

The hijab becomes your guardian, your safety-net, it becomes your strength

Bismillah al Rahman al Rahaim

Then set your face upright for religion in the right state- the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion, but most people do not know- (HQ: 30:30)

In the beginning:

Born and raised in Montreal, Quebec during the mid-seventy and eighties, Sr. Jennah Heydari (As she's know by her Islamic first name and married sir-name), grew up in an Agnostic family, having little knowledge of religion. A happy child, due to the fact that she had two loving parent's and even a doting grandmother living at home, she was content but often accused of being a little too sensitive. She had few friends that followed faith and she looked at religion as stifling and a waste of time. This lack of religion, however, did not squash her belief in a creator. As early as Jennah could remember she believed in the oneness of God. Without knowing why she felt compelled to pray to Him daily and led her life by a set of rules that she felt would please her creator. Jennah kept her thoughts private as she felt that other's may not share her views on God and maybe her simple rituals and her way of living could be looked upon as odd.

In the late eighties her parent's moved her and her two siblings to a small Eastern town in Ontario. She graduated high school and moved on to begin to study the Arts as she considered a career as a professional Artist and Graphic Designer. Not long after moving to Ontario she married and went on to have two children.

A jolt allows the soul to leap forward and reach out:

During the birth of her second child in 2000, she fell victim to a terrifying incident when her cesarean-section's spinal sedative no longer prevented her from feeling the Doctor's procedure. This placed her in a state of shock while she felt as though her life was coming to an end as the Doctors scrambled to reduce the pain and complete the operation. During that moment of approximately 15 minutes, under the knife, Sr. Jennah, had a life-altering experience.

"I felt as though my soul was being sucked away from me. I looked over to my newly born son as he lay in the bassinet next to me, as the nurses cleaned him up, and his sweet innocent little eyes looked back at me. I thought there is no way I can die, I have to take care of my baby, my children, they were all I could think of. I pleaded to the Doctors to hurry things along. I was frightened, the thought of leaving them without a mother was sickening. My heart was pounding and as I laid there alone looking up at the ceiling, I felt something I had never felt before. The pain was excruciating but that was not my prime focus. There was this overwhelming feeling that my soul was about to remove itself from my body. This strange suction, a tearing, a pulling of my soul, it honestly felt like my soul latched only to my shoulders as the rest of it was no longer within me. I pressed down with my arms, thinking this would help, as though I was about to slip off a cliff. Me, my soul, was slipping away. The 15-life-altering minutes were finally done and the Doctor's finished sewing me up. My restless soul subsided and I felt settled. I was exhausted and in a shaken state but I was there for the sake of my children and I was grateful to God for that. "

After this event, Jennah felt as though she had experienced something she was meant to experience. Her focus changed. She began to pick up books and read articles about the soul. She became unbelievably aware of the fact that her soul existed. She remembered, this feeling, from when she was young and now it had returned.

"When I was little I use to be very aware of my soul and at a young age I asked my parent's why we had to be in our bodies, why couldn't we be free. I was upset that I only had my eyes to look through. They were confused by my questions but looking back now I believe I was trying to tell them that my soul felt closed in by the flesh and that I was aware of it. I believe when you're young you're closer to the truth,

before you become absorbed by the material world. I also had this strange feeling that I was not doing what I was suppose to be doing, that this was not my path, that something was going to happen, something important. When I was a little girl I thought, maybe it's my birthday, but it would come and go and I would still feel that same feeling. As events came and went in my life, as they would build up and just before they would occur I would think to myself that maybe this will fulfill that empty feeling inside. Yet each event would come and each would go and I sat puzzled and lost. I honestly would ask myself what it was I was suppose to be doing, like that feeling you've forgotten something but you don't know what it is and it's driving you mad! After I recognized my soul again, I felt I was getting closer to solving the mystery, and I was. All these past experiences only helped to eventually justify my beliefs in Islam."

As Jennah began to look inward, this new focus had her painting feverishly, looking for direction, guidance and answers. However there was turmoil around her as her marriage began to fall apart and inevitably came to a close.

The catalyst:

An online gamer she enjoyed spending her leisure time playing games over the Net with her sons. It was while playing one of these games that she met a young Muslim man who ultimately pointed her to the truth and inevitably changed her life, his life and the lives of many that were discovering the truth.

As Jennah learned about Islam she found herself fascinated and soon passionate about this new area of study. The more she read, and she would spend sometimes as much as ten hours a day in study, the more she felt a sense of belonging.

"It was an amazing first few steps. It was a matter of one realization after another, each justifying itself based on my own innate beliefs and occurrences through out my life. It was all coming together. I felt as though I was coming home. It honestly left me breathless at times."

The epiphany:

After approximately a year of study Jennah picked up the Qur'an, for the first time, at a local bookstore it was at this moment in time where she had an epiphany that convinced her she was a Muslim.

“As I held the book in my hands I was immediately struck with a memory of an on-going recurring dream that I had my whole life. In the dream I am reaching forward towards an old book that sits open on a wooden table, the room is lit by candles, points of light surrounding the book. I feel compelled to get to the book, I must reach it but a force holds me back. I occasionally reach the book but the words are unclear and I suddenly wake up, feeling lost and frustrated by the dream. This dream began so early on in my life that I can't remember how young I was, it would repeat once or twice a year. On this day, the day I had this epiphany, I was forever changed when I realized the holy Qur'an that I held in my hands was the book I had longed for my whole life. It was the book I was trying to get to, the book I had to read. My eyes filled with tears right there at the check out counter of the local bookstore and I could feel the hair standing up on the back of my neck as a warmth built up inside me. Shortly there after I recited my Shahada under Allah(swt) and witnessed by the young Muslim man over the Internet. Alhamdulillah.”

“I was a Muslim. I felt as though I was reborn, a clean slate -ready to absorb and ready to do what is expected of me. That feeling of searching, that event that was going to happen, happened. I knew where I was, I was home.”

Her leap to Islam did not only come with the epiphany at the bookstore. When making the move to Islam many Reverted Muslims find them selves sifting through the many divisions found within the Muslim world. There are many sects, many schools of thought that need to be pondered. Sr.Jennah read on every sect that she could find information on, she did not wish to be pushed towards one sect or another without knowing well all the view points. When Jennah finally came across the life of Imam Hussain(as) and the tragedy at Karbala she was shocked and deeply moved and this historical moment in time allowed her to find direction and she was then certain of where she had to walk to find the truths within the many areas that Muslims find divisions.

“How can one know the truth of the Ahlulbayt(as) and not embrace

them?”

Her whole life she never followed any religion, not having much interest in any, now she found herself a devout Muslim prepared to study daily and ready to give back to her Lord. Jennah also had this overwhelming need to tell the world about the truth that she had discovered.

“I was struck with this unbelievable realization. How can I have walked this life without knowing or remembering this incredible truth? It was like the Matrix movie, I had taken the pill that showed me the ‘real’ world. This ‘truth’ was so amazing, so beautiful, so powerful and it related so well to my views of the world. For the first year of my Muslim life, I felt as though I lived in another dimension. I saw the world so differently now. Sitting down to watch a television show seemed to be such a colossal waste of time. Material things, not that they held a high priority for me, became of little interest to me. I focused on my soul, my children and my desire to serve and praise Allah(Swt). Allah(swt), his name, the words in the Qur’an, all of it was so much to take in. When I would read, a loud, surat al-Fatiha an indescribable calm would come over me as I recited the words that were that of Allah(Swt). These words are Allah’s words, how can you begin to express the blessing, that you are able to read His words? I would think to myself, do people really get that these are Allah’s(swt) words?? Do they understand the importance of every word? You want to speak to Allah(swt)? Then read the Qur’an and He will speak to you. Touch the words as you pass over them and remind yourself that this is divine.”

Jannah felt the need to learn as much as she could. Finding herself in positions where by she had to defend her beliefs not only by those around her who were not Muslims but even by Muslims.

*‘Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way.
(soorah an-Nahl 16:125]*

Jannah reached out to the community of Muslims in Ottawa, Montreal

and Kingston. She wrote emails and left phone messages. She soon became very saddened as she had little response and little interest to her questions and her hopes to come to know others who shared her absolute love for Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his family was looking less likely to have happen. She did have some response from some sisters in Ottawa who invited her into their homes and who embraced her and she was grateful, but the overall response was very small and there was no network set up for someone like her self.

Her parents, siblings and extended family were confused by her decision to become a Muslim. Their reaction was that of concern and disbelief, as they feared that her study of Islam might lead her away from them. The Revert's struggle can sometimes push them over the edge. Their families abandon them and when they reach out to the Muslim community they are not always given a warm welcome. Alone they stand, but to stand alone is never easy and to fall backwards is sometimes the only way. The Revert Muslim may fall and when this happens the Muslim community has failed her/him. All Muslims are obligated to welcome the new sister or brother, they must guide them to the best of their ability.

The veil:

Living in a conservative small town she found that wearing hijab was like putting on a gorilla-costume. The looks from strangers on the street were intimidating and sometimes even frightening. For a 50-mile radius she was the only hijabi around. It took a lot of prayer and duas of strength to wear the hijab.

"I wanted to please Allah(swt), I wanted to wear my hijab. It was so daunting. You have your family and friends who now look at you strange and you know they are not ready to see you cover. You are living in an area of the world where people are not use to seeing anyone different then them selves. It was so overwhelming. I wanted so badly to wear hijab but I was worried about how I would be treated and how my children might be treated. The first few times it was frightening and the dirty looks were shocking, it took about two years to wear hijab but, Alhamdulillah, when you wear hijab and you wear it

each day, something that I can't put fully into words will occur. The hijab becomes your guardian, the hijab becomes your safety-net, it becomes your strength, it becomes you. Soon I was hijab and without hijab I felt frightened and insecure. The miracle of hijab is that the longer you wear it the stronger you become. I get starred at more than someone would if he was wearing a clown costume, but the stares are ignored because Allah(Swt) has given me this gift of hijab and He has made me see that it is not just a veil it is so much more Alhamdulillah, . "

Revert Muslims was born:

Jannah began doing on-line dawah, helping various Islamic organizations, creating graphics, websites and writing articles. The work was satisfying but through her research she came to recognize that there was little being done for people like herself. Even though she knew people were coming to Islam she did not know how to locate them. Jannah searched the Net to learn how to recite salat, how to find the method of wudu. She searched the Net to find out what happens at the Mosque, what are the meanings behind duas and hadiths. Jannah searched the net for resources and support but through all her searches she found that she could not find everything in one spot and the information she found was very confusing and some of it very misleading.

"When I would sit and concentrate on Allah(swt) aware of his existence, asking for guidance, I would often see clearer than I ever had in my life. Allah(swt) guided me in that He opened my mind and the ideas came flooding in. I sat down and drew up the first draft of the new on-line support center for new Muslims. I recruited the help of the young Muslim man on the Net and together we began to create what was going to be a blessing for each other, as this beacon on the Net soon becomes the nesting ground for so many new Muslims. How satisfying it was to reply to people like myself, via emails, msn, even over the phone, helping them find support, resources and simply relating to them and their struggles and joys. My life was where it needed to be and I was brimming with happiness. As quoted by Imam Ali (as) When the ripples of the bounties [of Allah] come your way then do not repel these waves with a lack of gratitude. "

Love a new:

As Jennah continued her at-home studies and online dawah, she soon discovered that her companionship with the young man on the Internet had moved in a different direction. Their age-gap and cultural clashes seemed extreme to some but held no importance to the couple that now considered a possible life together. Their meeting, in their opinion, was not by chance and their compatibility and mutual respect was effortless. They were meant to be, in no simpler terms.

After much contemplation the proposal was made and Sister Jennah accepted. Their union was then met by tremendous struggle as the families, on both sides, were opposed.

The battle to be together had, understandably, developed unimaginable grief and dismay within the young mans family and as much as he did what he could to seek his parent's approval his words were met with refusal to accept. He sought out advice by top scholars, had counseling sessions by professionals in Islam and studied all that he could to help convince his family that he was making the right choice. In accordance to Islam and his right to marry whom he feels would be a good wife and future mother to his children and with his parent's giving no justifiable reason why he cannot marry Jennah; he chose to disobey his parent's and fly from England to Canada in 2007. His decision to leave was not an easy one to make. The two married under Allah(Swt) without a ceremony. The couple can only pray for the best solution and continue to reach out to his family in hopes that they soon accept his new wife and family.

They now live happily, in a small Eastern, Ontario town, where by Sister Jennah does illustration work and Br. Nafe, studies and works on computers. Together they continue to administer and support new Muslims through the Revert Muslims Association. They share their life with Jennah's children in a modest home that holds love, trust and a whole lot of faith in the truth, that is found only in Islam.

"My life is all about helping people find the truth. I am a believer, no

matter who may or may not agree. Only Allah(Swt) knows my intentions, only Allah(swt) sees what is in my heart. Once you know the truth there is no going back. The truth is what it is there is no denying it. I am a human, it's a fact, it's the truth, don't tell me I'm not. I will bring people to Islam by showing them the truth and there is nothing more powerful than that."

"Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256).

[Al-Baqara (The Cow)2:213] ... Allah guides whom He pleases to the right path.

UPDATE: Sister Jennah and Brother Nafe are now at peace with his family. They have accepted the union and our bond is growing, All praise to Allah(swt) the merciful.