6389 - You have to do it: do it and don’t hesitate

the question

Hello, I'm a 27 year old student from Bloomington, Indiana in the United States. I have discovered through many months of careful study and furious debate with the Christianity I was raised with that Islam is no doubt the clear, complete, and true word of the Almighty God. I had a furious struggle with Jesus but as I began to look upon his actual words in my new testament I found that they were completely, 100% in line with the Qur'an! I have not taken shahada and to be honest, I'm still a bit hesitant to. It is hard to describe the feeling one has toward the Christian faith after it's been drilled into you from the time of your birth for a solid quarter of a century. I am taking arabic classes this summer and am planning to enroll at Cales in sana'a in Yemen next summer for further study. My question is do I really need to take the final step because the Qur'an says that Christians who are dutiful will receive their reward. I question my ability to adhere to all the elements of Shari'a. The prayers, the mannerisms, the relationships with women, diets, etc. Is it necessary that I take this step and if I did, would I have to take an Islamic name, or is that simply receomended? Following that, would the name Ishmael be appropriate? Thank you

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

We appreciate your question and your efforts in studying and researching very much, especially since you have achieved such great and true results. Although we believe most strongly that it is essential to become Muslim and that Islam is the only religion which Allah will accept, because He revealed it as the final religion and way, we do understand something of the difficulty involved in leaving that which one is used to. But the wise person knows that he has to follow the truth even if it becomes clear to him after many years and even if he grew up in a different way. Hence Allah condemned those who refused to follow the truth because they were following the ways of their

forefathers. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And when it is said to them: "Come to what Allah has revealed and unto the Messenger (Muhammad for the verdict of that which you have made unlawful)." They say: "Enough for us is that which we found our fathers following," even though their fathers had no knowledge whatsoever and nor guidance" [al-Maa'idah 5:104]
"And when it is said to them: "Follow that which Allah has sent down", they say: "Nay, we shall follow that which we found our fathers (following)." (Would they do so) even if Shaytaan (Satan) invites them to the torment of the Fire?" [Luqmaan 31:21]
"And similarly, We sent not a warner before you (O Muhammad) to any town (people) but the luxurious ones among them said: "We found our fathers following a certain way and religion, and we will indeed follow their footsteps." (The warner) said: "Even if I bring you better guidance than that which you found your fathers following?" [al-Zukhruf 43:23-24]

The matter will not be too difficult for you - in sha Allah (if Allah wills) - for indeed if you believe in Islaam you will be believing in all of the previous Prophets, and you will be believing in the Divine Books. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):
"O you who believe! Believe in Allah, and His Messenger (Muhammad), and the Book (the Qur'aan) which He has sent down to His Messenger, and the Scripture which He sent down to those before (him); and whosoever disbelieves in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day, then indeed he has strayed far away" [al-Nisa' 4:136]

If you become Muslim, you will not be cut off from the sound roots, for every Muslim believes in the Messiah 'Eesa (Jesus) - peace be upon him - as a Prophet and Messenger, and he believes in the true Gospel - before it was distorted - as a Book that was revealed by Allah. Maybe it will encourage you to know that everyone who used to believe in 'Eesa and then believes in Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will have the reward twice. Hence when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent his letter to Heraclius, the Christian ruler of Byzantium, inviting him to Islam, he said:
"In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. From Muhammad the slave and Messenger of

Allah, to Heraclius the ruler of Byzantium. Peace be upon those who follow true guidance. I invite you with the call of Islam. Become Muslim and you will be safe. Become Muslim and Allah will give you your reward twice, but if you refuse, then the sin of the husbandmen will be upon you. 'Say (O Muhammad): "O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah (Alone), and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims." [Aal 'Imraan 64 - interpretation of the meaning]." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 2723)

The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "There are three who will be given their reward twice: a man from among the People of the Book who believed in his Prophet, then when he comes to know of the Prophet [Muhammad] (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), then he believes in him and follows him; he will have two rewards" (The hadeeth was narrated by Muslim, 219).

On the basis of the above, the answer to your question is: yes, it is very important, indeed essential, for you to take this step which will change your life, bringing you a life of joy and tranquillity through being close to Allah and believing in His Oneness (Tawheed), having the pleasure of worshipping and remembering Him, and earning reward by obeying Him and saving these rewards for the Day when man will need every single reward:
"On the Day when every person will be confronted with all the good he has done, and all the evil he has done, he will wish that there were a great distance between him and his evil. And Allah warns you against Himself (His punishment) and Allah is full of kindness to (His) slaves" [Aal 'Imraan 3:30 - interpretation of the meaning]

With regard to your name, if it has no meanings that involve Shirk (associating others with Allah) or Kufr (disbelief), then it is permissible for you to keep your name. The name Ismaa'eel (Ishmael) is very suitable; how could it be otherwise when Ismaa'eel was a Prophet of Allah of whom Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And mention in the Book (the Qur'aan) Ismaa'eel (Ishmael). Verily, he was true to what he promised, and he was a Messenger, (and) a Prophet. And he used to enjoin on his family and his people As-Salaat (the prayers) and the Zakaat, and his Lord was pleased with him" [Maryam 19:54-55]

We ask Allah to help us and you to do that which He loves and which pleases Him, and to guide us to the Straight Path, for Allah guides whom He wills and He knows best those who are guided.