

Monday 22nd March

Below is a short video clip that explains the shame-honour culture and how it differs from our guilt-forgiveness culture.

<https://vimeo.com/128012732>

Jesus lived in a culture that understood honour and shame. He came to restore honour to the outcast and disgraced. In Mark 5, we read how Jesus healed the shame of the demon-possessed man and the woman with the issue of blood. When the prodigal son returned to his father, the father said nothing about his son's sin and guilt, but instead gave him gifts and a party to honour him. (Luke 15:11-32). When Jesus died on the cross, he was despised and deserted by his friends, and died what was considered at that time as the most shameful of deaths; flogged and publicly shamed so that we all might have our honour restored.

A Frontiers worker living in the Middle East has written:

"In Middle Eastern culture and Islam, women are seen as the carriers of honour. This past month we have met many women who have a sense of shame. We met a blind woman who will probably never be considered for marriage, a woman who is divorced, and a wife who is unable to have children. All of these women need words of love and truth about how the Father sees them and how Jesus is the restorer of honour, similar to the story of Ruth, where Naomi (who lost everything) has her honour restored through a redeemer."

- Pray for opportunities for workers to show the love of Jesus to Muslim women living with a sense of shame.
- Pray for those who are ashamed to experience honour in Christ.
- Pray that you may have an opportunity to show the love of Jesus to a Muslim whom God puts across your path.

Tuesday 23rd March

Rules of honour-shame cultures

A Frontiers worker who served for 9 years in Central Asia shared, that "understanding the principles of honour-shame will help us learn to relate to Muslims in honour-shame cultures and better share the gospel with them."

This is true for Muslims we meet here as well as abroad. If we want to reach out to those in our community, we need to understand their values. He explained six cultural rules that may help us. Today we will look at three of them:

1. Family defines everything

In collectivistic societies, identity is defined by the group you belong to. When two people meet, one of the first items of conversation is figuring out which family, clan, or village the other person is from. Since honour is a shared commodity, what one person does, brings honour (or shame) upon the entire community. Children are taught from an early age how to bring honour to the family and people are expected to be loyal to their community, even at personal cost.



2. Social capital fixes anything

In honour-shame cultures, life is a constant quest to develop and manage an intricate network of relationships—that is, social capital. The most important asset any person has is his or her reputation. If other people respect and know you, then you can accomplish just about anything. Since problems are solved through relationships, a strong social network is essential for success in life. You accrue social capital by giving gifts, helping people, and sharing meals. Then, you can ‘cash it in’ when you need help with a problem.

3. Aggression restores honour

When honour is life’s most important commodity, then any insult to one’s honour must be vigorously defended. Many Muslim cultures are antagonistic, which means they fight for their honour. When a woman is shamed, her male relatives appear weak for failing to protect her. The cultural response is to defend the family’s name with aggression, either against the woman herself to ‘cleanse the stain’ or against the aggressor. Similarly, a father whose child turns to Christ will respond with public anger and threats in order to save face in the community.

On a larger scale, the rise of IS was partly a reaction to international shame and an attempt to restore Islam’s honour through violence. In the IS worldview, blood erases shame.

- Pray for people of influence in the Muslim communities, that they might encounter the truth of Jesus’ forgiveness of sins and restoration of honour.
- Pray these people would be bold to share this truth with those around them. May many come to know freedom from shame.
- Pray that Muslim communities would know the reality of Matthew 5:38-42: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” Instead of responding with aggression, may they pursue the path of peace.

Wednesday 24th March

Here are three more unwritten rules for honour-shame cultures that help us better relate to Muslims and understand the logic that governs their cultures:

1. Cleanliness reflects value

Honour-shame cultures expect people to maintain a respectable level of personal purity to be seen as clean and undefiled. This often means dressing in nice attire, strictly avoiding unclean foods, and perhaps not associating with outsiders. Outward appearances indicate a person’s status in the community. Impurities are seen as diminishing a person’s honour in the community and makes them the social equivalent of dirt; something to be discarded.



A Muslim student once tried to discredit Christianity by claiming, ‘Christians wear dirty shoes.’ This assumes a direct link between physical cleanliness and the spiritual importance of a person and his or her message.

2. Words define status

Honour-shame cultures often have clearly prescribed greetings for people of various social standings. For example, the greeting you say to an elder is completely different from what you would say to a younger person. Words are tools for defining the social hierarchy.

Since the purpose of language is to communicate honour and maintain relational harmony, the concepts of honesty and truth look different. An Afghan-American Christian once explained to me, “When I invite an American to my house and they say, ‘Let me look at my calendar,’ that is the most insulting thing. In my culture, you must immediately say, ‘Yes!’ to affirm the relationship, even if there might be a scheduling conflict.” In this woman’s culture, an immediate affirmation is true to the relationship, even if the invitee knows she’ll have to cancel later.

3. Food conveys honour

In honour-shame cultures, the people you eat with define both your community and identity.

A friend in Central Asia asked me incredulously, “Do Americans really eat lunch alone or while driving in the car, like in films?” Breaking bread together imparts honour, so eating alone is unthinkable. This is why hospitality and meals are so significant in Muslim cultures. Food represents the gift of life.

A Frontiers worker in the Middle East said “If I had a conflict with a Muslim friend who was guilty of hurting me, I would not simply say, “I forgive you,” but would invite my friend for a meal in order to honour them. In a similar way, if I hurt someone and wanted to say sorry, a meal would probably speak louder than words. It is interesting how many times Jesus ate with sinners as a way of honouring them, as when he went to the house of Zacchaeus.”

- Jesus said; “Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32. Let’s pray for Muslims to know freedom doesn’t come from following rules to be righteousness but from a relationship with His son Jesus.
- Many Muslims live in fear of shame. Pray they will know they need “not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.” Isa 54:4
- Pray that many Muslims will be able to read the Bible in their own language, for then they will know, “if anyone serves me, the Father will honour him” John 12:26

Thursday 25th March

The Desert Honour Code

Robert, a Frontiers worker in East Africa, shared the following story that illustrates the importance of hospitality in the Muslim culture:

Hospitality is a matter of honour, life and death throughout much of the Muslim world. “Failing to visit your neighbours means that you don’t respect or honour them,” explained Robert “In the United States, it’s rude and inconsiderate to visit someone without asking in advance, but here in Africa it’s considered rude not to visit, regardless of whether you have asked beforehand or not.”



Robert lives in a community where the doors are always left open for visitors. Guests may simply walk in unannounced, knowing they will always be welcomed and served a cup of tea. Hosts feel greatly honoured by the opportunity to serve their guests. This indiscriminate code of hospitality might be traced to the harsh realities of life in the desert. An open-door policy assures that any person, even an enemy, can show up and be provided with food, water and a place to rest for up to three days, no questions asked. This code has saved the lives of countless people who have found themselves wandering through the hot, waterless expanses of the desert.

Regular visits to neighbours also provide a way for communities to look out for one another. “I’ve learned that neighbours are supposed to greet each other every day,” Robert says. “This is not just about being friendly. It’s also so that they know you are alive and well. Death and sickness are daily realities here and neighbours are supposed to check in on one another. But when we visit, we may not actually spend much time talking together. If the host has electricity, the most social thing we do is watch television together. Indian soap operas are especially popular.”

“The most important thing,” he says, “is just spending time together. That’s how my friends and neighbours know that I value and respect them.”

- Praise God for open doors of friendship and hospitality found in many Muslim cultures. Pray for field workers to continue entering the lives of their Muslim friends and honouring them with their time.
- Ask the Lord to open the doors into Muslims’ hearts, for “what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.” Isaiah 22:22.

Friday 26th March

The scent of honour

The following story is from a Frontiers worker:

“We are in the days leading up to Easter and the celebration of Christ’s resurrection. I invite a group of Muslim friends into my salon—a Middle Eastern-styled living room. On the coffee table, I’ve arranged an assortment of intriguing objects. Each item tells part of the Easter story. Some objects come from Christian traditions; others are from the local culture. Each one has been carefully selected to communicate meaningfully to Muslim women.



A large bowl filled with sand signifies the desert, where God leads us to hear His voice and be renewed by Him.

A handful of stones remind us that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4.

There is a clear tea glass tinted deep purple and ringed with gold. It represents repentance.

A bottle of oil stands for baptism and the Holy Spirit.

A white candle represents the pure and sinless Christ who is the Light of the World.

In the weeks leading up to Easter, I add a new object to this visual recounting of the resurrection. My curious friends visit, eager to discover new items and the piece of the story each one reveals. As my friends settle into my salon, their eyes dart over to the display, searching for a new object. They’re polite, and yet I see that they feel pained to be kept waiting to hear more of the Easter story.

I bring out a small bottle of expensive perfume purchased in the local market. I open it, and the scent fills the room. We read the first half of Mark 14. The passage begins with religious leaders plotting Jesus’ death, and it ends with Judas agreeing to hand him over. In the middle of all this evil—in the midst of men’s failure to grasp who Jesus is—a woman shows up. In spite of criticism, she courageously pours out her perfume—and her love—anointing Jesus with perfume valued at a year’s salary.

And Jesus honours her.

My friends love the story. When it’s time for them to leave, I give each woman a small vial of perfume to take home. “Wear this scent so you don’t forget how the woman poured out her love to Jesus,” I say, “and how He honoured her.”

That little vial of perfume is a reminder that they can be part of the Easter story, too.”

- Ask God to remind these women that Christ honours them enough to die for them.
- Pray that Muslims would have their minds and hearts opened to the truth of the resurrection.
- Ask the Lord to give Frontiers teams creative ways to share the gospel with local men and women during this season of Lent and over Easter.
- Ask God to give you the opportunity to share the gospel with Muslims in your community. Know that “whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame.” 1 Peter 2:6

Saturday 27th March

God's Word is our promise and sure foundation. It reminds us we need never be ashamed of trusting in Him.

"On this mountain, the Lord will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food. On this mountain he will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples and the shroud enwrapping all nations. He will destroy death forever. The Lord will wipe away the tears from every cheek; he will take away his people's shame everywhere on earth, for the Lord has said so. That day it will be said: 'See, this is our God in whom we hoped for salvation; the Lord is the one in whom we hoped. We exult and we rejoice that he has saved us.'" Isa 25:6 -9

Let us end this week of prayer, praising and worshipping God.

Below is a link to a worship song entitled "All My Shame."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfbWZXPTw2I>

- Father we thank you that you have taken away our sin and shame.
- Father we thank you that you will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples and the shroud enwrapping all nations.
- Father we thank you that you will take away your people's shame everywhere on earth, for you have said so. May all Muslim people come to know this truth.