

STORIES FROM CONVERTS:

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In the Name of Allah, The Most Merciful, The Giver of Mercy

Everything began with an innocent travel to *Foz do Iguaçu* (*Parana*, Brazil) in January, 2005. My parents did not get so excited about traveling to this city, because they were thinking that there was nothing different but the Falls there. So, still in my city, I started to look for different tourist attractions on the Internet, besides the Iguaçu Falls. Then I found that there is also a *safari* trip, shopping in Paraguay, a Buddhist Temple and a Mosque. At long last, we decided to go.

I loved to know that there were Buddhist temple and mosques there, once I always loved everything that could be different for me, as well as to know different cultures. And, besides, I always looked for comfort to my spiritual side and I had never found anything until then.

So, arriving in *Foz do Iguaçu*, the first different thing I saw (at least it was for me) was a lot of women wearing scarves (today I know that these are *hijabs!*). Where I live, I had never seen any person wearing something like that! Every place I looked, they were there! And I thought they were so beautiful, feminine, and, at the same time, they showed respect, dignity and modesty! But, I would be a liar if I say that I knew **WHY** they were wearing that cloth on their head. In my mind (dominated by the occidental mass media), they were only Arabic and nothing more.

During the travel, I said every time to my parents to go to both the temple and mosque. My idea, firstly, was to know more about Buddhism and just to take some pictures at the mosque. I always thought that Buddhism was a philosophy which tells us to be humble and simple, not show ostentation of wealth and to not be a slave of all material things.

On a rainy day, we went to the temple. I started my chain of disappointments when we had just arrived there... Personally, I have never liked images and idols... And already at the entrance there was a Buddha about 3m high! And there were a lot of statues, images etc. which I had no idea of what they could mean. So, as I am very curious, I started to look for someone who could explain those things a little more to me. The only one I found was a Korean guy who spoke absolutely nothing in Portuguese. Whilst this was happening, another curious family arrived. Since it was raining a lot and everybody wanted to know better the temple, this Korean guy took us to the second floor, where they did their rituals. And there were four big Buddhas in a big room, everyone painted in gold color: the first was the most simple and the fourth was the most imposing one, which had a crown and a cedar. In front of every Buddha there were fruits and cereal grains maybe as offerings. And in this room there were also some statues of dragons and strange things like that. The Korean guy bowed himself a lot before close the door. We were not able to pass through the door line, just to take a look from the outside. Everything I lived this moment was disgusting! Bowing for a statue? For something which can do nothing for us and even his own self? And the offerings are to whom? To a statue who benefits none? And all the "gold" and ostentation!! I could not believe that! Then I realized that I would never like Buddhism or anything linked to it... I never accepted the worshipping of idols and statues made by human beings! I hated everything I saw at that temple. I went away very disappointed.

Then, after the temple, my family decided to go to the mosque, so that we could see something more that day. But when we arrived there we could not visit it, because they were praying that time. So we might go back another day.

We went back to the mosque only on the last day of travel, just before take the route to come back to my city. It was morning and the mosque was all empty! There were only some people who were cleaning the place, and they were not Muslims... But they seemed to be with a very willing to show us the mosque. One lady asked to my sister, my mother and I to put on a long scarf which she gave to us before entering. And then, when I entered, I started to be intrigued with everything I saw there... For all of my short life, all the religious buildings I have entered I discovered at first glance "what" they glorify: statues of Buddha, Jesus, saints, symbols, names written in front of the building... But nothing there (in the mosque) was giving me a clue!!! Inside the mosque there was only a carpet, a pulpit and a bookshelf at the corner. But where were the idols, the names, the symbols!!!!?? There were only some Arabic writings hanged on the walls... and nothing more! So the curiosity was filling me completely! What makes this place so different?! I decided, since all these questions and lots more were flooding in my mind, to know more about their (Islamic) creed. There were some different pamphlets on that bookshelf at the corner. I took one of each, and each one was dealing with different Islamic subjects (the pillars of Islam, women, God, prophets, rules, rights and duties etc). I read all of them during the travel and I was more and more enchanted by the religion every time I finished one pamphlet!

When we arrived, I started to look for some (more) Islamic knowledge! I wrote to Islamic institutions in my country and one Sheikh from Rio de Janeiro (to whom I am really grateful) helped me a lot! He sent me a lot of books, took out all of my doubts and had plenty of patience with me! So within about one month everything I did was to study Islam more and more! And every time I knew more about the religion, more it fulfilled me with peace, reason and logic! The Islam had (and has) all the reasonable answers to my (spiritual and worldly) questions!

Everything I looked for during my whole life I was founding in Islam!!! I started to feel self-confident about the religion and all the feelings which were strongly appearing inside me!

And so, after one month (or less) of studies I did the Shahada (confession of faith) with this Sheikh (by audio on Internet – very modern, isn't it?). And today, after more than one year, I am proudly a Muslim woman and feeling safe of my creed and that Allaah the Exalted guided me to His Straight Path! He found me astray and (then) He guided me! Subhana Rabbil-'Alaa (Exalted be Allah the Most High)! I started to use hijab just some weeks after my shahada, Al Hamdulillah (Praise be to Allah)!

Since I knew Islaam, I feel the mercy of Allaahu ta'aalaa and I love and fear Him as I have never did before!! And all my best acts, best prayers and all praises are for Allaah, the most High, the Most Merciful! I ask Allaah for His guidance and that He never let me astray and that may He make me die but as a pious Muslim woman. Ameen.

And this is my history! It is not so exciting but it is definitely a mercy of Allaah!