

Welcome to Islam -----

Russian Converted Sister: Dagina Kirkoz

Fatima Allaboun

- * My conversion to Islam I reflected as psychological tranquility which I have known after I began to communicate with Allah, a gift I had not been enjoying before that.*
- * The Muslim woman must be aware and cautious in order not to be turned into a merchandise by the media.*
- * I hope that all Muslims show the pure image of Islam which is being fought ferociously by its enemies.*

*You can feel transparency, sincerity and tranquility as she talks about her conversion to Islam.. Dagnia Kirkoz, who was born in Latvia, is one of those who have joined the convoy of Divine Light: she is reassured and satisfied thanking Allah - praised be His name
- Who has guided her to Islam.*

She did not suffice herself with the Nursing Diploma from the University of Latvia; she felt it was necessary for her to learn Arabic; the language of the Quran and Islam, although she is a mother of two girls.

She has felt the overwhelming desire to acquire knowledge of the bases of her faith and its rulings, so she is attending Arabic classes in an institute in Beirut.

Q. How many members are there in your family? And how was your relationship with them before you embraced Islam?

A. My family includes my father, mother and my elder sister. My parents worked all day long, and sometimes at night. This made my sister

and me shoulder the household responsibilities. Our parents' long absence from the house made our emotional ties to them cold, although my mother tried to be close to us urging us to learn, acquire culture and engage in school activities.

Q. Were there specific values that ruled in your town?

A. We were brought up in the small town of Madonna Latvia. Although the town was small, individualism governed the residents' lives; everyone lived in semi-isolation. There were a lot of quarrels among family members due to the parents' using alcohol and the resulting terrible fights that usually end up in divorce and family disintegration.

Q. It is known that the communist regime has left its marks on the intellectual and cultural life in the former USSR, to what extent did this affect your educational milieu?

A. This is true, the communist regime's ideology influenced the intellectual and cultural life, including the educational system. The political regime had activities in all schools and universities. You had to join the party's scouts or you would be looked at with suspicion and caution.

However, my mother believed in Christianity. She used to take us to church and we felt threatened by the regime for going there. Communist thoughts found their way into my sister's mind so she started to contradict my mother's faith and thoughts and my mother started to listen secretly to anti-USSR radio stations.

Q. What are the circumstances that led you to embrace Islam?

A. My attention was drawn by the Muslim students and how they dealt with others politely and ethically. Besides, they were serious in studying, and they undertook the responsibilities of their alienation and schooling with seriousness contrary to the other young men and women in the university who indulged in the life's pleasures.

It also drew my attention that they did not use alcohol or go to notorious night clubs. My husband was one of them. I admired Islam more as I -along with my family- saw how he treated me and all those around him in line with Islamic ethics.

My husband was the wide door through which I entered Islam, for he answered all my questions about this new faith. He has convinced my mind and not only my emotion.

Q. What were the reactions in your community to your conversion to Islam?

A. When my relatives knew that I had been married to a Muslim, they felt pity for me thinking that I would face a doomed fate. However, there were others who respected my decision. My parents were pleased with my marriage, for they rejected atheism and my faith in Allah - praised be His name- meant a great to them since they rejected the communist ideology. They admired Islam more as they saw how my husband treated me -in line with Allah's orders- politely, patiently and kindly.

As for my friends, they thought I was forced to embrace Islam and wear hejab because they believed that hejab lowers the woman and makes her a maid and prisoner of her husband. They did not believe that my husband had not forced me to do anything and that my acts were the result of my full conviction.

Q. What were the positive results of your conversion to Islam?

A. The major thing that was reflected on my life after my conversion to Islam was the psychological tranquility that I have known since I began to communicate with Allah -be He exalted- through my religious duties. I feel great relief when I perform the prayer or fast. I have found myself in a social life that is remote from individualism for Islam invites us to visit our relatives and neighbors, to check if they have any problems be it in good times or bad times.

Q. Do you suggest specific means to invite non-Muslims to Islam in light of your experience?

A. The enemies of Islam are using all their resources to distort the image of Islam, that is why you find that ordinary non-Muslims are afraid of Islam. Therefore, those who seek to serve this montheist faith need to show its reality and clear its image through satellite channels and internet in foreign languages as such as possible.

Q. After you came to Lebanon, have you ever returned to Latvia, and has the position of your relatives and friends remained the same?

A. I have visited my motherland. My relatives and friends were greatly surprised as they felt that I was happy after I converted to Islam and in my new homeland. I clarified to them a lot of the faith's teachings stressing on the social aspects because this side is missing in my town. And as those with whom I communicated did not enjoy a great deal of thought and education, I chose to speak to them in a simple language that they could understand.

Q. Is it possible to invite people to Islam in Latvia?

A. The Latvian state has allowed the Muslim minority to build its first mosque which needs preachers and imams to guide the people, for Muslims in Latvia know only a little about their faith. It is difficult for those people to invite non-Muslims to Islam as those who lack something cannot give it. Thus, it is the duty of the Ulama throughout the Muslim world to prepare preachers in Latvia and elsewhere in the world. The Eastern and Western Europeans view Islam with contempt and disdain; the politicians there sense its threat because of its universal message. Therefore, all Muslims have to be concerned with invitation to Islam in word and deed.

Q. How do you view the Muslim woman in your new homeland, Lebanon?

A. I see that most of the women here are absorbed by the details of the house chores and do not take interest in what is taking place in the society, although Islam has permitted them to go out of the house, work, and study in a manner that does not contradict their marital or motherhood duties.

The Muslim woman has to be aware and cautious; she must not be attracted by the media that try to make her a merchandise; she has to acquire knowledge about Islam, and finish schooling, because the educated mother is better than the ignorant, her face is the face of the country and she is the one supposed to prepare the children, so that they do what pleases Allah -be He exalted.-

Q. Is there a comment that you would like to address to Muslims through the magazine of NoorAl-Islam?

A. I hope that all Muslims show the pure image of Islam for the faith is being fought ferociously by its enemies. I pray to Allah to remedy the Muslims' inner and outer selves so that the deeds and words become identical, and praise is Allah's, the Lord of the worlds.