12 Tips for the Convert Muslim

By Brother Alex (Dallas, TX)

1. Practice Islam as much as you can

“He who loves my Sunnah has loved me, and he who loves me will be with me in Paradise.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Tirmidhi)

As a new Muslim, you will have trouble keeping up with prayers every day, fasting during Ramadan, and the many other practices in this religion. The struggle that we face, with such a radical change in lifestyle, is difficult and will take some time. Awkward moments are bound to happen, don’t fret. You are not expected to wake up at 4am every morning to pray tahajjud (extra night prayers). If you have problems with certain practices, then gradually work yourself into the mindset of worship. A counselor once told me when I was young, “How do you eat an elephant? Just One bite at a time.” Think of it as one step at a time. Pray to Allah (swt) and ask for Him to make it easy for you and the rest will come naturally.

Keeping up with your devotional practices is something that will strengthen your faith immensely. Read the Qur’an whenever possible. Find a collection of hadith, such as Riyadh us-Saliheen, and read it often. You will start to feel a connection to Allah (swt) and you will become used to Islam as a religion and way of life.

2. Respect your parents

“Heaven lies under the feet of your mother.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Ahmad, Nasa’i)

Keeping up a good relationship with your family is essential. Try to avoid bringing up or taking part in controversial subjects regarding religion. This is almost unavoidable, but your parents will eventually accept that Islam is not going to turn you into a terrorist if you stay calm during these tense moments. Gradually, your parents will gain some respect and understanding of Islam and may start to become genuinely interested. This is a great sign and insha’Allah, God will make a way for them to accept Islam.

What you do not want to do is act like you know everything, attempt to debate everything, or overly defend yourself in a way that might make you angry or upset. This will just cause heartache and uneasiness. Your priority now should be to work on yourself.

3. Find a teacher

“For him who follows a path for seeking knowledge, Allah will ease for him the path to Paradise.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Muslim)

Finding a teacher to bounce ideas off of is a great way to learn your deen (religion). I found it is good to find someone with as much knowledge as possible who also has an understanding of the English language and American culture. It is difficult to listen to someone with a thick accent or someone with a back-home mentality. When I first accepted Islam, I would drive every day to visit my teacher and I would ask him what seemed like an endless stream of questions. Sometimes he seemed overwhelmed! This is a great way to clarify things you hear on Sheikh Youtube or Google or any part of the Qur’an you are reading at the time.

This will also help you have a real grounding in the Islamic tradition. You will eventually have spent more time learning Islam than most people from Muslim families. Maintain a sense of humility if you do gain a lot of knowledge, as there will always be someone who will be more knowledgeable than you. Learn everything you can in small chunks, no one is asking you to be a scholar!

4. Keep away from debates and arguments

“Verily anger spoils faith as aloe spoils honey.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi)

Trying to constantly defend your religion is something that will cause you a lot of stress. I remember when I first accepted Islam, it seemed like the whole world was after me. This may happen to different people at different levels, but it was a very overwhelming experience for me. The best thing to do is avoid these arguments at all costs. If you are mature about your religion and display a desire to explain yourself without refuting others, then many doors will open for you. You are bound to give someone a refreshing view of Islam, which is what so many people are hungry for after seeing Islam in such a negative light in the media.

Staying away from these discussions will put you at peace and give you breathing room. A lot of converts are not really comfortable with bringing up their religion because of the backlash they receive. Personally, I recognized that if I just mention it when necessary, I get a more positive reaction. You’ll be surprised to hear “Oh that’s cool dude, what made you pick that religion?” This is always an opportunity for da’wah (inviting to Islam).

5. Gain a connection to the Arabic language

“Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’an that you might understand.”

-The Holy Qur’an, 12:2

This is one of my favorite parts of becoming a Muslim. To be honest, I’m a language-lover and I realize everyone is not the same in this regard. Just because you failed high school Spanish though doesn’t mean you will have trouble with Arabic. There are many tricks to learning the language that I won’t go into here, but there are ways to make this easier on yourself. These methods can be found online or in books; with a little research you can pave your way to gaining an understanding of Arabic.

Start by learning the alphabet and connecting letters together. You can learn this in an afternoon if you know someone that is a native Arabic speaker (but go at your own pace). Sit on that for a while and eventually you will be able to follow along in the Qur’an if you listen to a recitation on your computer or MP3 player. You will start to recognize words, after which you can get into simple grammar rules. I recommend learning common nouns and prepositions first (words like “in”, “on”, “for” and “with”).

Arabic can be really enjoyable, and you are bound to gain an Islamic vocabulary after listening to talks or lectures. Eventually you will know meanings of words like “furqaan” and “sajdah” and you’ll be able to use them in conversations with Muslims. Sabr (patience) is essential!

6. Understand Islam’s organic nature

“Those who make things hard for themselves will be destroyed. (He said it three times.)”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Muslim)

Coming to Islam will sometimes put you in a situation where you are overwhelmed with opinions that are hard to follow. As an example, one might be told that you have to wash your feet every time you make wudhu (ablution) unless you wipe over leather socks that have been worn from your previous wudhu. For most Americans, the idea of wearing leather socks is something that we find extremely unusual. If we do a little research, we find there are opinions of scholars that mention the permissibility of wiping over cotton socks (even ones with holes in them!). To an American convert, these opinions can cause a huge sigh of relief.

7. Maintain your Identity

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”

-The Holy Qur’an, 49:1

Being a Muslim is a huge part of your identity now. That doesn’t mean you can’t barbeque with your friends or watch football on Sundays. If there are things in your culture that do not directly contradict with basic Islamic creed, then you are welcome to keep those things in your life. You do not need to start wearing Arab or Indian clothing. As long as your clothes cover what they are supposed to cover, you are in the clear.

Many converts are also exposed to really weird food that is overly spicy or funny tasting. This might lead us to think that eating curry is sunnah or something righteous. We can still have our own culture and tastes in food: pot roast and beans are still halal!

There are many other examples of things that you will be exposed to that are from foreign cultures and do not necessarily have anything to do with Islam. Our goal as new Muslims is to worship Allah (swt), not to add a Pakistani or Arab identity to our persona.

It is good to have a teacher who understands the subtleties of different opinion in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and can inform you of differences among the scholars on issues that are of concern. Most people in masajid will have a very limited view of the juristic possibilities inside the Islamic tradition. Islam is a vast tradition and we should not make it small. These diverse opinions are there to help us, not cause strain on ourselves.

8. Force yourself to go to the masjid

“The person who receives the greatest reward for the Salah is one who lives the farthest and has the farthest to walk.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Bukhari, Muslim)

Going on Fridays is a given, but I would also recommend trying to fit a few prayers (at least) per week in the masjid. This will open many doors for you and will insha’Allah grant many good deeds to your account. You will meet people who are connected to Islam; networking opportunities are more readily available; and you are bound to make long-lasting friends. This is one of the things that I really love about Islam, that you can almost always find people in the masjid.

Although this may be hard initially, try and go to the masjid. The payoff will be huge, even if you just pray and leave right after. You will eventually warm up to the community and you can feel more comfortable going to the masjid whenever you like.

9. Find Muslim friends and avoid severing ties

“On the Day of Resurrection Allah Almighty will proclaim: “Where are those who have mutual love for My Glory’s sake? Today I shall shelter them in My shade where there is no shade but Mine.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Muslim)

Saying “As-salamu ‘Alaykum” ( “Peace be upon you”) to people you see on campus or at the grocery store is a real blessing in Islam. It immediately lets people know you are Muslim and they usually will be happy to return the greeting and hopefully share a few words with you. Doors of friendship will be opened and you will meet lots of people. Try and spend some time with Muslims when you can. It is beneficial to remind yourself that you are not the only Muslim on the planet and you share your religion with almost 2 billion people around the globe.

Also, don’t sever your friendships with your non-Muslim friends unless they are constantly partying or using the list of major sins as their weekend to-do list. You can be a light to your Christian, Agnostic, Jewish, or Atheist friends. You never know who Allah (swt) will guide, and showing that you are living an ethical life can encourage these people to learn a little about Islam or change their mind to having a positive view of the religion.

10. Avoid Loneliness

“Islam began as something strange and will revert to being strange as it began, so give glad tidings to the strangers.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Muslim)

This is a major problem in the convert community. We are lonely. The best thing we can do to fight the feeling of loneliness is to spend as much time as possible with good company. Having dinners with people a few nights a week is a sure way to maintain a good attitude. The practice of becoming a nun or a monk is alien to Islam; we are social creatures and Islam recognizes this.

Try not to lock yourself away in your apartment to avoid the world. This will just cause a vicious cycle that will cause deep depression and can lead to searching for solace in haram (unlawful).

Make it an obligation on yourself to remain a sociable human being. It takes a lot of work but the result is happiness and contentment in life.

11. Stay away from extremism

“And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people.”

-The Holy Qur’an, 2:143

Most converts do not enter Islam looking for an extremist point of view. Unfortunately, we have seen some converts do end up overseas working for terrorist organizations. This is something that can happen from a person feeling victimized or ostracized by their own culture and being overcome with anger.

I personally have not had a problem with anyone trying to “radicalize” me. It does happen enough though that it should be a concern. It will be best for you to keep your head on your shoulders and not get caught up with extreme points of view. Know that all of the scholars overseas and in America have absolutely refuted terrorism in their fatawa (legal rulings). Extremism is on the very edges of the Islamic thought. Do your best to stay on a middle way.

12. Do not despair

“So know that victory is with patience, and relief is with distress and that with hardship comes ease.”

-The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Being a convert to Islam, you will face a lot of tribulations. There is not anything that you cannot overcome though, and never despair in Allah (swt).

Allah (swt) guided to you to Islam, you searched for the answer and you found it. Be happy and constantly remind yourself of the blessings in your life. There are a lot of good things that will happen to you and you are on the straight road to Jannah (paradise). Rejoice in being Muslim. Remember the Sahabah (companions) were all converts to Islam and they were human beings that came from Adam and Eve just like you! Be strong and find comfort in your prayers and worship to Allah (swt). The first six months were the hardest for me, and insha’Allah we will all continue to grow as a convert community in America.