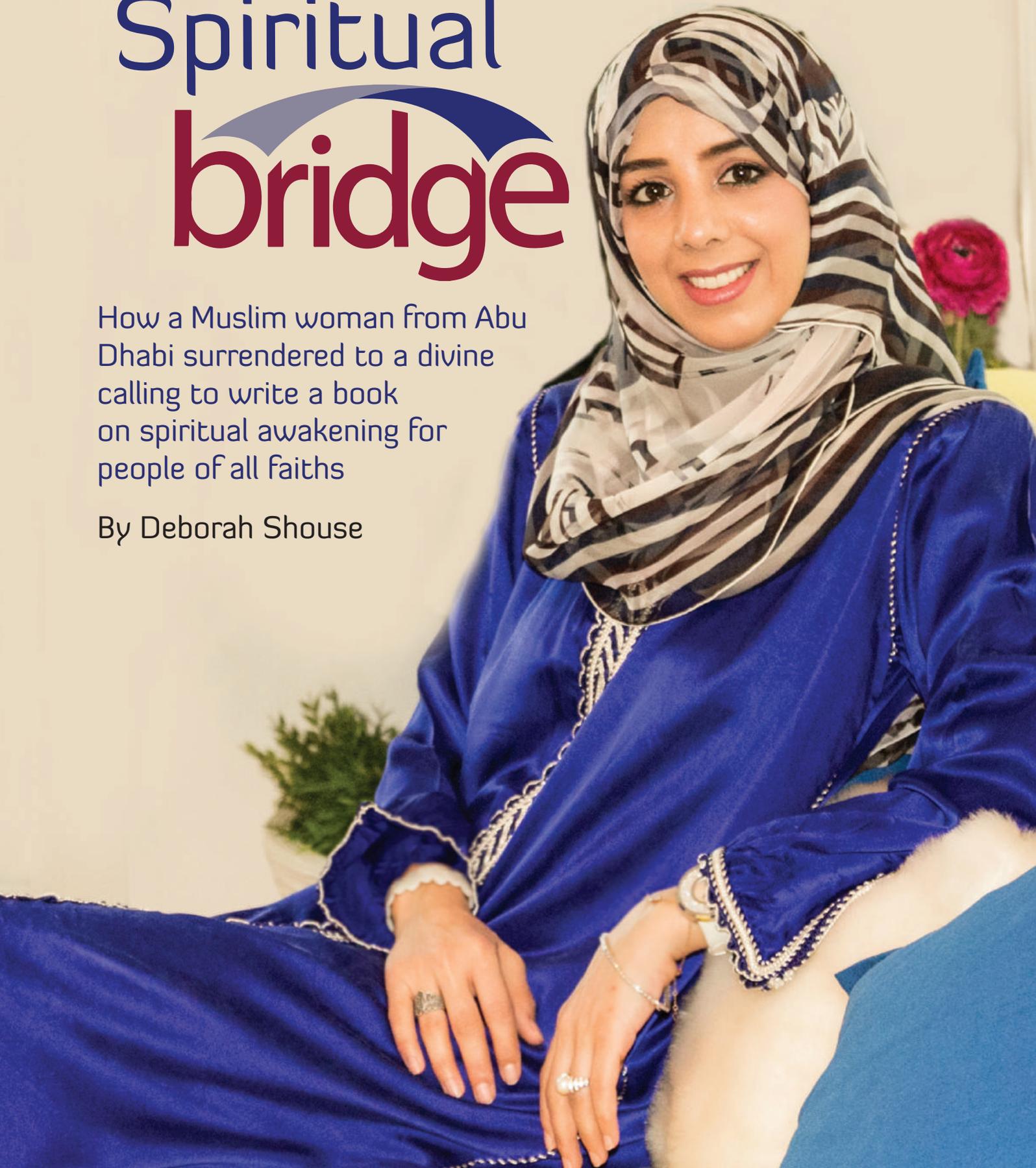


Building a Spiritual bridge

How a Muslim woman from Abu Dhabi surrendered to a divine calling to write a book on spiritual awakening for people of all faiths

By Deborah Shouse





EIMAN AL ZAABI tenderly held her sobbing infant son, rocking him, crooning songs, and trying to soothe him. It was 4 a.m., and he'd been crying for hours. Nothing she did seemed to help. The young mother felt frantic and helpless. "We need to take him to the hospital," she finally said, looking at her husband. Soon after, as Al Zaabi carried the wailing child toward the building, she gazed up at the dark sky and prayed, "God, please help me."

The moment she uttered those words, her son went into a deep sleep. Although Al Zaabi had been a practicing Muslim all her life, the moment was a spiritual turning point.

"In that instant, I had a different experience of God," she remembers of that winter night in 2000. "I felt God was looking over me; I had been heard by the Divine. I could go beyond the rituals. I could cultivate an intimate experience with God."

Growing up in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, Al Zaabi was the fifth sister in a conservative family of eight girls and two boys. Islam was woven through daily life. In the family's modest home, the eight daughters shared a room. They slept together, ate together, played together, studied together, and prayed together. They reminded each other to say their five daily prayers, and they listened to each other recite and memorize the Qur'an.

"Growing up, I felt religion was a duty rather than something I would enjoy doing," she says.

Al Zaabi was an adventurous girl with an entrepreneurial spirit. She created a haunted house in her neighborhood and charged kids the equivalent of a dime to enter. She roamed the backstreets, finding scraps of metal, wire, and recyclables to create toys. She was always exploring and learning. She was also intuitive. Early on, she learned to listen to the voice in her head.

"I didn't know it was my intuition," she says. "It was like an inner nudge."

Her insights often showed up in dreams, which are honored and revered in her culture. When she was a child, she dreamed about an earthquake, with people moving from one town to another.

The next morning, she heard the news: There had been an earthquake in the town she envisioned in her dream.

Al Zaabi excelled in high school and enjoyed college. She read voraciously, eager to learn. At age 19 she married, and at 20 she had the first of her four children. But with the birth of her son came the numbing lethargy of postpartum depression, followed by stabbing periods of wrenching anxiety.

“I felt like a zombie,” she says. “A heavy cloud hung around me and wouldn’t go away.”

A doctor prescribed medication, which she took reluctantly. She pressed forward, finishing college, working at various companies, while having and caring for her children. She struggled emotionally but didn’t truly understand the source of her issues. Life began to change when one day she was visiting a book fair and noticed a book about panic attacks. She read through it and realized she often battled those symptoms.

“Naming my condition was a big thing for me,” Al Zaabi says. She understood she was out of balance and began trying to nurture herself. She believed there must be more to her life than these confounding emotional and physical issues, so she continued to seek answers.

When a friend announced she wanted to attend an energy healing course and suggested they go together, Al Zaabi felt skeptical, but her inner voice said, *Yes*. During the multiweek course, she asked probing questions and her teacher did his best to answer them all. The real answers came when she started using her healing energies.

Late one night, her older son was struggling with an asthma attack. Her husband was ready to take him to the hospital, but Al Zaabi stopped him.

“I put my hand on my son, took a deep breath, and began to practice the energy work I’d been studying,” she says. “He soon stopped coughing and wheezing.”

Deepening Awareness

She realized the ideas worked and began integrating the energy healing principles into her life. While she faithfully practiced Islam, she also read self-help books, attended workshops, and studied various spiritual practices. For her,

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Islam stood on the solid foundation of truth, being the unchanging word of God. At the same time, her spiritual explorations expanded her views on how the universe worked and how she could grow and thrive in it.

“My journey was one of seeking confirmations from the holy book for the revelations I had as I was developing spiritually,” she says.

Within months of these studies, she was able to function without her medications. Her true spiritual journey had begun.

As part of her daily practice, Al Zaabi listened deeply to her inner voice, then acted on what she heard. Every evening, she journaled, asking questions such as, *What is my magical request for tomorrow? What would I like to happen?*

“I let the question sit in my heart and I allowed the pen to take over,” she says. “Through the pen, the voice of wisdom appeared. If needed, I asked a further clarifying question. If there was an issue I needed to look at, I did a meditation.”

She called this process “soul writing.” The following evening, she would review her journal, noticing what came to light. Taking these moments of reflection kept her aligned with herself and God.

“Self-awareness was a key part of my spiritual growth and development,” Al Zaabi notes. Whenever she felt discomfort or disconnection, she’d ask herself, *What am I feeling? Why have I attracted this issue into my life? What lesson do I need to learn?* Through this process and other practices, she learned to surrender to the Divine.

In 2011, while going through a time of exhaustion and physical upheaval, Al Zaabi had an elaborate dream about opening her heart and talking earnestly to a variety of diverse people about how their God was one. She didn’t understand the dream. Despite her growing sense of awakening, she was still searching for her life purpose. During one meditation, she saw an image of herself writing a book.

“No,” she said, promptly dismissing the idea.

In February of 2014, she held her pen as she prayed for a message from God. Seven times, her pen wrote, “Teach that God is only one.”

When she linked that message to her dream and her vision of a book, she realized writing a book was her purpose.

“I wanted to bridge different spiritual practices because I understood there is only one unified, universal truth,” she says.

Writing Bridges

Initially, her family didn’t approve of her doing energy work, talking about self-help, and saying she wanted to bridge spirituality with religion.

“You are going astray,” they told her. “You are out of your religion.” Al Zaabi felt isolated, accused, and deeply hurt.

“Show me the bridge,” she asked God. She then realized just deciding to write the book was the bridge.

For a few years she took online writing courses to study publishing and marketing, immersing herself in learning the craft and the field. In September of 2014, while listening to a YouTube video, she heard someone say, “If you don’t do it now, you’ll regret it.”

It is time, Al Zaabi thought. She created a vision board for the book and prepared as though she were birthing a baby. She explored the purpose of the project, including what it would bring to her and to the world. For four months, on weekends, she placed a “Do Not Disturb” sign on her bedroom door so she could write uninterrupted. For an additional eight months, she edited the manuscript, enjoying the process and feeling God was guiding her.

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Even so, doubt eventually crept into her mind. *I can’t publish this book*, she thought. *I don’t want to publish this. I’m not going to publish this.* One day, she prayed, “God, please show me the way.” At the end of the prayer, she reached for a brand-new thesaurus, one she had never used. As she opened it, her hand fell on the word *finish*.

She understood—she was to complete the book.

Al Zaabi titled the book *The Art of Surrender: A Practical Guide to Enlightened Happiness and Well-Being*. When she shared the finished product with her family, they were proud and pleased.



“I’ve drawn on my Muslim heritage and my study of a variety of traditions,” she says. “The book is about understanding your well-being, your self, your spiritual context, and learning about the spiritual awakening process.”

Al Zaabi sees religion as an enduring daily practice, much like breathing—a way to connect with God, the people around you, and your community. She sees spirituality as the place where practice meets presence, a place where we ask and receive, we witness grace and love, and we surrender to what comes into our lives.

“Surrender requires constant conversations (prayers) with the Divine,” she notes. “This helps us feel connected, healthy, and thriving.” As her book teaches, living with surrender as a natural way of being is far better than crashing into surrender at times of crisis. 🌍

Eiman Al Zaabi is a life coach, energy healer, and spiritual teacher living in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. She’s the author of *The Art of Surrender: A Practical Guide to Enlightened Happiness and Well-Being* (Balboa Press, 2015). Al Zaabi works in the Learning and Development department at New York University’s Abu Dhabi campus. She has a bachelor’s in business information technology and a master’s in business administration. Visit eimanalzaabi.com.