

## A Typical Muslim? – Discussion Paper

Stereotypes don't help! Each person is unique and deserves to be treated for just who he or she is. Obviously no two Muslims are the same. Even so, over the years I have found certain character traits to be more common among Muslims than other people.

### 1. Proud to be a Muslim

"My religion is Islam and I am proud of it"; - a bus sticker in Nigeria proclaims and makes me think. Yes, in general Muslims are very proud people, perhaps because ...

... the Qur'an tells them "*You are the best of people*". (S. 3:110)

... they are often carefully protected, or even threatened against looking "over the fence".

- So, if you are not allowed to compare, you may just as well believe that nobody is stronger, smarter, safer than you.

... There are so many Muslims all over the world. Masses matter: "*So many of us just can't be wrong*". It's a common sentiment.

### 2. Religion matters for most Muslims

Muslims generally love to talk about religion. And they will hold a religious, "good", person in high regard. "*You are such a good person, you really should be a Muslim*", many a Christian has been told. In a Muslim's reflection this charitable person is working so hard to please Allah, thus earning divine favour and reward, that he appears like a good Muslim in the eyes of his Islamic friends.

Sad to say that his moral standards (eg in family life, adhering to truth, rejecting Western poison like Hollywood films) often may not live up to his professed ideals; the late Dr. S. Zwemer concludes: "*Islam is phariseism translated into Arabic.*"

### 3. A rather "bold" or outspoken person

You will rarely find a Muslim apologizing for having given a harsh or radical response. "Muhammad taught us to be meek, but not to turn the other cheek", an Islamic pamphlet tells in direct rejection of Christ's command to his disciples.

He might also react strongly to any provocation to his perceived religious convictions (eg cartoons about the Prophet), often in fanatic, at times even violent ways. Could this be an unconscious show of insecurity in his religious system where he needs to defend the honor of Allah? Why can't Allah defend himself, one wonders. – And yet, despite all their heavy weaponry there is no place for any assurance, just a submissive "*In-sha-Allah*" (If God wills...) whenever you touch the point of eternal destiny.

### 4. Muslims seem to have never been taught to forgive

Forgiveness is not a virtue treasured in Islam. It is rather seen as weakness. This is true in both the active and passive mode, extending forgiveness to others as well as asking forgiveness from the one hurt or injured.

Moreover, the traditional Arab virtue of revenge far exceeds the sphere of personal hurt, but demands recompense for the whole clan, tribe, or nation. One wonders: If a Muslim in Afghanistan is killed, why set churches in Kenya or Nigeria on fire.

Muslims also do their utmost to not forget, lest forgive, the injuries received during the past: the Crusades, colonial oppression or, more recently, perceived unfairness towards the Palestinian cause. Wounds are deliberately kept open.

### 5. Muslims have been conditioned to accept without questioning

Independent thinking is rarely encouraged in Muslim education and upbringing. Even genuine, good questions about the "Why" of religious practices are either blocked, or are strictly forbidden. "*Mum, why do we have to pray like this so often*" may be just settled by commanding the child "*Shut up and finish your prayers*" (G. Housney). In another case (in

Nigeria) hot pepper was rubbed into the eyes of that “nonsense-questioning-child” stopping this “bad habit” once and for all.

#### **6. Programmed to think and reason in a typical manner**

Many times one is taken aback by a Muslim’s seemingly illogical response. Well, is it simply not “Muslim logic” to have “B” follow “A”?! The real issue is not what follows the first preposition, but rather what let’s Islam appear in a more favourable light. Here is an example:  
*Q1: Did Allah cleanse Muhammad from all his sins? – YES! ... Q2: Did Muhammad ever sin? – NO!*

#### **7. First thinks of the external, physical application, not of a deeper, spiritual meaning**

You talk about the “Son of God”, he thinks about God having sex with a woman: Blasphemy!  
You talk about honouring “God’s Holy Book”, he interprets “washing hands before touching the Qur’an”.

You talk about “dedicating ones life to God”, he translates “entering the toilet with the left foot first, not using toilet paper or per chance facing Mecca while urinating”.

#### **8. Many are steeped in deep fear of evil spirits, curses and bad omens**

From an early age Muslims learn to fear the “evil eye” (=envious look), wear charms and talismans, consider all kinds of dreams and their interpretation (books in Islamic bookshops with detailed explanations abound), seek power and protection against evil forces troubling them, he might be involved in white or black magic. Muhammad was afraid of his enemies’ spells, and actually fell ill from it. And even the Qur’an itself reminds Muslims in their daily prayers to “seek refuge/protection” from all sorts of mischief (Sura 113 + 114).

#### **9. He has a low regard for the truth in his daily affairs**

First of all, there is no obligation to say the truth in religious matters. One may actually conceal ones true identity or intention in order to mislead others; this is known as *taqqiya*. And it is strengthened by the knowledge that even Allah is known in the Qur’an in several verses as “the best of schemers”. Unfortunately this can easily be transferred to other areas of life also where it is more convenient not to tell the truth, or at least withhold part of it to make things appear in a better light.

#### **10. Programmed to reject the fundamentals of the Christian faith**

“Giving the gospel to Muslims” just the way we are used to do with nominal Christians, or even people of other faiths, will usually draw a negative response. *“How can God have a son? Does he have a wife also? – Are you telling me that God is three gods? Never! – Your teaching that someone else paid for your sins (atonement) is too cheap. Each one must be punished for the mess he did or make up for it with good works. – How can you believe the Bible to be a Holy Book when it contains all kind of immoral and nonsense teaching.”* - Unless Christians are prepared for such objections they are in for a hard awakening.

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#### ***Please let me have your response:***

- 1. Which ones of these characteristics do You find most typical, not so typical? Can you further illustrate from your experience and interaction with Muslims?*
- 2. What other typical characteristics have you observed? Try to keep them as specific as possible?*
- 3. How would you use the gospel to meet these spiritual needs in a Muslim’s life? – Give specific Scriptures if possible.*
- 4. In what ways could an awareness of these obstacles help us in relating to our Muslim friends in an understanding and sympathetic man*

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