

Running Head: MUSLIM FAMILY LIFE

A Day in the Life of a Muslim Family

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### Abstract

Admittedly, I knew very little about Muslim life. What did I possibly need to know? I, a Caucasian Christian woman who had no Muslim friends, or, prior to last fall, even knew anyone who was Muslim, didn't find it intriguing or necessary to explore the culture, religion, foods, traditions, or everyday activities of Muslim families. With the meeting of my new classmate, however, I started to become curious and interested in the Muslim culture. And then furthermore, with my enrollment in Cross-Cultural Counseling, I began to understand the necessity in knowing more about other cultures. With this desire and need, I spent time in the home of a Muslim family. The following describes my expectations, experiences, and education of this event.

## A Day in the Life of a Muslim Family

### *My Expectations of Muslim Family Life*

When I first planned to spend a day with my friend and her family in their home, I truly didn't know what to expect. Outside of her veil, I didn't view my friend much different than myself. In fact, we had a lot in common, and I tended to focus on our similarities more so than our differences. It wasn't until that morning when I began getting ready for my visit that I began to truly think about how this experience would enlighten me, really open my eyes to her culture, and force me to see the differences that, indeed, existed between us. I realized, for not knowing more about her culture and these differences, my head began to fill with curiosity, my heart with guilt and embarrassment, and my body with anxiety. While I did not expect these thoughts and feelings to be furthered by the way this family interacted with me, I did expect them to be advanced due to the mere fact that I had spent little or no time with people of the Muslim culture.

### *My Experiences of Muslim Family Life*

As I walked into the home of my friend's family, I immediately noticed the strong, yet delightful smell of food cooking on the stove. Seeing the mass amounts of food she was preparing made me feel even worse about not bringing something over to share. The week prior I had asked, but she was quite insistent on my bringing nothing. She was also insistent that I not help with any of the preparation; her desire to serve me in her home was very apparent. When lunch was prepared, she proceeded to place all the food on the middle of her living room floor on top of a round mat. This is where we gathered to eat. I asked if her husband would be joining us, and she merely chuckled. Our discussions during mealtime and throughout the rest of the afternoon were very

interesting and enjoyable. We talked about Muslim men and women, prayer and prayer rugs, the Qur'an, traditional and prohibited food products, and embracing Islam in everyday life. Furthermore, I got to see her interact with her children. Though in many ways a typical mom loving her children, their interactions also demonstrated incidental teachings based on the Muslim way of life. It was apparent my friend began instilling the basic principles of the culture into her children at a very young age.

### *My Education of Muslim Family Life*

Though the education I received from our discussions and interactions was just the beginning of what I hope to be a life long journey of multicultural learning, I left my friend's home with a better understanding and an increased awareness of the Muslim culture, along with a heightened desire to learn even more. I learned that it wasn't that she didn't trust my cooking, but the Qur'an makes it clear that certain foods are prohibited. Furthermore, her preparing an abundance of food was a common way for Muslim women to show service and goodness to others. I learned that her chuckling was not a matter of her feeling relieved to be away from her husband, but a way to let me know, in the Muslim culture, men and women do not mix; she intentionally planned my visit around a time when he would not be there. I learned more about the women's veil and its purpose, which is not to control or disrespect woman, but respect, protect, and care for them. I learned about the Qur'an, the Holy book and main source of every Muslim's faith and practice. I learned about why Muslims pray, how they pray, where they pray, and what they pray about. And, most importantly, I learned about the typical daily life of one Muslim family, a life that envelopes the religion of the culture and constantly has it uppermost in their minds.

*Analysis of my Experience*

Experiencing a small portion of life in the home of a Muslim family, and furthermore, reflecting on that experience, really allows me to see where I am in my own cultural development. Mentioning that I tended to focus on my similarities between my friend and I made me consider the stage at which I am in the white racial identity model. A person in the pseudoindependence status may often choose to befriend minority individuals based upon how similar they are to him or her. Because, before, now, I had befriended her, but had not attempted to further explore her culture in a more experiential and affective way, I would consider myself being in the pseudoindependence stage. My hope is that this experience will help me shift to stages beyond this and truly begin to increase my knowledge and awareness of my own White culture and the racial, ethnic, and cultural differences surrounding me.

Recognizing and discussing my thoughts and feelings about my visit allowed me, on an extremely small scale, to put myself in the shoes of members of minority cultures as they encounter the White dominant culture. I felt different, uncertain, worried, confused, and embarrassed going in to the home of a Muslim family as a Caucasian Christian woman. I didn't know what to expect, how to behave, what to say, or how they would view my unknowingness about their culture. I found myself wondering, "Is this how she, or any other person of a different culture, would feel coming into my home?" It is true that becoming culturally aware and competent comes through lived experience and reality. Sadly enough, it is also true that I have not had enough experience to feel completely confident in encountering other cultures, while people of other cultures have thoroughly experienced mine. I do, however, more than ever before, desire to gain this

experience. I am fortunate to have a “cultural guide” in my friend who is willing to help me understand a way of life that is very different from mine. I appreciate that, and I will certainly embrace it as I continue my cultural journey through not only the Muslim culture, but all other groups of people who are racially, ethnically, and culturally different from me.