

لا اله الا الله
محمد وآله

I was blessed to be born into religion, into a very strict Church of Christ family. My Grandfather was a Preacher, all my Uncles were Preachers, we didn't move without praying first, we literally ate & breathed Jesus. Our lives were invested in the Church, and I remember spending more time there than we did at home on many occasions. We were so Christian that I was baptized, three times! Once by force, again by my own accord, then yet again on my own...when I really meant it. When I started Kindergarten, I was enrolled in Odessa Christian School, where I attended school the first three years of my life. The school was just as Orthodox as my family; no talking to boys, no associating with the opposite gender, no shorts, no skirts, no dresses...not while boys are present, and not while under age 15. Every moment of my life from birth to age 10 was Church, Jesus, Church, more Jesus. This was all fine and well, even at such a young age I knew the Holy Scriptures were Divine, not just "some book." I always felt something different reading the Bible, felt a little "odd" around non-Church people. I knew I was part of some..."weird group", that I didn't quite understand, but I was definitely down with it. When I was suddenly tossed into public school in the 4th Grade, I

started paying more attention in Church. I can't answer why I was put in public school because quite honestly, I don't have a clear memory of why. But I believe it was personal family division, and somehow that resulted in me getting to know the secular world. Strange world then, strange world now. All of a sudden there's all these...BOYS...saying very different things than I've heard before, doing...very different things than I've seen before. The girls too! I remember this one little girl in 4th grade who used to sit on the playground and make all the boys kiss her. I was mortified. Why in the world were these strange little kids so different than me? The Preacher will know, I just have to pay attention to him. The Preacher answers all the questions. The only problem was as the years progressed with me in this secular world, the questions for the Preacher got a little bit tougher, and he got to a point where he didn't want to answer me anymore. Apparently my questions mocked the Church of Christ, but that was never my intention. Who decided the devil looks like that? You're telling me God created all these humans to just burn half of them? Wait wait...I'm going to be sitting on my couch and just....disappear someday? The whole rapture left behind thing had me

super confused! I just wanted answers, and I was called “faithless” when seeking these answers. What little I did get, didn’t make sense. And then...the question of all questions...the question that broke the camel’s back...”What happened to Ishmael?” I was incredibly troubled by Genesis 12:2-3 :

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.

At the time of asking this taboo question, I’m in my early teens. I’m still learning, still holding on to all the feel good Church-ey scripts, yet still troubled. The Church of Christ was very good at teaching us all about Isaac’s story. But Ishmael, well He wasn’t for us. He was for other people, “far away people.” THAT answer bothered me... “far away people?” You mean the people in the Holy Lands? Wouldn’t that make us the “far away people?” Also, Jesus, umm..Holy Lands. Why was this Prophet for us, but the

other ones aren't? Who decides what Prophet is for who? Who decides who's a Prophet!? Through a girl in the wonderful secular public school system, I remember hearing about Muhammed. Oddly, I knew His favorite color was green, and I sealed that fact into my memory. I knew just enough to know this was a different religion, something other than Church of Christ. Tell me more. Maybe Muhammed knew where Ishmael was? Let's ask the Preacher. Guess how that went?

Now I've had it. Why won't anyone just answer me? Why do I keep being told to just have faith with "our beliefs", they're "the only way." Why do I keep getting told it's not for us? God said... "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." If they're ALL blessed through Abraham, how can one be for me and the other not? Seems I should get to choose. Since nobody will answer me I choose...nothing. I've searched for years now, and found nothing. No Ishmael. It took forever to even equate "the far away people" to "Muslims." I'm 16 at this point, on my own, nobody can tell me what to do anymore. I can't learn about the Muslims and the Christians live in some fairy tale land. So, I left it all. Left the Church. Left

God. Left religion. I was done. I've wasted years of my life searching for someone nobody will lead me to and I felt something was being hidden from me. I didn't like it. I wanted to know why it was hidden, it MUST be special, but I give up. Nobody to help me and I've been raised to sheltered to even know where to start. Done.

Twenty years went by. I spent TWENTY years in isolation. How I'm even alive is a miracle in itself. Well, not complete isolation. I dabbled in some Church hopping... Baptist, Southern Baptist, Messianic Jew, Pentecostal.... (*note: I did not find Ishmael in any of those places.)

Fast forward all the way to 2015, I meet my now husband, but not my husband yet :-)

In the natural progression of getting to know one another, faith of course comes up. He knew the basics: Raised Church of Christ, little lost, a little confused, I love Jesus, kinda gave it all up, end of story. He told me he was a Bahá'í to which I said, "what's that?" Oh it's the most current revelation of God's message to His believers through the Prophet Bahá'u'lláh. I'm sorry, what? You

mean, there's more Prophets? They're all connected; the same even? Not only do I not have to choose, I can just be united with them all? YOUR Prophets are in MY Bible, whaaaaaat? It was cool, I let him tell me all the Bahá'í things he wanted to tell me, I soaked in all things religion. Why not at least listen? My now husband showed me the family tree of Bahá'u'lláh's and I could clearly see how He had quite the divine lineage. Evidence through lineage and scripture are two elements I hold in the highest regard. Bahá'u'lláh is from the lineage of Jesus AND Muhammed, so that means BOTH are in fact not only relevant, but FOR ME! Then suddenly, like a light bulb, hey wait a minute! I never got an answer to if Muhammed knew where Ishmael was. So, I asked my now husband, "hey, any chance Muhammed knows where I can find Ishmael?" I'm quite certain I asked just...like...that. To my delight, I got a yes!! What? Are you kidding me!? You can lead me to Ishmael? Ok, let's go!

It was a long way to get there...2015 to 2019 when we got married. Long "conversion", if you will. For a couple of years I just studied and read a little on my own. He gave me Some Answered Questions, My Bahá'í Faith, and I

just kinda ventured out onto my own. I stumbled onto BahaiTeachings.org and mosied around reading, and then reading more. The level to which I was learning of this constant renewal through Prophets and scripture designed for each age was compelling and intriguing. The Preacher made me believe this was impossible. There was so much to study, and I still had to find Ishmael, but I knew enough to know that in 2019 when we married I wanted to enter into that marriage as a Bahá'í. We wed under Bahá'í vows, in a Bahá'í Center, under Bahá'í leadership...I almost felt I'd be tainting the faith if I didn't. But that's not why I declared, of course. I declared because evidence upon evidence was before me. I declared because just like when I used to get a special feeling reading the Bible as a little girl, those feelings intensified when reading Bahá'í scripture. I declared because every time I had a question, I received an answer. No sending me away or calling me "faithless", just answers. But honestly, I also declared because my now husband said I could find Ishmael, and I believed he could show me how to find him. So that day, I did in fact become a Bahá'í, and a wife: June 1, 2019.

Now to the honeymoon: Finding Ishmael! Y'all I'm not only touching, but reading the Qur'án for the first time in my life, and I'm 44 years old. Nobody really needs to read this part, the testimony is over. My Church of Christ to Bahá'í path was an easy journey once I convinced my alter ego that we didn't have to give up Jesus. The other side of my family had strong Pagan ties (a whole new story) and the language of Bahá'í scripture appealed to that side; the love of earth and nature. Everything that surrounded the Bahá'í Faith encompassed some side of me that I searched for. This was for me, I had no doubt. And you know what else was for me? Ishmael!

The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." [speaking to Hagar, mother of Ishmael] ~Genesis 16:10

And remember when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, "Our Lord! Accept from us. Verily! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower." ~Súrah 2:127

Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob?
When he said unto his sons, “What will you worship after
me?” They said, “We will worship your God, the God of
your fathers Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, One God and to
Him we submit. ~Súrah 2:133

Verily, We have sent the revelation to you as We sent the
revelation to Noah and the Prophets after him; We sent
the revelation to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus,
Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave
the Psalms. ~Súrah 4:163

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the Well at Zamzam](#)

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