

people. "As one who has lived through it," Jeffrey Lang writes. The surrender to Allah is not any one single step "but a continual struggle." At book's end, he recalls a friend in anguish: "It's awfully hard to serve God. To truly serve Him." And he answers: "Maybe we are more demanding that He is. Maybe God only wants us to keep trying."

### Excerpt: Struggling to Surrender

Several nights later at dinner, I thought I had better explain to my parents why I was going to fail religion. My mother was shocked & my father was angry. "How can you not believe in God?" he screamed. Then he made one of those predictions of his that always have had a way of coming true: "God will bring you to your knees, Jeffrey! He'll bring you so low that you'll wish you were never born!" But why? I thought. Just because I could not answer my questions? There I was, an atheist in the eyes of family, friends, and schoolmates. The strange thing was that, at this point in time, I had not abandoned my belief in God but instead was only pursuing a line of argument largely for the sake of argument. I had never stated that I disbelieved. What I had said was that I found the proofs presented to our religion class inadequate. Nonetheless, I did not reject this new designation because the altercation did have a profound effect on me. I came to realize that I was not sure what I believed or why.

At first I felt free, for my new view liberated me from the phobia that Someone was tapping into my thoughts and fantasies and condemning me. I was free to live my life for myself alone; there was no need to worry about satisfying the whims of a superhuman Power. To some extent, I was also proud that I had had the courage to accept responsibility for who I was and to assume control of my life. I was secure, for my feelings, perceptions, and desires were entirely mine and did not have to be shared with any Supreme Being or anyone else. I was the centre of my universe: its creator, sustainer, and regulator. I decided for myself what was good and evil, right and wrong. I became my own god and saviour. This is not to say that I became completely greedy and self-indulgent, for now I believed more than ever in sharing and caring. But my reason for so doing was not to attain a future reward: I felt a real genuine human love. We hold love to be the highest human emotion. Whether this is due to evolution, chance, or some eco-biological utility hardly matters, for it is as real as anything else and it

makes us happy. When you give out love, you really do receive in return, here and now.

Going away to college is not the same as leaving home: you are simply not living with your parents. It is a transition between dependence & independence, a time & place when it is still safe to test your views. I learned very quickly that no one knows loneliness like an atheist. When an average person feels isolated, he can call through the depths of his soul to One who knows him & sense an answer. An atheist cannot allow himself that luxury, for he has to crush the urge & remind himself of its absurdity. He may be the god of his own universe but it is a very small one, for its limits are determined by his perceptions & it is continuously shrinking. The religious man has faith in things that are beyond what he can sense or conceive, while an atheist cannot even trust those things.

... "When a leaf falls from a tree and twists and turns on its journey to the ground, no segment of that journey takes place except by Allah's will. And when we pray and put our nose on the ground, we feel a joy, a rest, a strength that is outside this world and that no words could ever describe. You have to experience it to know."

He remained quiet for several seconds, letting the words sink in. How much I wished that he & I could change places, if only for a few minutes, so that I could feel the desire, the passion, the anguish, the yearning for his Lord! I wanted to know the serenity & the torment, the trust & the fear, rising from insignificance, aspiring for surrender. **I yearned to be resuscitated from this spiritual death.**

**"So, would you like to become a Muslim?"** His words cracked the air, **exploding in my consciousness...**

*Those who have been bridled by western stereotypes of the Muslim doctrines need to read this convert's journey. Do not remain trapped in the cage of your own illusions, never setting foot in the real world, the world of the inner reality, the world of Allah. True Surrender must be discovered, realized & accepted by each individual through the process of a quest for true self-understanding. It's only through Surrender, Peace, Contentment & Satisfaction that all wounds are healed. For a copy of this remarkable, well-researched, clearly articulated book in pdf format, call 225-9031.*

"I was happy enough to have found faith in a **sensible religion**. But I never expected to be touched by such **intoxicating mercy**."

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# Struggling to Surrender

Finding a safe harbour in turbulent times

Conversion triggers profound questions to the self. It heightens the awareness & prompts reflections of who one **is**, who one **was**, and where one is **heading**. The transition is as "a journey from individualism to traditionalism, from learning to illumination, from the sensible to the unseen, from reason to intuition."

Surrendering to God is **not** a single step; it is a continuous battle. Faith is seldom reached without difficulty & doubt. Without intense struggle. Faith is acquired **with cries from the heart**. Struggle is strengthening. "There are those of us who sought to change our souls, not our clothes; those who changed our clothes as if to change our souls." Once Islam embraces us, we surrender in deepening awareness. Complete & utter forgiveness of all sins, both large & small. No one in Islam is ever interested in knowing anything of your past. No embarrassing questions are ever asked. You are welcomed by God into the community to partake in the celebration of life in His love **free of charge**.

**N**ot another conversion story, please, the reviewer thought. So much essential Islam to absorb/practice, so little time. “Struggling to Surrender” sits on the desk. Then slowly weaves its threads. So without further ado, to one and to all, a request: read this book.

This is no story of one’s man conversion, though it is that also, intimately – Dr. Jeffrey Lang converted in the 1980s. But what this candid, frank, committed Muslim writer does is far more important. He draws the Ummah together, with a deep, invigorating love of Islam. To those native-born Muslims, who may not see, not comprehend the convert’s dilemma, our resistances, our questions, Dr. Lang offers a bridge for intelligent reflection; to show that if we “struggle” with our Islam, it is “within” our surrender. We have listened to native Muslims, received wisdom & sometimes **doses of rigid preaching**, albeit warm & well-intentioned. Sometimes we have felt, the gulf is too great, and it is impassable. It is a gulf of cultures, to be sure, but it has often felt like a gulf of Islam itself.

To those Islamic workers pursuing dawah in the Americas, “Struggling to Surrender” should become a textbook requirement, the freshest, most straightforward analysis yet of the real human experience of their now- and-future brothers and sisters; the queries, the apprehensions, the mental framework – at the antipodes of the Muslim’s traditions spiritual ascension.

And to us: “Those whom Islam has embraced” – how lovely a turn of phrase; exact, at times lyrical, tone which Dr. Lang hits again and again – to us, Jeffrey Lang holds up a precise mirror of motions, thoughts and soul. These are indeed the common and shared “impressions” of a life’s leap into rebirth. As at any birth, there are birth pangs.

Dr. Lang cautions that he is not a scholar. But his learning is wide & his thinking is incisive & he shares the fruits of both with his reader abundantly. The first brush with the Quran; we remember it too. But see how his description focuses the experience: the Quran “reads” its reader. “You cannot simply read the Quran. You have either surrendered to it already or you combat it. It attacks tenaciously, directly, personally. It debates, criticizes, shames &

challenges.” Yes, the Quran will not let the reader go. How illogical to attempt to swerve away; Islam is the brain’s natural magnet, he implies, marking how **Islam regards unbelief as “almost an infirmity of the human mind.”**

He takes up the astounding thread of the Quran and science – thoroughly argued – yet he challenges the erroneous mind-set which attempts to “force” scientific “corroborations” of its Divine Words. And still: they are there if we want them, as well he knows. He cites the wondrous feminine gender used for sister/worker bees, with the verb *attakhithi* [build] in the feminine form! 16:68. His Quranic discussions feel lively, even original; “Time and Eternity” is a profound mind-opener, as is “The Straight Path”: here this American who does not deny his heritage and continues to speak, within his Islam, the cultural language of his birthland, describes complex Islamic concepts in familiar Western terms (the Freudian Id, Ego, Super-Ego): “In Islamic thought these forces are very real and are embodied in the concepts of satanic, the self (al nafs) and the angelic.”

It is with a sturdy & exciting look at hadith and how new Muslims & non-Muslims (Orientalists) confront the traditions of the Prophet (p) that Dr. Lang’s scholarship becomes evident (hadith, he notes, means news, or a reporting by eyewitnesses or reliable source, i.e. the news). While answering the convert’s quest for direction and knowledge, he puts several misconceptions to rest. He recalls approaching hadith, entering a maze of “confusion, distortion, suspicion & dogma, a field to be explored only submissively & where there is little room for misgiving.” He did not choose passivity, the blind pell-mell maze, but eagerly explored it. As a Muslim: with the keen awareness and balance of one striving to “keep the middle way.” This awareness ingrained in Islam he elaborates elsewhere, eloquently: Taqwa means not so much fear (piety) as “vigilance or defensiveness. In terms of Islam, a state of critical awareness & readiness to submit to the demands of faith.”

Dr. Lang does not believe in avoidance. There are thorny issues in modernity, and particularly thorny ones for Western Muslims, and most particularly thorniest ones for Western Muslimahs, not rooted in centuries of cultural Islam, in the unquestioned and unquestioning tradition of “the way things are done.” If converts question social custom, are they questioning the Quran? Or a human context? Round & round we go; physical segregation of

women, for many converts, is one of these. “**The opposite of segregation is not promiscuity,**” Dr. Lang writes. This is **not** about moral laxity, **not** about ritual, or reform, **nor** yet Quranic injunction, in Dr. Lang’s discussion. It is about applying Islam to the modern world as “the people of the middle way.” It is about “allowing” fellow Muslims of different cultural legacies to be Muslim.

The main value of this book is not that it includes a convert’s autobiographical story of his conversion – there are already tons of those. The later parts of *Struggling to Surrender* tackle issues that concern all Muslims: how to reassess the Sunnah and Shariah from the original sources and realize a more liberal approach to living as a Muslim. Especially vital is Lang’s forthright, well-researched & clearly articulated defense of women’s liberation within Islam. He shows how the misogynist attitudes that cripple so many Muslim societies in their stultifying grip have no justification within the original revelation & that **it’s up to us to think for ourselves** instead of **blindly following the diktats of mullahs** from societies that deny women their rights.

In this fascinating portrait of a vast collective experience, the new Muslims are not monolithic. There are personalities and “types.” Dr. Lang notes that the “convert is among the least tolerant. Of all believers converts can be among the most severe in their ideas and practices. Established believers are likely to see them as paradigms of true faith while they are keenly cognizant of their own weaknesses and temptations.” Must we change our names to Arabic ones, must we pepper (or parrot) our speech with Arabic expressions? He tells searing anecdotes of converts-meets-Muslims; they are poignant. And they are wrenchingly familiar. He knows there are those of us who sought to change our soul, not our clothes; those who changed our clothes as if to change our soul. But he also knows that once Islam embraces us, we surrender in deepening awareness. When “the ritual becomes less of a discipline and more of an experience of peace.” And finally, an “act of love, a divine embrace and it is that love that comes to dominate our lives...”

This is a realistic book. This is a spiritual book. This is a book that can touch people, and teach

I testify that there is no god but Allah

I testify that Muhammad (p) is God’s Last Messenger