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My Muslim Friend's Wedding

By Lynda Hausfeld

I don't know that I had ever seen a more exquisite garment. It didn't hurt that the bride wearing it exuded beauty even when she dressed casually; but in this attire, my lovely Muslim friend beamed like the moon. There she sat, poised beside her turban-topped prince, whose own regalia and calm confidence intensified my awareness that this event represented the culmination of an entire community's regard for values, tradition and dignity.

Culmination because it was the third and final formal event my family and I would attend on this last day of festivities. I recall that at this point I had lost count of how many gorgeous dresses the bride had worn since she had first been presented to guests. In three days I had seen more gorgeousness than I could remember, enjoyed festivities I hadn't dreamed of, and banked heaps of wonderful memories, which I recall even now.

All my family and I knew when we were first invited to

the wedding was that the first night of the celebrations we would attend was called the *Mehendi* or henna party. The groom's mother saw us arrive and eagerly made it a point to welcome us and give us some instruction. She motioned for us to sit on the floor with a mixed-age group of mostly women. The few men who were present mingled just outside the girl-group, so for my husband's sake our family huddled on a spot of carpet left between the gals and the guys, where we waited for what would happen next.

If you have been to a Muslim wedding, you know that everything that comes next is worth your anticipation. If you have not yet had the pleasure of "guesting" a Muslim wedding, my hope is that this brief narrative will make you want to. True friends posture themselves to be a part of one another's big life moments. Sharing a Muslim family's wedding experience can be a highlight of your friendship journey; it will help you to understand and appreciate one another's traditions and values. It will most certainly dignify

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Hausfeld
International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



Recently I had the joy of leading a large number of undergraduate students from a college in the Midwest to Friday prayers at a mosque that is always generous to host guests like us. I briefed the students before the visit, to help them know some necessary protocol and what they might expect from the experience.

We arrived at the mosque to find leaders waiting in the cold to greet us and give direction. As always, their welcome was warm and their hospitality stellar. They told us where we could sit to observe, and they proceeded with the



service. Following final prayers they gave opportunity for some Q & A. The students, grateful for the experience, asked polite, insightful questions. I'm sure that the mosque leaders were as impressed as I was.

During a class debrief away from the mosque setting, the group proctor expressed that he felt the mosque presenters had "sanitized" what they shared with us. He want-

ed me to talk about "what Islam is really like." When I asked what he meant, he responded with, "I know that women in [a specific Muslim country] wear veils to cover where their husbands have beat them."

Sadly, this is the sort of assumption many people make with regard to Muslims. It is dangerous because it is false, and because it fosters fear that hinders us from friendships with our Muslim neighbors.

Muslims are created in the image of God, just like Christians are. They esteem good marriages, and worlds of Muslims have them. I have known many more good marriages than bad ones in my relationships with Muslims, and I know from experience that marriages are a great meeting point for Muslim/Christian friendships.

The narrative you will read entitled "My Muslim Friend's Wedding" is meant to help you know what a Muslim wedding is like, to shed fresh light on practices that extol values we might hold in common with our Muslim friends

If you appreciate tradition and legacy, if you know the strength of community, and if you value dignity, you'll enjoy what you'll learn in the wedding story. You'll be assured that you have grounds for great Muslim friendships. These relationships will dispel assumptions that keep Muslims from experiencing Jesus even where He is present.

Lynda's article gives great insight into Muslim marriage. However, the greatest insight we can glean about Muslims and their marriages is through intentional friendships. Ladies, reach out and begin the conversation by saying hello to Muslim women. Men, engage Muslim men in friendship. Invite Muslim couples into your homes. Observe their marriages and allow them to see Christ in yours.

God will begin a work in you that will bless your Muslim neighbor. He will work through you to give Muslims what they have not ever received: the Good News of Jesus' salvific plan for their lives. 

Muslim World News



A deadly winter

Nigeria

The new year has begun in exceptionally violent fashion in north-eastern Nigeria, prompting Christian organizations to renew their pleas for better government security. Boko Haram, the militant group that wants to set up Islamic rule across Africa's most populous country, has waged several attacks on specifically Christian targets in 2014's early days:

Jan. 26, Waga Chakawa village, Adamawa state: Attackers stormed St. Paul's Catholic Church during mass, blocked the main door, detonated homemade bombs, and opened fire. Some victims had their throats slit. "My brother was slaughtered like [a] ram," Moses Yohanna told the *Associated Press*. "The intruders locked the church, fired guns at those trying to flee, and cut the throats of others," the Catholic bishop of Yola, Stephen Dami Mamza, told the *BBC*. "They set off bombs and for the next four hours, burned houses and took hostages." News reports differ on the precise number of people killed, but some report the death toll is as high as 53.

Jan. 31, Sabon Gari Yamdula village, Adamawa state: Militants broke into an evening prayer service at Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria, or the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, and started shooting. The pastor and 10 members of the congregation were killed. The attackers attempted to burn the village, but were driven away by armed residents, including youth.

Jan. 31, Manchok village, Kaduna state: A Christian family of seven was killed by attackers described to news media by witnesses as being Fulani herdsmen. The Fulani are a West African ethnic group, largely Muslim, that has a history of land grievances with Nigeria's indigenous Christians and others. In addition, Boko Haram is suspected in recent attacks that have killed Nigerians indiscriminately, including:

Jan. 26, Kawuri, Borno state: Gunmen armed with

military rifles and bombs raided the village. They fired on residents and burned hundreds of houses, leaving 85 people dead, then disappeared into the surrounding forest.

Jan. 31, Kuthra village, Borno state: A bus ran over a homemade bomb on the road near Kuthra, killing seven and injuring others.

In all, 367 people were killed at the hands of Boko Haram in 22 separate incidents during the first six weeks of 2014, according to the Christian Elders Forum of Northern States. — *World Watch Monitor*

Churches, NGOs wary of 'restrictive' law

Algeria

A number of churches, as well as foreign NGOs, in Algeria have called for the abolishment of a new law, which they say will hamper their work. Under the law, which came into effect Jan. 12, NGOs may be dissolved or suspended if their business is deemed to interfere with national affairs.

Amnesty International claims the law gives Algerian authorities permission to restrict the work of foreign NGOs, including human rights organizations. The law was passed in 2012 as part of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's political reforms, but it has been criticized by Amnesty International as "draconian." Amnesty International says the law "arbitrarily restricts the right to freedom of association and elevated it de facto to a criminal offense, in violation of state obligations prescribed by international human rights law."

The Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) is concerned by the new law. The law stipulates that an association must be present in at least 12 regions out of a total of 48 across the country, in order to be granted national status. Previously the EPA in Algeria was present in only five regions, so it has been obliged to obtain the affiliation of other churches located across seven additional regions in order to comply. — *World Watch Monitor*

fy your relationship in ways that are God-focused and mutually affirming.

Much like anywhere, Muslim wedding practices vary from region to region, country to country, and even household to household. Most Muslim weddings do, however, hold fast to some core components that are less negotiable. Every Muslim wedding starts with a proposal. You won't be invited to it, but you should know about it.

Traditionally, the Muslim marriage proposal happens between families. Parents are to be careful guardians of their family's honor and their children's well-being. Typically, a boy's family will approach the family of a girl whom they believe to be a good match for their son. If the girl's family agrees to consider the possibility, they will take some time to think about it among themselves. Most families will learn what they can about the boy's reputation and his ability to provide for their daughter before moving forward. If and when all parties agree that the match is a good one, the girl's family will accept the proposal. An engagement party usually follows.

I have a Muslim friend who is in her 20's. She is a university graduate — the self-proclaimed apple of her father's eye. "The majority of the Muslims in [my country] prefer that their life partner is chosen by their family," she says. "The reason is that we believe marriage is the union of two families rather than two people. Hence, we learn to love the person we get married to ... We believe that our parents know best."

In some contexts the bride and groom will not know each other at all before they meet at their own wedding. However, often in places that are impacted by urbanization and globalization, parents will allow the daughters and sons to meet before they marry. Many parents want to be sure that their children approve of the arrangement even before it is proposed; however, dating is not the norm. Some couples might be allowed to socialize in chaperoned settings before or/and after the match is finalized, prior to the wedding. Regardless, in arranged marriages the fiancés do most of their acquainting after they are married. One friend of mine jovially recalls that she did not even know what her husband's favorite color was before she became his wife.

Most Westerners have a little trouble appreciating the



practice of arranged marriages, but it is important to emphasize that the practice is not uniquely Muslim. Islam, like Christianity, was birthed in the East, where arranged marriage remains the practice for Easterners of many faiths. That is something to bear in mind particularly if your Muslim friend is an immigrant neighbor. Muslim marriages still incorporate ancient Eastern practice; they reflect the nature of Old and New Testamentary wedding narrative and allegory. Weddings become a point of contact where our Muslim friends and we share common heritage, which can inspire truth dialogues and redemptive relationship.

Let's move back to that spot on the carpet where my family waited for what came next. The *Mehendi* party commenced to the beat of a *tabla* (drum) being played by a couple of the girls present. Before long we became slightly awkward participants in a banter that went back and forth from the group of girls who belonged to the groom's family to the group of girls that belonged to the bride's family. We didn't understand the language they chanted in, but we clapped along to the rhythm of the acapella singing that volleyed between the girls' groups. At one point the bride's-side girls produced a man's shoe. The banter got louder and more hilarious. Finally some-

end's Wedding

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one kindly explained to us that the girls had stolen the groom's shoe, and the two groups were haggling over the price the groom would have to pay to get it back. Neither the groom nor the bride had arrived yet, but the game that continued for some time was lots of fun.

Finally, to the sudden accompaniment of music and more drums, the gallant groom arrived. We joined the tide of guests that made its way to the salon's entrance. To welcome him everyone stood in separate lines to either side of where he would walk. My family managed to stand in the groom's family line. We threw rose petals on him, and as I recall, he sat on a decorated sofa at the front of the hall. Soon to follow came the bride, with her separate entourage.

The bride was dressed in traditional yellow. She walked in slowly, beneath an ornamented veil which family members held in place. In spite of the music and our hearty throwing of rose petals as she passed by, her head hung low. She wore no makeup, and she made no effort to connect with her guests — not even with a glance. She ambled as if she carried sadness between her shoulders. The veil over her head led her to a secluded place where she would sit alone, while the party continued. She

remained isolated while we all enjoyed a feast of curry and sweets. Then she was moved to the front of the room, next to her fiancé.

Even next to her fiancé she remained reserved. Women spontaneously arose from the crowd and walked toward her, one or two at a time, to offer modest, quiet blessings. Before returning to their places on the floor they dabbed a little something into the palms of her hands. I learned it was henna, the same herbal mix that was used to create the intricate, trans-generational designs that already adorned the visible parts of her hands and feet. The artwork danced delicately from her fingertips beyond her wrists, before disappearing beneath the sleeve of her yellow tunic. Most of the women present wore similar henna designs, though not as elaborate. The henna component of the evening is more tradition than anything, but it tends to be the focus of bridal blessing.

I think I remember the most about this night, because of the mix of emotions I experienced. My friend's veiled, bowed, ochre presence fused bunglingly into the fun of the talkative *tabla*, the buoyant banter of girls' games, and the mischievous *masala* I had eaten for dinner. Then the life-invoking henna designs on the outsides of her hands that held tightly to the sentimental smears of the henna clenched into her fists brought it all together. This was my friend's transition day, because the day she marries is the day she departs from the home she knows to the home she'll adopt. It would be dishonorable to be frivolous on the day she leaves loving family. There is plenty to contemplate; therefore, in spite of her excitement, she grieves.

The second day of the wedding is the most important day, although not the most celebrative, usually. This is the one event from which any other celebration might be derived, and it is prescribed in the Quran. It is called the *nikah*, which is the day nuptial agreements are finalized and signed. The *nikah* is itself a contract the groom and bride decide upon, according to the conditions of their design. A vital component of the *nikah* is the *mahr*, which is essentially the gift the groom intends to give to the bride should he divorce her or should an unfortunate circumstance leave her without means for support. It is the bride's Quranic entitlement. Sometimes this gift is paid up front. Partial payment might also be made, but the couple can also agree that the groom can promise it.

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Muslims believe it is more meritorious for the *nikah* ceremony to take place at the mosque, where the cleric will also deliver a prescribed marriage sermon. Nevertheless, families regularly host the ceremony at a wedding hall or the bride or groom's home.

The bride and groom must not see each other before the *nikah* is signed. They remain in separate quarters: the bride with other female family members, and the groom with other male family members. The Muslim cleric goes first to the groom and reads the *nikah* statement to him and the male family members present. If the *nikah* is agreed upon, the groom repeats a verbal vow and signs the document. Then the cleric takes the *nikah* to the bride and her cohorts, where prior to signing it she listens to its reading and expresses agreement by pronouncing a verbal vow. At each signing of the *nikah* all those present recite the Muslim creed.

Guests do not generally witness this signing of the agreements, but they will celebrate with a meal that happens once the *nikah* formalities have taken place. It is always well-attended. This is considered the actual wedding day, so the finery flows. The bride and groom are both exquisitely outfitted. It's the night when the groom wears wardrobe provided by the bride's family, and the bride wears special gifts given to her by the groom's family. The vibrant colors and the meticulously ornamented fabrics contribute indispensable flair to the celebration's atmosphere. Formally attired guests take advantage of this special opportunity to greet and be photographed with the bride and groom, and to give them gifts.

The last day's celebration (following the consummation of the marriage) is called the *walima*. It is when the bride and groom host their first meal as a married couple. It is fancy, festive, and food abounds. Once again, celebrants enjoy community and have opportunity to usher the newlyweds into their new life together.

My own post-*walima* thoughts were first, relief for the family, who I knew needed a chance to enjoy the afterglow of their efforts and investments. A successful wedding means that community had been well-served. It means that tradition has maintained strong footing, and that important values are being passed forward. It is a rite from which families emerge tried, tested, tired, but true to what they hope will live on in the legacies they nurture and sustain. The marriages that emerge soon face the realities forced upon them by faith, culture and personal choices. In that way, they aren't much different from marriages anywhere. Fine weddings don't always yield great marriages, but weddings for what they are grant great opportunity for reflection and learning.

What's the take-away? First, our Muslim friends' weddings will in full color remind us that God uses humankind's best-yet-imperfect perceptions of marriage everywhere to compel us into the unfathomable fullness of relationship with Him, our Bridegroom Christ. Second, sharing our Muslim friends' life-events draws us closer to each other. God means for us to invest in our friendships what He, our Groom who loves perfectly, invests in us. It's life everlasting, as the Bride of Christ. Every encounter with a Muslim friend counts; let's be about making the most of each one, in Godly friendship, for the sake of this heavenly marriage message. 

Prayer Profile: Southern Uzbeks of Afghanistan



Uzbeks identify themselves as Hanafi Sunni Muslims. Numbering approximately 3 million, Southern Uzbeks are Afghanistan's fourth largest ethnic group, and nearly one-tenth of her total population. Prayer points:

1. Ask God to call forth prayer teams who will begin breaking down the strongholds.
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit will soften the hearts of the Southern Uzbeks towards Christians.
3. Ask God to grant wisdom and favor to missions agencies focusing on the Southern Uzbeks.



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Friday, May 2, 2014. Please pray

...for Muslims attending mosques today. Pray that the Lord would reveal His love to them in miraculous ways.
...for more than 75,000 Muslim students studying at U.S. universities and colleges.
...for Muslim women in Somalia. They are often subject to *sharia* law and have little opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ.

Friday, May 9, 2014. Please pray

...for God to protect and sustain Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Libya.
...that Muslims in Turkey will hear witness of Jesus Christ, despite hardline Islam always threatening the political balance.
...for approximately 10 million Ansari Muslims in India. Pray that Christians would reach out to the Ansari.

Friday, May 16, 2014. Please pray

...for Muslim children to have the opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ. More than a quarter of the world's 2 billion children live in Muslim countries. Children make up over 40 percent of the global Muslim population.
...for Christian pastors and church workers across the Muslim world. Pray that windows of opportunity would open allowing indigenous pastors to openly preach about the love of Jesus Christ.
...for Muslim women in Yemen. They are often subject to *sharia* law and have little opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ.

Friday, May 23, 2014. Please pray

...for Muslims in the Maldives. Despite hostility toward Christianity, pray that Muslims in the Maldives would come to know Jesus Christ.
...for Muslim students in European universities to receive witness of Jesus Christ.
...for Nigeria's Muslims to be free from the influence of Boko Haram militants. Boko Haram continues to cause chaos across Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation.

Friday, May 30, 2014. Please pray

...for MBBs in Eritrea. Pray for God's protection over these precious people.
...for Muslims in Russia. By itself, Moscow is home to 3 million Muslims, most without official registration.
...for Muslims in Turkmenistan, which is currently the most closed country in Central Asia.



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Friday, June 6, 2014. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Iran. Pray they might receive Christian witness and testimony through social media and Internet outlets. There are 65 million mobile phone users in Iran.

...for an end to clashes in Assam, India between Bodo tribesmen and immigrant Muslims. Approximately 400,000 people have already been displaced.

...for God to work a miracle in the lives of Thailand's 4 million Muslims.

Friday, June 13, 2014. Please pray

...for Christian witness to the Muslims of Ghana. Many cities in north Ghana are up to 95 percent Muslim.

...for Bangladesh. In the last 15 years, terrorists have detonated hundreds of bombs and killed thousands of people. Bangladesh has the fourth largest Muslim population in the world.

...for refugees across the globe. Approximately 80 percent of the world's refugees are Muslim.

Friday, June 20, 2014. Please pray

...for Somali's Muslims to be free from the yoke of the Al Shabaab Islamic militia. Al Shabaab continues to wreak havoc across Somalia.

...for Muslims living in the United States. Pray that through their conversions and testimonies, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be spread into the Islamic world.

...for expatriate Christian workers in Kuwait to gain opportunities to witness about Jesus. A large percentage of Kuwait's population is comprised of foreign workers.

Friday, June 27, 2014. Please pray

...for Muslims in North Africa. Pray that the gospel of Jesus Christ would sweep across this stretch of countries.

...for God's protection over the Church in Egypt.

...for Germany's 4 million Muslims. Germany has a larger Muslim population than Kuwait, Lebanon, or the UAE.

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P. O. Box 2730, Springfield, MO 65801-2730

1-866-816-0824 (toll free)

www.globalinitiativeinfo.com

www.jumaaprayers.org