**American Christians Hosting Afghan Guests: A Few Helpful Hints**

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*“Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who… are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”* Hebrews 13:1-3

1. **HOSPITALITY:** We are honored as Christians to host newly-arrived Afghans in our homes. Pray for God to grant great love, patience, humility and genuine friendship to you, your family and your guests. Crossing cultures is not always easy, so don’t expect the time to be perfect. You and your guests will learn from one another. Hospitality is actually the Afghan peoples’ strength. So just accept the fact that you will never outdo their hospitality. To receive guests is to be honored in their culture. Make sure to treat your guest as you would want to be treated, with dignity and respect.

**HINT**: *Say, “We are honored to have you in our home.”*

1. **TIME:** If we Americans are honest, we would admit that time is our idol. Consequently, prolonged visits may not come easily. Pause daily to visit over tea and snacks. Get ready to relax a while, simply sit and chat with your guests, without rushing. Speak slowly and use simple English, since most Afghans speak Dari or Pashto as their first language, and a few will speak English as a second or third language. Without probing, show compassion and prepare to listen to your Afghan friend’s deep and often tragic story. Listening is a ministry. Feel free to ask if you can pray with them about their troubles; don’t hesitate to pray in Jesus’ name.

**HINT:** Serve either pistachio nuts, walnuts, hard candy, mini chocolates, dried apricots, or simple sugar cookies. Afghans are very relational. It often takes many cups of tea to build enough trust for Afghans to share on a deeper level. Every Afghan has experienced trauma and great loss; your presence and time can be such a gift for them to process through some of their pain.

1. **YOUR SCHEDULE:** Certainly, you must go about your normal commitments. Feel free to tell your guest that you will be gone to work or to other events. Let them know if there are certain expectations about your house or their time with you. There may be a lack of understanding about why you are not always available, just simply apologize and explain your commitments. On the other hand, they do not expect to be entertained. Likewise, Afghans are comfortable sitting in silence in your presence, unlike Americans. Just relax and enjoy a new Afghan friend filling your space. People are more important than time.

**HINT**: The resettlement agency will be making appointments for your guests to work on vaccines, social security, etc. You are not expected to take your guests to all of their appointments. Let others share the load. Your job is to host them.

1. **INVITATIONS:** *When you make an invitation to an Afghan (say for a meal or tea or a snack) don’t be surprised when they decline. In Afghan culture declining invitations is obligatory. They typically refuse at least twice. So, either keep asking or just make tea. Just simply place tea and a snack in front of them. Accept the fact that their culture DEMANDS that they say no until you oblige them. Conversely, we Americans usually respond to an invitation with an immediate: “Yes, I’d love to come.”* We feel that’s right to do, but Afghans often consider our immediate “Yes” as rude*.*

**HINT**: Instead of saying “Yes” to an Afghan offer, we need to always respond to an Afghan offer with “Oh no, that is too much trouble.” If they persist, you will see their sincerity; then you are free to accept or decline.

1. **GENDER ISSUES:** A word of caution is important about relationships between the sexes. Our Western freedoms are new and strange to most Afghans and will certainly be misinterpreted. As a rule, women should seek to cultivate friendships with women and men only with men. If, and only if you are much older, you have a little more freedom to relate with a younger person of the opposite sex. Afghan men have been taught to not look a woman in the eye. Don’t be offended by this; they are showing you respect. Ladies, please don’t extend your hand or hug a man; if the man offers you his hand, you can reciprocate. Women, try to avoid sitting next to a man on a couch. Don’t leave a single Afghan male at home alone with a young woman. It’s not really a matter of safety but of protocol. Having children around, however, makes it perfectly fine. As a matter of fact, Afghan families are typically large; you will likely see your guests playing with the kids and even babies. Men don’t ask adult women their names. Afghan children may not ever know their mothers’ names. Out of respect they simply call her “MadarjAn,” the equivalent of dear mommy.

**HINT:** Ladies, feel free to hug women guests; add kissing on alternating cheeks. Men freely hug men, as well. Make it a habit to give and receive food or anything with your right hand, the clean hand.

1. **MORALITY:** People in Afghanistan have often been told that Westerners live immoral lives. They have especially learned this from the internet, satellite tv, and movies. Unfortunately, Afghans often assume that all Americans approve of adultery, foul language, skimpy dress, drunkenness, etc. If you are hosting a former US translator, don’t be surprised at their language. They may have learned some language that would only be viewed by soldiers as normal on a battlefield. At the right time, gently correct them. Your gentle correction will demonstrate your godliness. If you watch lots of TV, change the channel when immoral matters appear.

**HINT:** Live out a very Christlike lifestyle; they will readily notice something very different about you. Enjoy brief prayer and Bible reading time at your table. Pray before meals in Jesus’ name. You will become your Afghan guests’ cultural informant. Teach them simple things about what to say and do in America.

1. **DRESS:** Be especially careful to dress modestly. For example, ladies should choose looser fitting clothes and long pants or capris. Avoid low cut shirts, tight workout attire, shorts, or short skirts. Now is not the time to challenge or debate their dress codes, women’s head coverings, etc. Of course, you can go work out, but come directly home to change.

**HINT:** Oddly enough, if you compliment someone on anything that they are wearing or own, they will feel culturally obligated to give it to you. Instead say nothing or say, “That color top looks nice on you.”

1. **DEPENDENCY:** Live generously but avoid the “Messiah Complex.” It’s not necessary for you to solve all your guest’s problems, nor meet all their needs. Certainly, serve them by taking them to purchase this or that. When it comes to bigger needs, pray with them regarding that need. Pray in Jesus’ name. If you feel led to help, invite others to join in. When, for example Christians assist them with something like a Walmart gift card, you can say, “This is a gift from our church.” Don’t forget to call the resettlement agency with your questions about their assistance. Not everything is urgent. The goal is for the newly arrived to learn enough English, find a job, and learn to provide for their own needs soon. If we over help, we can so easily create unhealthy dependency. Refugees’ high expectations of life in America will eventually come crashing down. Owning a big house and a fancy car is simply out of their reach as a new refugee.

**HINT:** If the guest is capable, encourage him/her to google topics such as “How to Study for a Driver’s License.” Model for them things such as how to make a doctor’s appointment. Have fun practicing with them. All this builds their confidence.

1. **FOOD:** As in most cultures, what we eat is important. For Afghans, FOOD IS EVERYTHING. They have mostly only known their delicious dishes and eating other foods will be different. Surprisingly, lots of Afghan males are great cooks. Offer to let them cook in your kitchen. Enjoy. Your guests will need to slowly get accustomed to American food, as well. Most Americans love cheese; Afghans typically don’t. So, spaghetti may go over better than cheesy lasagna. If you want to order pizza, get a plain cheese pizza – they might take the cheese off and eat the bread. AFghans typically eat less sugar than Americans, so serve lots of fruit and tea snacks for dessert. Their rice is better than our American rice, so just ask them to make it. Muslims don’t eat pork. Roasted chicken and lamb they generally love. You might ask them to add their spices.

**HINT:** Find a halal (Muslim) restaurant like ALI BABA or QUEEN OF SHEBA and treat your guests to some carry out food that will feel more natural to them. Try ordering chicken kebabs and rice, with naan. Most Afghans are fearful or disgusted of dogs, especially at meal time.

1. **WITNESS:** *So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become to dear to us.* I Thessalonians 2:8. We see in this passage that Paul the apostle had spent lots of time with the brothers in Thessalonica. Hosting Afghans for this short season may or may not afford Holy Spirit-directed moments of verbal witness. Pray for God to soften the hearts of your Muslim guests. It is the Spirit that drew you to Christ and He will draw them. Be prepared and spiritually strengthened through daily prayer, regular repentance, and daily Bible intake. Recognize the sacrificial service of generations of Christian witnesses that have gone before in Afghanistan. Be a humble, listening learner. One study revealed that Muslims typically come to Christ after 36 encounters with either Scripture, a need met, hearing a testimony, a dream or answered prayer. You are an important part of the process. Kindnesses shown certainly create opportunity for deeper friendship.

**HINT:** Don’t push, just kindly love your guests and answer questions about your faith and live out your faith humbly. How might God use your hosting to be a “link in the chain”?

1. **GOD TALK**: Strive to be viewed by your guests as a family who loves God. The Spirit may open natural doors to share biblical truth. Start with common ground rather than areas of contrast. For example, we as Christians and Muslims believe in ONE GOD; many of them think, however, that due to the doctrine of the Trinity we believe in three: Father, Son and Mary. Christians seek to live a moral lifestyle, but not to earn merit from God. Avoid offence, but don’t compromise the gospel. For example, avoid offence by never using their prophet’s name “Mohammad.” This is considered disrespectful. Instead, if their prophet comes up in discussion, just refer to him as “your prophet.” Likewise, don’t say the name of their book “the Quran.” Instead respectively refer to “your book.” Most Muslim-background Christians find Genesis a very important part of their journey to Christ. For a guest very interested to understand the Christian faith, start in Genesis with the narratives: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, etc. For someone serious, help them find a Dari Bible online: at the @Youversion Bible App. Or go to www.AfghanBible.com for the Bible in various Afghan languages. *See www.bibletelling.org to help you prepare stories to tell in simple English.*

Spiritual conversations should start with a question from your guest, not at your initiation. Afghan guests see you their host as their ‘authority,’ and they will be polite when you read the Bible or invite them to read it. Don’t misread their willingness as a genuine interest in Christianity. It’s best to be in a spirit of prayer, waiting and watching to see if he or she asks about spiritual matters. It could very well be that opening your home and serving is your complete assignment. That in itself will contribute to a hunger and thirst for more. It’s true that Muslims more readily discuss religion. Telling about your life and how God has answered prayer is usually received well. Be ready with a Bible story that relates.

**HINT:** There are many natural topics that can lead to spiritual conversations.

Is someone sick? Talk about God the Healer. See Mark 5:21-34

Is someone afraid? Talk about God our Protector. See Luke 8:22-25

Is someone broken and feeling alone? Talk about God as the One Who Sees, or the One who Hears our cries. See Genesis 21:14-21

Is someone in need financially? Talk about God the Provider. See Genesis 22

Is someone in need of forgiveness? Talk about God as the One who loves us best and is the source of forgiveness and reconciliation. See Matthew 18:21-35