

My Husband's Faithfulness Led Me to Islam

This article is based on an interview with Patricia Sharief, who converted to Islam in 1994; she is married and has three children.

Patricia Sharief is an Austrian who embraced Islam more than 13 years ago. She credits her acceptance of Islam to her husband, who never forced her to follow the religion. Instead, she was impressed by Islam through her husband's dealings and manners.

About her acceptance of Islam, Sharief says, "I was born in Austria and grew up in a Christian family who did not practice regularly. Neither one of my parents showed interest in performing prayer in Church. Also, speaking of religious issues was rare in our house."

She goes on to say, "And in this environment, I began to learn about Islam for the first time in high school through dealings with my colleagues of Turkish origin. I also came across many Turkish colleagues at work. However, what I learned about Islam was through my desire to learn about another culture and religion, and not from a real desire to learn about or convert to that religion."

And on learning about the teachings of Islam, Sharief says, "Destiny led me to meet and marry a Muslim Egyptian man. From our first day together, I noticed that he faithfully practices his religion. My husband always prayed and performed other acts of worship such as fasting and giving money to the poor. Yet, he never spoke to me about Islam, unless I asked him."

"This intrigued me even more and caused my questions to increase. His true commitment and steadfastness in following his faith made me even more determined to learn about the magic of this religion and its influence on its followers."

She adds, "However, my marriage was put to the test with our first Ramadan together. I was shocked to find a complete change in our daily routine. I never imagined that someone can endure an entire day without food or drink, which infuriated me and almost cost us our marriage. However, my husband asked me to calm down and tried to explain to me the reasons behind the various rules pertaining to Ramadan. And although at the time I was not entirely convinced of those reasons, I found myself looking forward to learning more about Islam and its teachings."

Sharief points that with the help of her husband, she began to grow closer to Islam. She was reading more and often asked her husband whenever she had a question. Her husband, despite his busy schedule, was very generous with his time whenever she approached him with a question or concern in order to facilitate her understanding of Islam.

She says that whenever she used to ask him a question that he did not know the answer to, he would then go with her to a Muslim scholars in Austria for discussion.

Sharief continued on her journey until she felt a strong urge to embrace Islam. When she told her husband of her feelings, he advised her to take her time and carefully think about her decision. He also asked her to thoroughly examine the issue from different perspectives, especially the effect this may have on her relationship with her family. However, in time she became more determined to embrace Islam, especially when she observed the closeness and kindness among Muslims and the magnificent environment that engulfs their social life, particularly in Ramadan.

Sharief then adds, "My husband took me to Al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt for my declaration of faith; there I received a document announcing that I have become a Muslim. Upon our return to Austria, I underwent the process of changing my faith on all my documents and certificates."

As for the reaction of her family and friends to news of her conversion to Islam, she says, "We have had our ups and downs for many months until they accepted the religion I chose for myself. Having my first child may have influenced their decision as well."

"As for my friends, some stayed away, while others stayed close; some of whom have even embraced Islam as well. My social life is still active, with the exception of rare occurrences due to the hijab."

Unfortunately, harassment of women wearing the hijab is common in Europe whether in the street or at work, especially since many assume that any woman wearing the hijab must be a foreigner. As a result, many people are shocked when they realize I am Austrian. Meanwhile, I receive many questions about why I chose Islam and wore the hijab and whether my husband forced me to do so among several other stereotypes that I try to disqualify.

Sharief stresses the positive changes in her life as a result of becoming Muslim when she says, "I learned that my life has a purpose; one that is higher

than physical pleasures that rob humans of their intellect and occasionally their souls and hearts; the purpose of my life is to worship God, Glorified be He."

"The five daily Prayers bring me closer to God, giving me greater self-confidence that lead me to more stability and success in life."

"Currently, my husband and I are trying to implant the spirit of Islam and its teachings in the hearts of our three children, which, for me, represents a greater challenge than my conversion to Islam."

"Children are always in a need to understand what they hear and see, rendering the process of teaching them about religion a hard task that requires a great deal of time and patience."

"Meanwhile, the Western media project false information about Islam, resulting in anyone connected to Islam being treated with suspicion and doubt, causing tremendous psychological stress for Muslims."

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About the Author

The website aims at creating and maintaining a balanced, holistic, and authentic center of information on Islam and interactive discourse, with an aim to promote dialogue and understanding through a variety of media.