A Letter from a Brother in the U.S.

It's been said that instead of saying, "All praise is for Allaah who has guided us to Islaam" we should say, "All praise is for Allaah who has guided us to Islaam and the Sunnah," because many have entered into Islaam, but have left the Sunnah in terms of *'aqeedah* (creed), *'ibaadah* (worship), and character.

My journey to correct Islaam was truly one of trial and error. Having grown up in the streets of Baltimore, Maryland, like many misguided youth, I aspired to be no more than one of three things: an athlete, a rapper or a gangster. Without proper guidance and having such low aspirations for myself, I was drawn into the "street life," and subsequently spent most of my life in and out of prisons and detention centers. Thus begins what I refer to as the first phase of my journey to Islaam.

Phase 1: Twisted- At age 18, I was serving a short sentence at a prison is Hagerstown, Maryland. While there, I attended the functions of the Nation of Islaam (N.O.I.) and the Moorish Science Temple of America (M.S.T.O.A.). One day when I was at a N.O.I. (Nation of Islaam) service, the speaker came out wearing his bowtie, having absolutely no hair on his face other than his eyebrows. Two bodyguards stood on both sides of the podium with rock faces. He began his talk: " **Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall! Humpty Dumpty had a great fall! All the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again!** " He paused, and then he shouted, "**Humpty didn't fall, he was pushed!**
" He continued, "
You see, Humpty Dumpty was an egg; and the egg represents life, and life represents the black man! 'All the king's horses and all the king's men' represents the white man, the powers that be! And they could've put Humpty back together again but they didn't want the black man to be united because it would've meant the end of the white man.
"

I came away with my head spinning. This must be the Truth; or so I thought. I had an older friend who was at the prison with me whom I respected. I had known him for years but did not know that he was a Muslim. When I returned from the service, he saw me and asked where I had been. So I told him blow for blow, word for word what I had heard (I have always had a relatively sharp memory). When I finished running it down, my friend could not control his laughter. "Nah, shorty. That ain't it," he said, "I'm going to take you to *Jumu'ah* with me." I didn't

know what *Jumu'ah* (Muslims' Friday congregational prayer) was, but I was willing to go because I thought being rounded meant that you attended all services (i.e. Christian, N.O.I., Rastafarian, M.S.T.O.A. etc.) without committing to any group. The ignorant people call this being “universal”, “spiritual” or, “I have my own relationship with God.” But this only serves to mix you up and confuse about your Lord and religion in general.

Anyhow, I went to *Jumu'ah* that week and for several weeks thereafter as a guest, and did not hear one thing that confused me nor one contradiction. Unlike, the other services I had attended which were full of contradictions. The Christians claimed to be monotheists, yet I found them worshipping a trinity and saying that Jesus is their Lord and savior. The N.O.I. claimed that the Black Man was God and that the white man was the devil, at the same time believing that Allaah created Himself out of “triple darkness.” The M.S.T.O.A. say that they are descendants of the Moors yet they do not follow the religion of the Moroccans and they deny clear verses from the Quran.

So initially, I took my *shahadah* (testimony of faith to enter into Islaam)”, simply because rationally, it made no sense to me to reject something which is apparently true. However, at that time, the knowledge was not as prevalent in the prisons at it is now, and the brothers I was around were not so much concerned with *tafsiyyah and tarbiyyah* (purification and cultivation) as they with simply having you take *shahaadah*, and that's it. It was more of a thing, like, “I got one!” (i.e. I got someone to take *shahaadah*). So at this stage, my Islaam was much like that of the Bedouin Arabs described in the Quran: " **The bedouins say: 'We believe.' Say: 'You believe not but you only say, 'We have surrendered (in Islam),'' for Faith has not yet entered your hearts...** " (49:14)

I did not know the rules and etiquettes of prayer; I recall one morning, I woke up for *Fajr* (dawn) prayer. I rolled out of bed in my underwear, made *wudhoo* (purification required for prayer), stood and prayed. Notice that I did not say I put my clothes on. I stood there in prayer wearing nothing but my boxers (Subhaan Allaah). This is elucidating for you my level of ignorance.

So when the month of *Ramadhaan* (the month in which Muslims observe fasting) came around, my older friend of whom I have mentioned earlier came to me and said, “As-Salaamu ‘alaykum, *Ramadhaan* is coming soon. Are you going to fast?” By him asking me whether or not I was going to fast, I assumed as a Muslim, I have a choice as to whether or not I wanted to fast. So I thought, “Leave my food and drink all day for a whole month?” So I replied, “Nah, I’ll sit this one out.” So my friend, who I later realized was as ignorant as I was, said, “I respect that Akhee (my brother).” (Allaah’s Aid is sought) Therefore, I did not fast my first Ramadhaan out of ignorance of the fact that fasting in *Ramadhaan* is obligatory for the one who is able.

My release date came and I was sadly ill-prepared for the battle that was to come. So when I got out, it was not too long before I abandoned my prayers (in boxers or otherwise) and was back involved with the drugs, the guns and the *zinaa* (fornication). This was 1995; I was 19 yrs. old.

Phase 2: Sincerity (Ikhlaas)- Traveling down the same destructive path, I travelled to Raleigh, North Carolina in late 1997 and continued a life of crime. Only this time, I was Muslim (depending on who you ask). I attended *Jumu’ah*, when I wanted to, and prayed when I wanted to. Shaytaan (the devil) had deceived me to the point that, if I planned to commit a crime on a particular day (an armed robbery, drug deal etc.) then I would make a prayer on that day, or if it was Friday, then I would go to a masjid and attend the *Jumu’ah* prayer. If I was successful in the crime, I would think that Allaah blessed me in my crime for the one prayer I made or the *Jumu’ah* I had attended.

Needless to say, I was arrested again in August of 1998 for armed bank robbery. This time it was federal. I was sent to a prison in Indiana.

In the federal penitentiary, the environment is different from what I had experienced in state prisons at home in Maryland. Inmates from all over the U.S. and different parts of the world are housed by the Feds. People hang together based upon what city or state they are from, their gang affiliations, or their race. And then there are the Muslims - those who come together for faith.

I was a bit rebellious, so I was torn between my “homies” (i.e. people from one’s hometown) from Baltimore, and my belief (as jaded as it was) in Islaam. Due to my ignorance and anger at myself for being in prison again, I inclined towards my “homies” who were into just about everything from wine to robbing other inmates. So the first year or so of my incarceration was a wild ride.

As a result of the mixture of different mentalities in prison, there is almost always some level of tension. Fights, stabbings and sometimes murders happen for the most trivial things; like sports, gambling or telephones. I along with some “homies”, were involved in an altercation with inmates from another town. A few days later, I was sent to a maximum security prison in Marion, Illinois.

While at this prison, I met the man whom I now refer to as my mentor. His name is Mujaahid Abdul-‘Alee Muslim, from St. Louis, MO. He was not like any Muslim I had ever seen. From him, I actually saw the beauty of Islaam in his character; for him Islaam was not just an association or something to do while in prison -as this is how a Muslim should be. This is what I say about him and I glorify no one over Allaah. The Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu ‘alahi wa sallam* (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), said, “
The best among you is he who when you see him, he reminds you of your duty to Allaah.
” I realized what I needed to do.

So I finally began learning Islaam. With Mujaahid, I learned about the *sunnah* of Muhammad, *s allallaahu ‘alahi wa sallam*
. I actually learned about the miraculous nature of Allaah’s Book, the Qur’aan. With him, I studied the books: The Sealed Nectar (one of the best biographies of the Prophet Muhammad,),

Tasfir Ibn Kathir
(one of the best commentaries on the Qur’aan),
Kitaab-ut-Tawheed
(A book on the monotheistic nature of God),
Fiqhus-Sunnah
and many other works. I also began my studies in ‘Arabic and learned how to read the Qur’aan with its proper rules of recitation (Tajweed).

Then, in 2001, my mother became ill and I was just beginning to learn from Islaam the reverence that one should have for his mother. Being her only child, we were always close, but for me, Islaam drew me closer to her. So when she got sick, I became deeply concerned for her soul. So I really began to step up my studies in Islaam so that I could call my mother to this

beautiful religion that I had grown to love. It would be a great task since she was a licensed missionary for the “Church of such and such in Christ,” and she was well versed in Christianity. We began to debate over the phone and in letters. I supplied her evidences from the Qur’aan and the Bible about the Truth of Islaam and the falsity of what she was upon. This went on until one day she said, “Baby, I recognize the Truth in everything you’re saying. I don’t know what the future holds for me, but as for right now, this is what I’m going to stick with.” (Allaah’s Aid is sought). Shortly thereafter, she had cardiac arrest which led to arrhythmia and a coma. While she was in the coma, I would call the hospital room and have my family hold the phone to her ear, and I would talk to her. I would say the *shahadah* in her ear and tell her to say it in her heart if she could hear me. Within a few weeks, she died. To Allaah we belong and to Him we shall return.

So in my grief, I focused on Islaam and poured all I had into it. I studied and memorized as much Qur’aan as I could. I memorized the *hadeeths* (prophetic traditions) and was steadfast in my worship of Allaah, and Allaah has aided me in it.

Phase 3: Happiness in Salafiyyah (Following the Righteous Predecessors – True Islaam) – In 2003 my mentor was sent to another prison and shortly thereafter, so was I. I ended up at a prison at Jonesville, Virginia. This is where I first encountered brothers who openly called to the way of the S *alaf* (predecessors) as a methodology, although they made a few mistakes. I listened to the lectures from the well known scholars and students of knowledge on cassette tapes, like: Dawud Adeeb, Abu Uways, Bilaal Davis, Rasheed Barbee, Abul-Hasan Maalik and many others. And from the scholars: Shaykh ibn al-Uthaymeen, Shaykh Muqbil ibn Haadee, Shaykh Rabee’ ibn Haadee, Shaykh al-Albaanee and many others. I also memorized the books: “The 3 fundamentals of Islaam,” “The Four Principles,” and “What Nullifies One’s Islaam” by: Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhaab, and studied the works of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Al-Qayyim and others.

I studied Arabic grammar with my Muslim brother Talib Shakir, and another brother from Palestine. The bulk of my Arabic grammar studies were with my friend Hossaam Abdel-Jaleel from Egypt.

In this phase I learned the difference between Islaam, and what some of the Muslims are engaged in from innovations, crimes and terrorism, which can in no way be called Islaam.

Since then, I’ve been to five other prisons between the federal system and the North Carolina

state system, continuing my studies and calling to correct Islaam. I have encountered many trials along the way, but Allaah has aided me in my endeavors. He has illuminated my heart with the light of faith and guided me to a path that is straight. So All the Praise is for Allaah who has guided me to Islaam and the Sunnah.

After 9/11 happened, things became somewhat hard for the Muslims in prison. Prison administrators strive harder to hinder the growth of Islaam using too many methods to mention. However, they could never put out the Light of Allaah. Islaam is continuing to grow and flourish, and due to the help of many *Salafee* organizations, the correct knowledge and methodology of Islaam is spreading. However, there is still much work to be done.

On June 1st, 2010, **Phase 4** of my story begins. This is when I'll be released from prison, inshaa Allaah (God willing). I am much better prepared for the battle this time. And the best provision is that of Taqwaa (piety).

Written by one in need of Allaah.
Raha Batts As-Salafee