

# Coming Home To Islam

## Conversion Stories of the Truly “Chosen Ones”

TO LAUNCH OUR SERIES ON *DAW`A* IN THE WEST, WE OFFER HERE VIGNETTES OF CONVERSION STORIES WHICH ARE PLANNED AS FULL-LENGTH FEATURES IN FUTURE ISSUES. WE HOPE YOU ENJOY READING THEM AS MUCH AS WE HAVE ENJOYED RESEARCHING THEM.



**Dr. Robert Crane**

CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH,  
WASHINGTON D.C.

I studied and studied, and I spent years reading Saint Thomas Aquinas, all the great philosophers, and wanted to become...well actually, I wanted to become a Jesuit priest, and then I decided to become a Franciscan because the Franciscans had been commissioned by the Pope to convert Russia. I spent a year writing about the spiritual dimensions of resistance against a Totalitarian state, and I escaped from communist prisons twice.

I figured there must be a secret to opposing evil. The ones who continued and were successful were all spiritually very deep. I figured the Franciscans are not intellectual—I was much too intellectual. That’s why I didn’t become a Jesuit, as I thought, “This intellectuality isn’t going to lead anywhere, so I’d better become a Franciscan.” And I did. As a matter of fact, because I’ve never left the Order, I’m—probably—the world’s only Muslim Franciscan!

### I’m the world’s only Muslim Franciscan.

I was a Muslim, actually, because of a religious experience I had when I was 20 years old. I almost died. The doctors told me later that they assumed I was dying. It must have been a massive infestation of trichina worms, millions of them, all through my body. Every muscle of my body was full of little worms. Normally if you have an infestation like that you die. And I actually think I did. But then I had this religious experience, and I lived.

I didn’t make *shahada* until 1980, until I was in Bahrain. I was doing some sight-seeing with my wife in Muharraq, which is the old merchant town, you know, winding alleys...we got lost and I met this old old man, the last of the pearl-diving captains. He loved me and he loved everybody—you know, a really remarkable person. And so I told him about this. And he said, “Oh, that’s very simple. You experienced Allah.” I said, “Wow, you have a word for it!” ♦



**Jennifer McLennan**

FORMER MARKETING OFFICER, CANADA

It happened so gradually that I didn’t recognize what happened until I sat down to tell this story. I bought a computer with a free CD-Rom encyclopedia, and the first thing I did was look up “Islam.” I also read all the books on Sufism, and enrolled in a course on Islamic Art. The professor’s approach was to teach the basic tenets of Islam before delving into the art. Since everything in Islam is done in the Name of God, I learned, it seemed to make sense.

### When I converted it was because my heart was telling me to.

It was like everything I had come to believe on my own—through informal explorations as a teenager, formal schooling as a university student, and self-analysis—was rolled up into a neat little package and handed to me. I had never felt so much like I belonged to something and that something was made for me. The Islamic concepts of God and angels, its recognition of all holy books, its respect for other religions and policy of tolerance for other religions, and many other truths rang true to me. A few people questioned my conversion: they thought it too hasty and not well thought out, but most expressed their apprehensions, however gently, about the religion of Islam. What I learned, I learned in my heart, and when I converted it was because my heart was telling me to, not because it made sense in any other way, because in the worldly sense, it didn’t. I know now that it was the greatest decision I have ever made—the first one I made for my heart and soul. My family and friends have been beyond supportive, and the Muslim community has been very open in welcoming me, *alhamdulillah*. ♦



**Muhammad Amin Bootman & Family**

VICE PRESIDENT, BANK OF AMERICA

My wife and I converted to Islam a few years ago and, more recently, some of our older children have as well. Admittedly, our path to this religion has been traveled in slow motion. I had studied the ideas of George Gurdjieff for over 30 years, all of my adult life. Here in California, where New Age religions and Eastern philosophies flourish, there has been a decided lack of popular interest in Islam. Negative press is certainly part of the reason, but at a personal level I can only say that Islam was simply invisible. In this culture, everyone loves to shop. New malls, subcultures and belief systems seem to pop up overnight. Ironically, locked within the confines of the ultimate secular state, increasing numbers of people are shopping for religions.

As a convert, I can now see that it is a great pity that this religion is not at the top of the shopping list because, in some strange way, Islam includes everything else. As a newcomer it was something of a shock over the last few years to encounter the marked Islamic reverence for all the prophets of the Torah and the Gospels. There seems to be a lot more about Moses and Abraham in the Qur'an than the Prophet himself, (peace be upon all of them). When you think about it, such deference and innate modesty would, indeed, befit the bearer of God's final and perfected message to all of mankind. A faith such as Islam, which resolutely focuses on the unseen One, has an uphill battle to get noticed at all.

My hope at this point, as a husband and a father, is that Islam will provide a much-needed balance for my family. Children learn by example, and this religion presents a standard of behavior quite beyond anything I've encountered in my own culture. This religion is imminently practical and yet profound. In fact, Islam seems to be constructed along the lines of a whole series of balances. It is direct and sophisticated. ◇



**Leonardo "Khalid bin Waleed" Stoute** MARTIAL ARTS MASTER, MICHIGAN

I got the first scent of Islam as a student of the greatest of martial arts, "Pencak Silat", which traces its lineage back to Sayiddina Ali (ka) through an unbroken chain of masters. My guru always began with Allah's name, but refrained from discussing Islam. The principles of the art,

however, were full of Islamic references, including the spelling of *kalimat ash-shahada* in the well-rehearsed movements we practiced daily. After many years, one of the students of my guru, a Muslim, said, "You must know that Pencak Silat has its spiritual roots in the Islamic tradition. Why don't you come with me to meet a spiritual teacher?" I didn't know what to say, so I accepted his invitation. Little did I know my whole life would be changed. I

entered the hall where the teacher met every Thursday night for Islamic remembrance of God, *dhikrullah*. Immediately I could sense that the roots of the Silat tradition originated in this spiritual path. As the teacher spoke—about essential and deep concerns that were deeply rooted in my own heart, about God, and about man's relation with the Divine—I was overwhelmed. He had read me like an open book.

I said to the teacher, "Whatever it is you have, I must have. I am asking you to grant me that permission." He assembled those present and they all joined in helping me say the *shahada*. I always remember that night, because my watch stopped right at that moment—11:11pm. The teacher never once pressured me to practice, but used to say, "Islam will grow on you, and you must always dress it like a suit of clothes. It must fit, and it must not be a suit tailored for any other person." With that kind advice I soon found myself drawn to the prayers. I gave up all kinds of vices and subhanallah, have never returned to them. ◇



**Jamal al-Din Hoffman,**  
JOURNALIST



**Iman Meyer-Hoffman**  
UNDER-GRADUATE  
STUDENT, SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

It has been just two years since my wife and I embraced Islam, and were embraced by it. But the change brought in our lives by the utterance of one simple phrase—There is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger—has been so profound and so all-encompassing that it is, at times, difficult to remember what it was like not to be Muslim. Our journey to Islam began long before we met.

Iman and I were both born into Christian families and baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. However, neither of our families were anything resembling devout, so our religious training was informal, at best. By the time we were in high school, Iman and I had begun searching for alternatives to Christianity. We found many. While America has failed to realize its goal of becoming a racial and ethnic melting pot, it has succeeded in becoming a nation in which all of the world's faiths are blended to the point of absurdity. Iman and I plunged headlong into this confusing melange of religiosity. We tried everything, but ended up with nothing. I was the first to encounter Islam. There were many Muslim students at the university I attended, and we American leftists made common cause with them on the Palestinian problem and other issues.

As I got to know them, I was increasingly impressed by their sincerity, their sobriety, and their lack of hypocrisy, and by the way in which their religion was integrated into every facet of their lives. I sensed that they had found what I was looking for. I may have been the first to encounter Islam, but Iman was the first to see it in our future. One night, as I was reading a verse from the Qur'an to her, Iman turned to me with a serious look in her eyes. "You are going to be a Muslim," she said. "I am certain of it."

One night, I had an inspiration. I ran into my office, turned on the computer, connected to the Internet, and typed in the word "Islam." In a matter of seconds, the names of dozens of Internet sites with information about Islam were flashing on the screen. On one specific website were volumes of writings by learned men of the faith. When I began to read what was there, I knew that I was approaching the end of my quest. Here was what I had been looking for. Here was Islam as presented by scholars who clearly penetrated the essence of this religion. Here was the missing piece of the puzzle, the key that unlocked the mystery of Islam for me. At that moment, my heart opened to Islam.

However, while Islam has proven the solution to the puzzle of faith that had confounded Iman and me for so long, our conversion has not always been easy. Wearing *hijab* (head scarf) was a challenge for Iman. "Today, I can't imagine not wearing it. It protects me, and it also continually makes me aware that I am a Muslim." The path of Islam may be clear to those who have spent a lifetime

walking it, but to newcomers like ourselves, it often seems like a maze fraught with pitfalls and dead-ends. In this regard, Iman and I have been most fortunate. We have found sheiks to guide us, to illuminate our way with the light of their knowledge and understanding. With their help, and with the mercy of Allah (s.w.t.) we will continue our journey into Islam. ◇

### The Lutz Family of New Mexico

NARRATED BY RAHMAH LUTZ

We first encountered the teachings of Islam over twenty years ago when we were a young married couple with two beautiful children. We had sought a spiritual path for awhile and had met many good and sincere people from different disciplines. Every path had benefits that we enjoyed, but none of them 'fit' comfortably. We were seeking the 'Divine Order' for our own destiny.



Abdur Rahim and Rahmah Lutz with their grandson, Ibrahim.

We experienced a great attraction to the writings of Sufi masters, and realized that saints who had lived over the past centuries were all practicing Muslims. This led to a study of Islam, and we began to repeat the key word that surfaced over and over: 'Allah'. We fasted during Ramadan although we still didn't understand the regulations of the fast, and we made simple attempts to pray as best we could.

In the summer of 1977, I attended a Women's Weekend at Lama Foundation, a spiritual center located on a beautiful and remote mountain top in northern New Mexico. For the first time I prayed with Muslim women, asked questions about Islam and I returned home convinced that Islam was the "way of the family". My husband, Abdur Rahim, then visited the Lama Foundation himself where we were invited to spend the winter studying Islamic texts at the Intensive Study Center. He came home, quit his job, packed up our family and we moved to the mountain. We stayed with some young American Muslim families living in Santa Fe, praying with them and asking them questions. Never once did they suggest we should pay for spiritual instruction. They believed that Allah had sent us to their door and they opened their doors wide to receive us. We not only studied Islam from books; we directly experienced the way of Islam—the beauty of people striving to live a spiritual life, who share their knowledge, provision and blessings without question. ◇



The Lutz' daughter Masrura, with her husband and two children.

*TMM wishes to thank our many readers who submitted their individual, inspirational conversion stories. We are happy to receive additional narrations for potential publication in future issues.*

- The Editor