

المكتب التعاوني للدعوة والإرشاد وتوعية الجاليات بأبها
Abha Cooperative Center For Call & Communities



Dr. Jeremiah's Spiritual Journey



STORY OF DR. JEREMIAH

Bism Allah, Al-Rahmen, Al-Raheem.....

I was raised Catholic and went to a Catholic grade school and high school-- in the U.S. grade school is roughly age 5-14 lasting 8 years and high school is roughly age 14-18 lasting 4 years. Many then go on to 4 years of college. I am of Irish-American ethnicity and from an upper middle class economic background.

I was always interested in religion, as well as things like psychology, and was reading rather broadly in the subjects even in late grade school. I often prayed the rosary and asked for faith, because that is what the Catholic nuns said one should pray for: faith.

At the same time, as I grew, I was rather wild: the whole American "sex, drugs, rock 'n roll" scene, as the saying goes. What can I say? I like to party! Nothing too outrageous for a young American, but wild just the same.

Anyway, in college I studied philosophy and focused on areas such as philosophy of religion and existentialism. I also studied a lot in Christianity as well as Buddhism and other religions, and psychology. (My background in psychology is strong enough such that I have done hospital-based clinical work.)

I very strongly considered being a priest or a monk. I would visit a particular monastery once in a while and have twice begun the entrance procedure into a seminary for the priesthood .

(Indeed I was in this process when I accepted Islam. Isn't that ironic ?)

So, after college I wasn't quite sure what to do: continue school, but wasn't sure if I wanted philosophy, theology or psychology. I ended up going to Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania which is in the Mideastern United States. Very pretty-- hills and rivers and forests .

I studied what is called Formative Spirituality-- which you can read about at my web site. Essentially, it attempts to look at human spirituality as a natural human function-- prior to any theological or specifically religious discussion of it. I have a Master of Arts degree (M.A.) and a Doctor of



Philosophy degree (Ph.D.) in this subject. These are among the highest academic degrees in the U.S. educational system. (In college you get a Bachelor's degree-- B.A.)

So, that is my background.

I was religious as a child and read the Bible, which often Catholics do not actually do-- relying on the priest for the interpretation and understanding. In college I practiced yoga and Buddhist/Hindu styles of meditation for about two or three years. Near the end of my first year in college I made a very conscious and ritualized type of personal vow to "go all the way" with religion. To reach enlightenment. To find God. I promised myself I would not stop.

I did not practice Catholicism at that time, but later did renew my practice of it.

However, as I studied various theologies, traditions, and other general religious studies I began to have major, major problems with Christian thought. For instance, it seemed clear to me that Prophet Jesus (God love him!), as a good Jew, would never have claimed divinity for himself. I concluded he did not claim to be God and that the Gospel accounts contained much more theology than biographical history. But I believed that through Jesus' life and personality God did indeed reveal His Will..... and that Jesus is Christ. (As Muslim, I still do believe that, of course.)

But this was problematic. I didn't really fit anywhere! And actually, it was rough to know what to believe, or even if any of it was true. I had many, many years of really fighting for just a naked faith in God. Years of praying at night: "If You are there give it to me. You said ask and you shall receive. Well, I'm asking. You said knock and the door will be opened. Well, I'm knocking. You promised guidance to those who ask for it. I'm asking for it."

And later I prayed like this: "I am sending this prayer out to the One True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Jesus. If You are there guide me, make me Yours..." and stuff like that. I specifically used this kind of a phrase naming these people for a good length of time.



During all this I consciously chose faith in God. This was pure naked faith-- not really having reasons to believe, but choosing to do so anyway. I did this because the saints in the Catholic tradition said to do so. They would say that often God seems far away or non-existent-- so keep the faith! Trust God even though you don't see Him at all. So, that is what I did.

I remember one time with particular clarity. I was standing in the hall between my living room and bedroom-- it all really hit me: I had no reason to believe in God. None at all. But I remembered all I had read and said to myself: "I say 'yes' to God in spite of the fact I have no reason to believe in God. I choose to say 'yes' and have faith that it is all true."

I was not really practicing Catholicism. (The last time I began application to the seminary it was because I was thinking where else could I go? It wasn't a perfect fit, but it would be the best fit.)

When it came time to write my dissertation for the Ph.D. I had to include a section about a religious tradition that was not my own-- i.e. something other than Christianity. I chose Islam. Believe it or not, it was the one religious tradition I knew nothing about! This struck me as somewhat odd. But I noticed I did indeed have a prejudice against it. I felt somewhat repulsed by it, actually. (Stuff left over from the Crusades just "gets into" Euro-Americans, I think.) And plus it couldn't possibly be true-- how could there be revelation after "The Jesus Event"? It had to be just another guy who felt "inspired by God" and really effected the people around him. No big deal.

It was difficult finding decent books on Islam. I had to get most by mail-order. There was an Islamic Center here so I began to go there and learn some things. (I finally learned what happened to Cat Stevens!

I had a bunch of his recordings but never knew why he disappeared from the scene.)

The people at the Islamic Center were very nice. Not really what I expected. No one put the slightest pressure on me to convert. It was nothing like being around born-again or evangelical Christians, which was what I half expected.

I mean, aren't all Muslims supposed to be a bit on the crazy-fanatical side?



Well, they weren't like that at all. They simply presented the information and answered my questions. No one called me or bothered me or anything like that. It was rather refreshing, I must say.

I repeat: there was nothing even resembling pressure to convert. Just a warm openness and a friendliness not often encountered in the States. One guy did try to get me to say the words, but everyone else jumped on him immediately and told him to be quiet. (And of course, I would never make a ritual declaration like that unless I thought it was true.)

This went on for a few years. I was reading a lot ABOUT Islam, but did not read the Qur'an. Slowly, my prejudices and repulsion faded away as I learned the true stories about Muhammad (God love him!), as well as Muslim history, beliefs and theology.

Then I stopped for a few years as I wasn't going to finish my dissertation. (It was resumed after I accepted Islam.)

A few years pass. I read things about Islam here and there.

At the behest of a good friend (non-Muslim) I read "The Autobiography of Malcolm X." After reading this I had a very strong urge to go and get and read the actual Qur'an. I called around to some bookstores and ran out and got the translation by Dawood (the one in the proper order).

I will never forget that day. Ever. I can still see it happening. Little did I know what I was in for-- that my life and total world-view would be changed-- that I myself would be changed.

I read the whole thing through in one sitting. I don't think I even changed position.

Right from the start it grabbed me. The very beginning-- called Al-Fatiha-- is a prayer. I immediately liked it as a prayer. It was, in essence, what I already prayed: You are God the Creator. Guide me, make me into one of those You love. I certainly couldn't argue with those sentiments! Then, in the beginning of the second chapter, it gave the description of who this book was addressed to: people who believe in God, establish prayer, give in charity, believe messengers were sent to us, and that we will return to God-- well, that was me-- and that this book was not to be doubted-- that it was truly and sincerely from God to these people-- like me-- precisely to guide them-- which was what



I had wanted for years.

So right off, it was speaking directly to me as an individual.

Right off, it wasn't just some ancient 1400 year old text.

It really grabbed me and did not, would not, let go.

As I read a thought began to form and then started going through my head over and over and over: "Oh my God! This is from God!" It was like being slammed in the head with a brick or a hard plank of wood. I was stunned. It was real. Not the "inspired writing" of the Bible. It was direct revelation--- it really was the Word of God. Literally. Oh my God! This really IS from God!

Well, needless to say, I was floored. I knew there was something very extraordinary here. Quite amazing. Something was happening.

Imagine how bizarre it would be to really see a UFO. How unusual and fantastic something like that would be. Or what if someone just started to truly levitate and fly around right in front of you? Or what if you really truly did see a miracle? Your view of the world would necessarily change after such a non-ordinary experience.

What was happening to me as I read the Qur'an was beyond that.

So much of what I was reading in the Qur'an was stuff I was already thinking due to my academic studies in religion. The Qur'an not only confirmed things I was already thinking, but completed thoughts and ideas I was only vaguely aware of-- like things I was "half-thinking" if that makes any sense-- and then it also opened up to me an entire new universe of meaning and possibility. Suddenly, it was as if I was standing in a whole new vista-- like the open plain of a whole new world stretched out before me. Quite stunning and amazing.

There was nothing that gave me pause-- I kept saying "yes" to all that I read.

One thing pulled me up short and that was that Jesus did not die on the cross.

But by that time, the evidence was so overwhelming to my heart, my soul and my mind that this Book was indeed EXACTLY what it claimed to be that I had no trouble accepting this as the truth from God Himself. And none of this is the slightest exaggeration whatsoever. I am not sugar-coating or embellishing my story to make it more attractive, or pious sounding, or dramatic, or whatever. I am telling the truth.



(I was especially struck by how contemporary the Qur'an is-- remember my academic background. Everything about it is just absolutely brilliant! I don't know why Muslims are so afraid of contemporary philosophy, psychology, or textual criticism. There is nothing to fear. The Qur'an is very "today." Actually, it is very "tomorrow").

Two weeks later I declared in public that I bear witness there is no god but God and I bear witness that Muhammad is a messenger from God.

I was always able to say the first part of that. Note the two week wait. I was nervous-- was I really going to get involved with these people? This was not my cultural background, to say the least. White Americans do not become Muslim, do they? I remember standing at the masjid during this period watching them pray salat. Indeed, a news camera was there filming for a story which was then shown on the local news. It showed everyone praying salat, except for that one guy standing in the back-- and in a bright red shirt no less. C'est moi!

I thought: "Who am I kidding? I really do think that Muhammad was a messenger from God." So, that was that. I would have been dishonest with myself if I did not declare what I now thought to be true, and I thus entered the Muslim ummah.

This was during Ramadan/April 1992 CE. The first time I ever met a Muslim was in Turkey during Ramadan when I was around 20 years old. (I am almost 40 now.) .

So, all those years of prayer for guidance were answered. For real. Even today, five-six years after these events I am still amazed by it all-- not only that I'm Muslim (who would have ever thought that?)-- but all those prayers really were answered by means of my encounter with the Qur'an in light of the sunnah of Muhammad.

Islam is truly the best-- and I say this coming from a background of formal study in religious issues. I am rarely at a loss for words, but I am when it comes to describing how I feel and think about Islam, the Qur'an and the sunnah of our beloved Rasool Allah, may God love him greatly. It is simply astounding. Beautiful like a work of art. Dynamic and vibrant. Brilliant in how it all unfolded. Mature-- no magic, no superstition. Excellent! What can be said but alhamdulillah 'Llah-- Glory to God in the Highest? Nothing! Nothing else can be said! Alhamdulillah 'Llah!

Dr. Jeremiah .



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