

# INTERCEDE

VOL. XXXVI, NO.3

MAY/JUNE 2019



## Muslim Conversion: The Role of Honor and Shame

by Fred Farrokh

*[In terms of the “honor-shame” discussion, the sad reality is that in many Muslim contexts the best thing a person could ever do—embracing Christ as Savior—is seen by the Islamic community as the worst thing he or she could ever do.]*

Jesus stated, “I have *other sheep*, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16, NASB, emphasis added). Missions, at its essence, is working together with the Good Shepherd in seeking out these “other sheep.”

We preach the gospel and perhaps also act as the energetic sheepdog in gathering new sheep into the fold. As a reader of *Intercede*, your intercessory prayer life is playing a key role in bringing in the other sheep—former Muslim sheep—out of the darkness and into the care of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. As a Muslim-background Christian, I thank you for your prayers and

involvement in this ministry. Your prayers are bearing fruit. Indeed, we are seeing many sheep—some who have been gashed by the “wolves” of a Father-less and power-oriented religion—come into the fold of the Kingdom of God.

### How Are the “Other Sheep” Thinking?

Reaching “other sheep” often requires sharing Christ cross-culturally. As such, we must understand how the “other sheep,” the lost sheep, are thinking. For those who have lived or traveled in Muslim lands, or who have been enriched through friendships with Muslim immigrants, one will eventually observe that some of our new friends have different values and priorities, which impact thinking, behavior, decision-making, communication, relationships, and ultimately, one’s worldview. Therefore, we must work hard at understanding each of these cultural components.

In many Eastern cultures from which most Muslims come, the “honor-shame” value system is hardwired into the

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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 Brink**

International Director  
Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



As I reflect on what the Holy Spirit has done through the Ministry of Global Initiative, I am amazed. Our goal is to equip believers and churches to reach Muslims with the gospel. In the last year and a half, team members have had the privilege of ministering in Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, India, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania, Tanzania, Trinidad, Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh, Austria, Indonesia, Turkey, the Philippines, Hong Kong, El Salvador, Spain, and Egypt. In all these places, two common threads seem to surface, one negative and one positive!

First, there is fear, especially in areas where people are faced with radical Islam. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ have suffered persecution under Muslim governments and live under constant restrictions for practicing their faith in Christ. Islamic governments often do not even allow Christians to have a formal meeting place. In a context of distrust and isolation, establishing true fellowship within the body of Christ can be difficult. Those of us who live in places of religious freedom can only begin to imagine how these kinds of sufferings could produce inordinate fear in the hearts of Christians.

Second, despite the challenges—and the fear—the Holy Spirit is constantly changing hearts and perspectives. During

our training sessions we have seen the Holy Spirit instill in the attendees a strong desire to become effective witnesses for Jesus to Muslims. They have moved from fear to faith, from anger to unconditional love, and from indifference to compassion for spiritually blind Muslims. A student in India said, “Before this class I hated Muslims and I never prayed for them. But after this class I have a burden for Muslims and I pray for them. After college I want to go and minister to Muslim people.”

In one of the largest Muslim countries in the world, I met Pastor Hasan (not his real name). He told me how God has blessed his effort to reach out to Muslims with the gospel. In spite of the challenges, during the last 10 years he has personally baptized 55 Muslims who have accepted Christ. In another part of Pastor Hasan’s country, God is raising up a growing church comprised entirely of former Muslims.

Through your faithful partnership and prayers, the Global Initiative team is equipping believers and churches in some of the most difficult places on earth. We continually thank God for you and your generosity, and we regularly pray for you. Please believe with us that during the remaining months of 2019 thousands of Muslims will come to know the Truth about Jesus.





# Muslim World News

## **Tajikistan: Children Barred, Bible Calendars Burned**

Tajik authorities implementing a new religion law are barring children from attending religious services and have burned thousands of calendars with Bible verses. Amendments to Tajikistan's Religion Law came into force in January last year, giving the state greater control over religious education, and increasing the amount of information religious organizations must pass on to the state.

The State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) now demands "all kinds of information on the number of members, finances and activities," a member of a religious community told Oslo-based news agency *Forum 18* anonymously.

In the same month, 5,000 calendars with Bible verses, which were imported by the Baptist Church, were confiscated by custom officials and destroyed. The church also received a fine of about four months' average wage for "producing, distributing, importing, or exporting religious literature and items of a religious nature which have not passed through the compulsory prior state religious censorship."

A customs official told *Radio Free Europe* that inspection had shown the calendars had "elements of propaganda of an alien faith," *Forum 18* reported. Tajikistan is a Central Asian country with a percentage of Muslims, approximately 97%, but the former Soviet republic is determined to be secular and to keep Islam under control.—*Worldwatch Institute*

## **UK: 'Fatwa' Family Deportation?**

A Christian family who say they could be killed at the hands of Muslim scholars in Pakistan are pleading with the Home Office to reconsider their bid for sanctuary. Wilson

and Lorina Dallas have made a fresh attempt for asylum after their initial application was rejected, and two appeals were unsuccessful.

A religious ordinance issued by Islamic leaders in Pakistan called for their deaths after a row erupted at a wedding Lorina attended in late 2017. During the ceremony, the mother-of-two was asked why she would not convert to Islam. The pair were subsequently attacked and held at gunpoint, prompting them to seek refuge abroad.—*Premier*

## **Pakistan: Mother of Three Forced to Convert?**

A Pakistani Christian mother of three was abducted, tortured, and forced to convert to Islam by a Muslim man who then forced her to marry him, according to local news sources. Saima Iqbal, who was already married to a Christian man, described in a Facebook video how she was snatched from her home on February 25. Saima's husband, Naveed Iqbal, reported the matter, but police initially refused to investigate and sided with the kidnapper. Naveed said the police only acted after he threatened to set himself on fire. Saima was reunited with her husband and children after her kidnapper, Muhammad Khalid Sati, was arrested on March 5.

"I have challenged the forced conversion and the forced marriage of my wife in a magistrate's court," said Naveed, who is awaiting the court's judgment. Non-Muslim girls and women in Pakistan are very vulnerable to kidnap, forced conversion, and marriage to Muslims, and authorities rarely intervene. A report compiled by a Pakistani NGO in 2014 estimated that every year at least 700 Christian and 300 Hindu girls and young women in Pakistan suffer this kind of abuse.—*Barnabas Fund*

# Muslim Conversion: The P

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individual, the family, and the community. This is not necessarily a good thing, nor an evil thing, but it is a reality.

## Honor-Shame Versus Guilt-Innocence

In the “honor-shame” value system, individuals almost invariably make their decisions collectively. The goal (often unconscious or unstated) is to enhance the honor of the family, tribe, or nation. In this context, honor can be defined as the attempted accumulation of esteem, reputation, and social desirability. In Islam, this includes the Islamic community, known as the *umma*. Conversely, members of these cultures will try to avoid shame, or *losing face*, at all costs.

Western societies, especially in past generations, have prioritized a “guilt-innocence” value structure above “honor-shame.” In the guilt-innocence system, greater emphasis is placed on “playing by the rules.” “Innocent until proven guilty” is a hallmark of this value structure.

Neither honor-shame nor the guilt-innocence system is completely biblical or unbiblical. All the themes of “honor,” “shame,” “guilt,” and “innocence” can be found in the Bible. “Honor thy father and mother” is one of the Ten Commandments, for example. And *guilt offerings* were a key part of the Levitical sacrificial system.

Jesus, through His shed blood, provided the remedy to the guilt and the shame brought on the human race by Adam and Eve, who lost their innocence by sinning against God. Jesus has removed the guilt and shame we deserve, restoring us to a forgiven state and fellowship with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. How appreciative we can be for what the Good Shepherd has done!

## A Shameful and Gripping Paradox

In our ministry to the lost sheep of Muslim lands, a difficult and gripping paradox soon becomes apparent. **As stated at the outset of this article, in terms of the “honor-shame” discussion, the reality is that in many Muslim contexts, the best thing a person could ever do—embracing Christ as Savior—is seen by the Islamic community as the worst thing he or she could ever do.** Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, made this statement to the Muslim community in one of his most famous *hadith* sayings: “If someone discards his religion, kill him” (Sahih Bukhari 4:52:260). As historically understood by the Muslim community, this includes any Muslim who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Though apostates are often not killed, in nearly all cases they are considered a great shame to the family and community. Most Muslims will shun them. Few, if any, will be friends

with them, give them jobs, or marry them. The family will also be shamed for allowing this to happen. The community will wonder if Allah or someone else has cursed this family.

The *umma* sees honoring God by receiving the gift of salvation through His Son as a colossal shame and humiliation. The community equates this with rejecting Allah and the religion of Muhammad for what is seen to be a weak and inferior religion. What we, as Christians, see as “The Good News” of the gospel is often viewed by fallen Muslims as bad news for the shame it brings on those who embrace it. In his book, *Insanity of Obedience*, Nik Ripken provides the results of a 15-year research project in which he and his wife, Ruth, interviewed over 700 believers in over 70 high-persecution countries. Of the Muslim Background Believers in Christ (MBBs), Ripken writes, “83 percent of them had declared their faith in Jesus *only after* the death of their father” (p. 164, emphasis added). While readers not familiar with these contexts may find this incredible, those familiar with the honor-shame dynamic—in which the approval of one’s father is often the highest virtue—will not be surprised.

Such dynamics create a ministry context in which **fear is the backdrop upon which life is painted**. Many Muslims are afraid of being a shame in the eyes of their family. They are afraid of forfeiting family honor. Islam has declared that Muslims who embrace the biblical Jesus are non-Muslims and that they cannot even receive a respectable burial in a Muslim ceremony.

In recent years, there has been emphasis on “finishing well” in life. This concept is also hardwired into the Eastern honor-shame worldview. A perfect verbal illustration of end-of-life honor is given in Genesis as the patriarchs died. In dying, they were “gathered to their people.” Of Abraham it is written, “Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8). The context is an honorable life celebrated by an honorable death. Abraham’s son, Ishmael, died at the ripe old age of 137 and was likewise “gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:17).

Isaac, who with his brother, Ishmael, had buried Abraham, would later receive an honorable sending off from this life: “Isaac breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him” (Gen. 35:29). To be buried by one’s sons is a great honor. Though these sons had previously squabbled, the family was united at the patriarch’s death, thus preserving the honor of their esteemed father.

# Role of Honor and Shame

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Our word “eulogy,” the funeral reflection, literally means “the good word.” Eulogy is another form of honor. For shame-ridden MBBs, there is little hope of an honorable ending. The families of some MBBs hold a funeral for them while they are alive to show they “are dead” to the family and all relationship is, therefore, cut off. When MBBs die, they cannot be buried respectfully in a Muslim cemetery.

Thus, Muslim inquirers who are considering making the decision to confess Christ are faced with a huge decision at the beginning of their spiritual journey: Will they honor God above receiving the honor of family and friends? For those who have not faced it, this may seem like a cruel choice. However, a proper ordering in life must always come by fully cherishing Christ as Lord; anything less constitutes idolatry. “Islam,” which is similar to the word for “submission,” is a caricature and counterfeit since it removes Christ from His throne. Honoring Christ as Lord is the true submission.

## Honor and Honesty

As stated above, the “honor-shame” value system impacts priorities and creates a tension in values, especially between honor and honesty. In a simplistic illustration, let’s say Joe is a boy raised in an honor-shame value system. His father is unemployed. And he meets another boy, Justin.

*Justin: “Hi, I’m Justin. I noticed you’re new here in this school. What’s your name?”*

*Joe: “I’m Joe.”*

*Justin: “Did your dad get a new job in town?”*

*Joe: “Uh, er, yes, my dad is working as an engineer at a local engineering firm.”*

In this brief exchange, Joe desires to maintain family honor and minimize the shame of having an unemployed dad. As a result, Joe lied about his father’s unemployment status. In the honor-shame value system, this would be the lesser of two evils, especially if Joe felt it was unlikely Justin would later find out the truth about this situation. Joe may even hope Justin will say good things about him to other kids in the school—thus boosting his honor. Joe may have even felt he was keeping the Fifth Commandment of honoring his father and mother. Unfortunately, he certainly broke the Ninth Commandment against bearing false witness. In the end, Joe will not be trusted if it is found out that he lied.

Courts seek to establish guilt or innocence. Witnesses swear to testify honestly: “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” To bear false witness under oath is considered another crime, perjury. No one swears to uphold

the honor of the accused in a court of law. The judge and jury are interested in guilt and innocence, not honor and shame.

Indeed, God places an extremely high regard on honesty. Most importantly, honesty before God cannot be removed from “repentance,” which is central to salvation. Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Honesty forms the basis for “confession,” which means literally to “say the same thing as” God is saying. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Confession requires honesty; unfortunately, our forefather, Adam, taught us how to play hide-and-seek games with God.

## Winning Muslims to Christ: Trust and Honesty

Though Western society has historically valued a guilt-innocence worldview, with its accompanying emphasis on honesty, it is apparent that truthfulness and honesty are eroding quickly. In former times, a man’s handshake was “his word,” and was considered better than a contract. This reflects a positive side to the honor-shame dynamic—having a good name and reputation. The Bible states, “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth...” (Prov. 22:1).

Sadly, honesty is at an all-time low. Even Christians have been impacted by these trends. As Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” We are fallen people. It is neither a Western-Eastern issue, nor a Muslim-Christian issue. It is a human issue. Our human hearts are deceptive and sick. Without the Great Physician, we would have no hope. But for Him who said, I am “the Truth” (John 14:6), we would have no forgiveness of sins.

New converts require spiritual care and discipleship. Praying the sinner’s prayer is a beginning point, but this alone does not guarantee the transformation integral to discipleship. Muslims will rarely believe or confide in those whom they do not trust. Discipling MBBs also requires relationships built on trust. Church planting can only be as strong as the bonds of trust and love formed among the members. Strong bonds take time to develop. Nothing thwarts the work of God among Muslims and MBBs more than dishonesty, which can raise its ugly head when the wrong kind of honor sneaks in—self-promotion, face-saving, dishonest communication, or failure to take appropriate responsibility for one’s sins and shortcomings. Dishonesty creates its own shame, too, as well as a barrier with God. If unchecked at

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# Muslim Conversion: Honor and Shame

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a root level, the pain of shame can be debilitating, causing MBBs to turn back from the path of following Jesus.

While we must intentionally choose to honor Christ as Lord, we do not get to choose whether we are shamed or honored. For example, the Children of Israel, a family of shepherds, had to go down to Egypt. One of them, Joseph, would become honored as second in command to Pharaoh. On the other hand, his family, when they came, had to obfuscate their occupation, since, as Joseph said, “Every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians” (Gen. 46:34). Nevertheless, God sent them to Egypt where they might encounter shame because of their occupation. Similarly, MBBs may encounter shame and other challenges. The answers to these challenges lie in Jesus himself. No one understands the honor-shame dynamic greater than Jesus. We turn again to Him.

## **An Astounding Paradox: Despising the Shame**

In an astounding biblical paradox, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is also the sacrificial lamb. He voluntarily endured a humiliating and painful death. God could have come into the world any way He chose. He could have come the first time the way He will come the second time on the clouds of glory to judge the nations. Instead, in His advent, Jesus was born in a lowly manger under somewhat scandalous circumstances.

We might wonder, “What was Jesus’ view of shame and honor as He lived on this earth?” The author of Hebrews states that Jesus, “for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (12:2). Jesus simply wasn’t worried about being shamed. He had a job to do and He did it. We are exhorted to not to worry about shame and honor in this life, but to connect only to Jesus, the Savior who was shamed: “So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come” (Heb. 13:13-14).

Jesus provides both the example and the place of refuge for MBBs who encounter shame by their families and communities. The Good Shepherd has walked this way before us. Whether God humbles or exalts someone is His prerogative. In any case, it is better to be shamed in this life if that is what it takes for Jesus to be honored.

## **The Final Analysis: Hope Has Dawned for Muslims**

As a reader of *Intercede*, you are aware that many Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus Christ in our times. Some became disillusioned with Islamic militancy and, thus, were open to other alternatives. In other words, Islam has dishonored itself to such a great extent that it is not considered



such a shame to leave it! Many Muslims have received Bibles. Some have found Christian materials online. Others met Christian friends. Some have experienced dreams and visions of Jesus, or they have received a miraculous healing from Him. God has used all these things to draw Muslims to himself in our times!

The fact is that more and more Muslims are embracing Christ. Their families and friends are observing this process and seeing their loved ones have not gone crazy. Due to these new converts’ willingness to sacrifice their own honor and social desirability, they are lessening the shame of embracing Christ. More and more Muslims are starting to think and feel that embracing Jesus Christ might be a good idea!

Encouragingly, many MBBs are becoming active in ministry. They are following the example of Jesus’ disciples in the New Testament. After several rounds of interrogations, threats, and imprisonment, it was written of these apostles: “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:41-42). Amazingly, the apostles rejoiced as they were shamed! But it was all worth it for the name of Jesus and for the gospel to go forth. Please join us in praying for present-day MBBs who are following in their footsteps.



# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

**Friday, May 3, 2019. Please pray for**

*...Muslims around the world* who will begin the 30-day fasting month of Ramadan on May 6 and continue through June 4. Intercede for the truth about Jesus to break through the spiritual veil over their eyes.

*...new Christians from Muslim backgrounds in Algeria.* Many find it hard to network with Christian groups in order to become rooted in Christ. Of Algeria's population of 42 million, 95.4% are Muslim.

*...equipping classes* being taught by a Global Initiative team member at an Asia Pacific Seminary during May 6-10.

**Friday, May 10, 2019. Please pray for**

*...a newly-opened sewing center* in a predominately Muslim province in rural Pakistan. Muslim ladies are learning a trade to help feed their families—and attend Bible studies each day.

*...the spread of the gospel in Afghanistan* through radio and TV. Of Afghanistan's 36 million people, 99.8% are Muslim.

*...the country of Yemen.* Over 10,000 people have been killed and 3 million displaced from their homes during the last three years of civil war. Of Yemen's population of 28 million, 99% are Muslim.

**Friday, May 17, 2019. Please pray for**

*...equipping classes* being taught by a Global Initiative affiliate in the Philippines during March 20-24.

*...God's wisdom and protection for Fozia,* an influential Christian lady from a Muslim background in Libya. Fozia's family is pressuring her to marry a Muslim.

*...equipping classes* being taught by a Global Initiative team member in a Central European capital during March 21-30.

**Friday, May 24, 2019. Please pray for**

*...the few Christians among the Salar people in China.* The Salars are a Muslim minority group of 130,000.

*...equipping classes* being taught by a Global Initiative affiliate at an Asia Pacific Seminary during March 27-31.

*...Muhammad, a converted Fulani university student* in Niger, Africa. Pressed by fellow students to join them in Islamic prayer, Muhammad courageously stated, "No, I am now a follower of Jesus."

**Friday, May 31, 2019. Please pray for**

*...equipping classes* being taught by a Global Initiative team member at an Asia Pacific Seminary during June 3-7.

*...Muslims around the world* who will (as of June 4) complete their annual required 30-day Ramadan fast, and will then engage in the three-day "Breaking of the Fast Festival."

*...equipping classes* being taught by Global Initiative affiliates in El Salvador during June 6-8.

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and  
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



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Facebook. Please join today:  
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

## **Friday, June 7, 2019. Please pray for**

...*Ahmad and his wife, Mirza*, who are being held in northeast Iran for “proselytizing” their neighbors. They are not allowed to communicate with family members or permitted access to legal assistance.

...*nine Fulani Muslims* in a town in West Africa who have recently given their lives to the Lord. That makes a group of 20 or more believers who meet there regularly. They praise the Lord that the New Testament is in their language.

...*wisdom for Karim in Lebanon*, who has seen seven Shia Muslims come to faith in Jesus in the past year. Another 20 Shias are “interested in the good news of Jesus Christ.”

## **Friday, June 14, 2019. Please pray for**

...*the Christian population of Iraq*, which has dropped dramatically from 1.5 million in 2003 to less than 200,000 today. Pray that God will multiply this faithful remnant.

...*a small group of believers* in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. The mostly Muslim Rohingya have fled the country of Myanmar searching for safety and succor.

...*Hamza in Kyrgyzstan*, a convert from Islam who runs an organization which rehabilitates the homeless—teaching them skills to earn an income and sharing the love of Jesus Christ. Of Kyrgyzstan’s population of 6 million, 86% are Muslim.

## **Friday, June 21, 2019. Please pray for**

...*equipping classes* taught by Global Initiative team members in the Democratic Republic of Congo during June 24-29.

...*Luka, an Albanian pastor*: “Our congregation is more than 80% converts from Islam, and many are young people. They need good discipleship materials, especially since Muslims are attacking their new faith in Jesus and the Bible.”

...*Radio Dardasha7*, an Arabic media ministry that continues to expand and target millions through its programs, including a website, phone app, and a Facebook page.

## **Friday, June 28, 2019. Please pray for**

...*wisdom for Pastor Ali in Algeria*, who reports, “I have baptized many new believers, including four former very dedicated Muslims, all of whom met Jesus in their dreams.”

...*Brother Anwar, a Christian from a Muslim background*, who is teaching “How to Love and Reach Muslims with the Gospel” seminars in remote villages of Indonesia. Of Indonesia’s population of 265 million, 82% are Muslim.

...*a Romanian missionary training school* faithfully preparing and sending missionaries to the Muslim world.

*\*All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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Intercede is a bimonthly publication of Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples

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