

# The Challenges Encountered by Mualaf After Conversion to Islam: A Study on The Apostasy (Murtad) Cases in Malaysia

Nazihah Rusli and Firdaus Khairi Abdul Kadir

Centre for Fundamental and Continuing Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT),

Terengganu, Malaysia

Email: nazihahrusli95@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The rising of conversion mualaf to Islam proved that Islam has become a universal religion, and people started to recognize and accept the truth of Islam. Despite that, the phenomenon of mualaf returning to their former religion had concerned the authorities as reported by newspapers and social media. Even so, the issues related to mualaf have never ceased since it is a difficult matter to deal with it. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the reasons that caused mualaf to return to their former religion based on the apostasy cases that happened in Malaysia. This qualitative document analysis technique uses secondary data in attaining the information related to the study. The findings showed that mualaf indeed had confronted various challenges after converting to Islam, for instance, lack of faith ('*aqidah*) in Islam, insufficient knowledge about Islam, lack of religious commitment, failure in marriage and trouble from the birth family. On the other hand, this study will assist the preacher and *da'wah* institution to comprehend more about issues related to mualaf and suggest a more practical method of *da'wah* for them in a way the apostasy cases in Malaysia simultaneously could be put to an end.

**Keywords:** Mualaf, Apostasy (Murtad), Apostasy Case, Faith ('*aqidah*), *Da'wah*

## Introduction

### *Definition of Apostasy (Murtad)*

In Arabic, murtad comes from the word *riddah*. In terms of language, *riddah* means the return of something otherwise (Al-Razi, n.d., p.101). In Islamic (*syarak*) terms, murtad is defined as renounce Islam and return to disbelief (*kufur*) and detach themselves from Islam (Al-Husni, 2016, p.637). According to Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, murtad means a person who turned away from Islam, whether through act or word, or intention; they are in disbelief (*kufur*), rebellious and unfaithful towards Allah SWT (The Almighty).

In Islam, apostasy (murtad) is categorized as a crime and it is clearly stated in the Qur'an surah al-Baqarah, verse 217, which says,

*"...while whoever of you turns away from his faith and dies an infidel, such people are those whose deeds will go to waste in this world and the Hereafter, and they are people of the Fire. They shall be there forever"* (translated by Mufti Taqi Usmani).

Based on the rough translation above, Muslims must avoid apostasy at all costs. It is because apostasy falls in the most extreme category of sin that will not be forgiven by God (Allah SWT).

### **Mualaf and Current Issues**

In Malaysia, when there is an apostasy issue amongst Muslims, they go to the Shariah Court to apply the declaration of apostasy and each state will have different laws to deal with the issue. This is because the laws related to religion or *syariah* included apostasy (murtad) will be discussed at state government (Suariza et al., 2018). Despite that, the phenomenon of Muslims had applied to leave Islam especially mualaf apparently because of various factors that forced the authorities to deal with this issue regularly.

*Malaysiakini* (2011) notified that Mufti of Selangor, Datuk Tamyas Abdul Wahid stated many mualaf had applied to leave Islam after conversion. He mentioned some of them convert to Islam only to get married but then the failure of the marriage caused them to return to their former religion. He also pointed out the role of parents or society in guiding mualaf in order for them to commit to Islamic teachings. Besides, Suariza et al (2018) stated in their study based on the statistic given by the department of prime minister, Shariah Court had received 863 cases from the year 2000 until 2010 to change the religion and mostly the application comes from mualaf. They pointed out the problem that caused mualaf to commit apostasy is because of challenges and sacrifices faced by them are coming from their family or the surrounding community.

In the meantime, *da'wah* in a plural society is not easy since it involves physical, mental and emotional. Nowadays, there are numerous activities and programs in helping mualaf to motivate them with the aim they would stay committed with religious commitment. However, issues related to mualaf are still problematic and in need of efficient solutions. The fact proved by Noreha et al (2019) stressed in their study about the inconsistency of *da'wah* activities to mualaf. They stated the various programs conducted by different organizations indirectly leading mualaf in confusion to learn about Islam also, the unorganized management of mualaf still existed. In such a way, mualaf need continuous assistance and guidance to strengthen their understanding and belief in Islam. Casmini (2020), stated in her study, mualaf had to adapt to their new religion since they had to experience in shifting of their identity, values, and behaviour that affects their social life. So, they would face numerous difficulties along the journey of seeking their new religious identity after converting to Islam.

Furthermore, Fatimah et al (2018) mentioned in their study that new life after conversion demanded mualaf to abide by Islamic rules and regulations, a commitment to practice Islamic values and build strong faith in Islam. They need to face all problems and difficulties in their life with patience and persistence, either internal or external factors. Moreover, the challenge of understanding Islam as a religion had left mualaf with no choice but to seek nonstop

guidance from others until there is an ease in getting through their religious identity simultaneously have resilience in facing new hardships after being a Muslim.

Thus, this study emphasizes mualaf as a complex issue that has never ending-problems and is in dire need of a more practical approach to deliver *da'wah*. It is mainly related to the need for them to have strong and steady faith (*'aqidah*) in Islam. Researcher wants to seek the reasons that caused mualaf to return to their former religion and shortcoming the effort taken by the authorities in dealing with this issue. It will leave a significant impact on the implementation of *da'wah* in Malaysia especially involved with mualaf. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the reasons that caused mualaf to return to their former religion after converting to Islam based on the apostasy cases that happened in Malaysia.

### **Literature Review**

Mualaf is the most important asset in *da'wah Islamiyyah* because they are the person who is tamed their heart to receive a guide (*nur*) from Allah SWT to embrace Islam as their new religion. Nonetheless, the apostasy cases happened among them are not an exceptional situation since they had to experience shifting between different culture and way of life from their previous religion. The preparation to survive all of the difficulties in life after converting to Islam is essential in order to fulfil the religious commitment in case, they lost their faith in Islam.

Titian and Rudi (2015) stated in their study there are five dimensions in conceptual of religious commitment which are: knowledge, belief, practice, experience and consequence. They believe those five dimensions can identify the level of commitment of mualaf towards religious teaching. This is because without commitment towards their religion, it will be difficult for them to do well with their religious life. Therefore, to fulfil the expectation towards the religion, mualaf should learn a lot to master Islamic teaching. Consequently, mualaf would be put at ease and genuinely practicing the religious teaching and at the same time, they would stay to have faith in Islam.

Nevertheless, the apostasy cases that happened among mualaf in Malaysia could happened for various factors. The possibility of main concern for them is the challenges to adapt to new religious identity as they had to go through in clash of cultures and different lifestyles from their former religion. Sometimes, apostasy cases occur due to the lack of attention given to them, life challenges and poor management in dealing with the issue related to them (Nizam et al., 2013). In their study, they addressed apostasy cases happened as a result of hardships in life after conversion to Islam without described more the details on why mualaf choose to renounce Islam.

After an individual had liberated himself/herself from Islam and return to disbelief (*kufur*), they had to go through counselling and be given advice so that they would repent as much as they need. According to the study by Zaleha et al (2016) the duration of repent (*taubat*) has two opinions either three days and three nights or 20 days. If they had realized their mistake (sin), their *taubat* accepted through the process; pronounce the Shahadah again and admit their sin. Based on the statement above, it showed that faith (*'aqidah*) in Islam is the most vital for mualaf to survive with their new religious identity. In addition, Yunus et al (2017) quoted faith education as notably the most necessary aspect in teaching mualaf about Islam

as leaving them with weak faith would be one of the major reasons which lead them to go back to their previous religion. They claimed the level of guidance and knowledge about Islam has a significant correlation to trigger off symptoms of apostasy (murtad) among mualaf.

The fact supported by Kamal et al (2020) cited in their research *da'wah* Prophet Muhammad SAW has priority in which their main mission is teaching *'aqidah* since *'aqidah* is the basic matter in Islam. Even there are three important elements in Islam; *'aqidah*, *syariah* and *akhlak*, the most vital thing is *'aqidah* to develop *syariah* and *akhlak*. For this reason, mualaf tend to return to their former religion because of the weakness of *'aqidah* as a result of lack of guidance and challenges in practicing Islamic teaching leading to neglect of religious commitment.

On top of that, in one study, Buhar et al (2013) clearly stated some problems faced by mualaf after conversion, for example, lack of knowledge, realization, confirmation, or confused acceptance of the religion or the sociological complexities or the negative impact of surroundings. They explained mualaf experienced various conflicting feelings towards Islam on negative insights as adopting a new religion caused them to traumatic inner conflicts because of different traditions of old religious faith. In this way, they believe this issue should be resolved using the real *tauhidic* (monotheistic) message of al-Qur'anic and al-Sunnah, an approach in which the purpose is to go after the goodness, prevent harm, and decline the evil; *al-masolih al-dharuriyyah* in *Maqasid Syariah*. This is crucial to the point it is essential and cannot be avoided for the sake of humans' religion and life. In the Qur'an surah al-Hadid, verse 25, which says,

*"We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance so that people could uphold justice: We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind, so that God could mark out those who would help Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him. Truly God is Powerful, Almighty"* (translated by Abdul Haleem).

Also, surah al-Ma'idah, verse 8, which says,

*"O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is [fully] Aware of what you do"* (translated by Saheeh International).

Accordingly, the translation clearly described the importance to achieve a motive of objective of *syariah* that discusses such measures and principles in protecting the right of people without discrimination between skin colour, race or nation. Hence, it means the right of mualaf is no different from born-Muslim, which need to be shielded no matter what and that is why these problems faced by them have to be settle thoughtfully.

Consequently, even though there are many efforts taken by the researcher to discuss and conduct the study related to issues of mualaf and apostasy cases that happened among mualaf, it is still not enough given this issue is complicated and has numerous problems. It would be enough reason for the researcher to seek a more efficient and practical approach in dealing with this concern. In such a manner, the authorities should be working together to

propose a more practical and consistent method in approaching muallaf since they need continuous guidance to understand Islam and fulfilling religious commitment, as well as muallaf, can resist the urge to leave Islam.

### **Research Design**

This study is a qualitative design using the document analysis technique. Data collection for this approach was reviewed and analysed from secondary data such as information from the internet, articles, journals, newspapers, and so on. This study also analysed the cases of apostasy that happened in Malaysia and then will identify the main cause of why some muallaf choose to return to their former religion and commit apostasy. All findings of the study will be summarized and presented in the findings and discussion.

### **Results and Discussion**

Muallaf indeed had gone through various challenges and problems in their life after converting to Islam. They lack resistance in dealing with their hardships to survive with new religious life. The findings of this study based on the apostasy cases that happened in Malaysia showed many reasons that caused muallaf to return to their former religion. Some of them are:

#### **Lack of faith (*'aqidah*) in Islam**

One of the main reasons that caused muallaf to leave Islam. If this the most basic thing in Islam was neglected, it does no wonder muallaf felt lost and confused to get the hang of knowledge about Islam. After all, they need to adapt to their new religious life since their culture and way of life from their previous religion is much different. Then, they choose to renounce Islam after do not have enough faith in Islam; Allah SWT (The Almighty) is the Only that Muslims should believe as He is the one who plans everything but, they still choose to leave Islam cause of this weakness of faith (*'aqidah*).

#### **Insufficient Knowledge about Islam**

After converting to Islam, the first thing muallaf should do is to learn everything about Islam. Being a muallaf at least they need to master the basic matters in Islam such as fardhu ain, prayer (*solah*), *Rukun* Islam, *Rukun* Iman, and the way of purification (*hadas*). They would not choose to go back to their former religion if they acquire this knowledge (*'ilmu*).

#### **Lack of Religious Commitment**

As stated by Titian and Rudi (2015) above, there are five dimensions in conceptual of religious commitment which is: knowledge, belief, practice, experience, and consequence. If muallaf had adept these five dimensions there is no way they would commit apostasy since they had a chance to fulfil the expectation of the religion. However, based on some apostasy cases that happened among muallaf, they failed to obligate religious commitment and still practice their old religious' habit.

#### **Failure in Marriage**

Based on the report or news about apostasy cases among muallaf, a big percentage of it happened related to marriage. Many muallaf converts to Islam because they want to get married to Muslim but, some of them had gone through a few problems like got divorced, being left with no reason by their Muslim partner, and being broken of engagement. There are some cases where muallaf got married to a Muslim partner, but their partner does not

guide them with Islamic teaching and allowed mualaf to practice former religion's habit. In that way, it could trigger them to return to their former religion since they cannot see the truth and beauty of Islam as well as got lost and confused about religious teaching.

### Trouble from the birth family

There are cases of mualaf got abandoned from their family institution and boycotted by friends just because they embraced Islam. They received threats and harm as their family and friend cannot agree with them being Muslim. Moreover, there is also an apostasy case where mualaf was raised as a Hindu by grandma even though the parents converted. This is an example of dilemma and confusion experienced by mualaf which leads them to not have a chance in learning and practicing Islamic teaching. Then, they were forced to commit apostasy since that is the only option as they think based on their situation.

### Conclusion

Mualaf had experienced many difficulties in their life after converting to Islam, namely psychological or social factors. Issues like social changes, daily routines, cultural integration, familial relationship, and emotional changes raised problems since these concerns also contributed to the factors why apostasy happened. The study indeed showed several factors which are the reasons why mualaf chose to commit apostasy and return to their former religion after encountering the challenges in their life. They also did the act as they had difficulty surviving with their new religious identity. Ultimately, such problems had become their reasons to leave Islam. Accordingly, the authorities like *da'wah* institutions and the preachers should lend a hand and work together in seeking the correct answer to these issues. Then, the most realistic approach should be the one that included all the aspects of living such as *Maqasid Syariah* which has five principles, protection of religion (*al-din*), protection of life (*al-nafs*), protection of lineage/dignity (*al-nasab*), protection of intellect (*al-'aql*) and protection of property (*al-mal*). Thus, the objective of the Islamic law could be accomplished as it aims to pursue goodness and benefit people both in this world and in the Hereafter as well as Islam will be a reality in life when it is practiced genuinely.

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