***In the Name of Allah, most Compassionate, most Merciful***

**Becoming Muslim
True Life Story - "Young Man Travels the World to Find Himself - *In Prison*"**

*Yusuf Muhammad Ansari*

*Assalaamu'alaikum! I am posting this story on behalf of a brother who is now serving his term in a prison in Scotland and hence has no access to the internet. He is a brother who takes his belief very seriously and looks forward to correspond with other brothers and sisters for discussions, exchange opinions and ideas. I hope this story would attract attention of visitors of your web site to befriend this sincere brother.
- Jamaludin Yaakob*

**MY JOURNEY TO ISLAM**

In September 4 1993 I began a journey that was a childhood dream. I left my home city of Aberdeen, Scotland at 4.10 p.m. with the intention of driving my camper van all the way to Goa, India, and back. Before I undertook this journey I spent a lot of time reading on the countries, customs, peoples and religions which at the very least could give me a basic understanding of the how I should re-act when arriving upon each place.

Although the diversity of the peoples was a task to take on board, it was the diversity of religions that stuck most in my mind. There seemed to be for me an excitement about Islamic countries, which kept coming to my thought.

The journey went well with the exception of a few mechanical problems throughout Eastern Europe. The first Islamic country I was to reach was Turkey. Although I had been there before, I had never been to Istanbul.

I was tired and needed rest. As one would do, I left my camper in a campsite and spent the next three weeks ad-hoc traveling through the center of the city to see the sites. On what was to be my last day in Istanbul I visited the Blue Mosque and the Pink Mosque *[probably the Aya Sofia -MSA-USC.]*. This, my brothers and sisters, was to be my introduction to the one and true religion of Al-Islam. It was a Friday, and as I recall during 'Asr prayer no one (from the tourists) was allowed in the Pink Mosque. Due to my inquisitiveness I got firstly lost inside the mosque and secondly found myself locked in standing at the back watching the wonderful event of 'Asr prayer unfolding before my eyes. I feel I can never quite express clearly what happened next except to say that I felt drawn, numb and very hot all at the same time. Unwittingly I remembered thinking that this was really for me without questioning why or what this religion was all about. I knew the basic belief was that there was only one God. I believed that all my life anyway. The prayer had finished and all were on their way out. A brother approached me. I felt embarrassed as I apologized for being there when I should not. He smiled and assured me that it was all right.

After leaving the mosque, I went on a walk about heading towards the harbour area. I was standing looking in a window when I felt a presence behind me. I turned around to see the same man I met in the mosque; again he smiled. He told me to wait a moment as he went downstairs in the shop. When he appeared again a few moments later, he handed me a plastic bag and said "Is this what you have been looking for brother?" As I looked in the bag there was a translation of the Holy Qur'an in English. This was when an amazing thing happened. I looked up to thank him but he was gone. The strange thing was that there was no side road, alley or lane for him to simply disappear. Until this day I have never figured out where he had gone.

The journey re-commenced the next day, heading towards Eastern Turkey. I began to read the Qur'an in the evening and felt drawn to visit mosques route. Every time I met Muslim people they were forever inviting me to their homes for meals, etc. Their politeness and good character was what I have encountered before. My head was full of emptiness waiting to be filled with knowledge and I constantly asked questions about Islam. I somehow felt that I had found something that was always there but did not know how to find it and what it was.

Iran was to be the same. The more I traveled the more I felt drawn to the mosques and the company of the people. There was something distinctive about how the people were. At first I couldn't put my finger on it. I came from the West where I had been nurtured into a set of beliefs, values and attitude. The attitude seemed hard to shake off. The attitude that I matter, I am indispensable, I will stand on who I need to, so I may get to the top. Who is God? Does it matter? Money and prestige is more important, is it not? I felt a constant battle as I came from there, but I somehow felt I belonged here.

All the way through Iran I never felt intimidated, in fact, quite the opposite. If I had taken all the many offers of meals, accommodation, etc., I fear that I would still be there, and I would have gotten into trouble with the authorities. My visa was for one week only.

The next country was Pakistan. Here was where things got even better. The people were quite at ease and seemed happy to answer my non-stop questions on Islam. I visited more mosques. I was in more houses in Pakistan than I had probably ever been at home.

Another thing that I have always believed in before embracing Islam was pre-destination. Others may call it fate. This had led me to the next encounter of life with the Muslim people. My windscreen had broken and I ended up searching Quetta for a new one. I was directed to Tradesmen Street. There was where I met Muhammad, a motor body repairer. He kindly let me stay in his lock-up yard for five days until he could locate a windscreen. Everyday without fail he I ate at his house or he brought me food. He took me to meet the headmasters of both a public and a private school. He refused point blank that I should put my hand in my pocket to buy anything. He told me stories of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and other Islamic issues. At times I found it difficult to contain my emotions. I could not believe the hospitality I was receiving.

One occasion sticks in my mind which left me in tears and astounded. I was in Muhammad's house for lunch. There was his family there including around thirteen children. While I taught them a Scottish nursery rhyme Muhammad videotaped us together. Within minute the children who spoke no English, mastered it. When I was entering my van I heard some commotion at the end of the street. There, there were around one hundred children running towards me singing the Scottish nursery rhyme. I was surrounded as the tears ran from my cheeks with joy. It was so beautiful. Here was a stranger in a strange land and they wanted nothing from me except just to stay a little bit longer. I had to go. The following day I visited the local mosque and said my good bye with regret.

On the road to the Pakistani/Indian border I continued to read the Qur'an and still question why these people were being so nice to me but wanted nothing in return. Strange indeed.

As I said before, I was coming from the West where, in the material sense, they have everything. There was me traveling through a land with a house on wheels while around me so many people were living in squalor. If you have never had nothing you do not know what it's like, or, from my point of view, I had never experienced nothing.

My next encounter showed me the simplicity of man in relation to our Creator, Allah (s.w.t.). As I drove the Sindh region in the desert I began to become anxious to find a place off the road to park for the evening. Suddenly I came upon a simple house of clay in the middle of nowhere. I approached the house and knocked on the door. An old man answered. I said "As salaam Alaykum", he replied in kind. I asked if it was ok to park for the night? He spoke no English but acknowledged what I meant.

He invited me for tea. Immediately I became consciously aware of the simplicity of his dwelling. There was nothing which did not have a use, and everything was to a bare minimum. As I recalled the items, there was a staff carpet, a copy of al-Qur'an, a pot and a water skin. We sat on the carpet and drank tea. As he moved to the window, he left without warning with the water skin and a mat in hand. After a good five minutes had passed, I went outside. What I saw next I could only describe as 'the day the world stopped.' As the sun dropped out of the sky below the horizon, there was complete silence. The man in front of me dropped to his knees in total obedient worship to our Creator, a memory that lasts with me until this day.

I made it to India, visited more mosques and made it all the way back unscathed. I thought the people back home had changed, they had not, but I had.

It is so easy to allow yourself to be consumed by the method rather than being the method. Please allow me to elaborate. While in the East, I had accommodation, money and for once in my life, simplicity, empathy and understanding. It is not that I don't have them now. It's simply a different game with different rules and players. I tend to call it the reverse process. In simple terms, to the wonderful creations in the East, God is the important factor. It was to be my downfall back here in the West, trading god for money, or you may call it materialism. It seems easy to say now but for me anything with the word 'ISM' attached should be avoided at all costs.

No! I still had not embraced Islam. Although conscious of what I had learned, I put it on the back burner. The quest for me, which seemed more important, was accommodation, job, flat, and car. All of these don't grow on trees and, really how money becomes available never really mattered. I couldn't find a proper job. My wife who had been my constant traveling partner became just as disillusioned as I did. We had only been married a short time and even getting married to each other was ever shorter on three and a half-month. We couldn't get work; we were tired of travel and extremely tired of each other.

As things got progressively worse as we could not find work or accommodation, things were getting desperate. My wife found an advertisement in the local paper asking for a sauna receptionist. In our naiveté we both believed that a Sauna was in fact a Sauna. At the same time she got the job, I got offered some work dealing and running drugs. The sauna turned out to be a front for prostitution and it was not long before my wife decided to swap answering the telephone for the red light. We both loved the money, we both became drugs users and all seemed fantastic.

This was to be short lived. It tore us apart. We were in a web where there seemed no way out. On the one hand we needed the money to feed our cocaine habit. On the other hand, I got sick of drugs, money, prostitution, in fact, everything. We kept the company of like-minded characters that helped feed the desire for self-gratification. I tried so hard to get off the drugs. In the mean time I tried to get my wife off the prostitution. She seemed by now to love the money more than me. I would sit for many hours staring at this accumulating amount of money before my eyes with total disdain. Little did I realize that all was about to change - first for the worst.

Two weeks before 15 April 1996 two things happened simultaneously. The first thing happened after an encounter to the library. I took a book out on loan called "The Basics of Islam". Inside I found what one says when taking the Shahadah. I was lonely, desperate and searching for the right way. I had no one in this strange city to witness me taking the Shahadah. I therefore had no choice. I took my Shahadah bearing witness to Allah (s.w.t.) four times. I took the piles of money and put it in a jack in a cupboard. I flushed the remaining drugs in the toilet. I felt alive for the first time in a long time, although short lived.

My wife who had become a stranger to me arrived back that evening. I told her of the day's events. This was to be the final acclaim. We spoke little over the next two weeks. I had my plan set that I was going back east. In all this confusion we both plotted a terrible crime and the end result would be we would go together east. Everybody says I am innocent. I was set up, etc. etc. I am not going to say this at all: I am guilty of committing a horrible crime and the consequence of my action has led me serving a life sentence. My wife? She got off and now we are divorced, thank God!

I have now served three years of my sentence and expect to serve a further seven or eight years. You may well remember earlier that I said everything is pre-ordained. I have questioned on many occasions as to how did I end up here. The story says it all. Nevertheless, brothers and sisters, everything has a reason. One might ask what have you done with your time in prison? What is the future of your life? What are your hopes, dreams and aspirations?

Well, I think it goes like this. No man can run riot through the land without taking responsibility for his actions and I feel it is better to be punished in this life than in the hereafter.

When I first came to prison I was in Stoughton Jail, Edinburgh. After being processed where all details were asked for, one of the questions was what religion are you? I replied Islam. I was immediately given a Muslim diet and allowed to go to the Muslim meetings where brothers from outside came to the prison fortnightly. I recalled the first meeting as I walked into the room I held my head in shame. I couldn't stop saying why did I do that. I wept as the brothers gave me support. I by my actions created not just one victim but so many. My victim's family, friends, work associates, etc. have all been affected by my thoughtless actions. I have seen my father turned gray, my mother on anti-depression tablets and my brother too.

I will probably never ever know the real impact of my crime upon my victim, nor do I ever expect forgiveness. I am deeply sorry and ashamed of my actions.

One of the brothers in Edinburgh said to me 'you can't change the past, you can only hope to attain to be a better person in the future.' I took my Shahadah again that evening this time in front of witnesses, back in 1996.

The easy part, which may seem the hardest part, is getting accustomed to nothingness and solitude. That is one thing prison does for a man. It gives you time, plenty of it, to think. My first reaction was to think of what I had lost; not only family, friends, my respect and all of that "ISM' materialism.

Soon I lost the need for materialism. As I sit here now in the concrete tomb, I exchange my coat of materialism for spiritualism. I have embraced Islam fully, slowly, but surely. I am building up a new set of moral and ethical values. I pray five times daily as prescribed in Islam and beg Allah (s.w.t.) for forgiveness.

What have I done with my time you may ask? I have undertaken a home study course in Islamic Studies which consists of twenty booklets on various Islamic subjects, which on completion leads to five O' grades or GCSES. I have undertaken the first year of a degree course in Arabic and Islamic Studies. I read the Qur'an and the Ahadeeth of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) daily. I get immeasurable support from regular visits from the brothers from the Aberdeen Mosque. Why all these you may ask? Well, I believe in Allah (s.w.t.), I believe that good can overrule bad and only through the straight path of Islam can this be achieved.

I want to be an asset to society when I eventually leave the prison, inshallah. I hope that I may have obtained my degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies by then so as I may undertake da'awah work and hopefully get a job teaching Islamic subjects.

My short-term objective is that I may be able to obtain some correspondence with Muslims world wide in the hope that I may be able to give support and hopefully receive some too. My final hope is that I may be able to get another chance of marriage. So, if any of you out there would be interested in correspondence and/or marriage, you can contact me at the following address.

Yusuf Muhammad Ansari
Reg. No 26202
H.M. Prison
Peterhead AB42 6YY
Scotland

May Allah (s.w.t.) grant you all success in this life and in the life Hereafter, Ameen.

My short resume:

Name : Yusuf Muhammad Ansari

Age : 38

Height : 5' 7"

Weight : 11.7 stone

Appearance : Round face, beard, short hair

Current Status : Life sentence prison

Qualifications : English GCSE, Information Technology 1 + 2,

 Word Processing, Math, 5 GCSE Islamic Studies,

 currently undertaking Degree course in Arabic

 and Islamic Studies.

Nationality : British

Caucasian : White

Marital Status : Divorced

Children : 1 daughter (no access or visiting right)

Previous

Employment : Oil rigs offshore (6 & 1/2 years)

 : Helicopter landing officer

 : Derrick man

 : Self employed house restorer (5 years)

Sincerely yours

*Yusuf Muhammad Ansari*

*Aug. 3rd, 1999*