

RELEASED FROM BONDAGE

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1. I Was Born

I was born in Solapur, a town in the southern part of the state of Maharashtra, India, in a fundamentalist Muslim family of the Sunni branch of Islam. When I was three years old my father sent me to a *madrasa* (Islamic school) to learn the Qur'an. I was skilful in reciting the Qur'an even at the age of eight.

My family's profession was trading in bakery items and running a hotel business. My father had a big family to take care of. We were six brothers and four sisters. I was the only son who was well versed in reciting the Qur'an and in the fundamental teachings of Islam.

My mother was a very devout woman. She paid attention to me especially, and encouraged me to study the Qur'an. When I was twelve years old many questions came up in my mind on the teachings of the Qur'an. This was in deep contrast to my brothers. They were fanatics without

understanding any of the Qur'anic teachings. My father was a strict Muslim, deeply attached to Islamic law (Sharia). Now I understand that my father took Islamic law (Sharia) into his hands to his advantage. Though my father projected himself as a pious Muslim, he was a dictator at home.

My mother was very submissive to my father. When she served food for my father at the table, my mother used to place a cane next to the dishes. If the food was not to my father's liking, even if there was only too little salt, the cane could be used on her. I witnessed my father beating my mother with a cane many times.

"Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And as to those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, desert them in their beds and beat them. If they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is ever Exalted Great" (SuratunNisa' 4:34).

2. My Parents

One day an incident happened in our house that shocked me. My father brought a young lady of 25 years old and said to us that she was his wife. I was 18 years old at the time. My father's new wife was young enough to be his daughter. My mother was obviously not disturbed. She knew that a Muslim man can take another wife at any time because the religion allows a man to marry and live with up to four wives at a time.

After about two years the relationship

between my father and mother soured. My father made secret plans to give *talak* (divorce) to my mother. But because of our large family, he did not dare divorce my mother; instead he continued to torture her. Whenever my father beat my mother I used to intervene on her behalf.

My brothers did not bother to stand between my father and mother during such beatings. One day a horrible incident happened in the house. My father took a knife and wanted to kill my mother. I threw myself over her and covered my mother and pleaded with my father. I could not allow him to kill my mother. My father was shaking with rage. In a fit of anger he stabbed me in three places, once in my right elbow, once in my left hip and once in my right shoulder. Even today, the scars on my body testify to this incident. When I was stabbed my mother came to my rescue and with tears told my father that she could not allow this any longer. She submitted herself like a lamb to be killed. Meanwhile I had become unconscious. We were taken to the hospital. On the way I regained consciousness, and I heard my mother praying for me. I heard her praying to Allah to take care of me, for I had accomplished my duties as her son. She cried to Allah to protect me, for I had paid her back for the milk she had fed me from her breasts.

After getting admitted to the hospital my mother died. Soon after my mother's death, my father surrendered himself to the police, not because he had murdered my mother but because he stabbed me. He had to atone for inflicting wounds and pain on a Qur'an reciter and a good Muslim like me. Nobody in the family felt sorry for my mother's death.

Everything went on as normal. I continued to study the Qur'an, but this time very seriously as a seeker of Allah and his truths. My earlier learning had been superficial. Now I probed deeply into Qur'anic teachings.

Allah in the Qur'an centres his attention on men, but he doesn't care about women at all. I understood that women are not favoured like men in the Qur'an. Islam denies women many rights. For instance, a husband can give his wife *talak* (divorce). SuratulNisa' 4 in the Qur'an commands a woman to obey her husband. She is even instructed to worship her husband as God, whereas a man can mistreat his wife. Why this onesidedness?

This raised many questions in my mind. I asked some Muslim scholars, but in reply they gave me excuses. One such excuse is in alHadith (the Muslim tradition). It is narrated by Abdullah Ibn Umar that the Messenger of Allah stated:

"A woman was subjected to divine punishment because she had kept a cat captive, and finally the cat died in that condition. So the woman had to go to hell. Neither she herself gave the cat anything to eat, nor did she free it to enable it to eat worms, etc."(Bukhari, page 74).

Women in Islam are nothing but childmaking factories. Not only that, a divorced woman has no right to her children. The offspring are the property of the father.

Moreover in Islam only men can go to *jannat* (paradise), where they can have wine, women and dance. The Qur'an talks about the many virtues of a chaste woman. But there is no reward for such a woman in heaven. Can a woman not get a handsome

man in heaven (*jannat*) if a man can get a voluptuous woman in heaven? Why does Islam show such partiality against women?

3. My Search Intensified

In spite of some unanswered questions my intense study of the Qur'an continued. I meditated on SuratulFatiha, which is the quintessence of the whole Qur'an:

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the world; the Compassionate, the Merciful; the Ruler of the Day of Judgement. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Lead us the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray."

I was confused when Allah, in this sura, is addressed as merciful, compassionate and the ruler of the day of judgement. Calling Allah merciful was not very convincing. It shows the human element in God. Man can also be merciful to a fellow being. So how is God's mercy different from man's mercy? The same thought came to my mind about the second part of SuratulFatiha: the compassionate. The third pillar of SuratulFatiha, the ruler of the day of judgement, aroused a sense of danger. I am a sinner and I will be judged on the day of judgement. What is the prize I am going to receive on that day? Of course, the judgement will be awful for a sinner. How can the God of Islam be merciful and compassionate when he is going to judge sinners? Thus alFatiha, an essential part of Muslim prayers, failed to quench my thirst for knowledge.

4. I Am Condemned as a Sinner

Another important thought came to my mind, which I would like to add here. SuratulBaqara 2:2,7 states: "This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God... God hath set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil; theirs will be great torturing."

This verse of the Qur'an says that Allah is going to reward only the righteous. But I am a sinner and unrighteous. If Allah is going to award only the righteous, what hope have I after my death? Islam is a religion that insists on good works. If that is so, how can a sinner atone for his past misdeeds? These questions tormented my enquiring mind.

Coming back to SuratulFatiha 1, it reads further as follows: "Lead us the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace..."

What path is the Qur'an talking about and trying to show? Where is the path and how do I identify it? To the best of my understanding, no such path can be found in the Qur'an. At this juncture I focused my studies on finding the path of righteousness. There is a prayer in the Qur'an that is recited during *namaz* (Muslim prayer time), which is in SuratulFath 48:2:

"May Allah forgive thee thy guilt of the past and that to follow; may He fulfil His favour to thee; and may He guide thee on the Straight Way."

Does this recitation convey that Muhammad the prophet of Islam was also a sinner? The Qur'an narrates that Muhammad was once a sinner who was later purified by an angel. So it is clear that nobody is free from sin. Even Muhammad

the prophet was not pure. He had to be purified.

My search for truth in the Qur'an continued. Every good Muslim is expected to recite the following verse of the Qur'an. So I dutifully used to repeat this verse during my prayers.

Suratu Hud 11:118,119: "If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made the people one nation: but they are still in disagreement. Except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His Mercy: and for this did He create them: and the Word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled: 'I will fill Hell with jinns and people all together.' "

Even if my works are according to the dictates of the Qur'an; to be precise, even if I fulfil the five pillars of Islam, I still have to pray to Allah to save me from eternal fire. What lies ahead of me after my death despite my good works? I still have to plead to redeem myself from damnation.

5. My Father Died

After a four-year prison sentence my father was released. He came back home a totally different man. His old aggressive nature was gone. He was very penitent of his misdeeds. Sometimes he wept during *namaz* (prayer). He prayed to Allah to forgive and save him from eternal fire. Despite praying respectfully, my father had no assurance that his sins would be forgiven. When he prayed I often saw my father weeping and pleading and uttering these words: "God, your grace be upon me." Despite following all the laws and pillars of Islam my father had no hope that his prayers would be heard and his sins would be pardoned. Once after witnessing

such a *namaz* I asked him why he looked dissatisfied, as if his prayers were not heard. He answered that without the grace of God all prayers are in vain. Out of curiosity I asked my father how one can receive the grace of God. He solemnly replied that after death on *qiyamat* (day of judgement) one can receive the grace of God. After a few months my father passed away. He was a poor man. His life vanished into nothing without any hope of receiving forgiveness from Allah. He left me with some vital questions unanswered. What is the grace of God? Where can I find it? How can I attain it?

6. My Search Changed

After my father's death, my search for truth in the Qur'an took a turn. His death was a signpost for me. As my study of the Qur'an intensified, my feeling of emptiness also grew. My study showed me that nowhere did the Qur'an mention the grace of God.

Allah is given 99 different names in the Qur'an. But there is not even one name that means God of grace or at least God of love. Allah in the Qur'an is an unapproachable, distant God, quick to punish the unrighteous. This is clear proof that the Qur'an has one great truth missing in it, for which every yearning soul longs. The grace of God for sinners like my father and me is not to be found in my religion! How can a sinner receive forgiveness from the God of his religion if the grace of God is not found in it?

Thus my search for the grace of God in Islam was in vain. That led me to another disillusionment. I diverted my studies to other religions in order to find that essential aspect of God that is missing in

Islam.

I avidly read the *Bhagavat Gita*, the sacred writings of Hinduism and the books written by Ramkrishna Paramahansa, the modern sage. I also read the book, *The Life of Buddha*, written by Dr. Kusmbi. I did not even leave out the books that dealt with secular humanism. I read the works of great philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Maxim Gorky, Dr. Ann Besant, Bertrand Russel and others. All those noted authors works were good for head knowledge, but they failed to fill the emptiness I felt in my spirit.

7. My Work and Marriage

The work my brothers gave me to do was to sit at the cash counter of our hotel. My collection of religious and philosophical books were arranged in a bookcase behind my seat at the cash counter. Whenever I had free time I used to refer to these books. The more I read the more I continued to ask my relatives and Muslim friends questions about the relevance of Islam in finding deep meaning in a person's spiritual wellbeing. They took my questions as defiance. Some even said that I was out of my mind. My brothers were unhappy about my research and concluded that something bad was happening to me. They planned with my relatives to get me married so that my rebellious behaviour would be put to an end. They showed me a fair girl, as was customary, from an orthodox Muslim family that lived nearby in my hometown Solapur, and married me to her. My brothers' plan did not bear fruit. My search for the grace of God in sources other than Islam gathered momentum.

A few years passed and there was no change in my attitude towards my religion,

at least in the view of my family members. Marriage could not stop my desire to learn about other faiths. It was of course, as I mentioned earlier, contrary to my brothers' and my family's expectation. My wife was obedient and pious, like most Muslim women. This kind of behaviour in Muslim women is very common, because the threat of *talak* (divorce) always hangs over a wife. Readers will be interested to note here, as I mentioned earlier, that Islam allows a husband to divorce his wife, whereas the wife is forbidden to divorce her husband. We had two new additions to our family. My first daughter, Nafisa, and a few years later my son, Imtiyaz, were born.

8. An Uninvited Guest

One day something surprising happened in the hotel. A man with whom I was already acquainted came to the cash counter and talked to me with piercing words. It was an unusual encounter. He frequently visited our hotel to buy food items. That man was a Christian and spoke flawless Urdu, which is my mother tongue. He complimented my Urdu, too. Once he noted the collection of books behind my seat at the cash counter, and made up his mind that I was an avid reader and a seeker of knowledge. That evening he looked straight into my eyes, and quietly but firmly told me that I appeared to be a man without peace. He added that there was a feeling of emptiness and I appeared to be a man without hope. Next he opened the book he was carrying, the Holy Bible, and recited the following passage: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Then he closed the Bible and said with

emphasis, again looking straight into my eyes, that because of being a sinner I had lost my peace. I was stunned when I heard these words from him. He had read my mind. I feared that this man knew my transgressions and my inner secrets. He had caught me redhanded! I felt as though my past misdeeds and sins passed before my eyes, one after the other. I wondered how this man had come to know my inner conflicts. The verse he read from the Bible, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) pierced my mind. I put my head down, I was ashamed to look at him. When I lifted my head he had gone.

The verse that he quoted from the Bible pointed at me. It proved that I was a sinner who was searching in vain. It was a fact I hated to face. I began to examine myself. At first I realised what a bad man I was. My next thought was to unburden myself of my sins. How can I get rid of the sins I had accumulated from the beginning? The rituals I had been taught as a Muslim only cleanse my outer being. How can I shed my sinful inner man? Can the five pillars of Islam that every good Muslim is expected to uphold purify the inner man? Can the washing of face and limbs before *salat* (Muslim prayer) clean the mind and heart? All these rituals try to make a man appear holy before God. But, no matter how one makes oneself clean one never appears pure before the Creator God. Man can only get rid of the dirt that is on the surface of the body. What about the poisons, wastes, urine and faeces inside one's body? If such is the physical state of a man, what about his sins that are embedded deep in his heart? How can they be got rid of?

That Christian continued to visit and

patronise our hotel. I had many more encounters with him. He talked all the time about the sinful nature of man, quoting from the Bible. I never liked his talk from the book of his religion. I often used harsh words to silence him. Had I used the same language to a fellow Muslim, that person would have retaliated. But this Christian was humble and patient. I replied that the Qur'an is the last testament of God and it shows the way to the ultimate truth. But he was steadfast in his stand in pointing out the sinful nature of men. In due course I was attracted to his humility and his genuine concern for me. As usual one day He visited our hotel and came to see me at the cash counter. This time he was dressed differently. He wore a formal suit. He said to me that he was leaving India shortly and presented me with a copy of the Holy Bible.

9. Nearing the Truth

But I said that I cannot accept that book because it had a black cover. To a Muslim, anything in black is unlucky. Black is the sign of mourning. Readers would be interested to note here that the Qur'an is always bound in a green cover. To persuade me to read the Bible, he tactfully said to me that the black cover of the Bible represents judgement while its white pages mean clean life. He added that if one accepts the teachings of the Bible and follows them, he will escape the dire consequences of God's judgement. With these words he bade farewell and left the place. After this incident, I never met that Christian again.

It was 9 o'clock at night when the man left. I took the Bible and went to a room in our hotel reserved for families to dine, and

opened the book. The first chapter of Psalms in the Old Testament caught my attention. I read the passage carefully.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:16).

As I was coming to the end of this chapter I suddenly felt something strange happening. There was smoke all around me in that room. I went to the kitchen to find the source of the smoke. The oven fire was out and the kitchen staff had left. I came back to the room to continue reading the Bible. The breeze from the overhead fan ruffled the pages of the Bible. When I stopped the turning pages my attention fell on St. John's Gospel, chapter 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:15).

Here Jesus is depicted as the Word. In the Qur'an, too, Jesus the Messiah is said to be

the Word of God (*kalimat ullah*).

"Indeed, Christ Jesus the son of Mary was the messenger of God, and His Word... and a spirit from Him..." (SuratunNisa' 4:171)

John 1:15 explicitly states that all things are made by Jesus Christ. The Qur'an also acknowledges that Bible statement by affirming that Jesus has the power to create. What a similarity in the Bible and in the Qur'an regarding the divinity and the supremacy of Jesus the Messiah!

"And (He will be) a messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): 'I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I create for you out of clay, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal the blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe... So fear Allah, and obey me'" (Suratu 'Al Imran 3:49-50).

10. The Qur'an Approves Jesus' Uniqueness

After reading John, chapter 1 I realised the uniqueness of Jesus Christ over all prophets who had come and gone. But the Qur'an, though approving indirectly His unique nature, teaches in most places that Jesus is a prophet. There is an apparent contradiction in the Qur'anic statement regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and denying Him as Son of God. But the Holy Bible explicitly claims that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, not in one place but numerous times. I read further in John, chapter 1, up to verse 16, and kept on meditating on this Bible passage. I

recognised that Jesus Christ lived on this earth, and combined humanity with divinity. In other words, He was the incarnation of God. He is superior to any person including prophets found not only in the Qur'an but also in the Bible.

While I was reading this chapter I felt something strange. The printed letters of John, chapter 1, in the Holy Bible that I was reading appeared bolder and bigger than the usual size. What an unusual sight! I was getting a new revelation through these verses. God talked to me through His Word.

11. The Light of Life

John 1:5 says: "The light shines in the darkness." As I meditated on this verse I realised that I had been brought to the true Light.

Darkness cannot show sin but the Light made my sins visible. Jesus Christ is so righteous that the Holy Bible compares Him with light.

The Qur'an acknowledges the righteous character of Jesus Christ.

"Nay, I am only the messenger of thy Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a righteous lad.' She said: 'How shall I have a lad, seeing that no human being has touched me, and I am not unchaste?' He said: 'So (it will be)...' " (Suratu Maryam 19:19-21).

Further study of John, chapter 1, showed me that John the Baptist, who was a great prophet living at the same time of Jesus, addressed Him as the true Light that gives light to all people. John, the great prophet of God, recognised Jesus the Messiah as a superior being to all the prophets.

Thus the Qur'an, the book of my faith, and the Holy Bible, my newfound light, were in unison as far as the uniqueness, supremacy and righteousness of Jesus Christ are concerned. "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17).

My further reading on the same night pointed out to me that through Moses we received the law but through Jesus Christ we received grace for grace. What a discovery I made that night! My father searched for this same grace in his lifetime. He died without finding it. At last my search led me to the original source of grace. I discovered that the Qur'an also states that Muhammad brought the Sharia and does not mention the grace of God.

Only through Jesus Christ do we attain the grace of God. All the religions I investigated talk about their laws, statutes and rituals, but the Holy Bible revealed that only through Jesus Christ can we receive grace. This grace leads us to become the children of God, not in a biological sense, but in a spiritual sense. This led me to the understanding of the fullness of grace. I felt triumphant that night. My long search was fruitful. I was very much excited about my discovery that night and shed tears of joy.

12. Grace of God Defined

"It is Allah Who has created you: further, He has provided for your sustenance; then He will make you to die; and again He will make you to live. Are there any of your 'Partners' who can do any single one of these things?" (SuraturRum 30:40). Muhammad could not do any of these.

The Gospel of John was precious to me. This led me to study every chapter of that gospel carefully. My attention fell on John 3:16, which reads: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Grace is a free gift of God though Jesus Christ, eternal life is in Christ Jesus, and Christ promised to give us heaven if we believe in Him.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:89).

Muhammad does not know the future: "Say: I was not a heretic among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow but that which is revealed to me by inspiration; I am but a Warner open and clear" (Suratul'Ahqaf 46:9).

The meaning (and application) of the grace of God became clear as I read these passages. Grace is the free gift of God for all mankind who are under the curse of sin. A man's good work cannot offer him this grace. This grace stems from the love of God, which He revealed through Jesus Christ His only begotten Son.

But as for the forgiveness and mercy in the Qur'an, we read just the opposite:

Giving alms and forgiveness: by giving alms to the poor one gets forgiveness of his sins (SuratutTawba 9:103104; SuratutTaghabun 64:1617; Suratu 'Al Imran 3:1517; Suratul'Ahzab 33:35).

By fighting for Allah's cause one receives forgiveness (Suratul'Anfal 8:74; SuratasSaff 61:1112).

Reciting the Muslim creed brings reward (SuratulHadid 57:19).

Good works secure an entrance to paradise (SuraturRad 13:2123).

Forgiveness through fasting: Suratul'Ahzab 33:35: "...for men and women who fast... for them has God prepared forgiveness..."

The pilgrimage: Allah is thankful if you visit holy places (Suratu 'Al Imran 3:129; SuratulBaqara 2:158).

And last, but not least, the will of Allah and forgiveness: even if you practice all Muslim obligations your sins will be forgiven only if Allah wishes to forgive you. In short, whether you are good or not, to whomsoever Allah wills He forgives, otherwise not.

Whereas in the Bible we read and it is very clear that "For God so loved the world... and He gave... and forgave..." If only you believe in Him and in His atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, you are saved and your sins are forgiven. Ah! What a wonderful privilege one has in Christ Jesus as a Christian!

As a Muslim, at first I was not able to accept the sonship of Jesus. But after giving much thought to the Gospel of John I understood that Jesus is the Son of God in the spiritual sense and not biologically. Because He is the Word of God (*kalimat ullah*) and Spirit of God (*ruh ullah*), the Holy Bible also says that Jesus had close companionship with the Almighty before His incarnation. This proves the preexistence of Jesus Christ.

One day, as I was studying the Gospel of John my eyes fell on chapter 14, verse 6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth,

and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.' " Here Jesus Christ unequivocally claims that He is the way and the truth to man's salvation. But the Qur'an in SuratulFatiha 1: "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the world; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgement. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way..."

13. The Path of Salvation

It is very clear that while the Qur'an searches for the path of salvation the Holy Bible is good enough to point out that Jesus Christ is the way and the truth that leads to eternal life. The truth mentioned in John 14:6 (that Jesus claimed) is not a religion or a way of life but a person. Jesus is the truth and anybody who follows Him will walk the way that leads to salvation.

The next aspect of the Holy Bible that moved my heart was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary. It is so unfortunate that Islam denies this historical fact. Surat Maryam 19:33: "So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I am raised up to life."

Jesus Christ, as all four Gospels relate, hung on the cross between two thieves. One thief mocked Jesus and the other confessed his sins. I identified myself with the latter who repented of his sins. I prayed for forgiveness for my misdeeds. While hanging on the cross, the sinless Jesus took the sins of all of mankind and died a painful death. Just before His last breath, as the Gospel of Luke relates, He even pleaded with the Almighty Father to

forgive the sins of those who were responsible for putting Him to death. Jesus, who preached and practised love, fulfilled all that He taught on the cross.

14. I Am Born Again

Thus my long search led me to Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible. I knelt down and prayed to God the Father and thanked Him for showing me the path of salvation. That same day I confessed all my sins and accepted Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as my personal saviour. A great burden was loosened from my heart. This incident was the turning point in my life. After this incident I could not afford to keep quiet. I wanted to proclaim my new found faith to the world. My Lord wanted me to tell others about the salvation He offered me through Jesus Christ. First, I told my acceptance of Jesus as my personal saviour to my brothers, with the intention of sharing the joy I felt in my heart. But the response from them was gruesome. They warned me that if I did not give up my new found fantasy the consequences would be dire. Meanwhile, the news spread like wild fire in my family and among the Muslims in the town that Abdul Jabbar had become a Christian. Within a few days my family members, particularly my brothers, became intolerant. They tortured me mentally and physically, and threw me out of my house. They not only took unsympathetic and drastic action, but also took away all my rights to inherit a share of my family property.

Soon my wife's family came to know about my conversion and they also responded with contempt. They decided that I could never be allowed to enter their homes.

15. Various Encounters

The news of my conversion reached the Muslim fundamentalists, too. They said among themselves that they should never ever allow a Muslim from a fundamentalist background like mine to switch faiths. They approached me with the intention of taking me back into their fold. They took me to a mosque and probed to find the reasons that led to my acceptance of Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. What they were able to get back from me was a series of questions that shook the most basic beliefs of Islam.

Out of their questions and according to my understanding of the Qur'an, I asked them several questions that were raised in my mind and bothered me very much. As some scholars say, whenever a new prophet appeared, he abrogated or nullified the previous prophecies of the last prophet with his message. And they also say that the Muhammad of the Qur'an is the last prophet of Allah, and Allah has sealed the revealing of prophecy to mankind with Muhammad. This also meant, according to Islam, that Muhammad had nullified the prophecy of Jesus Christ, as He was the preceding prophet of Allah. But in the Qur'an we read that Muhammad repeatedly praised and mentioned the Book, the Torah, the Zabur and the Injil, all these meaning the Bible.

But Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). So Jesus Christ has fulfilled the prophecies. Then why do people say that Muhammad is the last prophet and only his prophecies are to be followed? Every prophet who came into this world and

existed had died and was buried, whereas Jesus Christ lived on the earth, died on the cross at Calvary, was buried and was raised from the dead on the third day. His tomb is still open until this day. Not only that, He ascended to heaven and is seated on the right hand of the Father; He is going to come back to this earth as judge soon. This fact is accepted by Islam also. If this is true, then should we believe in a dead prophet like Muhammad or should we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and is still living?

Regarding the supremacy of Christ, the Qur'an is very specific. SuratulNisa' 4:171 states this about His birth: "Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him."

Suratul'Anbiya' 21:91: "We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples."

Divine promise of Christ: Suratu 'Al Imran 3:45: "O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God."

The righteousness of Christ:

The son of Mary is said to be the most pure from the moment of His birth. The angels said to Mary, "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son" (Suratu Maryam 19:19).

The inspiration of Christ: "And God will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel" (Sura 'Al Imran 3:48).

These things were said about Christ before His birth. Christ knows the secret of heaven and earth, because Allah told him all that had been written in the heavenly book.

The signs and miracles of Christ: "And He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be" (Sura Maryam 19:31).

Suratu 'Al Imran 3:49, SuratulMa'ida 5:110: He is the true fountain of blessing to all people in all ages.

He raised the dead; He is the young Creator; He is the kind Provider (SuratulMa'ida 5:112115)

He is the revealer of the secret (Suratul'Anam 6:50).

The death of Christ was much superior to the death of Muhammad. His burial and, most of all, His resurrection from the dead on the third day had made Him all the more superior, and affirmed all that he had said or did to be true. Not only that, this has proved that we can trust in Him. He is the only one who can save us, because he is the lifechanging and lifegiving Saviour of the world.

As I quoted all these from the Qur'an itself and spoke to them, the fundamentalists got confused and did not know what to say to me further. Some of them were even shaken in their faith in Islam.

All the efforts of the fundamentalists to reconvert me were useless. Then came my friends; they were curious to know the reasons that led to my conversion. When I declared that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that salvation for sinners is only through Jesus Christ, that Islam says nothing about the grace of God, and

Muhammad himself was not sure of His salvation, they became furious.

Next I approached my wife. She, too, shunned me with hateful words. She even went to the extent of warning me with *talak* (divorce). Islam allows a woman to pronounce *talak* (divorce) to her husband if he stops being a Muslim. Her parents ordered me not to enter their house to see my wife. She had returned to them with our children after I became a Christian.

16. Living Among Tombs

All the persecution I faced did not deter my new found faith. Instead I became closer to my Lord. My Saviour Jesus Christ gave me strength to withstand the pressure of persecution even from my beloved wife.

I had no place to go, neither my house nor my wife's house nor my friends' and relative's houses. I went to a church to seek fellowship and grow in Christian faith. But the authorities of the church reacted negatively. They did not allow me to enter the church because they feared reprisal from Muslim fundamentalists. The only place left was a *kabarsthan* (Muslim cemetery) where I spent three days and three nights. I felt no fear while I lived among the tombs. I always carried the Holy Bible in my hand and meditated on the words written in it. At night, when it was dark and frightening, I was at peace and joyful because I felt that I had my Lord Jesus at my side. I spent some hours sitting near the tomb of my mother and father.

Some Muslim scholars and learned men came to know about my denial of the Islamic faith and approached me with the

intention of winning me back to Islam. They took me to a mosque and started indoctrinating me with their dogmas. They said that Muhammad of the holy Qur'an is the last prophet and that Allah has sealed the prophetic gift to mankind with Muhammad. They added that a prophet of God made the law given by his predecessor null and void, which means that Abraham abrogated the law given by Noah, Ishmael abrogated the law of Abraham. Job made the teachings of Ishmael obsolete, David made the teachings of Job obsolete. Isaiah came after David. Isa (the Qur'anic name of Jesus) offered better teachings and laws than all the previous prophets. And at last Muhammad abrogated the laws of all the earlier prophets, including Isa. They proudly claimed that since Muhammad was the last prophet of God, the holy Qur'an revealed through him was the last and ultimate testament. I listened to these scholars carefully. When their talk was over I asked them about a doubt in my mind: The Qur'an states that all the prophets are dead, including the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, and adds that Isa is the only living prophet. Should I follow the law given by a living man like Jesus or a dead man like Muhammad?

When they were not able to convince me with their points, they quickly jumped to another point. One group of scholars said that the Bible in many places speaks about the advent of Muhammad both in the Old and New Testaments. I pointed to verses in the Holy Bible that clearly talk about the birth, death, resurrection and Sonship of Jesus Christ, and the salvation offered through Him. Those Muslim friends wanted to believe the verses from the Bible in favour of Muhammad and reject

the verses that are unequivocal about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ over all other prophets.

The third point they raised was to allege that Jesus was not a perfect man. He did not know anything about married life. He did not raise a family and did not rule any group or nation, whereas Muhammad was married, raised a family and was a ruler. He knew everything and was perfect. Muhammad gave a law to the world. I rebutted with the biblical truth that Jesus Christ was actively involved when God gave a set of laws to the prophet Moses, which is recorded in one Old Testament book, Leviticus. I made them read Matthew 5:17: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil."

Through these verses Jesus Christ emphatically claims that He came to fulfil all the laws the ten commandments, the marriage laws, the food laws, the ceremonial laws God had given to men and never to change anything. Only the ceremonial laws were nailed to the cross when Jesus Christ himself was offered as a sacrificial lamb on Calvary. The Holy Bible is full of evidence to prove that Jesus Christ was a perfect man while He was on earth. He practised perfectly all the matters He preached. His enemies, too, were not able to accuse Him of any imperfection. Even the Qur'an says that He was a perfect being.

17. Jesus Christ: More than a Prophet

The birth of Jesus was a supernatural phenomenon and superior to that of all men and prophets. He was perfectly

righteous and no man or prophet who lived on this planet ever matched His character. His birth, His inspiration, His miracles, His life, His death, His resurrection, His uniqueness are all mentioned in Qur'an passages that prove that He was superior to all other prophets, including Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. I concluded at the end of this encounter with those Muslim scholars that they had a shallow understanding of Jesus Christ and were utterly confused about the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an that refer to Jesus Christ. It was painful for me to see that they were not ready to accept the superiority of Jesus Christ even according to the teachings of the Qur'an.

Fanatical Muslims and fundamentalists, who advocate armed struggle against secular governments and nonMuslims to justify their stand, quote Suratul'Anfal 8:59,60 of the Qur'an:

"Let not the unbelievers think that they can get the better (of the godly)... Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of God and your enemies...!"

Islamic extremists brand all nonMuslims as *kafir* (infidels). As a proof for this they often cite the following verse of the Qur'an, in which Muhammad admonished Muslims to stay away from nonMuslims.

"O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guideth not a people unjust" (SuratulMa'ida 5:54).

The above verses that appear in the Qur'an

are given by Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and refer to a particular time rather than a general situation says an internationally distinguished Muslim scholar. He goes on further to say that the above two verses are superseded by many other verses, in which the Qur'an expresses high respect for the members of other religions, mainly Judaism and Christianity, such as this one:

"God is our Lord and your Lord: for us (is the responsibility for) our deeds, and for you for your deeds... and to Him is (our) Final Goal" (SuratushShura 42:15).

In another place the Qur'an states explicitly that the Muslims may share food with the People of the Book (*ahl alkitab*), Christians and Jews, and that Muslim men may join with their women in marriage. Moreover, SuraturRum 30:22 of the Qur'an states: "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know." This proclamation of the Qur'an is in stark contrast to how the fanatics and the fundamentalists view the other faiths.

All the attempts the Islamic scholars and the fundamentalists made to convince me and take me back to their religion failed miserably in the light of the knowledge of the Holy Bible I had gained.

18. I Left my Home and Hometown

Rejected by my family members, deserted by my wife, abandoned by my friends, I had no place in Solapur. How long could I live among the tombs? How could I feed myself?

I decided to leave Solapur once and for all. I travelled to Pune, a city about 4 hours northwest of Solapur. In Pune, I sought a job in a bakery owned by a Muslim. Later I understood that he, too, was a fundamentalist. I was well versed with bakery work, because it was my family's traditional business. I did my job so well that the owner soon recognised my efficiency. As days passed by he noticed that I behaved in an unusual manner. He knew me only as a young Muslim man. I never divulged to him that I was no longer practising Islam and had become a Christian. He never saw me performing *namaz* (Muslim prayer). When the month of Ramadan came he never saw me fasting. One day I approached him with the gospel and talked to him about Jesus Christ. He became furious and abused me with harsh words. He not only sacked me, but told other Muslim bakery owners in Pune not to employ me. Once again I was homeless. I had no money to buy food. After a few days I became weak because I had not eaten. A Hindu who had a bakery employed me as a labourer. The very first job I was asked to do was to carry a sack of flour weighing 90 kgs. Since I had not eaten for a few days I did not have the strength to lift that bag on my back. In spite of my weakness I tried to lift the flour bag. Suddenly I felt that someone was lending a helping hand from behind. Contrary to expectation, I was able to transfer the flour to the kneading table without much difficulty.

19. My Faith Strengthened

I continued to work in that bakery. Six months rolled by. The thought of my beloved wife and children continued to haunt my mind. I yearned to see them. I

wrote a few letters to my wife about my whereabouts and my work. In those letters I mentioned Jesus Christ and what is written in the Qur'an and the Holy Bible. I also wrote about the state of women as it is in the Muslim religion and the respect for women found in the Holy Bible. My wife did not reply a word to my letters. From the worldly point of view I was a lonely man, but the constant fellowship with my Lord Jesus kept my heart joyous. Often Bible verses came to my rescue when my spirit was low.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39). These verses promised me that the Lord is at my side during adversity.

20. Entry into Church

I looked forward with eagerness to have fellowship with Christians in a church. I met some Christians and started a conversation intending to share my conversion story. Very few showed interest in listening. The reason might have been that I wore untidy clothes and was unshaven. On one Easter Sunday I saw an old lady carrying a Holy Bible. She was on her way to a Protestant church. I

went to her and asked her to take me to church. On the way I told her my conversion story. She listened to my story and pitied me. Perhaps my shabby face and dirty dress made her do so. When we reached the church she asked me to stand among the beggars thronged in front of the church. I approached another man at the church and asked him whether I can join him in the church during the worship. He showed me the back row.

The message the preacher delivered that day from the pulpit was the first Christian sermon that I had ever heard. The basis of the sermon was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. My heart was filled when I realised that my Jesus is the risen Lord. This reinforced my faith in the living God. Songs and other aspects of the church service touched my heart. The preacher invited two or three people from the congregation to offer prayers. First a lady prayed and then a man. I was the third person who prayed. That was my first public prayer. I never felt shy. I was bold enough and filled with the Spirit on that occasion. It was a spontaneous prayer. My heart broke and I shed tears while I prayed. I cried aloud and said, "Lord, I have left everything to you, the living God, in search of grace and I found that grace in you, because you are the source of that grace." Then the congregation stood up and sang the offertory song in Urdu. The words of the song were, "I gave everything to the Lord." I asked myself what I could offer to the Lord, because I had no money to offer. When the offering bag was shown to me, I heard the spirit of God saying to me to put my life in that bag, which means I should dedicate my life to Him and for His work. I obeyed to the voice of the Lord. When the worship was over people

turned toward to the back row and looked at me with surprise.

Before the congregation dispersed the preacher made an announcement calling the man who prayed from the back row to come forward. I went forward and shook hands with him. He was very glad to see me and commended my prayer. The church members joined the preacher in appreciating my effort in praying publicly. Then he asked me who I was. I told him my conversion story. A missionary lady from Sweden who was in the church came to me, shook my hand and invited me for lunch at her residence. She spoke good Urdu. We drove to her house in her car. During lunch I shared with her all the previous happenings in my life, what led me to the conversion and my present pathetic condition. She took me to a cloth shop, got me two sets of clothes and made me wear them. She asked me a few questions to test my understanding of the Holy Bible. My answers impressed her. She said that her organisation was searching for a man who could read and write Urdu to write in the Bible correspondence school. Within a few days she made the committee of her organisation employ me. I was given shelter in the library. My job was to check the answer papers of the Bible correspondence course. I really enjoyed my work and since I was staying in the library I had access to a wide variety of Christian literature. I spent a lot of time reading, meditating and in solitary prayer. I had good fellowship with the workers there. In this way three months passed. Then the correspondence school committee enrolled me for a refresher course. During interactions in the class I asked questions on salvation by

justification, revelation of the Bible, the mystery of the Trinity and other queries from the Muslim point of view. I received convincing answers that refreshed my faith in Jesus Christ.

The refresher course motivated me to study the Bible deeply, and to dedicate my life to the Lord's work by obeying the Spirit of God's calling, and becoming an evangelist. I asked the Swedish lady to send me to a theological seminary for Biblical studies. By this time I had been baptised by immersion in a church, thus fulfilling one of the most cardinal obligations, to show outwardly the inward change that took place in me. By undergoing this ritual my old self died. I emerged as a new man. I became a full Christian. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a prerequisite to enter the theological seminary I had to write an entrance exam.

21. Reunion with my Wife and Children

Meanwhile I received a letter from my wife. At last she had replied to my many letters! In that letter she described her pathetic condition. All her relatives were treating her harshly because they saw her and my children as a burden and a nuisance. She asked me some heartmoving questions in that letter. Why did you do this to me and our children? What have you found in your new faith? Did your faith bring honour and joy to our family? She mentioned in that letter that she was ashamed to come out of her parents' house because people around asked embarrassing questions about her Christian husband.

Even her parents were treating her badly.

Being a submissive Muslim woman, she was not in a position to take a bold step to do what she wanted to do. She even wanted to commit suicide. When she looked at the four little children she thought, "If I am gone who will take care of these little ones?" The children's presence prevented her from taking such a horrible step.

After receiving such a heartmoving, poignant letter I wanted to write her back immediately. But I was sure that her parents would stop my letter reaching her. I knew a Christian lady who lived in Pune. She was from my home town Solapur. I asked her to go to Solapur, meet my wife and tell her that if she wanted to come with the children to Pune and stay with me, she could do so.

After a few days I heard a tap on my door. When I opened the door, a great surprise was waiting for me. There stood my dear wife and four beautiful children. My Lord once again answered my prayers! I welcomed them with kisses. My joy knew no bounds to have my family back with me. It was a joyous family reunion after four long years.

22. In Theological Seminary

The result of the entrance exam was out and I was eligible to join theological studies. The Swedish lady sponsored my entire studies at Bareilly Theological Seminary, Uttar Pradesh. That was in 1975.

My family stayed with me when I pursued my studies in Bareilly Seminary. I was offered a meager monthly stipend for my

family's subsistence. We were in abject poverty. All my children grew weak because there was not enough food. My oldest daughter Nafisa became so weak that she caught tuberculosis (TB). Almost at the same time my wife developed a lump in one of her breasts, which was diagnosed as cancerous. I did not have enough money to offer the right treatment to my wife and my daughter. The seminary authorities declined to extend financial help to my ailing wife and daughter. The doctor who treated my wife advised me to take her to Bombay for special treatment. Once again I was in a dilemma. I prayed to my Lord for help, for I had unshakeable faith in him. But my wife faltered in her faith. She felt a curse had befallen her family as a result of leaving her original religion, Islam.

23. A Miraculous Healing

I got her admitted in the hospital. But the hospitals in Bareilly, U.P., those days were not equipped or ready to treat cancer patients. Even then, when seeing the condition of my wife, the doctors admitted her in the intensive care unit. After a careful observation, these doctors almost said that there was no hope and gave up. They asked me to take her to Bombay immediately, where she would have special care and the right treatment for cancer. But where would I, a person like me, get money to treat her in a city like Bombay? And who would have helped me at this juncture for this highly expensive treatment?

I had my classes going on and studies to be done, I could spare very little time for my wife in the hospital. Even then, after hearing what the doctors said, I was on my

knees in my hostel room at the seminary, praying and pleading with God to deliver my wife from this serious sickness. She was literally in agony. She often fell unconscious due to the acute pain. I begged God for the healing of my wife, or a transfer of the sickness from my wife whose faith was still shaky, to me. The peace of God comforted me even in my wrestling with him in prayer. I believed that God would be able to heal her completely.

That very same night in a dream or a vision, my wife felt that I sat next to her, laid my hand on her and prayed for her. After the vision she woke up and she felt instantaneously released from her acute pain. Next morning as I visited her, to my surprise, she said to me, "After you touched me and prayed over me, my pain is gone and now I am feeling much better." But I told her that I had only just come. So who is this who prayed for her? Then the Spirit of God revealed to me that God had done a miracle here to strengthen my wife's faith. And that is exactly what happened.

During the regular rounds the doctor also came to examine her wound on her breast. The doctor asked her how she felt. Her response was, "I am much better now, doctor." He checked her again carefully, and he saw that his patient was ready to be discharged from the hospital. Then all the doctors came to know about the miracle healing that my wife had. They all started asking what had actually happened, and how this had happened. All I had to say was, "God is great, in whom I believe and pray to." It is certainly the touch of God and nothing else. They were all happy and said that I could take my wife home.

Thanking God and praising his good name, we both, my wife and I, went back to our living quarters. The whole seminary came to know about the miracle that took place. They all came to see us and praised God for healing her. This was the first and foremost incident that strengthened my wife's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, for the last seventeen or eighteen years since this incident, my wife is still alive and serving God's people who come to our house and work in the field.

24. The Public Ministry

After completing my B Th I left the seminary with my wife and our four children. We came to Bombay by faith. The Word of God and His promise had strengthened me, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). We started the literature ministry among Muslims in Bhiwandi at Bombay. Bhiwandi is the area where many Muslims lived. Here we lived and worked among them; those days our living conditions were poor, with no support from anywhere. Yet, trusting fully in God and His precious promises I went on sharing and preaching to those who listened.

The strong opposition from the Muslim people, the ill treatment and even threats to my life had made me a little scared. Once it happened that some Muslim fanatics and fundamentalists came to finish us, but in the end they pulled us out of the house and threw away all our belongings, because they failed in all their attempts to change my faith from Christ my Lord, back to Islam.

Nothing can move or shake my faith in Jesus and I was determined not to turn back. We went to a place called Dombivli

in Thane District. This place also was like going from the frying pan into the fire. In the last place we had the fanatic Muslims around us and now here we had the Hindu extremists with us. Even then we had a better time in our new place and had wider contact with more people. But as the time passed by, the Hindu-Muslim Riots broke out all over Bombay and in the surrounding areas. In this riot our house got ransacked and our things were burned. The testing was not over, here once again we were as good as on the road.

Without losing heart, we again looked to the Lord to give us the courage to take all this. We moved from this place to a city nearby called Kalyan. Certain good Christian friends helped us move from Dombivli to Kalyan. After reaching Kalyan we also had quite good cooperation with some believing Christians.

25. Conclusion

I and my family thank God, the living Lord, for giving us the courage and boldness to face all these sufferings for the Lord and for keeping us in the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only that, now I can say with pride that God is using our children, all four of them, for the furtherance of his kingdom.

In these many years of living and working for the Lord, we saw many receive Christ as their personal Saviour and join Christian fellowship. Out of them large numbers are our Muslim friends, and they are afraid of coming out of their own situation. They do not want to publicly confess that they are Christians and stand firm in their faith. They think that they will be killed by their own people or

disowned.

Here, my dear friends, I would like to challenge you: it cost me a lot to take a bold and strong step for my Lord when I came out of my home, leaving my wife and children. But God in whom I believe is not a dead God, who does not care for those who fear Him; He cares for all of those who come to him. It is said by Jesus, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). He, Jesus alone, can give you the rest you require, the peace that you are searching for, the life eternal. So believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your household will be saved. May God give you that bountiful grace to step out and stand for the Lord in coming days. May the good Lord bless you all.

26. Giving me a New Life - How Jesus Christ Changed my Life

I thank the Lord for giving me this wonderful and sought for opportunity to bring before you how, in the most miraculous way, God called me to Him and granted me salvation, by his grace.

My name is Mrs Zaibunisa Augustine, and I am the wife of Pastor Augustine Jabbar. I am the mother of four children and a grandmother also. I was born in the year 1947 in a very orthodox and staunch Muslim family. My father Mr Abdul Latif used to work in a cotton mill in my home town Solapur, and my mother Mrs Munawar Begum was a dutiful and loving housewife. We were, in all, eight children to our parents, namely six sisters and two brothers. By the grace of God, all members of my family, including my elderly parents, are alive until today. And now all

my brothers and sisters are married, have children and are well settled. Though all the members of my family are receptive to the Gospel, they are still adamant in following the same teachings of the Qur'an and keeping the same tradition.

At the tender age of eleven, under the strict instructions of my father and grandfather, we, and I in particular, were asked to cover our faces with a veil (known as a burkha) and were restricted from meeting any male person, whether known or stranger. We belonged to the Wahabi sect, who believe that there is only one God and he is Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. We did not believe in idol worship, like durga worship or mazar worship.

While attending the secular school, I learned to speak and read Urdu and studied up to the third class. My grandfather was very much against teaching girls to a higher standard in the secular field and was of the opinion that they should concentrate more on housekeeping. In the *madrassa* I was taught to recite the Qur'an in Arabic for four years. Thus presently, I can read Arabic and read, speak and write Urdu, Hindi and Marathi, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the age of 17, I was married to Mr Abdul Jabbar Abdul Kadar Shaikh, according to the Muslim custom. My husband also hailed from a very orthodox Muslim family and was himself a strict observer of Islamic rituals and traditions. Thus he was adamant that I should follow them closely and wear a burkha whenever I went out. He also instructed me strictly to abstain from talking to any unknown person. My husband, being wellversed in the study of Qur'an and hadith, was a good teacher of the same, too. I was involved in

the propagation of Islam among the womenfolk in the neighbourhood of our home.

After leading a happy and strict home life for about eight years, I noticed a sudden change in my husband. A person strictly given to following the teachings and the rituals of the Qur'an and Islam, and refusing to hear of any other religious thing, now he had started reading the Bible and trying to teach me the Bible. Since we believed in the militant religion of Islam, this was a great shock to my life and I started arguing with him. I publicly called him a traitor of our pure and holy faith of Islam, and shared this with my parents and others with much fear in my heart. I was afraid that he could even be killed by our own people. What would I do then with my four children?

Not heeding us at all, my husband went on reading the Bible and he believed in what he was reading. I neither liked what my husband was doing nor could I agree with his new faith of Christianity. I refused to stay with him, and left him, taking my four children with me. I stayed with my parents for almost three years, during which time he was thrown out of his house as well. His brothers and relatives hated him for what he had done and did not want to keep him in their house anymore. But my husband walked out of his home quietly. Without even taking anything from his share, he left the house and walked away.

He went and worked elsewhere and earned his living, but he never forsook me. He always remembered to write me letters. In each of his letters he used to preach about God, Jesus' love and so on, which I never paid attention to. But he never gave up and kept writing to me from the Bible,

especially about sin, separation from God and how God loves me and wants to give me eternal life. Most of the Bible quotations were contradictory to what the Qur'an taught us. Especially he wrote to me this verse, "And Jesus said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:5,6,9). Whereas in Islam a man has all the freedom to leave his wife and the right to marry any other woman up to four or seven wives. It seemed strange that my husband was still waiting for me to go back to him.

Another verse that struck me was this, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). By reading this verse I felt so much release in my tense mind. At the time I was greatly stressed and mentally troubled by the thought that I was alone with my four children, even tormented by the wounding words of my family members themselves. But without my knowledge these words of Jesus consoled me very much.

The thought that was foremost in my mind was, why not take a chance of meeting my husband once? He might even change his mind and come back to normal by returning to our faith in Islam, after seeing me and our children. At last I did exactly as I thought, I went to meet him where he was. As I reached there, to my surprise, I found him so happy and rejoicing to see us

back with him. He could have refused to receive me, according to Islam. Not only that, he could even have killed me for walking away from him. But, now I can say that it was the love of Christ that made him so simple and humble and loving that he had received me back.

This made me think a lot about his changed attitudes towards me. Once he used to be so rough and rude and dominant over me. And now he was just the opposite. His new way of life and his testimony had spoken to me without he himself speaking to me much. Here I came to change him back into our old religious faith, instead, his life and the word of God had changed my own mind and life. I started to reevaluate the whole thing and concentrate on the word of God in the Bible. Christ had changed my life, no doubt, but it took a long time for me to trust in Jesus fully because of the Islamic belief that I had earlier.

While fellowshipping with Christians at Pune and studying the word of God, my husband got an opportunity to go to a Bible college for further studies. It was in the year 1975. We praised God for the chance, taking and accepting it as from the Lord, to have more contact with God and to have more understanding through the fellowship with other Christians.

The seminary experience was quite enriching. Many a time in my little faith in Christ, I almost quit the seminary and was gone from there. We had almost nothing to live with, we both and the four children had to live with Rs 250 per month. This hurt me very much. But the faith that my husband had was so great that we went on with the Lord in the seminary. Meanwhile I was suffering from breast cancer and I

got admitted to the hospital. The doctors almost gave up the case and kept me in the ICU ward. My husband had not much time to spend with me, for he had to attend classes. Whenever he came to me he used to lay hands and pray over me. In severe pain I went into a deep sleep, and I had a dream that someone laid a hand over me and prayed for me. Later as I woke up, my husband was sitting next to me and I shared this with him saying, "After you had prayed over me just now, I am feeling much better and almost healed." To my surprise, my husband said that he had just arrived and did not have time to pray. Then we both realised that it was none other than the Lord's healing hand that touched me and I was healed from the severe sickness.

It was shocking news for the whole hospital and all the staffs including the doctors. Just the day before they said that there is no hope for me, and now I was healed. All that remained was a small spot. Thus I was healed miraculously. For the last 17 years I have been living, moving around serving the servants of God as they come into our house. Not only this had enormously encouraged and strengthened my faith. Now I do not have to be dependant on my husband's faith anymore, and I can believe in Jesus. I preach this message to all and it will be my testimony, that my Lord can do wonders, not only in this life, but also in eternal life.

Once after the Bible training in Pune we happened to have an encounter with some Muslim friends of ours. After seeing the dedicated life of my husband Pastor Augustine Jabbar, a few people came to listen to my husband's talk on the Bible. Out of these, one person accepted Jesus as his personal Saviour and continued in our

fellowship. This incident made the other Muslims furious and they came over to our house, threatening to beat us to death. Pastor Augustine Jabbar normally would not go for any fights or quarrels, and he kept talking quietly to the hotminded crowd. I do not know from where I got the boldness and courage, but I can say that the Lord was with me and protecting us. Amazingly, the people who came with sticks and rods drew back and left apologetically.

I now believe and say that the Lord, who has led us through all the difficulties in the past and brought us this far, can lead us all the way through without any doubt. Now we can boldly say that I and my household will worship the living Lord, and we are doing it, too. Praise the Lord that he is still alive. Pray for us that we may testify this living testimony to as many people as possible in this world. Thanks.

27. Quiz

Dear reader,

if you read this book carefully, you will answer the questions easily. Please send us your answers using our feedback-form.

1. What questions motivated Augustine to search the Qur'an closely?
2. What questions was the Qur'an not able to answer?
3. What did Augustine not find mentioned in the Qur'an?
4. Which books did he read after the Qur'an in his search for the grace of God?
5. What did the visitor to the family hotel say was the reason for Augustine's hopelessness?
6. Which verse did the man read to him from the Bible?
7. Which questions did this verse raise in Augustine?
8. How did he respond to the visitor?
9. What did the visitor give him when he came to say farewell to him?
10. What was the first Bible passage that Augustine read?
11. What did Augustine read in the Bible about Jesus?
12. How did Muhammad compare to Jesus for Augustine?
13. Compare what the Qur'an and the Bible teach about forgiveness.
14. What did Augustine do as a result of studying the Bible?
15. How did his family react?
16. What questions did Augustine ask the men who tried to convince him to return to Islam?
17. How did his wife react?
18. In what ways is Jesus superior to what is said about him in the Qur'an?
19. What did Augustine do when he left his home town?
20. Name three things that the Lord did to take care of Augustine.
21. How did Augustine receive an opportunity to learn more about the Bible?
22. How was Augustine reunited with his family?
23. How did Augustine's wife come to believe in Jesus as her Saviour?
24. What did Augustine and his family do after they left the Bible school?

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