Folk Islam

An introduction

Probably one of the reasons why the Gospel has had such a small impact on most Muslims is that the messengers of the Gospel have had little appreciation of the worldview of most Muslims. The resistance of Islam to the Gospel is partly due to:

1. The creedal simplicity of "high" Islam
2. The various historical confrontations

But the major reason is because we haven't related the Gospel to the **felt needs** of the common people. Folk Islam addresses those needs and by studying Folk Islam we can better understand the heartfelt needs of Muslims and how they perceive reality. We need to understand the world as Muslims report it. This is their worldview.

The Worldview of Muslims

A worldview provides people with their fundamental perceptions of reality. It defines for them what exists and what does not exist. A worldview poses the central questions of life and the methods by which people must find the answers. It also defines what answers are legitimate. There are really two important types of questions that have to be answered by a worldview:

- **What is the "big" story?**

What are the ultimate realities? What is the most lasting and comprehensive nature of things? What is the origin, meaning, purpose and final destiny of the universe? Of people? Of me?

Answers to these kinds of questions are given by "high" religion and in the case of Islam, by what is called "high" Islam, classical Islam, Quranic Islam etc.

Usually "high" Islam is controlled by an 'elite'. The elite have spent years studying theology and law and they control the mosques. However, because they are dealing with ultimate questions, the elite often lose touch with the questions of common folk. Common folk are so beset by the problems of everyday life that they have very little time to consider ultimate questions!

For most Muslims, life is full of problems. People need food, shelter, health, identity, relationships, pleasure, meaning and many other things. They know how to plant and tend their crops, how to cook meals, how to build boats, how to treat normal illnesses etc. but often their knowledge fails in a crisis and, for pragmatic answers, they don't turn to "high" Islam which seems very theoretical and impractical, but to "Folk" Islam. This leads to the second type of question a worldview has to answer.

- How do I practically handle crises in my life?

"Folk" Islam basically answers five types of questions to the satisfaction of most Muslims:

- What is the meaning of life and how do I handle the challenge of death? "Folk" religion answers this type of question by making sense out of life by ordering it into stages and making much of the periods that mark transition. So it majors on life-cycle rights: birth, initiation (at puberty), marriage and funerals. By making a big occasion of these transitions, the common people feel they have meaning and thus accept them.
- How can I handle the threat of misfortune? Or to put it another way, how can I guarantee I will be happy? To most Muslims life is precarious. At best it is filled with illness, plagues, barrenness, accidents, drownings, fires, droughts, earthquakes and disasters of all sorts including war. "Folk" Islam has an answer to this by providing amulets, talisman, magic, astrology, evil spirit repellents, rituals and many other practices.
- How can I have success and avoid failure? How can my family ensure its prosperity and property? How can I find a suitable spouse for my child? How can I win at gambling? How can I pass an examination?

Again, “Folk” Islam provides an answer to these questions through divination, omens and astrology. There is another side as well: sorcery, curses and witchcraft can secure the failure of rivals and enemies.

- How do I plan my life? How do I deal with the fear and frustration of the unknown future? Also there are questions like: Who stole my money? Will this plane crash? Again, “Folk” Islam provides guidance by means of divination, dreams, oracles, omens and prophecies.
- What is my relationship with other human beings? My ancestors? Local spirits, jinn, animals and plants? There is a great fear of rejection in a society that is very group conscious. Not only is rejection feared, but also the hostility or abandonment of the spirit world. Again, “Folk” Islam provides answers. Love magic and fertility rites etc. are commonly used to keep marriages together.

In summary, there are two forms of Islam: “High” Islam and “Folk” Islam. There is a continuum between these extremes – a spectrum of belief/practice between the theological/philosophical approach of “High” Islam and the occult practices of animistic “Folk” Islam.

Most Muslims (some authorities say ~70%) live down in the “Folk” Islam, part of the spectrum. Yet almost exclusively our approach and teaching about Islam and how to interact with Muslims has been to the ~10% who are at the other end of the spectrum – the “High” Islam end.

Figure 1

Islamic Worldviews

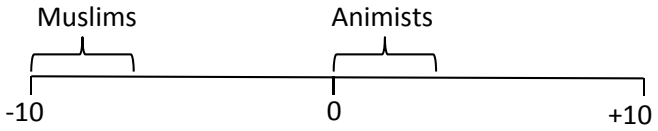
“High” Islam is concerned with:

- the nature of ultimate realities
- the ultimate origins, purpose and destiny of the universe, of people and of myself.

“Folk Islam is concerned with:

- the meaning of life and the challenge of death
- human well-being and the threat of misfortune
- success and the danger of failure
- human planning and control – the uncertainty of the unknown and the need for guidance
- meaningful relationships and fear of rejection

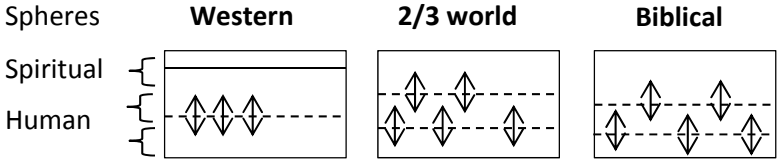
One reason we often fail to appreciate the felt needs of people that are being met by Folk Islam is that our western culture is far removed in its modes of thinking from Folk Islam. Missiologists have developed a Scale of Receptivity to the Gospel. In theory all people groups can be positioned on this scale. The lower end indicates a very great resistance to the Gospel.



Three types of society

The diagrams below were developed by Charles Kraft. I would like to refer to 3 types of worldview. There is the western worldview, the two-thirds world society worldview and a Biblical worldview.

Figure 2 – Types of worldview



Each worldview contains a sphere with spiritual content. This contains all that relates to spiritual beings – be they God, angels, demons etc. There is a second sphere involving human relations: politics, government, sociology, social sciences etc. A third sphere relates to the natural world.

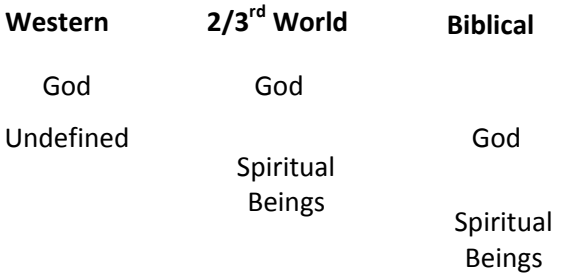
It is important to note the following:

1. Different worldviews have different emphases. The western worldview puts a major emphasis on the physical, biological and social sciences. Technology and mechanisms dominate our society. Both in the 2/3rds world societies and in the Biblical worldview the spiritual realm plays a far greater part.

2. The lines between the spheres are broken indicating an interaction between the spheres. For example: we accept the fact that there are psychosomatic diseases. Poor relationships with one's spouse (the human sphere) can lead to physical disease (the natural sphere). The difference in western societies is that there is no interaction assumed between the spirit world and the human and physical worlds. In practice, most people sense that God is remote, detached and has no interaction with them. They are Deists.

3. The major difference between the worldviews is their emphasis in the spiritual sphere.

Figure 3 – Three types of spirit spheres



Note the following;

1. The spirit sphere is very small for most westerners. They are mostly **Neo-Platonists**, but usually they don't appreciate this fact. This means they have a **dualistic** worldview. They separate the supernatural from the natural; the spirit from matter and religion from science. These concepts entered our European thinking at the time of the Renaissance.

2. Even Western thought divides the spirit world into two parts – that which relates to God and that other undefined part that relates to horoscopes, astrology, e.s.p. etc. It is probably true that interest in areas of the occult is increasing and we may be moving into line with 2/3rds world societies.

3. To many people living in the 2/3rds world (including "Folk" Muslims), the spirit world plays a major part in their lives. In fact in many societies it plays a controlling part in life. They separate a supreme deity from other spiritual beings, but there is a major difference between the Biblical worldview and these 2/3rds world societies. The major concern about the spiritual world is not a concern for truth but a concern for power – particularly power that controls spiritual forces. "Folk" Islam is deeply pragmatic, so it doesn't major on concern about the character and attributes of Allah, but on the influence on the daily life of such beings as Jinn, Qarina, Saints, the Evil Eye etc. and how the influence of such powers can be controlled.

4. The Biblical worldview emphasises God above all else. It is concerned with the character and attributes of God and what He has done. There is an emphasis on truth. It is true that the Bible mentions other spiritual beings – an archangel, angels, demons and Satan. However these play a minor role. God himself is centre stage.

The anthropologist, Dr Paul Hiebert, has developed a model or a grid in order to better understand the world of "Folk" Islam. (See figure 4) He uses two metaphors or models used by "Folk" Muslims to describe their experiences. The first metaphor is the **organic** (or better **relational**) model. This involves living beings relating to other living beings. The stress of this model is in the areas of life, personality and relationships that are essentially moral in character. The other metaphor is **mechanical**. This model is based on concepts of impersonal objects controlled by impersonal forces. The stress in this model is largely mechanistic. These forces are essentially amoral in character.

Figure 4

	Organic Model	Mechanical Model	
Unseen and supernatural	**"High Islam** based on cosmic **beings** Allah Archangels Angels Satan Demons	**"High" Islam** based on cosmic **forces** Fate (Qismet)	Involves the "other worldly"
	"Folk" Islam Jinn Zar Qarina Dead saints	**Magic and Sorcery** Divination, astrology Bakara Dikhr Evil Eye (Hasad) Omens, charms, curses etc. Sacred objects and numbers	Involves "This World"
Empirical can be seen and tested	**Folk "social science"** Living saints (Pirs, Wali) Dreams, visions	**Folk "natural science"** Herbs Drugs Natural objects and forces	

Please note the following:

1. The boundaries between the segments are dotted and indicate an interaction between them. For example: a human may acquire '*Baraka*' (the **power** of God's blessing) which is essentially amoral in character and is a 'force'.

2. The stress is on the supernatural, the unseen, the other-worldly that is beyond sense experience and above natural (especially scientific) explanation. Important knowledge for "Folk" Muslims is based on supernatural experiences.

3. In the west, *Jinn* (sexual spirits of many kinds and usually malevolent) are largely seen in cartoons as coming out of bottles. But to most people in the Muslim World they are feared. *Zar* are demonic spirits that possess people causing illness or abnormal behaviour and bad luck. *Qarina* are a person's (evil) double or shadow spirit. *Dikhr* is the power of merit.

Truth versus power

A crucial difference between "High" Islam and "Folk" Islam has to do with their purposes. "High" Islam seeks truth. It wants to provide people with the story of reality and with a map. It stresses revelation, insight and reason. The map provides people with exact directions of what they must do – i.e. The Five Pillars.

"Folk" Islam focuses on power and problem-solving in everyday life. It is pragmatic. Any method will do as long as it works. In fact, most "Folk" Muslims will use several methods at once. A father with a sick son will ask the mullah to pray to God for him, will tie an amulet to his arm to drive off evil spirits and also go to the pharmacy for modern medicine to kill the germs – all at the same time.

Kinds of power

Power is central to our understanding of "Folk" Islam. There are essentially three kinds of power.

- There are spiritual and human beings who have power. This would include Allah, angels, demons, some human beings such as leaders of the Sufi orders and other holy men.

- There are groups that have power. Power resides not only in individuals but in the group, the family, the tribe etc. Thus people speak of the "life" of the family and the "spirit" of the tribe. One of the reasons that "Folk" Muslims are so tightly group-conscious is that the group has a spiritual entity. Loss of a member by conversion very seriously affects the power of the group and is thus viewed with very great fear and concern.
- Power is also found in impersonal forces. This is supernatural power and it includes *Baraka*, the evil eye, astrological forces and magic. It also includes the very powerful force – fate or *Qismet*.

Power confrontation and power encounters

I will use the term 'confrontation' to mean the cosmic fight between good and evil. This is well understood by all Muslims and is part of their explanation of reality just as it is part of ours. Christians also understand this, ***"For this purpose Christ was revealed that he would destroy the works of the evil one."*** (1 John 3:8) Our whole understanding of spiritual warfare is in this context.

The term "power encounter" can be reserved for confrontations that take place between two religions and in this context it is the confrontation between the Gospel and Islam (both "High" and "Folk").

Four types of power encounter

1. An encounter with religious structures

This is a very common encounter between the institutions and members of an Islamic country and the believer. It includes the visa issue. An Islamic government may deny a believer the right to enter and share the Gospel. There might be a refusal of permission to build a church or to have a public meeting. In Scripture this type of power encounter was found almost daily in the life of Jesus. In John's Gospel stress is laid on the growing power encounter between Jesus and the Jewish religious establishment.

John 2: Jesus overthrows the tables of the money changers in the temple.

John 3: He talks to a leader of the establishment and says he needs a totally new experience (being born from above) if he is to be acceptable to God.

John 4: He challenges the religious segregation taught by the scribes and Pharisees.

John 5: He heals on the Sabbath day – against the institutional rules.

John 6: He challenges the religious authorities at a feast.

John 8: He confronts their unforgiving legalism.

John 9: He shows their powerlessness.

In return, the religious establishment questions Him, bates Him, attacks Him and crucifies Him.

Similarly, a believer sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom to "Folk" Islam is going into a power encounter with the structures of religion which will take place almost daily.

2. An encounter with "religious taboos"

A second type of power encounter occurs when a believer, either deliberately or unconsciously, violates a religious taboo and thus shows himself/herself immune to its power. There is a story of C.T. Studd in Africa when he ate some plantains he had cooked in a fire fuelled by fetishes of witchcraft. The fact that he did not die instantly convinced the people he had superior powers.

In her book, **Christ supreme over Satan**, Vivienne Stacey gives examples of workers taking houses with a very low rent because the local people knew of the demonic influences in the house. The local population expected those workers to have trouble. Some did, but if the house is "cleansed" by the blood of Christ and the authority of Christ then nothing happens to those who live there and the people round about recognise that those who live there have power.

This type of power encounter is not as common as the first but it does happen quite regularly to those living among "Folk" Muslims.

3. A ritual power encounter

The confrontation of Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al is this type. The essence of this type of encounter is that a formal challenge or dual is set up. Usually the winner demonstrates the superiority of his magical power.

I think we can include in this category the following examples:

- A believer may be taken to someone sick or dying and asked to pray for healing for that person.
- Someone brought to a believer may be obviously demonised. Perhaps "Folk" Islam has not been able to control the demon and help is sought from the believer. Such help is usually sought because "Folk" Islam has failed.

Such cases can be seen as ritual power encounters because they are a public "duel" between the power of the Lord Jesus through the believer and evil powers.

4. Conversion encounters

The final type of power encounter is of another sort. It takes place in the hearts of those wishing to convert. A Muslim wishing to turn to the Lord Jesus fears the power of the old fetishes. He is afraid he will be killed, not by his family, but by the powers of "Folk" Islam. The final triumph of faith is when he brings out his amulets, fetishes and other magical paraphernalia and burns them.

In this type of power encounter, the fetishes of "Folk" Islam must be destroyed if Christ is to take their place. Even in communal (not mass, but multi-individual), conversion there is always an encounter at some locus of power. There is a moment when the individuals experience an event when they turn from "Folk" Islam to Christ. This needs to be **seen** – a specific act of faith.

The believer sharing the Gospel can't (except through prayer) precipitate such a power encounter. You can't destroy the fetishes. The people will only buy more. Those converting must destroy them. A Biblical example of this is in Acts 19:17-20 where former sorcerers burned their scrolls.

Preparing for power encounters

The question most of us have is, "What should our response be to "Folk" Islam and how do we become involved in power encounters with the spiritual beings and forces that so dominate the lives of ordinary Muslims?"

Firstly we must refuse to be polarised into a "High" versus "Folk" mentality. We deal with ultimate realities. We teach and proclaim the character and attributes of God: the creation, sin, Christ, redemption and the Kingdom of God. We could call these aspects "High" Christianity. But we must also deal with the questions that dominate the lives of ordinary people. What should we strongly affirm and indeed proclaim to "Folk" Muslims?

- **God is a God of power**

"Folk" Islam focuses on power. In our own hearts and minds we must have a Biblical understanding of God's power. We must know how to demonstrate that power in and through our lives. We must strongly affirm the miracles of God.

We must understand God's power and His miracles in terms of the Cross. The Cross is God's paradigm (pattern) for how He works out His power (1 Cor. 1:18-25). In Jesus' teaching there is always a link between power and glory and suffering. God's power is radically different from 'magic' power.

Since God is a God of power, we must carefully think through our understanding of power encounter. We are called on to challenge the structures and beliefs of Islamic systems, calling people to turn away from false religion to Christ. However we should also recognise that there may be important truths in Islam and structural elements (like the emphasis on and forms of prayer) that don't need to be destroyed. They need to have new content and meaning poured into the forms. This raises the whole issue of contextualisation. Appreciating where the balance lies between contextualisation and power encounter demands much waiting on God for His wisdom.

Because God is a God of power, we must be living demonstrations that we are no longer subject to or afraid of the spirits and powers of "Folk" religion. The good news is that we are delivered from them and indeed, in the name of Jesus, we have authority over them!

Because God is a God of power we should not avoid ritual power encounters. But we would be unwise to precipitate direct ritual power encounters with the local mullah! Our model should be Elijah, who waited God's time. To press confrontation may be to presume on God. We also need to appreciate that such confrontations rarely lead to mass conversions. Their usual function is to force people to think and perhaps to reaffirm the faith of young believers.

Because God is a God of power we can take part in the struggle of conversion encounter, not directly, but by our prayer and intercession. Prayer is a vital part of power encounter at this level. There are also other ways by which we can show solidarity with those in the process of conversion.

- **God is interested in the everyday lives of human beings.**

It is important that we declare not only God's transcendence, not only His involvement in creation, redemption and eschatology, but also His involvement in the daily lives of ordinary people – guiding them, healing them and providing for them. We need to be able to tell of God's view on death, suffering, disaster, loneliness and failure. We need to be able to show how God is at work in the affairs of nations.

The sermons of Peter and Paul in Acts arise out of events. Something happened and the preacher explained its meaning to the people. We need to develop ways to relate all events – whether natural disasters or miracles – to God's intervention in human lives. We need to avoid the secularism of modern science.

We must learn to discern God's work.

Since no religious phenomenon is uniquely Christian, we must learn to test the reality and the source of human experience in the light of Scripture. The Scriptures are clear that Satan does signs and wonders and counterfeits God's works (2 Thess. 2:9-10). There is no phenomenon that is, in itself, proof of God's presence. Speaking in tongues, healings, miracles, resurrections from the dead – all are reported to be happening among Muslims. We need to develop tests we can use to determine spiritual realities on the level of "Folk" Islam and to discern what is of God.

Suggested tests of discernment

- ✓ Does the experience glorify Jesus Christ as God rather than as a human leader? (Jn. 7:18; 8:50; 12:27-28; 17:4)
- ✓ Does it lead to obedience to Him as Saviour and Lord? (James 2:14-19; 1 Jn. 2:3-5; 5:3)
- ✓ Is it in agreement with Scripture? (2 Pet. 2:1)
- ✓ Does it produce the fruit of the Spirit? (Eph. 5:9, 22-25)
- ✓ Does it lead to spiritual maturity and balance?(1 Cor. 3; Heb. 6; Eph. 6:11)
- ✓ Does it work for the unity of the Body of Christ? (Jn. 17:11, 23; 1 Jn. 2:9-11; 5:1-2)
- ✓ Does it agree with our understanding of the Cross as the paradigm of God's power encounter with sin and Satan?

We must learn to discern what is from God. Many of our Muslim friends will have visions and dreams which they will ask us to interpret. In countries like Egypt, there are phenomena like the appearance of the Virgin Mary seen by thousands in a Coptic church in Cairo. Muslims expect the super-natural to be part of their lives. We must discern what is of God and what is not if we are to help them.

- **It is wise to emphasise the Biblical view of God**

Sharing about God's involvement in everyday life must be rooted in our understanding of God Himself. It is best to begin with the providence of God the Father. We need to discover in our everyday lives the truth that, ***"In everything God works for good with those that love Him***."(Rom. 8:28)

So a proclamation of the sovereignty and loving care of God and a demonstration of this in our lives is the larger framework within which the other frames must be understood.

We need to emphasise the presence of Jesus Christ in our daily lives encouraging us in our victories and sustaining us in our sufferings. (Mt. 28:20; Jn. 17:23; Eph. 1:11-14) He is our example both in the way of the Cross and servanthood and in the way of the Resurrection.

Within the presence of Jesus Christ, we must emphasise **the power of the Holy Spirit** who shows us the Son and provides us with power to live victorious lives and to manifest the works of God as a testimony to the Kingdom of God on earth.

Some warnings

The area of life with the greatest potential for good is often also the area with the greatest danger of distortion. During the Middle Ages, "Folk" Christianity had moved so far from the Gospel that true faith was threatened. The Reformation in Europe was more of a reaction against "Folk" Christianity than against the heresies of "High" orthodox Roman Catholicism.

We face the same problem in dealing with "Folk" Islam. We need to deal with the problems it raises, but we must be on our guard lest our answer be a distorted version of the truth. Below are some possible dangers in regard to power encounter with "Folk" Islam.

1. The danger of using experience as the final arbiter of truth

All our experiences must be tested against reality and against divine revelation. If we take as truth everything that is reported, we end in total subjectivism and relationism. "Reality" testing is one of the most difficult things. In determining which tests to use, we already predetermine which religions are false and which are true. For example, Hindus reject empirical tests for to them the world is illusion. For them personal, inner experience is the final arbiter of truth. Some Sufis would argue the same and consequently they end up in narcissism (abnormal self-admiration) and holding a view that self is all that exists or can be known.

According to the Christian worldview, God created a real but contingent (dependent) universe distinct from Himself. Consequently there is real history. This means that historical and empirical verification become important tests of truth (1 Cor. 15:19). See the writings of Francis Schaeffer on this very important subject.

2. The danger of self-centred narcissism

"Folk" Islam is preoccupied with the 'self'. God is deeply interested in our 'selves', but not in our self-centredness. It is important that our experience of God in our everyday lives leads us into a greater God-centredness.

3. The danger of a new 'Christian magic' based on a false theology of power

In magic, the ultimate reality is supernatural power not a divine being. If we know how to control that power, we can get others – even God – to do our will! Magic, in this sense, is the complete antithesis of worship which is rooted in relationship with and submission to God. Perhaps this is why God hates it so much. As humans, in the crises of life we are always tempted to become 'gods'. We attempt to coerce God to do our will rather than submitting to His will.

We don't come to the Muslim World with a stronger form of magic than the one the people already have. God is not just a more powerful magic and we must avoid all acts that would appear to present Him as this. No! God denounces the underlying assumptions of "Folk" Islam that focus on self, on control of power and on pragmatic solutions.

4. The danger of instituting a new secularism by perpetuating a dualistic worldview

We need to affirm that God works in extraordinary ways, but if we see God's hand only in miracles, we end up in a neo-platonic dualism and secularise the ordinary. We need to emphasise that God works as much through natural processes, such as medicine and good technology, as He does through supernatural events.

5. The danger of making signs and wonders ends in themselves

God's extraordinary works are signs. They point beyond themselves to some lesson God is teaching us. We are tempted to look for the sign and not the message to which the sign points and to see miracles as signs of greater spirituality.

Jesus faced this problem. He healed the sick and fed the poor as signs pointing to the fact that the Kingdom of God had invaded the earth. But when people wanted Him to be a miracle worker to meet their daily needs, He refused and turned away from them. (Jn. 6:15-66) Similarly, when Herod wanted Jesus to do a miracle for the sake of entertainment, He refused. (Lk. 28:8-12)

6. The danger of generating a false sense of guilt/failure among those not healed or delivered

It is easy to rejoice with those who are healed, but those whom God chooses to sustain in their illness need the support of the church most. If we focus on miracles as ends in themselves, we are likely to blame those who do not experience a miracle as lacking faith or harbouring sin.

7. The danger of exalting a human leader

"Folk" Islam focuses on the human leader whether it is Muhammad or a Sufi leader or 'pir' etc. We must make it absolutely clear that power comes from God and that He alone deserves our honour and worship.

8. The danger of selling out to pragmatism

Because "Folk" Islam is more concerned with power than with truth, it means that any way may be used as long as it solves the problem. But in the end this leads to a denial of truth and attacks the very heart of the Gospel.

If we have a better understanding of the worldview of "Folk" Muslims we can begin to get involved in power encounter with the principalities and powers in the Muslim World.

There is much we don't yet understand. Here are a couple of areas where we need much more understanding:

- Are all "Folk" Muslim beliefs wrong? Are there any we can we retain and reinterpret as adequate vehicles of Christian truth? Which of them are merely cultural understandings, having little to do with the Christian faith, and must be totally rejected as antithetical to the Gospel?
- What changes must take place at conversion and what can be left to Christian growth? How much must a new believer from "Folk" Islam renounce or change at conversion and what can we leave to be dealt with through teaching and instruction?

Some examples of "Folk" Islam

There is a widespread fear of curses among "Folk" Muslims. Tunisians are afraid that someone will find their fingernail trimmings and use that to curse them. In Yemen they prefer using a person's hair to curse someone. Both of these illustrate what is known as contagious evil power. In Jordan people talk about "blood blessings" as a common practice. If someone buys a car, they will sacrifice a lamb and place the blood on the bumper of the car to protect it from evil forces. When a new house is built they also sacrifice a lamb and its blood is applied to the door frames.

Morocco has "occult fairs" (called *moussem*) that draw crowds of up to 20,000 people – a sort of 'Satanic signs and wonders congress'! People gather in groups to witness supernatural feats and to receive *baraka* (blessing). People possessed by evil spirits slash themselves with sharp knives, but there is no bleeding.

There is a 'comical' side to "Folk" Islam. In Morocco there is a common love potion used to keep a husband faithful to his wife/wives. The magical potion is served in tea and includes the wife's urine. One worker said, "Every man in Morocco has drunk his wife's urine, from the King down to the poorest peasant!"

The Evil Eye

Belief in "the Evil Eye" is very widespread. Don't dismiss it as superstition simply generating fear in those who believe in it. Some years ago there was an expatriate couple in Jordan. Their Arab neighbour gave birth to a baby boy. The wife of the couple went round to congratulate them and in the course of the conversation said something like, "What a beautiful boy!" The parents were very unhappy with this. A few days later the baby got sick. The family and the locals did everything they could to break the power of 'the evil eye'. They burned incense and recited sura 113 (the Dawn), *"Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn."* They recited many times suras 1, 112, 113. But after two weeks the baby died. By this time the whole neighbourhood believed that the expatriate wife had 'the evil eye' and revenge attacks began. They made an image of the wife and stuck pins in it. Things began to get worse. On the advice of other expatriates the couple left Jordan, never to return.

Belief in 'the evil eye' is widespread all over the Arab World and in other Muslim countries. It is found among both Muslims and Arab Christians, among university professors and illiterate slum dwellers, among those who are extremely religious and those who are very nominal. They fear people who, intentionally or unintentionally, have the ability to destroy anything they envy and especially children. Since you don't know who these people are, everyone must take action to counter any effects of 'the evil eye'.

- Orthodox Muslims recite special passages from the Quran (as above).
- In "Folk" Islam you can do much more!
  - ✓ Many have amulets with sura 113 engraved on them and wear them as a necklace.
  - ✓ Turquoise is a potent colour of protection. Little earrings are often put on babies.
  - ✓ The "Hand of Fatima" is also a good protector.
  - ✓ For some reason, '5' is a very potent number – found on the "Hand of Fatima" – other 'hands' are printed over doors and windows of a house.
  - ✓ Starfish (dead ones) are nailed over doors.
  - ✓ People lift up their hand and say, '*hamsa*' (5) if they notice someone is staring at them.
  - ✓ Some people wash their car or their own body in salty sea water.
- Baby boys are believed to be especially vulnerable and "Folk" Muslims will say, '*Ma sha 'allah*' before saying anything. Baby boys – even toddlers – are often dressed as girls or given girls' nicknames.
- Christians do the same except they say, "*Fil ism as'Salib*" (in the name of the Cross). They also make dough crosses and place them around the house.

Conclusion

Paul taught that ***"The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons and not to God."*** (1 Cor. 10:20) Moses taught the same in Deut. 32:16-17, ***"God was angered with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons which are not God".***

The Eye and the Serpent are symbols of great evil spiritual powers that still hold many millions in bondage.