

Way to Light

By Mufti Abdul Wāhid (formerly Sundar-Dās)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our Master, the Seal of the Prophets, the Mercy to the Worlds,

Ahmad al-Mustafa ﷺ^[1]

Whose blessed presence and exalted teachings delivered the world sunk in darkness with true light.

Abdul Wāhid

27 Muharram al-Harām 1429^[2]

¹ - *Sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam* (Allah bless him and give him peace).

² - Corresponding to 5 February 2008

Foreword

“My friend, my brother”

By Khālid Mahmūd

I met my newly-converted Muslim brother Abdul Wāhid six to seven years ago, and if I start relating his complete circumstances, much detail would be required. I think it would be sufficient to mention that whenever I hear of a person entering into the fold of Islam, I try to visit such a fortunate person and ask him about the circumstances that led him to enter the benevolent shade of Islam.

My brother Abdul Wāhid has completed courses of *Takhassus fil Da`wah wal Irshād*,^[1] *Takhassus fil 'Iftā'*,^[2] and Islamic Banking from Jāmi`a Dārul `Ulūm Karachi. Because I am an employee at Jāmi`a Dārul `Ulūm Karachi, I frequently met Mufti Abdul Wahid while he was studying there, and these meetings led to increased love and friendship between us. I ask Allah ﷻ^[3] to let this relationship always continue. Āmīn.

My soft spoken and well mannered friend and brother faced many difficult situations following his acceptance of Islam. Upon insisting, I have listened to his circumstances several times. I have often told him – whether provokingly or politely – to write down his story of accepting Islam; perhaps the story will become a source of guidance for many non-Muslims who hear and read it. However, Mufti Abdul Wāhid would always give the same reply: “I have no desire to praise myself; in fact, I see an aspect of show off in writing about my conversion. I suggest that the time consumed in listening and writing my narrative should instead be used in pursuing books of elders or remaining in their company so that the time becomes of value and benefit. Therefore, it would be better if you forgive me.”

Nevertheless, this lowly one’s heart was set that Brother Abdul Wāhid’s account of accepting Islam should be recorded, even if not in much detail. The narrative should be only be detailed enough to guide others while relating the circumstances of accepting Islam.

¹ Specialization in Preaching and Guiding

² Specialization in Islamic Jurisprudence

³ *Subhanahu wa ta`ala*

I would often jokingly tell him, “You have been infected with too much humility. Otherwise, people write voluminous books about themselves. Are you unable to write a single booklet about yourself?” Regardless, it was with much difficulty that Mufti Abdul Wāhid finally became ready to record his story of accepting Islam, and that too he accepted like having to bathe in cold water during winter. In reality, Mufti Abdul Wāhid likes to remain a bookworm – it was this pursuit that led my friend to research on `Allāmah `Ayni’s *Nukhab al-Afkār*^[1] as a PhD student in Karachi University in Pakistan. During his *Takhassus fil ‘Iftā’* in Jāmi`a Dārul `Ulūm Karachi, he wrote a thesis on “The Nullification of the Marriage Contract in Light of Shari`ah and the Pakistani Constitution.” Along with his other commitments, Mufti Abdul Wāhid is also teaching at Madrasah Fātima-tuz-Zahrā, which runs under the Defense Housing Authority.^[2] May Allah ﷻ accept his services.

The concise book in your hands *Roshni ki kiran* is only a brief account of Mufti Abdul Wāhid’s story of accepting Islam. In reality, his words of accepting Islam deserve many more pages. Mufti Abdul Wāhid’s lantern of accepting Islam has also lighted his house with his parents and siblings also accepting Islam. All praise is due to Allah that this light is increasing because Mufti Abdul Wāhid is carrying this lantern outside of his own house. May Allah grant my brother increasing success. Āmīn.

Khālid Mahmūd (formerly Yu`īl Kundan)

Jāmi`a Dārul `Ulūm Karachi

27 Muharram al-Harām 1429^[3]

¹ *Nukhab al-Afkār*, written by the brilliant fourteenth-century scholar `Allamah Badr al-Din al-`Ayni, is an eight-volume commentary of Imam Tahāwi’s classical work *Sharh Ma`āni al-Āthār*.

² The author has relocated since the time of this writing and is now teaching elsewhere.

³ Corresponding to 5 February 2008

Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله نحمده ونستعينه ونستغفره ونؤمن به ونتوكل عليه ونعوذ بالله من شرور أنفسنا ومن سيئات أعمالنا من يهده الله فلا مضل له ومن يضلل الله فلا هادي له ونشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له ونشهد أن سيدنا ومولانا محمدا عبده، ورسوله صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وأصحابه وبارك وسلم تسليما كثيرا كثيرا أما بعد

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

All Praise is to Allah. We praise Him, seek His help, seek His forgiveness, believe in Him, and rely on Him. And we seek Allah's refuge from the evils of our selves and from the sins of our deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, none can misguide, and whomsoever Allah misguides, none can guide. We bear witness that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah. He is alone and has no partner. And we bear witness that our master Muhammad is the slave and Messenger of Allah; may Allah bless and give peace to him, his family, and his companions.

How can I praise that exalted Being who, purely out of His kindness and blessing, granted me the opportunity of accepting Islam? Removing me from the darkness of disbelief, He granted me the light of faith. Right in my childhood, He took away the compassion of my home, relatives, close ones, and parents, and granted me refuge into the much more abundant mercy of His chosen religion of Islam. Saving me from the thorny valley of disbelief, He gave me shade in the soul-refreshing garden of Islam. I faced several difficulties in this journey, but Allah ﷻ granted me steadfastness and allowed me to reach the destination with peace and well-being. I ask Allah ﷻ to allow my end to be on this religion.

My beloved friends! I would like to commence by saying that during my studies, several friends requested that I compile my story of accepting Islam so that they

also taste the sweetness of faith that often may be acquired from such incidents.

However, not only did I avoid writing it, but I also abstained from narrating my account.

The main reason for my hesitation was that my accepting of Islam was not an incident worthy of decorating the pages of history. Instead, it was purely the kindness and blessing of my Lord that He showed me the straight path and allowed me to remain steadfast on it. Whenever a friend would repeatedly insist, I would mention a few reasons that led to my acceptance of Islam in order to reveal the bounty of my Lord, but I would not discuss the matter more than that. However, when I came to Karachi for further studies, my friend Brother Khālid Mahmūd – who only several years ago had repented from Christianity to be honored with Islam – insisted so strongly that declining was not an option. Moreover, my respected teachers and fellow students agreed with Brother Khālid Mahmūd’s opinion, and therefore I prepared to write down my circumstances. My only hope was that the respected readers, upon reading my few lacking and broken words, would ask Allah ﷻ to grant me the opportunity of becoming a true Muslim and bless me with the intercession of the Holy Prophet ﷺ on the Day of Resurrection.

Chapter 1

Back when I was a Sikh, my name was Sundar-Dās. After accepting Islam, though, I changed it to Abdul Wāhid, a name which I liked and selected myself. I used to joke with my friends that while their parents had chosen their names, I, through divine blessing, had the distinction of choosing my name myself. All praise and gratitude is to Allah.

I grew up in a small village called Dodah. The village is on the road connecting Sargodha and Lahore, two major cities of Pakistan. Almost all of my family lives in Dodah.

My extended family includes almost eighty individuals. Upon the formation of Pakistan, my family stayed in Dodah and did not migrate to India like most other non-Muslim groups. They decided to stay because they had cordial relations with the Muslims and no conflict existed to motivate them to move. My family also owned extensive land in the area. They are of the Arūra (Rajput) caste.

My grandfather's name was Jīwandah Rām. Jīwandah Rām had an older brother, Aya Rām, and three sons: Anand Lāl, Kanshi Rām, and Chaudhri Rām. Kanshi Rām is my father. He later accepted Islam and became Muhammad Abdullah. We are a total of six brothers and three sisters in my immediate family.

Sikhism has been running in my family for generations. Most of my family members still believe in and follow the teachings of Gūru Nānak, the founder of Sikhism.^[1]

¹ My immediate family members and some other relatives have also accepted Islam since the time of this writing. All Praise is due to Allah.

Chapter 2

Besides for a few other Sikh students, the vast majority of students in my school in Dodah were Muslim. During sixth grade, we had a choice between Islamic Studies and Art. I happened to choose Islamic Studies. In the Islamic Studies class, the teacher discussed the validity and truth of Islam, reaffirming the students' belief in Islam. This confused me, though, since my Sikh family members would also claim to be on the truth. By the time I had learned only several details about Islam, my thoughts regarding Islam began widening their horizons. Thinking about Islam at such a young age was only the special mercy and compassion of Allah. Otherwise, everyone knows that this age is not one of deep thinking and contemplation, but rather one of play and amusement.

I used to remain in a strange confusion. At school, my respected Islamic Studies teacher would strongly demonstrate the proofs showing the truth and genuineness of Islam. My Muslim friends would also sometimes merely tell me to become Muslim. At the same time, when I would return home, the teachings of Sikhism would be presented to me. I found myself unable to decide – which religion is true and which is false? In these thoughts I would pass my days.

Finally, one day Allah ﷻ changed my mind's direction, and I decided that I would ask Allah ﷻ to show me the true religion and make it apparent. Subsequently, I several times asked Allah, "O Allah! Whichever religion is true, make it clear to me and set me on it."

During winter, the Muslim students would perform Dhuhr Salāh^[1] while at school. I would lean on the Shisham trees at the side and watch them perform Salāh. I would reflect on the excellence of the Muslim students, observing how they remain pure and clean and always worshiping Allah ﷻ. I would often ponder over the prayers of the Muslims.

One day, when I was leaving the science room after school, one of the school's employees, Mr. Nadhr Husain, approached me with an axe in his hands. He took

¹ Noon prayer; one of the five obligatory prayers Muslims pray daily.

me aside and said, “Recite the *kalimah*^[1] and become Muslim.” I replied, “I am not afraid of your axe. You cannot force anyone to convert to Islam, nor is this an appropriate method of propagating the religion.” Upon my response, he refrained from what he was about to do.

I asked another school employee, Mr. Muhammad Amīr, to take me to a religious scholar so that I could obtain some information from the scholar. Mr. Amīr agreed, and we decided to leave at night so that no one in my family would know. At the appointed time, we reached the individual we were set to meet, though I found out that he was not a scholar. He discussed Islam with us at his own intellectual level, which was of no use to me. During our conversation, he told me, “First, remove the clothes provided by your family and wear new ones instead, and stop eating at home. Then, you can accept Islam.” I remained silent in front of him, but upon leaving, I asked Mr. Amīr, “Is this advice what Islam teaches?” Mr. Amīr became ashamed and remained silent. We never visited that villager again.

¹ Formal declaration testifying that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad ﷺ is His Messenger.

Chapter 3

In high school, I chose to study the natural sciences. The scientific process we went through struck me with an idea to test the validity of Islam.

Our teacher would conduct scientific experiments in the laboratory. While the teacher himself would be confident of the results of the experiment and the validity of the theory being tested, we would only be satisfied once we saw the results ourselves. Once we observed the experimental results, we would be assured that the information is accurate.

Keeping this principle in mind, I wondered about the companions of the Prophet of the Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ himself, of course, believed in the teachings he propagated. However, what was the reaction of those around him when he proclaimed himself Allah's Prophet and started teaching the Qur'an? What change occurred in those who accepted his message?

Very few Islamic books were available to me then. At school, though, there was a book on the expedition of Tabūk. Tabūk was a major campaign in which the Prophet and the Companions traveled more than 300 miles across the scorching desert in order to face an imminent Roman threat. To aid the Muslim effort, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه^[1], the Prophet's رضي الله عنه closest Companion and friend, spent his entire wealth for the sake of the mission, and adopted coarse rags instead of his usual clothing. In the same incident, it is mentioned that the Angel Jibrīl (Gabriel) wore identical rags and came to the Prophet رضي الله عنه to convey Allah's greeting of peace to Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه. This narration, and others of a similar nature, left a deep impression on my heart. Such stories made me wonder about men who would sacrifice their lives for such ideals – ideals that must be true in order to inspire such courage.

Another element that attracted me to Islam was the considerable practical guidance the religion offers. If examined carefully, Islam provides practical instruction on each and every issue one may face, in each stage of life. No other religion provides such comprehensive directions. In our Islamic Studies class, we learned about the many

¹ *Radhiyallahu `anhu* - May Allah be pleased with him

everyday issues that Islam provides guidance on. One of these matters I had read about was that the Prophet ﷺ used to wash his hands prior to and after each meal. One day, it so happened that I had dinner as usual, and afterwards I involved myself in some activity without washing my hands. My hand accidentally hit my eye, and the leftover spices on my hand caused much pain to my eye. I immediately washed my hands and eyes; however, the thought persisted in my mind that the Prophet of the Muslims had declared the truth when he told us to wash our hands before and after each meal. This thought settled the validity of Islam even more firmly in my mind; in Sikhism, I had never read or heard of washing our hands based on religious significance.

Along with researching Islam, I was also actively involved in learning more about Sikhism. I started reading Gūru Nānak's biography and other books of Sikhism, such as *Sundar Gutga* and *Jupjī Sāhib*. My purpose for studying these books was to assess the amount of guidance the Sikh religion provides its followers and consequently recognize the reality of the religion. To understand Sikhism, I first went to my uncles and several other relatives and asked them various questions. Many of the questions were ones that had been posed to me by my Muslim classmates. My relatives responded to my questions, but none of their answers satisfied me. Therefore, I directed my energies at understanding Sikhism myself by studying the major texts of the religion. After studying several Sikh texts, I also read a few Islamic books. Though I did not have many books of either religion with me at the time, I was able to conclude several points. I observed that Sikhism does preach monotheism; however, it lacks practical guidance. On the other hand, Islam, along with teaching monotheism, does not leave a single aspect in life unaddressed. The stark contrast between the two religions in this aspect also brought me closer to Islam.

Chapter 4

At the time I was exploring and considering Islam, I saw three notable dreams which helped settle my mind. I was in high school then.

In the first dream, a person came to me one night and said in an extremely kind manner, “Recite اهدنا الصراط المستقيم (Guide us to the Straight Path).” اهدنا الصراط المستقيم is a prayer often invoked by Muslims and is also the sixth verse of *Surah Fatihah*, the first chapter of the Qur’an. In the dream, only a voice could be heard and no image appeared. I did not mention my dream to any of my friends, yet, after the dream, I kept reciting اهدنا الصراط المستقيم. Because of that, my temperament started inclining toward Islam.

About a month after the first dream, I saw another in which an invisible voice taught me all of *Sūrah Fātihah*. This time, again, no one could be seen, and I kept the dream a secret this time as well. However, beginning with this dream, I often recited *Sūrah Fātihah* on my own.

Some time later, I saw yet another dream. In this vision, it was summer, and I was at home working on my holiday homework. Suddenly, a tall man wearing white clothes entered the house. He had a white beard, wore a white turban, and had a white cloth around his shoulders. His face beamed with light. I stood up out of respect for the man. He embraced me, and said, “Dear son! Allah ﷻ has made you successful.” Immediately after speaking, he disappeared from sight.

This dream too I did not reveal to anyone. However – despite the vision being but a dream – it was impossible to remain unaffected by the elderly man. When I woke up, my heart was in a state of great peace and contentment. ^[1]

While many factors played a role in inclining me toward Islam, by far the strongest reason that led me to Islam was the holy book of the Muslims, the Noble Qur’an. The Qur’an is such a glorious book that since the time it was revealed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ more than 1400 years ago, it has continued, unchanged, without a difference in

¹ It is essential to clarify here that while dreams can be employed for encouragement and glad-tiding, they do not have any significance beyond that. I did not accept Islam because of the dreams; I am mentioning them merely because they were significant in pointing me in the right direction at a time of turmoil and confusion, a time in which I frequently asked Allah ﷻ for guidance.

even a single character being found. An even more impressive and inspiring fact is that not only hundreds or thousands of small boys and girls – but millions – have memorized this book. Other than Islam, no other religion's holy book is preserved in such a manner, and no other book has been memorized.

Chapter 5

Considering everything that had occurred, I resolved to accept Islam one day. Immediately upon deciding thus, my thoughts diverged, and I started thinking about how I would bear the harshness of my family. I did not know whether I would be able to maintain their anger or not. The other option, of course, was to leave home; yet the thought of leaving my parents and siblings was difficult. These complications plagued me; however, the thought of death approaching anytime was also at the forefront of my mind. It would be a great calamity if I departed from this world unsuccessfully, without having accepted Islam.

As time passed, my mind kept revolving around these issues. Finally, I approached my respected Islamic Studies teacher, Mr. Shamshīr `Ali and revealed my intentions to him. He told me that he had often felt during class that I will accept Islam eventually. He then directed me to an excellent scholar, Mawlāna Muhammad `Umar Fārūq رحمه الله ^[1].

Taking permission from my mother one Friday, I went to meet Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq, who at the time was the preacher at Masjid Gulzār-Madinah in Kot Momin, a large town several miles away from Dodah. Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq was that light of our extended family who was the first to be honored with accepting Islam. Around 1970, he was bestowed with the immense blessing of the universal religion, Islam. Subsequently, he became a candle in the dark for many of the youth of the family.

At the very least, Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq's conversion forced the family to consider Islam as an alternative, that perhaps Islam is the pure and blessed path leading to fragrant gardens and heavens, where the joys are everlasting. No eye has ever beholden the comforts and no one has ever tasted the fruits of this place.

This Paradise is for those fortunate individuals who have – on their tongues and in their hearts – adopted what Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an: ^[2]إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ. Therefore, on that blessed Friday in 1988, at the hands of Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq, I

¹ *May Allah have mercy on him*

² *Truly, the (recognized) religion in the sight of Allah is Islam (Surah Āl-'Imran, verse 19).*

recited the glorious words لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله.^[1] My dark, dead heart, saturated with ignorance and disbelief, transformed as Allah ﷻ, through His blessing, kindness, and sheer favor, imbued it with a light of faith more valuable than the world and all it contains. So all praise be to Allah. These are the same magnificent words about which the Final Prophet ﷺ said that if these words are placed on one side of the balance and the seven heavens and earths are placed on the other, then these words would be heavier. When these divine words graced my heart and tongue, my entire condition altered. Words cannot describe the affinity I felt to Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ.

The immense jewel of this divine feeling can be found at the highest levels in the pure lives of the Sahabah ﷺ.^[2] The love of the Sahabah ﷺ for the Messenger of Allah ﷻ is proof of their high levels of faith. This fact needs no elucidation that in the treasures of their biographies, conditions of faith are so abundant that one reading the biographies centuries later will be illuminated by their light. The burning embers of their faith continue to blaze today, and one reading their biographies would feel his heart and mind blaze with change. We can see this high level of faith in Abu Bakr ﷺ, who, despite being the chief of his tribe, was severely beaten by his people following his conversion to Islam. However, not even a firm, rugged land can contain the power of faith that Abu Bakr ﷺ had. When his mother approached him, he asked her about how the Messenger of Allah ﷻ was, and swore not to rest until he saw for himself that the Messenger of Allah ﷻ was well. The motivation for such actions was built from the divine words لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله. The stories of all the Sahabah ﷺ is filled with such faith-refreshing incidents.

¹ Formal testimony to enter Islam, meaning: *There is no one worthy of worship except Allah, Muhammad ﷺ is the Messenger of Allah.*

² The Companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Chapter 6

After I had been blessed with divine blessing, I started returning home on top of a bus. Other people were also present on top; each one was busy in his private thoughts and affairs. As for me, I was drowning in the deluge of my thoughts. My heart bounded with elation and bliss. Trees were lined up, surrounding the bus on all sides. The leaves on the trees swayed gently and clapped with the wind. I felt that these blooming leaves were welcoming me with their speech, saying, “O fortunate Abdul Wāhid! You have been blessed today with a precious wealth that you are taking along with you. You have received this bounty with little cost, without even asking Allah ﷻ. The Prophets Mūsā ﷺ (Moses) and `Isā ﷺ (Jesus) asked Allah ﷻ to include them among the nation of the Final Messenger, Muhammad ﷺ. Only `Isā’s ﷺ prayer was accepted; hence, he will appear in this world near the Day of Resurrection and live according to the Sharī`ah of Muhammad ﷺ. Thus, O Abdul Wahid, you have received that immense bounty which even the Prophets used to pray for.”

I felt like a flapping bird, swiftly gliding and flying high. A strange felicity pervaded me. After traveling about seven miles, my thoughts took a sudden turn. I had been coming happily, and the circumstances of my faith filled my heart with joy. Through the blessing of Allah ﷻ, I had accepted Islam; however, when my family would know of my conversion to Islam, they would harm me and remove me from the house. They would forbid me from every privilege and might even inflict bodily harm on me. All these thoughts were difficult for me to bear. Being young, I was also afraid I would miss my parents.

When I neared the village, I repeatedly wondered what I would tell my parents about my absence. I normally had the same schedule: I would go to school in the mornings, and upon returning home I would help my father manage the fields. I rarely ever left the village, even to go to the nearest city, Sargodha. Therefore, I thought deeply about what I would tell my parents. They would definitely ask where I had been, and due to the winter days being short, the entire day had passed. I reached home, lost in thought. My mother immediately asked me where I had been the entire day. I replied with

innocence, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, “I went to visit a friend.” My mother did not press me for further details, and no one else in the house had noticed my absence.

Now, after embracing Islam, my intention was to announce my conversion in the main masjid of the village. However, I discussed this issue with several school friends, as well as my teacher Mr. Shamshīr `Ali, who advised, “Under the prevailing circumstances, keep your acceptance of Islam a secret. Your high school final exams are near; therefore, it would be best if you wait until after the exams and results to tell your family and relatives, at an appropriate occasion, about your conversion. Announcing your conversion immediately can provoke your family and relatives and cause trouble.” I accepted my friends and teacher’s advice and kept my acceptance of Islam a secret.

After I learned how to pray, I attempted to perform each of the five Salāhs of the day, and ensured that no Salāh was delayed or left behind. The main issue I faced in performing Salāh was that if I left to village masjid or some other nearby masjid for prayers, my family members would know that I had accepted Islam. However, due to the condition of faith, my heart would always remain restless and troubled and would want to perform each Salāh as well as the other commandments of Islam. I thus put my mind and heart to work to devise a method to perform Salāh on time, and for a while I pursued the following schedule: To do my homework, I would wake up at the time for Fajr. Because my family would be asleep at this time, I would perform ablution, lay a cloth in the house’s courtyard, and perform Fajr Salāh. Sometimes I would take a large sheet and would wear it so that it covered most of my face; I would then go to the masjid and perform Salāh in congregation. As soon as the Imām would end Salāh, I would leave and return home. I was afraid that an acquaintance would recognize me and, out of joy, expose my secret of accepting Islam to my family.

After I had prayed Fajr Salāh, either at home or at the masjid, my daily routine would begin. Following breakfast, I would prepare for and leave to school. Upon returning home, I would perform Dhuhr, `Asr, and Maghrib Salāhs, each time closing the door for a moment, praying while fearing my family.

Most of the time, however, rather than staying at home, I would leave to the fields after school to help my father in farming, and would not return home until late.

Therefore, I would perform these three prayers in the fields. At the time for each Salāh, I would seize the first opportunity to head to the bamboo or cotton fields, where I would perform the Dhuhr, `Asr, and Maghrib Salāhs. Often during Salāh in the fields, mosquitoes would bite my arms and feet and leave apparent marks on them. When my father noticed these bite marks, he inquired about them. I replied that I had left to the fields to relieve myself, and the mosquitoes there had bit me. To avoid lying, I would indeed leave for Salāh when I had a need for relieving myself, and would do so before starting Salāh. It was only through the blessing of Islam that, at a young age, Allah ﷻ instilled in my heart a hatred of lying. Out of fear that I would have to lie in case my father noticed bite marks again and asked about the matter, I would first relieve myself, and would then move to a different place on the fields to perform Salāh.

I would sometimes perform `Isha Salāh at the house of close Muslim friends, and other times at home after my family had gone to sleep. At home, I would pray either in the courtyard or behind the cabinet in my room. Once, it so happened that when I went to perform `Isha at a close friend's house, I found several other close friends already present there. We agreed to perform Salāh together in congregation, and I told my friend leading the prayer to keep his recitation in a low voice. Thus, we began performing `Isha Salāh together.

Someone – Allah knows best who – informed one of my brothers that we were performing Salāh in a certain house, and my brother arrived with a Muslim acquaintance. My brother did not immediately recognize where we were performing Salāh, and he started to leave after checking the courtyard of the house we were in. However, his Muslim acquaintance suggested that they could look in the rooms ahead as well, considering that they could hear recitation of the Qur'an and Salāh being performed. Hence, through the window of our room, my brother saw me performing Salāh with my friends. However, he returned without saying anything.

After I finished my Salāh and learned that my brother had sighted me, I sent a friend to my house to investigate my family's immediate reaction in response to what my brother had told them. When my friend reached my house, he observed that my entire family and many relatives were present, discussing me. Upon recognizing the situation, my friend became quite alarmed and returned worriedly to tell me everything he had

seen. After listening to his observations and noticing his distress, I reassured him, asking, “Why are you worried? I am the one who should be concerned since it is my issue.” I then left him in the support of the other close friends present there.

Instead of going home, I proceeded directly to my Islamic Studies teacher, Mr. Shamshīr `Ali, and related the entire incident to him. He advised me, saying, “Go home right now and further analyze your family’s response. Ultimately, Allah ﷻ holds absolute control over everything. If your family and relatives pose any serious problem to you, then do not worry. I and the other Muslims are ready to completely support and protect you.”

After listening to my teacher’s comforting words, I headed home in a state of fear and apprehension. On the way home, I met the same brother who had seen me perform Salāh. His shop came along the way, and I headed there directly to meet him. Upon seeing me, my brother told me to go home since my father was calling me. I reached home, and, as I had expected, my father inquired specifically about this matter: “Were you performing Salāh at so-and-so’s house?” In response to my father’s question, I asked, “If someone says anything about me, would you believe what he said before confirming from me?” I kept my tone neutral, neither denying nor confirming whether I had performed Salāh. My father was apparently content with my answer; however, this fear arose inside me that a day will eventually arrive when the entire truth will be revealed to my father.

Due to this fear that the truth will be exposed, I would, at different occasions, attempt to assure my father that there is no need to hold suspicions and doubts about me, since I was with him. At one such occasion, as I soothed my father, my uncle, who was also present at the time, came to my defense, saying, “Do not worry. This boy will never become Muslim.” Then, placing a hand on his chest, he affirmed, “You have my guarantee for that.”

Chapter 7

Days passed, and I kept performing Salāh secretly as described. I also tried my best to fulfill all the other obligations of Islam, and frequently asked Allah ﷻ to grant me steadfastness and protection. Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months. Finally, the blessed days of the holy month of Ramadan arrived. During Ramadan, some of my family members, due to living in a Muslim environment, would fast for four or five days out of their own choice. I became worried about Ramadan rapidly approaching, since I would have to fast for the entire month, and I did not want to arouse my family members' suspicions again. I planned on taking advantage of the fact that several of my Sikh family members fasted for a few days. I thus started fasting in Ramadan. It was my first Ramadan after accepting Islam, and it occurred in the summer months of June and July. My life otherwise continued as normal: I would harvest the wheat, manage the cattle, milk the cows, and perform other such tasks.

Once, my uncle castigated me and asked why I was fasting, since fasting would affect the performance of my tasks. I replied, "Why are you angry? If my performance and fulfillment of my responsibilities have been affected in any way by my fasting, then please tell me. The truth of the matter is that I am fasting while completely fulfilling my responsibilities at the same time." It was indeed the mercy of Allah ﷻ that I was able to fast while completing my responsibilities. However, I did not fast the entire month of Ramadan – there were some days in which I did not fast, though I later completed them after Ramadan. Had I fasted continuously the entire month, my family would almost certainly have been convinced of my conversion to Islam. As the days of Ramadan ended, I consulted several close friends, and we decided that I would perform Salāh of Eid al-Fitr in the main masjid in congregation.

On the day of Eid, my relatives would normally send one or two people from each household to the fields early in the morning. These individuals would prepare the day's fodder for the cattle in order to relieve the day of any pressing obligations. Since Eid was a public holiday and all economic activity would cease, my family would

diverge from normal procedure by wearing relatively good clothes and arranging for fine food.

This Eid was my first since I had accepted Islam, and I planned to perform Eid Salāh with my friends at the Eid ground. Therefore, on the day of Eid al-Fitr, I headed with my relatives to the fields early in the morning. While they were leaving in order to feed the animals, my primary concern was performing Eid Salāh in congregation. Therefore, I very quickly prepared to go outside, and urged everyone else to hasten as well. At the fields, I spurred everyone to work quickly to prepare the fodder, and on the way back, I kept encouraging all of my family members to move quickly. Perhaps I went too fast: one of my uncles asked for the reason of my haste, upon which I replied that I urgently needed to relieve myself. In order to avoid lying, I stopped on the way and relieved myself, then hurried home, showered, and prepared myself for Eid Salāh. I also covered myself partially with a sheet to avoid recognition. I then accompanied my friends to the main masjid and performed Eid Salāh in congregation.

Even though I had covered myself, some Muslims from my village saw and recognized me after Eid Salāh. One of them, being extremely joyful about my conversion, slipped to my family that I had performed Eid Salāh. When I realized that my family had been informed of my praying of Eid Salāh, I went to one of my close Muslim friend's house instead of my own. I stayed there for some time, then headed to another friend's house and slept there for a while. Finally, I woke up and proceeded home.

Upon sighting me, my family members immediately spoke: "We have heard that you have performed Eid Salāh in the masjid." I retorted, "Who told you that? You can go to my friend's house and ask him. He will tell you that I was asleep in his house and am coming from there." My family members did not press me further; however, they were not satisfied with my brief answer.

My uncle was among the people questioning me when I had returned home. He approached me that night, advising me thus: "Look, my son. For many days, your household members and I have been feeling through your behavior and attitude that you are leaning toward Islam. Reports of you performing Salāh have reached us twice. My son, I exhort you to remove any thoughts from your heart about accepting Islam. If you accept Islam, the entire family will be disgraced; therefore, avoid Islam. I would also like

to say that we will arrange your marriage with whomever you wish among the non-Muslims, and I am ready to support any educational expenses you may have. Simply remove the thought of accepting Islam.” After my uncle had finished, I reassured him, saying, “Don’t worry. Whatever you say will be done.” While we were conversing, I had a book on Salāh in my pocket, which he fortunately did not notice. It is only through the blessing and kindness of Allah ﷻ that, despite my uncle’s advice, my love for Islam only increased. My uncle left after my reply, being satisfied to some extent.

Despite my attempts at pretense, my family members’ suspicions about me transformed into beliefs, and they started watching me closely. Especially after the Eid al-Fitr incident, my older brother started carefully observing and monitoring my daily activities, such as my meeting with friends at school. One day I asked him, “Why do you stare at me everywhere?” He replied, “I do this out of concern for you.” Upon that, I retorted, “Am I some weakling who cannot take care of himself, who needs you to watch over him?” Still, my brother continued a close watch on me.

Before my high school results had arrived, I had decided and mentally prepared myself to leave the house as soon as the results arrived. To fully observe the Islamic injunctions that had become obligatory on me the moment I had accepted Islam, I would have to move to a Muslim environment and system, where I could live in peace, without fear or danger from my family.

Chapter 8

As soon as my high school results arrived, I started implementing my plan of leaving home. During an unexpected power failure one afternoon, I undertook my first step by taking three sets of clothes to a Muslim friend's house. Several days later, I told my family members that I wish to seek admission in Sargodha Government College, and asked them to arrange for my fees. While my family arranged for the fees, I secretly gathered several necessary items to take once I left home. By the time the day arrived when I was to seek admission in college, I had completely prepared myself to leave the house.

On that last day at home, a few moments before the sun had fully risen, I made my way to the fields to say farewell to my father. I went up to him and said, "Today, for which purpose I am leaving home, please pray that God gives me success in it." I then bowed in the direction of his feet, but before my hands had touched his feet, he grabbed my shoulders and pulled me up. He compassionately passed his hands over my head and shoulders, prayed for me, and granted me permission to leave. After leaving my father, I went to our domesticated cattle, buffaloes, sheep, and goats, who were also in the fields. Addressing them, I said, "You are the creation of Allah. I have burdened you, used your milk, and derived other such benefits from you. Therefore, if I had any shortcomings in serving you by preparing your fodder and water, please forgive me. I am leaving now." After finishing my monologue with the animals, I started moving toward the house. I stopped when I reached the end of the fields, and looking at the ground and its fruits, flowers, and trees, I addressed them, "I have used wheat, grain, and various fruits from you, and have benefited much from these bounties. Indeed, you have rights over me, and if I have been negligent in fulfilling any of your rights, then please forgive me." I then reached home and started saying farewell to my mother and siblings. I gave to each of my sisters some of my personal savings, and I requested the same from my mother as I had asked my father: "Please pray that God gives me success in my objective." I also asked for my mother's forgiveness.

When I had requested my parents to pray for my success, the following thoughts ran in my mind: “Today, I am leaving you and separating only because of the religion of Allah ﷻ. I do not know whether we will meet again in life or not. Therefore, O Allah, grant me success and steadfastness on the religion for whose sake I am separating from my parents and family.”

As I left, my parents prayed and displayed their affection for me. During that interval, I told them that I might visit my older brother’s in-laws in Sialkot after I complete my admissions process. I interjected thus because I did not want my parents to begin searching for me immediately in case I did not return to my village at night from Sargodha. After saying farewell one last time, I stepped outside the house, but promptly returned back inside. I went up to my mother and bowed to hold her feet, and requested her prayers and forgiveness. My mother sent me with a lot of prayers and affection, and I left home once more. As I had previously addressed the animals and the fields, I now addressed the house: “You provided me shade in times of heat. You protected me from cold, and sheltered me during rain. Therefore, if I had any faults in fulfilling your rights, please forgive me. Perhaps I will not spend a day or night in you again.”

The pain of separating from my house, family, and friends was overcome by the feeling of the greatness of Islam and the idea that I was now proceeding toward my next destination. I walked until I reached the village limits. I stopped, and once more collectively sought forgiveness from the entire village, its inhabitants, animals, flowers, trees, land, and sky. I then left the village Dodah and rode a bus to Sargodha. In Sargodha, I went to the Government College and, as planned, submitted my forms for entry into first year Science. After finishing my tasks, I went to a clinic in Sargodha, named Rahmaniyyah Pharmacy.

My reason for coming to Rahmaniyyah Pharmacy was that a doctor from our village, Mr. Habībullah, used to practice there. Mr. Habībullah was a kind and pious man. In the village, before coming to Sargodha, I had met and developed a relationship with him, and I kept him informed about my circumstances following my conversion to Islam. One of his relatives, Mr. `Atā`ullāh, who was also a doctor, owned Rahmaniyyah Pharmacy in Sargodha. In Dodah, Mr. Habībullah and I had planned that when I was ready to publicly announce my conversion to Islam, I should go to Mr. `Atā`ullāh for

legal protection and support. Therefore, when I reached Mr. `Atā`ullāh, he already knew the entire details regarding my conversion. Upon meeting him, I remarked that I no longer wish to keep my conversion secret, and I seek legal protection in this matter as well. He immediately took me in his car to the court. At the time, Judge I`jāz Baloch was presiding over the court. I presented myself and my case, and he asked me several questions, including how I had accepted Islam and whether anyone had pressured me into converting to Islam. I replied that no one had pressured or forced me into accepting Islam, nor was there any fear that led me to accept Islam. Rather, my conversion to Islam was entirely my own choice and decision. Hearing my reply, Judge I`jāz Baloch asked me to consider well what I was testifying to. I responded, "Sir, I have come to Islam with complete satisfaction and happiness, and I wish for my death to be on this religion as well." During our exchange, the court reporter had recorded all of my answers in writing.

When the judge heard my answer and was convinced that I had purposely accepted Islam, he took my signature as an official indication. He then embraced and congratulated me, and with love and affection allowed me to sit with him. After sitting with him for some time, I sought permission and then left to go to Mr. `Atā`ullāh. As I left the court room, I met all the other judges and lawyers, who had already heard about my conversion. They celebrated the occasion with a brief tea party, congratulated me, and considerably encouraged me. This incident occurred in August 1989.

After testifying before the judge and celebrating with the other officials, I returned to Mr. `Atā`ullāh's clinic. There was a guest room right next to the clinic, where I stayed for several days. While residing there, details about my conversion to Islam and my testimony before Judge I`jāz Baloch appeared in the daily newspaper *Jang*. Later, through one of Mr. `Atā`ullāh's acquaintances, I transferred to Lahore. I had intended to stay in Lahore for a long period of time; however, the environment in Lahore did not suit my temperament. I therefore returned to Mr. `Atā`ullāh in Sargodha after a few days.

While I lived in Lahore, I wrote a lengthy letter to a dear friend, Tāhir `Ali, who was one of my classmates in Dodah. I wrote to him hoping that he would inform me of the circumstances of my family and the effect my leaving home had on them. I also asked whether it would be appropriate for me to come home if I ever needed to. Before I could receive Tāhir `Ali's reply, however, I had already returned to Sargodha. I later

learned that after I had left home, my parents and relatives intently interrogated my close Muslim friends about where they had hid me. My parents also threatened to file legal charges against my friends if they did not divulge any information on me.

My family members greatly pressured my friends Dr. Muhammad Yūsuf and Ghulām Shabbīr for any information about me. As a result, the pair searched the village mail daily for any letter from me, thinking that I might perhaps write to one of my friends. Therefore, when my letter from Lahore reached Dodah, my friends read it and immediately set out to my address in Lahore. By that time, though, I had already returned to Sargodha. Before leaving Lahore, I did tell those with me where I was staying in Sargodha, as well as additional contact details in case my friends arrived to Lahore. Consequently, when my friends reached Lahore, they were informed that I had left to Sargodha, and were given my contact information. They then started coming toward Sargodha and met me there the next day. After we had met and settled, my friends told me about the circumstances back home related to my family and relatives. We then discussed what my next step should be, and finally decided to call Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq in Kot Momin, and implement whatever suggestion or order he gives.

Chapter 9

One of my friends present there, brother Yameen, called Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq and related the entire situation to him. Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq replied, “Bring Abdul Wāhid to me. It would be an honor to help him as much as I can in this difficult time.” I thereupon went with Yameen to Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq in Kot Momin.

Almost fifteen days had passed since I had left my home and village. During those two weeks, my parents and relatives searched in every place they felt a chance of finding me. That, of course, included Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq’s house. My family had thus members arrived at Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq’s residence and demanded to know where I was. They pressured him, saying, “Where is the child? We firmly believe that the child is with you since you are the first person in our family to accept the Muslim religion.” Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq repeatedly assured them, “Sundar-Dās (Abdul Wāhid) is not with me. If he does come to me or contacts me, then I promise to immediately inform you or arrange a meeting for you with him.” Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq kept his word, and as soon as I arrived at his house near Maghrib, he sent a reliable man to my family with this message: “Your child Sundar-Dās has reached me today. Therefore, if you wish to meet him, you may come at any time. My heart and home are open for you all the time.” The message reached my family, and the next morning my father sent my uncle Chaudhri Rām to Kot Momin. My uncle arrived in an emotional state, and discussed my decision to leave home and other such matters. After talking for about an hour and a half, my uncle set to leave, and said, “Your father told me to make Sundar-Dās return with me.” I replied, “Returning has two meanings. One is to return to Dodah and meet my parents and relatives. I intend to do that, and I see no harm in doing so. The other meaning is to leave Islam and revert back to Sikhism, and pass my life according to my former practice. Which of these meanings do you imply?” My uncle replied, “Of course, we desire that you return back to Sikhism, and pass the rest of your life with us.” To that, I responded, “If I eventually had to return to my former religion, why would I undertake such a significant step?” When my uncle heard my reply, he became quite upset, and emotion filled his eyes with tears. He left in this state without saying anything further, and he

related the details to my family members. The next day, my father himself came to Kot Momin to meet me. We met with such emotion that it seemed father and son were meeting each other after many long years. Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq also met my father. My father started the conversation by telling me that my uncle had conveyed everything that I had said, and had told my father, “Sundar-Dās did not return. Go and try yourself; perhaps he will listen to you.” My father continued, “Sundar-Dās, you used to assure me and Chaudhri Rām that we should not worry, that you would never accept Islam. Now what have you done? You have put us to shame in front of the entire village. We have been disgraced. I have come to bring you back in my position as your father.” After listening attentively to my father’s words, I gave the same reply that I had given my uncle the previous day.

When my father heard my reply, he also entered the emotional state my uncle had before. However, my father finally realized that I was not ready to return, and so he said, “All right, my son. This is your choice. Do whatever you like. Try always for a good future.” As my father started to leave, I accompanied him, and said farewell at the bus. About three days later, my mother, older brother, cousin, and youngest brother all came to Kot Momin to meet me. After my father had left, I had enrolled in a school in Kot Momin, named Madrasah Anwār-Madinah, where I started learning the Qur’an. When my family members reached Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq’s house, I was at school, studying. Someone came and informed me that my mother and other family members had come to meet me, and I immediately left school to meet them. My mother was very upset at me leaving home and not returning despite my uncle and father’s insistence. When she saw me, she started crying, and exclaimed, “It would have been better that you had died rather than converting to Islam. At least we would not have been disgraced. It would have been good that a snake had bit while you worked in the fields, and you died as a result.” I replied, shocked, “Mother! Is it not better that I am well and alive in front of you, rather than a snake biting and killing me?” My mother did not say anything after that, and after sitting with me for more than an hour, my mother, brothers, and cousin left back to Dodah.

This visit was, in essence, that last time my family members attempted to bring back to Sikhism. I occasionally met my brothers in Kot Momin, but my other

family members did not visit. In one of these meetings, my older brother, Shādi Lāl, arrived in Kot Momin with a Muslim friend, Sa`eed. Shādi Lāl said, “It has been more than ten months since you left home. We brothers occasionally meet you, every now and then. But what fault is it of your sisters that they are unable to meet you? They also wish to see you sometimes. I have in fact come to pick you up so that you may meet your sisters.” My eyes diverted to Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq, who was also present there, and I sought his opinion. I said to Shādi Lāl, “Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq is present here. Ask him what I should do, and I will obey whatever he says.” Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq contemplated the matter for a long time, and he then told us that he would like to consult with several other people before deciding. Therefore, as according to the practice of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, he sent for several trustworthy friends, and they decided amongst themselves I should go meet my sisters. They also sent a person named Khālid Fārūq with me to bring me back to Kot Momin after spending a day in Dodah. My brother Shādi Lāl had arrived in Kot Momin in the afternoon, but it took until night for us to decide whether I should leave or not. I prepared to leave at night, and along with Shādi Lāl, Sa`eed, and Khālid Fārūq, left to Dodah. About ten months had passed since I had left my home, and in that period of time, this was the first occasion in which I was returning home for a few hours, the same home that I had left with such a heavy heart.

As I neared home, various thoughts and possibilities clouded my mind. I remained thinking the entire trip until I reached home. My family members and relatives’ hearts and minds were full of complaints and questions about my conversion to Islam; during the trip, I mentally prepared myself to answer the accusations. We dropped off Sa`eed at his house on the way. The remaining three of us proceeded home, where Khālid Fārūq was given a separate room.

I went with Shādi Lāl into the main house to meet my sisters, mother, and other older ladies of the family, as well as the children. When I met my mother, I bowed down so that she may pass her hands over my head, as she used to do as a display of affection before I had converted to Islam. This time, though, she did not react, so I myself took her hand and put it over my head. When my sisters and the other women beheld this scene, they all started crying, and my mother herself started to cry as well. I was asked various questions about my conversion to Islam, some out of astonishment and others full

of criticism. Shādi Lāl interrupted at this occasion to forbid the others from asking me any questions. He also told them that I was here only to meet them and would return the next day. After spending the night among family and relatives, I returned to Kot Momin with Khālid Fārūq.

In Madrasah Anwār-Madinah, I started reading the Qur'an under the tutelage of Qari Muhammad Aslam. Meanwhile, Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq formed a blessed and noble intention of inviting our Sikh family members to Islam by first establishing a close relationship with them. This plan steadily took root, and after having spent but a year in Kot Momin, I moved with Mawlāna `Umar Fārūq to Bhagta Nawāla in Sargodha, where we established a religious school by the name of Jāmi`a Nu`māniyyah. After moving there, two more responsibilities were given to me in addition to learning the Qur'an: handling several administrative issues of Jāmi`a Nu`māniyyah, and teaching the students conventional education until grade 8, for two hours a day.

I then studied the first two years of the Dars-Nizāmi in Jāmi`a Nu`māniyyah, after which I transferred to Jāmi`a Imdādiyyah in Faisalabad for the remaining course. I spent the next seven years seeking religious instruction there, and in 2000, finished the final year, which involved the study of Hadīth. I graduated with the rest of my class, and at the end of that year, went to Jāmi`a Dārul `Ulūm Karachi with several friends for further study. In 2001, I started a two-year course on *Takhassus fil Da`wah wal Irshād*¹, which I completed at the end of 2002.

In 2003, I began a three-year course in *Takhassus fil `Ifṭā`*². During the third year, I wrote a thesis entitled "The Nullification of the Marriage Contract in Light of Shari`ah and the Pakistani Constitution," after which I was honored with a certificate of completion. I also started a PhD program during the third year of *Takhassus fil `Ifṭā`* under Dr. Khalīl ur-Rahmān, the director of the Sheikh Zayed Islamic Institute at Karachi University. I completed my PhD toward the end of 2009. I also taught Hadīth and Tafsīr in Madrasah Fātima-tuz-Zahrā in Karachi.

¹ Specialization in Preaching and Guiding

² Specialization in Islamic Jurisprudence

Along with all of these academic years, toward the end of 2004 I married into a religious family. My life partner, the daughter of Dr. Fazal Ahmad, is also a religious scholar.

At the end, I would like to request all the readers to pray that Allah grants steadfastness to me and my family and allows us to truly follow His religion, and guides those of my family who have not accepted Islam yet. *Āmīn.* و ما توفيقى إلا بالله