

# PIVOT

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# A SPIRITUAL PATH OF LOVE AND TRANSFORMATION



## KHADIJA ZAHRA

**Chris O'Byrne**

What was your childhood like, and how did it affect who you are today?

**Khadija Zahra**

One of the most influential people I was blessed with was my mother. However, it was the most profound gift when she entrusted me to my grandmother, whom

I affectionately call Ummi. The impressions formed from two months to seven years greatly influenced me. Ummi showered me with love despite our modest circumstances. We began with humble origins, yet our wealth lay in love—abundant affection, kindness, and good food. It didn't matter what we ate; we were happy and content.

**Chris O'Byrne**

Where did you grow up?

**Khadija Zahra**

I grew up in Morocco, in a small town called Kenitra.

**Chris O'Byrne**

How would you compare growing up in Morocco to the typical

person's experiences here in the US?

### **Khadija Zahra**

Quite distinct, markedly so. Morocco is in Northwest Africa, a region rich in culture. It's a predominantly Muslim country, with various denominations coexisting. However, the prevalent religion is Islam. The customs and traditions are drastically different from America. In America, you have a lot of freedom and accessibility to a diverse range of things. Life is undeniably easier, albeit in a different manner. Each country has its pros and cons.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

In addition to love, what else did you learn from your grandmother?

### **Khadija Zahra**

What I learned is patience. I learned the importance of faith in God and consistently doing the right thing. She was that reassuring voice in my head, especially when tempted to do something wrong. Growing up, she reminded me, "No, no, no, that's not good." She embodied ethics, prioritizing truth and justice and demonstrating unwavering faith in God, which transcended specific religious denominations or faiths during that phase of my life. She was profoundly spiritual, emphasizing

kindness to humanity and doing what was right with the belief that God would bless those actions. She frequently told me, "You're blessed." Her prayers for me resonated, and those moments of shared prayers, crafting homemade blankets together, and observing her were truly memorable. Despite the tribulations in her life, I'm grateful to have reciprocated the love she showered on me.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

What was the rest of your childhood like?

### **Khadija Zahra**

My mother was usually occupied with work, so I'd see her periodically. After that, she met a Marine, and they got married. He got permission from her biological parents, and a dowry and Islam conversion was part of the process. While mom was pregnant, they married on The Rock of Gibraltar and went to the United States and gave birth to my baby brother. After his birth, they returned to Morocco to pick up my brother and me and bring us to the United States. My brother, Ali, was eleven months younger than me, my Irish twin. That marked the beginning of our journey in the United States, ushering in a completely new life. Starting in beautiful Beaufort, South Carolina was undoubtedly a significant adjustment.



I was excited to be with my mother, especially since I had a new stepdad. The initial excitement of having a new family member, my brother Joe, added to the joy. However, adapting wasn't easy for me as I struggled with limited English proficiency, leading to enrollment in special development classes at school.

As time passed, our home life became increasingly chaotic due to frequent relocations. My stepdad being in the military meant that we moved across various states, including California (San Diego and San Francisco), Illinois, Maryland, and Virginia. The constant moving prevented me from establishing stable friendships or a permanent home, resulting in a challenging and transient lifestyle.



## Chris O'Byrne

I've noticed people who grow up in such circumstances often take divergent paths in adulthood. Some prefer variety and continue to embrace a nomadic lifestyle, moving around frequently. On the other hand, others deeply crave stability and opt to settle in one place for the rest of their lives. It's interesting to see how different life experiences shape these contrasting approaches to life.

## Khadija Zahra

Surprisingly, I've experienced both ends of the spectrum. Initially, I wanted stability, but after going through three divorces, my perspective shifted. Following those divorces, I found myself wanting to move around. I've lived in numerous places, including a stint in India, and each year brought a new location. It wasn't necessarily by choice but rather dictated by my circumstances; strangely enough, I didn't mind it. While others might express surprise or concern at my frequent relocations, I adopted a different perspective, embracing change.

I discovered that I love change and am highly adaptable. The extensive experience of moving around has made me feel capable of adjusting to any environment, situation, or group of people. Whether in a room with intellectuals or free-spirited

individuals, I'm at ease and able to connect with diverse personalities.

## Chris O'Byrne

Take me on a journey of those years from the lens of religion and spirituality. Were you taken to a specific church by your parents during high school? Did you adhere to a particular religious faith at that point, or did your beliefs encompass a blend of Islam and Christianity?

## Khadija Zahra

During my childhood, I experienced a mix of Islam and Christianity, as my mom occasionally took us to churches for support. Seeking assistance with finances or counseling from the church community was sporadic. The pivotal moments in my spiritual journey were the biannual visits from my grandmother, filling my cup with nurturing love. Despite my mother's unique journey, our home reflected a contemporary blend of practices. With my mom, there was inconsistency, while my grandmother brought discipline, emphasizing praying five times a day and using prayer beads. The focus was on fostering a personal relationship with the divine, transcending denominations or specific religions.

As I matured and entered marriage, my journey took me to a Greek Orthodox Church,

where I underwent baptism upon marrying my first husband. The grand ceremony unfolded in a spacious church with an engaged audience, and I distinctly remember reciting the Nicene Creed. Following my divorce, I met my second husband, a Catholic. While he wasn't actively practicing, my kids attended a Catholic school, prompting my involvement in the affiliated church. This transition included adjusting from crossing myself from right to left to adopting the left-to-right gesture in the Catholic tradition.

## Chris O'Byrne

What parts of those two have you kept with you?

## Khadija Zahra

I love the spirit of religion—the profound sense of love that



permeates a room filled with people earnestly praying for peace and harmony. Regardless of our diverse paths, we share a common aspiration: to draw closer to God, to offer prayers for our lives, and to envision a better world. This shared purpose across religions is wonderful. I find solace in the love inherent in every faith, acknowledging the genuine intentions that, while sometimes distorted, still carry goodness. Amid the complexities, I choose to focus on the positive aspects, embracing the uplifting feeling that resonates when we come together in prayer. This experience invites us to listen to our emotions.

The next phase in my life led me to the Sufi path, where I encountered my third husband, originally from Turkey. However, I had been on a transformative journey, distancing myself from the practices of Islam and my grandmother's way of praying due to the challenges of life. As I navigated my journey and life experiences, walking the Turkish path felt remarkably familiar. It resonated with my sense of purpose, and I felt this was where I belonged.

On this path, I found a profound sense of love and humility. Sharing meals on the floor with the women and engaging in collective prayer before and after eating marked a significant shift in my life. This transformative phase spanned seven years,

during which I gave up drinking and underwent various forms of detox and purification—both spiritually and physically. It became an educational pilgrimage, shaping my beliefs and practices.

During this period, I embraced a serious change in my appearance. I wore a hijab, a stark departure from the more Americanized style I had adopted while living in the United States. My shift to long skirts, covered shirts, and concealing attire surprised my children and family. I became conscious of not drawing too much attention in public, occasionally resorting to hats or wigs while at work.

This transformation extended beyond my outward appearance. Within our home, my lifestyle underwent a noticeable change. My children witnessed my commitment to praying five times a day and using prayer beads. It was a beautiful experience, fostering a deep connection with my imam and the entire Sufi community.

As with any journey, there were both positive and challenging aspects. I'm so grateful for this experience, acknowledging the lessons learned and the growth it brought into my life.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

What did you keep with you from the Sufi path through the years?

### **Khadija Zahra**

I learned so much—discipline, a profound connection with the divine (be it God or Allah), and cherished spiritual moments. It's deeply personal and almost brings tears of gratitude.

Post-divorce, I embraced growth. Unexpected, angelic individuals entered my life, guiding me in new directions. Not lost, I delved inward to heal the inner child. Meeting a guru inspired a trip to India—a departure from familiarity. Amid the unknown, I discovered my true self, free from external influences.

My life often involved caring for others—my siblings, mom, kids, and husband. There was a shift: I prioritized self-care. A six-month sojourn in India brought both challenges and unforgettable experiences. It facilitated



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reflection, introspection, and meditation, equipping me with coping tools for life's tribulations and mental health struggles.

### Chris O'Byrne

Is that the path you continue to follow currently?

### Khadija Zahra

I embrace the path of Hinduism, finding its beauty resonant. However, at my core, I am an Islamic woman; it's part of my identity, ingrained in my being. I feel it. I resist labels; I'm a spiritual human who loves Mother Earth, God, trees, and animals. My affection extends to people, even those with eccentricities. I believe in giving everyone the benefit of the doubt and recognizing that divine spark within each person. Everyone in my life serves as a teacher, revealing their beauty and offering insights into myself through their presence.

### Chris O'Byrne

Tell me about your book.

### Khadija Zahra

Many suggested I write a book, finding my life journey extraordinary. We all have our unique paths; I'm sure you have your own story to tell.

I've faced challenges and undergone self-reflection. As we

all do, I reached a point where I questioned my life choices. Having had three kids with my first husband, I repeated specific patterns. Instead of playing the victim, I decided to examine myself. What was I attracting, and why did I repeat these patterns? I embarked on deep self-analysis, asking tough questions and confronting uncomfortable truths. This introspection arose from experiencing difficulties that pushed me to a vulnerable state. I became determined to change and heal. I aimed to organize my scattered life experiences into a coherent book.

Creating a book wasn't easy, given the overwhelming experiences I had. Unsure of where to begin, I sought guidance from an old friend—an intellectual writer with a scholarly focus. I asked him how to write a book. He generously offered to assist every Sunday, teaching me how to articulate my story. Despite my challenging handwriting, I had journaled and taken notes throughout the years. Following his advice, I started recording my story, finding it more accessible than writing. In summary, this book journey began with the support of many, including my friend David, and has spanned seven years.

Engaging in the healing process while writing can be intense. Each chapter and triggering sentence brought emotions, leading

me to seek therapy four years ago. Grateful for a supportive therapist, I learned to nurture and love my inner child through visualization and affirmations, reclaiming my power. This journey to resilience took time, but the therapeutic process has been invaluable. Having healed myself, I'm ready to share my story with the world.

### Chris O'Byrne

The process of writing a book helps structure your thoughts and provides a broader perspective, offering valuable insights. What is the title of your book?

### Khadija Zahra

The title is *Khadija's Journey: What Love Is*. We are created with love. That's how God has made us, showering us with abundant blessings every day, every moment, every second. When you wake up and breathe, when you see the sky, you're surrounded by a continuous flow of blessings. I am that kind of person. In India, they call me Lakshmi because I perceive everything in abundance. The more grateful you are, the more at peace you become.

I share my journey, hoping readers find something valuable to aid their healing process. I'll share my perspective on how I pushed through and navigated my life, believing they can do the



same. Through perseverance, triumph, patience, love, and conviction, one can stand up for themselves and use their voice.

Having grown up in a very timid and submissive environment, which is part of the culture in many countries, including Africa and the Middle East, I carried these traits with me when I came to America. This submissive nature extended to my relationship with my mother and others. While I enjoyed being submissive and caring for my loved ones, I also experienced situations where people took advantage of me. I believe being appreciated is significant and can make a profound impact.

### Chris O'Byrne

What parting advice can you share?

### Khadija Zahra

Take time to love. Embrace self-love and accept that all is well. Life is an ongoing education and experience. Learn from each moment, but don't linger there. Keep pushing through. When you strive to do what is right with integrity and justice, God will guide you to the right people and the path you aspire to be on.

## Action Steps

1. **Embrace Change and Adaptability:** Khadija's life story shows a remarkable

ability to adapt to new environments and circumstances. In business, this translates to staying flexible and open to change. You can apply this by frequently reviewing and adjusting your business

strategies to respond to market changes. This might mean exploring new markets, adapting products or services, or even changing your business model if needed.



2. **Cultivate Patience and Persistence:** Khadija learned the importance of patience and consistency from her grandmother. These qualities are crucial in business. Practice patience when results aren't immediate and persist through challenges. This could involve staying the course with your marketing strategies even if they don't yield immediate results or continuing to improve your product or service despite initial setbacks.
3. **Prioritize Ethics and Integrity:** Khadija's grandmother's emphasis on ethics, truth, and justice can be a guiding principle in your business dealings. Make decisions that are not only profitable but also ethical and just. This means conducting your business in a transparent and honest manner, treating employees and customers fairly, and ensuring that your business practices contribute positively to society.



### About the Author

Khadija Zahra was born in Morocco and raised by her loving and spiritual grandmother. She immigrated to the United States at seven years old and experienced a life vastly different to that in Morocco. She journeyed from Morocco, around the US, to India, and back as she freed herself from the shackles of a traumatic childhood, religious dogma, and misogyny and learned to trust herself and her connection to the Divine. Khadija graduated from Edgar Cayce/Reilly school of Massage and integrates all modalities as an energy healer, light worker, and private chef. Khadija loves to create delicious healing foods that she imbues with love and gratitude. Now a grandmother herself, she loves to cuddle and play with her grandchildren and her Bichon Frise, Neo. Visit her at [khadiijasjourney.com](http://khadiijasjourney.com).