

How an Anger-Filled Jihadist Fell In Love With Jesus

Bashir Mohammed claims he once fought for a militant Muslim group on the front lines of the Syrian civil war. Today, he leads a Christian prayer meeting in an apartment building in Istanbul, Turkey.

In four years, according to his wife and neighbors, he went from being an angry follower of Islam ready to kill for his faith, to a man of peace who seeks to help other Muslim converts to Christianity grow in their faith.

Even he admits it's an unlikely story.

"Frankly, I would have slaughtered anyone who suggested it," he told a reporter for the *Times of India*.

It was a long journey that included growing dissatisfaction with the "holy war" in Syria. As a fighter for al Nusra, a splinter group of al-Qaeda, he saw death on the battlefield and the mass executions and torture of prisoners.

One day, peering through binoculars at Syrian government soldiers executing their prisoners, he realized there was no difference between him and the enemy.

Disillusioned with the idea of Muslims killing other Muslims, he deserted al Nusra and took his wife to Istanbul.

Although he remained a passionate follower of Islam, he soon had an experience that introduced him to the power of Jesus Christ.

When his wife, Rashid, became seriously ill, Bashir did the unthinkable and allowed a Christian cousin living in Canada to have his prayer group pray for her over the phone.

In a few days, his wife recovered and Bashir asked his cousin to introduce him to someone who could tell him more about Christ.

After several conversations with a missionary, Bashir was close to renouncing Islam to follow Jesus.

Bashir says the welcoming attitude of churches and the generous prayers of Christianity drew him to the faith. And, he says, reading the Bible brings him more peace than the Koran.

But it was dreams that he and his wife had that sealed the deal. Rashid dreamed that a character from the Bible miraculously parted the sea; Bashir dreamed that Jesus gave him some food.

Even though Muslim converts to Christ face great danger, there are many stories of converts from Islam to Christianity in the Middle East, and they often include people having dreams and visions of Christ.

In one respect, Bashir's story is different because instead of trying to leave the country he is choosing to remain and face the danger to help others grow in the faith.

"There's a big gap between the god I used to worship and the one I worship now," Mohammed said. "We used to worship in fear. Now everything has changed." {eoa}

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