

"Over the Wall" by Michael Booth (Hamid Hussein Waqar)

In this amazing story contrasting two completely opposite lives, Shaykh Hamid Waqar discusses his upbringing, his involvement in the gang life of Los Angeles, his time in prison, his conversion to Islam, and his studies in the Islamic seminaries of Lebanon and Iran.

Introduction from the actual book:

When someone converts, or better stated reverts, to Islam they will face many questions for the rest of their lives. They are always asked: Why did you convert? Who helped you convert? What did your parents think about you converting? The next thing that will happen is that one will be bombarded with compliments. The famous one is that: you are lucky; you are a real Muslim because you searched and chose Islam from amongst the million other paths that you could have chosen. If one asks me, I do not see a difference between a person who chose Islam from another faith or creed, and someone who was born into Islam. In fact, it seems as if it is a blessing to have been born into an Islamic family. But, the only thing that separates people is piety. Whoever has more piety is better; it does not matter if you are a convert or born Muslim. For the majority of reverts to Islam these questions get old very, very fast. Having lived in an Islamic country for close to a decade now I have probably been asked this question more times than I care to remember. I have started to resent being asked, but acknowledge that reverting to Islam is interesting to others – even inspiring. This is one of the objectives of writing this book. I pray that Allah helps people consider Islam as being the correct religion and as being a viable choice through reading this book. I also pray that Muslims, recently reverted or born Muslim, will take this book as an inspiration and that it will somehow increase them in spirituality. I have thought about partaking in this effort before but always shied away from it. But, recently I traveled to Tehran from Qum with a group of very religious reverts who came to the Islamic Republic of Iran on a ziyarah trip through the Islam IFC organization. We met with one of the great grandchildren of the famous marja' Sayyid Shirazi, who issued the famous verdict about tobacco over one hundred years ago. We met Sayyid Radi Shirazi, who is a top notch Shia scholar and mystic living in Tehran. He told us that we should write down how we reverted to Islam

in order to help others along similar paths. He then showed us a notebook of his which was full of people's testimonies of how they reverted to Islam at the hands of this Sayyid – they numbered over 400!

I pray that Allah will forgive me for my many shortcomings and I pray that He will give me the strength to produce a book which will guide others to the path as well as help those who are already on the path. I also pray that whoever reads this book does so with an open heart; without any preconceived notions about Islam or myself. I am sure that some people will be astonished about some aspects of my life and I only pray that they use that knowledge to help better themselves. Finally, I pray for the hastening of Imam Zaman's reappearance.