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What Should the Average American Know About Islam?

America is a very diverse country because many immigrants find America as their home. The American population consists of almost only immigrants that came to America in the last five centuries (counting out the natives that were already in America). Despite the fact that in the earlier centuries, most of the immigrants came from Europe, recently there has been a big flow of immigrants from the Middle East, mostly because of the war that is going on in the Middle East. Nowadays, there are many Muslims in America, therefore non-Muslim Americans see and communicate with Muslims very often. Traditional Islamic rituals are very different from the American and Western culture, so Americans are not used to see those rituals. Therefore, Americans should be familiar with the Islamic rituals and the meaning of them. Also, Americans should know that the Islamic and Christian ideas are actually very similar. Being aware of those differences and similarities would help Americans to understand Muslims better, which would increase and improve the social aspects between people from different religions and cultures.

In order to understand Islamic traditions and rituals, Americans have to try to understand and comprehend those. Such an understanding would help Americans to identify Muslims without asking them about their religion. In addition, being aware of traditions in the Muslim religion would help prevent Americans from being judgmental towards Muslims that are performing rituals. Watching videos about Islam is a great way to get familiar with Islam. *The Retreat* documentary is a great video where a viewer can get familiar with the Islamic traditions starting from basics. Further, by following the characters in this

documentary, the viewer can get a good insight into what these rituals mean. For example, there was a very good explanation on why Muslims have to wash themselves before praying.

One of the biggest Islamic traditions is Ramadan, which is one of five pillars of Islam. Ramadan happens roughly once a year and it is a month long fasting. During this fasting, Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, or smoke during the time of daylight. Some Americans might not take this tradition serious and when they see a person who does not eat and drink all day these Americans might try to convince them to do so. These ignorant Americans might try to help Muslims because they think that starving is not good, however, for Muslims Ramadan is very important. If Americans knew what Ramadan is, when it is, and the importance of it, there would not be instances when Americans try to feed a Muslim during Ramadan. Again, *The Retreat* documentary is a great source to find out about Ramadan. In this video, the viewer can see how hard it is to go without food all day. Therefore, Americans might have much more respect for Muslims, knowing that following Islamic traditions might be a hard task to complete.

Another important Islamic tradition that Americans have to know is Hajj, which is also one of the five pillars. Even though Hajj takes place in Mecca, knowing about it gives Americans a much better understanding of the Islamic religion. Watching the *World's Largest Pilgrimage –Hajj* documentary is a great way to see what happens in Mecca during Hajj. In this video, the viewer can see how many people attend this pilgrimage and that these people sacrifice a lot in order to participate, including their comfort because a lot of people have to sleep on the sides of the roads. Getting familiar with Hajj gives Americans a chance to know how important this aspect is for Muslims and how important religion is to Muslims.

Even though, Islamic traditions are very different and might seem even radical for Christians, Islam and Christianity have a lot in common. One of the most important things that Americans have to understand is that Christians, Jews, Muslims, and many other

monotheistic religions follow the same God. This idea might be striking for many Americans, but even Qur'an and Bible have references that support the notion that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. In the article *One God, Many Names*, Abd-Allah argues for many great arguments supporting the idea that we all are worshipping the same God, although different religions have different names for God. Some Americans are getting suspicious or even scared when they hear the word "Allah". In my opinion, it is funny because no one is suspicious when someone says "God". If Americans knew that Allah is just the Arabic word for God, it would definitely prevent many incidents happening all over America, such as kicking a person out of the plane because he was speaking Arabic on the phone and mentioned the word "Allah".

In addition, by looking at some of the Sufi stories like *Conference of the Birds* and *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, Americans can find that many fundamental ideas of Islam are similar to the Christian ideas. In *Conference of the Birds*, one can see how both religions are directed toward developing the same important values in people, such as love, unity, and that God comes before all else. Also, these stories show that Muslims and Christians act in the same way about their relationship to God; they do their best to live their life without sins and they ask God for forgiveness through their prayers.

Nowadays, most of the American knowledge of the Islamic culture comes from mass media, which is, unfortunately, mostly negative. Therefore, some Americans are very skeptical about Muslims. In my opinion, getting familiar with major Islamic traditions such as praying rituals, Ramadan, and Hajj should show those Americans the importance of religion for Muslims. In addition, if these Americans learn that Muslims and Christians are actually very similar that would fix the skepticism problem. The idea that Muslims follow the same God as Christians, should also erase many borders between Muslims and Christians communication, therefore making the community better.

