

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALI MOHIBUL ISLAM **A GERMAN CONVERT AND STUDENT IN QUM**

Translated by: Ahmed H. Sheriff

It was about a year before that I saw him at the public lounge of Daru-Tablighe Islami in Qum. He was deeply engrossed in the study of some Islamic books in German language. Unlike a normal tourist, he looked to be drawn and weak. I commenced by asking in German:

"How do you do?" He raised his head and gladly replied, "Very well". I asked "what are you reading?". He showed me a book and said "It is 'Mohamed and his Path'. Though small, its contents are valuable".

From thereon the conversation proceeded. Much as I wished, I found it difficult to carry on the conversation in German, having forgotten some words of this language. I, therefore, asked: "Do you speak English?"

His reply was in the affirmative. His English was comparatively good. I asked him: "Have you come to Iran for sightseeing?" "No" was his reply. "I have come to Qum to learn. Whilst in Pakistan, they told me that Qum is the main centre for study and research in Shi-ite Islamic knowledge. I have been looking forward to this since I converted to Islam".

I asked him "what made you embrace Islam? Why did you leave your original faith?" He replied, "When I left Germany, my aim first was to proceed to India in order to study Hinduism and Buddhism there. I had heard these faiths were the source from which one could acquire mental peace. I, like many other European youths being fed up with our Western materialistic society, was on my way to India. But on arrival in Pakistan, my plan changed and I instead came to Iran."

"Whilst in Pakistan, I became friendly with a Muslim. He told me that to embrace Hinduism or Buddhism is like to fall from a pit to a deep well. On learning more about the frustrations of those Europeans who had gone to India for similar purpose, I became discouraged to make the trip to that country. I was in Pakistan for four months."

"One day at a big mosque in Peshawar, I was watching a big congregation of people praying together. Their approach looked so united and organized - all the people standing together before One Almighty God - the scene deeply moved my heart. The spontaneous feeling I had was that how nice it would have been if I were a Muslim and could have joined that big congregational prayer. It was with the same enthusiasm that I decided and embraced Islam the next day. Since that day I have started learning how to pray. Some days later I started reading Quran in English."

"I learnt how to pray but not knowing the Arabic language, I could not read the holy Quran. Anyhow, I always carried in my pocket a small size Quran which often I would take out and kiss it. Whenever I opened it, my fervent hope was that I could one day read and be able to ponder over its words. I also thought that It would be advisable if I

could be admitted into an Islamic college where I would study and make research on Islam. No sooner I had this thought, an intelligent Pakistani youth suggested me to come to Qum and now that I am a student here of Daru-Tablighe Islami, I feel very happy."

Ali Mohibbul Islam (previously called Aroen Boer) stays on in Qum and carries on with his studies of various Islamic subjects. At first, he had hard time to pronounce and write Arabic. But after a week, he could write small Quranic sentences. As a result of great personal efforts, he gradually progressed. A tape recording machine was made available to assist him. Now in a few months he has improved so much that he himself laughs at his previous funny way of Arabic pronunciation.

Presently, Ali Mohibbul Islam has changed considerably. He is able to speak Persian as well. Every day, his time table includes four hours for Arabic, an hour for Persian, an hour for studying Islamic rules etc. He is happy with all his teachers. Once, finding a good opportunity, I sat with him and asked him to describe his previous life, the state of society in Europe and about his study and experiences gained in Iran.

In reply, he said : "As you know, the society in Europe is completely shrouded with materialism. If I may say so clearly, the Western society is just moving aimlessly in darkness. You in Eastern society cannot visualize to what serious level the spiritual and moral degradation has reached in the West. There, humanity has lost its value and trust. What has no place in Europe is spiritualism and religious way of life. Everyone is seen to run about in search of something. But in search of what? Only to acquire wealth. What has no place there is the human value. I was born in a Protestant Christian family. It was during the same period when Germany was progressing again after the failures of the last world war.

During my childhood, I spent most of my time at my grandmother's house. She was deeply attached to me and even now she writes to me more often than anybody else. Four years ago, I completed my education in a high school. From that same period, I started feeling that life in the West was rather frightening for me. What I saw in Germany was that it is no more than mechanical, just for occupation purposes only and nothing else. It is more sensual and full of animal than human instincts.

People there live clockwise in form of human machine busy in accumulating wealth. Moreover, on going through every aspect of Western life, you are likely to be moved with sensual thoughts. It is a fact that sex has gone in too much into every educational field in the West. The sexual literature and films, alcoholism and every aspect of immorality have all reached an alarming stage for a thoughtful person to witness and tolerate.

On persuasion of my father, I entered the Reagansburg University. There, I undertook the study of computer science. These days, this subject is considered very lucrative. But there, I used to feel sad at the thought that on completion of my studies, ultimately, I

would join an organization where my life would become like a computer machine and nothing else.

Thus one day, I told my father that I was no more willing to continue with the studies. After a month, I told my parents that I desired to leave Germany and go to India. My this utterance considerably surprised my parents. My father insisted on my joining his shop business as an alternative. But I was firm on my decision. I had the wish of releasing myself from the ties of the Western way of life and proceed to a new world where there was not so much of worship and adoration of wealth and sensuality.

But at that time I had no idea about Islam. In Germany, Islamic propagation is not so strong. If it is there, it is not well presented. There, like myself, youths think of 'YOGA and NIRVANA' for spiritual exercise. A western youth wants even for a few hours to be away from the noise of the machines and mechanical way of life. But he does not know the right way to it.

Lately, a Hindu missionary by name Guru Maharaj has been propagating in Germany. He has been able to attract many who look upon him as a prophet. He has been preaching spiritual purification and guiding youths to undertake courses of YOGA and such other exercises. Strange enough, he himself has married an American girl contrary to his Hindu religious rule.

At first, I thought the pathetic state of materialistic and immoral way of life existed only in Nuremberg but I found the same thing when I travelled through other towns of Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy. Hence, I decided to come out and head towards the East".

I asked what was the state of the church in the West? He replied: "Unfortunately both the Catholic and the Protestants have failed to revive the spiritual and ethical values. Of Course, with the vast amount of funds at their disposal, they have been publishing considerable number of literatures. But people have no interest in reading them. Yes, at last I came out on my journey towards the Eastern countries.

At the railway station at the time of saying good bye, my mother wept and said "But after-all what wrong have we done to you that you are deserting us. I have experienced much trouble in this world and have gone through bad times. Why do you separate from me?" And my grandmother who had brought me up, was even more distressed. But I was firm in my decision to travel towards India and search for the truth. At that moment I had no idea of what destiny awaited ahead for me. At last, the train moved out of the station and I waved goodbye to my parents. I could witness tears on their faces."

(From PAYAME SHADI - Qum)