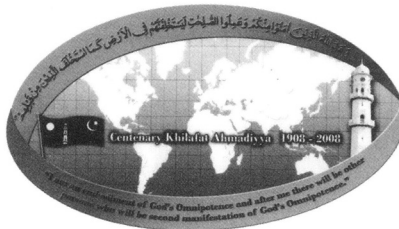


FAITH AFFIRMED
A JOURNEY TO
AHMADIYYAT ISLAM

FAITH AFFIRMED A JOURNEY TO AHMADIYYAT ISLAM

FAITH AFFIRMED: A COMPILATION OF TESTIMONIALS OF WOMEN LIVING
IN AMERICA WHO HAVE ACCEPTED AHMADIYYAT ISLAM.



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FIRST EDITION

Acknowledgments

Great is Allah and great is His mercy! In honor of the 100th year of the Ahmadiyya Khalifat, "*Faith Affirmed*", a compilation of testimonials by women in America who accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam, has come to fruition. This book was made possible with the dedicated work of women across America.

First, a special thanks to all the women who contributed their personal stories that make up the heart and soul of this book. Without your willingness to share, we would not have been able to capture the diversity and inspiration of all the paths to Ahmadiyyat. The initial collection of testimonies and first editing was undertaken by Laeeqa Ahmad, Mansura Minhas, Sobia Amin, Danniell Ollivere, Aisha Autry and Ruqaiya Asad.

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Our deepest apologies to anyone we accidentally left out; we thank you for your contribution.

Laeega Ahmad

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the women of America, their strength, their independence and willingness to sacrifice all to ensure that future generations are free to call on God's Name.

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This is a compilation of personal testimonies by women nurtured, educated, or born in the United States and how they were able to make the most profound decision of their lives, knowing and understanding it placed them outside the accepted norms of the society in which they reside.

Even though the decision makes their position within American society appear, in others' terms, subjugated, tenuously imposed upon, and at times—dangerous, in actuality, it more genuinely represents the truths held to be “self-evident and inalienable” as stated in the American Declaration of Independence, especially when compared with the trends of many of today's American women who live life dictated by commercialization and the degradation of their gender.

The testimonies of these women demonstrate their belief in the Oneness of God, the universality of mankind and the historically proven truth that human beings divided against themselves will ultimately morally destruct, having incurred the displeasure of God rather than His blessings.

Aaisha Antry

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Introduction

At some stage in our life span, we begin to question the purpose of our existence in this world. Why was I born? What is my overarching purpose in life? Am I achieving that purpose? At first, we do not realize that it is this type of questioning and self-reflection that sets into motion our quest for God. And as we search for answers, we come to realize that our God is a living God who has always existed inside each and every one of us. Islam is a religion that allows us to look inward and begin our personal *Jihad* to find God, thus finding the true meaning for life on earth.

This book is a beautiful example of the questions, doubts, struggles, obstacles, courage and deep conviction demonstrated by the sisters who contributed to this book. As you read their stories, you will find yourself embarking on an emotional and spiritual journey in which many of the struggles and victories portrayed in these heartwarming testimonies become your own. You will come to realize that no matter what the original beginnings were, the final and common pathway led to Islam.

This book is for those readers who were born Muslims and need to be reminded of the beauties that Islamic philosophy holds for them. This book is for readers who are searching for religion and a means to ameliorate their stressful lives. This book is a source of inspiration, motivation and guidance for countless readers searching for God. We are guided in the *Holy Qur'an*:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا
دَعَا فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

“And when My servants ask thee about Me, say 'I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to Me. So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way.’” (2:187)

We are all at different stages of development in our relationship with God. We must remember that our journey towards God does not end by accepting Islam; acceptance is the beginning of a long road riddled with distractions and temptations that deter from our main purpose. Thus, we should continue to pray:

رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

“Our Lord, let not our hearts become perverse after Thou hast guided us, and bestow on us mercy from Thyself; surely Thou art the Great Bestower.” (3:9).

I am most grateful to the team of sisters who worked hard to compile these stories in a thematic manner so that the reader may gain maximum benefit from the experiences rendered and inspiration from the accomplishments of the sisters who were willing to contribute their testimonials. May you be richly rewarded in this world and in the Hereafter.

*Dr. Shanaz Butt
President, Lajna Imaillah-USA*

Chapter 1

Who is my God?

My search for the true and perfect God

Hadhrat Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) had known even before Gabriel descended to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), that Muhammad would become the Prophet to bring mankind to the right path and out of darkness. On a Monday in the last ten days of Ramadhan, the angel Gabriel told the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) to recite and that he was the chosen Prophet of Allah. He went home and told his beloved wife, Khadijah, "Wrap me up! Wrap me up!" His heart was beating fast as he narrated the events to Hadhrat Khadijah, saying "I fear for myself." She replied, "By no means! I swear by God that He will never shame thee. Thou dost carry out the obligations of kinship, thou art truthful, thou relievest people's burdens, thou possesest high moral qualities which have become rare, thou honorest thy guests and thou dost succor the distressed." The next morning she took him to her cousin Waraqa Bin Naufal. He listened to the incident and told Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) that the angel Gabriel had descended upon him as he did on Moses and Jesus (peace be on them) and that Muhammad was a Prophet of God. Thus Hadhrat Khadijah became not only the first woman, but the first person to accept Islam. She was taught wudu (ablution) and performed prayers behind the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him).

Chaudhry Mushtaq Ahmad Bajwa
"Mother of the Faithful"

“A Blessed Community”

Jannat Gasaya

Janaat was born and raised in East Saint Louis, Illinois. She was previously a Christian and accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1999 in Saint Louis after her marriage to a Tanzanian Ahmadi living in America. She is presently living in Oklahoma City.

Although I was born Christian, I was completely unaware of the absence in my faith. And in fact, I didn't find out what I had been missing until I discovered it through marriage. But I have found that sincerity in prayers will always lead to the right path. I had prayed a very long time for a loving and spiritual mate, and God answered my prayers, giving me both a companion and the faith I had always missed and needed.

Before I became a Muslim, my life was fairly straightforward. My parents stayed at home and structured life around church and family. The rule was simple: unquestioning obedience was expected of girls. And so I was never defiant or rebellious. I took my responsibilities seriously and had little time for foolish running about. Determined and disciplined, I ultimately raised a child alone and managed my own business for 17 years.

I finally found a book that ultimately led to the path of Ahmadiyyat. That book was *Where Did Jesus Die?* It just made sense to me. I even shared it with a close Christian friend, though the book did not have a similar effect on her.

After I signed *Bai'at* in 2000, my own sisters severed ties with me because they didn't understand why I had chosen this path. In fact, my sisters and nieces were so upset that they refused to have

contact with me for nearly two years. In spite of their distance, I had no fears in taking the oath of allegiance, because the message of Islam and Ahmadiyyat filled a void that I hadn't known existed. In fact, once I discovered the benefits of *Purdah*—namely that men became respectful towards me and no longer addressed me in inappropriate ways—I had no reservations about wearing *Purdah* or talking about why I was covering.

Becoming an *Ahmadi* has given me a great sense of belonging. I feel an unshakable bond with the members and community, both locally and internationally.

Allah continues to bless me and although my sisters and I still struggle to connect, they are slowly opening up enough to ask questions about what it is that I believe. Please remember us in your prayers.

“My Gift From Allah”

Fareeda Maryam Dadzie

Fareeda accepted Ahmadiyyat in 1979. She has a masters degree in adult education and works in a specialized group home.



Thinking back on my childhood in the back woods of Mississippi, I can remember joyous times. The youngest of eight children, I was well cared for and sheltered. By the time I was five, I had such a God-given zeal for knowledge that the retired schoolteacher who looked after me while my mother worked took me to school herself and informed the

Headmaster that I could work at a third-grade level. I continued to develop a great love for learning and graduated as the valedictorian of my high school class. This was a dream come true for my mother. I was her first and only child to graduate high school.

I remember my life at this time as simple, innocent and loving. The trees where my sister and I played—the same trees that sheltered us from the blazing hot Mississippi sun—are fixed permanently in my memory. And though all we truly had were the gifts that God provided—blackberries, mulberries, figs and plums, watermelon fields and peanut patches and pecan trees—we never felt our lives lacking.



Of all the trees in my small world, there was a most magnificent tree my sister and I used to call the “Toy Tree.” In our imaginations, the

Toy Tree grew anything and everything. In fact, my sister and I imagined going shopping at this tree every Sunday on our way to the country church service.

Slowly, though, as I grew older, I became disillusioned. Having been baptized around the age of six, I had taken my faith seriously as a child. But later my family moved to Wisconsin. As it happened, city life did not come easy to a person who had never known much outside of nature, books, and Jesus.

In Wisconsin, I discovered a different world—a world in which it was very easy for me to feel inferior and unfit. At the age of nineteen, I got married. After an unsuccessful marriage to a “street lover” and the birth of three children, I moved back home to Mama.

As a teenager, I had been introduced to alcohol and found that, whatever else was lacking in my personality, once I was under the influence I became an Oscar-worthy performer. Alcohol enabled me to be the person that I thought I wanted to be. My dependence on alcohol grew until I could not see my way out of the blackouts, even with treatment. Two entirely different people dwelled within me. One was a nice, kind and considerate person and the other was a wild party animal out of control.

When alcohol no longer fulfilled me, my next step down the road to destruction was drugs. Before long, I became a full-fledged drug addict. By the late seventies, I was in and out of jails as though through a revolving door. While in jail, I often made the infamous “Jailbird’s Prayer”: “Oh Lord, if you just get me out of this one, I will straighten up and....” But there seemed to be no hope of ever getting back any self-respect or dignity.

After several stints in prison and moving on to the big time—Women’s State Prison—I desperately wanted a chance to start all over again. Thank God, He gave it to me. This time while I was

incarcerated, I decided that although I was locked up, I would not allow my mind to be locked up as well. Eventually, my request to continue my education was granted and I took up a variety of courses in advanced office skills. By now I had cried and prayed, and cried and prayed some more, to the point where I saw that I was the only one who could get me out of the hell I had created with my own hands. This time I became the model prisoner.

You can learn a lot about discipline in this kind of confinement, and the humility I gained from the experience was a genuine asset that will probably stay with me forever. God certainly did me a favor by allowing me this opportunity to get my life in order—without it, no doubt I would not be alive to write this account today.

As it happened, I'd become acquainted with several Muslims a few years before my imprisonment. I had found a job with a local community rehab program, and I had been hired to do typing and receptionist work for some Muslims who were trying to get a drug abuse program funded.

Though at the time I couldn't imagine ever adopting such a strict and disciplined lifestyle, even then I admired it. I ended up becoming close friends with one of the Muslim counselors, and after I was incarcerated, I received Islamic literature through the counselor. I began reading *The Life of Ahmad*, *Tadhkirah*, *Holy Qur'an*, and *The Life of Muhammad*.

Reading through them, the one I found most touching was *The Life of Muhammad*. I still remember the heartfelt and instantaneous feeling of love I developed for the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), especially after the torment and abuse inflicted upon him while he was praying. I thought to myself, "How could anyone be so cruel; and more importantly, how could the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) be so humble?" To me, he simply had to be a being inspired by Almighty

God Himself!

By now, I had been introduced, through letters, to some of the *Ahmadi* Muslim sisters, and they also forwarded literature to me. One in particular wrote me beautiful words of encouragement. I now used this time to read, study, and contemplate the direction I was going to take in life. Ironically, this imprisonment became one of the most precious times of my life. To this day, when I am on my upper spiritual beam, I often awake at the hours the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) received his most inspiring revelations. I attribute this to my intensive study of Islam during this period. What at first seemed to be a horrible end for me actually became the true beginning of my life!

Inside the prison system, Muslims were allowed to both pray and practice Islam, including fasting during the month of *Ramadhan*. When the menu contained pork items, special items were prepared for the Muslim prisoners. Since I had been a waitress once, I knew which items contained pork. Fortunately, very few pork products were purchased in bulk because of the male prisoners' demand for religious rights.

While still incarcerated, I signed *Bai'at*, joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and got married. After I left prison, one most beloved *Ahmadi* sister would pick me up for Lajna classes. I tried my best to never do anything that would jeopardize the privilege of being able to attend Lajna events. And when I was married, this same dear sister attended my wedding and made a gorgeous dress and scarf for me to wear. She explained that covering was an injunction in the *Holy Qur'an*, and I accepted it without question.

Since those days, *Ahmadi* Muslim sisters have enhanced my life immensely, and I pray to Allah that each and every one of them is granted the success in life and the hereafter they deserve, not for what they have done for me, but for their steadfastness and

perseverance. My *Abmadi* sisters—wherever they may be today—cannot begin to imagine the impact they have had on me.

Today I can affirm that Islam, through the Grace and Mercy of Allah, has indeed given me a new life. Though I've suffered ups and downs in my life, the teachings of Islam have truly been enlightening.

Although there are times when my grip on the Rope of Allah becomes slack, I can say with my heart and soul that I beg and pray that Allah will make me the best of Muslims and make my children and children's children, Muslims.

After becoming an *Abmadi*, I went on to receive my Master's Degree in Adult Education—a feat accomplished only by the Grace and Mercy of Allah. Under a program started by Hadhrat Khalifatul -Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him), I am married to a pious *Abmadi* from Ghana and am the stepmother to four beautiful children, three of whom are here in America and doing well, *Alhamdulillah*. All praise belongs to Allah—Alone!

“Learning through Lajna”

Aeman Bashir

Aeman accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam after a 25 year search for the true religion. She is married and lives in York, Pennsylvania.

The story of my conversion is similar to that of most converts—I started out searching for something that made sense. Whenever I looked for answers, all I could find were more questions. But when I looked at the universe, I could not believe that there was no logical order to it all. Through years of searching I finally arrived at that logical order—Ahmadiyyat Islam.

At the age of twelve or thirteen, I realized that I could not believe in Christianity. Nothing about its teachings made sense to me. Just hearing the Easter story or about the Christian concept of creation made me cringe. When I grew older, I found a church more in line with my own moral code. However, it still left me spiritually unfulfilled. Eventually, I gave up on religion, though I maintained my spirituality. I just didn’t think there was an organized form of religion that suited my beliefs.

Though I kept searching—with little hope that I would find what I was looking for—I concentrated on other goals in life. My birth name was Emily, which is from the Latin meaning the eager, the ambitious. The name suited me well. I was an excellent student at school, editor-in chief of the yearbook, layout editor of the literary magazine, writer for the school newspaper, co-founder of the environmental society and a member of the National Honor Society. I was chosen to participate in Governor’s School, a prestigious academic program. I was accepted into every college to

which I applied.

As successful as I was, I could have done just about anything I wanted professionally, but I still felt a huge spiritual void. Aside from the fact that it made my parents happy, my worldly success was unfulfilling. I wanted to be part of something meaningful.

So, after college I decided to dedicate a year to serving others by joining AmeriCorps, a service program similar to the Peace Corps but located within the U.S. My AmeriCorps project was located in Washington D.C., where I had been given the charge of running a soup kitchen. The move to a larger city also helped me find what I had been looking for; it was here that I was introduced to Islam.

Though I initially was excited while studying Islam at a Sunni mosque in D.C., I eventually became disillusioned. By the time I moved from D.C. to York, Pennsylvania—just two blocks from the Noor Mosque—I had almost given up hope of finding spiritual peace. But then I was introduced to Ahmadiyyat Islam. Though I had never heard of Ahmadiyyat before, I began studying Islam with the women in the community. Soon, things started to make sense.

My path to understanding did not end; it actually only began when I signed *Bai'at*. Even though I had officially become an *Ahmadi*, I still did not fully understand the beauty of Islam. It actually wasn't until about a year later, when I started to become an active Lajna member and changed my name, that I truly began to feel Allah's presence in my life.

I had always been very active in organizations in the past, and, as I started to understand more about Islam, I became more attracted to it. But this time, I was intimidated by the Jama'at and thought that I was going to make mistakes in my etiquette or offend someone inadvertently and this fear prevented me from becoming more active. That all changed one day after *Jum'a* prayer, when I overheard one of the sisters explaining that it was our duty as

individual Lajna members to actively contribute because the only way a group can succeed is through participation. That's when I realized that failing to participate at all was the biggest mistake I could make. I started to become more and more active and soon I started to feel less like a guest and more like a member. I felt a connection to something bigger that I hadn't felt in a long time.

Whenever someone said my new name—Aeman Bashir—I could feel myself becoming filled with faith and steadfastness. Though I had a lot to juggle with work, family and school, the more time I dedicated to Lajna work, the more fulfilled I felt. I could feel my understanding of Islam grow day by day.

Those who have been *Ahmadi* all their lives cannot imagine the joy I have experienced in finding Ahmadiyyat. When I finally found the fruit of my twenty-five year search, it was as though blinders had been lifted from my eyes. I know that my journey will never end in this world. Allah is truly the Best of Planners. May He continue to illuminate the path towards Him and continue to guide us, *Inshallah*.

“Revelation and Rationality”

Shoshana Timm

Shoshana was born in Eugene, Oregon to open-minded parents who encouraged their children to find their own spiritual paths. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam on April 15, 2001. She is the mother of twin boys.

In the fall of 1999, a friend invited me to an event at the mosque of her new religious community. I went upstairs to where the women were lined up for prayer. After prayers, there was some talk and I listened to a recitation of the *Holy Qur'an* and noticed how peaceful, friendly and humble the women seemed. A few weeks later, my friend invited me to attend a dinner at the house of an *Ahmadi* lady. Though I had been sick and suffering back problems, I felt fine all through the delicious meal, during which we discussed many aspects of Islam. It all seemed very logical and I sensed the beauty of the religion immediately, especially through the hospitality and generosity of the *Ahmadi* ladies. Over the course of the next eighteen months, I learned the Islamic way of praying and participated in many Lajna activities. I marveled at how educated the women were and how calm, accomplished, and well-mannered the girls were. My friend and other *Ahmadi* ladies helped me to learn to read Arabic and I began to love reading the *Holy Qur'an*.

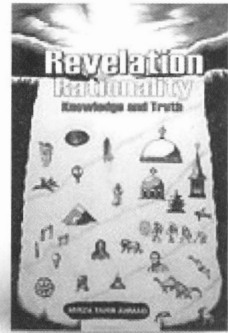
Throughout childhood and adulthood, I had been exposed to many different religions and spiritual practices, but I had never learned anything about Islam. There were times I thought I might be a Christian, as I thought about the life of Jesus and how he had transformed so many people's lives. I learned about the pagan religions originating from Ireland and Africa—mostly through

cultural festivals and dancing—and enjoyed the richness of the stories and how they informed people's lives. Some members of my family practiced meditation and studied Buddhism and the Hindu religion, and I thought it all very interesting. But I really never thought I could embrace any religion wholeheartedly. I could never understand how one actually practiced a religion and how some religious people could believe certain things that seemed unbelievable.

So I gave up on finding a religion and just tried on my own to nurture a relationship and understanding with God. Throughout my life, I always sensed God, but my understanding of God was limited. And though I "talked with" and prayed to God, I didn't really know Him as anything other than a presence or force. Though I tried looking for the good in other religions to help me find meaning in life, most of them seemed limiting and controlling in some way—hindering the development of the human practitioner, placing unattainable expectations on them, or requiring them to oppress others in a way that seemed unjust to me. And though studying science in school helped me to understand certain things, science wasn't able to help me understand the meaning of life.

As I began learning about Islam—and reading *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge & Truth*—I finally felt that I had found the perfect religion—one that integrated the scientific and spiritual in such a way that everything made sense and nothing seemed contradictory or unbelievable.

Before I had failed miserably at sustaining silent meditations, or even guided or chanting meditations, but I finally found in the Islamic form of prayer a way of praying that I was able to practice



easily. I did struggle in the beginning, but it helped to have the structure of the movement, the prayers and the timings laid out for me so I knew when and how to pray to God. And prayer helped me feel very close to God.

On April 15, 2001, which happened to be Easter Sunday, I signed the *Bai'at*. And though it seemed like a mere formality, it made me an *Ahmadi* officially and that made me feel more secure in my faith and in my bond with the Jama'at, the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) and the Khilafat. Since joining Ahmadiyyat, I have received many blessings and met thousands of *Ahmadis* from all over the world. I have seen that our Jama'at is very principled in its dealings, always trying faithfully and humbly to bring the light of Islam to the world and while we all struggle, there are so many obvious blessings bestowed on the Jama'at and its members, that I never worry I have joined the "wrong" religion or cult. Now remarried, I have been blessed with fraternal twin sons. I ask for your prayers for all of my family and for me as well.

“A Journey Home”

Shireen Ali

Shireen grew up in Augusta, Georgia where she lived with her step-mother and attended the Macedonia Baptist Church. Shireen resides in Albany, New York.

I thank Allah for allowing me to discuss my becoming a practicing Muslim and *Ahmadi* with you. My name is Shireen Ali, and I am a member of the Albany, New York, Lajna.

My first introduction to Islam happened in the late summer of 1967 in Augusta, Georgia. That was when my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Wingfield, taught us about the subject of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be on him), and Mecca and Medina. Even then, I felt captivated by Islam, and I wondered how life would be for me as a Muslim.

At that time, I was a member of the Macedonia Baptist Church in Augusta; earlier, I had belonged to the A.M.E. Zion Church in Johnstown, New York. Belonging to both churches was in line with family tradition—one church on my mother’s side, the other from my stepmother’s side.

Years became decades, and finally Allah led me to embrace Islam. I first heard about Ahmadiyyat when I was at a difficult point in my personal life. Friends reminded me that Allah had *everything* under control. The decision to become an *Ahmadi* is the most important choice I have ever made in my life.

I hope to emulate the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), and though I realize that the road is occasionally lonely, the end results justify all the struggle it takes to get closer to Allah and perhaps one day be accepted into paradise.

“A Lifetime in Ahmadiyyat”

Naima K. Latif

Naima was born in Washington, DC. She accepted Ahmadiyyat in 1972 and currently resides in North Carolina.

With the blessing of Allah, I was introduced to Islam in 1972, when my husband, Jalaluddin A. Latif, joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Queens, New York.

After he joined the Jama'at, I was greatly impressed with his transformation in thought and deeds. He started attending the Mission House and spent many hours trying to understand Islamic beliefs, never coming home empty-handed. One night he came home with a prayer rug, a *Holy Qur'an* and several other religious books. I used to wonder to myself, “How many books does a person need on one subject?” Brothers from the mosque visited him frequently at our apartment. When it was time to eat, I was not permitted to eat with them. This notion of eating separately was my first introduction to the concept of *Purdab*. The brothers would sleep over occasionally and I became accustomed to listening to their discussions from the doorway, learning in detail why Muslim men and women should not mix socially. Initially, the idea seemed strange to me, but eventually I came to understand the teaching.

When my husband initially talked to me about Islam, he mentioned the Islamic concept of God and it was hard for me at first to grasp the concept that Jesus (peace be on him) was not God. As I pondered over what I read in books on Islam, I was drawn to the believer's prayer—“Our Lord! We have heard a Crier calling us unto faith! Believe ye in your Lord, and we have believed”—and with the

blessing of God, I was able to memorize the prayer with meaning. My heart slowly began its transformation and I found myself drawn towards Islam, even though the beliefs contradicted what I had been brought up to believe.

I recall an incident during my first *Ramadhan*, when my husband woke me up at three in the morning by sprinkling water on me. I had never been as angry with him as I was at that moment. But as I lay in bed, I asked myself why I was so angry with a person who was only calling me to prayer. I soon felt ashamed and got up to join my husband in submission to God.

Two years later, I attended a program in New Jersey, organized by the Jama'at and was embraced by Sister Jameelah Afzal, who invited me to come to the Mission House in New York for *Jum'a* prayer.

This is when my journey to Ahmadiyyat, began in earnest, *Alhamdulillah*. In 1974, after studying Ahmadiyyat for two years, I pledged *Bai'at* at the hands of Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih III (may Allah have mercy on him).

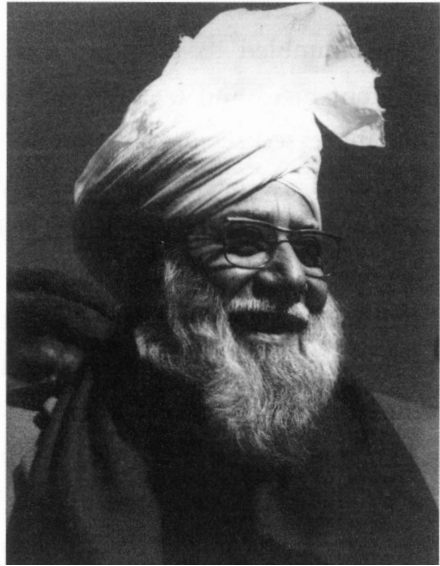
I was humbled to be part of a community in which people of different races and backgrounds were all involved in their faith. I was impressed seeing the community learning together and sharing their time and talents. I especially liked the separate organizations within the Jama'at: Lajna Imaillah, Ansar, Khuddam, Atfal, and Nasirat.

My lifestyle changed drastically after I accepted Ahmadiyyat, starting with congregational prayers at home and learning to read the translation of the *Holy Qur'an*. Sister Sadiqa Waseem moved nearby and taught me the *Holy Qur'an* in the mornings after our walks in the park. The late Sister Razia Arshed (may Allah grant her paradise), was my neighbor and was gracious enough to teach my children how to read the *Holy Qur'an* during the summer months. *Alhamdulillah!* Allah blessed me with generous sisters and He

especially gave me the strength to teach the importance of prayers to my children. After my children would come home from school or playing, they knew to perform their *Salat* (prayers). Prayer gave structure to our day, and we became a family that prayed together.

That was just the beginning of the changes in my lifestyle. During the late 1960s, I wore African attire that included a turban-like head covering (*gele*). The head wrap did not cover my neck area, and one sister even asked me to change the way I covered my head. But I did not actually change this until I heard our beloved Khalifatul-Masih III (may Allah have mercy on him) speak at Jalsa in 1976. As he began his address, he noticed that he could see the faces of the ladies and had the organizers arrange for proper *Purdab*. He gave a passionate speech on observance of *Purdab*. I was so moved by his address that I began observing proper *Purdab*. I heard and obeyed my beloved Khalifa. Although the rest of my family questioned my faith, my mother stated, after seeing our beloved Khalifa for the first time, that he was a Holy man, with a radiant light coming from his face.

Other changes came when I became more active in Lajna. In 1981, Sister Salma Ghani, then-President of the U.S. Lajna, appointed me to be the local Lajna Sadr (President), since I was practicing proper *Purdab*. And when Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him), Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, came to the United States, my family had



حضرت مرزا ناصر احمد صاحب خلیفۃ المسیح الثالث رضی اللہ تعالیٰ

Hadhrat Khalifa-tul-Masih III

the honor of meeting him several times. My daughter, Aliya, presented a bouquet of flowers to Huzoor on his visit to New Jersey. In 1995, by the Grace of Allah, we attended our first UK Jalsa. We had a meeting arranged to see Huzoor (may Allah have mercy on him) in person. However, at our appointed time, we heard the Adhan being called and went to the mosque for prayers. Someone announced that Huzoor was waiting for us. My daughter and I rushed outside and saw Jalal coming out from the men's area. Huzoor walked by us and asked where we had been. I told him that we had heard the Adhan and went to the mosque for prayers. He said, "All right then, let us go and pray." Jalal was kissed by Huzoor on his cheek as he was coming out of the men's hall. In 2000, I met Huzoor again, and he asked me who my father was. I responded that he was a Christian and that his name was Perry Robinson. I will never forget Huzoor's comment: "You look like you have *always* been a Muslim."

The best years of my life have been spent in Ahmadiyyat. All Perfect Praise belongs to the Lord of All the Worlds, for all of the answered prayers and blessings that my family has been granted by Him. As a young girl, I dreamt of having four children: three boys and one girl. After our wedding, however, I was told that I could not have children. But Allah answered my prayers and blessed us—I am the mother of four children: Abdur-Rahim, Junayd Ismail, Hakim Taufiq, and Aliya Amatus. Now, we also have two daughters-in-laws, two granddaughters, and a grandson who passed away in infancy.

Although faced with the challenges of raising African-American boys in America, prayers and trust in Allah have kept them on the righteous path, as well as frequent contact via letters with the *Khalifa* asking for his prayers. I followed the great advice that was once given to me in a letter from Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih III (may

Allah have mercy on him) in 1974. After he welcomed me into the Jama'at, he told me to stay in touch with the Jama'at, participate in its activities, and to write to him from time to time to let him know how I was doing.

In 2002, I was fortunate enough to perform Hajj with my husband and other members of the New Jersey Jama'at. Now in 2007, I am currently the local Waqf-e-Jadid Secretary for the Research Triangle Jama'at. Throughout my years in the Ahmadiyya Community, I have been actively involved in Lajna and Jama'at activities. I pray that Allah will give me the strength to serve this great Jama'at in whatever capacity I am able, *Inshallah*.

“Searching for Solace”

Hajja Tahira Lateef

Tabira was born a Christian and underwent a life changing moment when she accepted Ahmadiyyat in the spring of 1971 in Chicago. She moved from Chicago and is currently a resident of Amherst, Massachusetts and has been living there since 1978.

Before I became an *Ahmadi* Muslim, my life was in constant turmoil. I had been on the verge of divorce numerous times. And while I vaguely remembered a co-worker talking about Islamic traditions, I was so caught up in my personal struggles that I had no time to contemplate the larger concerns of life. This state of chaos lasted for the greater part of a decade, from 1960 to 1971.

I so desperately felt the need for a higher power in my life that I gathered a small group of women from my neighborhood to learn about various religions and discuss them in order to find the one true faith. Even at that time, my soul sensed that there was one true religion. During this search, my little band of women and I visited multiple churches, synagogues and mosques, analyzing the basic teachings of each.

At the same time, after about nine years of working the day shift at the Chicago Post Office, I switched to the night shift, enrolled as a full-time student at Chicago State University, and became a National Honor Society in Education member. Miraculously, in 1971, shortly before graduating, I was introduced to Ahmadiyyat. I left my name and address as an interested party when the Ahmadiyyat literature ran out at a University-sponsored student conference. As a result, I began receiving Jama'at books and pamphlets, including a copy of

the *Holy Qur'an*.

I started reading the literature, and though I didn't understand everything I read. I wasn't opposed to any of the ideas in the books I perused. My women's group then visited the Sadiq Mosque for the first time in early 1971.

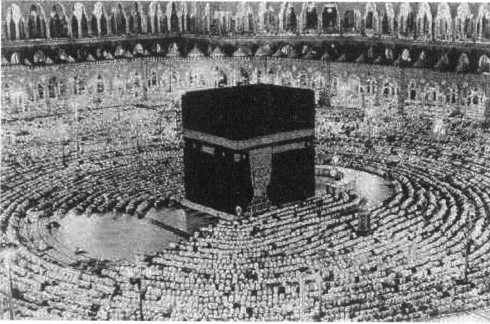
From the moment I stepped inside the mosque, I was in complete awe. The people were so polite, well-mannered, pious, attentive, and helpful. I particularly noticed that when they prayed, they bowed down with their foreheads touching the floor. The mosque was very clean, simple, and unpretentious. Reading *The Teachings of the Holy Qur'an* and *Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* led to many enlightening discussions with the *Ahmadi* women at the mosque. This all affected me positively and though I started attending the meetings regularly, none of the other women of my group ever attended again.

In the spring of 1971, I signed *Bai'at* and under the guidance of Imam Abdul Karim, studied prayers and the *Holy Qur'an*. I am grateful to Allah for this period and to all those that contributed to my growth and development.

Inevitably, home life became problematic for me since my husband was a Roman Catholic; the marriage eventually ended in divorce. By the Grace of Allah, I married an *Ahmadi* in 1973, relocated to New Jersey and was blessed with a son in 1975.

From day one, life as an *Ahmadi* Muslim was a new flavor of being. The rhythm of peace became my existence. Changes in my exterior appearance reflected my internal transformation. Family members and old friends questioned me about the changes in my dress and behavior, which they noted were all for the good. I agreed with them, explaining that I had learned real values by developing love for God (Allah), and that this had made me different—and better. I had learned how to pray, how to keep praying, and to remember Allah often.

By the Grace of Allah, I performed Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) in 1973; our family has attended Jalsa Salana U.K. four times and we



Pilgrimage to Mecca

have been blessed to pray in mosques in India, Ghana, Zaire, Nigeria, Spain, and Canada, as well as all over the US.

Allah has been Most Gracious to me and my family, extending bounties

too numerous to count, so

every day I continue to strive towards being a better, true, *Ahmadi* believer.

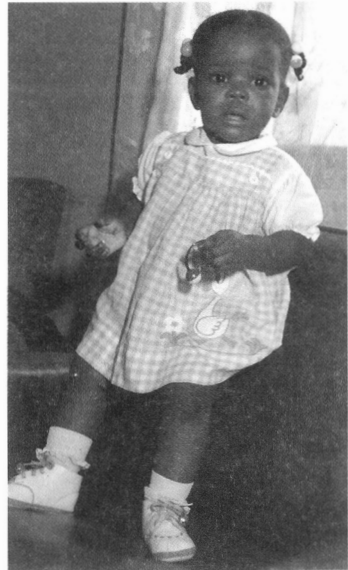
“Islam Found Me”

Tamara Rodney

Tamara was born in Kingston, Jamaica. She was an Evangelical Christian who grew up with her Rastafarian father and Catholic Grandmother. Tamara’s family migrated to the United States when she was 8 years old. At the age of 18 she moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and there she met her future husband. Tamara signed her initiation into Ahmadiyyat Islam in 2001. Tamara and her family reside in Saint Louis, Missouri.

As a convert, people often ask: “Why did you convert?” and before my mouth can form the words to answer, my mind tells me: “Because Islam has revolutionized my understanding of Religion.” Truthfully, as I look back on my conversion experience it seems to me that Islam found me at a pivotal time.

At the time that I was introduced to Islam, I was actually looking forward to moving away from formalized religion. I had become disillusioned



with the doctrines of my former religion and decided that formalized religion was NO longer the path I would traverse.

The dictionary defines religion as: *Belief in a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe.* To me this definition is too limited. However, life is defined as: *The property or quality that distinguishes living organisms from dead organisms.* From birth

through adulthood, I witnessed many individuals who had a religion, but that religion was unable to really permeate their being; I saw them practice their religion but I never saw their religion reform their life.

Islam, to me, separates me as a spiritually living organism from a spiritually dead one. Islam is not just belief in a supernatural power that I regard as creator of the universe. Islam is the perfecting of my spiritual self so that I not only believe in that Supernatural Power known as Allah but also, I ultimately submit to Him, and in so doing put in motion the reformation of myself... or should I say, my soul.

Why Islam? Because as the Promised Messiah says in his book *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*: “it (the Holy Word of God) lays down rules for the reform of the natural condition of man and then lifts him gradually upwards and desires to raise him to the highest spiritual state.” For me Islam is about living and not just belief.

Why Islam? I am alive with Islam. I am alive because I understand that for each day that I strive as a Muslim, my actions are not based on fear but on ultimate love. For each day that I strive as a Muslim, I actively increase my consciousness of who Allah really is and why He cares so much about mankind. For each day that I strive as a Muslim, my natural condition as a human is being elevated just so I can reach the highest spiritual state. For each day that I strive as a Muslim I come one step closer to actually living in Paradise here on earth.

The Promised Messiah (peace be on him) says in the *Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*:

“It should be remembered that the highest spiritual condition of a person in this life is that he should find comfort in God and all his satisfaction and ecstasy and delight should be centered on God. This is the condition which is called the heavenly life. In this condition a person is bestowed the heavenly life in this very

world in return for his perfect sincerity, purity and faithfulness. Other people look forward to paradise in the hereafter, but he enters it in this very life. Arriving at this state a person realizes that the worship that was prescribed for him is in truth the food that nurtures his soul and on which his spiritual life largely depends, and that its consummation is not postponed to the afterlife. “

Before Islam, I lived my life in anticipation of the hereafter, and as such every action, every deed and every word was based on fear; fear of loosing that place in the hereafter, so I worked on my religion but not my soul. But now I make every effort to reform and elevate my soul; by that I mean I make every effort to improve the condition of my life by reforming character.

So when I say “*Alhamdulillah*” it is because I truly believe that Allah (*subhana wa tala*) should ultimately be praised! Why? Because He continues to provide for me despite my faults, despite my doubts and at times my disbelief. When I decide not to lie, it is because I understand that by lying I am afraid of what I might lose and as such, I am ceasing to trust God entirely. When I decide not to complain about the present trials in my life, it is because I understand that true courage is holding on to my belief in God and I understand that I am being courageous so that I can become closer to Allah. When I decide to willingly run to each prayer, it is because I understand that *Salat* is the food that will continue to provide nourishment to my soul, and my spiritual reformation revolves around the elevation of my soul.

As I said in the beginning, Islam found me at a pivotal time. I believe that Allah gave me Islam because Islam would, in turn, give me the tools necessary to transform my life and revive my soul. Islam found me because as early as I can remember, I truly desired to understand God and why He placed me here on this earth. Islam has given me the answer. *Jazakallah!*

Chapter 2

True Dreams

How dreams and visions led to the
Promised Messiah (peace be on him)

“In my early youth I saw in a dream that I was in a magnificent building which was very clean and neat where people were talking about the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). I inquired from the people where the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was and they pointed to a room which I entered along with other persons. When I presented myself to him he was much pleased, and returned my greeting with a better greeting. I can still recall and can never forget his charm and beauty and the kind and affectionate look that he directed towards me. He won my heart with his love and the beauty and glory of his countenance.”

*Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, The Promised Messiah (peace be on him)
“Tadhkirah” (translation by Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan)*

“My Inner Voice”

Ayesha Allison Khan

Ayesha was born in Ontario, Canada and moved to the United States in 1998. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1995 and lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

It's only after we convert that we begin to realize conversion has really been the result of a lifetime of experiences.

When I was three years old, I told my mother that I talked to “ghosts in the wall,” and she kept quiet because she didn't want to frighten me by telling me that this wasn't normal. Of course my brothers and sisters heard about it and teased me. So I grew afraid of the voices.

Even when I was older, I heard voices speak to me. In 1985, I was walking at the University of Waterloo Library when I heard a voice in my right ear inform me that I would be in a car accident that day. I was dumbstruck because I knew no one was near me. But I ignored the voice and the bad weather outside. Sure enough, later that day, I found myself in a car accident. After that, I told myself if I ever heard the voice again, I would pay attention.

I was born on Good Friday, baptized on Good Friday and confirmed into the church on Good Friday. Yet I never understood why it was called Good Friday because Jesus (peace be on him) was put on the cross that day. I stopped attending church at twelve because we moved away, but I still considered myself a Christian.

In one sermon that I still remember vividly, the minister described what happened when Jesus asked who would follow him. The disciples responded that they were ready to go with him as soon as they took care of some business. Jesus replied that if they wanted to

go, they had to leave their worldly business and go. I promised myself that if Jesus really came again, I would be like those disciples. I never imagined the way it would happen.

After receiving a Master's degree in English, I took a teaching job at Monarch Park Collegiate in Toronto. Little did I know that my students would affect my life more profoundly than I would ever affect theirs.

Two students in my class impressed me with their truthfulness and dignity, and I discovered they were *Ahmadi* Muslims. One of the students, Zaib Khoker, gave me a book, *Muhammad and the Rights of Women*. The title surprised me since I had always assumed that Muslim women were deprived of their rights.

I began to ponder the subject. If it was true that Muslim women did have rights, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) was way ahead of the rest of the world. How could that be? I concluded that, if this were the case, he must have had the help of Allah. And I couldn't understand how I had reached the age of thirty-five without hearing about the excellent qualities of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). I felt a sense of betrayal. How could I have heard nothing of him in our information-saturated society?

The first book about Ahmadiyyat I read was *Ahmad, the Guided One*, by Iain Adamson. Its simple eloquence touched my heart. There was no doubt in my mind that a man as gentle as the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) was incapable of telling a lie. If he claimed to be a prophet of God, it must be true. I realized that it was Allah's plan that the events of Hadhrat Jesus' (peace be on him) life were not recorded in the same clear detail as the later prophets.

At the end of the class term, my other *Ahmadi* student, Mubarak Syed, gave me a present—the *Holy Qur'an*. Before he would let me touch it, though, he told me to wash my hands. I thought this was

very odd, especially since I wasn't interested in finding a new religion. Then he challenged me to read it. That was too much—I told him that I had a master's degree in English, and I had read all the English poets, so I wasn't going to be intimidated by his book! I *would* read it. Once I had committed myself to reading it, he suggested that I should not read it all at once—instead, he advised me to read a little every night.

“Don't think your book is going to change me!” I warned him.

But I kept my promise. I read it every night. I found myself wanting to read one more *ruku* and then another, before I went to sleep. The verse that put a finger on my pulse was “Certainly, Allah wrongs not men at all, but men wrong their own souls.” (10:45). I accepted the truth of this one verse—and that was the key to revealing the truth of the rest of the *Holy Qur'an*.

As an English teacher, I had always told my students not to use the omniscient voice in their writing, because only God knew everyone's motives. In the *Holy Qur'an*, the voice of God seemed to be addressing me with absolute certainty: “Man does not tire of praying for good; but if evil touch him he despairs, and gives up all hope.” (41:50). That omniscient voice was so powerful that it scared me like the rumbling of thunder. In a word, it put the fear of God into me.

When I returned to school in the fall, I found that Zaib Khoker had been selected for an ESL camp, and I was the supervising teacher. She had the room next to me at the camp, and I asked her to teach me *Surah Al-Fatiba* so I could try praying. I learned it in an hour or two, but still felt embarrassed; now the student was teaching the teacher, and I felt like a slow learner!

By now, I felt that Islam's requirement to pray five times a day made it superior to Christianity. But I still didn't see the necessity of Ahmadiyyat Islam. It seemed an exclusive, as opposed to inclusive,

movement. Then I began having dreams about the truth of Ahmadiyyat that were so vivid my other dreams seemed dull and colorless.



In one dream, I was walking down a narrow, cobbled street in England. Going into a tailor's shop, I saw three tailors sitting cross-legged on mats. I told them that I wanted to make a *shahwar kameez* (Pakistani clothing) for someone, and though I didn't tell them who it was for, I secretly intended it for Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him). The tailors took out the cloth I had brought with me and looked

at it with amazement, saying, "Oh, what beautiful cloth! You don't know what a superior cloth this is!" I was puzzled by their extravagant praise, but in the end I left the store with the finished suit. Their admiration had made me curious, so I ducked into an empty house and tried the clothes on to see what all the fuss was about. As I put on the suit, I saw the most beautiful sunset reflected on the wall opposite me. I then hurried to the mosque and requested a meeting with Huzoor. He was in a big, white marble hall surrounded by a crowd. It was more difficult to get his attention than I expected, but finally I was able to give him my gift. I told him the tailor's comments, but, though I was extremely excited, he only seemed amused. I later found out that seeing a sunset in a dream means following the true religion of Islam. I could only conclude that Ahmadiyyat was the true Islam.

Finally, I heard the voice again. Waking one Sunday at Fajr time, I heard a bell ring three times, and I heard the voice say "Turn to the left for Islam!" I knew that the right side was good, and the left was

bad, but in that room, I turned to the left to say my prayers. I felt the voice to mean, “Turn towards the *Kaaba* and pray as a Muslim.” Though I had been waiting for that voice, I was still awestruck that Allah would be gracious enough to tell me to accept Islam. Now there was no turning back. I feared the Day of Judgment when Allah might ask, “Didn’t I tell you?” And I would have to say, “Yes.”

In the meantime, I met another *Abmadi*, Amtul Saboor, at the Canadian Jalsa. She invited me to her house often. One night, she told me to write out any questions I had about the *Holy Qur’an* and present them to her husband, Pir Waheed Ahmad. I took up the challenge and wrote two pages of questions. Pir Waheed Ahmad answered question after question patiently. It grew so late that I looked at the short list of questions remaining, and, though I knew that he could answer them all, I thought it would be rude to continue. That was when I understood that the entire *Holy Qur’an* could be explained in a logical and reasonable way.

After that, I believed I was ready to wear the *hijab*—and that caused a silent earthquake in my school. It created a buzz among the faculty, even though my fellow teachers didn’t actually say much to my face. Though the staff’s reactions were mixed, my friends remained loyal. Although I could tell they didn’t feel comfortable with my scarf, they only said, “Don’t wear black. It doesn’t suit you.” I took their advice.

During the summer, I experienced a similar response from my family. I suffered a seizure while watching television one day, and my eldest sister insisted on taking me to the hospital. When we got to the front door, there was a short pause as she looked at my *hijab*. “Are you going to wear that?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said.

And that was the end of the discussion. My brother-in-law and my

nieces and nephew all accepted me just as my sister had. For me, it was a calamitous proclamation. For them, it was a message that they accepted me and cared for me no matter my religion.

I decided that I wanted what was truthful in my life more than I wanted tradition. I gave up one old habit at a time and exchanged them for better habits. Please pray for my family, show them patience, and challenge them until they accept the truth.

Allah reminds us in the *Holy Qur'an*, “Deem not your embracing Islam a favor unto me; on the contrary, Allah has bestowed a favor unto you in that He has guided you to the true Faith, if you are truthful.” (49:18) Islam is not an end point, but the beginning of a new journey.

“A Glimpse of the Future”

Aisha Khan

Aisha was born in India and came to the United States at the age of seven. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1990. She was previously Hindu. She resides in Plainsboro, New Jersey.

Allah Ta’ala says in the *Holy Qur’an* in *Surah Al-Shura*, Chapter 42, verse 53:

“Thou didst not know what the book was, nor what the faith. But We have made it [the revelation] a light, whereby We guide such of Our servants as We please.”

This verse describes my conversion exactly. As with all personal narratives, my conversion was a private decision, but I hope that by sharing my story, others may benefit in their own struggle.

I was born into a Hindu family. Though my mother was a practicing Hindu, the rest of my family was not particularly religious. Although I was born Hindu, I always felt myself drawn towards the monotheistic theme of Islam. Growing up, I never felt a spiritual connection as I prayed to the various idols that represented forms of God. I always felt that there had to be something more to praying and something more to God than a statue. As a young girl, I often tuned into weekend radio programs where the *Holy Qur’an* was being recited. It was during those sessions that my love and admiration for the flawless Book began. As I listened to the Arabic words which I did not understand, I felt myself become entranced by the beautiful sounds and I yearned to learn and understand this most magnificent Book and the religion that it taught.

Looking back upon my childhood, I feel that Islamic morals were always a part of my life. The way I spoke, the way I behaved in difficult situations, the manner in which I interacted with my family and peers—they all evoked Islamic principles. For example, even living in the middle of Western culture in New York, I did not attend birthday parties. Of my many friends, the company that I most enjoyed was that of my Muslim friends as I conversed with them about Islam. Part of this can be attributed to my parents, who kept our family relatively reserved, but I truly believe that Allah Ta'ala had awakened His love in my heart and had always been preparing me to become an *Ahmadi* Muslim. In *Durr-e-Sameen*, the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) writes:

The person who has good and righteous inclinations of the heart, they will look for the truth and will be attracted to Islam and Ahmadiyyat.

Now, having experienced Islam and Ahmadiyyat, I can fully comprehend the search for truth that I underwent when I was 16 years old. Hinduism had been unable to connect me to God, and I was having difficulty reconciling this shortcoming with continuing my life as a Hindu. I could not understand how the idols that I had been praying to my whole life thus far were a part of God. I knew that there was One Supreme Being, and I wanted to become close to God and feel that God was close to me.



When I was 17, I had a dream that I was praying (with my head covered), on a Muslim prayer mat. At that point in my life, I had not yet entertained the idea of converting to Islam. This dream, however, moved me to such a point that I felt that God was calling me to Him, and it was my duty to find Him. This childhood and adolescent period of admiring the *Holy Qur'an*, living with Islamic

morals, and desiring a faith system that worshipped the One True Supreme God prepared me for my coming conversion to Islam and Ahmadiyyat. Because of my growing connection with Islam, I never felt the need to explore other religions and continued to investigate Islam.

A year before I converted to Islam and Ahmadiyyat, I learned how to offer *Salat* by myself, and I began reading the translation of the *Holy Qur'an* in English. This was my official overt journey towards accepting Islam. In reality, however, my inner journey towards Islam had begun many years before.

Shortly after learning how to offer *Salat* and read the *Holy Qur'an*, I was introduced to Ahmadiyyat. I began reading the Ahmadiyya literature. Whenever I spoke with *Ahmadis* about their beliefs, I found everything to be completely logical and clearly defined. At this point, I believed that Islam was the right and true religion and that Ahmadiyyat completed the full picture. It was clear that the straight path that we pray for in *Surah Al-Fatiba* was encompassed in Ahmadiyyat and, if I wanted to be guided and protected from the evils of this world and become close to Allah Ta'ala, Ahmadiyyat needed to be my path.

In 1990, when Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him) was visiting New York, I was blessed to be at the mosque in Queens. As I stood in the hallway near the stairs, Bushra Butt Sahiba, then local President and also a sister figure for me, introduced me to Huzoor and explained to him that I was considering converting to Islam and Ahmadiyyat. After seeing Huzoor (may Allah have mercy on him), being the first to receive salam from him, and experiencing the holiness that glowed around him, there was nothing holding me back from converting. During this visit, at the age of 19, I converted to Islam and Ahmadiyyat at the hands of Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih IV (may Allah have mercy

on him).

Although my actual conversion was fairly simple, the effects of my conversion on my relationships with my family and friends were not nearly so simple. My closest childhood friend severed all contact (and continues to do so), and my family and I had no contact for more than three years. I truly believe that it was my firm faith in Allah Ta'ala and Ahmadiyyat and my attachment to the Jama'at that enabled me to withstand these pressures.

Now, *Alhamdulillah*, my family has accepted me and as a result of our growing relationship and the blessings of Allah Ta'ala, I have noticed a spiritual change in my mother. She now has a closer relationship with God, so much so that she wakes up at *Tabajjud* time to offer her own prayers, *Alhamdulillah*.

Adopting all of the aspects of an Islamic lifestyle was also a bit challenging. Although much of me was already aligned with Islam, there was still a struggle. Perhaps the biggest challenge was adopting proper Islamic *Purdab*. Although I initially found it difficult, I slowly began to understand the rationale behind it and came to accept it, *Alhamdulillah*.

A deep connection with Allah Ta'ala was my desire and, *Alhamdulillah*, I now have Allah Ta'ala with me and I am able to live my life as laid out in the *Holy Qur'an* and *Abadith*. I have gained a strong family with the Jama'at, and I finally feel that I am living the life that was meant for me. My true identity as an *Ahmadi* Muslim woman was finally given to me, and the inner peace that I have been blessed with is inexplicable. The dream that I had when I was 17 years old came true two years later, and my first *Salat* as an *Ahmadi* Muslim was such an amazing spiritual experience.

Looking back on my life as an *Ahmadi* Muslim, I can confidently say that I have been a better person in the last 18 years of my life than I ever was before, *Alhamdulillah*. I would like to conclude my humble

submission with a *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him):

God has declared: I am close to the thought that My servant has of Me, and I am with him whenever He recollects Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I remember him in Myself. And if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him better than those in the gathering. And if he approaches Me by as much as one hand's length, I approach him by a cubit. If he takes a step towards me, I run towards him. (Bukhari and Muslim)

“Come and Follow Me”

Helai Ayoubi

Helai Ayoubi was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and came to the United States in 2000. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 2001 and resides in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

People have always asked me why I decided to come from Los Angeles—the city of angels—to Oshkosh, a small dull town in Wisconsin. Sometimes, even I wondered what had led me to the Oshkosh campus of the University of Wisconsin, when I had had the option to study at better universities in livelier locations. But that mystery was eventually solved when I met someone special and realized that Allah had destined me to be in Oshkosh for something beautiful and fulfilling.

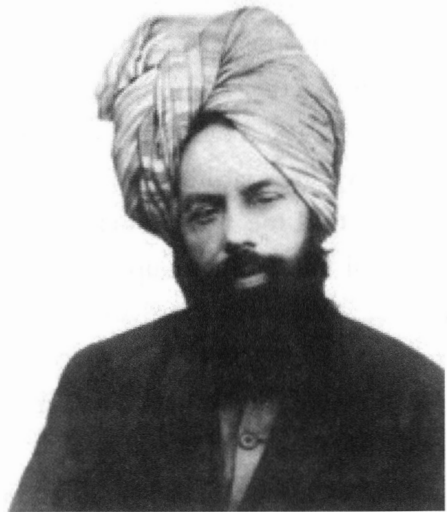
I met this special person in one of my classes at the University. He was of Pakistani origin, and seemed decent and humble. The acquaintance developed over a period of time when we took other courses together and helped each other with our studies.

One day I asked him whether he was *Shia* or *Sunni*. He surprised me by answering that he was neither. I asked him if he could elaborate, and he told me that he belonged to the Ahmadiyya sect. Being an Afghani and brought up in a mixed *Shia* and *Sunni* family, I had never heard of Ahmadiyyat before. So I asked him to explain his faith and when he told me that Hadhrat Masih Maud, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi (peace be on him), had come, it was quite mind-boggling for me.

As a *Shia* myself, I firmly believed that the Mahdi of the time, the twelfth Imam according to *Shia* traditions, had not yet come. I had

been taught from childhood that when the Mahdi descended physically from the sky, he would be seen in many places at the same time, and would bring peace and order to the world using his sword. But the world was still full of turmoil, disorder, and hostilities—peace and order had not prevailed. I became disappointed in my friend and his faith. Although he tried to explain to me the doctrines, activities and teachings of Ahmadiyyat, I kept rejecting him forcefully. He never gave up and kept preaching Ahmadiyyat at every opportunity until one day I got so upset and fed up with Ahmadiyyat that I started insulting him and his faith by using language of which I am still ashamed. He quietly tolerated my contemptuous rudeness with patience and perseverance, and said nothing but, “I hope you will realize one day.”

That very night I had a very unusual dream. I dreamt that a middle-aged man wearing a black coat and a white turban was standing on an elevated stage and addressing thousands of people standing in a desert. The man had an attractive face glorified with divinity and was holding a walking stick. I still remember his words, as if my mind had been stamped with them. He said “Allah is the witness that I only speak the truth and only the truth. I am in the right path and inviting all the people of the world towards it. I will not force anyone since everyone will go to his own grave and will be answerable to Allah alone. Whoever believes me should follow me and those who do not should take the opposite path and no one will stop them.” After saying



this, he started walking towards the right. Though many people were following him, there were also some who chose to go the opposite way. I saw myself standing in the middle, confused and baffled, looking for my friend, and when I finally spotted him, following the man, he waved his hand towards me and signaled for me to join him. I continued to stand there, confused, when suddenly I felt brightness in my heart and mind as if my soul had been nourished and energized. My heart and mind were telling me to follow him, that he was on the right path, and I started running after him.

When I woke up, I found myself sitting in bed shivering and crying. I was not sure what had happened to me and whether this was just an ordinary dream or some kind of a message.

I pondered the dream for a while and asked myself if I still believed in the idea of the twelfth Imam. Having thought it over, my mind was clear and I realized that I no longer did so. Thinking back, I felt guilty about insulting my friend and his faith earlier.

When I woke in the morning, the first thing I did was to call my friend and tell him about the dream, and I asked to see a picture of the founder of Ahmadiyyat. As it turned out, the man in my dream was none other than the Promised Messiah. This was the final proof—now I had no doubt that Ahmadiyyat was the renaissance of Islam.

The next step was asking my friend how to become a member of the Jama'at. He was both surprised and happy at the news, and told me how much he had prayed for me the night before. Over the next few days, I learned more about the teachings of Hadhrat Masih Maud (peace be on him) and signed the *Bai'at* form in 2001.

I am still so very grateful to the man who played such a vital role in my acceptance of Ahmadiyyat. This man has proven to be a sincere friend, righteous guide, and, for the past three years, a loving

husband.

I can't fully describe in words what Ahmadiyyat is for me. But I know that in Ahmadiyyat, I found the true Islam and a purpose to life. Not only has Ahmadiyyat given me contentment of soul and peace of mind, it has also introduced me to a way of applied thinking, and it is a fulfillment of all the promise and hopes that one expected from the Messiah of the latter days. I pray that I may always remember Allah, and this will give me the strength to serve Him in the best way. Allah has given me His greatest gift, Ahmadiyyat—the true Islam, and I pray that I can prove myself worthy of His love and convey His beautiful message to my family and those around me, *Inshallah*.

“The Spirit Train”

Sira Ahmad

Sira Ahmad accepted Ahmadiyyat in 1999. She was born in Trinidad, West Indies and relocated to New York. She holds the motto "Let your foundation be based on prayers."

My father used to tell me, “Let prayers be the foundation that you build your life on.” He was a pastor in the Evangelical Church, and when I was thirteen, I was baptized into that same church. A kind and humble man with many beautiful qualities, my father was a righteous and loved man. When I told him I wanted to be like him, he would respond, “No, you have to be the way God wants you to be.”

Inspired by my father, I pledged that I would serve God for the rest of my life.

As an adult, I stayed in the church and was very active in church activities. Wed at eighteen, I stayed married for nearly twenty years. The last two years of my marriage were difficult, though, as I had to separate from my husband because of our different values. Although I wanted to follow the way of God, the God of Abraham, my husband wanted me to follow a different route. Those two years were very difficult, but near the end of my marriage I had a vision.

At first, I saw many stars which had descended upon my home and covered all of it. I then saw the ocean and in the middle of the sea, I saw a dot which resembled a cloud. Soon the cloud started to form into a shape and I noticed the face of a man wearing a turban. This man was calling me towards him. When I saw the man, I realized he was a holy person, because when he called me in the dream, I

prostrated in the *sajda* position (although I did not know it was the *sajda* until after I joined Islam) and began to pray. The dream left me with a feeling of happiness. When I got up from prayer, the man began to wave goodbye. I saw his face very clearly in the dream.

At the time I saw this dream, I had been living in Trinidad. Eventually, I moved to America to live with my sister. The day I was leaving my home country, I felt so sad and was crying in front of my mirror. I prayed “Oh God of Abraham, please don’t leave me at this time.” When I finished the prayer, I clearly heard a voice say to me, “As of today, your name is Sira.” It sounded like a soft sound, almost like a song. And when I heard that voice, I was overwhelmed with happiness and kept repeating, “My name is Sira.” I didn’t question where the voice came from, but I immediately believed that this should be my new name.

After moving to the U.S., my initial exposure to Islam and Ahmadiyyat came during a subway ride in New York. I was reading my Bible when a man sitting nearby started speaking to me about religion. He told me that he was the follower of the new Christ. He then showed me a picture of the Promised Messiah. When I saw the Messiah’s photo, I was shocked. I replied “Oh my God! I saw this man calling me in a dream two years ago in Trinidad.”

The man, who is now my husband, then said something strange. “As of today, your name is Sira.” I was shocked again. I knew that the man in the photo was the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) because I had seen the picture in my dream and because this new stranger was repeating the same soothing words to me that I had heard two years ago when I *was* leaving Trinidad.

I took to reading, praying, and educating myself about the true religion of God. I kept thinking about what I had experienced and wondered what was happening to me. But I soon realized that this had to be the Will of God. I called the man, and he sent me a copy

of *Where Did Jesus Die*. As I read, I became enlightened about many of the contradictions in Christianity.

After more study, I saw yet another dream. This time, I was dressed in a *shalwar kameez* (a Pakistani outfit) and I was standing on top of a mountain. There were many houses on the surrounding hills and mountains, and there was a river running through the town. I felt that on one side of the river there were good people and on the other side there were bad people and realized that the river was separating the good from the bad. Then a woman came to me and said, "Don't be afraid, I will cross you over to where the good people are." She then took me to the good side, and I saw that the houses were made of mud. Since it was such a strange dream, I wanted to share it with the man who had been preaching to me.

The next time I met him, we talked about the book and told him that I had prayed to God for guidance and had seen this dream. After I had described it in detail, he said to me, "Madam, God has given you a vision of the pious city of Rabwah." After that, he gave me more books about Islam and Ahmadiyyat. Eventually, I married him and I entered the fold of Ahmadiyyat.

Prayer is the foundation of my life. Prayer transformed me from a religious person to a righteous person. My fervent prayers introduced me to Islam. Through Islam, I was introduced to a new level of prayer. When I pray now, I feel myself transform. Prayer brings you close to Allah and transforms you into a person who cares only to please Allah.

Islam made me feel complete. Islam allowed me to see all the beautiful qualities of God. Islam made me feel secure, peaceful, and close to the Almighty. Because Allah is the essence of my life, I can face any trial and tribulation. Now that I have become an *Ahmadi*, there is nothing in life that I desire. All my happiness is in Allah. And though there was a time when my eyes used to shed tears of

grief, now they have become a fountain of joy, all because of Allah's grace. Having become an *Abmadi*, I am at the point now where things do not bother me, because all I need is my Lord.

My father once told me that I would be transformed into a spiritual person and *Alhamdulillah* that is what Allah has done for me. My husband tells me, "I don't think you are of this world, because when you speak you sound like a creature from another world." My life is no longer mine. My life, my prayers, and my death all belong to Allah.

“Strength of Faith”

Kiran Khan

Kiran was born in Lahore, Pakistan where she later accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam. Currently, she resides in Annandale, Virginia.

After my physical birth, my conversion to Ahmadiyyat has been the most important event in my life. That conversion signaled my spiritual rebirth and made me feel that I would now be saved from the evils of this world. What an incredible and indescribable feeling! I have been asked to write about how my conversion to Ahmadiyyat changed my life. I have been a member of this Jama'at for the last eight years, and each day has brought learning and enlightenment.

I was brought up in a *Sunni* family, in which asking questions about religion—especially controversial or difficult ones—was discouraged. In fact, I was told that the devil put these questions in my mind and that they did not have to be answered. So throughout my childhood, I had many questions that I believed I should already know the answers to in order to be a good Muslim. I didn't want to cause trouble, but my questions still remained.

When I started attending *Seerat-un-Nabi Jalsas* (programs held in celebration of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be on him) as a guest of the Jama'at, I started asking those same questions. The difference was that I was patiently given answers to my satisfaction. If the people there didn't have the answer, they would admit not knowing the right way to answer and would always find the information and get back to me as promised. This impressed me so much that I started thinking that these *Ahmadis*, who were able to provide such helpful answers to my religious questions,

could not possibly be *kuffar* (nonbelievers). I wanted to learn more about Ahmadiyyat and why *Ahmadis* were persecuted. Luckily, my family didn't stop me—they thought that when I found out more about Ahmadiyyat, I would come to my senses.

Little did they know that my curiosity about Ahmadiyyat would open up a whole other world. I compared facts in the *Ahmadi* books—like the eclipse or Jesus migrating to Kashmir—to information I found in other books. Although the perspectives were different, the facts were the same, and slowly my perception of Islam changed. My first priority became signing the *Bai'at* (conversion at the hand of the Khalifa) because my faith had deepened so much through my research. I felt that I had to seize this opportunity. How could I face Allah the Almighty, the One Who had given my heart the strength to see the truth, if I did not accept the true Islam?

After I accepted Ahmadiyyat, everything else came naturally. While it initially took some time to gain faith, once I had it, it only grew stronger. This faith has guided me through all the phases of my *Tarbiyyat* (moral training).

The concept I had had of *Purdah* also changed. I started to realize that wearing *Purdah* didn't create hurdles—instead, it strengthened and empowered women. I also experienced an increase in my faith in Khilafat.

After my conversion, my mother also became interested in Ahmadiyyat and began to think of converting. After praying to Allah to provide her with some guidance in taking such a momentous step, she saw a dream. She saw that she was standing at the bottom of a huge marble staircase and so she started to climb up. Though she had felt hot and tired standing on the lower steps, as she ascended, she started to feel better and refreshed. When she was a few steps away from the top, she felt cool water touching her



feet and felt a sense of serenity. She continued to the top where she saw a heavenly light. She saw Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him)—who was the Khalifa at the time of our *Bai'at*—standing there. He saw her and called her to come join him in prayers.

Allah blessed us with the strength to keep going with our research “up the stairs” even when we were hot and unable to understand. In the end, we received the best reward anyone could wish for, the true Islam, a faith that changed my life.

Chapter 3

Solving the Jesus Riddle

How Ahmadiyyat Islam answered my questions about
Prophet Jesus (peace be on him)

“When Allah said, ‘O Jesus, I will cause thee to die a natural death and will exalt thee to Myself, and will clear thee from the charges of those who disbelieve, and will place those who follow thee above those who disbelieve, until the Day of Resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, and I will judge between you concerning that wherein you differ.’”

Holy Qur’an (Surah Al-Imran, verse 56)

‘I Will Not Be Misled’

Amtul Muid Anderson

Amtul Muid belonged to the Christian faith before she accepted Islam in 1973. She was born in Dayton, Ohio. She became a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 1975 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Amtul Muid is currently a resident of Atlanta, Georgia.

I am writing my memoirs to explain how I came to accept the teachings of Islam while dwelling in a sea of Christianity and other practices.

Although my father did not subscribe, I was reared in a household where Christianity was the accepted religious belief. My mother dutifully took her children to church and Sunday school as her parents had done. As expected, we were all active in the various church activities. It was in Sunday school that I learned the stories of the Bible. My parents encouraged us to ask questions. This accustomed us to frequent discussions surrounding civil and moral matters based on logic and reason. So it seemed quite natural for me to ask thoughtful questions of my teachers in Sunday school, as I did in regular classes and at home. As I grew older, my questions became more challenging. Given to debate and a yearning for an in depth understanding of ideas and ideals, I developed an interest in theology.

Three questions plagued me and were the root of discontent and my search for truth in religion. These were:

- If Jesus died to save us from sin, then why are we still sinning?
- If only the Jewish are chosen among all others created, then what has God determined for me, since I am not Jewish?

- If God is Just, (and I believed Him to be so), then what provisions were made for those souls born and past before Jesus (peace be on him) came to save the world?

As early as age seven, questions and doubts of religious dogma entered my mind. By the time I was nine years old, confusion had set in. I was repeatedly told, “If you don’t believe on faith, there is something wrong with your faith.” This frightened me, and I would repent for every little thing fearing that death would overcome me during such a lapse, causing me to burn in hell forever. “I believe on faith”, I said, resolving to keep quiet. However, this did not last. Coached by mother and my father, an educator in his own right, to seek understanding, I was the inquisitive child, given to exploration. I hungered to understand who I was, why I was, and what I was supposed to do with the LIFE granted by some force far greater than what was obvious to my narrow vision.

When I was twelve, my mother, disgruntled with church politics (not the philosophy), took us out of the church to seek a different place of worship. That left me seeking a better place too, but none other than Christianity. After all, every community has its politics. I started going to church with high school friends when I was 15. A youthful and aspiring preacher convinced me that our previous congregation had Christianity twisted. Young and naïve, I started attending church with him. We were married shortly before my seventeenth birthday. Soon thereafter, my new husband was ordained as a Baptist preacher. Ironically, during the same time period, we learned of Ahmadiyyat through an old acquaintance of mine. Her new name, chosen after her conversion to Islam was, Khadijah Malik. She studied with my husband and me. Our first book was the *Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be on him). Khadijah also shared a book of Biblical references detailing how Christianity foretold of Islam. I

was shocked, intrigued, and wanted to know more. I asked a multitude of questions, so many that she became annoyed, but she never left me. She consoled us to pray to God without mentioning any other name. I did so and became a believer. Every question asked was answered by a person, a book, or through my prayers to God alone.

After many heartfelt discussions, my husband professed that he also believed. Unfortunately the timing was wrong; he was moving up in the church and did not want to jeopardize his position. The church had held a celebration recognizing his service and ability to incite the spirit of the congregation. All of the money raised went to our family. He was happier than ever before, so again, I had to rationalize my questions on the practice of faith and keep quiet. I told myself:

- That despite Jesus' sacrifice, we still sin because we choose to do so.
- Jewish people are not the select of God and their plight is a result of their disobedience. Therefore it is alright to be non-Jewish.
- No longer concerned about those that came before Prophet Jesus (peace be on him), I was focused on myself and my children.

My answers became philosophical and devoid of practicality.

The hypocrisy of those confessing to faith that had driven my mother out of the church crept back into sight. It was up close and personal. I continued to perform my Christian duties but my soul was no longer satisfied. I now believed that the root teachings of Christianity were weak and felt compelled to seek out the truth wherever it might exist. This time I focused on:

- Finding those that do not take sin lightly and worshipped God as He instructed.

- Finding those of genuine faith not segregated by race or economics.
- Having faith that I would recognize the believers when I found them.
- Accepting that those before Jesus (peace be on him) were not my responsibility.

My heart was in Islam but my body still went to church. My husband preached Islamic principles from the pulpit, and we thought the people would slowly come to understand. What he preached was diametrically opposed to Christianity. I soon realized that like sheep, they said Amen to anything. They did not seek for greater understanding. Once, I visited a “Nation of Islam” temple. I left incensed that, here too, one race was taken to be superior to another. I was saddened and my spirit broken watching well intentioned people faithfully follow the misguided.

I wanted to be with those I’d met at the mosque, those who sought a higher understanding of their Lord. I continued my search, while my husband did not. He kept preaching, and we eventually parted. At nineteen years of age, I found what my soul had searched for my entire life, Islam.

“Truth Withstands Doubts”

Amenah Shakir

Amenah became a Sunni Muslim in the year 1991. She was born in Cleveland, Ohio in a Baptist family. She had been very active in the church and sang in the church choir. She moved to Atlanta, Georgia and accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1999.

I first heard of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam in the summer of 1998, and by November 4th, 1999, I had signed the *Bai'at* form. Here is how my journey began. I was born into a Christian family in Cleveland, Ohio. My maternal grandfather had founded a Baptist church. He and my maternal uncle were both Baptist ministers. My whole family was actively involved in that church: my mother—an excellent church musician, my father—a church deacon and choir member, my aunts and uncles—all were active in the church. I sang in church choirs; I attended Sunday school; I directed a church choir, and I was a church musician. This was my family. When I was in the 5th grade, a friend and I read the Bible from cover to cover. This was the first time I had read it that way. The summer before I began the 8th grade, we were required to read the Bible from cover to cover, as we would have a comprehensive test on it our first day back to school. It was during these two periods of examining the Bible that I began to question my faith.

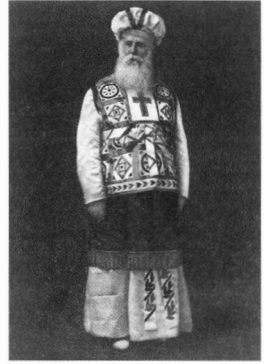
While living in New York City, I came across some literature from the World of Tomorrow, a Christian group whose headquarters was in Texas. They maintained, among other things, that true Christians would not observe Christmas (nothing about this festival was in keeping with anything Christian), true Christians would not believe

that Easter was grounded in truth, and no Christian would eat pork. In fact, they claimed that if one examined the popular festivals, one would realize that none of them were based in anything Christian or righteous. All of this was big news to me. I stopped considering myself as belonging to any particular sect of Christianity, and described myself only as a follower of Christ.

I then moved to Atlanta and met a Muslim, who would later become my husband. I began to read books he gave me about his religion, and found that what was described there seemed to agree with my view of myself. In 1991, I declared *Shahada* (declaration of the unity of God, with Muhammad as His messenger) and declared myself a Muslim. It did not seem to be a big move for me as I thought that the Christianity I was practicing was just mislabeled; I felt I was a Muslim before I made it official.

In the summer of 1998, I traveled to Los Angeles to visit my brother and his family. We stayed there for one week, and on Thursday of that week, we looked for a mosque to attend *Jum'a* (Friday prayers). My sister-in-law found one in the telephone book not too far from their house. After the prayer services, we were invited to sit in the office with a man who explained that this was the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam, and he described the differences. Chiefly, he said that they believe in the Promised Messiah (peace be on him), who came to fulfill the second coming of Jesus Christ (peace be on him), while the other sects of Islam were still waiting for him to come; and that Jesus had died a natural death, and would not be returning in his same form. I had never heard of this group, and everything I heard was new to me. He gave us some literature, and we left. It was a lot of new information, and I did not believe immediately. One thing did stand out for me. There was a Prayer Duel between the Promised Messiah and Alexander Dowie, and in that duel, the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) prayed that

whoever of the two was a false claimant should die in disgrace before the other. The Promised Messiah had essentially called down a curse on the one who was not true. If the Promised Messiah was not who he said he was, then he had cursed himself. This was a very strong act of personal belief, and I could not get this out of my mind.



My husband and I attended many Ahmadiyya functions when we returned home to Atlanta, Georgia. My husband understood and accepted the truth right away, but it took me quite a while. As a *Sunni* Muslim, I was taught that there would be no other prophets after the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and I could not reconcile this with the claim of the Promised Messiah. I was also taught that Jesus was taken alive to Heaven and would return to Earth. These two “facts” kept me from accepting the message given by the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam. I kept reading and listening, and eventually I came to understand the difference between the *Sunnis* and the *Ahmadis*. I signed the *Bai’at* form in 1999.

I believe, because I had questions about my beliefs, I was open to hearing different viewpoints and different interpretations of facts. I believe that the truth can stand up to questions. It is not wrong to ask—I am responsible for what I believe and for what I do so I need to understand what I claim to believe. Almighty Allah invites whomsoever He wills to the truth. Nothing I did brought me to the acceptance of this community, rather it was Almighty Allah’s Grace and Beneficence. On the Day of Judgment, I believe that I will be judged for what I possessed during my lifetime, and what I did with it. I think this includes physical possessions, talents, skills and abilities, and any understanding of fundamental truths. I believe that

anything I have that is “good” is to be shared with others. I believe that I must live my life so that I may be seen as an example of one trying to follow the right path.

“An Early Seeker”

Saliha Haneef

Saliha was born in Charlotte, North Carolina and accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1948. She currently resides in Sharon, Massachusetts.

I shall always regard 1948 as the pivotal year of my life. So many life-altering events occurred for me during that year that I consider it to be the year of my redemption.

I was born in Charlotte, North Carolina to a devoutly religious Christian mother. Some of my earliest and happiest memories are about attending religious services with my mother. Religion had always had a dominant role in our lives. My mother’s life revolved primarily around her church activities; so, at an early age she exposed me to the practice of regular church attendance and participation. In the small town of Charlotte, the majority of people were members of some denomination of Christianity. Therefore, I had almost no contact with people of other faiths.

In my early youth, my family, like so many other Southern families, decided to migrate north to New York in search of economic advancement. After our move to New York and my enrollment in public school there, I was exposed for the first time to different religious beliefs and practices, as well as other secular, political and social ideologies.

My youth became a time of turmoil, as I attempted to sort through the myriad of new ideas with which I was confronted. That was a time of active street propagation, and it seemed as if every street corner had a contingency of followers espousing some cause, many with seemingly convincing arguments.

My church attendances became irregular after my exposure to these influences, and I even began to question the church's validity. However, my mother continually attempted to involve me and encouraged me to resume participation.

As the youngest of my mother's children, we had always had a very close relationship. This was also fostered because of the age difference with my siblings who were much older, and they were absent due to employment and other activities.

Because of our relationship, I hesitated to do anything that would upset or hurt my mother. So, I began to study my Bible in search of answers to my dilemma and to actively pray for guidance and deliverance.

During this time, a fellow student introduced me to a young man at my high school. He had recently been discharged from the U.S. Army. During his Army service, he had met a young recruit who was related to the Ahmadiyya Jama'at President of New York. Although he was not an *Ahmadi*, himself, he had spoken of his relative and his "new" religion. Being exposed again to the street propagation about Islam revived his interest, and he began an active search for the local chapter.

In 1948, I married the young man to whom I had been introduced, and in 1948, shortly after our marriage, Allah blessed us with the gift of Islam.

We both like to say that our conversion was not the result of dreams, visions or supernatural occurrences. I regard it as the answer to my youthful prayer. We simply heard the voices of the early "Callers to Faith", and Allah in His mercy allowed our hearts to be inspired and captivated by their message. All praise belongs to Allah.

“The Mystery of Three”

Aida Lelcaj

Aida accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 2006. She was born in Albania and presently resides in St. Louis, Missouri.



My name is Aida Lelcaj. By the grace of Allah I took my *Bai'at* on December 31, 2006 (*Eid-ul-Adha* day) and officially became an *Ahmadi* Muslim. I hope the story of my road to Ahmadiyyat will inspire you in some way, *Inshallah*.

I was born a Catholic in the tiny village of Vermosh in northern Albania. I had a good childhood, but religion was insignificant in my life. Although my family and I considered ourselves Catholics, we did not practice Christianity regularly. The only religious education my siblings and I received was a few months of Catholic classes in elementary and middle school. At the age of 14, I first heard about the concept of Trinity. At this point I was too young to understand or care about these religious classes. I specifically recall the day when we learned about the concept of Trinity. Several of my classmates had questions on this topic. But our teacher kept repeating, “God is three in one and it’s a mystery that we will never understand”. I never understood it, as I was too young, and never realized how important this concept would become to me in future. My parents both grew up in Albania during the communist era. Religion of any sort was against the law. They raised their children with the same religious knowledge they had, which was not

significant. All that my parents knew was that Jesus Christ is God and those who believed otherwise were sinners. I had the same mind set until I began college. I looked down upon people who did not believe what I believed as poor and misguided. However my views would slowly begin to change during my freshman year in college.

In one of my classes in college I became friends with one of my *Ahmadi* Muslim classmates. We began to have religious conversations, and I was deeply disturbed to find out that this new friend of mine knew more about Christianity than I did. During our religious discussions, I found out that I was not able to adequately answer his questions about Christianity. I was certain there were answers out there to all of his questions, but unfortunately, I did not have those answers. In an effort to prove my friend wrong about Christianity, I decided to learn everything there was to know and show him how wrong he was not to believe in Christ as God. I began to read the Bible in great detail as well as reading questions/answer sessions online on various religious sites. I soon became very frustrated because I was not finding the answers I was looking for. I needed clarity on issues such as original sin, the Trinity and the death of Jesus. All my research was leading me down a more confusing road.

I decided to join a Bible study group where I could talk to an educated scholar about my questions. I joined a Bible study group at my local Catholic Church. The group instructor was a highly educated woman. She informed us that she had been a Bible instructor for over 25 years, and she even had a doctorate in theology. I was very excited to have found this woman; I was sure she would help me fully understand Christianity. The Bible classes were great, and we learned many new things about the Bible that none of us knew before. The only downside was that my confusion

about Christianity had now mushroomed. I was more confused than ever before. One of the most frustrating things for me at this time was that my questions were never really answered. According to our Bible instructor, the Bible is a book of theology. By definition, theology is the understanding of God, so the writers of the Bible documented their own experiences and views based on their understanding of religion at the time. This meant that all of the many contradictions in the Bible are because of the fact that it was written based on people's understanding of God. I was shocked by the fact that I was the only one troubled by this information. I could not understand why no one else in my class had the same disturbed look on their faces as I did.

This was about the time when I really started to question whether my Muslim friend was wrong, after all, in his views on Christianity. How could it be that millions of Christians around the world honestly and whole heartedly believed in a religion based on the "understanding" of a few people thousands of years ago? Had other Christians never thought about the questions I asked? At this point I knew Christianity was not the right religion. I could not continue to believe in something that was based on blind faith. Trinity, original sin and the death of Jesus on the cross made no logical sense to me. Christians are told to have blind faith and to believe in Jesus Christ because he died for our sins. There is no doubt that Jesus Christ was a wonderful prophet of God who was born to spread the word of God, but he did not die for my sins. How could he have? I was not born during Jesus' time. The only person who can die for my sins is me. I am responsible for my own good deeds and bad deeds. I could write a whole thesis on the many Christian concepts with which I do not agree.

My Muslim friend was right after all. Islam is the only religion that gave me the satisfaction of the heart that I was searching for. That

is why I am grateful and proud to be a part of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam. All praise belongs to Allah.

“My Path to Ahmadiyyat Islam”

Saleana Reno

Saleana was born in Tacoma, Washington. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in November, 2001 and lives in Beaverton, Oregon.

I was born in May, 1977 in Tacoma, Washington. My father was in the military, so my two sisters and I traveled around the world throughout our childhood. Our parents were strict Pentecostal Christians and raised us in the same faith.

When my father retired from the military, we moved to Vancouver, Washington, where I graduated from high school. After high school, I did not keep in touch with the church. Growing up, I had a lot of questions about our religion. My parents and friends would say, “That’s just the way it is.” I never really got a logical answer for any of my questions. So for several years I did not go to church and did not think too much about religion. It’s not that I did not believe in God; I always believed in God, but there were questions that I had about Jesus (peace be on him) and other things in the Bible.

Then, in 1998, my aunt, who was a Pentecostal minister, passed away. I received several of her Bibles including her teaching Bibles with all her notes. While taking some time reading through her notes, I still had questions. So I decided to go back to church and thought I would be able to find answers and come to a place in my heart that would confirm my belief.

In December 1999, a friend of mine introduced me to her brother-in-law and presently, my husband, Richard Reno. He told me he was a Muslim, so a lot of our conversations were about religion and our different faiths. He gave me several books about Islam and helped

in answering questions that I had on the differences between Islam and Christianity. After a few weeks of studying, Islam seemed very clear to me. And after about a month of educating myself about Islam, I decided that I was going to stop going to the Pentecostal church and really focus my mind on Islam and learning about this religion.

Richard invited me to the mosque on *Eid*, so my friend and I went. That was the first time I had ever been to or seen a mosque. When we walked in, there was a lady in the mosque who immediately greeted us and showed us upstairs to the prayer area. I remember taking off my shoes and sitting there thinking how beautiful the mosque was. Each lady that walked in greeted us. We did not join the prayers but sat and observed. I remember listening to the sound of the Imam saying the prayers and how I thought it was the most peaceful sound. I was mesmerized by the sound and how beautiful prayer was in Islam. After the prayer and the sermon, we were invited to be the first to take our food. During lunch, we talked with all the ladies. I will never forget the hospitality we received that day and how welcomed we were made to feel. It was so different from all the first times I had walked into a Christian Church. I had never seen that much kindness given to two strangers coming into a religious building. After leaving there, I remember feeling as though I wanted to hurry back. The very next Friday, I went to *Jum'a* (Friday prayer), and I kept going every Friday after that.

When I told my parents that I was no longer going to church and that I had been learning about Islam, they were a little concerned at first. I gave them some literature and explained to them that I really felt at peace with this religion. After reading and talking with them, they were very supportive of my decision. The most important thing to them was that I still had God in my life.

In May of 2000, I had grown to love Islam and knew in my heart

that I wanted to be a Muslim. After going to the mosque and learning all about Islam, I decided in October, 2001 to sign the *Bai'at*.

“Breaking the Cross”

Salma Ghani

Salma was born and raised in North Carolina, the youngest of twelve children. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1963 in Philadelphia where she still resides.

I was born and reared in the Bible belt area of North Carolina. At the young age of 15, I began to question the concept of Jesus dying on the cross for my sins. Many discussions between my mother and me as well as the minister and a few deacons were held on this topic. For some reason I did not believe nor could I accept that a loving, just and merciful God would punish any person by death on the cross for the sins or wrong-doings of others. By the age of 19, I felt very guilty in not believing all of what Christianity was based on. I wanted to find a religion that would leave me with no doubts, a religion whose teachings I could accept as truth. In my early twenties, I visited many churches and even signed up for 12 weeks of Catholic instruction, but I did not find what I was searching for nor did I know exactly what I was searching for. Later, I read about other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and other Christian sects.

There was some good in all of them but none of them met my expectations. Finally, I stopped going to church and decided that I would continue to believe in God and try to live a life that would please Him. Then one day a friend who had recently accepted Islam gave me a pamphlet and asked me to read it. I gave it back and said that it was a waste of time, because I believed in God and that was enough. The friend left me with the pamphlet and later I glanced at it. It was entitled *JESUS DID NOT DIE ON THE CROSS*. As I

read the pamphlet, tears ran down my cheeks. I felt alive, as if a part of me had been dead for years. The pamphlet gave me the answers to all of the questions related to the death of Jesus. In my heart and mind I knew this was the truth that I had been seeking for years. Several days later, I visited the mosque and purchased other books on Islam and finally became a Muslim. In summary, it was this pamphlet that brought me to Islam, the true religion.

“The Road to the Mosque”

Fatima Mahmud

Fatima was born in Arlington, Virginia, and raised in Washington, DC. She accepted Ahmadiyyat in August, 1965. She resides in Queens, New York.

As a child, whenever I felt troubled, depressed, or frightened at home, I would go to my room and sit on the bed and pray to God, asking for His protection and His mercy. Within moments, a vision would appear to me of a wondrous garden full of luscious green plants and trees. I would see beautiful, colorful flowers as well as fruits lying beside my feet. I would see birds flying and chirping their beautiful tunes in my vision, and instantly I would feel calm and peaceful. Little did I know then the full significance of the vision, but by the grace of God, I found out later in my life, when I became a Muslim, the importance of this vision.

I grew up going to a Baptist Church because my father was a Baptist. However, I never embraced Baptism because there were numerous things about it with which I wasn't satisfied. I wasn't pleased with the excessive gossiping and backbiting among the members, as well as too much emphasis on appearances and not enough on religious teaching. The ministers seemed to be more concerned with collecting money and flirting with the women, though they were married themselves. The sermons and presentations on the Bible were unclear and not beneficial for me.

At age 12, I accepted Roman Catholicism mainly because I began attending Catholic School and was impressed with the ceremonial atmosphere of the Catholic Church. For the next ten years, I attempted to adhere to that faith, but still had conflicting thoughts.

I had a lot of questions and not enough answers. I tried to find the answers, but whenever I approached the priests, I was told that it was too much for me to understand, and I should just have faith and not question my belief. I was told that it was not appropriate to question my belief in God in any manner. I became more and more frustrated and thought that I had a right to have answers to my questions about my faith.

The question that disturbed me the most was regarding belief in the Trinity - three Gods in one. This concept didn't make sense to me, but the priests told me that I dare not question it; it was blasphemy not to believe in the Trinity. However, I did not believe in the Trinity. How can there be three Gods in one God I thought? No, I knew in my heart that there is only One God. But as I looked around me, everyone said that they believed in the Trinity—even my parents. Was I crazy or sick and a bad person because I didn't believe in the Trinity?

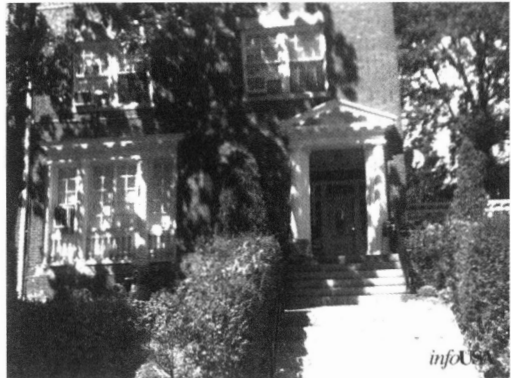
I was completely disgusted with Catholicism; I turned to other denominations, only to realize that almost all Christian's faiths taught belief in the Trinity. So I could no longer consider myself a Christian. But then, if I wasn't a Christian, what was I? My parents were completely furious with me and said that I was just going through adolescent changes. But I knew that it was much more than that.

By the late 1950's, I was attending college and was among students from many foreign countries and different religions. Some students didn't believe in the existence of God at all; even some of the professors didn't believe in God and taught the preference for science over religion. Nevertheless, I was sure that this was not true. God does exist! And He is One not Three! I thought that there must be some religion that teaches the Oneness of God. So I began looking and searching for other religions, especially eastern

religions. And I was not alone in this. By now it was the early 1960's, and many people were beginning to question who they were and their spiritual beliefs.

In January of 1965, a personal tragedy occurred that dramatically altered my life—my mother passed away suddenly of cerebral hemorrhage. She was the core of my being, and without her I felt like an orphan. Completely devastated, I sought solace in the church. For months, I wondered aimlessly, full of grief. Just then, a friend and co-worker who had recently converted to Islam approached me and invited me to come to her mosque and learn about Islam. Though I agreed to do so, I procrastinated. One month later, she came to me again, this time insisting that I come with her. So I did! It was the American Fazl Mosque in Washington D.C. It also happened that it was the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr*. What a wonderful experience that was. The people were so warm, welcoming and full of religious fervor. The mosque was beautiful and one could feel the deep spiritual atmosphere inside. But most importantly, they prayed to one God—Allah! Needless to say, I was fascinated with all of this. The missionary introduced himself to me and gave me a book to read and asked me to come back to see him after I had read it.

The book was *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, by the Promised Messiah (peace be on him), and it totally changed my life. It answered every question that I had about God, and faith in Him, and provided answers to questions that I didn't even realize I had. It



Fazl Mosque, Washington, DC

opened my mind to wonders that I couldn't have imagined. I almost converted on the spot. About one month later, the missionary called me into his office and gave me two more books—*Ahmadiyyat: the True Islam*, and *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat*. These two books removed any further doubts that I may have had. It was about this time that I began to have dreams and visions about Islam. In one particular dream, a powerful voice kept repeating “God is One, God is One” then I heard “*La Ilaha Ilallah.*” Upon further investigation, I learned that this was the *Kalima*. I was so overwhelmed and filled with joy and certainty that I had found my true faith, *Subhanallah.*

By the Grace of Allah, I signed *Bai'at* on August 1st, 1965. I felt like I had come home to Islam and Ahmadiyyat. I have lived in joy, certainty of faith, and hope of salvation ever since that day. Allah is my One and Only God, and the supreme purpose for my existence. All praise belongs to Him!

“A Sparkling Gem”

Aliyyah Shaheed

(as prepared for the project: *History of Lajna*)

Aliyyah accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1936. She had been a member of the African Methodist Church. She was elected President of the Ahmadiyya National Ladies' Auxiliary (Lajna Imaillah) in 1963. Aliyyah's efforts in organizing and educating Ahmadi women in America have been integral to the growth of Lajna USA.

Commitment—she wears it like a royal robe. It is so striking one can't help but notice. Her lifestyle portrays a dedication to a course of action that is clear, straight and uninterrupted. Here is a heart in which the germ of Ahmadiyyat was implanted for safe-keeping 65 years ago, and the gem it has subsequently produced is the Aliyyah Shaheed so many have come to love and respect. Mostly, one must listen intently when she speaks. Her voice is so soft, her manner so self-effacing, her smile so shy, you may miss the wisdom there. But it is always there; resolute, quiet and tall, like a mountain.

The impact of Aliyyah Shaheed's dedication and the power of her personal influence, are felt far beyond the Ahmadiyya Mission House in Pittsburgh where she worships. Indeed, in 1992, at Central Lajna Imaillah's International Golden Jubilee in Pakistan, International President Maryam Saddiqa lauded Aliyyah for outstanding service to Lajna for, at that time, 35 years. Twenty-eight years later, in 2000, at age 87, and long since widowed, she continues to contribute to Lajna. Besides working when and how she can locally, she has, for 15 years, been advisor to the National Lajna President. Aliyyah's judgment and wisdom, her vision and

counsel have been of immeasurable benefit to National Lajna. The tale of how her dedication to service began is an intriguing one.

It was 1934. Then Ella Louise Lynn, she was engaged to be married. She and her fiancé, William Frank Browning, were members of the African Methodist Church. They were happily planning a church wedding there, when Ahmadiyyat was introduced to her Pittsburgh community. Suddenly, Browning's parents, who had just accepted Ahmadiyyat, were proselytizing her fiancé. He was drawn to the new faith, and told his bride-to-be about it. He begged her to attend an Ahmadiyya meeting with him. "He was so enthused," she says, "but I just could not go. Yet I could tell he would soon accept Ahmadiyyat." Aliyyah was a Christian, an African Methodist, after all, and had been carefully nurtured in the bosom of her parents to remain just that.

The inevitable strain from their now diverging value systems began to show in the relationship, and it became rocky for a while. Finally, the dawn arrived when her fiancé declared that his heart could "no longer accept Christianity as his faith." William Browning formally accepted Ahmadiyyat and took the name Ahmad Shaheed. Years later, he became an outstanding president of the Pittsburgh Ahmadiyya community and an influential figure nationally.

When the couple decided to marry despite their religious differences, they pacified each other by promising to respect their faiths. Their marriage vows, however, would be solemnized, not by a minister of either religion, but by a Justice of the Peace, in Civil Court. This was done in 1935. The couple would later have one son, Omar Shaheed, who also became President of the Pittsburgh community, thus carrying on the hard working tradition of his parents.

Aliyyah Shaheed went to live in the home of her *Ahmadi* in-laws. "My in-laws were kind. They did not force Islam on me," she says.

Also living in the home was a family friend, Abu Kalam. He too, had recently converted to Ahmadiyyat. Fiery and aggressive, having not the restraint of her husband and in-laws, he took Aliyyah as his personal conversion target.

His dissection of Christianity was thorough and devastating to the young woman. Though she doggedly kept attending her African Methodist Church, she found herself less and less able to merge her heart with its doctrine. Even as the minister preached, memory of Kalam's arguments superimposed themselves on her mind.

Aliyyah began surreptitiously reading Ahmadiyya literature, when her husband and in-laws were away at the mosque. Particularly drawn to *Ahmadiyyat, or the True Islam*, by Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him), she gradually began questioning Kalam about passages she did not understand. "He, of course was delighted," she recalls, and he told her she was beginning to 'feel' Islam. The Ahmadiyya congregation began holding classes at her in-laws' home, and she attended. Her equivocation about the church finally solidified into disinterest.

One day, her husband told her an *Ahmadi* missionary from Chicago would visit Pittsburgh. Would she go? "Yes," she answered. Sufi M.R. Bengalee lectured on the topic 'Jesus did not die on the Cross.' "I never, as a member, went back to church again, after that," Aliyyah says. Instead she began attending the mosque. She saw the name 'Aliyyah' in a book and asked her husband to pronounce it. Later, the Jama'at president, Abu Salih, told her she could have that name if she wanted it. "I was so proud of my new name. Everyone called me Aliyyah. I became *Ahmadi* Muslim in 1936. A new surge of love for God erupted in my heart, and I have tried to learn as much as I can about God, Islam and Ahmadiyyat ever since," Aliyyah says.

Aliyyah's learning as much as she could has benefited the cause of

Ahmadiyyat Islam in America. Commitment to learning progressed to dedication, and to teaching and service. For years, Aliyyah worked in the mosque—cleaning, cooking, entertaining, fundraising, preaching, overseeing, nursing the sick and spiritless, donating money, counseling, praying, turning the other cheek, and remaining steadfast.



Some very early American converts to Ahmadiyyat Islam as printed in the "Moslem Sunrise"

In 1945, Aliyyah became the fifth local president of Lajna Imaillah in Pittsburgh. This was before Lajna was organized as it is today. Though the women's auxiliary carried the name 'Lajna Imaillah,' it had no access to Lajna's Constitution, and so the organization was not framed within its guidelines. Still, the sisterhood worked diligently and effectively under Aliyyah's leadership.

Between 1969 and 1971, when Aliyyah became local president again, Lajna had long since been structured constitutionally. In fact, Aliyyah says one of her favorite memories is participating in organizing National Lajna along Constitutional lines. Aliyyah's final two terms as Pittsburgh's local president, was in 1973 for a year, and from 1978 to 1979.

Nationally, Aliyyah Shaheed was elected Lajna President, U.S.A., by majority vote of the general membership in 1963. She served from

1963 to 1966. Hadhrat Maryam Saddiqa, Lajna's International President, later appointed her in 1972, to serve as U.S. National President for one year, completing the term for a President who was unable to serve due to illness. When Aliyyah resumed office, there were 12 functioning Lajna branches. They continued to operate under her watch, and membership even increased. Aliyyah was also National Finance Secretary at the same time.

Aliyyah's primary goal was to bring about a new level of 'togetherness' within the sisterhood. Toward that end, she wrote letter upon letter, instructing, gently scolding where necessary, and encouraging sisters to become like a "wall cemented together with molten lead." (This was one of her favorite Qur'anic quotations).

She also sponsored new institutions—the first American Mosque Fund and the first Muslim Student Scholarship Fund. She instituted "Annual Propagation Day," where sisters held events to proselytize Islam. As propagation was emphasized, Lajna mailed hundreds of literature leaflets, as well as placed the *Holy Qur'an* in libraries. The *Ayesha* magazine was also made available to libraries. Aliyyah had asked the Central Lajna President to name Lajna America's magazine, and *Ayesha* was the name thus bestowed.

Sister Aliyyah published reprints of Lajna's Constitution, *The Path of Faith, and Our Duties*. Under Aliyyah's prodding, American Lajna contributed handsomely to help build a mosque in Copenhagen, Denmark, and toward the refurbishing of the Mission Houses in Dayton, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Chicago.

During Aliyyah's presidency, American Lajna, as a cohesive body, was still very much in its infancy. At the time, 98-percent of the membership was American converts. Communication methods were slow, also money was scarce, equipment for Lajna work was practically non-existent, and Lajna was not an autonomous body. There was constant guidance at the local level from missionaries,

and in some cases from local Jama'at presidents. National Lajna could not even maintain jurisdiction over the money it raised. Missionaries kept Lajna's money in its headquarters' bank account. If National Lajna needed money for anything it was necessary to go through the missionary, and the project had to be sanctioned by him. A missionary even attended Lajna's National Amila (officers') and Shura (deliberation) meetings. Aliyyah emphasizes, however, that as President, she never had any trouble working with the missionaries, nor had any problem with request for disbursements. Moral training programs prompted sisters to observe five daily prayers, and to fast during the month of *Ramadhan*. Modest dress was also emphasized, but the "Islamic dress code was not stressed in the early days of Lajna," Aliyyah says. Yet there were some Lajna members who strictly observed *Purdah* in the mosque.

Educationally, every sister was to learn to read the *Holy Qur'an* in Arabic, and to read daily a portion of the *Holy Qur'an* with commentary. Nasirat (girls' auxiliary) programs were generally left for local chapters to develop, but national leadership stressed creating a syllabus that would generate eagerness within the girls to attend meetings.

Aliyyah was National Vice-President of Lajna from 1961 to 1963, and from 1971 to early 1972. In 1962—1963, and again in 1968—1969, Aliyyah was National Education Secretary. Sometimes she carried two or three offices at once. As National Finance Secretary for six years (1969-1975), Aliyyah received high commendations for her ability to move sisters to financial sacrifice and for her consistent, clear and prompt reports and excellent record keeping. Indeed, Aliyyah has probably received more commendations, awards and merit plaques than almost any member of Lajna.

As is typical of her, Aliyyah attributes what others call her "so many successful achievements" to the help and cooperation she received

from other Lajna sisters. “All of my national officers worked and helped me serve as National President. They also helped with my other duties,” she says. Aliyyah says she is especially grateful for the mentoring provided by Saeeda Lateef, Lajna’s sixth National President, who, Aliyyah says was a “natural born leader.” Saeeda would say they mentored each other. “I tried to establish unity between sisters. With unity, Lajna could accomplish anything,” Aliyyah says.

With internal unity, also, one can accomplish “anything.” That is probably Aliyyah Shaheed’s most enduring legacy—she is blessed with certainty. It surrounds her like a halo. And she spreads her certainty about the mission of Ahmadiyyat with generosity and aplomb. If she can’t reach a member in person or by telephone, she’ll write you a letter. She has probably been the most prodigious letter-writer in Lajna.

During some of the Movement’s most turbulent trials in America, when confusion, doubt and weariness licked at the heels of some of its most undaunted members, Aliyyah was there with a letter: “Hold fast to the rope of Allah. Don’t be divided. This is just a trial.” (This is another one of her favorite sayings). She would always remind sisters of the *Holy Qur’an’s* wisdom.

When once asked about her response to difficulties and trials, she answered, “I have witnessed many trials in the Ahmadiyya Movement, but I try not to copy anybody’s weakness, but rather try to remain steadfast and win the pleasure of Allah.” That philosophy provides the foundation upon which the power of Aliyyah Shaheed’s personal influence rests. She influences others towards tenacity, faith, commitment, love—year after year, she is an extraordinarily continuous woman. She has been thus for over a half century. By her very nature, she is a tower of strength to hungering human souls around her. Aliyyah says that she feels her

“most important accomplishment was gaining the respect and love of my sisters.”

Chapter 4

The Messiah Has Come

How I Came to Accept

Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be on him)

“...he was the Promised Prophet of every nation and was appointed to collect all mankind under the banner of one faith. In him were centered the hopes and expectations of all nations; he is the Dome of Peace under which every nation may worship its Maker; he is the opening through which all nations may obtain a vision of their Lord...All prophecies of previous Prophets were fulfilled in his person and at his hands...God has fulfilled the hopes and expectations of all nations in the person of the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement. The clouds of His Mercy have sent down showers of rain, and lands which had been parched have been watered; blessed is he who collects this water in his fields, and renouncing all manner of pride and hypocrisy holds his faith above the riches and glories of this world.”

Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him), “Invitation to Ahmadiyyat”, 1924

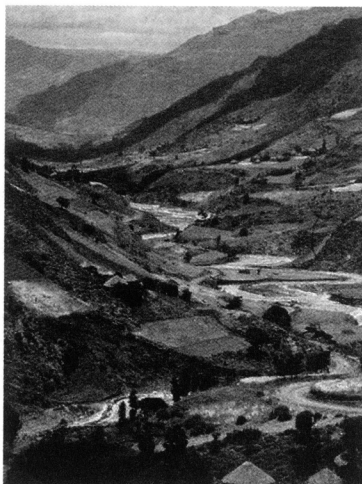
“The True Face of Imam Mahdi”

Parisa Jaffari

Parisa is a native of Isfahan, Iran. She belonged to the Shia sect of Islam before accepting Ahmadiyyat in 2005. Parisa came to the United States when she was 2 years old. She went back to Iran between the ages of 9 and 18. After returning to the U.S. she settled in Silicon Valley, California with her parents and siblings. Parisa is currently working for a pharmaceutical company as an analytic chemist.

Ever since I was a child, I prayed that the Mahdi would come during my lifetime. Born in a *Shia* family, I believed the Mahdi of the time had not yet come. Having grown up in Iran, I heard a lot of stories and fairy tales about the Imam Mahdi, who is the Twelfth Imam according to *Shia* traditions. One of the many things I was taught about the Mahdi was that he can be in many places at the same time and can have many forms and faces. And one very famous saying was that he is like the sun behind a cloud: even though you don't see him, you can see its light and effect. So I prayed and prayed sincerely that God would show me the light of Imam Mahdi. My desire to find the Mahdi did not abate after I moved to the U.S. almost six years ago, and my love for Islam only grew stronger, *Alhamdulillah*.

I was introduced to Ahmadiyyat through one of my friends. The



Isfahan, Iran

thought that the Mahdi had already come was, at first, mind boggling. It meant that all my beliefs and dreams were destroyed and invalid. I always thought the advent of the Mahdi would mark a dramatic transformation in the world. I thought that the world would change to a peaceful loving place in which to live when the Mahdi arrived. On the contrary, 9/11 occurred and much more suffering was taking place in the world. How was it that the Mahdi had come and no one in Iran knew anything about it, and they were the people whom I saw praying most for the Mahdi to come? It took me a while to feel comfortable with this fact. Even though what I heard from my friend about Ahmadiyyat stunned me, I became more curious and wanted to explore these new beliefs. There was a tremendous need inside me to find the truth, so I decided to go to the *Ahmadi* Mosque to see these Muslims myself whose Mahdi had come.

To my surprise, about everyone there was Pakistani. So I started to think that maybe it's just a Pakistani thing that the Mahdi had come, because similarly in Iran, Baha-Allah had claimed to be the Mahdi, and he also has many followers. But there was something different about these Pakistani *Ahmadis*. They were so kind and loving, and they talked about Islam with great fervor and passion. I could see the love for Islam kindled in their hearts. My visits to the mosque increased in frequency, and somehow I started to develop a sense of belonging to this Jama'at. I felt like there was something binding me to these people, though I couldn't explain what it was.

I then started reading the book *Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, Life of the Promised Messiah* by Iain Adamson. I was intrigued to know about this person who had captured the hearts and minds of millions of people all over the globe, and I wanted to know if he really was the Mahdi I'd been awaiting since I was a young child. As I read through the book, I started to feel a sort of connection to this

person, and I was left in total awe by the time I reached the end of the book.

But all this was still not enough; my heart was not at peace, and there was still much more I wanted to know to quiet the doubts racing through my mind. So I read the *Holy Qur'an* with the *Ahmadi* commentary, I listened to the questions and answers by Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him), and I discussed Ahmadiyyat with *Ahmadis* and also my non-Ahmadi friends.

The more I learned about Ahmadiyyat, the more evident the truth of Ahmadiyyat became and weaker grew my conviction in the beliefs I used to hold. The impeccable logic of Ahmadiyyat left my mind with no option other than to accept it, but something in my heart held me back. It was intimidating and difficult for me to declare to myself the fact that Ahmadiyyat was indeed the truth. This ambivalent situation I was now in troubled me a lot. So I resorted to praying fervently that God should show me the right path. During the last night of *Ramadhan* I performed *Istikhara* (prayer for guidance regarding a matter) and started reading the *Holy Qur'an*.

One evening, as I was reading the *Holy Qur'an*, I came across the verse: “*And when they hear what has been revealed to this Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears, because of the truth which they have recognized. They say, ‘Our Lord, we believe, so write us down among the witnesses;’ And why should we not believe in Allah and in the truth which has come to us, while we earnestly wish that our Lord should include us among the righteous people?*” (Chapter 5, verses 84-85). It seemed like this verse was the answer to my prayers, and I felt like God was talking directly to me. No words can explain adequately how I felt in that moment. I knew in that moment that I was an *Ahmadi*, and after I said my morning prayers, I performed *Bai'at* (initiation). My heart was finally at peace.

The next day I went to the mosque for *Eid* prayer, and it was one of the greatest days of my life. I was so happy to start my first day as an *Ahmadi* on a blessed day. I felt as if I was in darkness and had come into light!

It has been about eight months that I have been officially an *Ahmadi*, and I can not fully describe in words what Ahmadiyyat is for me. In Ahmadiyyat, I found the true God; I found Allah *Al-Hayy* (The Living) who speaks today as He spoke to His prophets before; I found Allah *Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahmeen* (The Gracious, The Merciful) who would never deprive His people of His guidance and leave them bewildered and wandering without direction when He has always delivered His people from their darkness by raising a prophet from among them. The same God who talked to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), Jesus, Moses (peace be upon them) and thousands of prophets before had now manifested Himself again through the Imam and Mahdi of our time, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be upon him).

Not only did I find the true God in Ahmadiyyat, but I also found the true Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said, "Islam started as something strange and it will return back as a strange thing, so give glad tidings to the strangers." Islam has indeed come back through Ahmadiyyat, and I am so glad to be from among the strangers.

Accepting Ahmadiyyat is, of course, not the end of my journey. I am at the very beginning of a long voyage into the beauties of Islam. I frequently find myself needing to re-read the Ten Conditions of *Bai'at* to make sure I am on the right path. The ladies of Milpitas Jama'at have been a source of great guidance and comfort to me, and I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to them. Especially living in these modern times, I feel it is so easy to lose connection with our real purpose in life and become overwhelmed by the attractions

of the world. My prayer is that I will always remember Allah, and that this will give me the strength to serve Him in the best way. Allah has given me His greatest gift—Ahmadiyyat, the True Islam—and I pray that I can prove myself worthy of His love, and convey His beautiful message to my family, my friends, and all those around me, *Inshallah*.

“My Open Mind”

Aasilah Faheem

Aasilah was born in Lahore, Pakistan in a Wababi family. She studied medicine at the King Edward Medical College in Lahore. She became a member of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam in April of 1996 and moved to the United States in the same year with her husband.

I began studying Ahmadiyyat thirteen years ago while in medical school. I was born and raised in a staunch *Wababi* family. Among the priorities in our lives, the love of Allah and the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) was at the top. In Pakistan, *Ahmadis* are looked down upon as the “*shudr*” caste of the Hindus i.e. the lowest of the very low. Ahmadiyyat is also popularly thought of as a Zionist plot. I began with a couple of introductory books on the basic beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Jama’at.

One of my uncles is the Imam of a local mosque in Lahore. He is not one of the usually illiterate *maulvis* (religious scholars), but holds a master’s degree in Arabic and can communicate fluently in the language. I went to him, requesting a couple of books from his massive library about Ahmadiyyat. While at his place, his son asked me why I was interested in studying Ahmadiyyat? I told him that I was discussing it with a colleague. I still remember his grim face when he said, “It is too hard. *Ahmadis* do not convert.” My uncle, though a strong opponent, told my mother, “*Ahmadi* men do not drink alcohol, are regular in their five daily prayers, and their women observe *Purdah* (veil), but their belief in *Khatame Nabbuwat* (the finality of Prophethood) will take them to hell.” In fact the finality of Prophethood and death of Jesus Christ (peace be on him) are the

only differences between Ahmadiyyat and Wahabiyyat. I remember when I was in fourth or fifth grade, my mother showed me some ladies in strict *Purdah* and whispered to me, “Aasilah, these are *Mirzai* (derogatory identification for *Ahmadis*) women”. With this background, I began studying Ahmadiyyat with a very closed mind. I knew for sure that *Ahmadis* were wrong and could never be right. However this biased thinking led me nowhere. Slowly, a time came when my own faith started to leave me with questions. Whenever I discussed a certain topic, I was forced to change my stance. I also went from one *aalim* (scholar) to another. I wrote letters and held personal meetings. It is not so easy to go on such a search single handedly in the hostile environment of Pakistan. Some *ulema* (learned scholars) did not respond, while others kept referring me from one scholar to another scholar. One staunch opponent of Ahmadiyyat even said, “The next step from Wahabiyyat is Ahmadiyyat.” I wonder if this is how Allah Ta’ala makes truth spill out from an opponent’s mouth. I once asked my father, who is *Hafiz-e-Qur’an* (memorized the Holy Qur’an) about the Holy Founder of Ahmadiyyat (peace be on him). He said, “Mirza Sahib was a very learned person. In fact his beliefs were identical to *Wahabi* beliefs, but then something went wrong and he claimed Prophethood.”

My own faith was leaving me with lots of grey areas, and it was then that I began studying Ahmadiyyat with an open mind. I honestly prayed for myself and begged Allah for true guidance. For the first time, since I had begun studying Ahmadiyyat, I opened my mind to the fact that my birth faith could be wrong too. It was a very scary feeling. I felt alone and timid and wondered why this was happening to me. I intensified my prayers. I remember once sitting in my room in my parent’s house, crying bitterly before Allah that I would sacrifice everything in this world to be kept on the path of the Holy

Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). Because all the hardships the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) had endured were for us, I wanted to live and die as his true follower so that he would be happy with me.

It was then, when I opened my mind and prepared myself for the fact that mainstream Islam could be wrong too, that black areas in Ahmadiyyat started appearing white. I read many books about our basic differences, and in the end, I was left with a few questions. I went to see a *murabbi* (missionary). He answered all of my questions and explained *Hadith* queries from the *Holy Qur'an*. I cannot forget how his eyes gleamed and his face shone with emotion during our discussion. In the end he told me that, as I had been studying Ahmadiyyat for a very long time, I should make a decision. After more prayers and good dreams, I became fully convinced that the anti-Ahmadiyya propaganda by mainstream Islam is based on sheer hatred and ignorance. *Alhamdulillah*, I signed my *Bai'at* (initiation) in April of 1996.

My parents totally abandoned me, as their favorite child had disgraced them and brought shame upon them. I am hopeful that it won't be the case in the hereafter, *Inshallah*.

I came to the United States in the summer of 1996. The US Lajna was my first Lajna. The Promised Messiah (peace be on him) has likened *Bai'at* to relocation into a new house with totally new surroundings. For adjustment, Allah Ta'ala provided me with an extremely kind American Lajna and in-laws. However my trials were just beginning. As Allah Ta'ala has promised in the *Holy Qur'an*, entering into a true religion is not the end of trials for a believer. It is just a beginning. It is Allah's way of differentiating between the weak and the steadfast. About five years ago, I went into a profound depression and started questioning my new faith. Only with Allah's Grace and the support of my husband, I came out of

that phase.

Now when I reflect upon that time, it was a period when I was entangled in diverse new roles and had lagged way behind in reading Jama'at books, mostly the works of the Holy Founder of Ahmadiyyat. I had been distracted and concentrating on the character of the people around me. I was looking in the wrong direction. I had looked around at the Lajna and wondered—where is the spirituality? All they seemed to observe were the latest fashions, and mothers were noisier than their children. Well, the answer is the same. You see what you are looking for. Jama'at-e-Ahmadiyya, like any other religious organizations has its share of all kinds of people. The question would then come to the minds of many pious souls who are studying Ahmadiyyat: if it does not make each one of its follower perfect, then why should we accept it? For those who are already at peace with themselves and their surroundings, what good would Ahmadiyyat bring to them? The answer lies in a famous reply of the first Ahmadiyya caliph, Hadhrat Hakim Maulvi Nooruddin (may Allah be pleased with him). When he was asked, “Maulvi Sahib, as a regular Muslim, you had abundant true dreams and often saw the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) in your dreams. Why did you then need to accept the *Bai'at* of Mirza Sahib?” At this Hadhrat Hakim Maulvi Nooruddin answered “Before accepting Ahmadiyyat, I used to see the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in my dreams. Now I see him even when I am awake.”

This is my continued journey into Ahmadiyyat. Remove your bias, pray fervently and read the books of the Jama'at and it will not take you three years to get there. Ahmadiyyat has given me contentment of my soul and peace of mind. It has also introduced me to a way of applied thinking, and it is a fulfillment of all promises and hopes that are expected from the Divine Messiah of the latter days.

“My Conviction in Faith Revitalized”

Shamim A. Sheikh

Shamim was born and raised in Pakistan. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1967 and moved to America in 1980. She resides in New Jersey. She served Lajna in the capacity of General Secretary, Social Secretary, Education Secretary, Tarbiyyat Secretary, Local President and Regional President.

I was brought up as a modest *Sunni* Muslim. Having neither an adequate knowledge of Islam, nor having an optimistic perception of it, I did not feel strongly about my faith. The prevalent customs and rituals practiced among Muslims those days seemed embarrassing, superficial and shallow. Characteristics ascribed to the Master Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) sounded irrational, and the adopted mode of meditation and worship appeared to be unreasonable. I always sensed a void between religion and intellect, between spirituality and logic. I was unable to ascertain any considerable authentication of Islam as the best of the religions as it was alleged to be; hence my spirit reflexively was searching for something superior and more practical. Those were days of confusion for me, and after having completed my degree, I had joined an academic institution.

To the best of my understanding, 1967 was the only year that the Ahmadiyyat community's *Jalsa Salana* at Rabwah was to take place in January instead of the preceding December. I came to know that the *Jalsa Salana* of the *Abraar* Jama'at, a group of antagonist to the *Ahmadis*, was also scheduled to take place in Chiniot (a town near Rabwah) simultaneously, in order to disrupt the peace of the Ahmadiyya Convention.

In many ways, it was motivating news, because my group of friends at my new job had become involved in discussions with a staff member who happened to be an *Ahmadi*. At the same time we were feeling quite self-conscious about our lack of knowledge on the topics of discussion. For this reason, while having engaged in friendly debates with her, any significant amusement was thought to be missing. She was prepared to leave to attend her *Jalsa* in Rabwah, and we decided to accompany her in order to attend the *Abraari* Convention in Chiniot. In view of our deficiency in religious understanding, the intended motive behind this trip was to better equip ourselves for our debates with her in reference to her Ahmadiyya beliefs, which we considered to be a distortion of Islam. Since the *Abraari Jalsa* in Chiniot was observed at night, we planned on making use of the day time by attending the Ahmadiyya *Jalsa* in Rabwah with our friend. We could then better arm ourselves by cross checking the facts and references on both sides. The plan to attend the Rabwah *Jalsa* was supposed to be entirely for the sake of fun and enjoyment, and that is how it worked out for everyone in my group, except me! I was fascinated by the charismatic decorum, valiant declarations, authentic claims, genuine assertions, dauntless arguments, as well as the reverence and courteousness in which the presentations were made. In comparison, at the Chiniot Convention the only perceptible motive of their convention appeared to be to slander and smear the Ahmadiyya belief, with no effort to put forth any substance to illustrate the beauties of Islam or that of the Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be on him).

I was startled by the quoted revelations and proclamations of Hadhrat Promised Messiah (peace be on him) such as: “*There came a Warner, but the world did not recognize him, but God will accept him.*” and “*I came only to sow the seed which has been planted by my hands. It shall now*

grow and flourish and there is none who can hinder it.” Furthermore, some powerful and magnificent poetry of the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) was chanted quite frequently. I saw Islam enlightened in the Ahmadiyya Convention! My heart was trembling over this magnificent discovery, and on that pleasant but unexpected breakthrough; after all, it was Islam being presented and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) being praised in the most logical reverence, which I had never encountered before.

Nevertheless, I was not to give in on such a small account without any further research and investigation. Yet within the three days of the event, I became very restless and anxious. Those ingenious assertions were spinning in my head during the night, and the perceptible truth of those claims was shaking my soul. My intellect raised many questions, which I started writing on a sheet of paper. On the concluding night of the *Abraari Jalsa*, I found the courage to send it to the stage for answers. My exploratory nature was asking for some satisfactory rejoinder, but surprisingly enough, what came afterward was shockingly disappointing.

I was anxiously waiting for the answers but after a long wait, from the stage a highly regarded scholar of *Abraari* Group who was wearing an elegant and illustrious robe made his appearance and gave his statement: “A *bibi* (lady) has sent us an outrageous paper. It seems as if she is under the influence of some *Mirzai* (derogatory identification for *Ahmadis*). I advise the *bibi* (lady) strictly to give up her company because it is dangerous for her faith.” And so on and so forth. Having heard this verdict, I was extremely shocked and felt as if I had been pushed to the edge. Consequently, incited and inspired by a yearning for research, investigation and exploration, I decided to set off on a fact finding journey to unearth the answers to my questions.

My friends were not very pleased with this new development. I had been at the forefront in debating our *Ahmadi* friend, so they tried their best to get me to denounce Ahmadiyyat. In their effort, one of them even provided me with a small booklet, which according to her some years back had been left at her home by an *Ahmadi* visitor. She never had dared to open it, and now she sought after me to use it as a rebuttal in my debates. *God is my witness that the study of that booklet proved to be a turning point in my life.* The explanation given in the book on the topic of *Khatame Nabuwat* (finality of Prophethood) and that on the subject of Jesus Christ—his natural death with all the related verses of the *Holy Qur'an*—were astonishing. The booklet was titled “*Wassaale Masib Ibne Mariam,*” written by Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) who had not yet been elected Khalifa. This moment of realization changed my life entirely.

It was an enormous and uncertain undertaking for a young and naive Pakistani girl, who always had been the apple of her parents’ eye. Now everyone was shocked, and their hopes and expectations of me were shattered, and I was cast away like a worthless object, without friends and feeling weary and overwrought. No doubt, it was a rocky, fearsome and perilous road, but I chose to tread it anyway. I certainly had made an educated choice, yet it turned my life up side down.

I tried my best to avoid the situations of confrontation, but I was not left alone and was pushed too hard into it to resist any longer. For this very reason, I made up my mind to educate myself with the study of Islam and learning of Ahmadiyyat in order to prepare for those uncalled—for debates. On top of everything else, due to dissimilarity of faith with the intended person, I refused to go through with the marriage which had been arranged for me. With this act of mine, I opened the door to a series of unrelenting trials

and tribulations. The Promised Messiah (peace be on him) affirms: *“This wealth is worth procuring though one may have to lay down one’s life to procure it. This ruby is worth purchasing though one may have to lose one’s self to acquire it. O ye, who are bereft, run to this fountain and it will satiate your thirst. It is a fountain of life that will save you”*.

For that reason, I heard the heavenly cry, recognized the divinely appointed crier, and I laid down myself to procure that invaluable treasure. In pursuit of it, only the Almighty knows what I have lost in the physical realm, and how much I have gained in the spiritual one. Was it worth it? Without any reservation, the answer is “Yes!”

“In Due Time”

Yasmin Sirraaj

Yasmin was born in Little Rock, Arkansas on July 8, 1943. She was brought up in St. Louis, Missouri, of African American and Native-American Ancestry (Sioux and Cherokee). Formerly known as Lavern Jackson, her father was a Baptist minister. Yasmin attended Practical Nursing School in 1966 and worked in this field until her retirement in 2005. She is the mother of three children, grandmother of eighteen and great-grandmother of two.

In 1967 I became disillusioned with my Catholic faith. Every question I asked the priest always had a mysterious answer, or he could not explain it. I knew there had to be some answers out there; I just had to search for them. I had been listening to some men on a street corner talking about God, whom they called Allah, and their Holy book which they called the *Holy Qur'an*. This was my first introduction to the Nation of Islam

I was introduced to Orthodoxy when the Nation split. I began attending the Islamic Center of St. Louis and took *Shahada* (declaration of faith) in the early seventies. I thought I was a Muslim until I met two *Abmadi* sisters from St. Louis, Najma and Rashida Rafat. They introduced me to the true Islam so beautifully. I would entertain them in my home occasionally and sit for hours listening to them tell me about the Promised Messiah (peace be on him), a prophet though not a law-bearing prophet, but a reformer, the Mahdi of the last days. They would also tell me about the fourth Khalifa, Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) and the other *Abmadi Khulafa* (caliphs). I was shocked to learn that they knew where Jesus (peace be on him) was buried. I read

everything I could get my hands on for two years. I could no longer deny the truth of what I read. I signed *Bai'at* (initiation) on June 2006 with the fifth Khalifa Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (may Allah strengthen his hands) and have not regretted it.

It took me thirty-eight years to find the true Islam. What really attracted me to the Ahmadiyya community is their commitment to *Salat* (prayer); the commitment to say it on time and in congregation whenever possible; and consistently coming to *Jum'a* (Friday prayers). Our *Holy Qur'an* class and Lajna (women's auxiliary) are awesome. The sisters and brothers here are truly a family and that is how I feel in this St. Louis Community. I still have a lot to learn about my *din* (religion) but I stay excited about it. Islam is truly Peace.

“The Messiah is Here”

Yasemin Zafar

Yasemin was born in Berlin, Germany into a Sunni Muslim family. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in April, 2001. She is married and living in Portland, Oregon.

My path to Ahmadiyyat may seem different from the path taken by others. I am from a Turkish family, but I was born and raised in Berlin, Germany. There is a large Turkish population in Berlin, and we lived in an area of Berlin largely populated by people of Turkish descent.

Turkish people generally fall into one of two categories. There are some who are very religious and very strict with Islamic rules. Then, there are those who are completely western, merely Muslims by name.

My parents and family belong to the second category and were never actively involved with or interested in religion. Subsequently, I was raised in a western manner and was never taught anything about Islam. I enjoyed a very modern and western lifestyle. Yet, I cannot blame my parents too much for that, as they themselves did not know anything about Islam.

My grandparents, however, were more traditional Muslims and lived in Turkey. I had the opportunity to learn from them about Islam whenever I went to visit them. In fact, I spent a full year in Turkey living with my grandparents. Because they were practicing Muslims, they had several books about Islam which I loved to read.

I grew up holding on to my modern and western lifestyle, but I still had moments in which I would pray a lot, and I found enjoyment in

reading about Islam. Whenever I read more about Islam, I found myself very confused because there was no unity amongst Muslims. Everyone had a different opinion or interpretation, even for very small matters, and sometimes Islam seemed so strict to me that it seemed almost impossible to practice it in a suitable manner.

In May 2001, when I was 21 years old, I was online, searching for information about Islam. The first website I happened to find was a German website, where a very well-known German *Ahmadi* Muslim named Hadayatullah Hübsch Sahib was answering questions about Islam online. People would send in their questions about Islam, and he would then post the response online. There were many different topics such as God, *halal* and *haram*, women in Islam, the Messiah and Ahmadiyyat.

I became very interested in this website and spent a great deal of time reading through all the categories of questions. It took me about a week to read all the questions and answers, however, at this stage, I skipped all questions in the category called “Messiah and Ahmadiyyat” because I assumed it would be some boring history.

While reading everything on this website, I was amazed by the way Hadayatullah Hübsch Sahib answered the questions. I noticed a clear difference between how he explained things and the way they were explained in other writings about Islam. When I read about Islam from other sources, I found the Islam they described to be impossible to practice because it sounded so strict. But when I read about Islam on this *Ahmadi* website authored by Hadayatullah Hübsch Sahib, the message sounded so practical and reasonable.

After reading through all the questions and answers from the other categories of the website, I finally went to the one entitled “Messiah and Ahmadiyyat”. To my surprise, it turned out to be the most interesting subject of all. It was at this time that I was first introduced to Ahmadiyyat.

A genuine interest for this new thing called Ahmadiyyat arose in me. But I did not know anyone whom I could ask questions about this community. So I turned to the internet to feed my desire for more information. I went online and searched for Ahmadiyyat and came across the alislam.org website where I found a lot more detail about this sect and about the Messiah. For the next three days, I spent all hours of the evenings and nights reading through this website. Also during this online search, I found many anti-Ahmadi websites that spoke about the falsehood of Ahmadiyyat. It became so evident to me that the authors of these websites were blatantly lying. At this point, I had learned enough about Ahmadiyyat to know that their accusations were false. I felt that if Ahmadiyyat were really incorrect, then their opponents would not need to lie about it. This strengthened my belief that there was truth in the message of Ahmadiyyat.

After these three days, I had enough information to believe that the Promised Messiah and Mahdi had come. I could not wait to officially join the Ahmadiyya Community since life is uncertain, and I did not want to waste a single moment. I had not discussed my intentions with anyone, not even in my family. But I felt the truth of Ahmadiyyat.

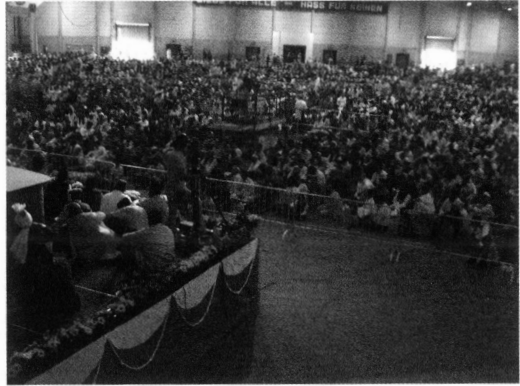
The next day, I found out that there was an Ahmadiyya Community Chapter in Berlin, where I lived. I called there and heard a voice say, “*Assalamo Alaikum.*” I didn’t even consider starting small talk and simply replied, “*Wa Alaikum Assalam.* I want to enter your community.” At first, the man on the phone seemed bewildered but then said that I had reached the right place. He asked me how I learned about Ahmadiyyat. Even though I did not know what would be expected from me as an *Ahmadi*, I made an appointment to come to submit my *Bai’at*.

A couple of days later, I went to the *Ahmadi* Mosque and filled out

the *Bai'at* form and was given access to as many Jamaat-published books as I wanted. I was very excited about this because it meant that I now had more resources to expand my knowledge.

Soon, I began attending *Jum'a* prayers, Lajna classes, and three months later, I attended my first *Jalsa* in Mannheim, Germany. For me, this first *Jalsa* was extremely spiritually fulfilling. I continued attending Jama'at events, especially gatherings for German and Turkish converts.

During my first years of accepting Ahmadiyyat, I faced strong opposition from my parents. They did not know what kind of group I had joined and were concerned that it might be a cult. They were willing to accept my desire to say prayers, but they could not understand why I needed



Jalsa Salana, Germany

to join a religious group. I consistently began traveling for entire weekends for meetings, and they thought I was acting strangely. My parents felt that I was turning my back on modern Turkey. By turning towards an Islamic group, they felt I had betrayed my own motherland. They feared that I would become brainwashed. They tried to convince me not to cover my head, but I followed what I felt was the right thing to do. Even among my friends, I was not considered “cool” anymore because I began wearing a head scarf and long clothes.

Everybody thought that I was going through a strange phase in my life and would give it up soon. That did not bother me much because I was proud that, among so many practicing Turkish

Muslims in Berlin, Allah had mercy and chose me to recognize the Imam of the age and allowed me to be the first of the believers. For that, I will always be grateful.

With time everything improved with my family. Today, they completely accept me as an *Abmadi* Muslim and even have much respect for the Jama'at.

After receiving a marriage proposal through Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul-Masih V (may Allah strengthen his hands), in 2005 I agreed to marriage. I am now living in the United States peacefully as an *Abmadi* Muslim, *Alhamdulillah*.

“All But Simple”

Anesia McRae

Anesia accepted Ahmadiyyat in 2005. She is currently a medical student and resides in Blackwood, New Jersey.

My conversion to Ahmadiyyat is similar to the children’s tale of Goldilocks. For anyone who is not familiar with the story, it is the journey of a young girl searching and trying many different options before finally finding something that is exactly what she needed. For me I found that Ahmadiyyat is just right. There are numerous qualities that make Islam so beautiful, but what attracted me most was the truth, logic, and most of all peace.

I come from a Christian background, with a devout Jamaican family on my mother’s side and a father who had been interested in Islam when I was very young. Still, I always had a desire to find religion for myself. The oldest of four girls, I felt the need to be a role model for them. Although my parents didn’t attend church, I would go and take my younger sisters along. At the age of 12, I would dress the girls, ages 4 and 2, and walk around the corner to hear the service. I would try to go every Sunday without fail. Something inside compelled me to learn about and communicate with God. Even at that age, I can remember feeling confused by the very foundation of Christianity. Specifically, the Bible teaches that one should believe in one God, yet one should also believe in the Trinity, and to communicate with God you had to go through a third party—Jesus. Were we so unworthy that we had to communicate with God via another source?

As my father began studying Islam, I began to learn too. However,

by my late teens my parents went through a difficult divorce, and I, in turn, divorced myself from much of what my father had said and done, including his study of Islam. As a teenager, my questions about religion lead me to conduct a bible study class at home with my three sisters. I knew I wanted a spiritual connection in my life as well as for my sisters. This plan only lasted for a couple of months. Just as Goldilocks' discovery that the porridge was too hot or too cold brought her to the desired porridge, similarly my ending the bible study class brought me closer to Islam.

I worked at a daycare and met a woman who organized her own bible study group, and I decided to attend and take my little sisters along. However, before I joined the study group, I told her my reservations about Christianity. She assured me that the denomination that they belonged to believe in the same principle that Jesus was not God, but the son of God. Although that was logical I soon found that our definitions of God's son were not the same. Despite the many gifts she would give me and my three sisters each week and her kind demeanor, I was just not sold.

My departure was bittersweet. I was happy about the fact that I could decipher that this was not the truth, yet disappointed that I had not found peace in a religion. Secretly, I wished that I could overcome all my reservations and just become a Christian. For in that decision, I thought life would be so much easier. Yet my heart, or more so God, would not allow me to make such a choice. Instead, I found myself down another course, studying with Jehovah Witnesses. These ladies were dynamic and energetic, if not a little pushy. Every Friday they would come to my home and teach me about their perspective of Christianity. Their doctrines were somewhat different from the conventional Christianity. However, like Goldilocks, it was not a match for me.

With further frustration, I stopped studying religion altogether. At

this stage in my life, I became absorbed in the world. Yet the world was still not enough for me. There was still emptiness and dissatisfaction in my soul. I would pray, but I didn't feel a real connection to a higher being. Islam was always in the back of my mind, but I had begun to adopt the mainstream criticisms that the religion was based on harsh, unattainable rules especially for women. Like many non-Muslims, my preconceived notions were that women, judging from their mode of dress, were treated as inferior and restricted by men. It is ironic that the same things I then thought were unattractive, I now find myself loving.

During college, I began spending more and more time with *Sunni* Muslims and attending Muslim Student Association programs. Eventually, I decided to take my *Shabada* and convert to Islam. The simplicity of the message and the Unity of God appealed to me on every level, and I was finally free of frustrations about the Trinity. The one *Ahmadi* Muslim friend I'd known since I was 14, understood my desire to seek out my own faith and separate myself from the views of my father. In all my religious transitions, my best friend Aliya Latif, was always in the shadows. She invited me to events and would share books, but never pushed her point of view. She never judged or condemned me as I was searching, unlike so many of the other faiths that I had investigated. Even when I shared the negative comments my *Sunni* friends would tell me about Ahmadiyyat, Aliya never replied with any antagonizing views or cruel judgments.

Although I had attended several *Jalsas* and *Lajna Ijtemas*, I was hesitant about signing *Bai'at* (initiation). I never jump right into something without proper investigation, and I was very apprehensive about committing myself to Ahmadiyyat because of the many negative ideas I had heard from my non-Ahmadi friends. I was already ridiculed by some of my family members for accepting

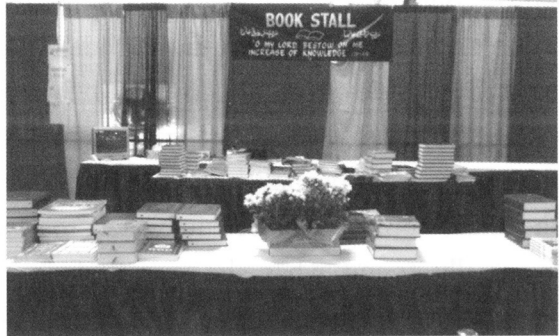
Islam, but now I would be ostracized by my *Sunni* friends who were also instrumental in my acceptance of Islam. I was once again at a crossroads, yet closer to finding true happiness or, like Goldilocks—a soft bed to finally rest. One might say just follow your heart, but it was extremely difficult for me as a fairly new convert, to go down what I feared may be the wrong path. I was deeply confused.

At this pivotal stage, there were a number of incidents that made me feel this was the right choice and continued to draw me closer and closer. The first year I went to an *Ahmadi Jalsa*, I was a college student and Aliya and I had spent all of our money at the book stall.

As we were getting ready to leave, I realized I didn't have my bag of books. It was Sunday afternoon and people were preparing to go home. No one had

seen my bag of books.

I felt discouraged and disappointed that someone would take my books, here at a spiritual gathering, when suddenly a sister



came and said my books are in the 'lost and found' tent. There was nothing in the tent as everything had been returned. But sitting in the grass in the middle of the tent were all my books.

At the same *Jalsa*, I met a beautiful sister, Amatul Rashid, and we talked as if I had known her my whole life. Upon discussing with her my apprehensions about Ahmadiyyat, she sent me an article about the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) titled "*The Removal of the Misunderstanding.*" It was as if he was talking directly to me and clearing up any misconceptions I had about Prophethood and the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) remaining the Seal of the Prophets. With this new seed planted, I

felt consumed. I ran with Ahmadiyyat. It was as though blinders were taken off—a light bulb moment.

The morning I signed *Bai'at*, Aliya and I read a portion of '*Our Teachings*' written by the Promised Messiah, and it brought us both to tears. This was the same book that prompted Aliya to sign *Bai'at* when she was 16, despite being born *Ahmadi*. Once more I knew that I was finally in the precise place I had been struggling to attain. Reading was as though the Promised Messiah was speaking directly to me. "*Every morning should be a witness for you that you spent the night with righteousness, and every evening should be a witness for you that you went through the day with the fear of God in your heart.*" As we drove to the Willingboro Mosque to sign *Bai'at*, I thought *Alhamdulillah*, I was finally content!

I don't remember the exact day I made up my mind to accept Islam in college. However, I do recall the exact day I accepted Ahmadiyyat, last year in September at the age of 26. Like Goldilocks finding the right porridge, finding the perfect chair and then finding the most comfortable bed in which to sleep was important. She eventually found what she was looking for. Similarly, my own journey was all but simple, but *Alhamdulillah*, Ahmadiyyat is just what I needed.

“My Religion is Complete”

Shahina Bashir

Shahina was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in a Sunni family. She came to the United States in 1980 to pursue a B.S. degree in Microbiology. After living in Texas for eight years, she moved to Maryland. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1996.

I was born a *Sunni* Muslim in Dhaka, Bangladesh. My family was not a religious one, though we observed all the religious holidays with great enthusiasm. Growing up as a child, I can not really remember my parents offering their *Salat* (prayer) on a regular basis or reading the *Holy Qur'an*. Whatever religious knowledge I received at an early age was through school. Neither school nor my parents taught me *Salat* (prayer). At the age of fourteen, one of my mother's uncles showed me how to pray. I was really proud of myself that I finally learned how to pray in Arabic, but I did not understand a thing I was saying.



Shahina (right) and her sister, Samina, in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1967

After graduating from high school, I came to the United States as an undergraduate student. Gradually, even the little faith that I had, began to diminish to the point that religion was not an important thing in my life anymore. It was easy to integrate into the western way of life. I stopped praying completely and many months of *Ramadhan* (month of fasting) would come and go, and I would not have fasted a single day. Even the excitement of celebrating *Eid-ul-*

Fitr (Muslim holiday after *Ramadhan*) was not there. It was easy to pass life without thinking of Allah. The company I kept also did not help, because none of my friends practiced their faith.

After I received my bachelor's degree, I was married to my cousin. We thought we were very compatible because we delved into worldly matters. Ten years into my marriage, things started to take a turn. My heart began to feel inclined towards the remembrance and worship of Allah. I opened the *Holy Qur'an* for the first time in fifteen years and started reading the translation in English, which I had never read before. I was afraid that I had forgotten how to read Arabic but, even though I was rusty at first, I gradually became fluent. No sooner had I started reading the *Holy Qur'an* with understanding, my heart would tremble and tears would roll down my cheeks uncontrollably. I was scared and excited to have found the most beautiful treasure. I couldn't understand where these emotions were coming from. I felt a rejuvenation of Islam. I went to the library and took out books on Islam and started reading and understanding what Islam meant. For the first time, every creation that I set my eyes on reminded me of the Creator. At night when I lay in bed, I would stare out the window and look at the minute stars and become totally awestruck.

For the first time, I could feel the nearness of Allah. I could not share this new feeling with anyone else except my father. He saw the change in me and was very pleased. I used to regularly visit my parents on the weekend. Whenever I visited my parent's house, I often saw him watching with great interest a sermon that was being delivered by a man, who was perhaps a Pakistani, and who wore a very traditional headdress and had a beard. This man's face was filled with light, and he indeed looked like the most pious man that I had ever seen. After I became an *Ahmadi* Muslim, I realized that the man I saw on TV was our beloved Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad,

Khalifatul Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him). His sermons were very interesting.

One day I asked my father about this man. He told me that he was an *Abmadi*. I did not understand, and I asked him who *Abmadis* were. He told me that they claimed to be the seventy-third sect of Islam, and that they had a prophet. I did not ask any more questions because I had never heard of the *Abmadi* sect. Nevertheless, every time I came to visit he was watching this man on television. My parents lived in an area called Burtonsville, which is not far from the *Abmadi* Mosque, Baitur Rahman. My sister lived in Layhill. Whenever we went to visit my sister, we would pass by Baitur Rahman. I always found the mosque very grand, unlike the other mosques I had been to. I asked my father, whose mosque it was. He replied that it belonged to the *Abmadis*. Again, I asked him to explain who the *Abmadis* were, and he gave me the same answer as before.

With my new interest in religion, I frequented bookstores, my favorite being Borders. As I was browsing through the books on Islam, I caught sight of a thin paperback book. The title of the book was “*The Testimony of the Holy Qur’an*”, and the author was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be on him). I had never heard of this author, and I wasn’t familiar with the title. However, I went ahead and bought the book. When I started reading it, I could not understand it very well. I showed the book to my father, and he glanced at it and commented that I should not have paid to get the book. I set the book aside and never took the time to read it.

My heart began inclining more and more towards Allah, and the desire to worship Him continued to grow. At the same time, my marriage started to fall apart. My husband told me that our paths were separating, and he couldn’t follow the path that I was choosing. He felt, therefore, there was only one solution, and that

was to end the marriage. I was totally devastated, but held on strongly to my faith and turned to Allah completely for His help and guidance. I went to live with my parents. Through this trial my faith in Allah became even stronger.

I continued to practice my religion and kept on reading the *Holy Qur'an*. At work, I started talking to a co-worker who was a Muslim of Pakistani origin. He was the only Muslim in my department and we talked about Islam a lot. He started asking me about my belief regarding the second coming of Jesus or whether I believed that Jesus ascended to heaven and that he would come back to Earth one day. I told him that was what I was taught to believe, but I wasn't very sure about it. Soon after our conversation, I received an email from him in which he quoted a verse from the *Holy Qur'an*. The verse was from *Surah Al-Imran* and it said, *'When Allah said, 'O Jesus, I will cause thee to die (a natural death) and will exalt thee to Myself, and will clear thee from (the charges of) those who disbelieve, and will place those who follow thee above those who disbelieve, until the Day of Resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, and I will judge between you concerning that wherein you differ.'* The moment I read this verse, I thought to myself that if Jesus (peace be on him) had died a natural death, then how was he supposed to come back alive? I immediately went across the hallway to my colleague and asked him about the truth.

Over the next several weeks our discussions revolved a lot around the death of Jesus (peace be on him). He did not disclose his true *Ahmadi* identity. I never even guessed for a moment that he was anything other than a *Sunni* Muslim. We both started to research Ahmadiyyat, and he brought me a lot of literature on Ahmadiyyat. One of the books that he gave me was *"Invitation to Ahmadiyyat"*. I found that book quite convincing. Despite the fact that he kept bringing me books on Ahmadiyyat, I never once asked him whether he was an *Ahmadi*. The more I read, the more everything made

sense. One day he could not keep his identity a secret and told me who he was. I was surprised and asked why he did not say so before. He replied that he thought I would not take him seriously and would in fact become hostile towards him. It was only then that he told me about how the *Ahmadis* had been declared non-Muslims by the Pakistani government and how the members are being persecuted.

Although it was easy to understand the death of Jesus (peace be on him), I was having some difficulty understanding the concept of *Khatame Nabuwat* (finality of Prophethood). He tried to explain it to me, and asked me to begin praying to Allah to guide me to the truth. After studying and praying, I finally felt it in my heart that the time had come to sign the *Bai'at* (initiation). So in April 1996, I went to Baitur Rahman Mosque and became an *Ahmadi*.

My life totally changed after I joined the Ahmadiyya Community. At first there was shock and opposition in my family. With many prayers, gradually everyone in my family accepted my conversion and did not stand in my way. Now I am free to practice Islam in the correct way. May Allah guide us all on the right path, Ameen.

“My Faith Affirmed”

Laeeqa S. Ahmad

Laeeqa was born in Gary, Indiana. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in December 1977. She resides in Zion, Illinois.

By the Grace of Allah, one of my parents converted to Islam during my early adolescent years. My father, Mansa Musa Khan, was the first to choose Islam as his faith, and I remember that day so very well. He came into the house and said to my mother, “I have found true faith and God is One.” My mother dutifully followed his lead in becoming a Muslim despite the conflicts that arose between her and her immediate family. At the time, and through a child’s eye, I thought my mother had equally embraced Islam, but eventually the disparity in their beliefs lead to an estrangement. My mother had born thirteen children, out of which nine survived. As the youngest of nine children, I believed I was the ultimate benefactor of my father’s conversion. Of nine children, there were three sets of twins, and my baby brother and I were the youngest children and the youngest set of twins. Previous to my father’s conversion, religion and its practice held no position of importance in our household, at least as I recall. My older brothers and sisters resented the change, the constant prayers, the disciplined life style, and chose to turn a blind eye to any virtues the faith had to offer. At only eleven, I deeply wanted to emulate my father but, it was very difficult.

Although I could write a laundry list of negatives about the Nation of Islam, it would not detract from the positive impact that even this misguided sect of Muslims had on African Americans during the early 1950’s thru late 1970’s. A group that demanded an almost

military style of obedience, the Nation of Islam was one of the earliest, most outspoken, and challenging voices to the political backdrop of the day for African Americans. Unified in the declaration that ‘there is none worthy of worship but Allah’, the strength of the sect gave thousands of African Americans not only the courage to change their surnames from that handed down by slaves owners, but also to stand up against the tyranny of the police enforced Jim Crow laws that most lived under. In the Nation of Islam, African Americans were encouraged to pursue education, were instructed in African history, told perhaps for the first time that they were not born to be slaves but were descendents of African kings and queens and great empires and civilizations. Most importantly, they were told that they were equal human beings in the sight of God, that the pictures of the ‘white’ Jesus (peace be on him) on the cross were a fallacy, and that the Bible, which European Americans interpreted to sanctify their continued enslavement, was not the word of God but a book rewritten by immoral rulers throughout history. So, just as Islam teaches that the worst Muslim is better than a disbeliever, the Nation of Islam is a clear example in support of this teaching and will forever hold a significant place in African American and Islamic history in the United States.

My hometown of Gary, Indiana had a large population of Muslims from the Nation of Islam, but very few, if any, from other Muslim sects. It was some eight to ten years later before I learned of Ahmadiyyat.

Truth has its own light, and I recognized it in a young man that I saw walking across the Northwest Indiana University campus. The young brother, Muhammad Ismaeel, now my late husband, was distributing literature as many Muslim brothers did in those days, but it was a propagation technique particularly identified with the Nation of Islam. A connection to the Nation of Islam was perhaps

in my mind as the brother, a current student at Northwest University, approached me, politely introduced himself, and handed me pamphlets describing Ahmadiyyat. As he was telling me about Islam, I was remembering my father. Muhammad told me about the Oneness of God and that His name is Allah. I said, "I have heard of the God you speak of through my parents." I asked, "What makes your religion better than anyone else's?" He answered, "It is not what I believe that makes my religion the best. It is that you believe in God and in all His prophets and the message that they brought from God." But I only knew of few prophets.

He went on to explain that God sends prophets to bring people back to the true faith and that a prophet had been sent for our own time. Then he told me about Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be on him), The Promised Reformer for all mankind. After telling me about Ahmadiyyat Islam, I responded that I believed in all the prophets too. He told me that I believed that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) was the last law-bearing prophet for mankind. But God also sends prophets as reformers when the world becomes corrupt. Such a man was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who appeared as a follower of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) for all religions. I returned home with many more questions for my parents than they were able to answer. They affirmed their belief that Allah is one and Muhammad is the last prophet for mankind. I did not understand my father's concept of Elijah Muhammad as a modern day leader and prophet; it sounded contradictory and left me totally confused.

In our next meeting, Muhammad gave me literature to read on Christian and Muslim beliefs. I researched Jesus (peace be on him) and Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) in the Bible and *Holy Qur'an*, but I was still not satisfied. I resorted to prayer, and God Almighty answered my prayers, relieving me of

doubt and fear. The Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam offered everything an individual needed to live a moral, physical, and spiritually healthy life. The essence of this true Islam guides a believer through each step and phase of our earthly journey in preparation for the life beyond.

My father was unaware of my excursions into Ahmadiyya studies, so I slowly began to introduce the topic of other Muslims sects. Eventually, I directed our discussions towards the *Ahmadi* Muslims and their belief that a prophet had come in the latter days in the likeness of Jesus (peace be on him). My father countered saying, "They are not Muslim." This led me to believe that he had heard of Ahmadiyyat and had been coached in this response.

My father was never able to provide any logic for his reasoning or more eloquent answers to my questions. Finally, I turned to prayer, praying for assurance that this was the right religion and that God wanted this religion for me. I took the initiation of *Bai'at* in 1977, in Waukegan, Illinois. I was later blessed to have my mother present at my marriage to Muhammad Ismaeel.

None of my brothers or sisters, or my mother, accepted the Nation of Islam, and I never again approached my parents about Ahmadiyyat or the subject of Islam. As a practicing *Ahmadi*, I respected their right to believe in and follow the tenets of their chosen faith. I had reached a point in life, having found certainty of faith, and that guidance about which I could not be misled, and I knew that I could only pray that their chosen faith would serve them equally well.

Chapter 5

Special Mentors

How Allah sent me a guide to truth

“By Allah! If Allah helps you to guide a person to truth, it is better for you than the most precious red camels.”

“The Book of Bukhari”

Holy Prophet Mubammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him)

“The Planted Seed”

Safeta Cerimovic

Safeta was born in Foca, Bosnia. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in October, 2000. She presently lives in Syracuse, New York. Safeta has two brothers and three sisters.

Before I share details of my life after acceptance of Ahmadiyyat, I want to briefly describe my family and previous home life as a non-Ahmadi Muslim. I am originally from Bosnia, and I was seven years old when the war in my country began. We had no consistency in day-to-day routines as we frequently moved from town to town depending on where there were safe locations. Mostly, we lived in schools with many other people. There was little privacy, and nothing to call our own. This drifting nomadic lifestyle fundamentally scarred my childhood and skewed my memories and perspective.



Grounds of destroyed Aladza Mosque, after the war, Foca, Bosnia

The one saving element of these makeshift quarters was that every school always had prayer rooms. We at least had the option to say *Salat* (congregational prayers) and learn from the Imam (leader of prayers). This is where I spent the majority of time; it was my place of refuge and security; I found comfort in asking Allah for the safe

return home of my father, my uncles, and my many cousins.

When the war ended, and everything was returning to normal, I thought it was the best chance to do something I had always wanted, which was to attend *Madrassa*, the Islamic school in Bosnia. Unfortunately, my dream fell apart when my family moved to the United States. It was not a rash decision since the city that we called home was no longer a part of Bosnia; and to make matters worse, all of my father's property was destroyed, lost, or stolen.

Even though I was born into a Muslim family, from an early age I felt that the teachings were somehow incomplete. Family members were very knowledgeable about the tenets of Islam; however, very little of that knowledge was put into practice.

We came to the United States in the year 2000. I cried every day and prayed to Allah to make a way for me to return to Bosnia and live with my sister who was still there. My prayers, however, did not prevent me from enduring the scorn and derision of American high school students. The most humiliating day of my young life was my first day in an American high school. I did not know anyone, and I could not speak English. Throughout the entire day, I watched students doing things I could never imagine, and deep in my heart, I was continually praying to return to Bosnia. The days could not end soon enough. When I returned home in the afternoons, my family expected me to be happy, but I was sad and miserable. I did not want to go back to that school ever again. My mom was supportive and did her best to comfort me. She counseled me saying that no matter how bad things appeared, Allah always provided for us and things would get better sooner than I knew.

My mom was absolutely right; little could I have predicted how drastically life was about to change for the better. It all started the day my brother's friend, whom he knew from high school in Bosnia, came to visit. I was in the kitchen making breakfast for them and

overheard him talking about Ahmadiyyat. Although I did not understand the conversation, I was interested because this was the first mention of Islam I had heard since coming to America. All I had heard up to this point was how much money we could earn and other materialistic possibilities, which were of no import to me. I was curious about this sect of Muslims, but I dare not ask too many questions in front of my family. Even though my family was not particularly religious, they had different beliefs about the death of Jesus (peace be on him), and were not interested in listening to contradictory beliefs.

My brother's friend, who with the blessings of Allah is now my husband, was thrilled that I was inquiring about Ahmadiyyat. I asked that he not mention Ahmadiyyat in front of my family because I knew that I would be forbidden to see him and I did not want that. I asked for literature on Ahmadiyyat, but he did not have many books to share. He was only able to give me two. One was the *Holy Qur'an*, which I read with translation in seven days. I was intrigued with what I read and tried to absorb as much information as I could. The more I read, the more I liked Ahmadiyyat, and I began to realize it was the true Islam. My family was thrilled that I was no longer crying or begging to go back to Bosnia; instead I was happy and content. I could not thank Allah the Almighty enough for answering my prayers. I began to see purpose in my life as a member of the Ahmadiyyat community.

I accepted Ahmadiyyat two months after meeting my future husband. It happened quickly because all of my questions were answered. After meeting other members of the Jama'at (community), I wanted to be part of this beautiful community. As time passed, my family started asking me questions about Ahmadiyyat. I remember once that a terrible book on Ahmadiyyat was given to my family that said Ahmadis are not considered

Muslims. After reading this, my family told me to stop talking to my future husband. At this point, I had not told my family that I had signed *Bai'at* (formal declaration of allegiance to Ahmadiyyat). I knew that they would not approve. At first, my father was amenable to my talking to my brother's friend. However after reading the awful propaganda against Ahmadiyyat, he told me not to see him anymore.

Five months later, we were married. Although my family was not pleased with our union initially, they slowly came to accept it. I was exhilarated and enjoyed saying *Salat* (congregational prayers) with everyone around me. What I did, I did only to seek the pleasure of Allah.

Not long after our marriage, my husband fell ill, so I took on a job. I was not opposed to this, but my work environment changed me considerably. I stopped attending Lajna meetings and entertained doubts and suspicions about the Jama'at. Looking back, I am saddened to think that I so easily succumbed to the evil whisperings of the disbelievers.

My life started falling apart, and I was not nearly as happy as I had once been. For example, before this period, I would feel rejuvenated coming home from a Lajna meeting. I learned something new at every meeting, had occasion to speak with the sisters about religion, and was readily given clarification on any questions or concerns that I might have. However, without the meetings, I felt fractured and lost, and I had no idea how to fill the void. People around me seemed insulted if approached in even politest manner on topics of religion, even other Muslims.

My husband and I both missed being part of the Jama'at activities and gatherings, so we decided to attend the *Jalsa* (annual gathering) one more time in an attempt to resolve the problems that were breaking our hearts. We registered for *Jalsa* in Virginia two weeks

prior to the event in 2006. My participation at previous *Jalsas* had not been very memorable. An inability to speak English and the challenges of caring for a newborn left my experiences somewhat lacking. I cannot thank Allah enough for the second chance He gave us. This time, I finally grasped the meaning of *Jalsa*. This time I listened to the beautiful speeches and my heart was cleansed of doubt once more. I felt refreshed, renewed and happy, and I started attending the *Lajna* meetings again. Our family became whole and at peace again. As a final note, I thank my sisters of the Syracuse *Jama'at* for their support. Though I distanced myself from the *Jama'at* for a long time, I was always welcomed without reservation or question. May Allah give all of us the strength of righteousness, Ameen.

“Mirrors For Each Other”

Saleemah Afful

Saleemah accepted Ahmadiyyat in 1969 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where she still resides. In addition to working as a daycare provider, she is the mother of three, grandmother and great-grandmother of 10.

My first introduction to Ahmadiyyat came through William Tatum (Irfan Malik), the son of Abdul and Mubaraka Malik. I was introduced to my future husband’s parents in 1968. His mother, Mubaraka, told me about a person named, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi (peace be on him). I could only ask, “Who is that?”

One of the first things she did was to invite me to attend a Lajna meeting. She explained that these meetings were for women only. From 1968 to 1969, I attended both the Lajna and Sunday meetings. In September 1969, Allah, the Most Gracious, allowed me to sign *Bai’at* (declaration of allegiance) under the Third Khalifa, Hadhrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad (may Allah be pleased with him).

Over the years I have met many wonderful sisters (mentors). All of them taught me something about Ahmadiyyat and helped me to remain grounded. The first among those of course was my dear mother-in-law, Mubaraka Malik. She taught me how to do *wudu* (physical cleansing ritual) every time before reading *Holy Qur’an*. She encouraged me, sat with me, and guided me on how to read and write the Arabic of the *Holy Qur’an*. Once, as we were just beginning to read *Holy Qur’an*, I was chewing gum. She slapped my hand and told me that whenever I read the *Holy Qur’an*, I was reading Allah’s words and should be in a state of respect and submissiveness

mentally and physically. After that, I never chewed gum, ate or drank anything, while reading the *Holy Qur'an*. She also taught me how to do *Salat* (prayers). Her words were, "You are humbly begging Allah for guidance. When you recite in Arabic, translate in your mind in English. Take your time, so that you know what you are saying. Remember, Allah's angels are recording what you say and what you are thinking."

In the early 1970's, I met two sisters from Baltimore. One of the sisters taught me that self-righteousness was 'the Devil.' She told me that a person who is self-righteous is a person who has elevated himself or herself to the level of a deity. After a while, it came to me that this behavior was a form of *Shirk* (associating partners with God). The other sister taught me to recite *Durood* (a specific prayer for the Holy Prophet), over and over during my waking hours. Saeeda Latif told me that there were only solutions, not problems. She said, "A problem comes from our misunderstanding of the solution." She also helped to reinforce in me the habit of making *Salat* at the proper times.

Nasira Razaa taught me that Allah is Lord of all the Worlds, by showing me that our minds are also worlds. She impressed upon me the need to read, read, and read. She also, instilled in me the habit of becoming a regular attendee at all Lajna meetings, not just the ones I wanted to attend.

Salma Ghani taught me what it means to be humble, by telling me that the word pride is a negative emotion. The women with whom I traveled to Rabwah, Qadian, and Afghanistan, taught me to be grateful for the many favors of Allah, especially in times of extreme adversity. Rasheeda Sa'eed taught me the pleasure of giving gifts for the sake of Allah. She would say, "The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave gifts because it was pleasing to Allah".

There are so many sisters who have guided me over the years that it would be impossible to name them all. I am grateful and thankful to Allah for all of His guidance and the helpers He has brought to me. We are truly mirrors for one another and I am a witness to it.

“Cleansing My Spirit”

Samiha Haqq

Samiba was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. She accepted Ahmadiyyat in 2002. Prior to her conversion, she belonged to the Baptist denomination of Christianity. She presently lives in Charlotte, North Carolina with her husband.

I converted to Ahmadiyyat in the year 2002. Amidst much confusion and anxiety, the true path of knowledge and the one way to Allah was shown to me. Now, six years later, I still fully embrace it and count on the teachings to guide me, help me grow, and teach me how to give back to the world. I am fully at peace with myself and have a much better comprehension and appreciation of the world around me. I owe this to the power of prayer, the wisdom of Islam, the blessings of Ahmadiyyat, and the institution of Khilafat (institution designed by God for the continuity of revelation and religious leadership).

My husband, Abdul Haqq, enabled my first encounters with Islamic principles and Ahmadiyyat by way of fasting. It was during a period in my life when I was stricken with grief and sadness due in part to an unhealthy previous marriage and in part to failed attempts at pleasing those around me. It was then, while I was still living in Memphis, that I observed my first full month of fasting during *Ramadhan*. Subsequently, my curiosity and Abdul’s mentorship guided me further towards inquiry, observation, understanding, and finally acceptance of Ahmadiyyat. After signing *Bai’at*, I quickly realized that comfort and peace is only found through dedicated devotion to Allah and His commandments. By pleasing Him, I

would find pleasure in this world. This discovery of faith distanced me from the demons of my past and *Inshallah*, I will continue to grow in my sincerity to this faith, the Ahmadiyya community, and to my Lord.

Abdul Haqq, whom I eventually married, never imposed his religious beliefs on me. To the contrary, he encouraged me to pursue the path of truth and knowledge. I had previously been a member of a Baptist congregation, where ministers seem to focus more on preaching the sermon and seldom teach about truth, righteousness, and the path to God. My exposure to Ahmadiyya literature such as the, “*Gospel of Barnabas*”, “*Way of the Seekers*”, and “*The Ten Conditions of Bai’at*”, changed this for me and soon, I was engaged in an entirely different course that altered the direction of my life for the better.

My conversion to Ahmadiyyat posed no real difficulties. My family supported my decision, and I quickly embraced *Purdah* (covering of the physical body and mode of modest conduct). While I had no previous knowledge of or experience with Islam, I quickly discovered how beautiful the religion was. I was especially encouraged by the treatment of and respect for women that Islam emphasized and exemplified. Today I carry myself with much ease and find that people are respectful of me. In turn, I have emerged as a stronger person, with a more open mind that is receptive to varying people and their beliefs. I find myself to be more considerate than I had been in the past, thanks to Allah.

I have found the true faith and true religion. I have found a community that accepts me with open arms. I have much room for growth, and I am ready to sacrifice all for the pleasure of Allah. In the meantime, prayer provides me the strength to continue through everyday trials and gives me the humility as well as the patience to overcome all obstacles.

‘No God But Allah’

Saliha Malik

Saliha was born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa and moved to the United States in 1984. She is of British nationality and accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1987. She resides in Providence, Rhode Island.

Having signed *Bai’at*, I approached the Mosque to attend a meeting. Imam Abdur Raqueeb Wali, of the San Francisco Jama’at, greeted me with a broad smile. Nervously, I tried out my carefully practiced, “*Assalamo-Alaikum*”, and with a deep warmth he told me, “You will never look back, all kinds of doors will open for you. Since my own conversion, I have traveled half-way around the world and my life is filled with yet even more amazement!” His face revealed the sense of awe and humility he felt at having experienced the wonders and blessings of Allah. As his memories flooded forth, his face expressed sheer joy and sincere excitement for me.

There is nothing I would refer to as extraordinary about my conversion to Islam, although the years that immediately followed were extraordinary to me. I came to Islam in 1987, nervous, shy, and with no inner strength. I had grown up in Africa and boarding schools in England. My background was in theater, specializing in voice instruction. However, I lost any sense of self worth, had lost all genuine connection with my Christian upbringing, felt battered by the anguish of failed relationships, sought understanding of my own existence in astrology and psychology, and immersed myself in reading books of poetry and Shakespeare to shield myself from an imperfect world...until Islam unfolded and revealed its gifts to me. I did not know much about Islam, before being introduced to it by

my future husband. He spoke about Islam from his heart and so lovingly, as if it was the central core of his being. I had never heard any one speak of their religion with such profound fidelity and devotion. From him I also learned that Hadhrat Jesus (peace be on him) did not die on the cross and that the Promised Messiah (peace be on him) had come. I remember feeling shocked and very uncomfortable at first. So foreign was this concept to me that I looked deeply at him to see if I could detect any kind of mental instability. But his appearance and demeanor were quite calm and his behavior was never erratic or questionable. My vague impression of Islam at the time was that of a violent religion where-in women are deeply oppressed and forced into a societal segregation and garment known as *Purdah* (my definition of which was a type of clothing that covers a woman's body from head to toe, preventing any interaction with men).

I started out reading three books: the "*Holy Qur'an*"; translated in poetic form by Arberry, "*Conference of the Birds*", and a thin book called, "*Our Teachings*", by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be on him), the Promised Messiah and Mahdi. In the *Holy Qur'an*, I found verses on *Purdah* and expected that it had been revised in recognition of the modernization of society and women's freedom. "*Conference of the Birds*" immersed me in the metaphor of submission to Allah...

*"Those who traversed the valley's depths and fought,
With all the dangers that the journey brought
Find a new life flow towards them from that bright
Celestial and Ever Living Light"*



Farid ud Din Attar's
Conference of the Birds

The idea of new life insisted itself upon me. How could real life be achieved? How could I lift myself out of a state of emptiness and hopelessness, which in spite of pursuing valuable work still preyed upon me?

When it came to the book, “*Our Teachings*”, I could not imagine a better society than the one so intensely described by this Messiah. How amorously he spoke of God! I longed to meet the people who agreed to live by these precepts, and who knew God to be Living and All Powerful as described. My one stumbling block was the inescapable detail of women and *Purdah*. Other than this, I found myself totally attracted to the teachings and tenets. I was informed that the Qur’anic instructions and injunctions stand for all time. There have been no revisions nor will there be. Then I had a dream. Because of this dream I accepted Islam and began my spiritual journey. The dream was very simple: in it, I was wearing full *Burkab* (outer coat) and *hijab* (head covering), including veil, and I experienced complete peace in that garment. In the morning I was so surprised, both by the dream and the power of the dream. I could not put it from my mind. I took it as encouragement from Allah. I recognized that it was hopeless to expect that the ‘Way’ would be altered to suit me; it was I who must change to find that Light, and I took those first steps into the valley.

When I first entered into the women’s hall of the mosque, I was met by a chaos of children’s noise. The women became occupied in their meeting as we sat together in a small huddle, but my mind was spinning. Everything was so unfamiliar. Then Imam Raqueeb called the prayer and the words of *Surah Al-Fatiba* soared over the confusion of activities. All became quiet. The children became quiet. The spirit of this house of worship carried through in melodic praise and the words went deep into my heart and soul. I knew I had come to the right place, I knew I had found home.

The subject of *Purdah* has always been a key factor in the life that unfolded for me after that. Serving as a pivot upon which my struggle to embrace Islam in practice revolved, I was very taken by the idea that Islam is a continuous inner revolution, an inner *Jihad* (struggle) until the clamoring desires of the ego become quiet. I realized that observing *Purdah* reminded me not to fall into my cultural ways or personal habits. It became the vehicle for me to understand myself as a woman and not as a product of changing societal whims. Much to my chagrin I felt liberated, and my subconscious needs to prove myself through fashion or display slowly dropped away.

Soon after I joined Ahmadiyyat, Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih IV (may Allah be pleased with him) visited our Jama'at. I sat in his company for a long time, with his loving and vivacious presence reassuring me. The impact of this meeting profoundly affected my commitment to Islam. I listened tirelessly to his *Khutbas* (sermons), soaked up his wisdom, and resolutely dedicated myself as a worker in his cause. After that, I never did look back and all kinds of doors opened for me.

“Satisfaction”

Khadija James

Khadija was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and came from a Christian family of ten. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1995.

Looking back over my life and its challenges, I must start my testimony saying that I did not choose Islam as my religion; my soul was ever inclined towards God. But, as a product of nurture verses nature, I needed guidance. So Allah perfected and chose a religion for me and called it Islam.

It has been some twenty years since a dear friend first told me about Islam and, even though, I was impressed by the change the conversion affected in my friend, my mind was closed. I had been born and raised in an Apostolic Christian family. Baptized under the tenets that Bible scripture is the word of God, I believed this arm of Christianity to be correct in every way. The Apostolic denomination dispenses with the dogma, innovation, and self-serving traditions that had come to plague Christianity over the centuries. Adhering to the ‘Word’, I lived what I perceived to be a good Christian life until around forty years of age. I had married, raised five children, and worked in various facets of public service. I had owned and operated several businesses including a catering service, a restaurant, and a janitorial business. In spite of these accomplishments, and in spite of my devotion to my faith, I found that my spirit lacked contentment and the exhilaration of fulfillment.

Searching for spiritual satisfaction, I began participating in and volunteering for every conceivable activity within my church. The more I struggled to feel complete, the more exasperated I became.

Exasperation led to more involvement and a search for deeper meaning. The desire for deeper meaning led to questioning of my beliefs. The answers did not lead to better understanding; the answers led to more questions, with more unacceptable answers. So distressed was I in my daily prayers that I would be at a loss as to what to pray for. Only those who truly believe are strong enough to make this transition. Submitting one's will after acknowledging fault in your most deeply held and guarded beliefs is not the dominion of the weak.

Through my travels and career I found myself in Merced, California. I met and began working for Imam Abdur Raqueeb Wali. I was also privileged enough to develop a close acquaintance with his kind and loving family. Imam Wali introduced me to Ahmadiyyat. By this time I had read about other sects of Islam and had several *Sunni* friends. Imam Wali gave me two books of note, "*Life of Muhammad*" and "*Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam.*" I read everything that he presented to me, which naturally brought on more questions. Imam Wali eloquently responded with comprehensible and logical answers. He also gave me the book, "*Life and Teachings of Paul the Apostle*", to use for comparison, as it forms the basis for most Christian beliefs. He became my mentor, guiding me slowly but steadily to true Islam and Ahmadiyyat.

After some time spent reading, talking with other converts, participating in Jama'at functions, and under the tutelage of Imam Wali, I signed *Bai'at* in 1996. My family was not exactly receptive to the idea of my converting to Islam. Notwithstanding normal failures, I have remained steadfast to the faith for these past fifteen years. I would not change or relinquish any parts of my life or the reasons leading to my acceptance of Islam and Ahmadiyyat.

My first *Ramadhan* was indeed a trial and a blessing and it is now my favorite time of year. I look forward to fasting and all of its

cleansing properties for both my body and spirit. Most impressive to me has been the order and structure of the Islamic prayer. In prayers I find completion. In prayers I find the answers to the needs of my soul.

Having resolved this most fundamental question of existence, by the Grace of Allah, I continue life's journey. I am now semi-retired while attending college in pursuit of a law degree.

“The Culmination”

Dhiya Bakr

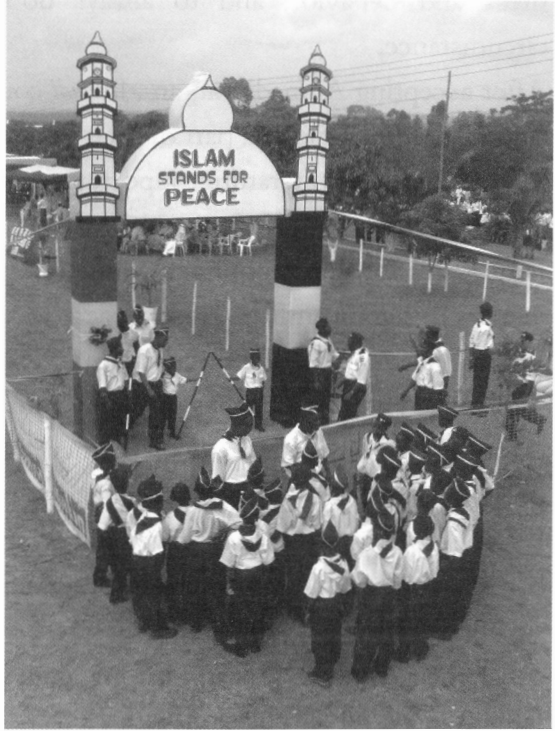
Dhiya was born in Chicago, Illinois. She accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in August, 1965. She presently lives in Zion, Illinois.

Before I ever considered becoming a Muslim, there was a day when I quietly said to myself, “There is no God.” Observing the incongruence in life and religion—lack of family moral teachings, promiscuity, teen pregnancy, adultery, and surrounded by many dysfunctional families, I felt an inner pain and struggled to segregate myself from societal practices exhibited as the norm. A discourse on, “*How What We Eat Influences Our Spirituality*”, presented by the infamous black Muslim Imam, Warith Deen Muhammad, shaped my first life long impression about Islam. I was twelve and in the audience only because my mother decided to hear for herself what these “black Muslims” were all about.

My next significant encounter occurred when I was 23 years of age, while traveling in Ghana, West Africa. The trip itself was the realization of a life goal, to visit the Motherland. However, I suspect that its true purpose was in fulfillment of Allah’s planned exposure for me to Islam in living practice. In West Africa, despite the everyday scarcity of food, poor housing, substandard sanitation facilities, illusory employment options, and only sporadic availability of electrical or alternate power resources, I witnessed countless numbers living lives of Islamic peace and contentment. These two pivotal situations culminated in my acceptance of Ahmadiyyat Islam while in Ghana. The year was 1984, when I could not have foreseen that the life goal of a 23 year young lady was merely the stepping off

point for the woman and life to be.

After signing *Bai'at*, there were many personal obstacles to overcome. One of my favorite activities, public dancing, is denounced in the *Holy Qur'an*. I had to cover my hair, at a time when "Afro" hair styles were symbolic of African heritage, African American women's independence, and opposition to



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oppression in American society. Islam altered my dietary intake as no pork consumption was allowed, even during family gatherings! My mother was concerned that I had joined a cult. Learning that dating was not permitted, family and friends suspected that I was a lesbian. How would I ever marry? My circle of friends declined to one. Despite the drama, I was unscathed by their comments and willingly sacrificed these meager worldly attachments.

My religious affiliation prior to Islam was Baptist. I did not know what this meant or how it defined me. I knew of no similarities between Islam and the Baptist faith. However, I saw many similarities to Islam and my upbringing by parents and grandparents. They taught me to be a good person, i.e. obedience to and respect of parents and other elders, to be truthful, kind, to be modest in

dress and behavior, and to always do what is right in every circumstance.

After accepting Ahmadiyyat, an *Ahmadi* couple, Nycemah and Dhul Yaqub, accepted me as a part of their family. They provided answers to my questions, literature, opportunities to participate in Jama'at activities, functions, *Jalsas*, and amazingly, the Ghana trip. Our family relationship continues, but the inclusive members have increased significantly. Now married to Abu Bakr, of the Zion Illinois Jama'at, we have three children, Khalida, 16, Junaid, 15, and Mubarak, 11. The changes brought more challenges, but *Ummi* (Mother) Nycemah and *Ab'ba* (Father) Hajji Yaqub, accept their position as our family "rock" of guidance and tutor of our children. I came to know God is alive, in us and around us. Through communion with Allah, there is peace and contentment in every situation. Hardships, trials, and successes evidenced in my personal experience; care and death of my grandparents, passing of my father, and a direct collision with cancer. I found God is my best friend and answerer of prayers. And, by following the perfect example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him), I am treading on the straight path to the final culmination, complete submission to God and belief in True Islam.

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CORRECTION: Faith Affirmed page 148

Dhiya Bakr Sahiba accepted Ahmadiyyat Islam in 1984, not 1965 as stated, In addition, she was 24 years old (not 23 as stated) at the time of her visit to Africa and conversion.

