

“Learn Islam From Its Source”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Suddenly our country is full of all kinds of Interfaith Outreach Events, carefully staged by Muslims for unwary Infidels. There is Ask-A-Muslim!, there is Meet-Your-Muslim-Neighbors, there are Coffee, Cake, and Qur'an meetings. Whatever the name, they amount to essentially the same thing: a deeply sincere offer of friendship to any non-Muslims willing to take them up on the offer, and a just as sincere offer of candor on the subject of Islam, which the Muslims running these events are prepared to discuss from top to bottom, for those non-Muslims who want to understand what all the fuss and, alas, suspicion is all about. Usually these events come with a meal, provided by Muslim hosts for non-Muslim guests, designed to leave a feeling of contentment, physical as well as mental, from the evening, when Muslims open up fully – no holds barred – about Islam, and after their exposition, welcome any and all questions. These events can take place at a mosque, or at an Islamic Center, or sometimes even at the private home of a Muslim who has done well, living

the American dream and therefore, it might be presumed from his financial success, fully integrated into American life. Never mind that Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri were both from the top socioeconomic strata of their respective societies, but did not feel at home in either Egypt or Saudi Arabia, respectively. Nor should we forget that among the first would-be terrorists arrested in this country was "Mike" Hawash, who as an Intel engineer earned \$360,000 a year, had married an American with whom he had several children, and appeared to be completely assimilated.

The first movement of the evening is the Meet-and-Greet. You are introduced by the presiding Muslim dignitary (it could be an imam, or a doctor, or a professor) to all those "Muslim neighbors" with whom you will find you have so much in common. They are, especially the women, full of bustling friendliness. The men are sober and deeply sincere of mien, but also very welcoming to their non-Muslim visitors. "And how nice that at long last we can all meet, just as people," says the head host, "and you don't have to think of us as that strange, sometimes forbidding group the media often refers to as 'the Muslims.'"

As the head host will say, as everyone has settled back in their seats, "the more of these evenings I conduct, the more I realize that we are all basically the same. Here's my day, which I suspect is a lot like yours: I wake up, help my wife get the kids ready for school, have breakfast, leave for work, endure the commute, listen to National Public Radio while driving, grab a lunch at my desk at noon, put in a solid day, endure the same commute home as you do, try to be home in time to have supper with the kids and hear about their school day, then another half-hour of work-related emails have to be answered, and then I help do the dishes, help put the kids to bed, and usually watch a little soothing television, the Turner Movie Channel, or BBC Mysteries. And then to bed. Isn't that a lot like your lives? The only real difference for me,

as a Muslim, is that Friday, not Sunday, is our holy day, but other than that, aside from the hijab our women like to wear as a sign of modesty, there really are very few differences. Like you, we are monotheists, and like you we revere Jesus. That deserves to be more widely known. Of course I don't want to minimize the big problem we all have: there is no denying that the criminal element – yes, some people who call themselves Muslims have criminal mentalities, just the way some Jews and Christians do – in Islam has wreaked havoc all over the world, killing non-Muslims and Muslims alike. I think the number of Muslim victims of Islamic terrorists is considerably greater than the non-Muslims, not that it matters, because terrorism is terrorism, but it would perhaps bring a little needed perspective to the issue if we recognized how much we Muslims suffer too from these madmen. And along with our own victims, we suffer in another way – the damage to the image of Islam, which means 'peace' and has nothing to do with this terrorism, and damage, too, to our image as law-abiding Muslims – that's what we find so sad, so lamentable. And we wanted to invite you here to undo some of that damage, to allow you to see us just as we are. And to ask questions, on any aspect of Islam, and to hear what Islam means to us. Why shouldn't Muslims, instead of your being told half-truths by FOX or CNN, tell you what Islam is all about? You would expect us to ask Christians, not Muslims, to find out about Christianity. Why should Islam be any different?"

The second essential component to the evening is the shared meal, prepared by the Muslim hosts for their non-Muslim guests. This ordinarily comes at the end of the evening, after the discussion about Islam, and is usually offered as a buffet. It's a kind of reward for the guests who have sat through the presentations. To show the full reach of Islamic civilization and cuisine ("Islam is not monolithic"), there will usually be a variety of foods from Arab lands, Iran, Pakistan-India, Turkey, even Indonesia. Curried chicken, lamb kabobs, hummus and baba ghannoush, stuffed grape leaves, pita

and naan, even possibly a rudimentary rijsttaaf if East Indians are among those in attendance. The smells have wafted from the kitchen to the room where the ask-a-muslim main event is taking place. These are a powerful sensory reminder of the pleasure to come, and that puts the visitors in a good and expectant mood as they offer their earnest questions, and uncritically accept whatever answers they receive.

And as they share that buffet, sitting at tables with at least one Muslim assigned to each table, to continue the Interfaith conversation, not just to explain the dishes to them, but to encourage their guests, in the friendliest possible fashion, to continue over dinner to ask them any questions they may have about their own lives as Muslims, or anything else about Islam that might be on their minds. But it's seldom about anything worrisome. The food, the friendliness, the warm sense of fellow feeling, will overcome even the most suspicious of souls. And when the Infidels leave that evening, it will inevitably be with a sense that they have learned a great deal about Muslims, who are just people like themselves, and about Islam, too, which apparently is more or less like Christianity – with the same rituals of prayer, and pilgrimage, and fasting, and charitable giving – only with a different day of worship and a few incidental differences, as the hijab, the fruit juices instead of alcohol, the ban on pork.

The evening comes to an end, and the well-fed guests promise their Muslim hosts that they will spread the word about what they have learned. Indeed, they are true to their promise, calling in to talk shows, or writing letters to the editor, or merely putting in their two-bits if the subject of Islam comes up at work, or at a social gathering, whenever they feel that Islam, or Muslims, have been unfairly maligned, always prefacing their self-assured remarks with “I've visited mosques, I've taken part in question-and-answer sessions about Islam, I've broken bread with my Muslim neighbors, and I've learned that the real Muslims, not the crazies who simply use

Islam as an excuse, are just like us.”

In Chicago, still another variant on these meet-your-muslim-neighbor events has just been announced. It’s called “[Jihad Watch](#).”