

Book Q&A for Media Interviews  
Culturally Speaking: Promoting Cross-Cultural Awareness in a Post-9/11 World

1. Why did you write this book? What was your motivation?

I was hearing so many misconceptions about Americans from Bahrainis and vice versa; both sides showed ignorance. I wanted to dispel that ignorance and allow the truths to come out.

2. What is the book about?

The misconceptions of culture and religion between Americans and the Arab Muslims of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Through interviews, I identified 11 common generalizations each group had of the other, and allowed those generalizations to be discussed from personal points of view. Other topics are also covered in the book.

3. What makes you an expert on this topic?

I am not an expert. I am a writer with a gift to allow the voices of other people to come alive for the benefit of all who read the book. This book is not an advertisement for Islam nor is it a major cure-all of the problem.

4. What are some of the book's main message points?

- a. Dispelling myths of two countries that are ignorant of each other's culture.
- b. Promoting a healthy culture through understanding, respect and dialogue.
- c. Citing examples of what our countries have done to bridge the cultural gap.
- d. Offering ideas of what individual Americans and Bahrainis can do.
- e. Recognizing the commonalities each share: a desire for world peace, respect, love of family, career and education aspirations, and basic needs of sustenance.
- f. Achieving a better understanding about Islam and learning how the Arab culture affects the religion.

5. What topics does the book cover?

Commonalities between Islam and Christianity, political Islam and the different sects of Islam (radical sect of Osama bin Laden vs. peaceful sect of most others), differences between Sunni and Shia, hijab, media bias, the Iraq war, Arab culture, 11 generalizations each has of the other, women's empowerment, drinking, family values.

6. Where is Bahrain?

Bahrain is a small archipelago island in the Arabian Gulf off of Saudi Arabia, and connected to Saudi by a causeway. The U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain and has been for more than 50 years.

7. Why did you choose Bahrain and not a more well-known Arab country?

Cultural practices differ widely from country to country. Since I have spent a great deal of time in Bahrain, since December 2005, visiting my husband who is working in Bahrain, this is the Arab country I am most familiar with.

8. How did you meet the people that you interviewed?

I met people in three ways: by coincidence, socially and through referral. The Bahraini interviewees were through coincidence mostly. My husband introduced me to some individuals from his client's office; others were referred to me from those I interviewed. One individual I met as a result of a letter she had sent in to the local newspaper editorial page, and she, in turn, connected me with others.

The American people I interviewed were a combination of friends, clients, and business associates from the Midwest.

9. How did you select the Bahraini people to interview? Don't you think it is necessary to live and experience their lives if you are going to write about them?

My "selection" process began with the delivery of my nephew's journal to the Bahraini family of his college roommate who had died in the US. After spending a few hours with the family, I realized what intriguing people they were and how interesting their culture was. I interviewed the two sisters and some of their college friends (who were Shia). I also keyed into professional people (all Shia coincidentally) who were clients of my husband's company. An American Muslim I met in Bahrain connected me with a friend of hers who was Sunni. She, in turn, introduced me to a half dozen Sunni families to interview so that I would have an equal balance of Sunni and Shia perspectives represented. Admittedly, my cross-section was limited insofar as everyone I spoke with was fluent in English and fairly well educated.

The non-college educated are also a target for my audience, as these Bahrainis have an opportunity to learn about Americans from this book.

The book is available in both English and Arabic in Bahrain; it's a first step to getting it into the hands of both English and non-English speaking Bahrainis.

In an ideal world, yes, it is best to live among the people. Since December 2005 I have been visiting Bahrain every other month spending 4-5 weeks at a time. I see many of these people socially on a weekly basis when I am in the country, and

have even connected some Bahrainis with Americans as email pen pals. It's the next best thing to living among them.

10. Don't you think your book is a bit misleading? It paints a picture that Arabs believe Islam is a religion of peace, but their actions show a totally different picture. Your book implies that we should be understanding, but in fact, America needs to be carefully suspicious.

First of all, from my experience, the majority of Bahraini Arabs believe Islam **IS** a peaceful religion and you can take this message from my book. But your point is well taken. Even though the majority of Muslims believe in peace, the minority are the ones making the headlines. The minority are the ones that want to get back to the pure Bedouin Islam; that is, early medieval times and they believe the way forward is to spread violence strictly on non-Muslims, especially the West. This is the radical sect of Islam that Osama bin Laden was educated in. But the point to take away from my book is that there is a large population of peaceful Muslims that disagree with bin Laden's sect. Americans will be better off if we can support the Muslim majority who are inclined to be tolerant and peaceful.

And how would you do that?

I wish I had the answer to that question, but I don't. I know that if all you listen to are media reports of the negative side of Islam, then you cannot make a rational decision about dealing with Muslims. With a balanced perspective, you are better able to make a balanced judgment.

11. What has the response been from Bahrain toward your book?

Very positive. People I've spoken with, particularly those within the Bahrain government, call this a "much-needed" book for both countries. The Bahrain press has also been very favorable. Bahrain's Ministry of Information believed in its message enough to support me as a sponsor.

The foreword is written by former U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Sam Zakhem, who served in Bahrain from 1986-89 and is very well respected and liked.

12. Give me some examples of what Americans can do to bridge the cultural gap.

First, read my book to learn about the culture. Be open-minded and willing to listen and learn about Islam and the Arab culture. Understand that most Bahraini Arabs hate Osama bin Laden as much as Americans do; realize that Arabs do not hate Americans, they strongly disapprove and disagree with the American government's foreign policy. Don't berate Arabs unless you understand the culture. The Arab culture is very different from the Somali culture.

13. How many people did you interview? What were their demographics?

- a. Bahraini and American – approximately 20 Americans and 25 Bahrainis with 10 Americans and 16 Bahrainis predominantly quoted
- b. gender – both male and female
- c. age – between 20 and 70 years of age
- d. Shiite and Sunni – equal number of both sects
- e. Catholic and protestant – mixture of both
- f. Profession – university students, retired businessmen and women, individuals within the Bahraini government, housewives, professional men and women

14. How can someone buy your book?

[www.culturalyspeak.com](http://www.culturalyspeak.com) or [www.bookfulfillment.com](http://www.bookfulfillment.com) for online orders

Amazon.com

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