

On Life In The Sudan

By Bayyinah Sharrleff

Many people who are not familiar with Islamic customs have read or heard that the Muslim women are regarded as being so below the men that they must enter the side or back door of their homes and not the front door.

DURING MY FIRST months in the Republic of the Sudan, I noticed that the women did indeed enter their homes by a smaller entrance usually located to the side of their homes, and that the men always entered by the main entrance which was located at the front. By my being a guest in their country, I was always invited to the main entrance.

Within the walls of this entrance was a pleasant garden or veranda which led to a large sitting room. This room was primarily for guests and the male visitors. The women also had a large sitting room separate from the men. It too opened on to a large garden area or veranda.

Although, I entered by the large main entrance (as a guest), I often found myself passing through this empty guest room to the room where I

found my own kind (females). The smaller entrances led one straight to this area.

Women everywhere like to meet occasionally and discuss their families, friends, and news such as newly weds, engagements, accomplishments, etc. Going to this area, I always felt at home, for I could relax well, be comfortable, take off my shoes (if I liked). A woman did not have to worry about a man entering this area and seeing her in an unrepresentable position, for the men did not come into this area.

AN INTERESTING THING to note here is that these smaller entrances were never locked. The front main doors were. Whenever I went to visit my female Sudanese Sisters, I always entered the side entrance, clapped three times (as is their practice) and found myself received and welcomed well.

The guests and male visitors, salesmen, businessmen, all knock at the front main entrance. Women do not go to answer this door, only the men of the family do. If there are no men of the family at home, no one answers the door and the

visitor knows this and leaves. The Sudanese society on a whole know the general hours to find the men of the family home and rested (after 4:30 p.m.).

After experiencing this facet of the Sudanese Muslim society, and understanding the practicality of such an arrangement, I appreciated going to a side entrance. I was not visiting the family to meet their fathers and husbands, I was visiting to see my Sisters.

THE HONORABLE ELIJAH MUHAMMAD is always in accord with the Islamic practices of good. He instructs the woman not to open the door of her home to a man other than her husband and relatives unless her husband is home and if he is home — he should open the door. This is for her safety and protection, and avoids evil.

In a society such as America, one never knows who will be on the other side of the closed door and rather to invite trouble we, the Muslim women leave our doors closed.

All praises are due to Allah for blessing us with such a Wonderful Leader, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad.