



Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim

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Introduction

The aim of this manual is to give important and practical knowledge on witnessing to Muslims. It will focus on practical advice on gaining the trust of Muslims. It will also look at the Islamic beliefs and objections that most hinder them from accepting the Gospel.

I'd first like to note that people are people. They have the same concerns, the same dreams, and the same struggles. Most Muslims (like most people) are more concerned about themselves and their families than they are about God. Therefore there is no reason for you to fear your Muslim neighbours; they are people just like you.

Secondly, there is a danger in writing a paper like this. I am making sweeping general statements to familiarise people with Muslims, but such statements are not always true. We are starting in ignorance with every person we meet. We might know about their cultural background; but we don't know about them. Spend much time asking them what they believe.

Finally, I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for the evangelist to the Muslims to humbly commit all his life and outreach to the Lord. In spite of the recent rise in Islamic fundamentalism, more Muslims are coming to faith in our Lord at this time in history than ever before. Please, believe that the Lord can save Muslims and use you toward that end.

Basic Muslim Beliefs

The Articles of Faith (Essential beliefs)

A. The Belief in the Oneness of God.

The deepest felt and most emotionally held belief for a Muslim, also the basis for their strongest objection to Christianity (they think we believe in three gods).

B. The belief in God's Angels

Every Muslim believes that he has two angels - one on each shoulder. One records his bad deeds, the other his good deeds.

C. The belief in the Books of God.

A Muslim must believe in the books of Moses (Taurat), David (Zabur) and Jesus (Injil) as well as the Koran.

D. The belief in God's prophets

Muslims believe there were 124,000 prophets of God, each sent to their own people. They believe in the Biblical prophets, especially Moses, Abraham, and Jesus. Mohammed is held to be the last prophet, superceding all the others.

E. The belief in life after death and the day of judgement.

Muslims believe in heaven, hell and a day of judgement, but their concept of these differs from the Christian view. Heaven for a Muslim is a place of sensual pleasures and at the time of judgement Allah is not bound by His promises.

The Pillars of Islam (Essential practices)

A. The Creed (Shahada)

"There is no God but God and Mohammed is God's messenger." A sincere repetition of the creed is all that is needed for conversion to Islam. A Muslim may encourage you to repeat the phrase. So, do not repeat this in front of a Muslim.

B. Prayer (Salat)

They are said by rote five times a day, are in Arabic and often based on memorized or read Koranic texts. Muslims consider this kind of prayer more important than spontaneous prayers, though they also use the latter.

C. Giving to the Poor (Zakat)

Given annually, it is more like a tax as it is a mandatory amount (2½ % of income).

D. Fasting (Sawm)

Especially during the month of Ramadan. Eating food, drinking water, smoking, and sexual relations are forbidden between sunrise and sunset during this month.

E. Pilgrimage (Haji)

Pilgrimage to Mecca once during one's lifetime if it is within one's means. The Muslim receives complete forgiveness if he completes the trip with a sincere heart.

Getting Started.....

Think of yourself as:

a) A learner:

Ask genuine questions about their culture and faith. Affirm them if you agree with them. Appeal to them on the basis of building understanding between Muslim and Christian. Muslims feel misunderstood in Western society and often quite justifiably. LISTEN!

b) A sharer:

Appeal to them as equals in the sense of two people going through this thing called life together. Don't focus on your differences!

c) A storyteller:

Quite often in a cross cultural situation there is a language and communication barrier. It is hard to listen to people struggling with your first language, isn't it? However, if you can tell a story that illustrates gospel truth you'll have the attention of your audience.

Points of Contact

In comparison to some of the world's religions Muslims and Christians have much in common. The belief in one God, the belief in the prophets, similar views on the last judgement and common practices such as fasting and praying. Obviously this is just on the surface, underneath Islam and Christianity have as much in common as day and night. At any rate these ideas can be used as open doors to initiate a spiritual conversation. For example:

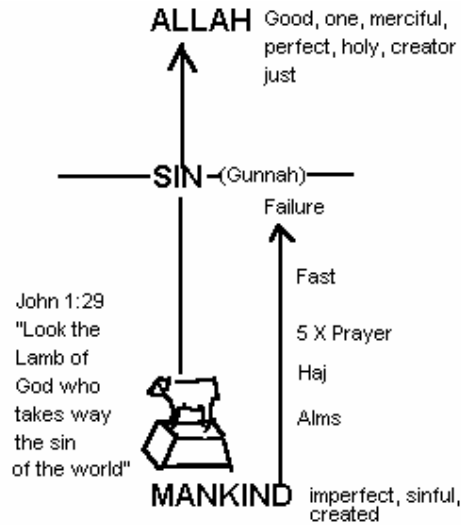
- "Do you believe in the prophets and their books? (*i.e. Abraham, David and Jonah?*) Have you read the books that God sent down through them?"
- "Isn't it true that all Muslims must believe in all of God's Books, including the Taurat, Zabur, Injil as well as the Koran (*that is the Torah (books of Moses), Psalms of David, and the Gospel of Jesus respectively?*)" All knowledgeable Muslims will say, "Yes" (2:136). "Then why do Muslims not read the Gospel of Jesus?"
- "What is the Islamic view on fasting? Do you know that Christians fast as well?" You can then go on to explain about true heart fasting through Isaiah 58 and Matt.6. This should open up a whole feast of conversations.
- "How does a Muslim find forgiveness on judgement day? You are not perfect; God's holy law is perfect. How can God lower his standards and forgive you without denying his perfect justice?"

Sharing your faith with a Muslim.

Even within Islam itself there is a picture or redemptive analogy to help us explain to the Muslim the wonder and power of the Cross of Christ.

There is a Muslim holy day called Eid al Adha or as it's more commonly known amongst British Muslims: Bakhra Eid or even more simply Big Eid. This is the chief pilgrimage time for Muslims going to Mecca. On this day in Mecca and all around the Muslim world Muslims sacrifice a ram to remember the day when God gave a ram for Abraham to sacrifice. This was a substitute for the sacrifice of his son, just like in the Genesis account. (N.B. That Muslims believe that the son on the altar was Ishmael and not Isaac. I believe it is best to avoid this controversy when using this illustration and just refer to Isaac as Abraham's son.)

You can use a "Bridge to Life" presentation for Muslims to explain how God has provided another lamb:



First draw Allah (God) and Mankind. Emphasise God's holiness and greatness. Man is cut off from God, because, unlike God, he is sinful and imperfect.

Man tries to reach God through good works, he prays five times a day, etc.. He gives money to the poor, etc. These paths to God run into a barrier: SIN (or 'gunnah' in Urdu). Draw in relevant sections. No matter how good we are we cannot erase the evil things we have done. God said to the prophet Adam if you eat of the fruit of this tree, you sin and you will die. He sinned and died. In the same way we have sinned and deserve punishment. What hope is there for us?

At this point it is good to recount the story of Abraham and his son from Genesis 22. Then quote from John 1:29 where the prophet John saw Jesus coming and said, "Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Draw in the ram. As the ram was a substitute for Abraham son, so Jesus was a substitute for us, taking all of our sins. As you say this, draw the line from the ram straight up through the wall of sin to God and in so doing form a cross. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Ask if they have a blood sacrifice for them.

This illustration brings home the substitutionary aspect of Christ's death. Granted it is limited, there is always more to explain, but it is a great place to start.

The Muslim's Way of Thinking.

Please remember that:

1. Very, very few Muslims are gun-wielding terrorists.

They are normal people. By and large they are more friendly than your average English person. They are not afraid of spiritual talk. You are likely to find it much easier to start a spiritual conversation with a Muslim than you would with a secularised Westerner. However, often Muslims are not as devout as they might like you to believe.

2. Islam is an anti-Christian religion.

It denies the deity of Christ. It denies his death and resurrection.(4:157) It denies the Trinity. It denies all of these Christian doctrines quite definitely in the Koran.

3. It is against Islam for a Muslim to make friends with a Christian.

4. Muslim training does not teach reasoning, or rational thinking.

It is not for the Muslim to question the Koran. He is simply to apply himself to rote memorisation. The sound of the spoken Koran is more important than understanding it.

5. The Muslim's God is distant, remote and dictatorial and hard.

This belief is reflected throughout Islamic culture. Authoritarianism in the home, in the job, and in the government is standard.

6. The issue of sin is less significant to the Muslim.

He has only made a mistake. His God has made him weak morally so what can one expect?. He has no idea of God's real anger and disappointment at rebellion and sin.

7. Many Muslims are not so individualistic as their Western counterparts.

To think independently about God and so to disgrace their family and lose their security within it would be virtually unthinkable.

8. Muslims do not distinguish between culture and religion and politics.

Therefore many Muslims believe that all English people are Christians. They see the way that many of them live and conclude that Christianity has failed in Britain.

9. Many Muslims are very suspicious of the West.

They blame all of their problems on the West and the Western colonialism of the last generation. You have done well in your witness if you have only been friendly. You've helped to break down some of these harmful stereotypes.

Other Cultural Considerations....

Do's (especially with non-Westernised Muslims)

1. Ask to speak to someone of the same sex during your visitation.
2. Always visit with someone of the same sex, except for married couples.
3. Try to use the right hand, (or even both hands), when giving literature or videos.
4. Learn and use a greeting in their language, e.g. for Pakistani Muslims: "A salaam alaykem".
5. Be friendly. Ask about family and background.
6. Relax. It is not as necessary to have a direct agenda (i.e. survey, invitations or tract distribution) with Muslims as it is with Western people.
7. Dress conservatively.
8. Suggest a revisit.
9. Pray all the time!

Don'ts

1. Do not look at a woman directly in the eyes if you are a man, or vice versa.
2. Do not attack, denigrate or insult Mohammed.
3. Do not emphasis what's wrong with Islam. Rather, talk about the wonder of the Gospel. If you want to show the weaknesses of Islam do so by gently questioning them to get them to see the consequences of their thinking. Do this respectfully and almost apologetically, e.g. "Forgive me if I'm wrong, but if you say God is all powerful and can do anything, why cannot He become a man?"
4. Do not get side-tracked on trivial debates, especially about politics.
5. Do not go inside a home if you are a woman unless there is another woman there. The same holds true for men. Women ask, "Is your wife (or a lady) at home?" Men ask, "Is your husband (or a man) home?" You need to show your good morals very clearly. Many Muslims will assume the worse about the morals of ALL Westerners. This type of advice is born out of the heartache of many women with bad experiences. Please heed it!

Avoiding Arguments

Invariably you'll meet an argumentative Muslim. I'd like to suggest some helpful hints and information to smooth your way. First, few Muslims are well trained in how to defend their faith. If you meet a Muslim who gives quite forceful responses to your questions, it probably means that he is unsure of his ground and he is positioning. He feels uncomfortable and wants to get you on the defensive. Focusing on an intellectual argument probably isn't your best approach. However, sometimes the situation warrants a direct and courageous response. What I am saying is simply this: DO NOT FEAR! The Lord is with you in your evangelising (Matt.28:20). A strong reasonable response shows the reality of Christ in your life. By nature I don't think of myself as very bold, but I've seen that the Lord can give courage in difficult situations. Let's pray for courage in such situations!

Muslim objections

"Your Bible is changed!"

If I had a 10P coin for every time I heard this!! Ask: How do you know? Where was it changed? When was it changed? Before Mohammed or after? If they say before, ask why the Koran doesn't say anything about the changes, but urges respect for 'the people of the Book'? If they say after Mohammed, there are fragments dated before and they are the same as today's manuscripts.

When?

The Muslim deals with the contradictions between the Bible and the Koran by claiming that the Bible has been changed and corrupted. For example, Surah 61:6 suggests that Mohammed is the fulfilment of John 14 and 16 and not the Holy Spirit. There is no textual evidence in the Bible to support the Islamic view of this passage. So, to back this interpretation, the Muslim claims that the Bible must have been changed by Christians and that the original mentioned Mohammed. But when was it changed? Even in the 7th century the Bible had been translated into 8 languages and there is no doubt that the church stretched from Ireland to China. Therefore Muslims must conclude that there was a great conspiracy and that all Christians got together to consistently alter their texts, defying all schismatic, linguistic and geographical barriers as well as moral objections.

The Koran says the Bible cannot be changed

The Koran itself says that the word of God (including the Bible), cannot be changed (Surah 6:34, 10:64 and many more). The Koran also say that it guards and protects the Gospel (Surah 5:48-52). Therefore for the Koran to be true so must the Bible be true!

What about all the versions of the Bible?

A Muslim will often argue that the Bible has many versions, but the Koran has been unchanged and is as received by Mohammed. If they press these textual issues about variations in the Bible, you can answer by admitting that there are minor variations in translations and versions, but none that affect the central doctrines of Christianity. Our central beliefs are as the early Christians. The preservation of the Gospel message and central doctrines of scripture have been proven beyond doubt. You can then go on to show that the Koran has variations. Yusef Ali himself admitted to a variant in his translation of the Koran (see his commentary note number 3674). Also Uthman, one of the early Muslim leaders, who during his reign had the early manuscripts brought together to make the 'definitive' Koran had all other texts and Korans burnt (Bukhari, vol. 6, p.479. note: Bukhari is an authoritative Islamic source). Why?

(N.B. If you question the Koran it is important to stress to the Muslim that you do this only to bring authority back to the Bible. Try not to get personal.)

"Jesus is not the Son of God. You believe in three Gods."

It is best to steer clear of this issue in the early stages. Of course, in a relationship with a Muslim you have to deal with this sooner or later. Here are some suggestions in how to deal with this issue in the short term.

What the Muslim thinks the Christian Believes.

"And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, 'Take me and my mother For two gods beside Allah?'" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, Thou wouldst indeed have known it." (Surah 5:116, An-Nabawiyah)

"Praise belongs to God, who has not taken to Himself a son and has not had a partner in His kingdom, nor had a patron against such abasement." (Surah 17:112)

From these two Koranic references you can draw two interesting premises:

- 1) Muslims believe that Christians believe in three gods.
- 2) Muslims believe that "son of God" has physical connotations. That is God the Father, God the

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Mother, (consort / partner), and God the son, Jesus, the product of their physical union. Therefore ask the Muslim what he believes Christians mean when they say "Son of God". If he expresses an understanding in the physical sense, then correct him in the strongest way. Such ideas are blasphemy to both the Muslim and the Christian.

Is Jesus God?

Ultimately the issue is: Is Jesus God? How can God be one in three? Best to correct the Muslim's misunderstanding about these ideas, reaffirm Christian belief in the oneness of God and move on. These are the Muslim's strongest felt objections against the faith. I believe many Muslims feel great horror in just thinking about the idea of Trinity. These are very emotional issues.

One reference I do suggest is Zech. 12:10 (NIV):

"And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him, as one grieves for a firstborn son."

The Lord God is pierced here. The change from first to third person strongly suggests the oneness of Jesus and God. The fact that God is pierced demands the incarnation.

The Bottom Line

In answering any objection or objector to the gospel (Muslim or not), there are no fool-proof arguments that will automatically convince the other of the truth. We need to study our Bible, be sure of what we believe and be able to give a reason for what we believe. There is no short cut to this, just time in study and reflection. However, God can use us even when our knowledge is limited and we must not wait until we have every answer. Often our testimony and life says far more than our words and arguments. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know and explain that you will think about the issue and try and find an answer.

Further Reading

Ishmael My Brother: Anne Cooper

Islam and Christian Witness: Martin Goldsmith

I Dared to Call Him Father: Bilquis Sheikh

Into the Light: Stephen Masood

Sari 'N' Chips: Ram Gidoomal (on Asians in UK, not specifically on Muslims)

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