

# I Dared to Call Him Father Study Guide

**Bilquis Sheikh 1919 - 1997**

## About the author

### Background

Begum Bilquis was born on 12 December 1919, in Rawalpindi, close to her small ancestral village of Wah in northern Punjab, Pakistan. Her father was Nawab Muzaffar Ali Khan, a Punjabi feudal landlord and autocrat and a cousin of the prominent Punjabi statesman and Premier Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan. She is also the mother of ambassador Khalid Amir Khan. Her family is one of the feudal elites of South Asia and have long held political power in the Punjab region. Sheikh was very wealthy, well-known, and highly respected throughout the country. Throughout the first 46 years of her life, Sheikh neither embraced nor rejected her Muslim faith, choosing to only believe in that which she could either see or explain.

She became active in political, diplomatic, and social work, following her marriage to General Khalid Masud Sheikh, who was a high-ranking government official, serving as the Interior Minister of Pakistan from 1962 to 1965.

She is known for her high-profile conversion from Islam to Christianity in 1966, following a series of visions and prophetic dreams. She told her life story in the book, *I Dared to Call Him Father*. Published in 1978, the book is a classic in Christian literature and evangelism. Her autobiography was one of the most popular Muslim-to-Christianity conversion books of the 20th century. It has been printed numerous times, in several different languages around the world.

## Story Summary

### Religious conversion

In 1966, following the death of her parents and dissolution of her marriage, Sheikh left her homes in London, Paris and Rawalpindi and returned to her family's ancestral land in Wah, located at the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. She lived on a large estate with many servants, yet became a virtual recluse, alone and disappointed over the abandonment by her husband. Discontented with her life, she began reading the Quran in depth, searching for hope and a higher purpose in her life. During her study, she began noticing that Jesus was mentioned in several places within the Muslim scriptures and thought that reading his teachings might be beneficial. Unfamiliar with the life of Jesus, she began researching further, turning to other sources that were referenced in the text. She asked her chauffeur, who was a Christian man, to bring her a Christian Bible, which he did.

Sheikh was intrigued by biblical passages that were alien to her Muslim faith and became drawn to research further. As she read the Bible alongside of the Quran, she began

questioning her beliefs. She felt a sense of peace when she read the Bible, but was puzzled that she did not experience these same feelings when reading the Islamic texts. In response to her questions, she approached the home of some local American missionaries, David and Synnøve Mitchell, where she learned of Christianity for the first time. That night, she began experiencing a series of dreams and visions about John the Baptist; and God as the Father, as Jesus the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. These dreams contradicted the teachings of Islam, where she was taught that the trinity was merely Christian heresy.

Sheikh adopted her grandson, Mahmud, when his divorced mother remarried, opting to leave him behind with Sheikh. When her grandson began experiencing pain in his ear, she took him to a Christian hospital near Taxila. A Catholic nun, who was the doctor, noticed that Sheikh had a Bible and asked why, when she was a Muslim. Sheikh replied that she was in search of God. At this point, Dr. Pia Santiago suggested that Sheikh should pray to God and ask Him to reveal Himself to her. She told Sheikh to talk to God, just as she would speak with her father. Sheikh had a very good and loving relationship with her father, so she prayed to God as if he was her father. She had never before thought of God as a "Father", but she found that this personal and intimate view of God began to transform her life. On 24 December 1966, in response to her prayer and search for God, Sheikh was converted to Christianity. Soon thereafter, she began attending a local gathering of Christians that met on a weekly basis. Christian baptism of a formerly Muslim individual was considered the defining moment in her culture, which signified a definitive break from Islam and identifies new Christians as traitors and infidels.

When news of her conversion came to light, she was confronted by her family. When she spoke with conviction and shared the news of her baptism, her family shunned her in response. She also began receiving threatening letters and telephone calls from unknown persons. She lost most of her Muslim family and friends. Those of her servants who had become Christians, fled her home in response to rumours that she would be killed by Muslim religious leaders in the area. She was considered a traitor and infidel, and many people were of the opinion that she ought to be killed for apostasy. At one point, her home was torched, but her remaining servants were able to put out the flames before the whole house caught fire.

Sheikh fled to the US for her safety, and that of her grandson. She began speaking about her conversion at churches in Pakistan. In 1968, Sheikh spoke at a Billy Graham Crusade in Singapore, where thousands were in attendance. In 1972, when an Army General of Pakistan began confronting her about her beliefs, she escaped to the United States, through the sponsorship of Robert Pierce and the Samaritan's Purse missionary organisation. She was also supported by Billy Graham and his son, Franklin, who became president of the organization in 1979, following Pierce's death in 1978. Sheikh remained in the US for almost 15 years, where she spoke in various venues, church services, public conferences, and Billy Graham Crusades with thousands of people in attendance.

Sheikh lived in the United States with her grandson and adopted son, 'Mahmud', until 1987. Following a severe heart attack and declining health, they both returned to Pakistan to live closer to her family. She died on 9 April 1997 at the age of 77 after a stroke paralysed the left side of her body. She is buried in a Christian graveyard in Murree, a hill station in the foothills of the Himalayas.

## **Chapter Summaries**

### **Chapter 1 Summary: A Frightening Presence**

"I Dared to Call Him Father," is the true story about a Muslim woman from Pakistan who converted to Christianity.

Bilquis's has an unsettling experience in her garden, where she perceives a chilling presence, causing her to question her beliefs about the supernatural. Her experience prompts her to explore traditional Muslim rituals to combat what she believes might be spiritual trouble affecting her grandson, Mahmud, who suddenly refuses to eat. Despite her initial dismissals of supernatural beliefs, circumstances lead Bilquis to engage with both her Muslim faith through the Koran, and the Christian faith.

### **Chapter 2 Summary: The Strange Book**

The chapter explores the tension between her Muslim upbringing and the emerging Christian faith within her life, particularly as it affects her grandson, Mahmud. Bilquis finds herself increasingly drawn to the Koran while concurrently feeling a hunger to understand Christianity, leading her to consider reading the Bible. Despite cultural expectations, Bilquis acknowledges her wish to explore the Christian faith further.

Struggles with Love and Forgiveness:

Bilquis grapples with her feelings towards her ex-husband, Khalid, and struggles with the Christian principle of forgiveness. Through a profound moment of realization and prayer, she begins her journey towards forgiving Khalid, experiencing a lifting of her emotional burdens.

The chapter illustrates Bilquis's transition toward a relationship with God. Her interactions with both the Koran and the Bible set the stage for the transformation that is forthcoming.

### **Chapter 3 Summary: The Dreams**

#### *Spiritual Sensitivity*

Bilquis demonstrates remarkable spiritual insight and compassion, as shown when she reassures a friend fearful of surgery, predicting a benign outcome, which indeed occurs.

#### *The Strange Experience*

As Bilquis tends to her garden one night, she experiences an unsettling encounter with an unseen presence, described as a cold and unholy mist. Alarmed, she rushes into her home.

Bilquis Sheikh describes her initial feelings of unease while walking in her garden one evening—something supernatural seems to disturb her. This unsettling experience becomes the catalyst for her deeper exploration of faith. Recognizing this as a spiritual attack, she discusses the mysterious and unholy presence felt in her garden, with her maids. One maid, who is Muslim, suggests calling a mullah for cleansing, Bilquis initially tries to put the experience out of her mind, but later contemplates the idea of spiritual influences affecting her grandson, Mahmud, who has become ill and is refusing to eat.

#### *Growing Curiosity for the Koran and Bible*

With continuing concerns for Mahmud and her past, she feels drawn to explore the Koran and the Bible simultaneously, seeking answers to her experiences. She recalls her childhood learning of the Koran and recognizes her growing emptiness and longing for spiritual fulfillment which she finds through the Bible.

#### *An Unexpected Dream*

Bilquis dreams of having dinner with Jesus and later finds herself intrigued by the figure of John the Baptist, leading her to query his significance. This dream fuels her desire to know more about the Christian faith while creating a rift with her longstanding Islamic beliefs.

#### *Meeting with the Mitchells*

Bilquis visits the Mitchells, Christian missionaries, to seek understanding and answers. During this encounter, Mrs. Mitchell shares her personal relationship with God, which resonates with Bilquis. The discussion intensifies Bilquis' spiritual quest, prompting her to ask for prayer for guidance.

### **Chapter 4 Summary: The Encounter**

#### *A Personal Encounter with God*

After a powerful moment of prayer, Bilquis experiences a profound shift in her spiritual life, leading her to view God as her Father—a concept she had never considered before.

#### *Navigating Confusion and Clarity*

Bilquis wrestles with her loyalty to the Muslim faith and the pull towards Christianity, reflecting on how both traditions have shaped her beliefs about life and God. She struggles with reconciling her feelings towards her past, particularly her relationship with her former husband, and is challenged by the concept of forgiveness.

#### *The Choice and Commitment*

Despite fears of repercussions for her beliefs, she continues to seek solace in her newfound understanding of God and the Bible. Ultimately, Bilquis finds herself at a pivotal point of commitment towards embracing her identity in Christ, while fostering an environment of love and understanding for her loved ones.

This chapter encapsulates Bilquis Sheikh's internal struggle, emotional turmoil, and her eventual awakening to a deeper, personal relationship with God, culminating in her realization of His fatherly love.

### **Chapter 5 Summary: The Crossroads**

#### *Crossroads of Faith and Exploration*

As she grapples with her identity and beliefs, Sheikh faces a significant spiritual crossroads. She wrestles with the implications of fully accepting Jesus and the possibly rejection by family.

Deeply affected by her dreams regarding Jesus and her studies of the Bible, she finds herself yearning to delve into the Koran while simultaneously feeling intrigued by Christian teachings. The contrasting views of God as portrayed in both scriptures lead her into emotional turmoil as she seeks answers about her future.

#### *Personal Encounter with God*

A pivotal moment occurs when she begins to pray to God as her Father, leading her to an overwhelming sense of His presence. This transformative experience marks a profound change in her heart and mind, guiding her to read the Bible and embrace the teachings of Christianity wholeheartedly.

#### *Reconciliation and Commitment*

Sheikh ultimately declares her commitment to Jesus after recognizing the significance of her experiences, including previous divine dreams and revelations. She finds peace in her decision to follow Christ, which signifies a new chapter in her life marked by spiritual growth and the welcoming of the Holy Spirit. The chapter concludes with her excitement about celebrating Christmas and her joyful proclamation of faith as she embraces her new identity as a Christian.

### **Chapter 6 Summary: Learning to Find His Presence**

Amidst her spiritual revelations, she struggles with the implications of her faith on her family relationships, particularly concerning her grandson Mahmud and her former husband, Khalid. In a moment of prayerful desperation, she acknowledges her resentment and the pain that Khalid caused her, ultimately submitting it to God and experiencing a transformative release of love and forgiveness.

### **Chapter 7 Summary The Baptism of Fire and Water**

Calling on her close Christian friends, Ken and Marie Old as well as the Mitchells, she grapples with the implications of her conversion, including potential backlash from her family and community in Pakistan.

Despite initial fear and uncertain repercussions, Bilquis experiences profound moments of divine guidance and reassurance. She recounts a series of encounters with God, dreams, and powerful visions that deepen her faith. These experiences prompt her determination to follow God's will without fear, culminating in her desire to be baptized publicly despite knowing the risks.

## **Chapter 8 Summary: Was There Protection?**

### *The Challenge of Baptism*

Sheikh feels the weight of potential social repercussions from her decision to be baptised, as baptism signifies a clear renunciation of her Islamic faith. Amid fears of isolation and being labelled a traitor, she chooses to follow Jesus and seeks to be baptized, initially with reservations. After prayerful consideration, she reconciles her feelings and proceeds to act on her faith, culminating in a personal and private baptism in her home.

### *Family Pressure and Isolation*

As her conversion becomes known among her family, Sheikh faces hostility and the reality of being ostracized. Family members and relatives express their concerns and fears regarding her faith, leading to emotional confrontations and feelings of loss.

### *The Growing Threat*

As societal tensions increase in Pakistan, Sheikh receives alarming reports of potential threats against her life for her faith. Despite these fears, she remains steadfast in her belief and commitment, seeking solace and guidance from God. Dreams and visions further guide her, indicating that she may need to flee for her safety.

### *Final Decision to Leave Pakistan*

In a dramatic turn of events, after consulting with her son Khalid, Bilquis decides to leave Pakistan for the United States, a decision that feels both liberating and heartbreaking.

## Questions

Answer the following questions in 200 words or more.

1. What evidence is there showing us that Sheikh was from the upper class and lived a more prosperous life than most. Use examples from the text and information from the Study Guide.
2. From the book “I Dared to Call Him Father”, make a character study on Sheikh. Give evidence from the text to support her character qualities such as kindness, compassion, determination and bravery.
3. Explain how Sheikh became interested in Christianity and the subsequent steps to finally becoming a Christian.
4. What inner struggles did she experience when trying to choose between Islam and Christianity?
5. Being such a high-profile figure in Pakistan meant that conversion put her life in danger. How did the act of Christian baptism put her life further in danger?
6. What sacrifices did Sheikh have to make in becoming a Christian?
7. What dangers confronted her once becoming a Christian?
8. Describe her Christian ministry after her conversion.

From the article below:

9. Describe the status and treatment of women in Pakistan today.
10. List the countries that have the worst treatment of women.

### The Disparity Between Islamic Ideals and the Treatment of Women in the Modern Muslim World

<https://revistaminerva.pt/the-disparity-between-islamic-ideals-and-the-treatment-of-women-in-the-modern-muslim-world-a-cultural-and-historical-analysis/> June 2026

Islam’s foundational texts—the Quran and the Hadith—present a view of women that emphasises their spiritual equality with men while delineating distinct social roles. Yet, in much of today’s Muslim world, women face systemic mistreatment—restricted education, enforced veiling, honour-based violence—that seems at odds with these early ideals.

#### *Contemporary Realities and Regional Variations*

The modern Muslim world presents a stark gender gap. The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report ranks Afghanistan (152nd), Yemen (149th), and Pakistan (142nd) among the lowest globally

for women's education, economic participation, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2023). \*

In Afghanistan, Taliban policies since 2021 bar girls from secondary school and mandate male chaperones, restrictions absent from the Quran or Hadith (UN Women, 2022). Yemen's civil war has worsened child marriage rates, with 32% of girls wed before 18, a practice tied to poverty and custom, not religion (UNICEF, 2023).

In Iran in 2022 Mahsa Amini was arrested and beaten to death for not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards. This sparked a series of protests from activists against the police.

Contrastingly, some Muslim-majority states, such as Tunisia and Turkey show flexibility. Morocco's 2004 Moudawana reforms, forbade forced marriage, increased women's rights to refuse their husband taking a second wife and placed divorce proceedings in a secular court rather than a religious one. The new law also protected women from abandonment and violence and children in custody from unsuitable accommodations. It granted inheritance to a man's daughter's children as well as his son's children, allowed children born out of wedlock to acknowledge paternity, and set the legal marriage age at 18 years for both boys and girls unless a judge allows otherwise.

\*There are 193 countries in the world (2026)