see the ground peak through from beneath. Almost instantaneously a beautiful white body of light, an “angel,” appeared, with its wings glistening from the sun that shone from above it. It was magical! “What splendor!,” I exclaimed. I had sculpted it by myself, just like my Grandpa taught me. It was beyond marvelous! It





was a spectacular display. I was indulged to master more! With each additional one, I became even more enchanted by the resulting marvels. Those bodies of light were all around me, fully alive and dancing like fairies under the powder blue sky--I had achieved my secret mission! I was proud! I had crafted angels! Then, I swiftly bolted up onto my feet; and off to the post office I sprinted, with full intention of arriving there as quickly as I could. Because, I knew, that once I had the mail in my hand, I could dash straight away to home. I couldn't wait to sip my way to the bottom of that cup of hot chocolate—that yummy milk-chocolate drink topped with mini marshmallows--with which my Mom had cleverly coaxed me into the winter cold. So she thought!



My First Glimpse at Religion

The story that I just shared captures my first recollection of my young mind being influenced by religion. I learned at the tender age of five that angels were special. To me, these bodies of light had earned my admiration because; not only did my Grandpa think it prudent to teach me how to make them, but also I heard my Mom and my Aunt Lizzie talking about how nice “the Lord” was to send His angels to help them when times got rough.



Chapter 2



School-Age Indulgence

School-Age Indulgence



A Secret Plot

Like most young girls and boys, my brothers and I never missed a chance to be in the lime light. Our first opportunity for stardom arose just a couple weeks before Christmas that year. At that age, my Mom and Dad seemed not to be particularly religious but wanted to keep us mischievous kids entertained and out of “their hair,” as we heard them say often, especially when they appeared to reach the ends of their wits. On this particular occasion, my Mom was ahead of the game, as she had already plotted a plan for her to execute as soon as our grade-school teachers announced our winter school break. Just between you and me, dear readers, I think my Mom had this important date jotted in bold on her calendar. She was utterly determined to get us involved in the Christmas play. Our local fire department was launching the event to entertain the community during the holidays. So, just like clockwork, on Tuesday, just before Christmas, my Mom cleverly sent me and my twin brother off to rehearsals for a “spectacular drama.” It really didn’t take much prodding on her part, though. She needed merely to mention the words “practice for the play,” and we were sold!





Besides, what kid in its right mind, at that age, would turn down a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to achieve “celebrity status?” None, that I knew of anyway. So, on that especially chilly Tuesday evening around six, my Mom yelled, “Okay guys get your coats on; you got to get going! You’re Daddy’s here!” she yelled even louder. “Okay, we’re cumin’!” my brother and I yelled just as loud in unison.

Headed for Some Adventure

With my Dad behind the wheel and me on my brother’s lap next to him, my Dad shoved the gas pedal to the floor with all the strength he could muster, and off we rolled. In addition



to our truck being an old red 1948 Hudson Big Boy that lost its “umph,” it had only one bench seat that forced us to make room. Actually, the fact that Dad’s truck even started up surprised me. Even so, my brother and I were just happy we were off to some unbridled adventure. “Forget the truck,” I told myself.

We arrived a few minutes early, as Dad always insisted on being an early bird. He never wanted to waste time, especially if a slight delay cut into his time to sip a few cold



“brews” with his buddies at his favorite neighborhood tavern. After driving about five minutes, we made a quick turn around the corner and drove into the parking lot of the fire department. My Dad pressed on the break and skidded to an abrupt stop. I just glanced over at him and snickered because I knew he was just trying to show off his driving prowess. “Alright, go!” he insisted. On that cue, my brother and I jumped down from the high brown tattered leather seats and onto the asphalt pavement. Darting across the parking lot, my brother yelled, “What time are you pickin’ us up?” Dad hollered back, “8:30 sharp!” We knew exactly what “sharp” meant because; not only had we heard it many times before, but also we knew he was daring us not to linger once rehearsal was over.

Shuffling in front of my brother, I darted up the grey cement steps and through the glass front door of the fire department. We were the first ones there, except Miss Williams. She was our grade-school teacher who prided herself in being a social butterfly and always took part in every community event. I was delighted to see her. I was her pet; and, in her eyes, I could do no wrong. “Hi, Miss **23**



Williams,” I politely greeted her, stretching my arms upward to hug her. “Well, hello my dear,” she replied. “How are you?” “I’ve missed you!” she continued. “I’m fine, thank you, Miss Williams,” I said. She then turned to hug my brother. He immediately showed his disapproval by turning away, pouting as he puckered up his lips and tightly grasped both arms together in front of him and then shoved them onto his full chest. He didn’t like being smothered with hugs and kisses like I did. After all, he was going to be a man some day, so he had to insist that no one invade his private space. With my face fully blushing, I told myself, “It’s okay, I understand, and so does Miss Williams.”

On the Way to Stardom

Miss Williams, then, pointed us down the hall to the activity room. My brother and I took seats in the first row to make sure she didn’t overlook us when she passed out the scripts. We judged her right! She handed the first part to me and the second to my brother. I felt so excited because I was going to talk about baby Jesus.





Equally delighted, my brother glanced over at me and smiled. He was going to be a wise man. We were going to be “stars,” so that was plenty exhilarating for us. And, for certain, we couldn’t get home fast enough to tell Mom the good news. She would be ecstatic. Knowing that we would be happily occupied with becoming stars for a week or so would give her a much needed peace of mind. She could then concentrate on all her tasks ahead. Getting her Christmas shopping, gift wrapping, and Christmas cards written and mailed were among her first priorities. Once all these things were done, she could focus on making her own grand display—her Christmas dinner feast. Her food would make the mouths of even the most talented chefs water and surely tempt those having a conservative appetite. No doubt our surrounding circumstances would lead to happiness for us all on that anticipated Christmas get together. For now, though, my brother and I were fully satisfied that we could get busy plotting our rehearsals around Mom’s busy schedule. We were sure that we would soon be well-equipped to dazzle the audience of our neighborhood “Broadway” production.





Preparing for Our Grand Debut

Well, I have to say the week passed by “faster than a rat up a drainpipe,” as my Uncle Jim used to exclaim to make us kids laugh. Mom hadn’t yelled at us as often either, as far as we knew. We were too busy rehearsing our parts to even notice her bouts of temper. I must have mumbled to myself: “He left his home from heaven above to teach his children how to love” at least a thousand times, while stroking the long, silky blonde hair of my favorite Barbie. I was starting to bore myself and my Barbie doll. Even so, I had to be certain I made no mistakes. After all, I was preparing for Hollywood, and this was a major feat. My brother, on the other hand, seemed more confident. He played with his trucks in between pacing across the floor as though he knew everything. I guess this was good, considering he would be one of the three wise men. That, or he was showing off to make me feel like he had already been crowned king.

The night before the grand event, my Mom insisted that she hear us recite our parts. On her command to get ready, I don’t know who giggled the most, me or my brother. At any rate, my Mom threatened to tan our hides if we didn’t settled down and recite our parts. So, we both shut up and waited for her to listen. I was first. My Mom said: “Alright, you need to get this right.” “I will,” I assured her.



“Okay, go,” she insisted. The first time, I recited the words so fast that she, nor I, could tell what I was uttering. I was a bit nervous, and she could tell. “Slow down,” I can’t understand you,” she complained. “Okay, Mom; here we go,” I promised. “He left his home from heaven above to teach his children how to love,” I rattled off more slowly and fairly clearly. “Alright, then; see, when you slow down, people can understand you. Now, make sure you do the same when you’re on stage. Good! You’ll do fine,” she lamented, looking quite pleased. Then, it was my brother’s turn. “Alright, where are you, Donnie?” she yelled. In a flash, my brother came racing toward us. And, just before he reached Mom, he tripped and almost fell on her. Mom, yelled at a much higher pitch this time: “I told you to keep those trucks out of the middle of the floor!” Okay, let’s go,” she insisted. My brother dropped his head a tad, rolled his eyes at Mom and then said, “Well, it’s not that hard, Mom.” “Okay, let me hear your part,” she insisted. “We will follow the big star in the east,” he quickly blurted out with confidence. “ Well, now, aren’t you just a perfect wise



man!” my Mom exclaimed. She then playfully tapped him on his behind, while nodding to me, saying: “I’m proud of you guys.”



“Now, pick up your toys and get ready for bed,” she calmly ordered. “So, you think we’re going to do okay, Mom?” I inquired. “Of course, sweetie,” she replied. “Well, I guess we’re gonna knock ‘em dead,” I proudly professed to my brother. “Well, yeah! That’s what wise men and celebrities do,” he chuckled. Mom was happy, and so were we. So, off to “dreamland” we two stars shuffled.

Just Before the Big Event



The big night arrived. And, of course, Dad was on time as usual. Surprisingly, we were just as prompt. My brother barreled out the front door in front of me, and my Mom and I hurried behind him. We all piled into Dad’s truck, my mother next to Dad and me on my brother’s lap. As we approached the fire department, we could see all the people dressed in their red-carpet fashion, heading for the main door. It wasn’t long before Mom and Dad and all the other guests were all settled into their seats with their eyes fixed on the stage just ahead. Meanwhile, my brother and I and all the other soon-to-be celebrities were gathered back stage, putting on our home-made costumes. Miss Williams, besides being a social butterfly, was well regarded as the



most talented seamstress in town. This night was more than just a chance for us to gain stardom. It was an equal opportunity for her to show off her designer garbs. She had sown all of our costumes. They not only fit us perfectly, but also they magically transformed us into characters that we would proudly portray.



Center Stage

As we gazed at the opening curtain, each of us characters felt a magic come over us. We heard the loud applauds from the audience which made our hearts race with glee. Miss Williams summoned us on stage, and on we traipsed to our assigned spots. And in an instant, the magic began. Ms. Williams had a knack for directing, too, I don't think there was anything that she couldn't do and do perfectly. Each of us characters played our parts as flawlessly as we had last rehearsed them. We could all feel the excitement from the audience's extended applauds that reverberated between the grey concrete block walls. Our acting proved



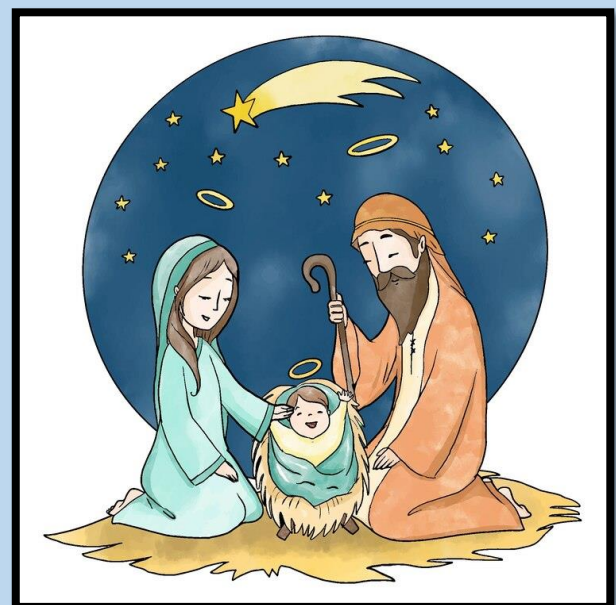
magnificent! We were fabulous! We were, indeed, stars! In fact, We were brilliant as the star of Sirius to which the



three wise men looked for guiding them to finding baby Jesus. We did become celebrities in our own rights. We even had the proof that what I'm telling you is true. Because as we looked out across the stage, we witnessed a standing ovation that was accompanied by applauds that caught the attention of the fire fighters clapping in the next room. This reaction from the audience would make any Hollywood star envious. My brother became even more joyous as he pointed to the night guard and proclaimed out loud: "Look, even he is teary eyed!" This was, indeed, a night that my brother and I made our parents proud. It was a night forever engraved in both our memories.

Another Lesson Learned

While my learning to appreciate angels laid the foundation of my religious beliefs, the experience of playing parts in the Christmas play planted another basic idea in my heart about religion for me. I come to recognize that Jesus was a very unique man.





He was so different from any man that I had known or heard of. Not one of them, other than baby Jesus, had the miraculous ability to give up his position in such a special place as heaven to come to earth and teach us to love each other. So, from that point forward, I loved talking to my friends and family about angels and Jesus. I learned how important it is for us to accept each other as we are and to love everybody unconditionally.



He left his home from heaven above to teach his children how to love.

We will follow the big star in the east.



Chapter 3



Adolescence Mischief



Adolescence Mischief

That Bright Sunny Day

It was a warm, sunny Friday afternoon in June around 1:00. Mom had fed us peanut butter sandwiches, potato chips and raspberry Jell-O for lunch. And, since Dad had the day off from work, he headed out the door to run his usual errands, getting groceries and the like. I heard his truck rattle down the lane and turn the corner. Dad must have given it a little more gas, as I could hear the engine roar more loudly. I guessed that he was approaching the hill a block or so away. The noises from the truck reminded me that Dad's truck was getting pretty old and losing its "umph." I understood why Dad was pressing the gas pedal to full throttle to get up and over that hill. Anyway, we kids were delighted that Dad was on his way. We were safe to play however we wanted. So, I immediately dismissed any thoughts of Dad's truck breaking down. Instead, thoughts of having fun flashed across my mind.

That Old Rusty Play House

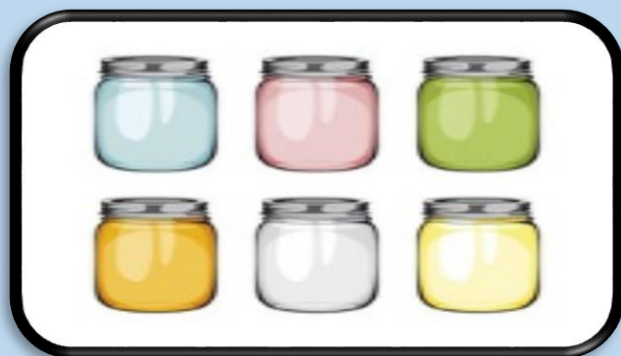
We all dashed out the back door, my youngest brother slamming the screen door behind him. Mom yelled: "I've told you: Don't slam the door!" "Okay," my younger brother



yelled back. We darted across the back yard and headed for the old bluish green rusted truck bed that Dad stored under the bunch of weeping willows that hung over the fence, separating our yard from the neighbors property. My brothers and I jumped upward and straddled the sides of the truck bed as if we were mounting black stallions. Our right legs dangled along the inside of the bed, while our left legs firmly hugged the bed from the outside. We, then, lunged slightly forward and pulled our left legs up and over the edges and let them rest against the bed. None of us had legs long enough to touch the bed's floor. This awkward position didn't matter, though, as our small fannies comfortably gripped the bed's narrow edges.



Dared to Do It!



My brothers spotted two Mason jars lodged in the far, right corner of the truck bed. Davey jumped down on the floor and scurried over to fetch them. No different than most curious boys, my brothers had a growing infatuation with insects--of all kinds!



Knowing the bubble bees often swarmed above the small patch of dandelions close by, I suspected that the bees were fair game for the boys. My brother Davey stood near me as he screwed the lid off his jar and prepared for scooping up the first bee that flew by. A reminder of my handful of butterscotch candies that I had grabbed from my mother's plastic, 10-Cent Store candy dish and stuffed into my pants pocket popped into my mind. So, I clumsily shoved my hand into my pocket, pulled out one of those yellow circles of pure, sugary sweetness, and plopped it into my mouth. "Hey, guys; you want one?" I asked. And, before either could answer, a yellow jacket that had been nesting in one of the weeping willows just above my head parachuted down in front of me and landed smack dab onto the middle of that



goldish cellophane candy wrapper that I had clasped between my right thumb and forefinger. A highly-skilled paratrooper couldn't have made a more precise landing.

I haven't the slightest idea how I managed to get that candy wrapper around that bee. All I remember is that, with all



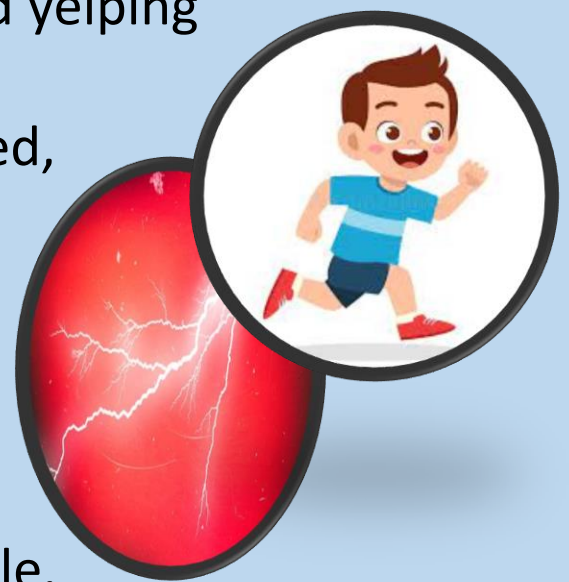
my might, I feverously twisted the ends of the wrapper snugly around that beast of a bee, more tightly than it had originally enveloped that tasty piece of butterscotch. No way was I going to allow that little critter to sting me.

A Bolt of Lightning

Davey hadn't noticed my devilish maneuver in capturing that buzzin' insect. He immediately replied: "Yeah, I'll have one." "Okay, I answered. Just close your eyes and open your mouth wide, I said coaxingly. "And, don't peak," I added. He did exactly as I instructed him. I quickly reached up and planted the captured critter on my brother's lower lip. "Bite!" I commanded him with authority. The instant sting that that buzzin' inmate inflicted on him caused my brother so much pain that he started yelping louder than a severely injured pup.

He, then, jumped out of the truck bed, bolted like a flash of lightning across the lawn, and charged through the back door. His yelling pierced my ears. I knew, then, that I had gotten my little naughty self into more than just a great deal of trouble.

I stood up and anxiously awaited my mother's coming bout of unmerciful wrath.





The Lashing of my Life

I didn't even have time to seek cover. It appeared almost instantly that Mom came racing toward me, screaming: "Come here; you little brat!". She had Dad's brown leather belt grasped in her left hand; and, a look that signaled death, itself, engulfed her slender face. She grabbed me by my right arm, pulled me down from the bed of the truck, and drug me across the lawn and through the back door, all the while lashing my fanny and legs in sync with ever step. "Ouch, ouch, ouch," I cried out: "Please, Mommy, stop!. She ignored my pleas and kept lashing me with that leather belt until we reached the living room. Then, grasping both of my shoulders, she shoved me down onto the couch. "Don't you dare move, young lady!" she shouted! "You stay there until your Daddy gets here!" she ordered me abruptly. I began to cry out more loudly as I glanced into the bedroom and saw Davey lay sobbing. I could see him holding on his swollen lips the ice pack that my mother made from one of our old white wash clothes. I felt so sad, for I realized the harm that I had done and the potential of my having killed my dear brother—my best friend! As the tears streamed down my





puffy red cheeks, Dad came barging into the room, grabbed me by my arm and pulled me close. He hollered: “Louise, where’s my belt?” Mom come running. “Here, she said, stretching out her hand that still tightly gripped that leather strap.

A Little Reinforcement

My Dad wrestled me across his lap and began walloping me more vigorously than my Mom had already done. I yelled: Stop! Stop! Stop! I’m sorry!” I pleaded. “You know you could have killed your brother. You know he’s allergic to those bees. That’s the devil’s work; I’m telling you! Tricks like that is what will take you to hell,” he bellowed--one warning after the other. “Now, go to your room!” he clamored. Of course my Mom chimed in shouting her own tailored orders: “Now go! Don’t you come out until I tell you to!” she yelled. “You’re grounded for the week!,” she shouted. “No toys! No books! No nothing!” she yelled vehemently; and, then, slammed the door shut.



I don’t know which made me feel worse the lashings that I got or the harm that I had unintentionally unleashed on my brother.



Also, being grounded for an entire week without anything at all to do wasn't going to be much fun. "I was going to be in solitary confinement, worse than a prisoner suffering behind bars on Alcatraz," I assured myself. I become painfully aware, at that precise moment, that having a little bit of fun can, in a Nano second, turn into an unexpected disaster. All of these thoughts made me terribly sad--so sad that I lay on my bed, hugging my tear-sopped pillow until I eventually cried myself to sleep.

A Change in Attitude

A couple years later, we kids had grown aware that many things had changed in our cozy lives with Mom and Dad. Dad seemed never to be around much, and Mom was busy taking care of everything, especially raising us kids—all five of us. She was doing her best. It was at this time as a youngster that I noticed a drastic change in my Mom's mental state. She appeared distant and in her own little world. She was making an effort to "know the Lord better," as she told us kids. One day not long after she told us that, she insisted that "it was the Lord," to whom she would look for comfort. I noticed that she was reading an old book that had the name "Holy Bible" written in shiny gold letters on its charcoal cover. This old book was special to Mom, for it



was one which had been passed down to her from her Great Grandmother. Being too young, we kids weren't sure if we really understood why Mom said the things she did, nor did we

understood that book in which she seemed to give so much credence. What we did know for certain was that the angels helped us when we needed them and that Jesus was a really good man who wanted us to love everybody.

Some days—many days, in fact, I saw my Mom crying. It made me sad. One day, I got the courage to ask her why. So, I stretched my little frail arms around her neck and quietly whispered into her left ear: “Mom,” Why are you crying?” I pleaded. No sooner had those words left my puckered lips, than Mom thrust her long, ivory arms out against my chest and forcefully shoved me away. She exclaimed: “It doesn't matter! Go outside and check on your brothers and sister,” she demanded. My eyes instantly teared up a bit. I was hurt. My Mom's surprising attitude toward me confused me. The tears that gathered in the corner of my eyes started rolling down my tender, pale cheeks. I dashed out the front door without turning to look back at her, for I didn't want her to see me crying, too. 40



And, as I flung open the front door, instant memories of my Mom's recently growing impatience and anger toward me poured into my conscious, causing the tears to flow more intensely and to drench the top of my cotton floral blouse. I made my way down the rickety wooden steps and under the front porch that was raised high on lumber columns that looked like majestic stilts supporting it. This under-the-house getaway had become just that—a place for us to retreat when we kids wanted time to ourselves, and or, to play without being ordered to “do this” or “to do that” by Mom and Dad. I stopped a few feet short of where my brothers and sister were. I quickly wiped my face dry on the bottom half of my blouse and sauntered forward a few steps closer. I could easily see that they were all okay. They each held jars of crickets that were hopping and bouncing off the sides of their glass prisons. Even from my distance, I could hear them chirping so loud that the noise they made appeared that night had rapidly fallen upon them. They were clearly declaring that they were captured.

The Ambush

My older brother sneakily lunged forward and pushed his jar of crickets into my face. The crickets instantly exploded in size and in sound, causing my arms to involuntarily flail



like goldfish fins in a shoal of piranha. I involuntarily shoved the jar back onto my brother's chest, leaped passed him faster than greased lightning, and made a mad dash under the apple tree to ward off his seemingly unfair taunting. Had I mustered the stamina to scream at the top of my lungs, the famous words of a pop music artist: "I don't like spiders and snakes," I may have immediately calmed my nerves. Anyway, my brother, grinning ear to ear, had achieved his goal. He could see me straining not to yell or to tinkle down my legs. My animated reaction was just what he was seeking, so he slowly backed away and started laughing uncontrollably, losing his balance and almost falling. I looked at him angrily, in full disgust and frowned. Suddenly, I dropped to the ground and started weeping.



A Little More Than Drama

"Ah, come on, I was just playin' with you. You don't have to be a baby," he jeered. "You'd cry, too if you saw Mommy crying like I just did!" I exclaimed. "What are you talking about?" he asked. "Well haven't you seen Mommy crying?"



I see her crying a lot lately. And, where is Dad these days?" I demanded. "Oh, that makes you cry?" he asked, trying to downplay my emotional outbursts. "Well, I have to say, I have seen Mommy crying, and I don't know where Daddy goes all the time. He just disappears a lot and doesn't come home until after we go to bed," he explained. "I know," I replied. All of these changes with Mommy and Daddy really make me sad," I told him. "Don't worry; everything will be okay," he tried to assure me. "Okay, then," I replied, so as not to make any further fuss. I knew my brother didn't like it when I got emotional. But, in spite of my brother's reassurance, I had a feeling deep inside that things would never be the same as they were before Dad had seemingly disappeared. "We have to get dressed; its time to get ready for church," he insisted. "Go tell, Donnie and Sis it's time to go," he ordered, rather authoritatively. "I guess that he is going to be acting like a father figure now that Daddy is gone," I told myself, as I pulled myself together to round up my siblings.

A Bit of a Side Show

It was a cool Thursday evening in autumn around 6:30, when Mom, my two brothers, my sister and I, all dressed in our best clothes, walked down the steep hill to the main dirt road. We





headed to the school-house-looking church that was adorned with a huge gold wooden cross atop its steeple. Mom was unusually quite. But, my brothers and I made up for her silence. We joked about what might happen at the service that night. We didn't know what to expect, for each night had its own special "happenings," as we kids referred to them. We started giggling louder and louder because we were making fun of Miss Nellie and her unexpected outbursts. Mom got a bit agitated and demanded that we stop. "Right now, I said," she yelled. "You kids better behave. I've told y'all before to stop laughin' at other people. You'd better behave now; and don't be gigglin' during the service," she warned. "We won't, we replied, all at the same time. "You better not," she rebuffed.

When we arrived at the church, we walked down the aisle and took seats in the front pew on the right. My Mom sat nearest to the aisle, and we kids sat to the right of her, my youngest brother sitting closest to her.



Mom always like sitting in the front row because she didn't want to miss anything--especially if things started to get a bit "rowdy." Of course, we kids weren't at all disappointed



about the seating arrangement. Not only could we see better, but also we could better hear Ms. Nellie, who always sat in the front pew to our left and was a master at capturing our attention with her sudden gibberish outbursts.

Reverend Harris came in. She was the only female preacher that we had ever seen. She was a petite lady that dressed modestly in her exceptionally loose fitted, long-sleeve blouses that covered her hips and her long straight skirts that covered her legs, down to her mid-calves. She was a bubbly lady and kind, who took a special interest in us younger folk. She began her sermon precisely at 7:00, and we were glad. She talked about a lot of things that people do wrong and assured us that we would be forgiven if we repented to “the Lord.”

My brothers were starting to get a bit antsy and began poking each other to pass the time. My mother reached over and slapped my youngest brother on the knee as a way of daring any of us to make any bit of noise. My sister and I were trying to ignore my brothers so as not to cause either of us to initiate a giggling fit.





Touched by the Spirits

Then without warning, Miss Nellie leaped up out of her seat, began mumbling unintelligible words, and raised her hands above her head, while prancing around in circles. It sounded like she was speaking a foreign language. The best we kids could decipher was a phrase that sounded like “pulla my tiah.” She repeated these mumblings multiple times. This was one of the “happenings” that my brothers and I were joking about during our walk to the church.



Each of us kids looked on in amazement and sheer fright. Then, about a minute into her ranting, Miss Nellie turned toward the congregation and planted her eyes on a man in the middle pew of the left row. The man darted to the front, stopping near the pulpit and, too, started mumbling--just like Miss Nellie. As we listened more carefully, we kids could understand this man’s words more clearly, but we still had no idea their meanings. These outbursts just sounded like religious ramblings to us. Those strange exchanges



between Miss Nellie and the man went on for several minutes and halted abruptly, just as quickly as they had begun. Then, Reverend Harris, appearing to dismiss the charade, continued with her sermon and finished it on time. She summoned us all to open our hymn books and to stand while we sang several songs that included three religious classics: “The Old Rugged Cross, Amazing Grace and Sweet Chariot.” We knew these songs by heart. So, on her cue, we kids happily turned to the first hymn and excitedly stood



up. We liked to sing; and besides, we knew service would soon end. We couldn't wait to get outside the church doors and talk about the “goings on.” Miss Nellie hadn't failed us. In fact, she gave us plenty of ammunition to fuel our coming

bouts of laughter. So, the minute we sang the songs, we quickly said our good-byes to everyone and darted out the church door and onto the dirt road leading home.

Homeward Bound

I don't know who started laughing first; but by the time Mom caught up with us, we were all giggling and laughing so loud that a few passers-by glanced at us unapprovingly. As Mom approached us, she noticed the people's



disapproval and immediately began to reprimand us. She warned us again not to laugh at the people. “Stop, it; right now!” she insisted. “Okay, Mom,” my sister and I replied. My two brothers, though, kept giggling and, under their

breaths, kept repeating Miss Nellie’s unintelligible phrase: “pulla my tiah; pulla my tiah,” over and over, and over again. In her growing rage, my Mom insisted that we not make fun of Miss Nellie because she was simply “speaking in tongues.” Now, that, my dear readers, was another new phrase for us. And, witnessing such a sight of “speaking in tongues” made us giggle to cover up our fright of such unimaginable, scary gibberish.

More Lessons Learned

The past couple of years proved to further shape my understanding of religion. I come to know that there was someone called the “Devil” who made me do bad things that would lead me to “hell,” as my Dad had warned. Too, I learned that there was a special old book, called the “Holy Bible,” from which my Mom learned about “the Lord,” the



same mysterious entity that Reverend Harris spoke about and who had the miraculous power to forgive us if we “repented.” While indelibly etched in my subconscious were Miss Nellie’s “speaking in tongues,” those such unintelligible ramblings had not sparked my interest to understand, but rather spurred my ever effort to forget them.

I wasn’t sure if all these new words and phrases made a lot of sense to me. What I did, understand is that I certainly didn’t want to do bad things that would take me to a scary place called “hell.” I also would keep in mind that if I did do something bad to promptly ask “the Lord” to forgive me. Finally, I promised myself that I would never go into convulsions that would startled even those who seem to grasp such mysterious and embarrassing outbursts.



Chapter 4



Pre-Teen Disillusion

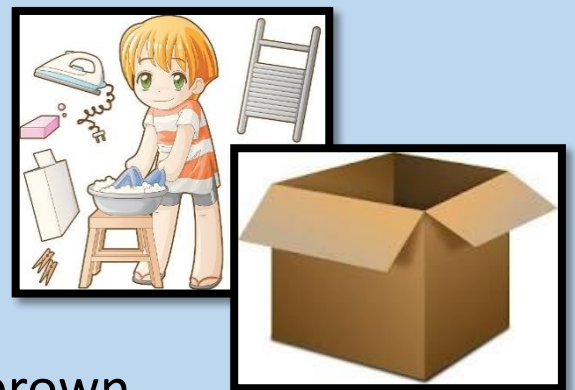


Pre-Teen Disillusion

Severing the Ties

The days of running in flowery fields, chasing butterflies, playing in Dad's old truck bed and laughing at Miss Nellie had become distant memories. Mom's mental state grew more dark and her treatment of us kids more cold. She withdrew from us older three completely and demanded that we take care of ourselves. Being older, then, our appetites grew more hardy; yet, more often than not, the contents of our food pantry grew bare. Our clothes lost their fresh creases and pleasant fragrance.

And, as for me, at the age of 8, learning to wash and iron my own clothes became my new hobby. Too, most astonishing to me, the drawer in which I kept my clean clothes had magically turned into a brown cardboard box. And, that was okay to me, as my outfits became fewer in number and didn't fill their once familiar dresser drawer.



Dad didn't come home anymore and hadn't for several months. We kids were growing distraught, trying to distract ourselves from the unsettling circumstances. I kept



myself busy reading anything I could get my hands on when I wasn't playing in the soapy water that foamed up on the washboard as I pressed what I was washing against it. For the boys, they often strolled along the nearby stream, fetching rocks and throwing them at any distant target.



Somedays after school and, especially on Sunday early afternoons, we three older kids took long walks along the winding country road that ran adjacent to our house. When we weren't kicking at the multi-colored pebbles that lay along the surface of the dusty dirt road in front of us, we picked blackberries and wildflowers.



Then, one autumn day when I was walking home from school, I stopped to admire the leaves of the huge oak trees that lined the fence along the road. I gazed at their beauty and pondered their many shades of red and gold. "How magnificent! How grand! I told myself. After a few minutes of enjoying one of nature's blessings, I continued my journey home. I finally reached our yard, walked down the grassy path to the house, and bolted up the steps, skipping one or two rungs during my rapid ascension. When I



reached the top stair, my eyes caught sight of an all-too-familiar brown, cardboard box wedged against the door. I knew its contents well, as I had opened and closed that box many times. I gasped! “What is this? Why are my clothes out here, for goodness sake?” The answers to these questions lie behind the door that I discovered was locked. Feeling panicked, I immediately tried to force the door open. I yelled: “Mommy, I home. Can you unlock the door, please?” From a distance, I heard my mother holler unforgettable words that pierced my tender heart. “Go! I don’t want you here anymore. I mean it! Now go, and don’t you come back,!” she screamed. I was jarred, totally jolted, astounded! The first thing that popped into my mind was she’s gone crazy! The next thought I had was to go call “Granny.” So, I picked up that box that spelled uncertainty for me and dashed down the steps and over to my neighbor’s house to make that call that changed my life forever.



A Whole New Beginning for Three

A few weeks following my abrupt departure from my mother, and just a day or so before Thanksgiving, I found myself still comfortably sleeping on Granny’s sofa. She and



Grandpa were my Grandparents on my father's side of the family. They were both kind and appeared happy that I was with them. This extended visit, however, seem to signal a longer stay than they had expected, so there was an urgency for them to enroll in our local grade school.

Granny was eager to wash and iron my clothes. This made me happy because I could look for a new hobby or two. She fed me well with some really good, home-cooked meals, much like the ones that my mother used to prepare. Also,



just like Mom, Granny never cooked anything that I didn't find appetizing, especially her macaroni and cheese casserole. I loved to eat that golden, perfectly melted

cheddar cheese that smothered that bubbling cheese-sauced pasta delight. It, indeed, was my favorite dish. And, I would expect her to earn nothing less than a blue ribbon at the annual county fair for

her rich, dark chocolate candied fruitcake--moistened with just a little Brandy spirits. I often didn't stop at one small serving, which Granny took as a compliment. And,





I don't think in either case, our favorable reactions had anything at all to do with those aromatic "spirits."

A day or so before Thanksgiving, I overheard Grandpa tell Granny to call my Mom. "Ned, Thanksgiving is coming. Try to convince "Weezie" that she needs to let this child come back home;" It's been over a month now," he continued.

"You're right, E.P.," Granny replied.

Granny immediately shuffled off and took a seat at the kitchen table next to the wall where the old mustard green rotary dial phone hung. She held the earpiece in her left hand



and her almost burnt-up cigarette in the other. Granny should have entered the Guinness Book of Records for smoking a cigarette the longest without dumping the ashes. On many occasions, I witnessed her smoking cigarettes that had ashes at least an inch and a half long. It was like a magic trick seeing the ashes just hanging there without falling into one of her chef specialties. Perhaps the mystery spice that I tasted on occasion was just that— her "magic" ingredient. I couldn't hear all the few-minute conversation. All I know is Granny hung up the phone, quickly hobbled on her crutch into the bedroom to fetch her purse, and alarmingly exclaimed: "Come on, E.P., Let's go!"



“We have to go get the boys!” “What happened, Ned”? he questioned. “Well, she’s gone off her rocker, E.P. She doesn’t want the boys either. She told me she had already filed for a divorce and that she couldn’t take care of them any more. Taking care of the other two was enough for her,” she yelled at me. “Besides she told me that these kids are Paul’s, too,” Granny shouted, as she began to tremble. Louise demanded that I come get them right now, or they’d be on the street,” she continued to mumble, while puffing more intensely on her cigarette that she nervously held in her right hand. Her same hand began to shake more furiously, and the burning ashes of her cigarette quickly fell to the floor. “Well, Ned, calm down, now,” he said as he reached down to sweep away the ashes with a tissue that he moistened with his spit. “It’ll be okay. We can work this out,” Grandpa offered consolingly.” “No, E.P., I’m telling you. She won’t listen to me,” Granny insisted, raising her



voice to make sure she made her point clear. “Okay! Alright! Don’t worry, Ned. Let’s go. We’ll talk about this in the car,” he assured her. And, out they dashed to the car. I immediately flopped down in my Granny’s favorite armchair. It had something special about it,

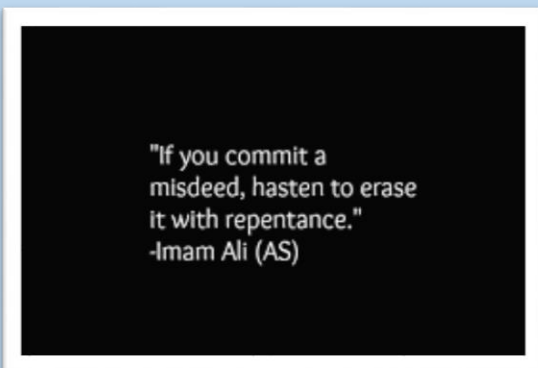
Where Was “the Lord” in All of This?



a sort of “magic” that I couldn’t explain. It always made me feel calm. This time was no different; for as soon as my fanny hit the chair, my heart beat slowed to a normal beat. I began to smile. The anticipation of being back with my brothers--my best friends--filled my heart with pure joy.



My brothers and I were close, so to be back together was a real miracle for all of us. We were just confused and terribly sad that Mom didn’t want us. We wondered how “the Lord,” to whom she and Reverend Harris had often times



referred, would allow a mother to sever ties with her own children. It seemed to me to be a horrific misdeed—inflicting a trauma on us innocent kids that would scar us forever. And, for this piercing

discomfort that I felt deep inside, I could never forget nor ever forgive my mother. To this, I made a solemn promise!

This period of my young life that I have narrated here, to be quite frank, caused me to begin questioning the few things that I had already had in my heart about religion. The love

Where Was “the Lord” in All of This?



that Jesus taught us to have for each other seemed to have faded completely from my parents, especially my Mom. And, I had to wonder if what Mom did would lead her to that bad place that Dad so vehemently warned me about. Too, I questioned whether or not either of my parents had “repented” to “the Lord” for tearing our family apart. And, I had to ask myself: “What happened to the angels that Grandpa taught me to make and that Mom and Aunt Lizzie assured each other would help them when times got rough?” In fact, I yearned to know if “the Lord” would ever forgive my Mother, for I had it not in my heart to ever do so. I didn’t voice any of these deep concerns to anyone. I kept them safe in my heart and tried to anticipate what might come. I hoped that “the Lord” of whom I’d heard so much about was actually good and that He would solve our dilemma.



Chapter 5



Teenage Confusion

Teenage Confusion



Finding Our Way

My brothers and I settled into our new life fairly comfortably after coping as best we could with the shocking separation from our parents. We strived to do our darnedest to get acclimated to our new middle school. The kids at school formed many clicks that appeared driven by childish aspirations. Neither my brothers nor I joined any of them, for we matured considerably over the past year and yearned to become more responsible teenagers.



During the first year at our new school, we three stuck together and looked to entertaining ourselves. Playing horseshoes in

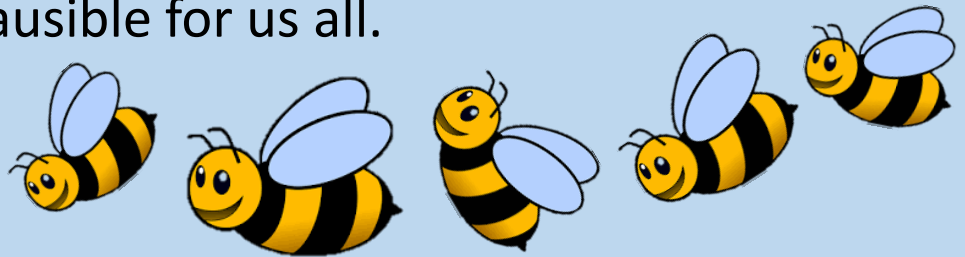
Granny's driveway, shooting badminton birdies over the net drawn across the front lawn, and hosting our private music awards and football half-time shows--starring none other than we three seekers of stardom—all became our favorite pastimes.



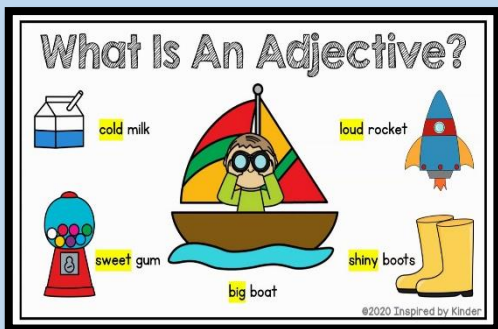


Eventually, our self-driven entertainment drew the attention of a brother and sister who lived near by and who were experiencing similar life-altering changes. They had walked by several times when we were playing horseshoes which sparked their interests. They and another passer-by who became friends with my twin brother accepted our exclusive invitations to sign up for our private club. These new friends helped to make the remaining school year become one of those most memorable times of our lives. And, we all perceived that letting go of our recent traumas soon appeared plausible for us all.

Those Busy Bees!



The following school year presented a few unexpected challenges. For one, the classes were more difficult, so we all had to buckle down and study harder than we had ever done before. My passion was English, especially literature and writing essays. So, I signed up for Miss Keffer's creative writing class. Everybody loved her, and she knew my Mom from the Nazarene Church that my Mom last attended. I eagerly anticipated the coming assignments. The first couple of weeks, we learned about the Parts of Speech which came fairly easy for me, especially the adjectives.

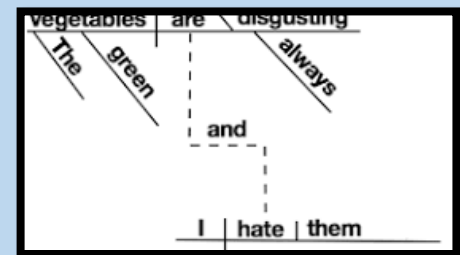


They captured my curiosity because they describe people, places, things and ideas. For example, one could write: “She sent her roses.” Or, instead, write: “The beautiful

young girl sent her mother a dozen of fresh, long-stem red roses.” The later sentence makes the girl and the roses come to life in the reader’s mind. I was so excited about using these curious words that I imagined, if used creatively, these gems would lead me to become a fine writer someday.



My excitement about English class halted abruptly, however, as I faced a second hurdle. Mrs. Keffer starting diagramming sentences to demonstrate how to use



adverbs--“busy bees,” I decided to call them. My frustration grew as I learned that they could appear anywhere in the sentence. I found them extremely daunting, completely perplexing. They reminded me of hyperactive kids that helped themselves to too much chocolate—appearing to dance about and suddenly landing wherever they wanted in the sentence. Having asked Mrs. Keffer numerous questions just in the first few minutes of the lesson, I felt faint.



I finally lowered my throbbing head and rested it on my desk. I remained in that position until the bell rang. Then, I jumped up and darted for the door. Just a few paces away, I could hear Mrs. Keffer's kind voice: "Deborah, are you okay?" she asked. I didn't turn back to answer. Instead, I dashed out the door, down the hall and through the glass doors that led to the gravel-covered parking lot where Bus #471 awaited. And, up into the bus I charged. Forget those "busy bees," I exclaimed to myself. "It's the weekend!"

Challenging My Pride



That following Saturday morning around nine o'clock, I was on my way to deliver a newspaper to Mrs. Hastings. I had inadvertently missed her when I delivered all the rest. We three kids delivered papers to help Granny and Grandpa with the household expenses. I walked down the street, around the corner and up the small hill that led to Madison Avenue. Several of my customers lived on this street, including Mrs. Keffer. Just as I was approaching her house, I saw her open her front door and saunter out to retrieve her own copy of *The Morning Gazette*. "Good morning, dear," Mrs. Keffer announced in a pleasant tone. "Good morning



Mrs. Keffer; how are you?" I replied. "Very well; and how are you this cool spring morning?" she asked. "I'm great!, I answered. "That's wonderful," she said with a smile. "Oh, by the way, why did you storm out of my class on Friday?"



"I had a terrible headache. I just don't understand those intimidating adverbs. They can appear just about anywhere in the sentence," I complained. "I know, dear; but,

really, they aren't that difficult. If you have a few minutes, I'll give you a private lesson and we can eat a little snack," she offered with a big smile. "Well, Mrs. Keffer, I have to deliver this paper to Mrs. Hastings first. Can I come back in about ten minutes?" I asked. "Sure, dear, that's fine, she replied.

I scurried down the street until I reached Mrs. Hastings' red-brick home that set back from the road.



I knocked on the door, and waited for her to answer. It wasn't even a second, it seemed, before she flung the door open and grabbed for the paper. "She must have been standing right there," I said to myself. "You have to be more attentive when delivering those papers, young lady," she said, scolding me. "This is twice that you've forgotten me,"



she said, as she continued to complain. “Oh, I’m sorry, Mrs. Hastings; I’ll be more careful the next time,” I said. “I didn’t mean to miss you,” I assured her. She shook her head to show me her disappointment. I quickly handed her the paper, said a quick good-bye and raced back up the street to Mrs. Keffer’s house. I felt a bit sad that Mrs. Hastings was so annoyed with me; and, in fact, I became even more blue because she seemed to imply that I forgot her on purpose.

I reached Mrs. Keffer’s house and found her waiting for me.

“Come in, dear, she said politely



and motioned for me to take a seat on her wine-colored antique sofa, adorned with vintage floral pillows. I slid backward from the edge so that I could rest my shoulders against its unusually high, tapered back while I waited for Mrs. Keffer to return. She came with freshly-squeezed orange juice and a slice of homemade strudel in her hands. After placing them on the coffee table in front of me, she took a seat in her Queen Ann chair near by. “Well, dear, how is your Granny, Grandpa and the boys?” she asked, leaning her head back against the chair. “Oh, they’re all good,” I answered, trying to sit up straight as I looked into her kind, blue eyes. “And, how’s your mother? I haven’t seen her at church for a very long time,” she continued. 65



Suddenly, memories of our kids' separation from Mom flooded my conscious, and my eyes filled with tears. "Oh, my, dear! You're about to cry. What's wrong?" she inquired. "Well, Mrs. Keffer, don't you know that my Mom and Dad are divorced?" I asked. "Mom doesn't live with us anymore," I whimpered. "Oh, my! I'm so sorry, dear, to hear that." Your mother is such a lovely lady. I miss seeing her." Hearing those words brought back the pain.

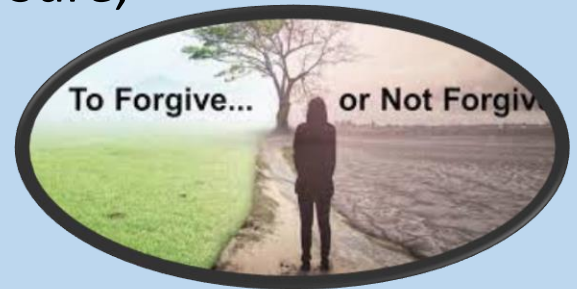
The tears that I was trying to hold back streamed down my cheeks. And, before I realized it, I blurted it out: "I hate her! I hate her!" I gasped and shouted again: "I hate her! I will never forgive her for what she did to me and my brothers! She made us leave the house and wouldn't let us come back. You know that is why we live with Granny now, right?" I stammered. "No, dear. I had no idea. I did hear she was very sick and was in the hospital for awhile," she offered sympathetically. "Yes, the hospital for crazy people," I assured her, as I raised my voice. "How could she ever do such a thing?" I asked, in hopes Mrs. Keffer had an answer.



"Listen, dear. Maybe your Mom had too much stress, especially having all you children and going through a divorce . These kinds of



circumstances can cause most people to lose their minds. Think about your mother; maybe this is what happened to her. Maybe she got sick because she knew that she was unable to take care of all of you children by herself. It's just a thought," she insisted. I abruptly interrupted her and asked: "Can you just help me with the adverbs? I don't feel like talking about Mom anymore." "Sure, sure, dear. Of course," she assured me. "But promise me that you'll think about what I've just said. You really need to think about forgiving her. What would you have done if you were in her circumstances?" she asked sympathetically. "Okay, Mrs. Keffer. I'll try," I said as I nodded my head. "I'm ready to tackle those adverbs," I said with great hope of forgetting and of redirecting Mrs. Keffer's attention from the obvious.



After some further explanation and drawing numerous diagrams, I begin to catch on. "Very good, dear!" Mrs. Keffer exclaimed. "See, I told you that adverbs weren't worth getting stressed over. Here, let's do a couple more." she



insisted. And, you'll want to make these guys your best friends if you want to be an author someday. And, you mustn't forget that many adverbs end in "ly," she added. That time it clicked! "So that's the secret! Just look for words that also end in "ly", I announced, gleefully. From then on, I got them all correct! I was so happy. "Alright, very good! Mrs. Keffer exclaimed, as to encourage me. "Now, I have a couple handouts that I want you to take home and complete. Bring them to class on Monday. We'll go over them then. If you still have questions, just let me know. Okay, dear?" she insisted. "Sure, Mrs. Keffer. I think I got it!" I said confidently. "Yes, I think you do, dear. I'm so proud of you! That's my girl!" she declared with a smile. "Thank you, Mrs. Keffer, I replied with a grin. I had realized at that very second two important things: First, Mrs. Keffer was right. I did need these "busy bees" as my best friends. Secondly, I had decided to nurture a strong relationship with these powerful parts of speech.



A Time to Forgive

From the minute I left Mrs. Keffer, I began to ponder the promise I had made to her. This oath dominated my thoughts. I couldn't dismiss it for even a second.



Finally, I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I kept asking myself, over and over again, whether Mom deserved to be forgiven. I thought about her being in the hospital and how difficult it must have been for her to carry the full responsibility of raising five children on her own. These thoughts overwhelmed me with pity. I felt ashamed that I hadn't thought about Mom's feelings, not once. I thought only of the pain that she caused me. I wanted to scream. Then, I remembered what Reverend Harris taught us about people that did bad things. She said that such individuals needed to repent to "the Lord." He would forgive them when they did. I felt like I had become one of those people. I began to cry. I looked up to the ceiling, stretched my hands above me and cried



out: "Please, Lord, forgive me! Please, Lord, forgive me! Help me to forgive my Mom!" I pleaded incessantly. No sooner did those words cross my lips that last time than a feeling of calmness came over me. The pent up anger seem to fade away. A sense of peace replaced that anger. For



once in a long time, I felt affection for my Mom. I wished that she was with me. I wanted to hug her tightly and tell her that I understood and that I was sorry for hating her.



I yearned to say: “I love you, Mom” —words that I thought I would never again utter. At that moment, not only did I learn the meaning of “forgive,” but also I learned how to do it. It all started with forgiving myself first and then passing that forgiveness onto Mom. I couldn’t wait to plan a visit with her. “Tomorrow, I will. I mustn’t delay,” I told myself. Too, I felt immense gratitude for Mrs. Keffer and obliged to express it to her. She was a special angel that “the Lord” had sent me. She encouraged me to forgive my mother and to love her as any child should. I became acutely aware at that moment that Mrs. Keffer’s lesson on “forgiveness” etched itself on my heart, and that its powerful influence on me for the rest of my life would far exceed that of teaching me how to become a promising author by partnering with those daunting “busy bees.”

A Stronger Spiritual Discernment

Having faced some difficult hurdles during middle school presented me an opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of my self. I had a chance to examine my selfish pride which had been preventing me from forgiving my mother. As a consequence of being proud, I learned the true meaning of forgiveness. Certainly,





once I examined this tremendous human quality, I gained a peace of mind and the ability to love someone who brought me great pain. Being able to forgive is an invaluable trait that could be granted only by one possessing a unique power, a force that could not possibly be conceived by any human. The feeling that spread throughout my body when I gazed up at the ceiling that night and pleaded for forgiveness was no less than a miracle bestowed by someone, something—a higher power—perhaps “the Lord,” of whom Reverend Harris spoke. Regardless of who “the Lord” was, from that moment, I was determined to get to know that remarkable one who harnessed such majesty.



Chapter 6



A Time to Explore



A Time to Explore

My Search Begins

Learning to forgive myself and my mother opened the way for me to explore a more spiritual path. I could not forget the impact that seeking forgiveness and the feeling that “the Lord” answered my pleas had on me. More than ever, as a young adult, I wanted to do my best to earn that miraculous gift. I began to pray just like I had seen my mother, Aunt Lizzie and Grandmother do many times.

Most every night, I prayed before going to bed. This private time became just that—I didn’t share my praying with anyone, not even my brothers.

My Granny, Grandpa and Aunt on my Dad’s side of the family were all Catholics. My Aunt attended “Mass” regularly,



while my Granny seemed less committed to the faith and went during Holidays: Christmas and Lent (as I heard Granny say many times when she gave up some of the foods that she normally ate). My Grandpa never showed any interest in religion. Often, I observed my Aunt carrying a set



of beads that I later learned was called a “rosary.” As I understood from my Aunt, she would say a special prayer while holding her rosary. Too, I saw a small statue of a



woman sitting on the dashboard of my Aunt’s car. I was particularly curious about this strange figurine. One day my Aunt decided to do some shopping and

asked me if I wanted to go. “Sure,” I said. So, we headed out the door, down the steps, along the walk that led to the gravel driveway and hopped into her light blue 1965 Chevy Impala. It was a huge car that could seat three average size people in the front seat and four in the back seat, quite comfortably. I felt like I was taking a ride in an army tank.

We rolled down our short street, turned the corner and started up the steep hill that led to the main road. When my Aunt pressed her foot to the gas pedal, the car jolted up the hill, and her blue, pink and white sculpture came sliding down into the console. I reached and grabbed it. And, as we reached the top of the hill and the dashboard was level again, I slid the figurine back into its place. “Ah, ha!” I said to my self. “This is the perfect time to ask what this woman



represents. So, I blurted it out: “Aunt Kitty, why do you have this statue of a woman?” I asked. “Oh, that,” she replied. “That’s a statue of the Virgin Mary.” You know you’ve heard me mention Mother Mary, right?” she asked. “Oh, okay,” I said. “So, the Catholics worship her?” I further inquired. “No, not really. We just have great respect for her,” she explained. “Well, I heard a couple kids at school say that Catholics worship Mother Mary,” I told her. “Well, don’t believe everything you hear. They don’t know what they’re talking about. They probably heard someone else say that and are just repeating what they heard, just like parrots,” she insisted. “So, don’t you mimic them, alright?” she instructed me. “Oh, okay, I won’t,” I assured her. Still not



convinced, I stopped my inquiry. This idea about giving one’s reverence to a woman appeared inconceivable to me. So, I recognized that what my Aunt was telling me was far from what Mom,

Grandpa and Aunt Lizzie had taught me--which Reverend Harris, the pastor whom I trusted, had confirmed. Also, I knew that I asked “the Lord,” not a woman, to forgive me, and He did. This idea of Mother Mary I instantly stored in my subconscious with the intent not to discuss it again.



An Invitation to Something New

A few months after my ditching the idea of Mother Mary, I joined Granny and Grandpa as they sat on our front porch. Sitting on porches and chatting with neighbors was one of our favorite pastimes, especially after the sun went down. Many times our neighbor directly across the street from us, came to talk about all the happenings in the neighborhood and any other topics that popped up.



One Saturday evening around 6:00, just after we finished our dinner and grabbed our tall, Tupperware glasses filled to their brims with Granny's homemade ice tea, we all headed out to sit on the porch. We had been talking about the clay figure of "Sam Bo," fishing in the water fountain planted in the center of our front yard. That colored man, as we learned to call the people with dark brown skin, had sat for years fishing in Grandpa's cement fountain. "You know, he's never caught one fish," Grandpa said, as he looked at Granny and





grinned. We all laughed. Grandpa talked very little; and when he did, we all listened. He had a great sense of humor. We were all still giggling at Grandpa's statement as Miss Rhodes sauntered across the road and came to stand in front of our porch and rest her elbows on the banister.

"Well, guys, what's up?" she asked us. "Not much, Granny," answered. "What's new with you?" Granny added. That's all it took to get the conversation going. Mrs. Rhodes loved to chit chat and so she began: "Well, I've been busy with

yard work. I trimmed the hedges and edged the walk. You know it's getting awful hot these days," she exclaimed. No one had a chance to reply as Mrs.



Rhodes babbled on about

this and that and the other. At one point, she finally stopped and looked at me. "You know we're having some nice young fellowship programs starting next week at our church. Would you be interested in going?" she asked. "It starts on Sunday after Sunday school," she continued before I could answer. I looked over at Granny to see her reaction.

Granny nodded her head approvingly. "Well, I guess so, Mrs. Rhodes, I'd like that," I said with a little enthusiasm.

"Okay, that's wonderful," she said as she smiled. "I'll meet you in front of the house about 10:15, if that's okay



with you.” “That’ll be okay,” I replied. “All right, dear, sounds good,” she said. We chatted about a lot of things until we could see the bright orange sun disappear behind the dark horizon, signaling night fall. Grandpa was the first to get up from his comfy spring-loaded lounge chair and head for the door. Mrs. Rhodes finally said her good-bye and sauntered back across the road. The rest of us followed Granny as she opened the door and motioned for us to come in—I think she meant before Mrs. Rhodes thought of something else and hurried back to talk about it. We were all so glad to see an end to her endless babbling. So, in the door we all scrambled, with all intent to not look back.

A Different Understanding

On Sunday morning at 10:15 sharp, Mrs. Rhodes pulled out of her driveway and rolled over in front of our house. On our way to the church Mrs. Rhodes babbled about many things, but she seemed especially excited that I was coming with her. She said so several times. That was okay with me. I was happy that she invited me and was curious about the service and seeing what the youth fellowship entailed.

After it was all over, I wasn’t at all disappointed in the service. Reverend Smith had a lot to say to encourage the congregation to do good deeds and to help those who were



less fortunate than they. He mentioned God many times. At the conclusion of his sermon, he asked us to bow our heads and pray. I followed the others and listened intently as Reverend Smith led us in prayer. I noticed when he closed the prayer he spoke an unfamiliar expression. He exclaimed: “In Jesus’s name we pray, Ameen.” This “in Jesus’s name, we pray,” proclamation caught me by



surprise. Too, I wondered why Reverend Smith kept referring to “God,” instead of “the Lord,” throughout his sermon. I told

myself: “This is new for me, I’m going to ask Mrs. Rhodes to explain these new concepts about religion. Maybe, this is what the Baptist Church believes, which is different from what I had learned from Reverend Harris at the Church of Christ or what Grandma and Aunt Lizzie taught me from the Church of God,” I told myself. Anyway, I was confused and intended to gain a better understanding about the differences in God, Jesus, and the Lord. “For now, though, I told myself “I’ll see what goes on in the fellowship program.” We said our good-byes to those who weren’t attending the youth program and headed to the room adjacent to the nave. I was pleasantly surprised to meet





several nice girls my age. Mrs. Smith, Reverend Smith's wife, headed the program. She passed out the programs, and we discussed the contents. I was convinced that the program was going to be exceptionally interesting and full of fun activities. We were even going to go on a few field trips and join other members of the Baptist Church communities. So, immediately, I committed to this opportunity to enrich my spiritual self.

On, the way home, I asked Mrs. Rhodes about the things that Reverend Smith talked about. "Why, did he say "God," instead of "the Lord?" I asked first. She told me that it was accepted to use both titles, but when we refer to either, we are talking about our Creator in Heaven," she explained further. "But, why did Reverend Smith say: 'We ask this in Jesus's name' when he closed the prayer?" I next inquired.

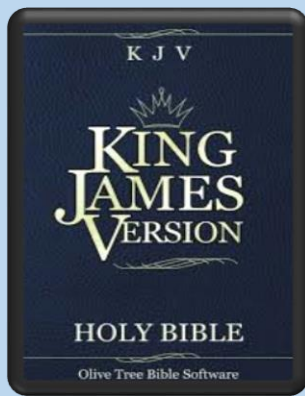
"Well, you know that Jesus is God's son who died on the cross for our sins. So, God tells us when we pray to ask all things

in Jesus's name," she said. "Oh, I see," I replied. It made since to me that the words "God" and "Lord" could be used interchangeably. "You can read the Bible and learn all you want about God and how He sacrificed Jesus to save us all





from our sins. Don't be discouraged, though, by the Bible language, as it can be difficult to understand at times. I recommend that you read the King James version, as most Christians follow this wonderful version of God's word,"



Mrs. Rhodes explained. "You can ask me if you have questions. Also, Reverend Smith and his wife hold regularly-scheduled Bible studies for teenagers in their home. They would be delighted for you to join them," she added. "Thank you, Mrs. Rhodes, for answering my questions. I feel so happy about what I'm learning. This is a special time for me. I want to know God better and learn how I can serve Him the best way I can," I told her. "That's an admirable quality, dear," she said. "It's a good feeling to see young people like you growing to be good Christians," she exclaimed enthusiastically, as she looked at me and smiled to show me she was well pleased with my reaction.

Embracing A New Concept

In the following days after attending that first Baptist Church service with Mrs. Rhodes, I thought deeply about the family unit. I surmised that it made sense, too, that God would



have a son. After all, He created all of us, and we function as families . However, I didn't understand why God let His son die on the cross for our sins. This was a very strange concept that I would have to think about more intently. The rest that I learned from Reverend Smith during his sermons, I accepted. I also felt good about joining the Baptist Church and was eager to participate in the youth fellowship activities. The Sunday sermons and the Sunday School teachings lifted my spirits. Consequently, over the following summer months, I gained a new understanding about religion. All of these new experiences helped me to feel closer to God, our Heavenly Creator, whom I formerly recognized as "the Lord."



Chapter 7



A Time of Confidence



Sharing My Faith



Having an understanding that “the Lord” and “God” were the same, I felt enthusiastic about learning more and drawing closer to my Heavenly Creator. I was eager

to read the Bible to see what all God had to tell me. So, during the last month of the summer, I read a lot. I started reading the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as Mrs. Rhodes had told me that reading their stories would be a good place to start. She assured me that I would gain a better understanding about Jesus and what led up to his “crucifixion,” a new term that I learned means “death upon a cross.”

As Mrs. Rhodes said, a lot of the Bible language was difficult, but I understood the basic circumstances surrounding Jesus. I felt overwhelmed by what the people did to him, yet he remained patient and showed his unshakable love for them. I was proud to learn how he fought with the money changers and how he despised the idols and the idol worshippers. I appreciated his love and obedience to God even more.





I was amazed to read about the miracles that God bestowed on him and how faithful Jesus was at carrying out God's orders. Too, I marveled at Jesus's instructions to the people to worship God and no one else. It was clear to me that God and Jesus possessed separate identities and that Jesus shared no divinity with God. I just had an innate understanding of this fact, as I read these gospels--unlike what I've since learned that many Christians believe today. I still, however, could not imagine how God gave Jesus up to die such a horrendous death on the cross and to be mocked at even up to the very moment of taking his last breath. This concept disturbed me. I simply could not comprehend such an event, so I decided to not concentrate on this matter. I, instead, hoped that some day God would help me to understand it. The ideas that were clear to me, however, I started sharing with my friends. None opposed me, while a couple seemed enthusiastic to learn more. This latter fact delighted me tremendously.



An Unexpected Hurdle

Armed with this new knowledge from the Bible, I felt the need to share it beyond my intimate friends. So, I looked to the start of the new school year. That year was my first



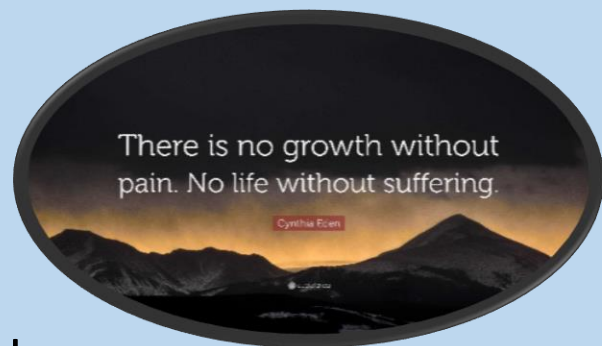
year in high school, which meant I would travel a good distance by bus to get there. It also meant that I would have a chance to meet students from many other schools



around our neighboring communities. I anticipated adventures, as well as some anxieties. Changes, I found, brought good and bad; but I excitedly embraced it all. I

reminded myself of a quote that I heard my Uncle Jimmy repeat several times: “There is no gain without pain.” This reminder gave me the courage to forge ahead with the challenges of high school.

After settling into the new environment and getting acclimated to the new curriculum, things seem to fall into place. I was particularly pleased about our seventh-period class. We were assigned to “study hall.” This was a whole new concept to embrace, as we older students were given the opportunity to learn, as we worked more independently. Also, the activities associated with our new curriculum encourage preparation for college classes. It was my hope to attend a university.





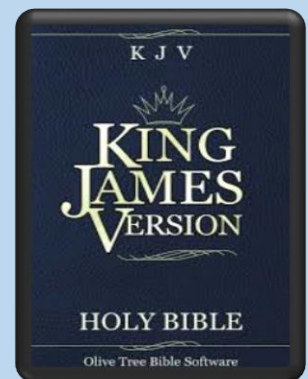
STUDY HALL

I liked the independence and the free time to complete homework or focus on special projects. “Besides, this was the perfect opportunity to share my Bible knowledge with new acquaintances when I had no other school work to do,” I assured myself.

I had already attended study hall for several weeks when one particular female student came to sit beside me. She asked: “Do you mind if I sit here?” “Of course not,” I kindly replied. “My name is Deborah; what’s yours,” I inquired. “Oh, I’m Sherry,” she said. And, in unison, we affirmed to each other: “It’s nice to meet you.” I noticed that she pulled out a chemistry book, while I retrieved my Bible since I had no homework or special projects.

We sat quietly for about ten minutes when I realized she was looking over my arm trying to see in what it was that I was so intensely immersed. “Oh, you’re Christian?” she asked. “Yes,” I politely replied.

“So am I, she said quietly. “That’s really cool,” she added. “But, you know that you can’t be reading the Bible in here. It’s the law,” she whispered. “Oh, really,” I questioned, a bit agitated. “Well they haven’t allowed religion in school for a





long time. And, lately, people on the news everywhere are talking about how they've taken prayer out of everything," she explained. "I guess I'm in the dark on this one; I don't watch the news, I replied. "I find it so boring. David Brinkley, Tom Snyder, and all the others are as dull as the skies on a cloudy day, I exclaimed. "And, I don't mean that as a compliment," I rambled on. "I don't believe this; This is so unfair," I grumbled. "Quick, quick!" she advised me. "There comes Coach McCune, the study hall monitor," she urged. "Okay," I said. "Thanks for the warning," I told her. I hadn't gotten those words out more than a second when Coach McCune appeared out of no where. He stood next to me, looked down at me, and then grinned ear to ear. He winked at me and walked away. He had noticed that I was shoving my Bible back into my book bag. I knew from the Coach's kind reaction that he approved of me having my Bible and that he didn't agree with Principal Ward's enforcement of the government's rule. I was happy that Coach McCune handled me with diplomacy. I was especially pleased that he hadn't shown disapproval of what I was doing. Nonetheless, I was very disappointed that I would not be able to read the Bible





while at school, nor would I be privileged to share my love for God and His word with other students while on school property. This revelation really disturbed me.

A New Prospect

My freshman year of high school was a good experience for me, as I learned to handle the more difficult curriculum. The lecture halls in which many of our sophomore and senior classes were held challenged me. We had to take lots of notes, which we hadn't done so much before. Our high school participated in a pilot program for preparing students for university learning. With unwavering determination, though, I managed to keep up. The biggest challenge that I faced was whether or not I would even be able to attend college, as Granny's and Grandpa's income would not support such elaborate expenses.

Apparently, Mrs. Crawford, one of our school counselors who lived in our neighborhood, was aware of our financial circumstances. She asked me to come see her after fifth period one day near the end of my freshman year. She explained that our high school was collaborating with one of the well-respected vocational schools which offered a number of





vocations for students who were most likely unable to pay for a college education. She discussed the programs that the school offered and asked me if I would be interested. She described one particular program that caught my interest. I could study to become a dental assistant which would be equivalent to earning an associate's degree and that I would attend the school during my sophomore and senior years. Mrs. Crawford further explained that many dentists in the local communities gave students from this program preference when hiring, as the program was one of the best available in our state. I was extremely encouraged by what she was telling me, so I signed up on the spot.



According to the plan, I would attend regular classes in the morning and dental assisting classes at the vocational institute in the afternoons. Then, during the second half of my senior year, I would complete my

internship with Dr. P. (as most people called him}, she told me. “Oh, wow! My dad worked for Dr. P. doing some construction on his home. In fact, his office is located within walking distance of our home,” I said excitedly.

“That’s fantastic, Deborah. It looks like this was meant for



you,” Mrs. Crawford said with a big smile. Then, she went on to explain that once I completed the program, I would have access to their placement services which would make it easier for me to find employment. “Or it might be that Dr. P. would be in the position to hire me himself if I did a good job,” I told myself. Now, wouldn’t that be grand!”

I thought enthusiastically, without telling Mrs. Crawford. It sounded like a full-proof plan, so I accepted the challenge. Mrs. Crawford sensed my excitement, as a look of warmth



and satisfaction spread over her face. “Well, I’m so happy for you, Deborah. You’re really going to love this program. I feel certain of it,” she said as she winked and motioned me to the door. “Thank you so much Mrs. Crawford. I can’t tell you how happy I am,” I assured her. “Oh, I see, dear. And, I can assure you that I am just as happy,” she replied. I raced down the hall, out the door and into the parking lot. I could feel a sense of enthusiasm overcome me as I hurried up the steps into the bus. I told myself: “I really look forward to working for Doctor P.,” as though I knew that this was going to be the case. I felt deep inside that this was God’s plan for me and that he sent Mrs. Crawford, another angel, to initiate the plan. For, this I thanked God then and was eager



to express my appreciation to Him again when I said my nightly prayer. It was clear to me then that God helped us all the time, not just when we face unimaginable hurdles, as I had experienced in the past.

Slip Sliding Away

My freshman year of high school ended on a good note and I looked enthusiastically to my summer activities. While attending the Baptist Church fellowship activities, I got to meet many girls. They were all kind and loved God just as much as I did. We had many conversations; and, over the summer, as we engaged in various activities, we had a chance to talk about each other's backgrounds. I learned that most had a different perspective about religion than I did. They pretty much followed what their parents taught them.

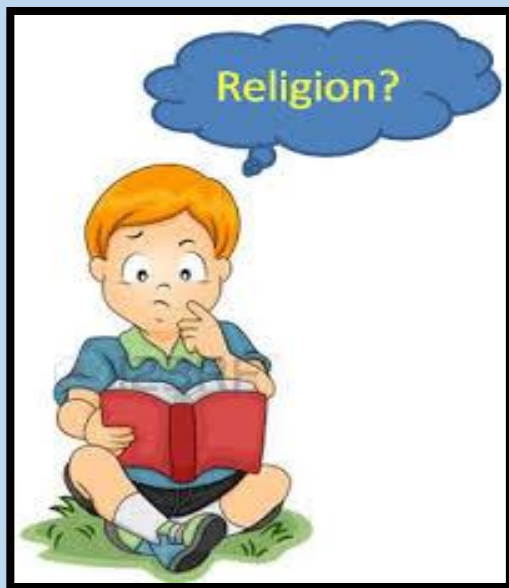
I understood that some still went to other churches, like the Methodist, the Church of God, the Nazarene and even one



attended Mass with her parents. And, another went with a friend to the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. As our discussions continued, I grew more anxious. It appeared that some believed that Jesus was God, not God's son. This



fact confused me. I couldn't comprehend this at all. Too, one of the girls tried to explain the Trinity, which she insisted taught that God was three: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. No matter how much this girl tried to help me understand, it made no sense to me that one equaled three. I didn't have to be good at math to figure this out, nor would any mathematician advanced this anomaly. I simply closed my mind to this lack of logic and had no desire to entertain this idea with her again. She could believe the Trinity if she wanted. That was on her, not me. "Good luck to her trying to explain this strange doctrine," I told myself.



So, over the rest of the summer, I pondered the things that all of us girls discussed during the fellowship gatherings, and I became a bit disturbed and even more confused. I prayed about it over the coming months, but I didn't get an answer. I decided to put the matter to rest for awhile and wait for God

to guide me. I was satisfied that I knew God and accepted the idea that Jesus was His son, without doubt, and that Jesus was not God himself.



Chapter 8



An Independent Spirit



An Independent Spirit

More Than Just Jobs

My final two years of high school went close to what I had imagined them to. I even graduated from High School and from Carver Career and Vocational Center with my High School Diploma and an Associate's degree in Dental Assisting. I did get to work for Dr. P., as I had hoped for, and I was fortunate that he hired me as a full-time assistant



at the completion of my internship. I couldn't have been more happy. For the next year, I worked for Dr. P. during the days and at The Medicine Shoppe in the evenings.

The Medicine Shoppe was located next door to my dentist's office, so I frequented it often. I became friends with Mrs. Ingram, who was our next door neighbor. She was a lovely, kind lady who was exceptionally glamorous and whom I admired. One day during the mid-summer, my Great Aunt, who worked at The Medicine Shoppe at night, mentioned that they were looking for someone to work the





evening shift. She asked if I would be interested. I had lots of energy and was excited to have more to keep me busy. Besides, I told myself that I could use extra money to help Granny and Grandpa, as well as to buy a few clothes and others things that I dreamed of having. I told my Aunt Annie that I was interested, so she immediately arranged for me to talk to the owner, Mr. Engle. As scheduled, I arrived promptly and talked to him, he seemed to be a nice man and appeared to be someone easy to work for. I hadn't talked to him for more than a couple minutes before he asked: "Can you start tomorrow? I need you to be here at 6:00 p.m.," he insisted. Completely surprised that I didn't have to answer a battery of personal questions, I immediately replied: "Sure, Mr. Engle, that's great!" I was also all too happy that I didn't have to tell any of those little "white lies." "I can come directly after I finish working with Dr. P. next door," I said. "Oh, yes, I know Dr. P. He and his girls told me that you were a good worker. Alright, Deborah, we'll see you tomorrow night," Mr. Engle said with a grin. "I'll be prompt, too!" I assured him.



Work at Dr. P.'s office and the pharmacy made me happier than I had imagined. We three girls at the dentist's



office became best friends. And, I became more than a friend to Mrs. Ingram. She was overly kind to me and seemed to want to mother me. I was okay with this. I missed my Mom's influence in my daily life, so I became content with Mrs. Ingram's motherly love.

An Unexpected Attraction

My relationship with Mrs. Ingram grew, and so did our family arrangements. She lived next door with her husband and son who was away in the Army. Upon his return, he would come to talk with Granny and Grandpa while they sat on the porch. I remembered his great sense of humor and found him especially interesting and mature, not like the young boys my age. I liked both of these things about him and found him to be quite handsome. "He'd make a good husband," I remember telling myself one day, as I listened to him joking with Grandpa and Granny.

After having worked at the Medicine Shoppe for a couple of months, Mr. Engle asked me if I could work day shift on the week-ends. "Of course," I eagerly replied. I didn't mind since I had no special obligations. I liked working on the week-ends, as I got to meet and talk to other people



besides the regulars. Several months passed by and during that time, Mrs. Ingram's son came often to peruse the magazines, buy his favorite comic books, and chat with me. The more we chatted the more it became apparent to both of us that we liked each other. By my surprise, one early afternoon, we got to discuss a few happenings in the neighborhood and eventually chatted about a popular movie that was showing. Before, I knew it, this charming young man asked me to go with him to see that movie. The movie was just the beginning of our real serious attraction for one another. A few weeks later, he invited me to have dinner with him and his mother and Step-father, as his mother had divorced not long before and remarried. We all got along well, and I fell more in love with his mother, and later, with him. In November a year later, we got married.



Stifling My Spiritual Growth

The last year or two before I got married, I had grown independent and more away from nurturing my spirit. I neglected regular prayer. Working and pursuing personal



interests demanded most of my time. And, married life added to those constraints. My husband and I were busy making a home and building our lives together. We made the sad mistake of agreeing not to concern ourselves with religion. We both had reached the same conclusion that all the denominations disagreed with each other and caused even the learned ones to be confused. We both decided that we would just do our best to be good people, help others and be happy living together. In fact, my husband embraced a scientific view, and not a religious perspective. He entertained the “Big Bang Theory,” which I never questioned. I assured myself that to be a good person, to stay out of trouble and to not cause harm to others were good enough ambitions for me in that period of my life.

Eventually, I didn’t actively pray. Instead, I would give thanks for the many blessings God bestowed on me and would consciously ask for His help when I faced challenges. Sadly, I put my spiritual growth aside.



Chapter 9



Middle-Age Conundrums



Middle-Age Conundrums

The Comfortable Years

Being married brought both my husband and me many great years of joy and happiness. We worked hard at our jobs during the week, enjoyed good-old home-cooked meals in the evenings and week-ends, and took in the sights and entertainment of various kinds, as time afforded us.



Traveling home for the holidays after we had moved out of state was a special delight. The Christmas holiday, though, became a focal point for spending time with his family, as living in Florida didn't offer the change of seasons, especially the winter. We got to drive in the snow and see it on the mountain tops and feel the snowflakes on our cheeks. We could see the snow-covered trees and the ice sickles hanging from the eaves. The sparkles of winter shown everywhere. And, we were in awe of all of its beauty.

So, the month or so before this magic holiday, we did our Christmas shopping, wrapped gifts in beautiful





Christmas theme paper, made cookies with all their sparkles and tasty ingredients, and anticipated our trip home.

All of the things that I mentioned kept us busy for the next few years and seemed to satisfy all our expectations. We were well-settled into our individual routines and had far less demands on each other's time.

My husband kept himself entertained at the computer, designing spreadsheets and researching; while I engaged in sewing, decorating cakes and making home-made crafts. We became so comfortable that we began to neglect our affections for and attention to one another.



A couple years of our taking each other for granted started to take its toll on both of us, especially after I had suffered a severe depression as a result of my childhood trauma and he lost his job as a manager that he had held for seventeen years. Both circumstances challenged us. We each, however, were committed to overcoming these challenges and did our best to support and encourage each other.



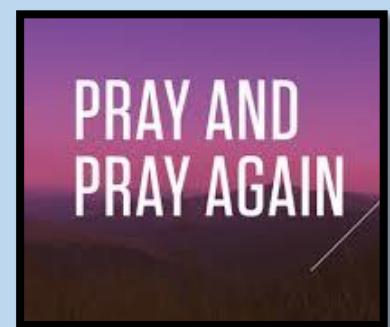
However, in the passing days, I grew more distant and felt a huge void in our lives together. I yearned to restore our closeness. I began to ponder things that might bring relief.

Attempting to Fill the Void



Neither of us wanted children, so the subject of having a child never occurred to us. Even though I still felt I didn't want a child, the thought of having one seemed a possible solution to my growing despair.

One day, I found the courage to ask my husband. I knew he would most likely refuse. And, I was right. I hadn't gotten the words out of my mouth completely before he told me flat out—no! "I should have known; why did I even ask?" I told myself. His saying "no" disturbed me for days and added to my feeling of being isolated and unappreciated. I felt desperate to resolve my dilemma. It is, then, that I started to pray incessantly. I prayed for God to resolve our problem. I reached a point that I didn't want to be with my husband. So, I prayed even more for God to help me love my husband





and to help us stay together. I never shared with my husband any of my thoughts about not loving him Nor about wanting to leave him.

My secrecy added to my stress and made me even more withdrawn and distraught.



A Knock at Our Door

One Saturday mid-morning when I was sitting on the living room sofa, I heard a firm knock on our door. I shuffled to the door, looked through the peephole, and gently unlocked the door. I could see a younger man and woman standing



on the other side. I opened the door slowly and said: “Hello!” The guests replied: “Hello. How are you this beautiful mid-summer day?” “I’m fine.

How are you? How can I help you?” I asked. The man stood back a bit and let the woman speak. “I’m Nilah, and this is my husband, Ron,” she said. “We’d like to ask you a question,” she continued. “Sure, I said,” politely. “Can you imagine living in Paradise?” she asked inquisitively. “Well,



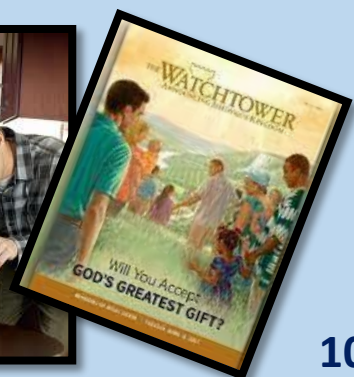
yes, I think about such a place a lot lately,” I replied. “You know God promises us this in the Bible,” she offered confidently. “I don’t know about Paradise. I know we are supposed to go to Heaven if we are good Christians,” I



replied. Then, she asked me if I had a few minutes. “I’d like to share a couple scriptures from the Bible with you, if you don’t mind,” she said excitedly. “That’s

okay. Please, come in,” I politely offered. I then opened the door widely and motioned for them to come in and have a seat on the sofa. I took a seat in the chair beside them. “Would you like something to drink?” I asked. “No, thank you they said at the same time. “Oh, okay,” I said, trying not to be pushy.

Her husband set quietly and she talked. She first told me that they were Jehovah Witnesses. I told her that I had heard of them but didn’t know anything about them. Then, she shared a couple Bible scriptures with me as she said she would. Finally, she handed me two magazines. One was titled *The Watch Tower* and the second *The Awake*.





“These are beautiful magazines that have some very interesting articles. Also, they will give you a good sense of what we share when we go door to door, as God has asked us to do, she explained further. “Yes, I understand. I remember the one scripture that says something about preaching the word to others. I just don’t remember the number or the exact words of that scripture,” I told her.

“Well, Deborah, she said. we would love for you to join us



for our Sunday service. Our Kingdom Hall is just a couple miles from here. If you’d like to go, we will be happy to pick you up and bring you back home,” she

offered. “Oh, that’s nice for you to invite me. Let me think about it. What time is the service?” I then asked. “We start at 10:00 a.m.,” she replied. “Oh, I see,” I said. “Is it okay if I just call you this evening after I have some time to think about it. Is that okay?” I asked. “Sure, that’s fine,” she said, as her husband handed me a piece of paper with their phone number written on it. “Thanks,” I said politely. As I showed them to the door, both thanked me for inviting them in and for letting them share the Bible scriptures with me. “You’re welcome,” I assured them. They, then, went on their way, as they headed to another neighbor’s house **106**



My husband came from the den and asked who the couple was. I told him who they were and that they invited me to Sunday service. “It’s okay with me if you want to go,” he said. I, then, started looking through the two magazines. The couple articles that I read and the general presentation of them I found to be quite interesting. “Nilah and her husband were modestly dressed, very kind and showed a strong reverence for God,” I told myself. “Who knows, maybe it’s a good way to get back to serving God like I should. Also, maybe I will feel better if I get involved with a church again,” I told myself. So, later that evening, I called and accepted their invitation, as well as got the directions to the Kingdom Hall. By late that night, I was feeling pretty enthusiastic about going to the Sunday service.

Accepting God Back into My Life

Arriving a few minutes early, I found Nilah sitting in one of the front pews to the right of the main aisle. She glanced up as she heard me walk in. She stood up and headed to meet me. “Hello, Nilah, it’s so nice to join your service





today. How are you?, I asked. “Oh, fine, Deborah, and I’m so happy to see you. Please, come and sit with me,” she kindly offered. I enjoyed the service and found all of the congregation kind, modestly dressed and friendly. I didn’t hear anything in the Elder’s sermon that was much different from what I understood, except that he called God

“Jehovah.” and later explained how they arrived at this name. His explanation was sufficient for me to accept logically. So, that was enough for me to want to attend again. I continued to go to the Sunday services for awhile. Then, Nilah asked me if I would like to come with her and her husband on the coming



Saturday for field service. I knew what she meant by “field service.” She wanted me to go door to door. That was fine with me. “Sure. I’d love to,” I told her. I found the door-to-door work a little intimidating, but I was happy to invite others to come to the Kingdom Hall. Eventually, I joined Nilah, her husband and other congregation members for regular door-to-door witnessing. I actually started enjoying it. Being active in church again helped my mental state. I think that even my husband noticed my mood was changing. One Saturday, I couldn’t go for door-to-door



witnessing. It turned out that Nilah's husband and another gentleman came to our house and talked to my husband. My husband was receptive and kind. Being amicable was, although, the extent of his interest. He did tell me that both men were exceptionally nice and that he enjoyed talking with them. Having heard these words, I thought that it would be an appropriate time to ask him to go with me. I



was in great hopes that if he decided to go that this would make our relationship stronger and help me to dismiss my thoughts of leaving. I quickly learned that that would never happen, as he politely

refused and gave me the impression that I was not to bring up the matter again. As was with his response to the issue of having a child, I was greatly disappointed and was sad for several days. The thoughts of leaving him



intensified. Again, I prayed and prayed and kept praying for God to help me to love my husband and not to leave him. I kept myself occupied by attending Bible study with Nilah, her husband and several other Kingdom Hall members. We studied one particular book that I loved. The title of the Book is *The Greatest Man Whoever Lived*.



This book recounts the life of Jesus and discusses his mission on earth. Clearly, when reading this text, the readers come to appreciate that Jesus was not God, nor God's son; but, rather a man who came to teach us about God and to share God's commandments with us. This was incredible news for me. Now, I understood something that had always been in my heart—I simply couldn't explain or give proof of this belief. Because of this revelation, I wanted to learn more of what the Jehovah Witnesses taught. I continued going door to door, attending the Bible studies and eventually took my Baptism.

Parting Ways

While studying with Jehovah Witnesses I was happier, but the thoughts of leaving my husband persisted and grew even stronger. As I prayed my nightly prayers, I again, and again asked God to help me love my husband. Then, one particular early afternoon, I knelt down beside my bed and raised my hands in front of me and began to pray. I once more asked God to restore my love for my husband and to save our marriage. During that prayer, a thought





that I couldn't shake that grew stronger, enveloped me. It became clear that God was telling me that it was okay to not love my husband and that divorcing him was also permissible. I was terribly stunned. I was scared and sad, but at the same time, I felt a sudden relief. The dilemma that I was in had, in an instant, been resolved. So, I pondered about this prayer for several weeks. Then, I made the decision to leave and realized that I had considerable planning and preparations to make. Over the next month, I packed my things when my husband was out mowing the lawn or running errands. Also, I looked for a place to live and found one near my brother. Once, I had all these things arranged, I felt ready to be on my own and had garnered the courage to tell my husband. This was the most difficult thing that I had ever done. The look on his face and his physical demeanor are still etched in my mind. I felt like a murderer and wanted to cry because of the pain that I



envisioned to be inflicting on us both. Of course, he wanted to work things out, and I wanted to help him to deal with his coming grief. So, I promised him that I would give



him and me sufficient time to adjust and to assure myself that I was not making a mistake. I couldn't dismiss the strong possibility that I could be experiencing "the mid-life crisis" that I had heard many people refer to during their own marital debacles. I set a goal of two years. We agreed on this arrangement, and I packed my last few personal belongings, said my good-bye and drove away.



Turning Their Backs

During the proceeding weeks, I didn't go to the Kingdom Hall since I moved to a city far-away from the one that I attended for so long. I was in hopes of going to a Kingdom Hall in my new city. Also, I had intentions of calling Nilah to tell her my circumstances, but I was a bit embarrassed and had heard that Jehovah Witnesses forbid divorce. Knowing this made me more apprehensive and caused me to procrastinate even longer.

Finally, one Wednesday evening, I got the courage to call Nilah. We exchanged





our normal greetings, Then, she asked: “Are you okay? We’ve missed you.” “Oh, I’m okay. I have to tell you something,” I said rather solemnly. “What, what is it?” she asked. I could hear her clear her throat as if she suspected bad news. “I’ve left my husband and am planning to get a divorce.” “Oh, that’s terrible. I’m so sorry, Deborah,” she exclaimed. “I have to tell you that Ron and another congregation member stopped by to see your husband. He told them that you had left and were living in another city. That is why I’ve not called you. I was hoping that you all would work things out. I wanted to give you time, as your circumstances create an additional challenge for the Elders,” she explained. “Actually, that is the reason that I’m calling



you. I’d like to schedule a meeting with the Elders to discuss the matter,” I told her. “You know that this is not good news, right,” she inquired. “Yes, of course,” I

said. “I’ve heard that divorce is not permitted. Am I right?” I asked. “Yes, that’s right,” she replied. “Well, can I please get an appointment with the Elders, please?” I insisted. “I’ll ask and get back with you,” she assured me. I could feel the reservation in her voice. I sensed that she was just as



uncomfortable with discussing the issue as I was. So, we quickly said our good-byes, and I hung up. Several weeks passed, and I had not received a call from Nilah nor from one of the Elders. This inaction made me nervous and frustrated. So, I called Nilah. When she answered, I could hear the distress in her voice. She had no choice but to give me the bad news. “Well, Deborah, you know that you will be dis-fellowshipped, right?” she offered in a tactful tone. “Oh, really?” I asked. “That is why I wanted to talk to the Elders. I’d hope that there was another remedy,” I explained. “Yes, I know, Deborah, but the Elders will not talk to you about this,” she added. “I don’t believe their reaction. How can they just ignore me and not talk to me?” I insisted. She went on to explain that one of the Elders will announce my plans to divorce to the congregation. “Once he makes this known, no one in the congregation will associate with you nor acknowledge your presence if you come to the Kingdom Hall,” she offered emphatically. I was so upset, I couldn’t find any other words to say to her. I simply said good-bye and hung up. I was devastated. “How could the Church turn its back on me when I was in desperate need of guidance, moral

I can't believe that the Elders won't even talk to me!





support and encouragement?” I pleaded with myself. This question dominated my thoughts for days, weeks. Finally, I reached the conclusion that the Elders’ way of dealing with me was ungodly. In fact, I felt such abandonment was of the devil. I decided that I would never go to another Kingdom Hall and that I would look for another church. I would not give up on God; however, because He had never turned His back on me. I felt deep down that there was one religion and one God and that He would eventually guide me to the right form of worship.



A Commitment to Uncover the True Religion

My being a Jehovah Witness ended on a sad note because of their prohibiting divorce. Also, I later realized that I could not grasp why they thought of Jesus as an intermediary—offering their prayers to Jehovah through Jesus’s name. This concept baffled me. Even so, I felt all was not lost. During my fellowship with them, I come to understand two extremely, irrefutable truths about religion that indelibly etched themselves onto my heart: First, I confirmed my innate understanding that Jesus was not God, nor His son



and that he was a mere man whose mission was to teach us about God and His Commandments. Secondly, I discovered a fact so significantly powerful that I realized one's knowing it would change completely his or her understanding of Christian doctrine. Thus, it is my duty to present this factual gem here. Jesus spoke of "one who would come after him—"the comforter." This undeniable proof appears not only in *The New World Translation*, the Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible, but also it is confirmed in the Holy Bible, specifically in the King James Version which most Christians embrace. I subconsciously stored these religious jewels safely in my memory bank. Consequently, my love for our Magnificent Creator had grown, fueling my commitment and courage to uncover the true religion, as I forged ahead.



Chapter 10



A New Life, Adventure and Insight



A New Life, Adventure and Insight

A New Acquaintance

A few months after I left my husband and had departed from the Jehovah Witnesses, I was standing in line to order lunch at a sandwich shop next door to my work. The owner and the male patron standing in front of me were speaking to each other in a foreign language that I had heard before. So, to satisfy my curiosity, I asked the gentleman in front of me: “Are you speaking Arabic?” He replied: “Yes, how do you know? I see you are American.” “Yes, I am, but I have a friend from Kuwait, who speaks Arabic, so what you were saying sounds familiar.” “Oh, okay,” he said in his Arabic dialect, somewhat different from what my friend spoke. He got his order and took a seat at a table near the window and close to the front door. My order soon followed so, I took it and headed to a table located directly behind him. I could sense he was a nice man; so as I passed by, I looked at him and smiled. “Oh, you can sit here at my table if you’d like,” he kindly offered. “Well, I guess that’s okay. Thank you,” I said politely. “I’m Osama,” he said. “It’s nice to meet you.”





“Hi, Osama. I’m Deborah,” I replied. “It’s nice to meet you, too,” I said with enthusiasm. He was a dark skinned man with dark brown eyes and wore Adidas sports clothes. While dressed casually, he appeared very business like. After chatting for a couple minutes, I could sense that he had a strong knack for humor. This quality in him made me feel comfortable. He asked me where I was from because he detected my southern accent. I explained that I was born



and grew up in West Virginia in the country. He appeared surprised and told me he was also from the country, just outside of Ismailia, Egypt. We shared information

about entertainment in the US and in Egypt, as well as a few historical facts about each of our countries. Before we knew it, lunch time was over for me.

So I politely excused myself. “Oh, I understand,” he assured me.

“It’s a pleasure to me you, I told him. “Thanks! It was nice to meet

you, too,” he replied. Then, I was out the door and walked determinedly next door to my office.



Over the next couple of months, I kept myself busy fixing up my new home and spending time with my brother when I



wasn't working. Work and driving back and forth to the office demanded most of my time during the week. It took me at least one hour each way in addition to delays in traffic that backed up on the long bridge connecting the cities in which I lived and worked. My weekends were filled with grocery shopping, washing clothes, doing house work and fitting in a little fun when I could. The following weeks of being on my own passed rather rapidly. Then, one day when I was at the hair salon getting my hair cut, the hair stylist who had been cutting my hair for several years, invited me to join her and

some of her friends for a Sunday barbeque. At first, I was reluctant to accept her invitation, but she reminded me that I hadn't come to



the last two. I had the feeling that she was trying to play matchmaker, and I simply wasn't interested. Anyway, she made me feel guilty, so I accepted her offer, so as not to insult her further or cause her to not invite me again.

During the following week, all I could think about was not going to that barbeque, so I tried to come up with a good excuse. I couldn't find one. So, Sunday arrived and I made myself get dressed. I jumped into the car and drove



across the long bridge to Tampa. The traffic was fairly light since it was Sunday, so I made good time. I hadn't prepared anything to take, so I stopped at the Publix not too far from



exiting the bridge. I turned off the main road into the Publix parking lot and grabbed the first free parking space. I turned off the ignition and opened the door.

However, before I could plant my feet firmly on the asphalt pavement, I immediately pulled my size nines back up into the car and again started the car. "I'm not going!" I told myself. "I know she wants me to meet her male friend. I can't! I don't want to! I'm simply not going to go!" I exclaimed, one statement after the other. I swiftly put the car in reverse, backed back into the travel lane, shifted the gear into drive, drove a short distance straight ahead and entered the main road. After a minute or two on the road, I glanced at my dashboard and saw that "little yellow light" blinking. "Oh, thank, God," I exclaimed to myself. "I'm sure glad I noticed the warning light before I started back across that bridge," I said. Fortunately, I was just a couple miles from my old neighborhood Shell gas station.





I headed directly for it; and upon arriving, I made a sharp left turn onto the parking lot, pulled up to the pump, hopped out of the car, and filled the tank with the usual 87 octane fuel. I twisted the black plastic gas cap back on tightly and darted inside the station to pay.

A Second Encounter

Surprisingly, when I approached the counter, I saw a familiar face behind the glass enclosure. “Oh, my, it’s nice to see you again “Ossaaama?” I stammered. “I’m sorry, I can’t remember how to pronounce your name,” I offered apologetically. “It’s Osama,” he replied. “Thank you I said. “I remember you from the sandwich shop. I certainly didn’t expect to see you here,” I exclaimed. “Yeah, me neither,” he replied. I handed him my money, and he promptly reached into the register and gave me my change. “Thank you. It was nice to see you again,” Osama,” I said politely. I was really happy that I pronounced his name correctly that second time. “Oh, wait, wait, wait!” he repeatedly insisted.



He darted out from the glass enclosure and zigzagged over to the soda fountain. “What kind do you want?” he asked. “Oh, my! A diet coke with lots of ice.” I replied. He filled the large foam cup with ice and diet



coke, and then handed it to me. “Thank you so much,” I said, in surprise. I looked at him and smiled. He smiled back. I immediately walked to the door and started across the lot to my car. I noticed he was walking behind me. I turned back to look at him. “Oh, I was wondering. Are you married or dating someone?” he asked. That was certainly a second surprise. “Actually, I’m separated, and I will be getting a divorce,” I told him. “Oh, I see. “Well, then, I’d like to take you to dinner some Friday night if you’d like,” he



offered rather confidently. “Well, maybe. Can I think about it and let you know?” I asked. “Sure. That’s okay, he replied. I thanked him again for his kind gesture of buying

me the coke. We said our good-byes for a second time. I was pleased that he wanted to take me to dinner. I thought he was handsome and extremely kind. And, of course, I recalled that he had a wonderful sense of humor. Even so, I felt somewhat apprehensive because I didn’t know what to expect. And, deep down, I thought to go to dinner with another man while I was still married was morally unacceptable. However, I told myself that I would honor my word and think about it over the coming week. I assured myself that I had plenty of time. The week flew by and



Friday was approaching. A few minutes near the end of the business day, I found myself daydreaming. “Oh gosh! I have to make a decision,” I told myself. I pondered his invitation, I felt some excitement, but a stronger apprehension. Suddenly, a slew of thoughts flashed across my mind. “Oh, I’m not sure. I really don’t know. Maybe I’ll have a good time. Who knows? Maybe we’ll be compatible as friends,” I told myself all these things, trying to build up the courage to call him by days’ end. Then, I reminded myself that I had made him a promise and recalled the old adage that “a promise made is a promise kept.” I can’t break my promise,” I told myself as I glanced up at the clock hanging on the wall in front of me. “Oh, my it’s Five o’clock!” I exclaimed. I quickly returned to a state of reasonable consciousness, closed up shop and bolted out the door to my car. I managed to arrive home before dark. After settling in, I mustered a bit more courage to call Osama. So, I picked up the phone and dialed his number. I could hear ring, ring, ring as second thoughts suddenly overwhelmed me.

Before I could hang up, though, I heard: “Hello!. Hello!” Gaining my composure, I replied: “Hello, Osama. This is Deborah.” “Hello, Deborah, how are you?, he asked. “I’m good. I just wanted to tell you that it’s okay to go to dinner,” I said





nervously. “I’m going to be playing tennis then. What about Saturday?” he asked. “Oh, my! I didn’t expect this!” I told myself, feeling more anxious. “Well, that’s okay. What time is best for you?” I asked. “I’ll see you at 7:00. We can meet at the restaurant if you’d like?” he said. “Sure, that’s fine,” I told him. We said our good-byes, and I quietly hung up the phone.

Dinner for Two

After having a restless night, I got up and began my busy day. Throughout the day, the thoughts of our dinner together flashed in and out of my mind. I kept trying to decide what I was going to wear. Nothing that I thought of seemed just right. When I finished my chores, I dashed to the bedroom closet to rummage through it to find that “perfect dress.” I found a couple that I thought were appropriate, so I tried them on, looked in the mirror, and said to myself: “I just don’t know! Alright, stop this! Just choose one,” I said. Finally, I picked the most modest and comfortable one. I jumped in the shower, dried my hair, powdered my nose, brushed on a little blush, and darted to the bedroom to get dressed. Not long thereafter, I raced to the car, hopped in and started the drive to Tampa. I made good time, so I arrived a few minutes early and found



Osama waiting outside his car as I drove up. He approached my car to accompany me to the door. I thought to myself: “Now, he’s a real gentleman!” That, I found very pleasing.

The restaurant was cozy and inviting. No sooner had we taken our seats than the waiter appeared with the menus.

Both of us ordered the same entrées and drinks: steak, baked potatoes, hot rolls, salads and ice tea. We chatted for a few minutes before our dinners arrived and found ourselves quite comfortable with each other. Those first few minutes



set the tone for our entire dinner together. We really enjoyed the food and our conversation. It seemed to end rather quickly, though. “Too soon,” I told myself. Osama escorted me to my car. “I enjoyed the dinner, Osama,” I told him. He replied: “I did, too. We’ll keep in touch if you’d like,” he added. “That would be nice,” I replied. We got into our cars and drove away.

A Promising Future

The future for me and Osama looked promising. After several months, we both felt a stronger attraction for



each other. I learned that he was Muslim and seen him pray a couple times. I was pleased with this because being religious was the most important characteristic that I



needed in a companion if I were to marry again. Ramadan, which I learned was a special month that Muslims worshipped God more devoutly, and I admired this

practice. I thought to show special reverence to God for an entire month was an incredible commitment and a sure way to show appreciation to God for His countless blessings. As Ramadan drew closer, Osama talked more about Islam and the activities surrounding that special month. One day, he asked me if I believed that Jesus was God. I told him no that I believed that there was only one God. "Oh, that's good," he said. He then asked me when I was going to divorce my husband. I told him that I was going to give it a few more months, as I had promised my husband that I would wait for two years. Osama told me that I had to make a decision sooner because he wanted us to get married. I was well pleased with this proposal. "We will not go to dinner or talk to each other during Ramadan. To do so is not Islamic,"





he explained. “Also, this will give you time to think and to apply for a divorce,” he insisted. This discussion made me happy, but I was scared because I felt time had run out too rapidly. I was afraid to tell my husband that I had met someone else who wanted to marry me. And, of course, I would have to tell him that I was applying for a divorce.

Having to do this made me extremely uncomfortable. I thought about it for a few days, and decided that I loved Osama and that I wanted to marry him, too. About a week thereafter, I



went to my husband and told him. Of course, he was devastated. He tried to get me to change my mind, but I assured him that this was my decision and that I would file the divorce papers that coming Monday. I explained to him that I would apply for a simplified divorce, which would free him of all obligations and that I would not be asking for any money nor for any property or other jointly-owned possessions. This news seemed to bring him great relief. I suspected this to be the case because I wanted not to cause him any more discomfort. His grief would be difficult enough. He agreed to this arrangement, so I felt content that my husband would be okay. We departed on amicable



terms and promised each other that we would keep a peaceful and honorable relationship. We respectfully said good-bye. And, as I walked out the door, both our eyes filled with tears. I sprinted to the car and didn't look back. As, I drove across that long bridge, many memories that my husband and I made together invaded my thoughts. I did my best to restrain them and to think about the future that I would be making with Osama. These thoughts cheered my spirit. I could, then, look forward to telling Osama the good news and assure him that I would file for my divorce on the coming Monday.



A Time for Adjustment

Two weeks after Ramadan had passed, on Thursday at 10:30 a.m., I arrived at the court house. My husband came a few minutes later. At 11:00 a.m., we were summoned into the court room, and by 11:45 the Judge rendered our divorce. My husband and I treated each other with respect and said our final good-byes. Of course, the coming months would be much easier for me than for him. I had a whole new life with someone whom I dearly loved ahead of me. And, I



wished that my Ex-husband would be blessed with the same and wished only good things for him.

As soon as Osama called me, I gave him the good news. He was equally elated. We were eager to make arrangements for our wedding ceremony. Neither of us wanted a big wedding, as we both had been married before. So, he arranged the Islamic ceremony at the Tampa Masjid, and I scheduled the marriage license formalities at the court house. One thing that I had to make clear to Osama before the ceremonies, though, was that I couldn't promise him that I would ever become Muslim. I explained that I respected his beliefs and his love for God, for this was the most important quality that he had. He accepted this from



me. So, in December of that year, 1998, we were married and moved into our home. The coming year had a mix of ups and downs, more positives than negatives. We slowly

got used to each other's habits and adapted to the other's preferences. I learned to cook some of his Arabic dishes. All in all, we were making a happy and fruitful life together. We both worked full-time and looked forward to the weekends where we engaged in a number of sight-seeing adventures,



traveled to the beaches, visited a host of theme parks, and shopped at our favorite department stores and malls. We had little spare time to ourselves.

My First Trip Abroad

In 2001, we traveled to Egypt to meet his family and friends. This was my first time to leave the United States. While I was extremely curious and enthusiastic about the trip, I felt



a little afraid of the unknowns. The long flight was a bit tiring, but the airline staff were more than just accommodating. We were delighted,

however, when we landed in the capital city of Cairo, got through customs and were on our way to his home in Ismailia. Upon arriving in Ismailia, we headed straight away to his sister's home where a whole slew of family members awaited us. Their reception was indescribable! We all hugged and kissed each other and extended the warmest of greetings. We all dined at a huge dining room table filled



with countless delicious Arabic dishes, more than one could possibly imagine. The comradery far exceeded any gathering that I can recall ever experiencing while living in the States. The family possessed unexplainable love for each other. This was just the beginning of my love for all that Egypt offered. I was impressed with all of it at that point!

A Trip on the Nile

One could not fully appreciate Egypt without cruising the longest river in the world, the Nile, measuring some 6,825 kilometers. Neither would it be prudent to not understand the significance that Egypt has played on the world stage. Acknowledging its spectacular ancient history and its impact on our current-day view of religious and political events is noteworthy.

To say that I was “in awe” of Egypt’s rich history and God’s using its ruins as proof of His Magnificence and Power would be a major understatement.

My trip up the Nile and further excursion to Aswan and Luxor completely captivated me. Witnessing the massive temples,



The Nile



Kamo Ombo



lying in ruins, proved to me beyond any doubt that God was the only one who could have possibly destroyed such majestic architectural edifices. Among these massive



Valley of the Kings

marvels are the Valley of the Kings, Valley of the Queens, Medinet Habu (the burial temple of Ramesses II), Kamo Ombo, and Edfu Temple. I have recently read that some regard these

temples as “residences of deities” of notable pharaohs;” however, of this claim I am uncertain . At the end of this fabulous journey, though, I was absolutely intrigued by all that I observed. This indescribable voyage up the Nile to Aswan and Luxor will remain memorable to me forever!

Our Grand Finale

The culmination of our adventure was our visit to the Great Pyramids of Giza and the Great Sphinx, which are located on the west bank of the Nile river in the western part of Cairo, Egypt. The massive structures are indescribable. When one stands and looks at





them, he/she will seem as a grain of sand or salt. We were astonished at their size and could not fathom how they were ever erected. One cannot fit a dollar bill between the mud-bricks that form their massive structures. We ventured inside the largest of the three. Both of us had difficulty breathing, especially as we traveled further down into



where some of the burial tombs lie. The grand edifices serve as proof of God's bestowing on man the knowledge and capacity to construct these architectural marvels. Seeing them up close and being able to touch them gave us a sense of awe and unexplainable appreciation.

Our Return to America

Our time in Egypt engendered me and my husband to draw even closer. We both appreciated our differences in culture, religion and the things that really added value to our life together. Residing in America helped us to appreciate those who live far meager lives and have little means nor desire to pursue material things. We also found the structures and systems that America has in place provided us comforts that



we should never take for granted. Besides all of these tremendous benefits, we aimed to establish lasting and meaningful relationships with family and friends, the best gift that one can have. We were thankful to live in a land where we were free to practice our individual faiths in harmony while respecting our differences. We were truly blessed and yearned even more to please our Grand Creator. We had full-heartedly embraced diversity and acceptance of all mankind!



Chapter 11



A Time for Spiritual Enrichment



A Time for Spiritual Enrichment

Embracing My Spiritual Growth

Our marriage was benefiting us both, and we were each content with each other, as we managed the challenges of daily life and work responsibilities. I had time to begin my search for the true religion.

Having observed my husband's dedication to prayer and the warm relationships that he nurtured with brothers and their families was refreshing. I witnessed



his own close ties to family and found them to be especially honorable. These two qualities led me to admire his faith even more. Also, I was attracted to the Arabic language



even though I found it extremely difficult to understand. My curiosity about Arabic prompted my husband to invite me to the Tampa Masjid to take Arabic classes. The Imam was

particularly friendly, kind and possessed a wealth of knowledge and impressed upon me his love for Islam. Too, some Muslims that I met explained that Islam was a lot less



demanding than what some Muslims who became fanatics made it out to be. I thought about this as I continued to watch my husband pray his daily prayers, attend Friday prayer (or “Jummah,” as I learned it to be called), and his general ways of dealing with everyone, even non-Muslims. His example set into motion a conscious effort from me to keep an open mind about his Islamic faith.

This new interest in my husband’s religion caught me totally off guard because I had made it clear to him that I would never promise to become Muslim. I reminded myself of this promise, more than once. However, I realized that inherent in such a promise was a choice for me to change my mind if I felt compelled to do so. I simply needed to convey my change of heart.



That Catastrophic Event

On that warm, sunny Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001, about 9:00 a.m., I was processing accounts payable for our home office, when suddenly three of my colleagues dashed out of their offices and sprinted to the conference room, closed the door behind them and turned on the TV. I could see through the glass





enclosure the scenes flashing on the screen. “Oh, my God!” I exclaimed to myself. “What in the world is going on?” I said under my breath, repeating these words of dismay several times. I could see an airplane crashing through a skyscraper. Then, I recognized from the distance that the resulting inferno was engulfing the World Trade Center in New York. I couldn’t control my anxious feelings. So, I made a bee line to the conference room, opened the door and asked if I could enter. The colleagues motioned for me to come in. I took a seat at the conference table and focused intently on the news journalist covering the story. Soon, my colleagues started shouting and exclaiming: “Those terrorists have attacked the World Trade Center. How dare they! It has to be those Arabs!” they claimed in unison. Then, the youngest of the three (they were all men) started making remarks and made a couple that really made me angry. I was so insulted that I immediately got up and left, returning to my desk in a complete rage. “How could he say such things?” I asked myself. “And, who said that it was Arabs who committed this atrocity?” I begged of myself. “I know many Arabs, and I met all of my husband’s family members, friends and acquaintances. None of them could





ever commit such evil acts!” I told myself. I grew so distraught that I wanted to leave and go home. Then, I heard the older of the colleagues pound his hand on the conference room table and blurt out loudly: “They’ve hit the second tower!” When I heard these words, my heart



raced! I felt faint. I knew that I couldn’t dare say what I was thinking. I had to keep my composure. When the colleagues exited the conference room, I couldn’t have been more relieved. The rest of the day, I felt so apprehensive I could hardly

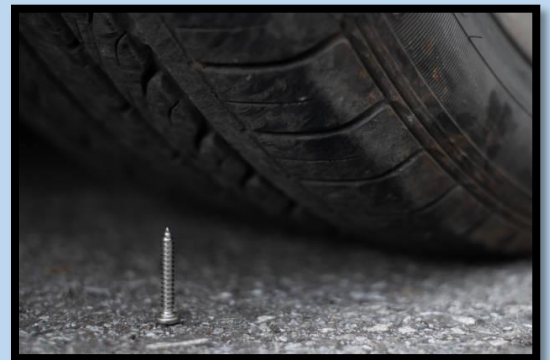
concentrate. The three colleagues would glare at me when they passed by my desk. They knew I was married to an Arab and had made sly remarks before. This horrific event just gave them more reason to show their dislike toward me. It was all that I could do to keep busy, while I anxiously awaited for five o'clock to arrive. The minute the big hand hit five, I raced out the door and didn’t say good-bye to anyone. I was fuming! As my one brother used to say: “I’m madder than a hornet!”

No, my dear readers, let me be frank. I was so enraged that I was more angry than the entire nest of hornets! I wanted to hit someone. The anger and dismay that I felt didn’t disappear for several days.





I hated going to work, and I couldn't wait for Friday at five o'clock to come. My colleagues appeared eager for me to leave, too. This fact became clearly obvious the following week, when I was getting ready to get into my car to go home after work. Suddenly, a thought just came over me from nowhere. "You better check the pavement behind your rear tires," the voice was saying. "Really? Why?" I thought to myself. "Oh, well nothing ventured; nothing gained," I told myself, as the old adage goes. So, instead of going around to the driver's side of my car, I circled my car from the passenger's side. Low and behold! I looked down at the pavement and saw large nails with their points facing upward. They were strategically placed behind both of my rear tires—all standing up straight; none lying on their sides. When I saw the maze of nails, I was certain that they were placed there intentionally. I couldn't prove it, but I felt strongly that one of my colleagues had planted them there. The offender intended that when I drove backwards out into the drive lane, the sharp nails would puncture both rear tires and deflate them. To be more sure, I looked at the pavement under the cars on either side of mine. There were no nails!





“Thank, God!” I was even more sure then that this act of sabotage was done intentionally, and I exclaimed so out loudly to myself. This warning could have only come from our Loving Creator. I jumped into my car and drove home safely, dreading my having to go to work the next day. I didn’t dare tell my husband. He would have been livid. I’m certain he would have taken a day off from his own job and gone to my office to figure out what was going on. I can assure you that his visit would not have ended on a peaceful note.

Over the Shock

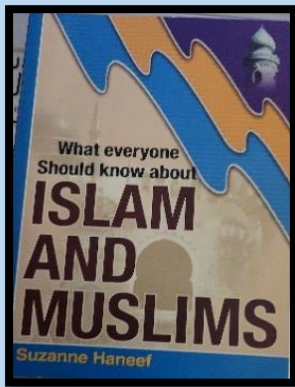
I don’t recall when I did finally get my wits about me, but when I did, I was determined to prove that young colleague wrong—dead wrong! I immediately decided to apply for other jobs because I expected further harassment. I was very afraid and anxious. Fortunately, within a couple weeks, I got a better opportunity and left. I don’t know who was happier the day I departed—me or them. But, for me, I was ecstatic and never looked back once I walked through those glass office doors. I claimed victory!



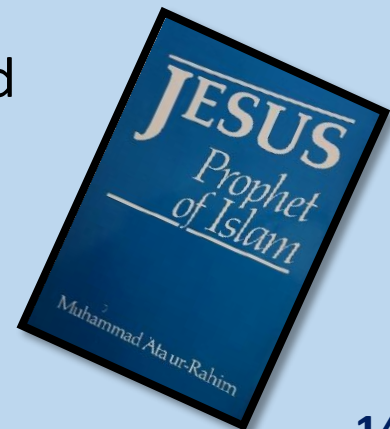
Not long after, I got settled into my new job, I began to read some books that my husband had given me when we



first got married. I had put them aside, not knowing when, or if, I would ever read them. A few chapters into the first book, I was so surprised by the content, I couldn't stop reading it. The title is *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims* by Suzanne Haneef. Not only did the

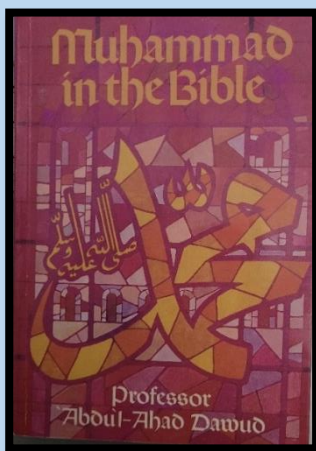


book answer the questions that I had collected in my memory bank, but also, this author gave me many other things to consider. When I finished this book, I had a clear understanding of Islam and the Muslim people. I loved these people more than ever, now. Too, I felt a deep sense that Islam was the religion that I was searching for. Still, I was unclear about Prophet Muhammad and his role in religion. I did recall that Jesus tells us in the Bible that "the comforter" would be coming. This fact I could not dismiss. So to remove any doubt, I looked to the second book that my husband gave me titled *Jesus Prophet of Islam*. Way before I reached its end, the book convinced me that God had removed all my doubts. He revealed to me the religion for which I had been searching for most of my adult life. This was, indeed, a miracle. I was in utter disbelief! And, for me to have made the





assertion that I would likely never be a Muslim proved to be nothing less than pure irony. I was baffled! Still, I felt an obligation to shore up the copious evidence. Thus, I read the last of the three books that my husband gifted me. This one's title is *Muhammad in the Bible*. And, as the other two



books did, it made me marvel at the truth it revealed. It became blatantly obvious to me that these three books were miracles from God—Allah (SWT) Who kept them safe for me to read when He felt that I was ready. Thus, my work had just begun. My Ex-husband and other family members viewed me as jumping from one religion to another. So, I had to be more than 100% sure before I made my official declaration to be a Muslim. I had ahead of me some important validation work to do.

Preparations to Make My Shahada

The average person might expect that taking one's Shahada requires little effort and time—"just say it!" one might claim. However, I was under the mistaken impression that I had to be perfect to worship Allah (SWT) in the way He has commanded us. In other words, I had to first know how to pray and to recite the prayer in Arabic. Too, I must wear



more modest clothing and the head covering (or scarf). I have since learned that I took a big risk in delaying my declaration of faith. Nonetheless, I told my husband that I wanted to learn to pray. “You’re not Muslim,” he said. “You don’t have to pray,” he told me. I insisted, however, that I needed to pray. “Okay,” he replied. A couple of days later, he brought me a book meant for children that gave, step-by-step instructions for completing the prayer. Each step was presented in English and in Arabic transliteration to insure the proper Arabic pronunciation. It was a perfect book for me! I was truly delighted and couldn’t wait to read and put it to good use.

Learning to Pray Here and Abroad

I first learned the prayer steps in English and practiced the steps as I prayed. I prayed every prayer in English until I had the prayer completely memorized and could recite the prayer quickly in its entirety. Once, I was comfortable with praying in English, I began memorizing the Arabic transliteration. Over the following months, I would repeat each part on the way to and from work until I was comfortable reciting it for my husband. I would, then,

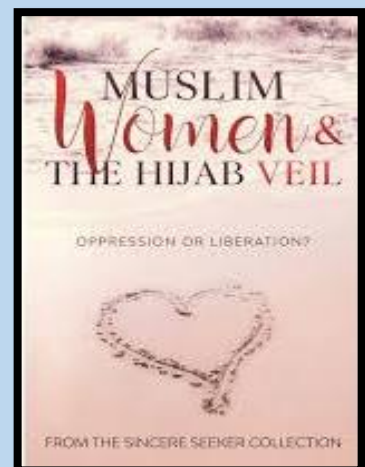




incorporate what I had learned in Arabic in each prayer. I would first recite the prayer in English; and, then, I would recite the prayer in Arabic. I never missed any of the required (or Fard) prayers. I continued with this routine even after I accepted an offer to teach English at the International Arabic Egyptian School in Egypt in 2005.

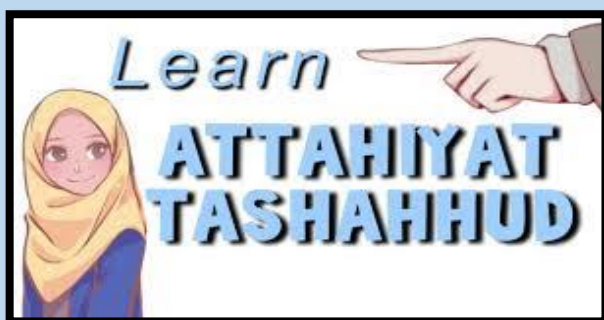
So, in August of 2005, I left the United States and relocated to Ismailia, Egypt. During the following two plus years, I lived in our apartment there while my husband completed business in the U.S and joined me in 2007. My time at the school was incredible. I learned so much about Egyptian culture and traditions and much, much more. All the while, I continued to pray in English and Arabic. At the same time, I read a book about hijab, another beautiful gift from my husband that I had not yet considered. The words inspired me. Still, I knew that once

I put on the scarf, that I must never take it off. What convinced me more than anything to wear the scarf was one simple but very profound statement: “Men are more visual than women.” I kept thinking about this. Finally, I realized that as a woman, I admire women’s beautiful, soft faces. More than their faces, I love





women's hair. So, I questioned: "If I, a woman, admire another woman's face and hair; then, surely a man would be more easily attracted to these soft feminine features." It is only at this revelation that I connected the dots to the Quranic verse that was quoted in the book on hijab. That verse enjoins men and women to "lower their gaze." In essence, it warns us that looking at the opposite sex can incite lustful desires that could lead to forbidden sexual acts. I then understood that Muslims are responsible for preventing others from sinning in their hearts. I did not want to be guilty of such a transgression. I was now sold on wearing hijab! So, When I accepted the importance of this safeguard that our Loving Creator provided, I was inspired to learn the last two parts of the prayer in Arabic, the Tashahhud and Taslim. One of my Muslim teachers was kind enough to write these parts in Arabic transliteration for me. For several days, I prayed, and when I came to the final elements of prayer, I would read them from the paper on which they were written until I could recite them fluently.



What an indescribable feeling that came over me when I prayed the entire prayer in Arabic from memory.

"Tomorrow; I will take my Shahadah!" I exclaimed with immense enthusiasm!



Taking My Shahadah

On the morning of that very warm Saturday, August 5, 2006, I woke up with excitement knowing that this would be the day that would change my life forward. It would thrust me into a completely different routine that I would carry out for my entire life. I prayed the full prayer in Arabic for both Fajr (the morning prayer) and the Dhuhar (the noon prayer). Shortly after the Dhuhar prayer, I jumped into the shower, ran into my bedroom, put on my abaya (woman's Muslim dress), struggled to get my scarf pinned securely about my head so none of my hair was showing, put on my socks, took a look in the mirror, and calmly walked into the living room. I took out the paper on which I had written the Shahadah. Standing erect with my arms to my side, I lifted my right hand with the index finger pointing to the sky, and made my declaration of faith;



I took my Shahadah! Calmness enveloped me. I felt peaceful and self-assured. Tears of happiness poured down my cheeks. "I am a Muslim!" I said happily to myself, as I



wiped away my tears on the sleeve of my abaya. I felt that, for the first time in my entire life, I had a purpose. I had direction. I had taken the most important step in my life. I was going to serve the only true God, Allah (SWT) in the way He has commanded us--by following Islamic principles as He outlined in His safeguarded instructions—the Holy Quran!

A Time for Celebration!

In less than 10 seconds of wiping my tears on the sleeve of my abaya, our doorbell rang. I dashed over to answer the door. When I opened the door, there stood my husband's sister. She looked at me with great surprise. I said in excitement, "Haga, I'm Muslim!" She smiled the biggest smile that her face could make, just as I did. We embraced each other and kissed the other on both cheeks. We shared unbridled happiness! Haga suddenly disappeared and returned almost as quickly with three of her friends (who were dear Muslim sisters whom I previously met) and drinks and biscuits. We hugged and kissed each other in glee. The love and enthusiasm filled the room. This was one





memorable celebration that remains in my thoughts as though it happened just yesterday.

More Joy!

My husband was not aware that I was even close to saying my Shahadah. He knew that I was continuing to work on learning my prayer only. His usual routine was to call his sister (I always referred to her as “Haga”) every day first before calling me. This day was no different. When he talked to Haga, she, of course, told him the great news. I suspect when he heard that I had taken my Shahadah that he hung up immediately and called me.

When the phone rang, I answered right away. “Hello, how are you doing?” I asked. He replied: “What do you mean how am I doing? I should be asking you!” he exclaimed with excitement. “Mabrouk, mabrouk, mabrouk!, he repeated over and over again. “You’re Muslim, Ma Sha Allah!, he exclaimed. “Boy does this change our lives!, he said happily. “Yes, I’m so elated. I’ve been waiting for this day ever since I had more than copious evidence that Islam was the true religion from the first three





books you gave me!” I declared. There was so much excitement in both our voices that we could hardly hear each other. That phone call made a fond memory for us both. In fact, we both learned that we must respect the differences in others and to respect all who love God. More importantly I understood the role of Jesus and Muhammad as mere Prophets in delivering God’s message to the people. I confirmed that there is only one God and that He has a personal name--Allah (SWT), and His perfect religion is Islam!



Chapter 12

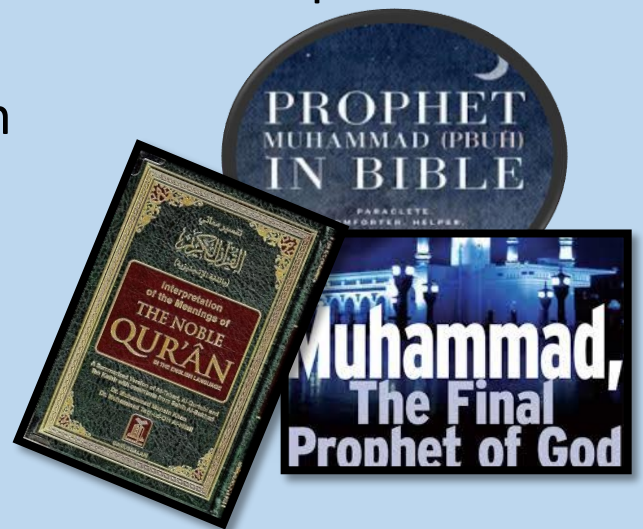


The Fruits of My Journey



Culmination of My Research

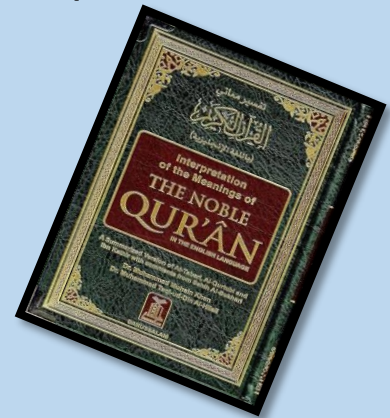
My life in Egypt played a pivotal role in my spiritual transformation. The culmination of my research, witnessing the remarkable creation of our universe, and living with others who practiced the true faith led to Allah (SWT) removing the veil of darkness that had enveloped me. He gave me control over the huge void that strangled my spirituality. Taking my Shahadah freed me from the shackles of disbelief. I came to understand how my parents, friends, pastors and acquaintances, who influenced my beliefs throughout my life, had been deceived by the misguided principles of faith that obscured the truth from them. I, indeed, ventured beyond these clouds of darkness. The only true God, Who has a personal name--Allah (SWT)--guided me to the light. I learned that the Prophet of whom Jesus (PBUH) spoke of in the Bible was none other than Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), our final Prophet. Ultimately, I understood that Allah (SWT) gave His final set of instructions to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)—the Holy Quran.





The Book of Truth

The most incredible affirmation of what I had learned during my journey to Islam comes from the Holy Quran. This book proves its own authenticity. I started reading it before I took my Shahadah. I couldn't stop reading it. I was and still remain in awe of its details, its accuracy, its irrefutable evidences, and its words that capture the hearts of its readers. It offers solutions, reassurances and love when one grapples with uncertainty. It commands good and forbids evil. Allah (SWT) enjoined our beloved Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to recite it, to teach it, and to follow its commands. It is miraculous! It reaches the entire fabric of one's being. In essence, if one follows its principles, one is truly guided and is promised everlasting life in Paradise.



The Only True God

The Torah, the Bible and the Holy Quran all teach that there is only one true God. One only needs to dismiss any pre-conceived notions about God and earnestly read the scriptures to discern this most relevant truth. One must



The Only True God (Cont'd)

acknowledge this fact because knowing that there is only one true God provides the framework for anything and everything that governs man's existence and maintenance--not just in his present life but in his life in the Hereafter.

Thus, the Holy Quran makes clear that there is only one true God Who has a personal name which is Allah (SWT). We Muslims, when referring to Allah (SWT), use SWT (Subhanahu wa ta'ala, Arabic for "The most glorified, the most high"). SWT denotes our giving Him the highest level of respect. The following Ayat (Quranic verses) clearly announce these important facts:

2:164 "Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alteration of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and the water (rain) **which Allah** sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving (living) creatures of all kinds that He has scattered therein, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed Ayat **(proofs, evidences, signs, etc.)** for people of understanding."



The Only True God (Cont'd)

2:256 “There is no compulsion in religion.

Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in **Taghut** (anything worshiped other than the only true God [Allah]) and believes in Allah then he grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And **Allah** is All-Hearer, All-Knower.”

These Ayat prove beyond any doubt that we are not forced to believe in Allah, but that He is the only true God. And, when we willingly accept Him and follow His teachings, then we have a bond that can never be broken.

The Final Instructions

My journey to Islam has indelibly etched in my memory that Allah (SWT) has sent us instructions from the beginning of time. Most of us are aware of the “Tablets” that Allah (SWT) gave to Prophet Moses (PBUH) on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. We also learn in the Bible about the Psalms. The Holy Quran discusses all of these, in addition to other revelations that Allah (SWT)



The Final Instructions (Cont'd)

sent to us through the Prophets of old. Allah (SWT) confirms all of these when He gives us the following two Ayat”

3:3 “It is He Who has sent down the Book **(the Quran)** to you (Muhammad) with truth, **confirming what came before it**. And He sent down the Taurat (Torah) and the Injil (Gospel).

3:7 “It is He Who has sent down to you **(Muhammad) the Book (this Quran)**. In it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book [and those are the Verses of *Al-Ankum* (Commandments), *Al-Fara'id* (obligatory duties) and *Al-Hudud* (laws for the punishment of thieves, adulterers)]; and others not entirely clear. So, as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking *Al-Fitnah* (polytheism and trails), and seeking for its hidden meanings, **but none knows its hidden**



The Final Instructions (Cont'd)

3:7 (Cont'd) “meanings except **Allah**. And those who are grounded in knowledge say: “We believe in it; the whole of it (clear and unclear Verses) are from our Lord.” **And none receive admonition except men of understanding.”**

The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad

It is important to note that we show respect to all of our beloved Prophets. We Muslims follow the Prophets names with “PBUH,” which means “Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him.” Most Christians and Jews acknowledge Jesus even though they disagree about his role established by Allah (SWT). During my journey to Islam, I learned that Jesus (PBUH) is a mere man, a Prophet whom Allah (SWT) sent to the Jews to make clear the errors that the Jews were making in following Allah’s (SWT) religion. Jesus made it also clear that he shared no divinity with Allah (SWT). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came to make clear what mistakes the Christians were making in following



The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

Allah's (SWT) religion. He also, shared no divinity with Allah (SWT). Moreover, Jesus (PBUH) told of Prophet Muhammad's coming and that he would be the "Comforter," the "last Prophet." Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) confirms what Jesus (PBUH) taught and makes clear, just like Jesus (PBUH) did, that Allah (SWT) is the only true God and that the Quran is His final instructions to mankind. To understand the roles of Jesus (PBUH) and Mohammad (PBUH), our dear Prophets, one needs merely to embrace these following Verses from the Bible and the Holy Quran:

Bible Verses Talking About Muhammad (PBUH)

Mark 1:7

"And this was his message: "After me comes **the one more powerful than I**, the straps of whose sandals I am **not worthy** to stoop down and untie."



John 16:12-14

12) "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13) "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you



The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

John 16:12-14 (Cont'd)

what is yet to come.” 14) “**He** will glorify me because it is from me that **he** will receive what **he** will make known to you.”



John 14:15-16

15) “If ye love me, keep my commands. 16) “And I will pray to the Father and He shall give you **another Comforter**. That **he** may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth.”

John 14:17

“But the **Comforter** which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name, **he** shall teach you all things.”

John 16:7

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away **the Comforter** will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send **him** unto you.”

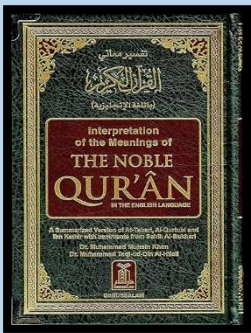
Please note, dear readers, that the above Bible verses do in no way refer to an inanimate, or non-human form of existence.



The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

Rather, Jesus in the Bible uses the pronoun “he” to reference a human being, not a spirit—something that has no life form. Thus, the idea of the Holy Ghost being a person is clearly refuted.

Ayat from the Quran about Prophet Muhammad



61:6,

“And (remember) when “Isa (Jesus son of Maryam (Mary)), said: “O Children of Israel! I am the Messenger of Allah to you, confirming the Taurat [(Torah) which came] before me, and **giving glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me**, whose name shall be Ahmad. But when he **(Ahmad, i.e. Muhammad)** came to them with clear proofs, they said: “This is plain magic.”

3:81

“And (remember) when Allah took the Covenant of the Prophets, saying: “Take whatever I gave you from the Book and *Hikmah* (understanding of the Laws of Allah), and afterwards there will come to you a Messenger **(Muhammad)** confirming what is with you; you must, then,

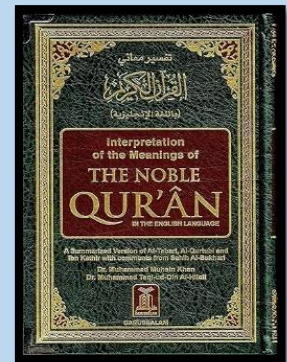


The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

believe in him and help him.” Allah said: “Do you agree (to it) and will you take up My Covenant (which I conclude with you)?” They said: “We agree.” He said: “Then bear witness; and I am with you among the witnesses (for this).”

3:164

“Indeed, Allah conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger **(Muhammad)** from among themselves, reciting to them His verses (the Quran), and purifying them (from sins by their following him), and instructing them (in) the Book (Quran), and *Al-Hikmah* [the wisdom and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (i.e. his legal ways statements and acts of worship)], while before that they had been in manifest error.”



Please note that this Ayah **confirms the Bible verse of Deuteronomy 18:18** in which God, Allah promises a prophet that would come who was one of them, not one coming from any other group of people.



The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

3:187

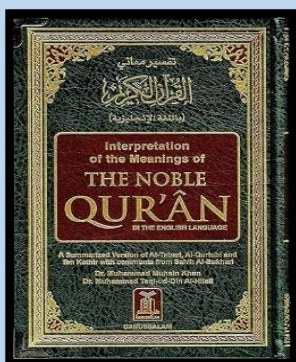
“(And remember) when Allah took a covenant from those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians) to make it **(the news of the coming of Prophet Muhammad and the religious knowledge)** known and clear to mankind, and not to hide it, but they threw it away behind their backs, and purchased with it some miserable gain! And indeed worst is that which they bought.”

4:54-55

54) “Or do they envy men (Muhammad and his followers) for what Allah has given them of His bounty? Then, We had already given the family of Ibrahim (Abraham) the Book and *Al-Hikmah* (*As-Sunnah*—Divine Revelation to those prophets

not written in the form of a book), and conferred upon them a great kingdom.” 55)

“Of them were (some) who believed in him (Muhammad) and of them were **(some) who averted their faces from him (Muhammad);** and enough is Hell for burning (them).”

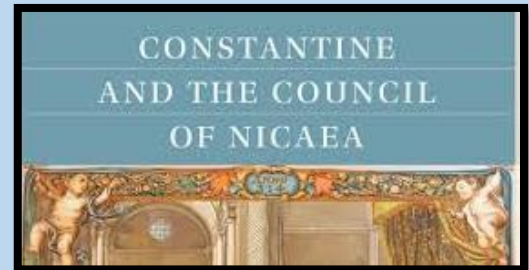




The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

The above two Ayat highlight the fact that Allah (SWT) made it clear as early as in the time of our oldest Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) that He would be sending Prophet Muhammad. Nonetheless, some Biblical scholars refuse to accept this fact, and some have even made great strides to hide this truth.

One should endeavor to recognize this intentional deception by reading about the Council of Nicaea



held in 325 A.D. in a place known today as Iznik, Turkey. It was headed by the Roman Emperor Constantine and his bandits for the purpose of usurping the truth. They even removed, burnt parts of the Bible and ultimately decreed death for those who were caught reading this Holy Book. Even more significant was the adoption of the “Trinity,” which no religious scholar has been able to explain up to this day and have it make any logical sense. Consequently, because of this massive campaign to obscure the truth, one

should make a sincere effort to uncover the truth about religion. By doing so he can protect himself from being misled by the evil ones





The Roles of Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (Cont'd)

who have made it their mission to destroy religion. However, the truth exists in all Allah's (SWT) revelations that include the Torah, the Bible and the Holy Quran. One would be prudent to consider the gems residing in each and acknowledge that the founding principles of religion "Islam" have been safeguarded in these Holy texts, in spite of the manipulations, and can be uncovered by anyone who truly wishes to know the truth. Knowing the truth will set you free!



Social Equality

I learned as a youngster that one must have a college education to be respected by others. This expectation caused me great mental anguish. I came from a very poor family and could not afford a university education. I learned a trade in high school, and I worked extremely hard in my



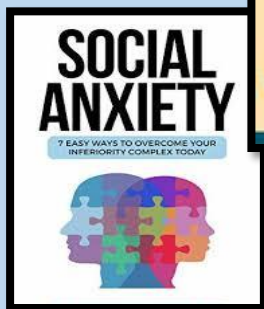


Social Equality (Cont'd)

subsequent jobs. My employers were always impressed by my hard work. However, deep down I felt I was not equal to those who held higher-level jobs. I felt inferior.

I was freed from this terrible complex when I learned that one of the most basic principles that the Holy Quran teaches us is that all men are equal. It makes no difference in one's religion, race, age, gender or social

status. It doesn't matter whether one is a doctor, lawyer, businessman, student, Imam or a common laborer. Allah (SWT) wants that we conduct ourselves honorably in whatever our job is. In fact, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) set the



perfect example as first being a shepherd and than progressing to a businessman. Thus, no one should feel less than another, especially if he/she is poor and works as a “blue collar,” or manual laborer. There is no such distinction in Islam—Allah (SWT) cares only that we do our best. He considers our work to be a form of worship. Hence, Allah (SWT) frees us from social inequality. We know this when we read the following Ayat:



Social Equality (Cont'd)

3:195

“So, their Lord accepted of them (their supplication and answered them), **“Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be they male or female.**

You are (members) one of another, so those who emigrated and were driven out from their homes, and suffered harm in My Cause, and who fought, and were killed (in My Cause), verily, **I will expiate from them their evil deeds and admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise)**; a reward from Allah, and with Allah is the best of rewards.”

65:7

“Let the rich man spend according to his means; and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him.

Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him. Allah will grant after hardship, ease.”



Surpassing Science

Science wields considerable influence on our world and how many perceive our universe and interact with it. Many great astronomers, scientists, doctors, and globalists look beyond Allah's (SWT) words to decide, hypothesize, predict and plan for future conditions of man and our universe. Hence, many scientific miracles discussed in the Holy Quran--which were revealed from 609 to 632 C.E--are completely overlooked.

Sleep

One such example involves medical experts being unable to explain what causes a person to fall asleep. However, the Holy Quran in Ayat 30:23 addresses sleep:

30:23

“His Signs is your sleep by night and by day, and your seeking of His bounty. Verily, **in that are indeed signs for a people who listen.**”

Stages of Prenatal Development

Too, according to an explanation on Study.com, it wasn't until the early 1800's that embryologists began to understand prenatal development. In fact, the actual stages



or trimesters were not identified until the 1950's, as a result of a collective effort by embryologists and doctors during that period, according to the writer on this website. Yet, the Holy Quran gives us the minute details of how the human develops. In Ayat 23:12-14, we read about the stages:

23:12-14

12) “And indeed We created man (Adam) out of an extract of clay (water and earth).” **13)** “Thereafter We made him (the offspring of Adam) **as a Nutfah** (mixed drops of male and female sexual discharge and lodged it) in a safe lodging (womb of the woman).” **14)** “Then We made the **Nutfah into a clot** (a piece of thick coagulated blood), then We made the clot **into a little lump of flesh**, then We made out of that **little lump bones**, then We **clothed the bones with flesh**, and then We **brought it forth as another creation**. So, Blessed is Allah, the Best of creators.

Barrier Between two Bodies of Water

In 1873 A.D., “Oceanographers discovered that there were certain differences between water samples taken from various seas,” as explained on the Quran and Science **169**



Barrier Between Two Bodies of Water (Cont'd)

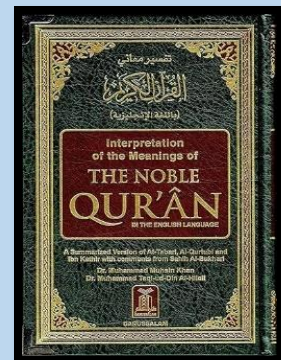
website. However, we learn this irrefutable fact as detailed in the Holy Quran in Ayat 55:19-22:

55:19-22

19) "He has let loose the two seas (the salt and fresh water) meeting together." 20) "**Between them is a barrier** which none of them can transgress." 21) "Then which of the Blessings of your Lord will you both (jinn and men) deny?" 22) "Out of them both come pearl and coral."

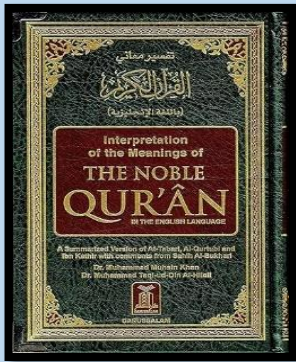
The Holy Quran, A Miracle

There are numerous other scientific miracles that exist in the Holy Quran that involve the bees, the ants, the creation of the universe (which refutes the "Big Bang Theory"), and the shooting stars. One simply needs to read about them and do his own research. All of these things and much more caught my attention as I read the Holy Quran and





The Holy Quran, A Miracle (Cont'd)



considered the research of others that led me back to the Holy Quran.

When one considers the reach of the Holy Quran in all aspects of our existence, he must conclude that the Holy Quran is, indeed, a miracle. It proves its own authenticity. Therefore, the Holy Quran warrants our reading it, pondering its messages and following its guidance and commands.



قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَأْمُرْنَا لِتُسَلِّمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
Say: Surely The Guidance Of Allah,
That Is The (True) Guidance, And
We Are Commanded That We Should
Submit To The Lord Of The Worlds.

Al-An'am, 6:71

Chapter 13



Facing the Opposition



Family

It wasn't until I returned to the United States that I faced ridicule and disdain. For the most part, however, I never felt as though my life was being threatened. Once I said my Shahadah and started wearing Hijab, I was proud and determined not to be deterred in any way. I loved Islam and wanted to share it with the world. Nonetheless, I faced opposition from many. My family members' acceptance or disapproval was of my gravest concern.

None of my family liked that I had become Muslim. All said they loved me and accepted me "as I am," and kindly



inferred that I not talk about Islam or try to enforce my new beliefs on them. I had no challenge in complying with this request. The one who opposed me the most, however, was a

older female by marriage. Even her disapproval was fairly mild. She wanted to give me clothes that were not Islamic, made comments that I was just trying to get attention, and finally said that I would be better off around "my kind." In other words, living around her and her family was not her recommended choice. She felt that I needed to be around other Muslims. I accepted her assessment without



Family (Cont'd)

feeling reason for resentment or for being angry. Actually, being closer to other Muslims would help me to strengthen my faith, so I eagerly accepted her advise.

My oldest brother who was a strict military man and was the one that I feared most. Suffice it to say that he made a couple sly remarks about Arab men, but he assured me that he found my hijab and modest dresses to be attractive. He even told me that American women needed to wear less revealing clothes. I took this stance as a compliment and was overall pleased with his demeanor towards me.

My youngest brother treated me with the greatest respect. He was, and is now, the most supportive and encourages me to follow what I believe. He, however, finds Islam to be too strict for his understanding of religion. He sometimes asks me questions about Islam, and I'm eager to answer them. My dream is that he will someday accept Islam. This blessing would be, indeed, a true miracle! Ameen!

Friends

My two best friends reacted much like my family members did. Neither liked my becoming Muslim. Both chose not to talk about it, and were quick to change



Friends (Cont'd)



the subject if I mentioned anything about Islam or Muslims. One of the two become more verbal while yet careful how she phrased her expressions when she talked to me. At one point I was looking for work and told this friend about it. She responded by saying: “Maybe you can find an office job where you can work in the back where you don’t have to deal with the public.” “Oh!” I said. “So, you don’t think the people will accept me wearing my hijab?” I asked. “Well, Deborah, I think you’re going to have a challenge.” she said. Obviously, we both changed to another topic. Much later, this same friend told me that her daughter might know about a job for me. She then asked: “Are you willing to take off your scarf?” I quickly responded: “No! I can never take off my hijab.” “Oh, okay,” she replied. At that instant, our conversation ended about perspective work. I continued to see both friends, but our relationships changed to ones that were more guarded, less affectionate—devoid of any discussions about Islam or Muslims.

Acquaintances

I consider acquaintances anyone other than family and friends, with whom I talk. Most were/are kind. Generally, they



Acquaintances (Cont'd)



make comments about my hijab or my Islamic dresses. They say they think they are pretty. Some ask where I bought the dress that I'm wearing. Others say that they admire my commitment to my faith. One even asked if she could come to the Masjid. "Of course, I replied. I made an appointment with her, and she did accompany me for one visit. She told me she liked it. I offered her to come a second time, but she cancelled at nearly the last minute. I gave her some pamphlets to read and offered to answer questions after she read them. However, she never followed-up with me. She has since showed no interest. We remain in contact, so I hope that my conduct will help her to change or mind.

The Public Sector

The reactions from this category have varied from mild to right out disdain for me. The most offensive ones include airport security personnel, driver's license office staff and a patron of a local DMV office.

Airport Security



The first incident involved a security officer when I was boarding an Egypt Air flight at the Tampa International Airport. The line for



Airport Security (Cont'd)

the flight was quite long, and I was standing mid-way of the queue. The officer passed by all those standing in front of me and handed me a “green card,” about the size of a 5 X 5 index card, didn’t say anything to me, and immediately walked away and out of my sight. The text on the green card made little sense to me. I waited for a few minutes, then the officer came to me again and motioned for me to move out of the line and to stand to one side of the waiting



area. He left just as abruptly as the first time. I noticed him in an office a good distance away talking to another officer. I could see him making motions with his hands, but I couldn’t hear the conversation. I

must have waited another half hour. Finally, he came back to me and told me I could get back in line. I was a bit shy to ask why no one else got a “green card.” In fact, he left so quickly that I really didn’t have time to ask him anything. I dismissed it as a routine thing and thought no more of it until the second incident.

The second incident with airport security was clearly obvious to me what was happening. I couldn’t deny it. It was intimidating, a bit embarrassing. This security check occurred at the Kennedy International Airport in New York

Airport Security (Cont'd)



when I was getting ready to board another Egypt Air flight. As soon as I passed the whole-body scan machine, two female security officers approached me. They motioned for me to follow them to a private room located behind the main check-in area. The one officer explained that they had to do a body search and that I needed to remove my scarf and that they would be searching under my clothes and between my inner thighs. The one officer who appeared more kind asked me if this body search was okay with me. I told them that I would cooperate but didn't understand why they were doing it. One of them told me that I had lots of clothes on and that they had to be sure that I was not carrying a weapon, drugs or anything else dangerous. I felt I had no choice because I had little time to make my flight and couldn't miss it. After all it was an international flight to Egypt, and the fair was extremely expensive. There was not one spot on my body that one or the other checked. I was so humiliated. I just wanted it to be over. Finally, they were done and told me I could put my scarf back on and return to the que. This incident was the worst thing I had ever experienced. I recalled the "green card" incident that





Airport Security (Cont'd)

had happened a few months prior. In comparison, I could conclude one clear fact: I had been a victim of profiling. I have not traveled by air since that incident. I feel certain that I am and will be targeted because of wearing Islamic clothes, and no other reason. For this, I am still angry and sad and will not fly anywhere accept in a dire emergency.

Biker Woman at DMV Office

As far as the public incidents, I experienced several that amounted to just words yelled at me, and then, the offenders were on their merry ways. However, this huge woman at the DMV office really frightened me. I had just



completed my transaction with the DMV staff and was walking down the aisle to the front exit door. As I passed where the biker was seated, I saw from my peripheral vision that she immediately stood up and bolted toward me. She shoved her

hand against my right shoulder and started shouting, over and over again: “You need Jesus! You need Jesus! You need Jesus! Take off that thing! Take off that thing! I picked up my pace and caught up with my husband.



Biker Woman at DMV Office (Cont'd)

He is hard of hearing and couldn't hear that the woman was yelling at me. "Let's go! Let's go!" I told him. The biker woman finally backed off when she saw my husband turn to look at her. I couldn't get out of that place fast enough! My husband was angry when I told him. He wanted to say something to her, but I told him to just ignore her. I assured him that I was okay.

Attitude Matters

In short, I have experienced a lot of disparaging remarks, but feel fortunate that I haven't suffered discrimination like some Muslims. No matter the opposition, I will not be deterred from practicing my faith. And, if I must, I will defend myself. I don't, however, envision this happening because I put my full trust in Allah (SWT) to protect me. I believe that one's attitude toward and response to harassment can determine the ultimate outcome. It is better not to cause a bad situation to escalate. Being calm is the key. Also, I am convinced that Allah (SWT) helps one if he is peaceful and resists being aggressive. Finally, Allah (SWT) says that He tests us in many ways. Perhaps these minor annoyances are among such trials.



Chapter 14



A Relationship with Allah (SWT)



The Most Essential Tool-Prayer

Understanding the fundamentals of Islam and making one's declaration of faith are only the beginnings of changing from disbelief to belief. It is necessary for one to build a lasting and growing relationship with Allah (SWT). The most essential form of worship of Allah (SWT) is prayer. We Muslims are enjoined to pray five times each day. While this number may appear overwhelming to those of other faiths, Allah (SWT) makes this obligation enjoyable; and, through prayer, we gain unimaginable benefits. From my own personal experiences in praying, I have been blessed beyond my expectations. I share the most notable ones here:



1. When I pray, I am reminded of my relationship with Allah (SWT) and am encouraged to show Him that I love Him and want to honor Him.
2. I always feel a sense of peace and tranquility after praying. If I have entered my prayer anxious, these stressful feelings subside by the time I have completed my prayer.



The Most Essential Tool-Prayer (Cont'd)

3. Allah guarantees me that the sins that I have committed between prayers will be forgiven. This helps me not to be shy when asking Allah (SWT) to forgive me.
4. I am constantly aware of feeling “pure” when I pray. This sense of honor discourages me from doing anything that would nullify that feeling of “piety.”
5. Washing before prayer gives me a sense of cleanliness and helps me to feel relaxed and more focused.
6. I can ask Allah (SWT) anything. I can share everything, anything or nothing. Allah listens to me and knows me, better than a best friend.
7. I gain a sense of direction and can imagine that, if I remain faithful, one day Allah (SWT) will grant me ever lasting life in Paradise.
8. My fear of anything disappears; I think I can manage even the greatest of hurdles. I am able to put my full trust in Allah.
9. I leave my prayer having the desire to be kind, generous and loving to all whom I encounter.



All these blessings I proclaim are genuine, as they are made evident to me from the words of Allah, as He announces



The Most Essential Tool-Prayer (Cont'd)

them to all His faithful servants. Here are just a few of His grand assurances regarding such benefits and safeguards that we gain through prayer:

8:2-3

2) “The believers are only those who when Allah is mentioned, feel a fear in their hearts and when His Verses (this Quran) are recited to them, the (i.e. the Verses) **increase their Faith; and they put their trust in their Lord (Alone);** **3)** “Who perform *As-Salat* (the prayers) and spend out of that We have provided for them.”

2:45

“And seek help in patience and *As-Salat* (the prayers) and truly, it is extremely heavy and hard except for *Al-Khashi'un* [i.e. the true believers in Allah—those who obey Allah with full submission, fear much from His punishment, **and believe in His Promise (Paradise)** and in His Warnings (Hell)].”



The Most Essential Tool-Prayer (Cont'd)

11:114

“**And perform As-Salat (the prayers)**, at (the two ends of the day and in some hours of the night [i.e. the five compulsory *Salat* (prayers)]. **Verily, the good deeds remove the evil deeds** (i.e. small sins). That is a reminder (an advice) for the mindful (those who accept advice.”

13:22-24

22) “And those who remain patient, seeking their Lord’s Countenance, **perform As-Salat (the prayers)**, and spend out of that which We have bestowed on them, secretly and openly, and repel evil with good, **for such there is a good end.”** **23)** “*And (Eden) Paradise (everlasting Gardens), which they shall enter* and (also) those who acted righteously from among their fathers, and their wives, and their offspring. And angels shall enter to them from every gate (saying):” **24)** “*Salamun ‘Alaikum* (peace be upon you) for you persevered in patience! **Excellent indeed is the final home!”**



The Most Essential Tool-Prayer (Cont'd)

29:45

“Recite (O Muhammad) what has been revealed to you of the Book (the Quran), and **perform *As-Salat* (the prayers)**. Verily, ***As-Salat* (the prayers) prevents from *Al-Fahsha* (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse) and *Al-Munkar* (i.e. disbelief, polytheism, and every kind of evil wicked deed)** and the remembering (praising) of (you by) Allah (in front of the angels) is greater indeed [than your remembering (praising) of Allah in prayers]. And Allah knows what you do.”

65:2-3

2) “. . .And whosoever fears Allah and keeps his duty to Him, **He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty)**.” 3) “And He will provide him from (sources) he never could imagine. And **whosoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him**. Verily, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Indeed Allah has set a measure for all things.”



Respecting Others

While one grows close to Allah through the most essential form of worship, prayer, he must act upon Allah's other teachings. We, as Muslims, must give respect to all those around us. We should hold our highest regards for our parents and never treat them with disrespect. In fact, we read in the Holy Quran the following:

17:23

“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you **be dutiful to your parents**. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, **say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them** but **address them in terms of honour**.”

Muslim men are enjoined to respect their wives and treat them kindly, as commanded in the following Ayah:

30:21

“And among His Signs is that He **created for you wives** from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and **He has put between you affection and mercy**. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect.”



Respecting Others (Cont'd)

Children are held in high regard by Allah (SWT). He honors them and tells us to do the same. We read in the following two Ayat how we are to deal with these precious beings:

17:70

“And indeed We have **honoured the Children** of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with *Al-Tayibat* (lawful good things), and **have preferred them** to many of those whom We have created **with a marked preferment.**”

6:140

“Indeed **lost are they who have killed** their children, foolishly, without knowledge, and **have forbidden that which Allah has provided for them**, inventing a lie against Allah. They **have indeed gone astray** and were not guided.”

Besides, parents, wives and children, Allah (SWT) has enjoined upon us to respect all relatives and not to break our relations with them. The following Ayah is crystal clear:



Respecting Others (Cont'd)

4:1

“O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife [Hawa (Eve)], and from them both He created many men and women; and fear Allah through Whom you demand (your mutual rights), and **(do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship)**. Surely, Allah is Ever an All-Watcher over you.”

Therefore, the Ayat that we have considered here leave no doubt that we are to respect all our family members, especially our parents. Also, Allah (SWT) refers to children as His “creation with a marked preferment.” Indeed these words carry tremendous credence for loving and honoring our children and for never breaking ties with our kinfolk.

In addition to honoring family and relatives, we Muslims are responsible for how we treat others and for not showing disrespect towards faiths that are different from our own. Several Ayat help us to understand our obligation to accept and appreciate others who have different beliefs. These Ayat are emphatic and can, in no way, be misunderstood:



Respecting Others (Cont'd)

First is the Ayah about not disrespecting others:

49:11-12

11) “O you who believe! **Let not a group scoff at another group**, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. **Nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames**. How bad is it to insult one’s brother.” after having Faith [i.e. to call your Muslim brother (a faithful believer) as: “O sinner”, or “O wicked”]. And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed *Zalimun* (wrongdoers).” **12)** “O you who believe! **Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins**. And **spy not, neither backbite one another**. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One Who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful.”

Islam means “peace.” We Muslim reject aggression towards anyone. We follow Allah’s (SWT) wisdom and promote respect for all mankind, particularly those of other faiths.



Respecting Others (Cont'd)

Regarding other faiths, Allah (SWT) enjoins the following:

2:62

“Verily, those who believe and those who are **Jews** and **Christians**, and **Sabians**, **whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord**, on them shall be no fear, **nor** shall they grieve.”

5:82

“... and you will find the **nearest in love to the believers (Muslims)** ^{and} those who say: “We **are Christians**.” That is because amongst them are priests and monks, and they are not proud.”

29:46

“And **argue not with the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians)**, unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islamic Monotheism with His Verses), except with such of them as do wrong: and say (to them): “We believe in that which has been revealed to us



Respecting Others (Cont'd)

29:46 (Cont'd)

29:46

“and revealed to you; our *Ilah* (God) and your *Ilah* (God) is One (i.e. Allah), and to Him we have submitted (as Muslims).”

Being Muslims gives us reasons to reflect on ourselves and our relationships with others. We are responsible to Allah (SWT) for our conduct and for worshiping Him in a way that He commands us to do. We have been truly blessed, as Allah (SWT) has chosen us to be His pious servants. May we be the best ambassadors of Islam and make every possible effort to share our knowledge and love for Allah (SWT) far and wide and not to disrespect anyone for any reason. May our stewardship inspire others to accept Islam. Ameen!



Chapter 15



The Finale



Conclusion

My journey to Islam spanned most of my life, but finally Allah (SWT) freed me from the shackles of disbelief. He has rescued me from the Darkness and guided me to His Radiant Light.

During my adventure, I learned and understand these crucial truths which I feel obliged to recap here:

1. Allah (SWT) is the only true God who created All things, including our universe.
2. Jesus (PBUH) and Muhammad (PBUH) are our beloved Prophets. They are two of the most influential men chosen by Allah (SWT) to deliver His message of His Oneness in worship. Neither share divinity with Allah (SWT). Both have significant roles in our future.
3. Allah (SWT) has given mankind instructions from the beginning of time that include the Ten Commandments, the Torah, the Bible and, finally, The Holy Quran. All of these Holy texts have served their purpose and have safeguarded Allah's (SWT) fundamental principles, in spite of the attempts by evil ones to obscure the truth and to destroy religion entirely.
4. Islam is Allah's (SWT) religion which He established with our oldest Prophet, Ibrahim (PBUH). Further, Islam means "Peace" and "full Submission to Allah."



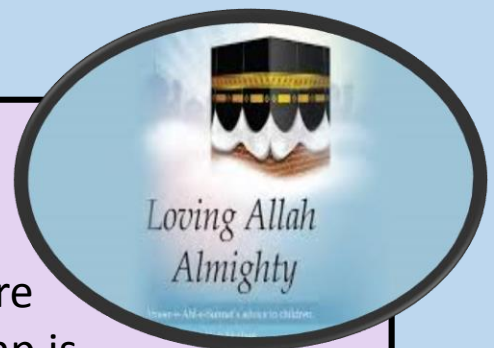
Conclusion (Cont'd)

Thus, adhering to these mentioned Islamic principles leads us to love and respect all mankind--no matter their race, age, religion, gender or social status. If one understands these things and allows Allah (SWT) to guide him, he will, indeed, be successful. He will live everlasting life in Paradise.

In closing, dear readers. I must share one last gem—the Light of Allah (SWT), our Magnificent Creator! He has guided me to His Light, and for this miracle, I am eternally grateful. It is His Light that is indelibly etched on my heart. I humbly ask Allah (SWT) to guide all who are living in darkness to His Loving Light. Ameen!

24:35

“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east (i.e. neither it gets sun-rays only in the morning) nor of the west (i.e. nor it gets sun-rays only in the afternoon, but it is exposed to the sun all day long), whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself), though no fire has touched it. **Light upon Light!** Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. And Allah sets forth parables for mankind, and Allah is All-Knower of everything.”





Author's Notes

1. I extend my sincere gratitude to all who read this book. It is my hope that each of you benefit from its contents. You are welcome to share it far and wide.
2. I humbly ask that you read my first book: *Beyond the Clouds*. In this captivating narration, I unravel the mysteries obscuring the truths about our universe, whether or not God exists; and if so, what His purpose is for mankind. I reveal the truths to passengers aboard Radiant Airways, Flight 777, as they transverse our globe on their journey “Beyond the Clouds.” These passengers include people of many faiths and some who claim to be non-believers. Together, they discover through intense discussion and retrospection the shocking answers to these extremely controversial issues. This book is also meant to be used as a teacher’s tool by Muslims as they conduct their own Daa’wah.
3. I welcome your questions, comments and suggestions for both books. In sha Allah, I hope to soon publish these narrations in hard-copy format.

You can reach me at my email address or by phone:

Paisley_1956 @yahoo.com

727-336-7105

Recommended Resources



Holy Texts

Holy Bible, King James Version

Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Quran in the English Language by Dr. M. Taqluddin Al-Hillall and Dr. M. Muhsin Khan

Books

Beyond the Clouds by Leilah K. Ibrahim

Jesus Prophet of Islam by Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim

Muhammad in the Bible by Professor Abdul-Ahad Dawud

What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims by Suzanne Haneef

Websites

Islam Question & Answer at <https://islamqa.info/en>

Muslim Replies <https://muslimreply.com>

(This website was created by Brother Mohamed Qarout. It offers copious information about Islam and tools for learning how to read/recite the Holy Quran. Also he showcases his book titled *Why Islam?*.)

Muslim Replies <https://muslimreply.com/deborah>

(My books and details about me are on the same website at my own address as noted.)



References

Bible Gateway. King James Version (KJV). Genesis 1.
www.biblegateway.com, July 22, 2023.

Homework.Study.com. <https://homework.study.com/explanation/who-came-up-with-stages-of-prenatal-development.html>

Quran and Science. *The Description of the Barrier Between Two Seas*. <https://quranandscience.com/quran-science/earth/133-the-description-of-the-barrier-between-two-seas>. May, 17, 2009.

Dr. M. Taqluddin Al-Hillall, Dr. M. Muhsin Khan, *Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Quran in the English Language*. First Edition: December 2011.



Notes/Comments

A series of horizontal dashed lines providing space for notes or comments.

About the Book



Having reached a critical juncture in her life where obstacles seemed unsurmountable, the author curiously began to question everything. She looked to anyone and everyone for answers, but to no avail. She prayed incessantly, yet she felt no noticeable relief. Her spiritual upheaval became her

focus which led her to conduct massive research. She read books, viewed websites and read numerous articles that she had to decipher—making her best effort to connect the dots and to ultimately glean the truth within it all.

Thus, after considerable time, great effort, and unfathomable consternation, the author slowly began to uncover truths that were undeniable—truths that would thrust her into an entirely different existence, a whole new way of life. She ultimately discerned that there is One God and that there is only One religion for All mankind. Thus, after 48 years as a Christian, she freely submitted to the will of this only true God and has served Him for over 17 years. Her life has changed incredibly for the best, for she has been blessed beyond measure, surpassing her grandest expectations. No obstacle becomes unsurmountable; nor challenge proves too great for her. She puts her full faith in her Merciful, All Mighty Creator and leans on Him for her every need. Indeed, knowing the truth has set her free! Ameen!