

A Dialogue between a Muslim Man and an American Christian Woman

By

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Part 1

Introduction

These series (part 1-6) of dialogue between a Muslim man and a Christian American woman are intended to understand the social relations between the individuals of the American society. Understanding the internal factors influencing the American society would certainly shed light on the behavior of its people and the consequences resulting from such behavior.

In order to facilitate the information given in the series, the text is presented in a literary form. These series or dialogues are not imaginative but based on my own experience gained from my frequent visits to the United States, and from my relations with several American friends.

Bright Star when was first started in 1981, it was a U.S.-Egyptian single service ground maneuver event, but it has since grown into a major war game on a scale not seen since the Gulf War. The Bright Star maneuvers were expanded to include other countries after the 1991 Gulf War such as Italy, Britain, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, U.A.E., Kuwait, and Jordan.

It was in Bright Star 1996 that Omar, the Egyptian Colonel, knew Colonel Kenny Walker, Commander of the American Special Forces in Bright Star 1996. The operations of this Bright Star included landing on the Egyptian coast, air operations, and surface to surface engagements, rescue, and data sharing. Omar was watching the operations of his troops from a Gazelle light observation helicopter, while Walker with twelve soldiers on board in a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter was practicing rescues. The two choppers were only one 500 meters apart and Omar could see Walker's helicopter plainly. Just before the soldiers were to descend to a mockup of a downed helicopter and rescue soldiers pretending to be injured, Walker's helicopter plunged into quick sand. The chopper burned up and began to sink slowly into the sand. Omar quickly instructed his pilot to descend the chopper as near to

Walker's helicopter wreck as it could. Omar tied a rope around his waist and hung down from the chopper. Walker's helicopter was still burning and all soldiers aboard were killed except for Walker who amazingly survived. Omar could see the pilot crushed against the instrument panel and dead. The soldiers were burned to death and thrown out of the chopper. Walker still strapped in his seat was also thrown out of the chopper. He suffered burns on his hands and buttocks and had his pants burned off. His left wrist and left collarbone were broken, and he lost two upper teeth. Walker was nearly unconscious and the quick sands began to swallow the blackened corpses, and the chopper wreck. Hanging by a rope, Omar tried to free Walker by trying to unbuckle his seat belt but he was unable to. With a sharp blade Omar freed Walker by cutting his seatbelt, then wrapped Walker with the rest of the rope and with an enormous effort pulled him out of the seat. The chopper flew for twenty minutes to reach the air base during which it took all Omar's strength to keep Walker and himself from falling down. In the air base, Walker received first aid, and then was transported to an Egyptian military hospital to take care of his burns and broken bones.

As an appreciation for his heroic action in saving Colonel Kenny Walker's life in Bright Star 1996, Omar's Special Force Department received in 1997 an official invitation letter from the United States Department of Defense inviting Omar to visit the Military Academy at West Point, and the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. Colonel Kenny Walker was appointed by his Department to keep company with Omar during his stay in America. Walker lives in Maryland in an elegant house. He offered that Omar lives in his house during his short visit to America. At first Omar insisted to live alone in a motel in order not to interfere in Walker's private life, but at Walker insistence Omar had to accept the generous offer.

When Omar first arrived to America, Walker welcomed him heatedly at the airport then drove him directly to his home. After a small knock on the door, Jennifer Jones opened the door to see Omar and Walker standing at her doorstep. She smiled at Walker, then shook hands dearly with Omar and led him to the guestroom in the second floor. The room was large and comfortable and attached to a sizable bathroom. When Omar thanked Jennifer for her kindness, she smiled saying that she would be happy to host a friend who saved the life of the man she truly loves.

Jennifer was a slender tall woman, with long black hair and wide blue eyes. Her white skin, perfect body and soft musical voice brightened her beauty

more. She was an independent American woman working as an executive manager in a company developing computer systems. Omar realized that Walker who always seemed to Omar a handsome and robust American, had a good taste in women. Jennifer was certainly a good match for Walker. It seemed to Omar that Jennifer and Walker were newly married since no kids were around.

At lunchtime, Jennifer prepared a wonderful table with dishes rich of baked ham, rice, fried potato, salad and a bottle of good red wine. According to Islamic law, liquor and pork were prohibited, so Omar abstained from eating ham or drinking wine. He didn't even touch rice fearing it might have been cooked with pork butter. Omar only ate salad. Jennifer was really annoyed to see her effort in preparing a good meal for Omar was in vain. Disappointment showed on her face. Omar noticed Jennifer's upset, and was utterly embarrassed.

"You don't like American food I suppose?" Jennifer asked politely caring not to hurt Omar's feelings.

Omar: "Sorry Jennifer, but Pork and wine are prohibited in Islam."

Jennifer: "In the U.S. we have inspection and governmental seals on pork to make it safe for people to eat. This pork we have here on the table is no raw meat; it has been cured before I cooked it for you. I am afraid I don't understand why Islam is against pork meat!"

Omar: "Pork is often referred to as 'cured'. If pork's meat has to be cured before we eat it, then we should not take the chance to eat it. You are what you eat, so why not eat the best. Do not allow this diseased meat to be brought into your home."

Omar's words were to Jennifer like a slap on the face. She did her best to prepare for him the best meal she can; yet he rejects her food without any logical reason. She didn't want to embarrass Walker by arguing more with Omar, but she just couldn't stop herself.

"I am not a religious woman, and I don't base facts on religion. Science is what we must rely on. There is nothing wrong with the hog. The pig was made for human consumption. All its parts and by-products, has been a chief food for the Americans. Veterinarians, Public Health officials and the Agricultural Department say that thorough and slow cooking remove the danger found in pork. Additional cooking of pork purchased in the summer or processed pork products makes the pork safe for eating."

Omar:” Based on science I would add that studies showed that swine has no certain time to eat until it is sick and has to lie down, but as soon as it finds a vacancy in its stomach, it eats more food. It doesn’t matter what kind of food it may be; the swine eats anything. The swine’s life is very short, because it eats itself to death, and death soon takes its life away...”

“So what, there is nothing wrong with that?” Jennifer interrupted.

Omar: “The pig is a mass of worms. Each mouthful you eat is a mass of small worms the naked eye cannot detect. Worms thrive in the hog. When these worms are digested into your system, they cause a high birth rate to hundreds of new worms, which travels the blood stream of your system and lodge in your muscles. These worms even enter your brain, lungs or your spinal fluid. They cause muscular aches, fever and many other symptoms of sickness. The worm has an amazing ability to go undetected in your system for many years. There are two harmful worms harbored by pigs, one is *Taeniasolium* which on ingestion passes to the brain and causes epilepsy, and the other is *Trichinella spiralis* which passes to the muscles and brain causing muscular swelling and pain as well as epilepsy and trichinosis. The parasite toxoplasma may be also present. In Malaysia the lethal Nipah virus infected pigs and killed more than one hundred persons. Regardless of how long you cook pork’s meat you still should not eat it. Thorough and slow cooking of pork does not remove the danger of worms found in all pork. Inspection and governmental seals on pork do not remove such danger. Some say never tastes raw sausage or any raw pork. It is best not to eat pork, raw, processed, cooked, smoked, cured, or seasoned. Pork has more fat and cholesterol than any other meat. Over eating pork increases blood cholesterol levels. Birds and fish however have the least amount of cholesterol. The Koran mentioned that bird meat is one of the specialties of Paradise. So as you see, the pig is poison. In the Bible, Moses forbade the Children of Israel from eating the swine: “Thou shall not eat the swine, nor touch its carcass.” Strict Orthodox Jews do not eat pork, so their food is good for Muslims and our food is good for them. In this regard the Koran stated:

O believers, eat of the good things wherewith We have bestowed on you, and be grateful to Allah, if it be Him that you worship, But certainly what Allah has forbidden to you are dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, what has been hallowed to other than Allah, but whoever is constrained by necessity, not out of insolence, nor of the intention of repeating it, then no sin is on him. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (Al Baqara, 172,173).

Omar added,” Did you know that pork is not forbidden to Muslims only? The Jews and Christians are also forbidden from eating pork. Here is a quote from the Old Testament to that effect:

“And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: Ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcas.” (Deuteronomy 14:8.).

Many Christians believe that this verse was directed only to the Jews. But Jesus himself said during a Sermon on the Mount, “Think not that I have come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill.”

Jennifer pointed at the bottle of red wine placed on the table before her and said:

“And why Islam forbade wine too?”

Omar: “Islam prohibits intoxicants because of the potential effect they have on the human intellect, the human faculty of reasoning and the human conscious. Medically speaking, numerous diseases have been attributed to alcohol like dyspeptic trouble, peptic ulceration, cancer stomach, pancreatitis, cirrhosis liver, vitamin deficiency and coronary heart disease. The Koran says about wine:

They ask you about intoxicants and gambling, say: ”In both of them there is grievous sin, and some profit for people; but the sin is more grievous than the profit (Al Baqara, 219).

The Koran also says:

O you who believe! Most certainly intoxicants and gambling and idol worship and fortune telling are an abomination of Satan’s handiwork, so shun it, that you may prosper, Satan desires only to cause enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer, will you then desist? (Al Maidah, 91-92).

It is a shameful retreat from reality and an irresponsible insult to human mind to get entangled in the tight strands of intoxication or cornered in the vicious whirl of alcohol. The menaces and tragedies of intoxication are too obvious to be elaborated. Many lives are being lost every day on this

account. Many families break up because of this menace. In the United States many billions of dollars are swallowed in the drinking channel every year. Countless doors are closed on misery and unhappiness arising from the drinking habits. Besides the destruction of health, the depression of mind, the dullness of soul, the absorption of wealth, the disintegration of families, the abuse of human dignity, the sabotage of morality; every one of the so-called social drinkers is a highly potential alcoholic. Islam cannot tolerate these menaces or let man abuse the very sense of life in this tragic way. That is the reason why Islam has banned drinking once and for all. Of all the agonizing social problems, alcoholism is by far the most serious. More than one-half million Americans become alcoholics every year. One in every ten to twelve people who take their first drink in any given year is destined to become alcoholic. The harm of alcohol had spread to American schools as well. There is a need for colleges and communities to work together to fight the so-called 'culture of drinking' at U.S. colleges. A study showing 1,400 college students are killed each year in alcohol-related accidents should change the views of people who see drinking on campus as little more than a rite of passage. Statistics showed that drinking by college students contributed to 500,000 injuries and 70,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape. On any given day, alcohol is responsible for the deaths of nearly four college students, injuries to another 1,370 and almost 200 sexual assaults. All you have to do is to look at a couple of cable television channels which cover spring break where endless groups of drunken students get up and say 'I'm having the greatest time here' and then you recognize on the basis of these statistics what the fallout of the great time is. These results should raise alarms among parents and campus officials who don't believe college drinking is a significant problem."

In the USA alone, the economic costs of alcoholism and drug abuse are reported to be at a quarter trillion dollars per year. The social and moral costs are additional.

In 1917, Congress passed the 18th amendment, prohibiting alcohol. This was after a century of grass roots efforts, which included thousands of societies for prohibition and abstinence pledges in churches. They also allocated \$5million for enforcement to turn USA into a liquor-free society. A few years later the estimate was \$300 million and growing. Organized crime started. Thirteen years later prohibition was repealed. The "Noble Experiment" had failed miserably."

In contrast, Islam banned alcohol 14 centuries ago among people whose love for alcohol was second to none. Islam has declared alcohol to be the root of all evil and no power on earth can change that designation.”

Jennifer glanced at Walker who was listening to the current conversation while eating voraciously a large portion of pork meat. She then turned her head to Omar and said ironically, “It is evident then that nearly all the dishes on my table are unlawful to you. In this house we drink wine, and eat pork. Walker and his friends gather here twice a week to play poker with good money. And as you have just said, gambling seems to be unlawful too. It seems that the Koran had deprived his followers from the pleasures of life. You Muslims are living a dry life devoid of enjoyments”

Omar; “Muslims live on earth only to serve Allah. Their road to this is by applying the koranic instructions in their daily life. The spreading of virtue among people is something worth living for. All the pleasures Muslims are deprived from while living their mortal life on earth will be given to them more splendidly in Heaven. In Heaven they will eat the desirable meat and drink the agreeable wine.”

“And how is that?” Jennifer said with a hint of mockery in her voice.

Omar said smilingly, “There is no better than the Koranic verses in this regard:

The similitude of paradise which the pious have been promised, therein are rivers of water ever pure, and rivers of milk of unchanged taste, and rivers of a beverage a delight to the drinkers, and rivers of honey clear and pure, and for them therein is every kind of fruit, and forgiveness from their Lord. Are these like those who abide in the fire forever, and are made to drink boiling water tears their bowels asunder? (Muhammad, 15)

*Surely the righteous shall dwell in Bliss;
Reclining upon soft couches gazing around;
You will recognize in their faces the glow of bliss;
They shall be given of a pure drink sealed;
Whose seal shall be musk, for this let the strivers strive;
And a mixture of Tasnim;
A fountain at which those closest to Allah do drink (Al Mtaffifin, 22-28).”*

Jennifer continued her debate with Omar, “What was Allah’s purpose of giving life then? What’s the purpose of this whole existence if we don’t enjoy the amenities of life to the full? Have you ever heard about the

American dream? It's achieving wealth and power in all fields. The Americans made their dream come true, this is how America became the strongest nation in the world."

Omar: "Man's deeds in the Hereafter are not judged by materialistic gains. Allah created the heavens and the earth, and created life and death for the purpose of testing human beings. The time and place of our birth, the environment that surrounds us, the mental capabilities we have and the opportunities that come our way are pre-destined for us. But Allah gave man the freedom to choose between right and wrong. This granted freedom is the very essence of the grand scheme of things without which the whole existence becomes meaningless. If Allah had so willed, He could have made all men follow the right path. But that would have meant that man was not given any freedom to choose. And without this freedom the human soul could not have been tested. Reward or punishment would then have become meaningless. It was Allah's abounding mercy to give eternal life to man in the Kingdom of Heaven. With His absolute wisdom Allah decided to make this eternal life conditional to man's behavior in a temporary life subjected to Allah's laws relating to life and death. Those who cleanse their minds, bodies and souls in the life of this world and follow the laws of their creator shall deserve the bliss of the eternal life in the kingdom of Allah. Those who ignore the call of their creator and live a life of arrogance, turning a deaf ear to the commands and interdictions of their creator shall be put to a painful chastisement. Thus, Allah is testing man on earth by giving him free will to choose between good and evil. The purpose is to select cleansed souls for Paradise."

Jennifer looked at Omar for a long while then said, "How could a nice looking man like you abstain so easily from the pleasures of life?"

She gave Walker a quick glance then continued saying, "Most people are carried away by the thrills of life."

Omar: "For the sake of trial Allah has sanctioned man's freedom on earth and at the same time He provided him with considerable liberty to choose between good and evil. Allah has prepared the Paradise to those who volunteer to fear Allah even on occasions when fearing is not seemingly warranted; those who despite wielding full authority surrender all their authority to Allah. When such people are provided with sustenance they acknowledge that it is in fact Allah Who has arranged it for them. They have the liberty to be unfair to others, but they check the sinful inclinations of their liberty for fear of Allah. Opportunities of demonstrating anger, hatred and revenge come their way but they choose to exercise restraint on occasions of anger and offer forgiveness on occasions of hatred and revenge.

Allah allows them to be praised lavishly by others, but they find solace in remaining humble. Allah makes them wealthy, but instead of spending their wealth to satisfy their vain desires, they spend it in Allah's way. Instead of living for their own sake, they live for the sake of Allah. They follow the way of Allah instead of following the way of their own whims. They believe that blessings and calamities are distributed among individuals not as a reward or as a punishment but as a test. Would they be thankful when are living in comfort? Would they remain steadfast in the way of their Lord when are hit by misfortunes? The serene world of Paradise is indeed for such people.”

Walker who hasn't uttered a word since the beginning of lunch laughed happily at seeing Jennifer struggling with Omar to prove her point. He knew her like the palm of his hand. Jennifer is a typical free independent American woman. She is proud of the American heritage. Like most Americans, she knew nothing about other cultures except her own. He even doubted whether she had ever heard about how Muslims think or look at life from its different angles. Walker joined the Gulf War in 1991, and participated in two Bright Star war games performed in Egypt. Before going to Egypt he was given special courses about Muslims and Islamic traditions. Yes, Muslims are different people. Their aim in life is to please Allah by abiding to his laws. They believe that this materialistic world is perishable, and what counts are the good deeds they have been ordered to do to themselves, to their families and to others. To them, Allah is always there, looming in their horizon. They strive to seek his consent and forgiveness in the Day of Judgment. This is why good Muslims live their life in strict straightforwardness. The free American life Jennifer and he are fully living, the life of comfort and pleasure they both think is the most perfect, a strict Muslim like Omar could see it as a big failure. Because Muslims combine materialism with spiritualism while crossing the road of life to the Hereafter, they believe that money and power are not important goals in life. Allah's blessing to Muslims in the form of money or power is but a tool for enabling them to construct the world and inhabit the earth as their sacred Book told them, and not to tyrannize or oppress others. This blessing is also a test. Would they use it properly as Allah had ordered them to, or they will use it to cause injustice and rise over others?

Muslims could easily fight and sacrifice themselves for a noble cause like defending their homeland against the enemy, or defending their religion. They call this fight “Jihad” which means fighting in the cause of Allah. In these wars they seek martyrdom, because the reward is to enter Heaven and

be close to the Almighty. It is false to say that Islam teaches its followers to resign meekly and passively to their fate of destiny. Rather, Islam challenges the believer to fight against wrong and oppression and to strive for the establishment of righteousness and justice. In Jihad, Muslims stand equal, rich and poor; both strive to die in the cause of Allah. Although Islam teaches its followers to be merciful and incline toward forgiveness even in time of war, it never teaches them to turn the other cheek. The concept of Jihad is one of the highest concepts in Islam. The term has at times been translated as “Holy War” however, this translation is wrong for Jihad also means by language “Struggling.” It is a concept that places much emphasis on the struggle of oneself against the temptations of Satan by living righteously.

The Prophet of Islam said,

“The greatest Jihad is the striving of the Muslim to purify himself.”

The Koran instructed that Islam was the last of religions, and that it was not only sent to the Arabs but also to the world at large. Muslims were ordered to spread Islam to the whole world. It was a divine message; it was Jihad, so they fought in the cause of Allah to deliver his last message to the people, until Islam reached the four corners of the world.

Muslims make themselves subservient to Allah with their own free will; they choose to remain constrained within the divinely ordained restrictions, despite enjoying the freedom to remain unrestricted.

Omar is one of those good Muslims; he speaks the words of Allah and applies them in his life. He is a wonderful soldier and also a man of Allah. He will never forget what Omar did to him. He still remembers the steely grasp of Omar holding him tight lest he should fall. Physically he was not in a position to facilitate Omar’s attempt to rescue him because he was nearly unconscious. However, he was aware all the time of the steely arm holding him tight. One arm holding the rope and the other grasping him firmly. He was like a helpless baby unable to move or think. That steely arm was to him like a navel-string attaching a baby to life. In that critical instance of total desperation and helplessness, a tremendous love and gratefulness was born in his heart to Omar. He suddenly realized the true meaning of devotion and loyalty - the meaning of love and giving without expecting any return. He was sure that Omar did that not because of courage or bravery, but because

he was urged on by his religion to help others no matter what their religion or race is.

After the end of Bright Star war games and his return back home, he never stopped writing to Omar, and Omar always answered back. Over the past few months they understood each other better and their friendship grew stronger.

Walker poured himself a glass of good red wine and frowned at the thought of forgetting to tell Jennifer about some Islamic traditions that might have helped her in dealing with Omar. He should have told her that Islam forbids wine, pork, gambling and also something else that Omar had not mentioned yet, fornication. O God! What would happen if Omar knew that Jennifer was not his wife but his girlfriend? She had been living with him for five years now! Based on the Islamic sermons Omar had just given Jennifer, Omar would consider that Walker had been committing four grievous sins in his house, pork, wine, gambling and fornication. Omar was right to insist from the beginning to live alone in a motel. He shouldn't have persuaded Omar to accept living with him in his house!

After launch, Jennifer collected the dishes and cleaned the table. Walker helped washing the dishes and started a conversation with her in the kitchen: "Don't talk deeply with Omar about the odds between his world and ours; let him get easily into our life without feeling any difference."

Jennifer: "My father was a teacher. My skills came from him. He taught me from the earliest age to think for myself, and that there are always other sides to the story. He taught me that before accepting any fact I have to search it and read and read. There are many times in my life when I wished he had not taught me these things, and that I could innocently accept information like others and just go on and be obviously happy."

"Sometimes thinking, discernment and intellect are more of a curse than a gift." Walker commented laughing.

Jennifer continued seriously, "Perhaps by sharing the little I perceive and have learned with others, my thoughts might find its way to someone about to make a major mistake in our world and perhaps change his mind."

"I hope you are not bothered by Omar's encounters." Walker said hopefully.

Jennifer said teasing him, "Your friend looks strong and very good looking. He is also polite and highly knowledgeable. I have many questions in my mind about Islamic heritage and I want to hear some answers from your

friend. Don't worry Walker, I like to have a person like Omar under my roof for a while."

A week later, Omar and Walker traveled to New York to visit the United States Military Academy at West Point. Omar also visited the Eisenhower Hall Theatre.

The theater has hosted such luminaries as Bob Hope, Ethel Merman, Sarah Vaughn, Harry Belafonte, Bob Dylan, James Taylor and countless others. Its theatre credits include CATS, West Side Story, South Pacific, Camelot, Les Miserables, The King and I, Sunset Boulevard and many more.

