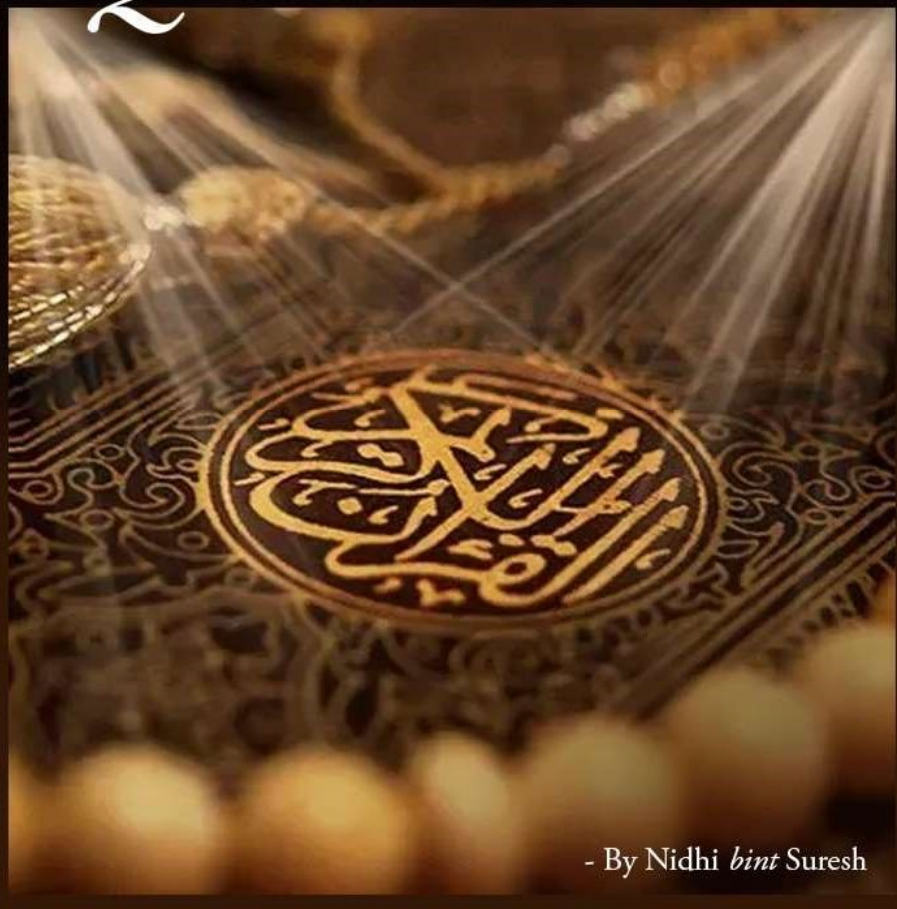


IQRA - my search for His Signs



- By Nidhi *bint* Suresh

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

I seek refuge in God from Devil, the cursed

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Forever Merciful

IQRA: My Search for His Signs

- By Nidhi *bint* Suresh

January 2020 Edition

In Appreciation and Gratitude

I submit this humble effort in service to God, in thanks and appreciation for His guidance. My efforts are flawed and insufficient, but His mercy is perfect and boundless.

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي، وَارْحَمْنِي، وَاهْدِنِي، وَاجْبُرْنِي، وَعَافِنِي، وَارْزُقْنِي، وَارْقُعْنِي

O God forgive me, have mercy on me, guide me, support me, protect me, provide for me and elevate me.

I dedicate this to my mother and my father, both of whom God selected for me with His utmost wisdom. It is through my parents that He taught me the importance of beneficial knowledge, tireless efforts, honest truth, open-mindedness, revolutionary thought and compassionate service.

رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ إِنِّي تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَإِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

My Lord! Inspire me to always be thankful for Your favours which You blessed me and my parents with, and to do good deeds that please You. And instill righteousness in my offspring. I truly repent to You, and I truly submit to Your Will.

I write with appreciation and thanks to my husband who stood by my choices and supported me; who never once forced me or preached to me; who only asked me one thing – if you ever do anything that is a part of Islam anytime in your life, do it if, and when, YOU believe in it, otherwise don't do it. Don't worry about the opinions and statements of others. Stay true to yourself.

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous.

PREFACE

My journey to Islam has been in steps and stages. It was a different journey at every stage – sometimes it was lip service alone, sometimes it was emotional, sometimes intellectual, sometimes based on my need, and sometimes based on my current situation. At every stage though, it was compelling. I tried to resist it, but it overcame me. I was never looking for Islam. I was looking for who I was, I was looking for an explanation to my pains and my pleasures, I wanted to know what I meant to different people in my life, I was looking for my self-worth even. I was never looking for Islam! It, however, kept pulling me. Even as I couldn't make sense of this attraction, this need, I still found myself pulled to it. I tried to explain it to myself in many ways.

My life, just like everyone else's, presented some struggles – internal and external. There has always been a search for peace – sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. Ever since I could remember, I used to have some internal conversations in my head. Whenever I was confused or hurt or in some need, I would ask “whoever God was” for some signs. Nobody knew about this conversation, it was within my heart. It sounds dramatic when you say it aloud, but inside my head it was the most natural conversation ever, ***“God, I don't know who You are, and I am confused or hurt about such and such ... show me a sign.”*** I was born in a Hindu family, but temples, idols and religious ceremonies were mere rituals to me. I used to better relate to the private and confidential conversations in my head with “whoever God was.” I didn't think I knew Him, but I knew He was there somewhere. My reasoning was that God cannot be like humans. He should not be in any need of my worship. At the same time, if He is God, then He should be able to listen to the private conversations inside my heart, and He should be able to respond to me with His signs. That would suffice for me, I thought! I didn't feel the need to know Him anymore than that.

"If this stubborn motorbike of mine starts today morning in one kick, that means that today my test results will be good in school."

To the outer world it may seem silly, but to me it was my internal talk, my personal savior and intuition. I based small and big decisions of my life on these wishful signs that I created for myself and then looked. As life progressed, somethings didn't make sense – whether it was personal life or events around the world. I was still looking for signs, only overtime my questions grew bigger than the school classroom or the next family meet.

From whatever little I had seen in the 20 odd years of my life, Muslims to me represented low status of the society. Basically, poor people with very basic jobs, little education, and even lesser success. Particularly Muslim men on the streets were forever eve-teasing, swearing or generally low in manners. Basically, humility and character were the last things that I would have ever associated with Muslims. That was all my exposure to Islam was. But I was an open-minded person in the sense that I always thought every individual is different. So, despite being a Muslim, some people might turn out good too! Other than that, Muslims and Islam didn't really mean anything to me. Until I met my husband. As I accepted his marriage proposal, I reasoned to myself – He is nice, genuine, truthful, loyal and well mannered. On, he must be an exception to the general trend!

After marriage came my first step towards Islam. Religion, at that time, was not a big deal in my life. I was doing this for my husband. I said the *shahadah* – the declaration of Islamic faith – *la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad ur-rasool Allah* – there is no god but Allah ﷻ, and Muhammad ﷺ is His Messenger. It was just a statement to me then. I had only heard it being spoken in movies. Muslims say it before they die – I thought to myself. Frankly, I didn't even know what it meant. And I didn't really care. I simply repeated it after the religious priest who came to help us get married. Something about that statement felt both nice and heavy at the same time. I liked the sound of it and I was scared of it at the same time. But I was sure there was nothing more to it!

Sometime later, one of my husband's uncles gifted me an English translation of the Quran. It had "English of the Victorian era" and I must confess that I literally understood nothing at all. Besides, I knew nothing about the Islamic history and the references to any stories and characters were totally lost on me. Nevertheless, I wanted to read it. I couldn't understand why I felt compelled to read it. I told myself that I only wanted to know something about Islam to be able to somewhat understand my husband's life and beliefs. It is true that I had never felt this compelling desire to read any other religious book ever before. I had never read a Ramayana, Mahabharatha, a Bhagvat Gita, Guru Granth Sahib, Torah or a Bible cover to cover before. I felt that the religious books were read cover to cover and in depth only by the priests of that religion. It was not something I would ever be interested in. There were so many reasons not to read the translation of the Quran, yet I found myself reading it from beginning to end, even though I didn't understand anything. I kept telling myself I was only doing this for my husband!

The second time that I came in touch with Islam was when my kids started to learn at a home-based *madrassa* (Islamic school) in a small town of England. I remember when my husband told me to go and talk to this lady who runs a home-based *madrassa* to enroll our kids. My first thought was – "why?". I don't want my kids to be into religious studies and become conservative. But I went because I felt that this was important for my husband. I was nervous as I went to speak to her. I don't know what I was expecting but I simply found a very nice lady. She appreciated the fact that I was not technically a Muslim but still wanted my kids to learn about Islam. I relaxed as I spoke to her. My kids started learning from her. Around the same time, a lady from my husband's family who is also a dear friend, asked me what my beliefs are and if I ever prayed. It was a light-hearted conversation but something about that statement hit me. I felt low and ashamed of myself that I didn't know much about God, I sought Him and His help in my internal conversations whenever I needed it, but I had never made any effort to know anything

about Him or to thank Him. To my utter amazement, a few months after dropping and picking my kids from classes, I found myself going and talking to the teacher that I wanted to learn something about Islam. Would she be able to teach me? She asked me what I wanted to learn. I replied that I don't know. Just teach me something. Anything! I felt drawn like a magnet attracts metal. I just couldn't peel myself away. The teacher was a busy lady, so I started learning from her daughter, who was almost half my age. This time I told myself that I am only doing this to understand what my children are learning, nothing else!

There was a lot of media hype at that time about defamation of an Islamic religious figure – the prophet Muhammad ﷺ. One day while learning, I asked my teacher about her thoughts regarding the demeaning cartoons of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that were being made, and all the uproar in the media. How do you respond to such character attacks? I was curious how Muslims with knowledge respond to such situations. I was probably expecting the usual angry response, or an expression of her frustration with the ignorance, disregard and insensitivity of people in today's day and age. But I saw nothing of the sort. She was so overwhelmed with emotion that she couldn't speak. Her head bowed down, and a tiny tear slipped her eye. It was almost as if someone had said something disrespectful against a person's dead parent, only the pain on her face looked many times over. I was astonished. I had never seen such genuine love in anyone for any other human being. Her love for the Prophet ﷺ was more than her anger for the people trying to insult him! How can anyone love anyone with this level of truth and intensity? This question was going to stay in my mind for a long time to come. But right at that moment, I wished I knew love like that. I wished I loved someone with that amount of devotion or someone in this world loved me like that – to honor me, to respect me, and to love me in a way that even if the conditions around them are the worst, their love and care for me would still prevail. What I did not know then was that years later, I would be hearing a description how the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ loved people who would follow him. He loved

those who were not yet born, those who he had never seen, and he loved them so much that he cried for them every night. Then I would understand that this is the love that I have been craving. Then I would understand that the prophet Muhammad ﷺ loved me like this even before I was born. But I did not know that right now. For now, I was in awe of the amount and intensity of love that my teacher had for her prophet ﷺ.

Around the same time, I met some “practicing Muslims”. To my surprise, they were the nicest and the most welcoming ladies that I had ever met in my life. They were friendly, helpful and kind. I had friends before, but this friendship was different. They were very simple ladies with simple lifestyles, and they went out of their way to make me feel so comfortable. Why were they so nice to me? And they did not want anything in return! What was the cause of so much peace and unconditional love in their behavior? They did not judge me by any means – fat or slim, rich or poor, famous, intelligent and successful or ordinary, fashionable or simple - none of that mattered! To top it all, once I talked to them and turned to leave, I knew in my heart that they will not backbite about me, ever! Now, that was a kind of confidence that I had never felt in any friend or family member ever before. What made them like this? I had just found another justification for my enticement to learning about Islam. Ah! I told myself. I want to learn about this religion, have such genuine friends and enjoy the peace and honesty that these people have. This time I was telling myself that I am learning about Islam for the sake of having a circle of good friends and bonding with people, nothing else!

Then one day, I had an eerie dream. It felt more real than any reality. It was a short dream and I could remember every part of it in extraordinary detail. It should have been scary, but I wasn't scared at all. A part of that dream was – *“that a dark invisible force was pulling me towards itself like a powerful vacuum, sucking me and my kids in. I was super scared and felt helpless and was looking for something to hold on to, that could stop me from being sucked in. I paused for a fraction of a second and then I started to recite*

the shahadah. I was reciting it non-stop, almost frantically, desperately, repeatedly, without pausing to breathe. And as I started to recite it, the force loosened. I quickly took the opportunity and ran away into my room – huffing and puffing but continuing almost mindlessly with shahadah, like it was the only thing in the world.” I could not explain this dream to myself. I didn’t identify myself as a Muslim yet, but I started to pray and fast and it gave me beautiful peace and contentment. I couldn’t explain my connection with fasting and praying, neither did I feel the need to reason it.

It was blissful and peaceful to pray, fast and hang out with my new friends. Little did I know that I would be leaving this circle of friends very soon, but they will continue to be my friends forever. Even when we would be miles away, we would stay connected. We would see each other in our dreams. We would pray for each other’s well-being almost every day. And whenever we do meet years later, I would still feel the same love, the same connection. I moved from England to Canada. Slowly life took over and I started to forget about this attraction to Islam. I almost didn’t realize when or why I stopped praying. I told myself and my family that I was a secular open-minded person. Let us celebrate religious festivals of all religions – Eid, Christmas, Diwali, Chinese New Year, Halloween. Doesn’t matter what it is! Life is meant to enjoy and be good to people and that is it. God will be good to us as well. We are not doing anything wrong or bad. So, it’s all good. Until there came a time, when my life came to a sudden, crashing halt. A jolt of reality is enough to wake up a person lost in blissful dreams and delusions. So many things going on in my life didn’t make sense. I felt broken emotionally, physically, spiritually, socially, financially, mentally. Life seemed to be going alright in outward terms with a few hiccups here and there, but then what was the reason for such deep pain in my heart. It wasn’t as if I had never faced any problems before. I was not in the best of health but wasn’t dying of any terminal disease. I wasn’t super rich, but I wasn’t broke either. There were a few unpleasant things going on in life, but it wasn’t the end of the world. Then why did I feel

so broken, so shattered. I would wake up in the middle of the night and feel like crying for no reason. I would feel like I couldn't breathe. I would go out in the balcony at 2 am and stand there in the cold air just so that I could get some fresh air and breathe. I felt like my heart was breaking into tiny little pieces. And then someone was nailing them one by one to the floor. I was confused, sad, angry, upset, lost – all at once. One night, I reached the peak of my pain. It felt like the end. I wasn't expecting to wake up next morning. But I did. A big question kept doing rounds in my head and in my heart – WHY? Why am I still here? Do I have a purpose?

I saw another dream this time. It again felt very real. Once again, it was a short dream and I could remember every part of it in extraordinary detail. Once again, it should have been scary, but I wasn't scared at all. Among several other things, I saw myself, to my utter astonishment, fully covered and in a hijab and my two daughters standing next to me. I saw some scary punishments being given out to people who had committed wrong acts. I woke up with a strong feeling that complete justice will be served for every little right or wrong that is done, and I do not need to worry about anything at all. That was an empowering thought. But I was surprised to see myself in the hijab. I had never thought that I would be the person to cover my head. I didn't pay much time and attention to this feeling, but it stayed with me for quite some time.

I remembered the prayer mat. I thought to myself, no harm – let's do this. I hadn't yet memorized words of the prayer, so I began with the slip of paper next to me with the step by step transliteration of the prayer written on them. So, I started. The first time after so long felt a bit awkward. I was all by myself in my apartment. I knelt and sat and then with the heaviest of hearts, I fell into prostration – the *sajdah*. Nothing had changed around me, but in an instant, it was as if something had changed forever inside me. It was as if the weight of the world was lifted from my shoulders. As my forehead rested on the floor, it was as if my mother had put together all her love, care and attention,

multiplied it many times over and then she just caressed my head saying - it will be OK, you will be OK.

My teacher from England had emailed me some internet links to Islamic lectures that explained things about life from the Quran. I opened those links and I was mesmerized as I listened. It was as if someone was answering the questions that I hadn't even asked. I started feeding my attraction to the book of Allah ﷻ. I kept listening to explanations and Islamic lectures about marriage, parenting, purpose of life, self-love, human worth etc. They offered smart reasoning and helpful advice. This time I told myself, I am learning about Islam because it is a smart choice – it has the perfect solutions for all my problems, nothing else!

I prayed for small things, and as soon as I prayed, it would come true. It was eerie. It felt like someone almost heard every word of what I was asking and responding immediately. I thought to myself – I pray, I fast, I connect in the prayer, I find peace there, I guess I am a Muslim. I need to burn my bridges now. As we moved to another city and to our new home, I went to the local mosque. This was the first time I had ever gone inside any mosque. I prayed and cried while praying. I couldn't understand why I was crying but as I cried, I felt a level of peace that was so new, so empowering, so refreshing. I said my *shahadah* publicly, with purpose and intention this time. Learning and practicing this faith gave me so much peace but I knew so little about it. Now I was ready to dive a little deeper into the ocean of Islamic knowledge. Internet came handy. I did a few courses from Al-Maghrib, Islamic Online University and tried to learn Arabic at my local mosque. I even started to understand some words in the Quran. I read the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. My library started to fill with Islamic books and my alone time with Islamic lectures instead of entertainment. I also volunteered for some social causes. I would listen to the explanation of parts of the Quran while cleaning, cooking, and all other household chores. I felt like Quran was changing something inside me or giving me this subtle internal strength. It was a refreshing knowledge, the speakers

that I listened to were captivating and empowering. I was satisfying and stimulating my thirst for good intelligent knowledge. I was helping other people solve their issues and was inviting them to Islam as well. I even felt that I had some positive role models to look up to. Learning about Islam was providing me with a complete holistic package - inspiration and empowerment, intellectual stimulation and a spiritual high, a sense of purpose and direction, a feeling of self-worth, a means to attain true respect and heartfelt appreciation, character building and perfect personality building for my children, and calming peace for my life and family. I told myself this explains my journey to Islam.

I used to take my children to a park and there I met with the mother-in-law of one of my neighbour. She was an old lady from Ethiopia who spoke only Arabic. And I could not speak any Arabic. Yet as I sat with her, I felt like I could understand her, and she could understand me. She said to me through her actions and a few words of English that she could speak – you are a woman, you should do hijab, it is good, it is pretty. Other than this, all she would ever speak was words of gratitude to God and prayers for my well-being. She kept repeating this to me every time I met her. I remembered my dream in which I had seen myself wearing the hijab. No one knew about that dream. Could this be a sign? I told myself I am being paranoid. This can't really be. How could I do hijab? I didn't even know where to start, and it didn't make any sense. What would be the reaction of my husband, my kids, my parents, my friends and my social circle? As time went by, the feeling kept growing stronger and stronger. I researched as much as I could about Islam's stand on hijab. One of my closest friends from England who knew nothing about what was going on, shipped a gift to me. When I opened it, the gift was a hijab and some sleeves. Around the same time, another friend gifted me an abaya and a hijab as well. The old lady from the park kept reminding me how God loves it when women cover themselves, and it is so good and pretty. I found myself convinced with the parts of the Quran which talked about the hijab and I felt a deep yearning to start wearing it. But I did not have the courage to

start. I asked God in my private conversations – *“Dear God, I know You love me. But I don’t truly understand yet who You are, and I am confused about whether I should wear a hijab or not, please show me a sign.”* A few days later, my elder daughter told me that she wants to start wearing a hijab. For a few minutes, my mouth was left open. I didn’t know if I was hearing right! She must have wondered mom is in shock or something. I supported her, and thought to myself, is this a sign that I should start wearing the hijab? I felt that it was, but at the same time, I felt weak. I didn’t think I had the courage to start. It is hard to explain this weakness, this lack of courage. After all, it just meant covering my body and putting a piece of cloth on my head. What was the big deal? I couldn’t understand my deep desire to start with the hijab and I could also not understand my mind’s resistance and fear in starting to wear the hijab. I needed more signs. I asked again, *“Dear God, I don’t truly understand yet who You are, and I am confused about whether I should wear a hijab or not, please show me a sign.”* A few months later, my younger daughter started wearing the hijab too. This was it for me! As the Arabs say it was – *khallas* (done deal)! I started to wear the hijab too.

Words cannot be enough to describe certain feelings. I felt covered and liberated at the same time. It was as if I had divine protection, a divine respect even. I felt a sense of freedom, a relief, dignity and honor. Whenever I walked out in the hijab, I felt that I was protected by an invisible bubble around me. I remembered that this was another thing I used to crave for in my childhood. I used to wish for an invisible bubble around me which would keep me safe and not allow anyone to enter my personal space ever without my permission. It was a wish come true, but in a way that I could never have imagined. It felt like someone was caring for me. I felt I was in a state of obedience to God, in flow with rest of the universe, which is also in obedience to God.

Slowly, I started noticing some people close to me feeling “upset” with me because of my hijab or trying to learn too much about religion. I guess in today’s world, people can treat a sport like a

religion, movies like religion, performing arts or athletics as their religion, money making as their religion, mindless never-ending entertainment as their religion, working out, health and body care as their religion, shopping and make up as their religion, their love for their family as their religion, but if you take a religion as your religion – then it is not acceptable. Using swear words is the new being “cool” and people are applauded for it, but the G word - God must be avoided. People can worship a million things, people and needs as gods, but you can’t talk about the One God. The word Allah ﷻ in your vocabulary makes others around you uncomfortable! In today’s day and age, being religious labels you as a freak, a backward person, a person who doesn’t have a mind of her own, a blind follower. Islam is now starting to be a reason of certain challenges for me. I had convinced myself deep down that Islam will straighten my life and its problems. That reasoning is not working anymore! There were many things that played a role in bringing me to this religion – but all of them were based on the benefits that I was looking forward to reaping.

But none of these situations, people, struggles or even benefits are permanent. So, as soon as my struggles disappear, and I am at a happy place, does the faith become redundant for me? My husband is not asking me to learn about Islam. My kids don’t need me for their Islamic studies anymore. Instead of gaining friends, I have lost touch with many friends and family since I started practicing Islam. I barely get time to meet or talk to my friends that I do have. The so-called role models are human beings too with their own sets of challenges, shortcomings and sins to deal with. More people are upset with me than those who are pleased with me. It seems like just as it solves some problems, this religion is also posing some challenges to me. But I was here to reduce my challenges, wasn’t I? If my previous reasonings for my attraction to Islam and the book of Allah ﷻ were correct, then it’s about time that I should be able to pull myself off from it... and look for an even higher purpose!

Except, that I can't. Despite the challenges that I face, the force with which this book is pulling me is stronger than ever. I want it to permeate deeply into my blood, my mind, my heart, my seeing, my hearing, my life, my relationships. I want it to envelop my whole being in its shade. Over the last one and a half decades, I have tried to answer my question in many ways – and none of my speculations proven to be absolute answers. The question remains – WHY and HOW does this book attract me and pull me towards itself? As I look back now, I see that the magnetism with which this religion and the book of Allah ﷻ pulls me is not natural. It is - Oh so beautiful and peaceful, but it overpowers me at the same time. It feels like I am dying of thirst, and this is where the fountain of pure water is. But the more I drink, the thirstier I get. It is internal peace and at the same time it is restlessness to learn more, to do more. The more I learn, the more ignorant I feel. It is empowerment and at the same time it is realization of my utter helplessness. It fills me up with energy and at the same time it drains me out completely. The more I try to better myself, the more I am aware of my sins and shortcomings. What is this that doesn't let me "enjoy" anything else? What is this that occupies my mind and envelopes it? What is this that on one hand gives me patience when dealing with difficult people and difficult situations, and on the other hand becomes the reason to create challenging situations for me?

Many people come to this religion either by default by being born into a Muslim family, through marriage or through heartfelt attraction and intuition. I have too. But this time I want to take a step ahead. I want to find out and be sure. Is this right or not? My theory is that if so many people in my life are upset with me, there could only be one of two reasons:

- Either, I am totally wrong and deviated. This was nothing, but a façade, or magic of some sort. This means I should take stock and correct myself. Being a Muslim doesn't make any sense then. I need to let go of this religion completely; or

- I am finally on the right path. This, by its very nature, will make others uncomfortable, create some dissent, confusion and opposition. Then there is nothing in life as meaningful as holding on to this faith.

Crazy as it may seem, there is no in-between these two options for me. It is either this or that. I cannot declare to submit and then submit only on the parameters that are convenient for me. I cannot lie to myself. I am either a Muslim or I am not. I cannot be Muslim when it suits me, when it is beneficial for me, and then cut corners or hide my identity at times when it is not giving me any visible benefits. Which way do I go? As I explore my question, I am once more going back to my life and all the highs and lows of it, I am once again going back to my inner conversation that sustained me throughout my childhood. I am, once again, the lonely, hurt, lost and afraid child who feels like she can't share her pain with anyone else, and she is desperately back to the question – **“Dear God, I don't know who YOU are, and I am confused about this, show me a sign.”** This study is my personal search for His “signs.” I share this with you in the hope that it answers some of the questions in your personal search too. I share with you ***IQra – My Search for His Signs***.

Allah ﷻ says in Surah Hujurat 49:14,

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“The bedouins say, “We have believed.” Say, “You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], ‘We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts. And if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not deprive you from your deeds of anything. Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.”

I talked to God in my head and I even professed Islam for the sake of the benefits that it offered me. I surrendered a sweet surrender, but I feel that belief has yet to enter my heart. I crave for it, how I crave for it! I feel like a homeless kinder-garden child

who has no resources, yet she wants to go to Harvard or Oxford one day. A child who is afraid to put her face into water, yet she wants to win the greatest swimming competitions one day. A lost child finally coming home. I accepted faith. But now I crave for more. I crave for not just *emaan* (belief), I crave for *Ihsaan* (excellence in belief and good actions), as my heart echoes:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Certainly, God loves muhsineen (those who strive to achieve excellence in faith and good deeds)

Through my search, I am seeking to find some answers:

- **The Quran:** What is the Quran? Is it glorious? Really? How? Why do I feel the need to study it? Why I am so deeply attracted to it?
- **The Almighty:** Does God exist? How do I know for sure? Who is God? What about the things and deities worshipped by others? Aren't they god? If not, then why are so many people worshipping them? Who is the real God? Do I have a relationship with Him? Does He know me, love me? How can I know Him? How can I love Him?
- **Me and My Life:** Who am I – how do I define myself and how do others define me – according to the roles I play (mother, daughter, wife, sister, friend, colleague); my nationality; qualifications; talents and skills; professional success; finances; looks; sense of fashion; home; community involvement; social media following; or the strength of my character. Is it all these things or none of them? How do I make sense of my emotions and the pleasant and unpleasant things that happen in my life? Does my life have a purpose? If yes, then what is it? How do I follow my purpose?

I pray that God accepts this work from me, forgives me for any mistakes and shortcomings present in this book and make it a means of encouraging myself and others to approach the Quran with an open heart and mind.

DISCLAIMERS

A word of caution here, this book is a service to the Quran. It is a human attempt to look at some beauty of some of the Divine miracles of the Quran, given the speeches and written work of scholars, scientists, historians, lawyers, etc. God's book and God's knowledge are perfect, human knowledge is not! Quran is beyond any limitations of anyone's personal opinions or analysis. Its miracles are unlimited and unchallengeable, but our understanding of these miracles can easily be challenged. I have compiled things that I personally found amazing about the Quran according to my understanding and study at this time. You are free to agree or disagree with me. Agreeing or disagreeing with me does not take away anything from the Quran itself.

This collection is in no way, shape or form intended to be an alternative to reading the Quran. If any human being were to exhaustively study even one of the topics related to the Quran and its miraculous nature throughout their life, they would not be able to do it justice. Quran's knowledge is like a turbulent ocean the floor of which cannot be reached and like a lofty mountain the peak of which cannot be attained. My effort is to admire a few beautiful shells at the shore of an unsurmountable ocean of miracles, knowledge, mercy, love, guidance, healing and good news. These shells are more beautiful than anything I have ever collected in my life. I am sharing these with an intention and belief that it is our duty to share beneficial knowledge with those who might not have received the message and for those who already have, reminders always benefit a believer!

You might have come across whatever you read here at some other forum too. I have collected my notes from listening and reading the works of different scholars, who in turn have been inspired by the Quran and the life of the prophet ﷺ. As one of my mentors says, our religion and whatever we hear of this religion is now available to us through "nakal" or copying. All of us essentially only take from what the prophet ﷺ gave us.

Arabic terms

In the Islamic tradition when certain names or titles are mentioned, honorific phrases are used as a sign of love and respect. The reader is encouraged to read these phrases if they are familiar with the Arabic language.

ﷻ - *Jalla Jalaluhu*; an honorific name to God (Allah in Islam). Translation - "May His glory be glorified"

ﷺ - *SallAllāhu ‘alayhī wa sallam*; A supplication to be said or written following the name of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Translation: May peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him.

عليه السلام - *‘Alayhis salām*; A supplication to be said following the name of a Prophet or Messenger (other than the prophet Muhammad ﷺ). Translation: May peace and blessings be upon him.

عليها السلام - *‘Alayha salām*; A supplication said following the name of ladies like Eve, the Virgin Mary, etc. Translation: May peace and blessings be upon her.

رضي الله عنه - *RadhīAllāhu ‘anhu*; A supplication to be said following the name of a male companion of the Prophet ﷺ. Translation: May Allah be pleased with him.

رضي الله عنها - *RadhīAllāhu ‘anha*; A supplication to be said following the name of a female companion of the Prophet ﷺ. Translation: May Allah be pleased with her.

رضي الله عنهم - *RadhīAllāhu ‘anhum*; A supplication to be said following the names of more than one male companion of the Prophet ﷺ. Translation: May Allah be pleased with them (m).

رضي الله عنهما - *RadhīAllāhu ‘anhumā*; A supplication to be said following the names of more than one female companion of the Prophet ﷺ. Translation: May Allah be pleased with them (f).

بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ - *Rahimahullāh*; A supplication to be said following the names of pious persons who were not prophets or their companions. Translation: Allah ﷻ have mercy on him.

Besides honorifics, some other Arabic phrases have been used in this book. The ayaat of the Quran have been referenced separately and translation provided with them.

بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ - *Bi'ithnillāh*; A means of expressing a desire to undertake an action. Translation: By the permission of Allah ﷻ.

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ - *A'udhubillāh min ash-Shaytān-nir-rajeem*; This is an expression one states to seek protection with Allah ﷻ from the devil. Translation: I seek refuge in Allah from Shaytān the cursed.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ - *Bismillāh-ir-Rahmān-ir-Rahīm*; This statement is called the Basmalah. It is said or read prior to the beginning of all good actions. Translation: In the name of Allah, the most Gracious most Merciful.

إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ - *Inshā' Allāh*; An expression said upon the desire to undertake an action. Translation: If Allah wills.

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