



NEW MUSLIM  
ACADEMY

# When Holiday Nostalgia Creates Sadness

---

A GUIDE TO NAVIGATING  
THE HOLIDAY SEASON FOR NEW MUSLIMS

by Megan Wyatt



# It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Everywhere you go...

It hit me. Sixteen years later it still does.

I was walking down the aisle of the grocery store, and this classic Christmas song came right to my ears, and then stirred my heart. I walked a little faster towards the checkout, but my mind was already drifting off...

*I'm out in the snow with my big brother and my Dad. We're shivering, but barely noticing as we begin to string lights across the gutter on the front roof of our house. It's late afternoon, and it will be dark soon, so we want to get finished fast. I'm smiling and happy, but too little to really be of any help, but I try anyways, doing my best to keep the string of lights from becoming tangled together. The street is covered in snow, and I cannot wait to see our house light up!*

On my way out of the store, I walked past the candy display and remembered my mother's homemade holiday fudge and chocolate chip cookies. I vividly remember the satisfaction on her face when she took her first bite of homemade fudge, and the care she took to display the pages in the Bible that spoke of the birth of Jesus.

As I exited the store, I was greeted with the smell of fresh cut pine in the parking lot where trees were being sold. This transported me back to the smell of the new Christmas tree being brought into our living room. My father would struggle to get it into the stand while my brother and I prepared our old ornaments from the years gone by. I couldn't wait to wake up on Christmas morning to the brightly wrapped gifts under the tree.



Now, sixteen years after converting to Islam, I am still hit with these powerful feelings and memories every single year. All the sites, smells, and songs of this season bring back the joyous memories of my family's holidays.

Through the years I've met and heard from many converts who have experienced the same nostalgia, but didn't know what to do or how to handle their feelings. You might be reading this because as a brand new Muslim, you have absolutely no idea how to even imagine your life without sharing in your family's holiday traditions.

Or perhaps you've been Muslim for years, but the pain and emptiness still creeps up on you every year and you want to stop feeling so down simply because Christmas songs start playing in every restaurant and store. You might feel like no one else understands you, and so you've kept your sadness to yourself, trying to figure things out on your own.

Perhaps someone has even judged you for having positive emotions connected to your previous non-Muslim holidays by shaming you, leaving you to feel not just isolated in the Muslim community, but isolated from God Himself.

My hope is that this ebook will bring you some beneficial reminders and show you concrete steps to take to ease the sadness or struggles you may be going through right now.

## **Here is what I'll guide you through in this ebook**

- 1 How to integrate your nostalgic holiday past with your new life as a Muslim and ease the feelings of missing out.**
- 2 How to avoid the top mistakes many converts make with their family around holiday season that can actually harm your relationships with them and create unnecessary discomfort for everyone.**
- 3 What to do when you are feeling overwhelmed by strong feelings of not belonging with "everyone else" during the holiday season.**
- 4 A profound example from the life of Prophet Muhammad to hold on to when you feel your heart is breaking.**

# 1

Let's first tackle holiday nostalgia.

Here is a simple truth: if you experience nostalgia, it's a sign that God has blessed you in your life with love and some form of prosperity.

Not everyone enjoys the holidays. Some children wake up Christmas morning to no gifts at all under the tree. Maybe their family had no money to buy gifts, or perhaps they were in a women's shelter where their mother was seeking to escape from a violent relationship. Some people remember the holidays as a time of greater tension, where families got together but fought the whole time.

So having a nostalgic past means we should pause and thank God for everything that was given to us, and done for us out of familial love.

As a mother of four children myself, I can tell you how long it takes to get Eid clothes for everyone, buy gifts, wrap them, and prepare some special food or dessert for my family. No matter how well I plan, I'm still up the night before Eid wrapping something or putting some toy together for one of my children til 1:30am! In these moments, I often think of my parents. How did they do so much without us ever noticing? I'm aware of how much things cost, and how hard it is to earn every single dollar.

Take a moment to reflect on what sacrifices your family made and how much effort they put in to make your life and your holidays special.

## Ride with Nostalgia, Don't Fight It.

Instead of fighting against the emotions that arise, consider riding with them. Ride with them, soak them in, and allow your heart to recognize how much was done for you, and Whom it is that allowed all of that to be provided for you.

Instead of trying to push away your desire for peppermint hot cocoa during the holiday season, go grab a cup and enjoy it! It's OK! It's ok to remember. It's ok to reminisce. It's ok to share a happy memory with your non-Muslim family, too.

You do not need to feel ashamed of your past, or feel ashamed that you are moved by it. Your past will always be a part of who you are. When you became a Muslim, all your previous sins were erased, but your lifetime of meaningful memories were not!

You are still the same you, but with a heart that has been purified to reflect the Oneness of God in your life.

## Live in Gratitude

Just remember to pause, and thank God for giving you happiness and love in your life. This marries the past with your present in a way that strengthens your faith, and your appreciation and love for your family.

Instead of feeling sad, you may find that you've begun feeling deeply moved in gratitude.

When your heart is in a state of deep gratitude, you can pray for the family that you love to be given happiness in this life, and happiness in the next, and to ask God to grant you all hearts that affirm His Oneness.

With each Christmas song, and lit-up tree in a shop window that sparks memories, just repeat, "Alhamdulillah. Thank you God for all the happiness my family strived to give me."



# 2

Few people understand the emotional challenges that come with being a new Muslim. While the heart finds contentment at finally accepting the pure Oneness of God, and living a life in servitude to Him, the lifestyle of being a Muslim (especially for a convert) can be incredibly challenging. This is specifically true when it involves breaking tradition within your family.

How can you explain to your parents that becoming more “religious” and finding the truth suddenly means cutting off every beautiful family tradition you have created over the years during the holidays?

The ornaments you made as a child, the handwritten cards, the special desserts you made every year, the tradition of decorating the tree, praying together as a family – so many of these traditions now have to be left behind.

Suddenly, you are wondering what you can hold onto, what you have to let go, and how to let your family know. If you’ve been a convert for awhile, you may find that each holiday season you have to struggle with the awkwardness on the phone as you try to maintain a loving relationship without discussing the obvious: you are missing from their holiday picture. Come Eid time, they’re also missing from yours.

In order to deal with the pain of the situation, many converts take a hard, almost radical approach to the holiday season. They focus on studying the history behind Christmas trees, or historical accounts of how the Bible was corrupted in order to justify their decision to stay away from the holiday season. The more they persist in this direction, the harder their hearts become.



## Common Mistakes Converts Have Made

Instead of being respectful to their family, converts may choose one of these unfortunate but common mistakes:

- 1) Ignore their family entirely around the holiday season pretending it’s not happening.
- 2) Lecture their parents/siblings/extended family about the history of the holiday in an attempt to prove how justified they are in avoiding it.
- 3) Stop calling and speaking to the elders in the family altogether in order to avoid having to explain why they aren’t participating anymore.
- 4) Return home to visit with family, but remain emotionless during all the festivities in an attempt to prove they are not in any way celebrating.

All of these are going to create further pain for you and your family, and I do not recommend this path.



Instead, ask yourself the following two questions:

- 1) What is one of the most important aspects of Islam you want your family to witness?
- 2) How do you want those around you to remember you after you die?

When we stop looking at those who raised us, love us, and are related to us as “people needing to be saved,” our hearts are opened again to genuinely living the Prophetic model of mercy, compassion, generosity, and kindness. We remove our spiritual arrogance, and instead, see human beings who are truly special to us.

Prophet Muhammad said, **“I have been sent to perfect good character.”**

Harshness and hard heartedness do not reflect the light of Islam, rather, they hide it completely. Allow the desire to reflect Islam through beautiful character to be the new driving force in your life.

Your family has a right to celebrate their own holiday traditions and to be treated with love and respect, even if you hold that such traditions are not ones you have chosen to follow. When dealing with your parents, or any other family member you were always close to, it is very likely that they really miss having you around in their holiday traditions. Keep that in mind when speaking with them.

I recommend avoiding internet search engines as a way to find advice on dealing with non-Muslim family and holidays, as most of what you will find is not only extremely narrow minded, but does not take into account the unique situation and relationship of you and your individual family.

The beauty of Islam is that flexibility in dealing with sensitive situations is a part of our Islamic tradition. It’s what allows Islam to be practiced by all people in all times. If anything pushes you to harshness, leave it.

You must trust that God gave you a heart to guide you with, and so you must use it in all matters. Seek His guidance when you personally pray or speak to God, and then do what feels right in honoring your family, and honoring your life as a Muslim.

God is Al-Wadud (The Most Loving), Ar-Rahman (The Most Merciful), and Al-Ghafur (The Most Forgiving.)

# 3

I remember one of my first Eids as a new Muslim. I spent most of the day alone, until a friend invited me over for pancakes and to watch T.V. That was as good as it got. I had no idea that Eid prayer even existed yet, or that there was any kind of actual celebration to be had.

I also remember my first Christmas as a convert. It was really lonely, and I made a lot of mistakes in how I dealt with my family during that time. I'm still trying to repair that damage many years later.

Loneliness isn't an easy experience, but it's a very real one many converts will go through. It can be challenging enough to fit in within a very diverse Muslim community that seems to have organized itself into cultural pockets, leaving you to wonder where exactly you "belong."

You neither feel you belong with your family as you once did, nor with the Muslim community. Come winter holiday time or Eid, you may find yourself feeling lost and homesick for the life you had before.

## Serving Others Eases Loneliness

At a moment like this, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Who else in the world is feeling lonely that I can help?
- 2) How can I bring more joy into the lives of others right now?

Loneliness can be eased if not removed by focusing your time and energy on those who are in greater need than you.

### Here are some thoughts to get your creative ideas flowing:

- Can you invite friends over for dinner where you cook all your favorite foods and dessert? Spend a week planning something elaborate and enjoy the process of doing so.
- Are there other converts who might be in the same boat as you? How can you organize an event at the masjid or at your home to get everyone together?
- Is there a local homeless shelter or women's shelter you could contact and find out what kind of donations they are in need of right now?



- Are there Facebook groups or online forums you can spend time in, being a source of support and encouragement for others for the tough times they are currently facing?
- Could you start a weekly meet-up at a local coffee shop for other converts who want to get together and share their experiences?

The goal is to be busy in the service of others. When we do this, we may no longer feel like we don't belong, and we also are filled with the happiness that giving brings.

After all, wasn't that the entire point of the holiday season to begin with?

Revive its true meaning in your life, and then you are also living Islam in actions that are pleasing to God.

"They ask you (O Muhammad) what they should spend in charity. Say: 'Whatever you spend with a good heart, give it to parents, relatives, orphans, the helpless, and travellers in need. Whatever good you do, God is aware of it.'" (2:215)

The Prophet Muhammad said: **"Every act of goodness is charity."**



# 4

The final issue I'd like to address is about the feelings you may have about your family not having accepted Islam yet.

The truth is, beneath all the beautiful memories and holiday traditions, you see your family shining with good intentions in what we believe is the wrong direction. Our beliefs about who God is, or who His Prophets were or were not separates us.

That separation keeps a small pain in your heart that is always alive out of your love for your family. You want them to know God as He truly is, and receive the gift of Islam for themselves.

Of course you want them to know God as He truly is, and to receive the gift of Islam for themselves. But until then, you may wrestle with feelings of despair, sadness, and fear.

At this moment, you need solace and guidance on how to handle your feelings, especially so they do not carry you into a place of harshness or spiritual arrogance, as I noted before.

God says in the Quran:  
“Indeed it is not such that you can guide whomever you love, but God guides whomever He wills; and He well knows the people upon guidance” (28:56).  
I have always found comfort in knowing that Prophet Muhammad understood how I have felt.

His own uncle, Abu Talib, who he loved dearly never embraced Islam. His uncle took care of him and protected him during the early rough days in Mecca when he first announced that he was a Prophet of God. When everyone else was turning their backs on him, our Prophet found love and support with Abu Talib.

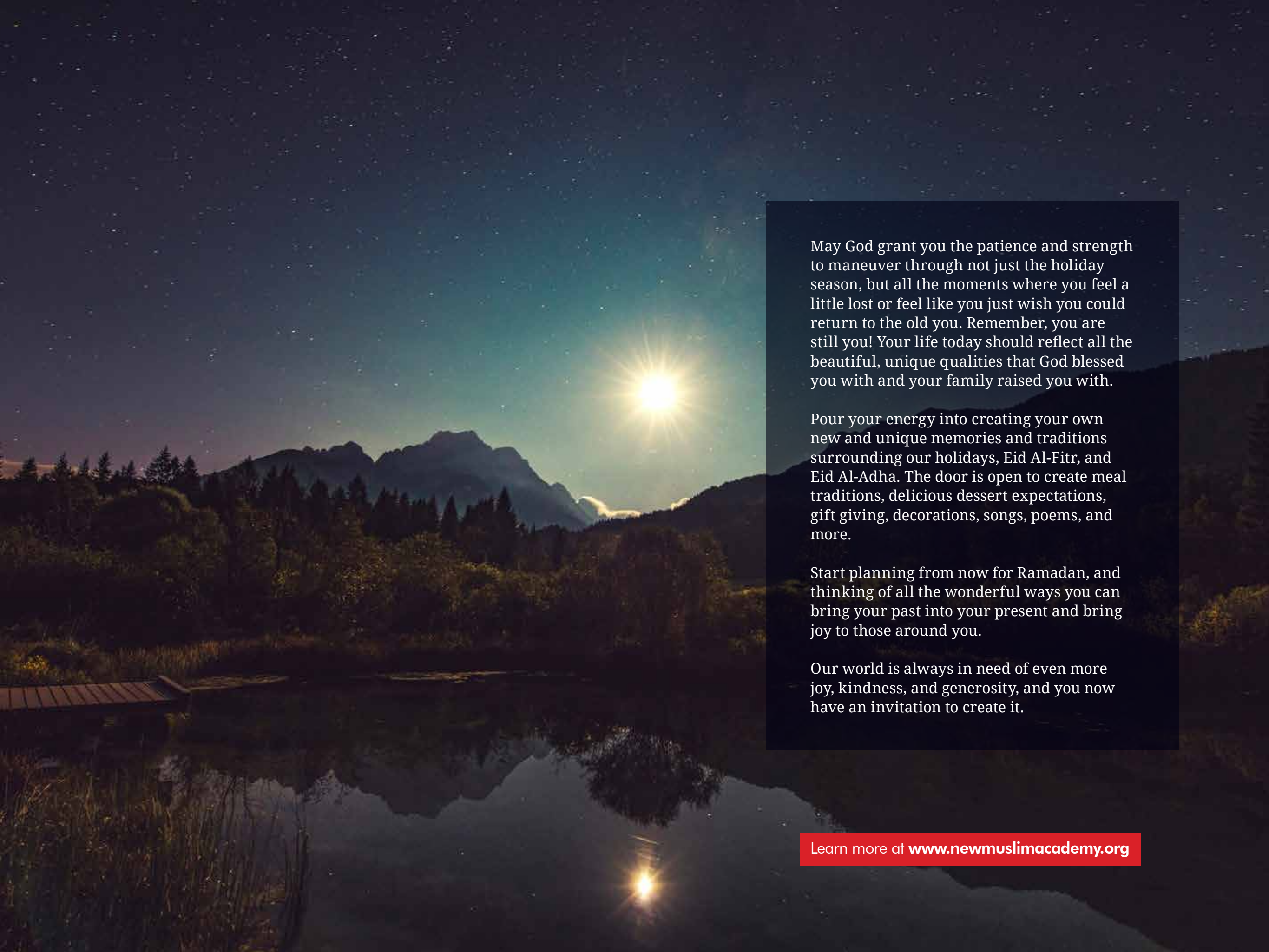
They remained close to each other, with prophet Muhammad standing next to him as his uncle was ill and lay dying. The prophet urged him to accept Islam, but his uncle resisted. I imagine this to have been an excruciating moment for prophet Muhammad.

But even then, we leave the final Judgment to our Lord, and we accept that He will always judge everyone not just fairly, but with infinite mercy.

Hold onto this thought, and leave it to the One who created and fashioned each of us with purpose. He knows what we affirm and negate in the depths of our hearts. He knows what we fear and desire that holds us back or propels us forward.

He knows everything.

Pray, do your personal best to live Islam, be good to your family, and trust Him fully.



May God grant you the patience and strength to maneuver through not just the holiday season, but all the moments where you feel a little lost or feel like you just wish you could return to the old you. Remember, you are still you! Your life today should reflect all the beautiful, unique qualities that God blessed you with and your family raised you with.

Pour your energy into creating your own new and unique memories and traditions surrounding our holidays, Eid Al-Fitr, and Eid Al-Adha. The door is open to create meal traditions, delicious dessert expectations, gift giving, decorations, songs, poems, and more.

Start planning from now for Ramadan, and thinking of all the wonderful ways you can bring your past into your present and bring joy to those around you.

Our world is always in need of even more joy, kindness, and generosity, and you now have an invitation to create it.

Learn more at [www.newmuslimacademy.org](http://www.newmuslimacademy.org)