

## II. Reorientation

### **DANIEL MILO** Interview

**WELCOMED:** Tell us about your background. What kind of faith did you grow up with?

**Daniel Milo:** I was born in Albania to Albanian Greek Orthodox parents, and my family moved to Boston in 2001. On paper, we were Orthodox, but my experience of religion at home was unusual. We believed in God, but we did not attend church, either in Albania or after moving to the United States. My mother would often say, “God is with us. God is within us. God is in our hearts. So we do not need to go to church.”

At the same time, my family kept certain practices that I did not fully understand as a child. For example, we were very strict about not mixing dairy with meat, and also not mixing dairy with fish. It was never explained to me clearly as a religious rule, but it was treated with great seriousness. We also lit many candles, and older family members kept icons of saints. As a child, I accepted all of this, but I was also confused. Our household was clearly shaped by religious inheritance, yet much of that inheritance felt partial, private, or difficult to explain.

**WELCOMED:** Did you ever try going to church yourself?

**Daniel Milo:** I did, once, before the military. I was looking for direction and wanted to feel closer to God. But when I went to an Orthodox church, I left feeling that I still did not understand how to build a direct relationship with God for myself. I had gone hoping for clarity, and instead I felt more uncertain.

That experience intensified questions I was already carrying: what does it mean to know God, to serve others, and to live with religious purpose? Why did my family believe in God but avoid church? Why did we keep certain food rules so intensely? Those questions led me into a long search.

At some point, I learned more about Sephardi and Romaniote Jewish history in Greece and southern Albania. My mother’s family is from southern Albania, and I began to wonder whether some of the customs in my family reflected older practices carried forward quietly through time. I cannot prove every detail, but that possibility changed how I understood my own family’s history.

**WELCOMED:** What did that possibility open up for you spiritually?

**Daniel Milo:** It made my search feel much more personal. Before that, I was trying to understand God in a broad sense and to figure out where I belonged religiously. But once I began to wonder whether my family might have preserved older practices quietly over time, the search no longer felt abstract. It became a question about inheritance, memory, and what had been

carried forward in my own family without being fully explained. I still could not prove everything, and I wanted to be careful about that. But the possibility made me feel that my questions about God were also questions about who I was and where I came from

**WELCOMED:** Tell us about your military service and what it meant to you.

**Daniel Milo:** I am an Air Force veteran, and I served for six years as a munitions systems technician. My service gave me a deep sense of purpose, discipline, and responsibility. Much of who I am today was shaped by the military: the mission, the camaraderie, and the sense that your work mattered to something larger than yourself.

My first duty station was Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska. The work was demanding, and it required constant training and care, especially because we were working with explosives and other dangerous materials. But what stays with me most is not only the technical responsibility. It is also the community. The bonds formed in military life, the feeling of shared obligation, and the culture of service all shaped me profoundly.

**WELCOMED:** What happened when you left the military?

**Daniel Milo:** After my service, I attended community college for about two and a half years, studying cybersecurity, and eventually I came to Stanford. The transition out of active duty was difficult. I left the military just a few months before the pandemic, and I often felt disoriented, isolated, and unsure of where I fit. Military life had given me a strong sense of collective purpose, and civilian life felt much more fragmented.

During that period, I turned more seriously toward reflection, service, and faith. I also began thinking more clearly about how I wanted my work to matter. I became increasingly interested in building tools that could help others, especially in the area of mental health care. I want to build tools that help people dealing with PTSD, something I also live with. I have struggled with it since 2016. That experience changed how I think about care, urgency, and what technology should be for.

I am interested in how technology might support doctors and shorten the time it takes for someone to receive effective treatment. I have lost friends, and I know how urgent these questions are for many veterans. I want my work to be useful. AI and haptics especially interest me because I see real potential for them to support mental health treatment in ways that are practical and humane.

**WELCOMED:** How did Islam become part of your life?

**Daniel Milo:** In 2016, while I was on active duty in Alaska, I was in a very dark place. I was struggling with severe depression, and conventional support did not feel like it was helping.

During that time, something happened that I experienced as spiritually significant: my printer began printing instructions for Muslim prayer without me having sent anything to it.

The cybersecurity part of my mind immediately went into analysis mode. I checked the queue, the drivers, the Wi-Fi network, and the logs. I understand that there may be a secular explanation. But at that moment, I experienced it as a message directing me toward prayer.

That experience led me to reach out to someone I knew who was Muslim, and it opened a new path for me. Islam gave me a clear practice, a strong sense of discipline, and a living religious community. Muslim prayer gave me direction at a moment when I needed it, and I became a Muslim.

**WELCOMED:** What has Islam meant to you since then?

**Daniel Milo:** Islam has brought structure, meaning, and community into my life. The five pillars, especially prayer, fasting, and giving to others, gave me practices that grounded me. The Qur'an also spoke to me deeply, especially its emphasis on equality, patience, and the value of human life.

At Stanford, the Muslim community has been diverse, active, and welcoming. I have felt encouraged in my path of learning. At the same time, my search has not entirely ended. My study of Islam also led me back to the Torah, the Talmud, and the longer history of the Abrahamic traditions. I still feel that my path is unfolding, but faith has helped me far more than a purely secular framework ever did.

**WELCOMED:** What advice would you give to a Stanford student seeking God, or seeking a spiritual home?

**Daniel Milo:** First, I would tell them that the fact they are asking the question matters. In a world that can feel very materialistic, even beginning that search means you are reaching for something deeper.

Second, do not rush. If you come from a family tradition, spend time learning it more deeply. Read, ask questions, and stay close to what feels true in your heart. If your inherited tradition does not fully speak to you, it is also okay to learn from others. Talk to people. Learn how they live, what practices shape them, and what community means to them.

I do not think there is a simple formula for finding God. You keep searching, and when the time is right, God's presence becomes known to you. What matters is that you do not lose hope, and that along the way you keep doing good for others. For me, that is one of the clearest places to look for God.