

# I AM A REVERT

In countries such as Malaysia where we have large population of Muslims and non-Muslims, the word ‘convert’ is not something new or alien to us. It is generally understood to refer to brothers and sisters who have newly converted to Islam.

As Muslims, we believe when someone converts to Islam, he or she is cleansed of previous sins and starts afresh, just like a new born baby. They are not to be judged on their past lives regardless of their previous lifestyle and doings – none of it matters anymore. This is the beauty and simplicity of Islam.

*It was narrated that Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri said: "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: 'If a person accepts Islam, such that his Islam is good, Allah will decree reward for every good deed that he did before, and every bad deed that he did before will be erased. Then after that will come the reckoning; each good deed will be rewarded ten times up to seven hundred times. And each bad deed will be recorded as it is, unless Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, forgives it.'"*

An-Nasai

The ‘converts’ form a very small part of the Muslim population, especially in Malaysia.

So, who are then the majority?

They are the people who are as lucky as I am – born into a Muslim family and was given the privilege to be a Muslim since birth.

However, the privilege given is usually taken for granted, as many, if not the majority, live lives far from the true teachings of Islam and more than often misrepresenting it. I admit that I was also once in this group, which I am surely not proud of.

The academic introduction above is important for a better understanding of a fundamental sharing that practically changed my life i.e., taking that important step to change, as in *really* change and revert to the true and straight path of Islam. At least, it has been something that I have continuously attempted to do for the past few years.

The discussion in this chapter is skewed to the understanding of Islam. However, it is not intended to teach about the religion itself. This storyline is very important to illustrate how ‘reverting’ has absolutely, in a totally 360-degree-way, changed my view of life and the way I have been living it since then.

I am a ‘revert’ and I am thankful for it.

Conceptually, reverting is not very much different compared to converting. Both terms basically represent the same action and results in similar effects. If we were to surf the web on the meaning of revert, one of the results displayed would be the act of converting to Islam.

For the purpose of our current discussion, let us just refer both terms to differentiate two groups of people. Nevertheless, the contents of this chapter are for all Muslims, regardless whether they are new or old to the religion.

When discussing ‘reverts’, we can take into consideration the current situation where a majority of us claims to be Muslims but yet have limited, if not minimal, understanding of Islamic teachings.

As I continue to write, you will notice the literal attempt to emphasise the word ‘revert’ to anchor a very important message and lesson on hope and change, which hopefully we will be able to have a better understanding as we go through this chapter.

‘Reverting’ can be defined at various levels with the fundamental of it being the act of returning or reverting back to Allah for His mercy and grace, for hope and guidance. This results in the realignment of our lives with the straight path based on the guidance He has provided us via the holy Quran and Sunnah – sayings as well as actions of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

From a more general perspective, reverting can simply be understood as returning to goodness and kindness. This may sound normal to most of us but without us realising it, a majority of us fails to do so.

This situation has a lot to do with the world we grow up in today; full of unfiltered influences that unconsciously builds our mindset, behaviors and ego as we mature with age. This is sad, but true – our growing up process was not accompanied and complemented by the appropriate depth of knowledge. In the context of our discussion, this refers to Islamic knowledge in particular, which is essential in forming a strong belief, moral and social internal system of a Muslim.

In conclusion, we can summarise ‘revert’ as an ongoing and continuous process of turning back to Allah and goodness.

***Allah is more pleased with the repentance of a believing man.***

Ibn Majah

It sounds so simple and logical to do but then why do many still fail to do so?

Why is it so difficult for many of us to even try to revert and take that first step towards an ‘ultimate’ change? The kind of change that would enable an individual to be mentally and spiritually prepared to survive and adapt to future changes and challenges in life.

Are there not enough motivations or rewards to do so?

***And [saying], "Seek forgiveness of your Lord and repent to Him, [and] He will let you enjoy a good provision for a specified term and give every doer of favor his favor. But if you turn away, then indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a great Day.***

Hud 11: 3

There is no one answer to this question. That is the truth.

The spectrum of answers for such questions varies too much from one person to another. We can only attempt to solve this mystery as much as possible based on the obvious facts and observations available.

I would like you to ponder on the following points:

1. Ultimately, the privilege to revert is actually a gift from Allah.

***Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided.***

Al-Qasas 28: 56

Most of us had heard the story about how much Prophet Muhammad (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) wanted to convert his beloved uncle Abu Talib to Islam. Abu Talib had always supported, protected and defended his nephew throughout his lifetime despite not being a Muslim. Prophet (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) did not manage to convert his beloved uncle up until the last moment; even at the

deathbed of his uncle, Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was unable to convince him to recite the *syahadah*. Allah reminded our beloved Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) that only He can open up hearts and provide ultimate guidance. It was never within the capabilities of any human being, including Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), to do so.

2. Nevertheless, all of us are given choices in life and it is up to us to make the right choice. Many people misunderstand the meaning of fate and blame it for almost everything that happens in their lives. Some even go to the extent of blaming fate for their acts of sin, which is obviously ridiculous and untrue. In one way or another, we are the ones who gave in to the temptations of this world due to the weakness in our faith – we made our choice.

Unlike animals, humans are blessed with the ability to think and differentiate between good and bad – right and wrong. This ability enables us to make choices and decisions. The choice has always been in our hands, it has never resided with anyone else. It is us who needs to decide whether we want to take the necessary steps and actions to become a better person. Change starts with us.

***Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.***

Ar-Ra'd 13:11

3. The privilege to revert is usually given to the ones who sincerely and continuously seek for it. This is usually coupled with continuous efforts and attempts of ‘reverting’ despite the challenges faced. Most of the time, these attempts would result in failures where we fall back to our old ways.

It is those who persevere in making these setbacks temporary instead of permanent who makes it out from the vicious cycle.

***O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.***

Al-Baqarah: 2:153

4. Ignorance is the biggest enemy, ego is his best friend. A lot of us choose to be ignorant and believe that we are already living a life that is already in accordance with the true teachings of Islam. We refuse to admit that there a lot of things that we still do not know due to our ego. There is no way that we could move forward to revert if we continue to be held back by these two enemies of ours.

***Take what is given freely, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the ignorant.***

Al-A'raf 7:199

5. There is still a long way to go, so what's the rush? There is still so much time left, so what's the worry? These are the delusions that are embedded in most of our minds. We forget about the important reminder from our Creator, which could not have been made clearer to us – we will never know when death will come knocking on our door. There is no guarantee that we will still wake up alive tomorrow.

So how, I ask you, my dear readers, can we be so arrogant in thinking that there is no need for us to hasten ourselves to revert?

***But never will Allah delay a soul when its time has come. And Allah is acquainted with what you do.***

Al-Munafiqun 63: 11

6. Our surroundings influence our behaviors and decisions in life, be it good or bad. It is extremely difficult to take that first step to revert when our surroundings is not supporting the intention. When most of the people around us continue to live a life far off the straight path, it is also highly likely that we will be together with them on that lost ride – if you can't beat them, join them. The worry of being an outcast for living differently keeps playing in our minds and persuades us not to take that step forward. This is how most of us shy away from the idea of reverting – we fail miserably at taking the first step.

***A man is upon the religion of his friend, so let one of you look at whom he befriends.***

Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi

Points number 4 to 6 above hits us at some spots didn't it?

I am pretty sure that most of us have faced, if not still facing, these situations before. The truth does hurt, realising that we always had that option to revert given to us but chose not to because of our own selfishness. While we continue to hold on dearly to our worldly interests and comfort and being complacent with the lives we are living, the clock continues to tick away bringing us closer to death.

Death; even the thought of it is terrifying. Are we ready for it?

We can try avoiding the topic as much as we want but it remains to be something certain. Death is inevitable. Everyone will face death; it is only a matter of time. It is, after all, part of life. This talk about death is necessary in building up the case to revert. It may well be the strongest trigger that could motivate us to revert under normal circumstances.

Remembering death could be the answer for us to open up to the idea of reverting because ultimately, when death happens, we return to our Creator.

***Abu Hurairah reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Remember more often the destroyer of pleasures – death."***

At-Tirmidhi

Both revert and death applies the same concept of returning to the Creator but with different circumstances and consequences. When it comes to reverting, we still have the chance to make the necessary changes to the way we live so that we are back on track. Hopefully a better ending awaits us at the end.

Where else, when it comes to death, as obvious as it may seem, we have already reached the end of the road. We can only wish to come back to life to live it the right way but this, unfortunately, will never happen. We can only wait for the Day of Judgment and hope for the best – provided we had given our best.

***(In Falsehood will they be) Until, when death comes to one of them, he says: "O my Lord! send me back (to life)***

Al-Mu'minun 23: 99

***And could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord: Our Lord! we have seen and we have heard, therefore send us back, we will do good; surely (now) we are certain. And if We had pleased We would certainly have given to every soul its guidance, but the word (which had gone forth) from Me was just: I will certainly fill hell with the jinn and men together.***

As-Sajdah 32: 12-13

The question therefore remains: in what state shall we return to Him – reverted or astray?

You decide.

Facing reality is not easy. There is always that internal battle in us that pushes us to be in denial. However, if we keep on being stubborn and not change our ways, we will continue to live a life that drifts further and further away from the rightful path. Are we ready to face the consequences later in our afterlife? Have we really given any serious thought on this?

These provocations are necessary to at least get us start thinking about this important step in life. It is not something easy to do; that I can attest to. The phrase “it is easier said than done” fits it perfectly.

Honestly and sincerely, I am forever grateful to Allah for giving me the chance and guidance to revert. Remembering the things that I had done in the past always makes me wonder why I was given that chance to realise how far astray I had gone and subsequently, to make the decision to revert. I never actually found the answer but I am just glad that it happened.

Even now, as I continue with my journey in life, despite trying hard, I still fail to keep the sheet clean from doing things that displeases my Creator. I struggle with my efforts, yet here I am writing on a topic that revolves around repentance.

Circumstances such as this remind me of how fortunate I am to still be given the ability to remember that I have the option to revert each time I lose my way; something that I know would surely happen again.

Like anyone else, I am just a normal human being and there is no way that I can be perfect. I just need to ensure that I do not go too far off and still be able to find my way back whenever it happens.

## **Revert Realities – Spiritual Health Connections**

Despite the discussion we had on the reasons behind the difficulties to revert, we cannot deny the fact that under normal circumstances, the thought of reverting is not something that would automatically come to mind. At least, not for the majority of us as we continue to live our daily lives comfortably and feeling contented with how things are going.

People might have a thousand things to complain about their worldly lives. However, it is very unlikely they complain about how their spiritual conditions and level have deteriorated, some up to the point where they lose the ability to differentiate between right or wrong.

The time has come for us to open up our eyes and see how much the world we live in has been corrupted because of this. There are so many wrongdoings that have now become acceptable to the community as we continue to stray away from the true teachings of Islam.

Most of us fail to see the importance of maintaining our spiritual health. There is a direct correlation between our spiritual health and how we behave. We may not realise it but our spiritual health determines our values system, which then determines the decisions and actions we take. Our values are the ones that ensure our actions and decisions are within the rightful and guided path; the reverted path.

## **Signs and Triggers**

As we already know, the thought of reverting does not come easily. We have never heard (or at least, I haven't) someone waking up in the morning and spontaneously say “I want to repent (revert) today”. It is close to impossible to hear this unless it was not spontaneous to begin with. Something had actually

triggered the person to say it and most likely, a significant event that had happened in the person's life.

Yes, that is how most of us found our way back – only when something big, usually bad, happens to us.

As we are an ungrateful bunch, we usually remember our Creator when something bad happens to us rather than when things are good. During good times, we are too engrossed in the temporary joy that we forget where it all came from. This is normal human behaviour, at least for most of us.

There are, however, situations where it can go the total opposite – we forget Allah entirely when calamity happens and remembers Him when we are blessed with something good. The likelihood of this happening is lesser but it does happen.

There are reasons behind these variations and if we were to spend time analysing it, we will be able to see a trend. The trend actually shows an extreme on both sides but tied to a common variable – the level of closeness to Allah.

Usually people who remembers Allah when something good happens are people who are already close to Him; the ones already on the straight path. Being grateful and thankful for everything that happens to them is already part of their lives.

Where else, the ones who choose to forget their Creator during bad times are the ones who are already far away from Him. They blame anything and everything around them for what had happened. Losing hope and giving up on their Creator's help during times they need it the most. This is surely far from the true teachings of Islam, as Islam is a religion based on hope.

For the majority of people who does not fall into either of these categories, it is during bad and tough times that we pray hard for guidance, strength and help to find our way out of the problems we face. It is during these

times that we truly remember Allah and submit ourselves fully to Him, desperately seeking His blessings on us.

These are hard facts – this is the degree of how ungrateful we humans are, remembering Him only when we are in dire need of His help to save us. He, however, continues to bless and provide for us every single moment despite the many things we do that displeases Him. That is how bad of a servant we are; we are never able to remember Him to the level He deserves. In actual fact, He is never in need of our remembrance; it does not affect Him in any way. We are the ones who are constantly in need of Him.

***Then, to Allah belongs [all] praise – Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of the worlds.***

Al-Jathiyah 45: 36

The saddest thing about it is this – when things turn for the better, most of us return to our ungrateful state and not remember our Creator as much again. It is as if nothing had happened. This is the normal “good to bad, bad to good” cycle we humans go through. It would seem that we hardly ever learn.

### **Worst Days – The Painful “Switch”**

However, there are certain events that are significantly bad enough that it hits us really hard and becomes a wakeup call for us. These are the kinds of events that shake us up from all angles – mentally, physically and spiritually. The kinds of events that make us feel incapable and hopeless.

In such moments, a way out seems impossible. It felt as if it was the end of the world.

The reality is, however, it isn't impossible.

When we are tested with the worst possible situation, we automatically become desperate and cry for help. We start seeking for support and guidance. As we shed tears realising our incapability in dealing with the situation, a door of hope opens up as we start to make our way back to Him. It does not take long for us to realise that there is no one else who could help us through such challenging times – no one except for Him.

It is during the painful process of recovering that we rigorously seek the help, guidance and forgiveness of our Creator. The situation forces us to reflect a lot on ourselves, looking at every angle of our lives and identifying where we have gone wrong. As we go through this rigorous cycle we finally realise that the time has come for us to completely change our ways and revert entirely to Allah.

It is a painful experience to bear. But then, a hard knock on the head is needed to make us realize. A hard lesson seemed to be the most effective way.

***Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of Allah?" Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near.***

Al-Baqarah 2: 214

Actually, we can relate this awareness process to a familiar phrase that we always hear: “you don’t know what you have until you lose it”. When things are good, we usually take for granted the things we have. For instance the important people around us. It is when they are no longer around that we long for their presence. Only then do we start remembering the good things they had done for us and living the way they had expected of us. We needed to be triggered by something painful for us to remember. It was through losing something that we gained something else – a hard lesson in life.

It doesn't always have to be this way – not for all of us.

We could skip this painful experience by taking lessons from the experiences of others. Knowledge is the key; we just need to seek it – the more we learn, the more we are aware and the closer we are to reverting. It is an easier and less painful process, yet we can achieve the same results.

However, not many resort to this method including myself; I learned it the hard way. Why aren't there many takers for this method?

### **The Need of a Reason**

As I went through my personal experience, I discovered some intriguing facts about human beings, in particular, Muslims. If we were to look deep down inside us, we would realise that there has always been the desire to live life the right way – a life on the straight path. I personally believe that no one in the right mind would feel otherwise, at least at the very beginning. Everyone wants to live a great life; to be successful, to be loved, to feel appreciated, to achieve and give back something, and the list goes on. We want to be good at almost everything including being a good servant to our Creator.

But somewhere along the line, we start to lose our way. Life experiences, friends, influences, temptations, distractions; these are some of the things that changed us, making us forget our internal desire to live a life on the straight path. We became victims of our own doings as we gave in to the temporary worldly desires and achievements, bringing us further away from reality.

Our definition of successful is no longer holistic as we dwell deeply in our present lifestyle. We become too focused and engrossed in our worldly goals. Blinded by its short term gains, we shy away from learning and understanding further the knowledge of Islam. What more to reflect it in our lifestyle.

***Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hordes of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (To return to).***

Ali Imran 3: 14

Our priorities became entirely different and then, just like that – we forget. There were no pushing factors. For this reason, a hard knock on the head is usually necessary to make us realize. Tough times give us a good reason to open up and face reality. It pushes us to start reverting and usually, it pushes us the furthest.

### **Different People, Different Switches**

Different people have different switches to trigger something important in their lives. Some of us remember an unforgettable moment with a loved one just by listening to a song. Others may experience the same through the sight of a picture, a visit to a particular place or a familiar scent. These switches then trigger the relevant emotions in us that would subsequently influence our actions. Taking the example above, positive emotions such as happiness and joy fills us up after reacting to such a memorable and pleasant event.

This is how our brains are wired; we react towards the triggers provoked in our minds.

“Revert Switches” behave in the same way but with some slight differences. As mentioned earlier, Revert Switches usually comes in the form of hard lessons and varies from one person to another.

There are many instances of events that could happen in a person’s life that would trigger an intention to revert. It is very difficult for us to explicitly list

down each of these events as everyone goes through different experiences. There might even be triggers that do not make sense to most of us but yet it became a reason to revert for someone.

But if we were to try and highlight some of the common triggers, we can fall back to a famous hadith of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

***Ibn Abbas narrated: The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: "Take advantage of five matters before five other matters: your youth before you become old; your health, before you fall sick; your wealth, before you become poor; your free time before you become preoccupied, and your life, before your death."***

Mustadrak of Hakim and Musnad Imam Ahmad

This hadith was never meant to explain repentance or the act of turning back to Allah. But if we were to analyse the conditions mentioned in the hadith, we will come to realise that these are among the common events that would trigger someone to change.

## 1. Youth before old age

If it we were to go the mosques, at least in Malaysia, it is a common sight that most of its occupants are retirees or old people. Most of us only come to realise the need to repent and change our lives when age catches up with us. We choose to believe that we have so much time ahead of us especially when we were young.

It is only when we realise that death is around the corner that we decide to prepare ourselves to meet our Creator. Although it is never too late for us to turn back, the fact remains that we had lost so much time and opportunity to achieve, learn and do much more for ourselves as well as for the people around us.

Old age is the most common trigger to revert. The downside of it is that it only happens at the end of the trail – it is a long wait. The scarier part is that, for some of us, this may never happen.

## 2. Health before sickness

Health is among the most common thing that we take for granted. When we are healthy, we are all up to pace to chase the worldly gains and temptations. At times, disregarding the parameters Allah has set for us and sometimes even at the expense of others. But the moment this privilege is taken away from us, we start to feel the pain, literally.

Pain is something difficult for us humans to bear – be it physical, mental or emotional pains. When we are inflicted by a sickness especially the serious ones, all the different types of pain start rushing inside of us. We start feeling the pain in our limbs, an increase in our stress levels and worst of all, we start to feel depressed. Hopelessness takes over confidence as we try hard to recover.

For terminal illnesses where there is less hope of recovery and survival, the situation pushes us closer to the thought of death.

With so many things happening after this single event, it is no surprise that during sickness that we turn back to Allah or decide to return to Him. I must admit that I fall under this category, which I will share more on later in this chapter.

Besides my own story, I have actually seen other people reverting due to the sickness they had suffered.

There was a lady I knew from my first job, who was someone with a very strong character, opinionated and at times vocal without considering other people's feelings. She was actually one of the bosses who interviewed

me for the job. She was subsequently fated to face a challenging illness – breast cancer, which she only discovered at a later stage. She suffered a painful attempt at recovery, losing significant weight and eventually ending up bedridden. I visited her during the last few months of her life and got to know a totally different lady from before. She had submitted herself entirely to Allah as she waited for her time to go. She kept on apologising for all of the things she had done while shedding tears of regret, which displayed a sincerity that was impossible to deny. She returned to Allah that same year and I personally believe that she returned as a better servant. May Allah bless her soul and place her among the faithful ones.

Sometimes, the change spreads to the people around the ill person especially to those close and dear to the person. I have heard stories of many people who drew closer to Allah as they diligently took care of their loved ones.

I was told the story by my mum about my cousin who became a much pious person after a long haul taking care of my uncle who then passed away due to cancer. Come to think of it, there were many people around me who also drew closer to Allah after my own episode.

### **3. Wealth before poor**

Money is important and essential to us – everyone wants to be rich and wealthy. Wealth allows us to do and own the things we desire in this world. We get to buy things, travel, eat delicious food – the list is endless. There is even a saying that money can buy anything in this world, which I totally disagree with.

But the moment our ability to continue earning and spending money is taken away from us, we will immediately be taken aback. Most of us do not

cope well with the thought of poverty or hardship and it is during such times we start reflecting on ourselves. If we reflect hard enough, we might be bestowed with the necessary wisdom for us to turn back to Allah.

I personally know at least two people who were holding high position jobs who went jobless due to unavoidable circumstances. The sudden change was obviously hard on them as they had to worry about managing the financial needs for themselves and their families. The higher you are on the corporate ladder, the lesser choices you have for a new job. It is not every day an organisation needs a new CEO.

While they went through the difficult transitional period, both of them changed their ways and reverted to Allah. It started to become obvious over time. As I kept myself updated on their development, I noticed that they were spending a lot of time reflecting on their previous lifestyle, acquiring Islamic knowledge, spending time at the mosque, sharing religious reminders on social media, and eventually changing their ways entirely.

One of them, who, by his own admission, used to publicly and confidently think that he had lived a life according to the teachings of Islam had subsequently and humbly admitted that he had been ignorant (*jahil*) all this while. If you knew him personally, you would know that it was not something easy for him to admit due to his strong character and personality. But when a person starts to see the truth, even the fiercest tigers are tamed.

*Alhamdulillah*, after a while, both of them managed to secure good jobs. Allah is always with the ones who reverted to Him.

#### 4. Free time before Preoccupied

Although not as significant as the other conditions, in rare occasions, even extreme busyness can push someone to reflect on their lives and

subsequently decide to revert. There is one thing that worldly busyness certainly does to us, it stresses us out. Certain people are burned out up to the limit and starts falling into depression. We are left with no time to spend with loved ones, to do our own things or even rest.

During these kind of moments that we start to wonder what it is all for and whether it is all worth it. We start to wonder whether we had live life the right way and as we ponder on it, we find our way back to Allah. In an unlikely situation, it becomes a reason for us to revert.

## 5. Life before death

Death is pretty much the final part of life and as repeatedly mentioned, it is probably the strongest trigger that could motivate someone to revert provided that the person is consciously aware of it coming. In the current context, it relates much to conditions 1 and 2; old age and sickness, which eventually reminds us of death. By itself, provided that someone has high self-awareness, the thought of death itself might trigger a person to revert.

There is also the possibility of someone reverting due to an unexpected death of another, usually a loved one. I have seen people who drew closer to Allah after an unexpected loss of their spouse, children, parents, siblings or even a close friend. As we try to cope with the unexpected loss, after exhausting all avenues, we can only turn back to Allah for strength and guidance.

As mentioned before, it is usually through losing something that we gain something else. The five conditions above have proven this fact to us. However, we need to continuously be aware of these triggers as sometimes we can actually miss them despite it being just under our nose. It would be even better if we can be triggered to revert by learning the types of switches rather than

going through the hardship – we can save ourselves from going through hard and painful experiences.

### The Unexpected Switch

Surprisingly, a lot of us are actually triggered to revert through the act of sinning itself after facing its after effects. It can be coupled with the conditions above or it can be a switch on its own; either way it triggers us.

Out of our own weaknesses; we either commit sins due to our ignorance or arrogance – either way, it is a form of disobedience to Allah. It is said that regular sinning will harden and darken hearts. Sinning only gives us temporary joy but will subsequently result in all kinds of negative impact once its after effects start to damage our soul. We will start feeling restless, lost, empty, guilt and at the very end, fear – fear of being unforgiven and punished.

*It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: A man went to extremes in committing sins. When death came to him, he left instructions to his sons, saying: 'When I die, burn me, then grind me into powder, then scatter me in the wind and in the sea, for by Allah, if my Lord has power over me, He will subject me to a punishment that He has never subjected anyone to.' So they did that to him, then (Allah) said to the earth: 'Return what you have taken,' and there he was, standing. He said to him: 'What made you do what you have done?' He said: 'Fear of You, O Lord.' So He forgave him because of that (fear)."*

Ibn Majah

Fear can either give a positive or negative impact depending on how we decide to deal with it. If we allow it to take over our lives, it is highly likely that we would succumb to its pressures and start losing hope. During desperate emotional states, we might give up on finding our way back and decide to continue sinning. It may even lead to a person rejecting Allah completely (Allah

forbid) or lead us to commit a bigger sin. These are the things that might happen if fear is not handled and managed appropriately.

On the positive side of things, fear can actually be a strong motivator for us to initiate the intention to revert. Although it might seem contradictory, it is through the understanding of fear that we can eventually find hope. As we search for answers to calm ourselves, we will find the solution to our worries; a way for us to return to our Creator despite the numerous sins we had committed. It is all possible due to Allah's love and compassion towards us.

***Umar ibn Al-Khattab reported: Some prisoners of war were brought in front of the Prophet (ﷺ) and a woman was among them who was breast-feeding. Whenever she found a child among the prisoners, she would take it to her chest and nurse it. The Prophet said to us, "Do you think this woman could throw her child in the fire?" We said, "No, not if she is able to stop it." The Prophet said, "Allah is more merciful to His servants than a mother is to her child."***

Bukhari

He has made easy the path to return to Him but yet we still find it difficult to do. It can be achieved through a step rightfully placed at the beginning of the revert process – repenting.

### **The “U-Turn”**

Allah has made the gate of repentance opened to us since the beginning. He has made it clear that the door of repentance will only be closed when the sun rises from the west; it is open so long as we are not in the throes of death. In other words, He has graced us with an unlimited timeframe to return to Him whenever we lose our way.

The call of repentance has been mentioned repeatedly in both the Quran and sayings of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), which proves the unconditional love our Creator has for us. There is so much for us to realise and gain from such a simple act. The onus is on us to grab the opportunity provided by our Creator. It is through repentance that we will realise the true meaning of hope, love and mercy.

***Oh you who have believed, repent to Allah with sincere repentance. Hopefully your Lord will remove from you your misdeeds and admit you into gardens beneath which rivers flow [on] the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believed with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right; they will say, "Our Lord, perfect for us our light and forgive us. Indeed, You have power over all things."***

At-Tahrim 66: 8

***And whoever does a wrong or wrongs himself but then seeks forgiveness of Allah, he will find Allah Forgiving and Merciful.***

An-Nisa 4: 110

***But whoever repents after his wrongdoing and reforms, indeed, Allah will turn to him in forgiveness. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.***

Al-Maidah 5: 39

***Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."***

Az-Zumar 39: 53

The beauty of repentance is repeatedly elaborated in numerous hadiths of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) where it continues to emphasise on Allah's call for us to return to Him as well as the benefits and His liking of us doing so.

**Narrated by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "He who repents of a sin is like him who has committed no sin."**

At-Tirmidhi

**Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His servant when he turns penitently towards Him than one of you would be on finding the lost camel.**

Muslim

**It was narrated from Anas that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Every son of Adam commits sin, and the best of those who commit sin are those who repent."**

Narrated by Ibn Majah. Graded Hasan

He reminds us of His promise to accept our return; Allah always keeps to His promise.

**Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: He who seeks repentance (from the Lord) before the rising of the sun from the west (before the Day of Resurrection), Allah turns to him with Mercy.**

Muslim

**It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "If you were to commit sin until your sins reach the heaven, then you were to repent, your repentance would be accepted."**

Narrated by Ibn Majah. Graded Hasan

**Ibn 'Umar narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Indeed Allah accepts the repentance of a slave as long as (his soul does not reach his throat)."**

At-Tirmidhi.

Even if we continue to repeat our sins and then repent, He will still accept our repentance.

*Abu Hurairah reported from Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) that his Lord, the Exalted and Glorious, thus said. A servant committed a sin and he said: O Allah, forgive me my sins and Allah (the Exalted and Glorious) said: My servant committed a sin and then he came to realize that he has a Lord Who forgives the sins and takes to account (the sinner) for the sin.*

*He then again committed a sin and said: My Lord, forgive me my sin, and Allah, the Exalted and High, said: My servant committed a sin and then came to realize that he has a Lord Who would forgive his sin or would take (him) to account for the sin.*

*He again committed a sin and said: My Lord, forgive me for my sin, and Allah (the Exalted and High) said: My servant has committed a sin and then came to realize that he has a Lord Who forgives the sins or takes (him) to account for sin. O servant, do what you like. I have granted you forgiveness.*

Bukhari and Muslim

## Repentance Made Easy

One may think that the act of repenting is a difficult and complicated process but in actual fact it is relatively easy to perform – at least in terms of steps. However, true repentance requires a lot of internal commitment from a person. This is the part where it can turn out to be difficult.

Repentance basically involves four steps:

### 1. Admit directly to our Creator

In Islam, there is no intermediary between us and Allah; we are to communicate directly with Him. Hence, when we talk about admitting our sins, there is no need for us to admit it to other people; no need of a third

party especially if telling others was meant to brag about the sin. There is even the possibility of the sin not being forgiven by Allah if we were to do so.

***Abu Hurairah narrated: I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying: "All the sins of my followers will be forgiven except those of the Mujahirin (those who commit a sin openly or disclose their sins to the people). An example of such disclosure is that a person commits a sin at night and though Allah screens it from the public, then he comes in the morning, and says, 'O so-and-so, I did such-and-such (evil) deed yesterday,' though he spent his night screened by his Lord (none knowing about his sin) and in the morning he removes Allah's screen from himself."***

Bukhari

We are required to keep our sins to ourselves. Confide and admit only to Allah, keeping it strictly between us and our Creator. Unless we really need help and advice on finding our way back, let what has been committed in secret be left a secret; Allah has already hid it from the world for us. Even if it is really necessary to share with another person for the purpose of seeking guidance, only disclose the bare minimum required – spare the details.

***It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Whoever covers (the sin of) a Muslim, Allah will cover him (his sin) in this world and in the Hereafter."***

Ibn Majah

The beautiful hadith above is also applicable to our own sins. So cover your sins as Allah has covered it for you.

## 2. Regret the sin we committed

The next step is for us to sincerely and truly regret the sin we committed.

***It was narrated that Ibn Ma'qil said: "My father and I met 'Abdullah, and I heard him say: The messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Regret is repentance." My father said: Did you hear the Prophet (ﷺ) say: "Regret is repentance?" He said: Yes.***

Narrated by Ibn Majah. Graded Hasan

In doing this, firstly, we need to verbally express our regret to Allah. This is best accompanied with tears of guilt and sadness as it was said by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that Allah loves His servants who shed tears at the remembrance of Him. It is only natural and logical for us to do so as we deeply remorse on the sins we had committed.

***Abu Umamah Sudaiy bin 'Ajlan Al-Bahili reported the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Nothing is dearer to Allah than two drops and two marks: A drop of tears shed out of fear of Allah and a drop of blood shed in the Cause of Allah. Regarding the two marks, they are: Mark left in the Cause of Allah and a mark left in observing any obligatory act of worshipping Allah, the Exalted"***

At-Tirmidhi

On top of that, shedding tears in remembrance of Allah is rewarded with great privileges on the Day of Judgment.

***Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had said: Seven are (the persons) whom Allah would give protection with His Shade on the Day when there would be no shade but that of Him (i.e. on the Day of Judgment, and they are):***

***a just ruler, a youth who grew up with the worship of Allah;***

***a person whose heart is attached to the mosques;***

***two persons who love and meet each other and depart from each other for the sake of Allah;***

***a man whom a beautiful woman of high rank seduces (for illicit relation), but he (rejects this offer by saying): "I fear Allah";***

***a person who gives charity and conceals it (to such an extent) that the right hand does not know what the left has given;***

***and a person who remembered Allah in privacy and his eyes shed tears.***

Bukhari and Muslim

But fundamentally what is more important is for us to intensely feel and internalise the regret inside of us. This involves experiencing within ourselves a profound sense of guilt for having disobeyed Allah for the terrible sins committed.

We despise the very act of us sinning and deeply regretting each moment of it, bearing the emotional pain as we let ourselves sink in the feeling of sadness, worry, uncertainty and fear. Let it be a regret that leaves a tremendous impact on us and hopefully it becomes a reminder for us to never repeat the sin again.

### **3. Seek forgiveness on the sin committed**

We have come to the core of repentance; the act of seeking forgiveness from Allah for the sins we committed.

The act needs to be continuous and repeated as even our beloved Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلٰيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) who is free from sins repents to Allah at minimum seventy times a day.

***Abu Hurairah narrated: I heard Allah's Apostle (صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلٰيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saying: By Allah! I ask for forgiveness from Allah and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day.***

Bukhari

**Al-Agharr bin Yasar Al-Muzani narrated that: The Messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: "O people turn in repentance to Allah and beg pardon of Him. I turn to Him in repentance a hundred times a day."**

Bukhari

***It was narrated that Ibn 'Umar said: "We used to count that the Messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said one hundred times in a gathering: 'Rabbighfirli wa tub 'alayya innaka Antat-Tawwabur-Rahim (O Allah forgive me and accept my repentance, for You are the Acceptor of repentance, the Most Merciful).'***

Ibn Majah

More importantly there needs to be an extensive and relentless effort from us in seeking forgiveness from Allah. After putting all the efforts, it boils down to hope and faith – we put our hopes in Allah and leave it for Him to decide. In formalising our repentance, we can perform a specific act of worship known as the *salah at-tawbah* (prayers of repentance). The conduct of this prayer is unanimously agreed by the scholars as described in the following hadith.

***Abu Bakar as-Siddiq narrated: I heard the apostle of Allah (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saying: When a servant (of Allah) commits a sin, and he performs ablution well, and then stands and prays two rak'ahs, and asks pardon of Allah, Allah pardons him. He then recited this verse: "And those who, when they commit indecency or wrong their souls, remember Allah" (Al-Qur'an 3:135).***

Abu Dawud

The prayers of repentance is considered among the best act of worship as it draws us closer to Allah as we continue to be hopeful for His ultimate mercy; hoping for our repentance to be accepted.

The whole process itself humbles us as a person as we come to realise and understand that no matter what, we will always be at the mercy of our Creator. It also strengthens our faith as we continue to hold firm to Allah's promise to accept our repentance.

#### **4. Promise not to commit the sin again**

The last step is to make a promise to Allah and ourselves with full determination that we will not commit the sin again. We should totally refrain ourselves from approaching the sin as well as from any associations and circumstances that may lead us to it. This is then followed with a strong resolution to never repeat the same sin in the future. A continuous effort of keeping up to this promise is required to prove the determination and sincerity in our repentance.

After making the promise, we must also do whatever we can to wipe out the past sins by engaging in good works and deeds as much as possible. This is the point when we start reverting.

#### **Between You and Me**

Through just four steps, a sin is wiped out, at least for sins between us and Allah.

However, if we have infringed the rights of others, a sin between us and other people, the repentance requires an additional step where we need to seek the other person's forgiveness too.

***Abu Hurairah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Whoever has wronged his brother, should ask for his pardon (before his death), as (in the Hereafter) there will be neither a Dinar nor a Dirham. (He should secure pardon in this life) before some of his good deeds are taken and paid to his brother, or, if***

***he has done no good deeds, some of the bad deeds of his brother are taken to be loaded on him (in the Hereafter).***

Bukhari

It is important for us to reflect on this additional requirement involving sins with others as it is not only burdensome to do, but also difficult to achieve.

Firstly, we need to return whatever is due to the person we have wronged. We can only be exempted from it if the person forgives us. If the person decides not to forgive us, we have no other choice but to ensure that no matter what, we return their dues in order for our repentance to be completed. This is when the problem starts – sometimes we are no longer able to return it because it is something that cannot be replaced.

It is an undeniable fact that human beings will never be as forgiving as our Creator. In fact, forgiving others is among the most difficult thing to do. Many times we may say we forgive a person on our lips but do not mean it in our hearts – this means that we have never actually forgiven the person.

This is why it is very important for us to keep good relationship with others and at our best avoid from wronging anyone. Sins between us and Allah are easier to be forgiven due to His ultimate mercy to us while people are just people; there are limits in whatever we do, including forgiving others.

***Abu Hurairah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim; he does not betray him, lie to him, nor forsake him. All of the Muslim is unlawful to another Muslim: His Honor, his wealth, and his blood. At-taqwa is here. It is enough evil for a man when he belittle his Muslim brother."***

Graded Hasan by At-Tirmidhi

## There is Always Hope

There are among us who make a big mistake by self-concluding that the sins we had committed are too great and impossible to be forgiven. We forget the fact that Allah is Most Forgiving and Merciful. There are many stories in hadiths that tells us even the gravest sins are forgiven if we were to sincerely repent to Allah. We have heard the story of a prostitute who was forgiven after a simple deed of providing water to a thirsty dog.

***Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) said, "While a dog was going round a well and was about to die of thirst, an Israeli prostitute saw it and took off her shoe and quenched the dog's thirst. So Allah forgave her because of that good deed."***

Bukhari

Then there is the story of a man who killed 100 people that went on a journey to seek a way to repent. He continued to kill people as he was searching for answers and eventually died before reaching the village where he had hoped his repentance will be accepted. One may think that the man was not forgiven because he did not actually manage to repent.

However, Allah's mercy is so great that He instructed the angels to measure the distance between the man's dead body and the village he had come from and also the village he was heading to. The angels found that his body was closer to the village he was heading to i.e. the village he wanted to go to repent and because of this; the man was forgiven by Allah. This story is narrated in detail in a *sahih* hadith of the Prophet (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) related by Imam Bukhari.

***Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri narrated that the Prophet (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) said, "Amongst the men of Bani Israil there was a man who had murdered ninety-nine persons. Then he set out asking (whether his repentance could be accepted or not). He came***

*upon a monk and asked him if his repentance could be accepted. The monk replied in the negative and so the man killed him.*

*He kept on asking till a man advised to go to such and such village. (So he left for it) but death overtook him on the way. While dying, he turned his chest towards that village (where he had hoped his repentance would be accepted), and so the angels of mercy and the angels of punishment quarreled amongst themselves regarding him.*

*Allah ordered the village (towards which he was going) to come closer to him, and ordered the village (whence he had come), to go far away, and then He ordered the angels to measure the distances between his body and the two villages. So he was found to be one span closer to the village (he was going to). So he was forgiven."*

Bukhari

The thought that we cannot turn back to Allah should never cross our minds as He has made it clear to us that He can forgive all sins except for sins associating Him with others (*shirk*).

*Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And he who associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin.*

An-Nisa 4:48

We should never lose hope even if others say otherwise. It was reminded to us that we should never judge another person's sin despite the graveness of the sin. No one is given the right to judge and conclude whether a sin of another will be forgiven or not.

*Abu Hurairah narrated: I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: There were two men among Bani Israil, who were close friends. One of them would commit sin and the other would strive in his worship.*

***The man who exerted himself in worship continued to see the other in sin. He would say: Refrain from it. One day he found him in sin and said to him: Refrain from it.***

***He said: Leave me alone with my Lord. Have you been sent as a watchman over me?***

***He said: I swear by Allah, Allah will not forgive you, nor will he admit you to Paradise. Then their souls were taken back (by Allah), and they met together with the Lord of the worlds.***

***He (Allah) said to this man who had striven hard in worship; Had you knowledge about Me or had you power over that which I had in My hand?***

***He said to the man who sinned: Go and enter Paradise by My mercy.***

***He said about the other: Take him to Hell.***

***Abu Hurairah said: By Him in Whose hand my soul is, he spoke a word by which this world and the next world of his were destroyed.***

Abu Dawud

Turn back to Allah, revert sincerely and hope for the best. Leave forgiveness to Allah to decide while we continue to have good thoughts of Him – these are things beyond us.

### **The Formula: (5 + 1) R**

In essence, reverting is very much similar to repenting. It is more accurate to define repentance as part of the overall ‘revert’ process as reverting involves a continuous effort of us trying to be on the straight path.

Reverting involves a holistic change in our lifestyle as we approach every aspect of life with the right mindset. We assess the suitability of our actions and ensure it does not fall under a category that displeases Allah.

As I continued with my reverting process, I found a way to formalise the steps involved in reverting. Some of the steps in the formula are similar to the steps for repentance and to certain extend a repetition. Nevertheless, we will still discuss these steps as we try to put things into perspective against the formula.

$$\text{Revert} = (5 + 1) R$$

What does this formula mean?

The formula consists of six steps where each of the steps starts with the letter 'R'. The number '5' represents the five main steps involved in the 'revert' process while '+ 1' is an additional step if the situation requires us to make amends with other people for our reverting process to be completed.

The '5Rs' consist of the following steps:

1. Reflect
2. Remorse
3. Repent
4. Return
5. Repeat

The additional step forming the last 'R':

6. Reconcile

Plotting these steps into the equation:

$$\text{Revert} = (\text{Reflect, Remorse, Repent, Return, Repeat}) + (\text{Reconcile})$$

### 1. Reflect

Reflecting on ourselves is literally the first step we need to take to initiate the whole reverting process. This step itself is so significant that it

should already be part of our daily routine. We should reflect on ourselves regularly – ideally at the end of each day.

Reflecting is basically a process of reviewing our way of living and measuring it against the guide that Allah has provided us through the Quran and Sunnah. It requires self-appraisal on the things we have done and subsequently identify any mistakes, wrongdoings or weaknesses in each of our actions. Umar ibn al-Khattab in one of his most powerful statements said:

***“Bring yourself to account before you are taken to account (on the Day of Judgment) and, weigh your deeds before your deeds are weighed.”***

Since before, self-appraising has been practiced by many of the Companions and predecessors (*salaf*) of Islam where they would make up the account for themselves at the end of each day, repenting for any wrong they did and determined to be a better person the next day – a routine of true believers.

## **2. Remorse**

Remorse is the feeling of deep regret or guilt for a wrong committed. We have actually discussed this in detail earlier where we have emphasised the importance of significantly regretting our sins – regretting the sins so deeply to the extent it hurts us so hard that it makes it impossible to forget. Let the scar it leaves become a motivator for us to remain steadfast on our journey to revert.

## **3. Repent**

We have dedicated a specific section on repentance where we have discussed at length its meaning and steps.

In the context of our current discussion, we will specifically refer the word ‘repent’ as the act of seeking forgiveness from Allah instead of the entire repentance process.

Just to recap, this step involves us putting in an intense and dedicated effort of seeking forgiveness from our Creator for the sins we had committed. These are the sins we had identified and regretted after completing the two steps above.

#### 4. Return

The heart of reverting – the point of return where we make the 360 degrees change required to align ourselves back to the straight path as prescribed by Allah.

We become sensitive to each detail of our life and consciously put a concentrated effort to ensure all our decisions and actions are within the parameters set by Allah. Nothing is considered small anymore – everything matters.

***Abu Dharr reported: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do not belittle any good deed, even meeting your brother (Muslim) with a cheerful face".***

Muslim

Each time before we embark on something, let us first reflect on what will happen on the Day of Judgment, which acts as a reminder for us to weigh our decisions and actions wisely.

We are reminded that we will be accountable for every single thing we do, every single word we utter, every single decision we make, which applies to all aspects of life, be it social, economy, politics, worship or family – in short, everything.

***That Day shall We set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to us, and their feet bear witness, to all that they did.***

Yasin 36: 65

Among the things that we do more often after reverting are good deeds. Performing good deeds strengthens our faith, elevates our stature and erases previous bad deeds and sins.

***Abu Dharr said: "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said to me: 'Have Taqwa of Allah wherever you are, and follow an evil deed with a good one to wipe it out, and treat the people with good behaviour.'***

Graded Hasan by At-Tirmidhi

***And those who believe and do righteous deeds – We will surely remove from them their misdeeds and will surely reward them according to the best of what they used to do.***

Al-Ankabut 29: 7

***Those who have faith and do righteous deeds, they are the best of creatures.***

Al-Bayyinah 98: 7

We were reminded to consistently perform good deeds as there is no guarantee that we will still be alive by the end of a day.

***Abdullah bin 'Umar reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) took hold of my shoulders and said, "Be in the world like a stranger or a wayfarer." Ibn 'Umar used to say: When you survive till the evening do not expect to live until the morning; and when you survive till the morning do not expect to live until the evening. While in good health (do good deeds) before you fall sick; and while you are alive (do good deeds) before death strikes.***

Bukhari

It was also specifically mentioned that once we revert and improve our religious obligations, rewards are multiplied tremendously while bad deeds are recorded as it is.

***Abu Hurairah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "If any one of you improve (follows strictly) his Islamic religion then his good deeds will be rewarded ten times to seven hundred times for each good deed and a bad deed will be recorded as it is."***

Bukhari

Returning to the right path does not only require a change in our actions but also an internal change – changing our intentions. Each of our deeds will be measured and rewarded according to our intention as clearly mentioned in the famous hadith of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

***'Umar bin Al-Khattab narrated: I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for."***

Bukhari

I recently read a statement by the distinguished Quranic scholar, Nouman Ali Khan – “forget bad deeds, even the good we do are full of mistakes”. I could easily relate to this. Although it may sound easy, it is actually difficult to balance and achieve both changes concurrently. The biggest challenge is achieving the required internal change – how do we actually measure the level of sincerity when performing a good deed?

Human beings always look for attention and recognition in the things we do. It is natural for us to start feeling proud after doing a good deed especially when others start noticing it. The feeling comes more frequently

once we start being conscious of doing them, which is what reverting is all about – returning to goodness. How do we then balance the act of performing good deeds with our intentions?

Honestly, there is no straightforward answer to this perplexing question.

Hence, our initial focus should be concentrated on external changes rather than internal. We try our best to do as much good deeds and along the way as we become more successful in achieving external changes, we will start to build up our internal strength. The sincerity in our intentions will eventually increase and felt by others. Building internal capabilities is part of a process and does not just happen overnight. It is like a marathon that requires perseverance and patience.

Besides doing additional good deeds, we should also commit ourselves with full determination to avoid things that displease our Creator. This is a fundamental part of reverting and holds the same importance, if not higher, than performing good deeds.

***The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "By Him in Whose Hand my life is, you either enjoin good and forbid evil, or Allah will certainly soon send His punishment to you. Then you will make supplication and it will not be accepted".***

Graded Hasan Sahih by At-Tirmidhi

Although there are much lesser things that Allah has prohibited for us compared to the things we are allowed to do, it is the prohibited things that we find difficult to avoid especially those that seem less obvious to us. These are sins such as gossiping, backbiting, lying, and many other sins of our senses – the sins caused by our eyes, ears and mouth. At one glance, these

sins might not appear to be major but in actual fact they are bigger than we think. The sins are even more problematic because it involves other people.

***Abdullah b. Mas'ud reported the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as saying: Avoid falsehood, for falsehood leads to wickedness, and wickedness to hell; and if a man continues to speak falsehood and makes falsehood his object, he will be recorded in Allah's presence as a great liar. And adhere to truth, for truth leads to good deeds, and good deeds lead to paradise. If a man continues to speak the truth and makes truth his object, he will be recorded in Allah's presence as eminently truthful.***

Abu Dawud

After returning to Allah, life now has become more meaningful to us as we pursue it according to its true purpose as prescribed to us.

***And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.***

Adh-Dhariyat 51: 56

It is now our responsibility to remain steadfast on our paths to return as we continue to perform good deeds and avoid sins while influencing others to do the same.

***And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.***

Ali Imran 3: 104

## 5. Repeat

The reality is that reverting will never be entirely completed as it is an ongoing process. An important component of reverting is the ability for us to continuously remain on the straight path. This ability increases over time as we build the disciplines required through hard work and dedication. The

main concept is repetition and driven by two main attributes – consistency and persistency.

***Aishah narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Do good deeds properly and moderately and know that your deeds will not make you enter Paradise, and that the most beloved deed to Allah is the most regular and constant even if it were little."***

Bukhari

The hadith emphasises the significance of performing a deed consistently, putting quantity as secondary. Consistency signifies our commitment in achieving a particular goal, which is important in maintaining momentum. It requires a lot discipline, dedication, perseverance and focus for us to consistently perform a particular action, hence the reason why most of us fail to do so.

It is common that many of us tend to primarily strive for quantity once we start to revert. Driven by strong motivation and high spirit of wanting to change, we believe there is a need to commit and perform as many good deeds as possible to make up for our previous wrongdoings. However, we usually don't have the stamina to maintain it.

***People do not lack strength, they lack will.***  
Dato' Paduka Wan Ibrahim Wan Soloh, my late grandfather

There is also an acceptable standard of quality that we need to maintain while we strive to achieve constant success in reverting. The main challenge is whether we are able to maintain continuous performance of good deeds and not fall out along the way. Firstly, we need to be true to

ourselves when gauging our capacity and capabilities on whether or not we are able to cope with such high commitments.

As time goes by, we will start to feel tired and less motivated. There is the possibility of us losing momentum and stop pursuing the good deeds we committed. The difficulty for us to maintain steadfast on performing a particular deed is too obvious to deny. For this reason, our beloved Prophet Muhammad (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) reminded us not to push ourselves too much and focus on the good deeds we are capable of doing.

***Aishah reported: The Messenger of Allah (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) did not observe fast in any month of the year more than in the month of Sha'ban, and used to say: Do as many deeds as you are capable of doing, for Allah will not become weary (of giving you reward), but you would be tired (of doing good deeds); and he also said: The deed liked most by Allah is one to which the doer adheres constantly even if it is small.***

Muslim

The repeat step consists of two prongs; firstly, the repetition of good deeds as discussed above and secondly, the repetition of the overall revert process itself. Remember this: change is constant; such is the fact of life. We will evolve alongside the changes and without us realising it, we may start to be complacent. This imposes a problem to our overall revert journey as it may cause a decline in our progress after putting in so much efforts in becoming a better person.

Because of this reason, it is essential for us to repeat and go through the whole revert process from time to time to ensure that we are always on the straight path. Repeating the process provides us with the platform to check on our progress and also enables us to fill in any gaps as and when it arises while we try our best to get closer to Allah.

## 6. Reconcile

Similar to repentance, if we have infringed the rights of another person, we need to make the necessary amends. For this reason, the last step of reverting is called reconcile. The step requires us to reconcile our relationship with the person we have wronged by seeking their forgiveness and settling any dues to them.

In Islam, maintaining good relationship with one another is given high priority. Every Muslim is considered a brother (or sister) of another and is required to treat each other well. There is even a strict reminder from Prophet (ﷺ) not to avoid talking to another Muslim for more than three days.

***Anas bin Malik narrated that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Do not hate one another, nor be jealous of one another; and do not be hostile to one another, but O Allah's worshipers! Be Brothers! And it is unlawful for a Muslim to desert his brother Muslim (and not to talk to him) for more than three nights."***

Bukhari

We are only considered true Muslims if we were to treat each other as how we like to be treated. This is how much Islam elevates the importance of building and maintaining relationship in Islam.

***Anas narrated: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself."***

Bukhari

With such importance highlighted, it is obvious that any wrongdoings to another is prohibited and displeases Allah.

To appeal to us even further, we are also rewarded for providing good treatment to our fellow Muslims.

***'Abdullah bin 'Umar narrated: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim. So he should neither oppress him nor hand him over to an oppressor. And whoever fulfilled the needs of his brother, Allah will fulfill his needs."***

Bukhari

To me personally, this is the most difficult step to do. Reconciliation goes beyond just forgiving, it includes building the relationship back to normal after a sour experience. There will always be the awkwardness in communicating with the person we had wronged after the reconciliation attempt. Depending on the severity of the conflict, it is less likely for a relationship to fully return to its original condition.

However, on certain rare occasions, a conflict can actually draw two people closer once it is settled. But again this is more likely in less severed relationships. We often hear people resurrecting each other's previous wrongdoings following arguments despite how close they are. This is very apparent in marriage relationships where there are high levels of emotions involved.

“Forgive and forget” is not an easy thing to do. More often we do the slight opposite. We often hear statement from people saying “I forgive you but I can't forget”. In actual fact, such statement would naturally mean that the person has not fully forgiven the other. This imposes a problem to the reconciliation or even fundamentally, our repentance process.

Nevertheless, this is a step necessary in our journey to revert. Despite the difficulty of it, at least we need try our best and put an effort in doing it.

If we are not able to fully reconcile the relationships, at least we should try our best to obtain certain level of forgiveness.

I remember trying really hard to locate a junior I thought I had wronged in school – I thought I might have said something that hurt her feelings; at least I believed I did. I finally found her on social media. Then the next challenge came; to find the courage to ask for forgiveness. I was not even sure whether she still remembers me.

Nevertheless, I was determined to ask for it and eventually found some courage to drop her a note. To my surprise her response was less embarrassing than I thought. She literally denied any wrongdoings I did and told me that no apologies were required. The experience left me with only good feelings and further convinced me that saying sorry would only result in good outcomes, no matter how hard it is for us to actually say it.

## **A Glimpse of My Journey – An Introduction**

***All change is hard at first, messy in the middle and gorgeous at the end.***

Robin Sharma, author of 15 bestsellers

My reverting journey started some time in late 2010 – somewhere in September 2010 to be exact. The realisation and initiation of this process came quite unexpectedly as I came closer to my first *umrah* trip.

My boss back then persuaded a few of us to make a vow to go for *umrah* together with him if we were successful in securing one of the family takaful licenses we had been working on since 2009. We waited quite a while for the results, only receiving it a year after the submission of our application.

There were many false alarms along the way with the first coming as early as three months after our submission. Although the regulators indicated that the results will be out by then, nothing was announced.

We received another false alarm three months later and similarly there were no good news. However, we were requested to make some changes to our initial submission and got ourselves a joint venture partner.

The next alarm came roughly two months after we resubmitted our revised application. Again, it just meant more waiting for us.

Finally on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010, exactly one year after we officially worked on the license application (I joined the company to work on the project on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009), we received the good news. Motivated to fulfill our vow, we immediately made arrangements for our *umrah* trip and got ourselves a slot in the middle of February 2011.

There was roughly five months before my first *umrah* trip and I realised the need for me to really prepare myself spiritually for it.

Although we were already preparing to launch the new takaful operator prior to receiving the approval, there were a lot of things that we had to hold back. There were too many uncertainties; we were unsure whether we will be successful in securing a license and as made obvious, we had no idea when the results will be announced. The false alarms lowered our confidence further. Many times, it was a chicken and egg situation especially when it comes to matters involving large investments such as system development. We were caught in the middle and all the waiting was killing us.

What is the significance of telling this part of the story? It is to illustrate the circumstances that were caused by the situation I was in. Despite the many things happening, I actually had more time to spare because of all the waiting and holding back, which resulted in me having more time to sway away.

Also at that point of time, there were a lot of things happening around me, which were both good and bad. Some of it involved personal matters of important people around me, which I had to lend a hand in managing it.

Maybe I got myself too much involved in it. It was badly affecting me especially emotionally, it was more than I could handle – I was biting more than I could chew. The worst thing about it is that I started to lose focus on the important things in life. Either I was spending time attending to the never ending work, my friends' problems or I was flushing it out of my system through unbeneficial ways – clumsily releasing the built up stress I was consistently carrying.

### **The Previous Me**

Back then, I had always thought I lived a life according to true teachings of Islam. I was, for sure, not pious, not even close to it but I acted as if I had everything in order. At least optically on the surface I was like any normal Muslim; I performed prayers, fasted in the month of Ramadhan, paid alms etc.

However, there were some fundamental issues that I had not sorted out. I was still involved in sins that I saw as small or insignificant. My life was focused on achieving worldly achievements and desires – having a big car, a big house, a good career, a good pay, a good time etc. Furthermore, I have not grasped the true idea of internal submission.

At the root of it all, I had yet to even realise the existence of these fundamental issues.

I was complacent.

I was lost and too engrossed in my worldly life to realise and admit it.

I was yet to be triggered.

I was what most of us refer to as a “moderate Muslim”. A term or concept that people came up with to reflect (or more likely, to justify) a more relaxed Islamic way of life. To those holding on or believing in this concept, such so called “moderation” was required to appeal to the general public – representing a breed of Muslims who are seemingly progressive and open-minded. Due to ignorance and lack of knowledge, the moderate Muslims view the supposedly “traditional” Islamic way as conservative and outdated.

How wrong are they to misunderstand the true meaning of Islam, (and back then) myself included.

For academic purposes, let us also note another term that we commonly hear – “liberal Muslims”. It refers to the so-called ‘modernised’ Muslims who put less emphasis on the religious aspect of life, choosing only certain parts of Islam to fit their so-called westernised lifestyle. Parts that go against their lifestyle are either discarded or changed. Influenced by the ideals of secularism, worldly affairs and religion are kept separate. Religion focuses mainly on worship while all other matters are guided by man-made laws and culture. Because of this, limits are crossed and broken. The adoption of westernised lifestyle and culture resulted in certain acts of sins being accepted as a norm. The obvious includes the interaction between different genders, where in certain cultures, are limitless.

Does the description sounds familiar or fit the surroundings around us? And more critically, do we fall under this category?

In actual fact, there are no such differences in true practice of Islam – there is only one Islam, a holistic way of life. Anything other than that are just terms or concepts that people come up with to justify their drifted ways.

## It Started with Fear

Back to the main story – my journey to reverting was initially triggered by fear. Yes, it was fear of my previous sins that started me on the journey and yes, it all started during the preparation for my first *umrah*. The moment I came to realise that the *umrah* trip was about to happen, I got myself thinking – am I ready for it?

The irony of it was that despite my desire to go and hope for it to happen, I was not living a lifestyle that was preparing me for it. I had actually swayed quite a bit due to the circumstances I was facing, trying hard to cope with the stress and pressures inside of me.

Nevertheless, it is not an excuse I should be using for allowing it to happen. I should have remained steadfast on the straight path (or should have attempted to do so) but I had failed to do so. It remains as one of my biggest regrets in life.

In an attempt to combat my fear, naturally, I did a lot of self-reflection; reflecting on my present and past lifestyles. It was not difficult for me to realise the many sins I had committed. It is not as if I never knew it before but it was through the conscious reflection that reality finally struck me. I started to feel scared – really scared.

The recent sins I got myself into kept repeating in my mind and resulted in me going into deep thoughts about myself and the life I have been living. Among the biggest fear I tried hard to reconcile was the fact that I will be going to the most sacred place on earth while carrying all these sins with me. It did not stop there, the feeling started to build up each day as I continued to reflect and take account on each sin I could remember, especially the major ones.

In no time, the feeling of fear really got to me to the extent I concluded my sins were too great to be forgiven. I was covered with tremendous fear every single day as I tried to figure a way out.

Each night I would ponder on the sins I committed and started crying out of regret and hopelessness of not knowing what to do next. It was no longer about the *umrah* trip anymore – it was between me and my guilt to my Creator. Besides fear, I felt stupid, ungrateful, depressed, guilty, disobedient, betrayal and hopelessness. I remember clearly the few moments that I really felt like giving up.

It became emotionally unbearable.

All these feelings eventually got out of control. Emotionally strained and drained, I started losing my appetite, my weight and was no longer sleeping well. It was not long after that I started to be physically sick.

I was a mess.

## Right Friends

Despite the mess I was in, I was very fortunate to be blessed with a special friend (more so a brother) who was there for me during that critical time. I could not have asked for a better person to be around; he happens to be a friend, a brother and also a subordinate at work (not an important point but relevant in the context of our current discussion), making him conveniently available around me. More importantly he had the answers I needed the most – he is well-equipped with the various knowledge of Islam. Formally educated in Islamic studies, he was my *shariah* officer and teacher, Mohd Hafizal Elias or fondly known as “*Seroja*”.

For obvious reasons, the whole situation was something difficult to talk about with other people. I needed someone who I was comfortable to express

myself and he fitted the purpose perfectly. I started to share my fears and sought answers to my worries, which he then helped guide me through the process after I expressed my commitment to revert and change.

I must admit that he was very patient with me, entertaining all the questions and curiosities I had. Some were literally repetitive as I was seeking affirmation and assurance, which I knew over time, irritated him. I don't blame him; anyone would have been irritated being asked the same questions over and over again. I still remember remaining persistent in getting certain and confirmed answers, which he was not in the rightful position to give. I kept pestering him for it but he remained calmed and patient in entertaining my annoying requests and pressures.

Till today, I am forever thankful to Allah for bringing him into my life and also thankful that he remained by my side, to this very day.

He helped me understand the basics of repentance, which opened up my eyes to realise the greatness of Allah's love and grace towards His servants. Making me understand the true meaning of hope in Islam and how everything about a Muslim is built around it.

As my advisor, he continuously advised me on the things I needed to do. Among the most important thing he kept reminding me was to acquire in-depth knowledge on Islam. He made it clear to me that it is only through knowledge that I could build the confidence and certainty in the answers that I required.

I ended up doing a lot reading (which is how I got familiar with the numerous Quran verses and hadiths on repentance that I cited all over this chapter) and started to have regular informal sessions with him discussing the various topics on Islam. The sessions were important as certain matters require explanations. Reading alone would not be able to give a full understanding of the topic at hand or worst still, results in misinterpretation – there is still the

need of a teacher. I got to revise old knowledge and acquire new ones, which helped build the necessary basics required to go through the reverting process.

Along the way, another brother joined us at work. He is another amazing person who greatly contributed to my reverting process; Ahmad Murshidi Ahmad Mukhtar, nicknamed "*Tanjung*". He is also formally educated in Islamic studies. His role became more prominent in the middle stage of my reverting process.

In short, both of them helped me find my way to revert. Not many people know the big role they played in my reverting journey, especially during the initial stages. They continued being there even after the bigger challenges started to appear, which I will be sharing more on it in a short while.

### **Mixed Reactions and Responses – A Negative Start**

My initial changes were quite rapid and were perceived to be extreme by the people around me. I embarked on a 360 degrees change in the way I lived, slowly letting go of the strayed ways and misdeeds that I was still hung up on. However, as I 'reacted' towards my life, 'reactions' started to surface from my surroundings.

I started to concentrate on performing more acts of worship, especially in increasing the performance of recommended prayers such as the repentance prayers. As I tried hard to obtain internal appreciation and sincerity in my acts of worship, I allocated and dedicated a lot of time to it, which unintentionally drifted me away from the people around me.

#### **Reaction no. 1: worries and concerns of family members.**

The first group of people who started to experience and felt the change was my direct family. It did not take long before they started to raise their

concerns. I remembered the constant reminders from my mum, nagging me on how Islam preaches about achieving balance between the worldly life and the afterlife. She was of the opinion that I was becoming too engrossed in seeking the afterlife, which was not entirely untrue.

Come to think of it now, I don't blame her and my family for feeling that way. When I reflect back on how I behaved back then combined with the observations of other reverting instances of people around me I saw a common trend – it is during the initial period that people start to be a bit more extreme in their efforts. There is a logical and valid explanation behind such behaviour – the strong drive was necessary to give the required push to sustain the initiated reverting intention and actions.

Nevertheless, I do admit that if the initial period is not managed properly, it could create unnecessary discomfort and displeasure for the people around us, especially the ones who are directly impacted by our actions. There needs to be clear communication on our intentions explaining the reasons behind our change in behaviour. We need to continuously seek their understanding and patience in dealing with us during the critical initial period.

It is during this period that we set the tone for our reverting journey; to either make it or break it.

Family will always be family. Blood is thicker than water; the bond between blood relations is undeniably strong. They stick around despite the things we do, not leaving our side even when they don't fully understand what we're doing, at least for the majority of us. Despite their worries, my family was with me throughout the way, which was even more obvious as I entered the middle stage of my reverting journey.

### **Reaction no. 2: skepticism and doubts of close friends.**

My changes did not go unnoticed by my closest friends. There were mixed reactions among them but the majority concluded my changes as extreme. Most of them thought that I was overreacting towards the *umrah* trip and strongly advised me to ‘chill’ and not take things too seriously. Some of the changes caused me to stop doing certain routines that I had been doing with them, which was obviously not positively received.

Initially, there were sincere concerns of my well-being as everyone was not sure where I was coming from or going with the sudden changes. As they gained more understanding, then came the next phase, they started giving discouragements after forming an opinion that I was overreacting towards my self-discovery. I was constantly discouraged of my efforts and was repeatedly told that everything happening was only temporary; that I will not be able to sustain whatever it is I was trying to do. I remember vividly during one of the company’s “Management Away” days in Jakarta, some of my closest brothers were telling me to take a “moderate Muslim” approach rather than the one I was pursuing.

When everyone realised that their discouragement did not get to me, they started to move on to the next phase – they started to ridicule me. The so called ‘uncool’ changes in my life were ridiculed as everyone continued to discourage me from pursuing my intentions. For instance, how everyone made it a big deal when I started to try to lower my gaze towards the opposite sex. I remember being teased about this for a very, very long time.

I also got myself numerous new nicknames that sarcastically referred to me as being the so called “Mr. Good Guy”. Although it did not really matter to me but as a normal human being, it still got stuck in my head. To a certain extent,

it did hurt realising that those closest to me were not supporting my intentions and worse, making fun of it.

Then, when everyone realised that their discouragements and ridiculing efforts did not manage to push me back to my previous self, the final straw came. I started to be sidelined. I was no longer being included in outings, discussions, gatherings, activities. I guess it was partly my fault as I pulled myself away from some of the things that we used to do together. I also started to be less talkative than I used to be, refraining myself from talking about certain topics, especially conversations involving gossips about other people.

Mind you, these were people who were really close to me, not just mere colleagues or acquaintances.

Nevertheless, there were the few who fully understood my intentions and continued to support my efforts. They were the ones who kept me going.

### **Reaction no. 3: the baseless assumptions of the public.**

To the general public, I was perceived to be withdrawing from the majority as I interacted lesser with people. It was something that I could not have avoided when I was trying to balance myself out. Some even presumed that I was facing problems. I later found out that there were rumours going around about me facing problems at home. It came as a surprise to me as I never thought anyone would be talking about me, especially about my personal life.

To illustrate how quiet and reserved person I was during my recovery period, let me relate what happened during a trip to Jakarta somewhere in mid-2015. I went to a conference with the boys (my team at the office) and took the chance to meet an old colleague who moved there after she got married. She was so surprised of how friendly I was compared to when she first met me back in 2010. We hardly talked to each other before – she reminded me how I always

had a serious look on my face. She kept repeating this, impressing the fact that I was a vastly different person than I was back then – I had kept a distance.

These were the three main reactions I received when I initiated my reverting journey. In summary, initially my changes were not really well accepted by my surroundings. Most of them felt skeptical towards the changes I made – doubting my intentions and actions.

One thing for sure, I did not receive the support I thought I would.

### **Me, Myself and I**

Besides the external resistance from my surroundings, I was battling a more difficult enemy – myself. Although I was set on my path to revert, there were internal resistances flooding my mind. I was constantly battling with myself to remain steadfast on pursuing the intended purpose and changes. There were a lot of negativity thoughts playing around in my head persuading me to return to my previous ways.

In unusual and unexplained ways, there was a sudden feeling of laziness as I tried to draw myself closer to Allah; when I was trying to perform prayers, reading up on Islam, reciting the Quran, etc. Mysteriously, it went up to the extent that it was literally causing me physical pain. I was confused with what was happening but I continued to be persistent on what I was pursuing.

The harder I tried, the stronger the internal resistance reacted and the harder I had to battle. It was simply perplexing as I tried hard to reconcile with what was happening.

The negativity thoughts started to increase rapidly, questioning the unnecessary and persuading me to do ridiculous things. The internal resistance was actually pushing me to the wall to the extent that I almost broke down as I could not handle it. The challenges started to become harder by the day.

## **The Unexpected Discovery – The Sickness that Changed My Life**

I was contemplating whether or not I should actually be writing about this part of my life.

I had a short debate with my advisor – he was with the opinion that I should keep it general and not write too much on it as many may not be able to accept certain facts of what I am about to share.

However, after giving much thought to it, I decided to let it flow as I write because the experience is the most suitable example to illustrate an important learning related to reverting – the hardest lessons are the ones which usually get us through.

***But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not.***

Al-Baqarah 2: 216

Before I share this significant piece of my life, let me start first by conditioning the necessary using relevant Quran verses and hadiths.

***Say, [O Muhammad], "It has been revealed to me that a group of the jinn listened and said, 'Indeed, we have heard an amazing Qur'an.***

Al-Jinn 72: 1

***O company of jinn and mankind, did there not come to you messengers from among you, relating to you My verses and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?" They will say, "We bear witness against ourselves"; and the worldly life had deluded them, and they will bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers.***

Al-'An'am 6: 130

**Abu Sa'id Khudri reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) having said: There is a group of jinns in Medina who accepted Islam, so he who would see anything from these occupants should warn him three times; and if he appears after that, he should kill him for he is a satan.**

Muslim

**Aishah reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: The Angels were born out of light and the Jinns were born out of the spark of fire and Adam was born as he has been defined (in the Qur'an) for you (i.e. he is fashioned out of clay).**

Muslim

By now, some of you would be able to briefly grasp what had happened to me. Apparently, the hard internal battles were not a coincidence. It was caused by something mystical that I thought could only happen in movies or dramas – unexpectedly, it happened to me.

It was difficult for me to comprehend or accept at first, but once things got out of control, I could no longer deny it. Although I suspected it before going to *umrah*, I started to really discover it when I was in holy city of Makkah. Because of it, my first *umrah* became a very challenging experience for me.

However, the discovery helped make sense of things despite it being difficult to comprehend. It answered all the questions I had about the reason why I was reacting in certain ways after taking the route to revert.

This was the middle stage of my reverting process.

I suffered a sickness that many might find difficult to accept due to its mystical or supernatural properties; my body was inhabited by *jinns*, not one but many and apparently for many years. Don't ask me how it happened because I don't know the answers. To make it easier for me to accept, I concluded that my previous swayed lifestyle made it easier for them to inhabit my body; I left it that.

It all started when I took action on the necessary changes needed when I decided to revert. They disliked what I was doing and reacted negatively towards it. They started to rebel and reacted against each action I took – this was the reason for all the internal battles and challenges I was facing.

It was an unforgettable and painful experience for me. I was literally battling myself every single day from the moment I wake up until the moment I sleep (that is, when I can sleep as I was literally on sleeping pills for months). The sickness became so bad that there was period of time that I was frequently possessed. Yes, like the ones you see in ghost or horror movies. I will leave it to your imagination but basically during those times, I lost control of myself, entirely.

It came as a shock to everyone close to me – some remained close by my side, some created distance as they were scared of my condition. I don't blame them, I was literally unstable. I ended up being in the hospital for two weeks and was off from work for a month. I must thank my previous boss and mentor for his understanding when he let me off from work; I literally could not get a hold of myself and was surely not fit to be in the office. As much as it came as shock to the people around me, the experience shocked me much more than anyone could imagine.

It was a long road to recovery. I started to be treated by numerous 'religious doctors' or 'healers' over a long period of time. Everyone close to me tried to help by arranging various parties to provide treatment to me. We made sure all treatments were within the parameters set by Islam – it was basically treatment using verses of Quran – a vehement "No!" to black magic.

During this time, the ones who were really behind my back was my family, particularly my wife and parents. There were also the two important gentlemen, *Seroja* and *Tanjung*. Also not forgetting, their housemate *Iman*, who I just got to

personally know due to this incident. They were with me throughout the long process of recovery. *Tanjung* spent a whole two weeks taking care of me in the hospital. He took care of my food, my hygiene, my treatment routines, and most importantly, my morale and emotional support – anything a sick man needs.

My parents and nanny stayed over at my place for over three months to accompany me and my family after I was discharged from the hospital. They were with me most of the time when I had my treatment sessions and got to see the worst versions of me whenever I was possessed. But they remained by my side, going through each moment of it together with me.

Every time I remember all these moments, I become very emotional, touched by all the sacrifices they made for me. I can't thank Allah enough for blessing me with them and I also can't thank them enough for just being there for me. Their support played a major role in my recovery. I could not have done it without them.

I will not indulge into further details of what had happened because it is not the important point that I would like to highlight. It is the lessons from the experience that I would like everyone to take note of, which I will elaborate more as we go further.

Some of the main points that we can take away from this challenging experience of mine are:

- It was a sudden and painful sickness;
- It was one of the toughest time in my life;
- It was surely a hard lesson;
- I got through it with the support of family and friends; and
- Unexpectedly, it became a catalyst for me to revert, which hopefully you will be able to appreciate in the upcoming section.

## My Road to Recovery

As mentioned, it was a long road to recovery. Initially, I went through a rigorous treatment discipline based on what was guided by the healers. At this stage, I relied a lot on other people for treatment. It made positive progress but I did not manage to fully recover.

Throughout the treatment process, I was continuously reminded by the people who were treating me that cure comes solely from Allah, not from them. They are just there to help facilitate the treatment process.

The important piece for recovery is the efforts that needed to be put in by the patient himself, which, in this case, was me. The disturbance will only leave the patient if he or she becomes strong enough physically, emotionally and more importantly, spiritually. In other words, the patient needs to strive to become a better servant to Allah, to be a better Muslim.

In short, the patient needs to also treat themselves.

The self-treatment is actually aligned to the reverting process. Basically, it is as simple as the following equation:

Road to Recovery = Reverting Process.

Unintentionally, the sickness and the self-treatment process had become a catalyst for me to remain steadfast in changing my ways and revert to Allah.

Besides wanting to return to Allah, I now had a stronger reason to revert. I needed to do it in order for me to recover from the painful sickness I was experiencing.

The change process had already been initiated and the challenge was to follow it through with dedication and persistency. Forced by the situation, all I had to do was to double or triple the earlier efforts I had put in.

I started to focus on my self-treatment. I repeated many cycles of self-reflection by looking at every aspect of my life – worship, knowledge,

relationships, food, wealth; anything that I thought was relevant. I poured in tremendous efforts to ensure that all of these aspects are taken care of and improved. Ensuring that there are no prohibited elements in any of the aspects particularly wealth – cleansing it up to the roots, where possible. Nothing was spared; I tried looking at each single detail to my best ability.

To ensure I remained focus on the intention, I kept myself around the right people; people who had the right lifestyle, attitude and knowledge to ensure that I adopt a lifestyle closest to the straight path.

I built a discipline in the acts of worship, no longer focusing on quantity but on quality and persistency. I chose the ones that were practical and doable, which I knew I could commit to everyday. Repeating certain surah and *dhikir* at specific times every day, performing prayers in congregation, repeating certain recommended prayers consistently, visiting the mosque regularly – these were some of the things I would repeatedly do every single day until up to a point, it became a routine.

One thing that I have to thank *Seroja* till today is his simple advice to read a page of Quran every day, just to keep the momentum going. Unconsciously, it helped improve my discipline, something I always had a problem with.

There was no room for free time or empty spaces for me. This was to avoid my mind from drifting away into unnecessary thoughts, which happened quite a lot during this period. During my free time, I tried to keep myself busy by reading up and learning more on Islamic knowledge. I would talk to my brothers cum teachers if I require any clarification on the topics I was reading up on. As mentioned before, knowledge forms an important part of being successful in the reverting process.

I also realised how bad my Quran recital was – to me it was pathetic. I had forgotten all of the basics, even my pronunciation was wrong. Embarrassed with

myself, I knew I needed to start over and as fortunate as I was, my teacher was just around the corner. I struck a deal with *Tanjung* to teach me how to read the Quran from the basics. We sat down after work for about half an hour each week for Quran lessons. We went on doing this consistently for more than two years. I believe I read the Quran much better now compared to before – after a lot of studying and practising.

I also took this opportunity to reconcile and strengthen the relationship with my family, especially my parents. Building relationships is another important part that I needed to improve. As mentioned, during the initial stage of reverting, I withdrew from people, including my family. Eventually, I started to return and blended back with everyone – not as the previous me but as a new person, hopefully a better one.

These were some of the things that I started focusing on during my recovery period. It might not sound much but trust me, a lot of efforts were put in – it was a hard, long battle. It took a lot of patience and persistency to get to where I am right now.

It was only after two years of constant battling and coping with change, with Allah's permission, I more or less recovered from my sickness. It was only then that I managed to really come back and be among others. After consistently putting all the efforts to return to Allah, the results were worthwhile, *Alhamdulillah*.

I had not only recovered but I believe I am a better person than I used to be. This is how reverting changed my life.

### **Learning from Experience – Reverting Pillars**

There is a larger purpose for the sharing of my personal experience. I would not claim that I have been fully successful in my attempt of reverting but

I know for sure that I have improved to be a better person compared to before. Also, as mentioned before, reverting is an ongoing and never ending process. We need to always be cautious of what we are doing as we never know, we might just slip again along the way.

However, there are a lot of lessons that we can take note from my experience. It gives us an insight on what to expect and do once we embark on a reverting journey. It also acts as a reminder and reference in case we ever slip away from the path we are already on.

Based on the experience shared, there are a few key factors that increased the possibility of success. Being aware of the possible hurdles enable us to manage and use it to our advantage. Although we will be discussing these factors with specific reference to reverting, they are also relevant and applicable to managing change in general.

### **1. Oppositions and challenges are guaranteed, use it as a catalyst.**

There were a lot of oppositions and resistance from even the closest around me when I started my journey to revert. The circumstances were also not supporting me – I ended up sick.

Negativity is not something we can avoid. There will always be people who will be against us and there will always be things that does not go as planned; most of time, beyond our control.

***Another key to success: learn to ignore haters. This is hard.***  
 Sam Altman, entrepreneur, programmer, venture capitalist and blogger

So, beat them at their own game. Acknowledge the challenges and oppositions, but don't give in, go against them. Use them as a reason to fight.

Let it be a catalyst to motivate us in moving forward rather than letting them bring the worst out of us.

Turn negativity to positivity.

*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear,  
but the triumph over it.*

Nelson Mandela, South African anti-apartheid revolutionary politician

## 2. Be around the right people, be like them.

The best way for us to maintain good behaviour is to be among people who behave as such too. Birds of a feather flock together. It is very natural and common for us to be influenced by our surroundings and the people around us. This is the reason why we are reminded to properly choose our friends. If our circle of friends consists of good people, they will directly or indirectly mold us to behave like them as well – influencing us to be good. Similarly, if we are surrounded by crooks, we will eventually become one too.

*Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) said, "The example of a good companion (who sits with you) in comparison with a bad one, is like that of the musk seller and the blacksmith's bellows (or furnace); from the first you would either buy musk or enjoy its good smell while the bellows would either burn your clothes or your house, or you get a bad nasty smell thereof."*

Bukhari and Muslim

Besides being around people with good attitudes and behaviours, we should also be around people who are knowledgeable and learn as much as possible from them.

*If your friends don't motivate or inspire you,  
you're choosing them all wrong.*

Neil Patel, entrepreneur, investor, and analytics expert

### 3. Knowledge is key – equip ourselves with it to be strong.

The importance of knowledge in building up our competencies and confidence in dealing with change has been repeated numerous times. Without knowledge, we will not be able to find the answers to our worries and curiosities.

*Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge.  
Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving*

Fatir 35:28

It is through knowledge that we would know and be able to understand the necessary things that we need to do and how to do it right. It is through knowledge that we will find the path to revert to Allah.

*Abu Hurairah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him."*

At-Tirmidhi

More importantly, it is with knowledge that we become strong to fight the challenges ahead of us.

### 4. Keep it up, be persistent and don't be over ambitious.

Consistently repeating certain actions build behaviour, both good and bad. For instance, if we were to consistently perform a recommended act of

worship, it eventually becomes a routine making us feel as if it is part of our obligatory act of worships. Similarly, if we were to consistently perform sins, it becomes so embedded in us that we no longer see it as a sin.

Persistency in our actions is essential to achieve success in change. Practice makes perfect – a concept that can easily be associated persistency. Practice helps build the routine and discipline required to be good at something, also for a long period of time.

As mentioned before, we sometimes become too ambitious – wanting to do so much to make up for the wrong we have done. But many times we fail to remain consistent in doing it as we tire ourselves with commitments that we cannot carry and cope with.

The key is not to focus on the quantity but quality. I had mentioned before about how much Allah loves good deeds that are performed consistently instead of large one-time deeds. Focus on the things that are practical, doable and within our capacity.

***Abu Hurairah narrated: I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying, "The good deeds of any person will not make him enter Paradise." (i.e., none can enter Paradise through his good deeds.) They (the Prophet's companions) said, 'Not even you, O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)?' He said, "Not even myself, unless Allah bestows His favor and mercy on me." So be moderate in your religious deeds and do the deeds that are within your ability: and none of you should wish for death, for if he is a good doer, he may increase his good deeds, and if he is an evil doer, he may repent to Allah."***

Bukhari

Even in life, it is doing something good over a long period of time that makes a difference, not a one-time glamorous glory – a lot of us got it wrong.

***Long term consistency beats short term intensity.***  
 Bruce Lee, martial artist and founder of Jeet Kune Do

## 5. Never lose hope, don't give up.

As we will face many challenges in our journey to revert, there will be many times we will feel frustrated and demotivated. There will be times when we might feel that we are burdened with challenges that we are not able to carry. Surely, there will be times that we will feel like giving up.

***Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned.***

Al Baqarah 2: 286

Giving up isn't an option for Muslims as Islam is all about hope. Whenever we feel as if there is nowhere else to go to, always remember that we still have Allah to turn to. Supplications to Allah is our greatest weapon, it represents ultimate hope as we fully surrender our matters to Allah – have faith as Allah is always with His beloved servants.

***Jabir narrated that: the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "There is none who utters a supplication, except that Allah gives him what he asked, or prevents evil from him that is equal to it – as long as he does not supplicate for something evil, or the cutting of ties of the womb."***

At-Tirmidhi

## 6. Never walk alone, establish a support system.

We should already realise by now that we cannot live and do things alone. Everybody needs a support system especially to help us through hard

times. This is among the reasons why Allah created the concept of partners or pairs, be it humans or animals.

On a micro level, we have our nucleus family structure to support us. At the macro level, each Muslim is a brother (or sister) to another in Islam. It is our duty to support each other, remind each other, and being there for one another, cheering the other person whenever he or she is facing difficulties in life or struggles to achieve their goals.

***Abu Musa reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "The relationship of the believer with another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each strengthens the other." He (ﷺ) illustrated this by interlacing the fingers of both his hands.***

Bukhari and Muslim

## 7. It is a marathon, be patient for results.

There are no shortcuts in life, this is a fact that we need to brutally accept. Even though some might claim there are such paths, any achievement through a shortcut is usually temporary – there are bound to be gaps.

Naturally, it is through sheer hard work that an achievement is able to give us the ultimate satisfaction; knowing that we have put in our best efforts, dedicating time and energy in doing all the things that needed to be done despite all the challenges we had to face – now that's true success.

***Anas narrated that from the Prophet (ﷺ) who said: "Indeed greater reward comes with greater trial. And indeed, when Allah loves a people He subjects them to trials, so whoever is content, then for him is pleasure, and whoever is discontent, then for him is wrath."***

Graded Hasan by At-Tirmidhi and Al-Albani

The best things in life are usually worth waiting and is most appreciated when it isn't easy to achieve. As mentioned numerous times throughout this chapter – some lessons are learned best through hardship.

## **It is just the Beginning**

An important point worthwhile repeating is that reverting is not a one-time exercise. We should never assume that once we have reverted, everything is completed and done. Such an arrogant mindset is the last thing we want to adopt as there is no guarantee that we will always remain in a reverted state. A man can change overnight without even realising it.

The scope of reverting is so wide that we might not be able to cover all aspects in one go; we might have repented on a particular sin but not for another. For discussion sake, say we have repented from the gambling. At the same time, we have not repented from another sin related to our wealth – we are still involved in engaging in *riba* (usury/interest) based financial services, a sin a lot of us continue to take for granted. As you can notice in this particular example, both sins are different but similar in nature – they involve different actions but both sins are related to wealth. Repenting from a sin on wealth does not mean that we have repented from all the sins related to it.

Each different sins are sins on its own, regardless whether they are related to each other or not.

All I can say is that, there is still a lot that needs to be done.

These facts we have just discussed cannot be taken lightly and I can attest to it as I am still struggling with my reverting efforts even up till today. There are days that I am all set for it but there are also days that I lose out to temptations. The choice continuously remain in our hands, it is for us to decide the direction

we want to take – to continue to remain on the reverting path or be lost again in the path of the misguided.

Closing this important chapter, let us summarise and reemphasise a key point on reverting – reverting is an ongoing process, it is just the beginning.

Each of us has a ‘certain’ uncertain end, which refers to the moment we literally return to Allah via death, an event totally beyond our control. It is only when death comes to us that the reverting cycle ends.

In the meantime, what is more important is for us to give our best in our continuous attempt at reverting, an action that we need to take as immediate as now, and engage in each of the steps diligently: **reflect, remorse, repent, return** and **repeat**, and also not forgetting, whenever necessary, **reconcile** – the (5 + 1) R formula.

Once we have put our hearts and souls in our efforts, the only thing left is for us to pray hard to Allah requesting that we continue to remain steadfast on our journey to return to Him, because at the end of the day it is only with His mercy and compassion that we will be able to do so.

***"Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us and grant us from Yourself mercy. Indeed, You are the Bestower."***

Ali Imran 3: 8

Happy reverting!