

Getting Adjusted To the Muslim Community

Description: Practicing Islam entails one to participate in the community of faithful in communal worship. This lesson provides guidance to help in the process of adjusting and becoming part of the Muslim community.

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Objectives

- To understand seven important points related to adjusting, participating and becoming a part of the Muslim community, and some tips and pitfalls related to them.

Arabic Terms

- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Haram* - Forbidden or prohibited.

Part of practicing Islam is to participate in the community of faithful in communal worship. Like any faith community, it has certain characteristics, some good and some bad. The purpose of this lesson is to help you in the process of adjusting and becoming part of the Muslim community.

First and foremost, before you meet Muslims, you should keep in mind that Islam is perfect, while Muslims are not. They are, after all, humans. You will find some Muslims who will be easy to get along with and will make great friends, while you will also run into others who you might feel are insensitive or offensive. You do not have to be the best of friends with every Muslim you see, even if they be pious. Muslims differ in their education, knowledge and practice of Islam, cultural sensitivity, and social bias. Among them are saints and criminals, homeless and millionaires, doctors and cab drivers, racists and drug addicts. You will learn many things which Islam preaches, but you will see fellow Muslims doing the opposite. All Muslims are not the same. They are imperfect. It's a simple point worth keeping in mind. Choose as friends those Muslims who are pious, actively follow the tenets of the religion, and also are easy to get along with.

Second, most mosques and communities are socially and racially integrated, but there are others which may be found in locations where a certain ethnic group is a majority, whether it be African, Indian, Pakistani, Bengali, Bosnian, or Arabs. Others may have been

built to meet the needs of a certain ethnic community, or other reasons more cultural than religious. College and university mosques tend to be more integrated. Due to lack of interaction between various ethnic groups, you may find that certain stereotypes may have been developed between members of various races, such as whites, Arabs, blacks, Asians, or Latinos. Many of these stereotypical opinions have developed due to various reasons, amongst them TV, movies. Moreover, immigrant Muslims come from diverse cultures and may not totally understand or relate to Muslims of other countries, and for that matter, new Muslims.

Third, new Muslims may have some reasonable and some unreasonable expectations. Some rightly complain of social isolation, or a lack of quality educational programs for those who have newly embraced the religion. Some, with financial problems, expect immediate monetary help from the Muslim community, a demand usually difficult to meet. It is a good idea to find a family that will “adopt” the new Muslim and help them grow and develop social bonds. Try to involve yourself in various social activities, accept invitations, and invite others over. In social gatherings, be prepared to repeat your conversion or reversion story often! If you are asked an inappropriate question, just say you don't feel comfortable discussing it. Many Muslims don't have experience dealing with new Muslims, and thus may not be sensitive to certain issues or questions.

Fourth, many times you will be given advice on matters of Islamic belief and practice, whether that advice be Islamicly correct or incorrect.. You should realize that every Muslim is not an expert on Islamic Law or creed. Being an Arab does not automatically qualify a person to interpret the Quran. The majority of Muslims have not undergone any formal study and practice Islam according to what they were taught from youth by the elders of their family. Many Muslim practices over time have been influenced by culture, and many times they actually conflict with the true tenets of the religion. Some Muslims may unknowingly have been influenced by some sects regarded heretical, or much worse, some may actually attribute to them. You might become confused by the multiple opinions you may hear. With time and some knowledge, you will be able to distinguish between the two. You will make your life easier if you ignore, for the time being at least, the advice of a person who fails to provide any evidence. All beliefs and practices in Islam must be taken from the Quran or a confirmed *Sunnah* of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him. Also, try to get some well known websites and reputable people of knowledge as a reference. Reading, interaction, and prayer will help you learn, grow, and mature. In short, be cautious of those with good intentions but little knowledge.

Fifth, don't be discouraged by Muslims who are too aggressive in approaching you. Some people might attempt to teach you everything they know in an hour. Somehow they feel it's their duty to tell you what they feel is the most important '*haram*' (a prohibited deed) you must rid your life of. They lack wisdom, patience, and perhaps knowledge. Do not be deterred. Find a 'teacher' you are comfortable with.

Sixth, many new, single Muslim sisters may feel an intense pressure to get married. There is no doubt that marriage is an important part of Islamic life, but allow yourself some time to adjust in the new faith, and learn the proper etiquette of Islamic life and marriage.

Finding a compatible, practicing spouse is likely to help a new Muslim in learning and practicing Islam, but there is no need to rush into marriage and end up in divorce!

Seventh, a word about the Internet: It has some good sites, some sites that are useful to you, but many sites that damage you morally, financially and ideologically. You can find excellent resources for learning Islam online, but it is as easy to be misled by wrong information. The Internet has its fair share of pseudo-experts with a lot of spare time on their hands. Numerous email groups and chat rooms serve their audience with a mix of good and bad information. Many new Muslims are tempted into cyber dating to find a spouse. People report anger and frustration after having bad online experiences. The biggest problem for a new Muslim is to identify credible sites. The best word of advice about the Internet is to know who you are getting information from and to approach the Internet with caution.

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