

Early birds

19 January 2016 | [Blog](#)



I knew that in Egypt things are different from Europe. For instance times to have meals and opening times of the shops. In Cairo some supermarkets do not open before 10.30 AM, but then again they are still open until one o'clock at night. "I guess they haven't heard the saying 'the early bird catches the worm', I sometimes thought by myself. I was wrong however, I discovered a while ago...

My Egyptian husband and I are since a couple of months living in an apartment in the capital of Egypt. As it goes you have all kinds of chores to do as far as decorating is concerned. Likewise we still had all the boxes of our newly-bought devices - fridge, washing machine, stove - stacked in our 'children's room'. Finally on a Saturday we decided to clean up the mess; we moved everything to our living room. After that my husband would arrange that 'the man of the carton' would come to pick everything up.

Unfortunately after talking with the owner of the building it appeared that the man who is responsible for picking up the carton had just left. Tuesday he would come again. Annoying... but there was nothing left to do but wait a few days...

That following Tuesday my husband received a very early phone call from the owner of the building - the alarm clock showed 5.00 AM - the man of the carton had arrived. My husband quickly got up and opened the door, but the man had already been at our doorstep, judging by the fact that the plastic bag, which we had put on the stairs in front of our door, had been collected. My husband raced down the stairways of our building and luckily met the man of the carton downstairs. After exchanging phone numbers the man promised he would come back later. Indeed after a few hours, 7.30 AM, the man of the carton came back with a colleague. In just a few seconds our carton 'piece of art' was removed from our living room. We were happy, but what a bizarre early time to pick up carton... there are some 'early birds' in Egypt after all.

The shisha

2 February 2016 | [Blog](#)



Shisha

Men and women, young and old (with the exception of children) smoke the shisha in their free time in cafes, on the street or at their homes. The 'shisha', the (Egyptian) water pipe. The ancient alternative for the cigarette or cigar and I believe more healthy too – but I admit I haven't done any research into the matter.

The shisha has a mouthpiece attached to a long curly wire that is connected to a kind of candlestick on which the tobacco is burning. The tobacco is available in all

kinds of flavour.

A while ago, on an unusually rainy and wet evening, I tried the apple flavour in the famous and eldest cafe of Cairo, 'Feshawi'. Though I dislike the smell of cigarettes and had never smoked before, I loved the taste of the shisha! But there is no accounting for taste, of course!

21 March 2016 | [Blog](#)

The message of the cross...



Leaning against a street lantern I noticed her. Completely dressed in black, her face and eyes covered with a black veil and even her hands tucked into black gloves. Quietly I prayed for her and thought: "how can a woman choose this, does she really want to be dressed like this?" She looked aside and glanced at me a little while. I stared back for a moment and then looked straight ahead of me again.

After a little while I felt somebody tapping me on my shoulder. It was the same young lady covered in black. With a kind voice she addressed me in English: "Welcome to Egypt." I thanked her; this gave her courage to continue. She took a little book out of her bag. Instantly I knew what it was. A brochure to evangelize, but this time it did not come from one of the Jehovah's Witnesses or from Christians who were evangelizing, like I was used to in the Netherlands, but from a Muslim

Christians who were evangelizing, like I was used to in the Netherlands, but from a Muslim woman.

She wanted to tell 'the gospel' to me; it felt strange to me. However, I accepted the book from her, because I was interested in the writing and the arguments. The book even contained a chapter about Jesus, I read it. I noticed that they acknowledge the virgin birth of Jesus... but very soon I discovered the catch in it. "Muslims believe that Jesus was not crucified." That statement is completely contradictory to the foundation of the Christian faith; Jesus' death and resurrection are the heart and essence of the Gospel.

The message is wrapped in a fine gift; a nice-looking little book, they even want to admit that Jesus is called the Messiah but to acknowledge His salvation work... that is a bridge too far. Unfortunately nowadays this not only applies to women who are totally covered in black, but also to a lot of (church)people.

Oh Lord, hear my prayer...

21 March 2016 | [Blog](#)



One of the things I love about Egypt and living in Cairo are the Arabic worship songs, 'taranim'. It's hard to say which one is my favorite but there is one very special to me, it's called "ya rab isma' salaati" ("oh Lord, hear my prayer"). In November 2014 one of my Egyptian friends, and Arabic teacher at that time, introduced to me this song. It came exactly at the right time.

Just the day before I had heard the news of the death of my younger cousin (age only 25) in a car-accident. This news was quite a shock. My cousin, almost the same age as me and in the bloom of his life, was aspiring to become a pastor. Though I knew my cousin was with Jesus, I had a hard time coping with the grief, the question 'why?!' and was feeling sad for my aunt and uncle who had lost their one and only child. Being far away in Egypt instead of being in my home country the Netherlands, didn't help either.

Yet God knows what we need; the day after I got this terrible news, He sent my Egyptian friend and teacher to teach me this song. She already had prepared to teach me this song a week before, but then we didn't have enough lesson time left. I'm convinced that wasn't a coincidence. After the visit of my friend I still felt grieved, but God had comforted me so much which enabled me to continue and to feel that peace which He promises to each and everyone of us, if we bring our sadness, worries and pain to Him.

I would like to share this song with you and the story behind it, which my Egyptian friend shared with me that day. I wrote down what she said:

"The first time I heard this song was in 2010 at a prayer conference. That young man (who wrote the song, Joseph Saber is his name) came to the stage, he was maybe 18 or 19 years old, to share with us his testimony and how God healed his soul, the reason that allowed him to write this song. And he was praying to God to heal his body also...

A few months later I heard that the young man had a car accident, while he was crossing the road... a few days later he died...

I was wondering why God allowed that to happen. Yet, God can make beautiful things from death and also from damaged things. This worship song is now very famous in the Middle East in all church denominations, it greatly affects lives. So God made something beautiful out of something tragic, He turns the evil into good (Rom 8:28)."

I can say 'amen' to that with all my heart, this wonderful worship song also encouraged me. God is good. To listen to the song click [here](#).

There's also a video made of Joseph Saber playing this song to watch it click: [Joseph](#)

Here follows the translation of the worship song:

Oh Lord, hear my prayer... accept and respond Come and visit my life... fill it with flames (twice)	يا رب اسمع صلاتي ... اقبل و استجيب تعال و زور حياتي ... و املاها لهيب
<i>My request is to see the glory...</i> <i>I hope to see You</i> <i>Even when the last door is blocked...</i> <i>I will touch the border of His garment (twice)</i> <i>You are the Healer of my soul...</i> <i>You are the Healer of my body (twice)</i> <i>You are my doctor</i>	انا طلبي اني اشوف المجد ... أملني اني اشوفك و حتى ان آخر باب اتسد... هلمس هذب ثوبك انت شافي نفسي ... انت شافي جسدي انت طبيبي
You are a great God... You are my God With You nothing is impossible... Revive me from my death (twice) You are my God (4x)	انت اله عظيم ... انت الهى معاك مفيش مستحيل .. تحييني من مماتي انت الهى
You are Jesus the Redeemer You are the Giver of Life... You are my life-line (twice)	انت يسوع الفادي انت و اهب الحياة ... انت لي طوق نجاة
My circumstances are in Your hands (2x)	و في ايدك ظروفى
You give me peace... In You there is safety (twice)	انت بتدي سلام ... انت فيك الامان
You are the Eraser of all my fear (2x)	انت ماحي خوفى
I just need Your voice...	انا بس محتاج صوتك ...
My goal is to satisfy and fear You (twice)	انا هدفي رضاك و خوفك
<i>Refrain</i>	

[Song](#)

Video link is no longer available.

Abdallah

2 May 2016 | [Blog](#)



Abdallah

We were having a nice time eating some snacks and taking a rest from all the shopping. We found a good spot on the curb where we could sit down. We had just finished the snacks when I suddenly saw him. I hadn't noticed him at all. He was sitting at a stone's throw distance from us in the sand under the shrubbery, all alone without anyone caring for him. My heart broke by that sight. My husband saw my face; he also had seen the boy. He gave me some money to give to the boy.

I stood up and kneeled down in front of the boy. I gave him the money. I saw tears on his face. 'What's your name?' I asked. "Abdallah" (servant of Allah/God) he responded. I asked him where his father and mother were. He told me that he only had one brother and that they lived together in a one-room-apartment and that they had to pay the rent but were short of money. That's why he was sitting on the street. Where his brother was he didn't know.

Suddenly a lot of people were surrounding us, watching what was happening. I didn't know what to do. I told Abdallah that God loves him. I stood up and talked with my husband and sister-in-law about what we could do. I had to cry. My sister-in-law suggested he could go to an orphanage. The young man of the kiosk nearby began to talk to us, he told us that the boy was sitting here every day; this was 'his job'. Still at our request the young man asked Abdallah if he wanted to go to an orphanage. Abdallah said no. My husband, sister-in-law and the young man implied 'there you go'. In the meantime I kept looking at Abdallah he looked right back at me. I tried to fathom him; I couldn't and can't believe he really chooses that kind of life.

In Cairo street children are a phenomenon that sometimes numbs us; it's 'adi' ('normal') people say. No it is not. Although perhaps Abdallah's story is not true, or he might indeed want to stay there in the dust, I'm sure he made that choice because he doesn't know what love is. Someone has to offer him a chance. A chance to go to school. Why couldn't I be that someone? Do you recognize this? That feeling of being powerless.

I believe God puts for every one of us something or someone on our path and we have the choice to obey the command to love the other or to ignore it. Yes, I left Abdallah behind because he chose to stay there, though I'm not convinced that's really what he wants. The danger lies ahead that I will forget him; I pray that God will give me wisdom as to what I can do. To love the other is not just something for Mother Teresa's, each Christian received this assignment. Including you and me.

(The picture is not Abdallah; they are children who live in Zebbaleen, the "recycling" area of Cairo)

A golden rule in traffic...

14 June 2016 | [Blog](#)



A golden rule in traffic...

"I want you to remember that all people around you are crazy, really crazy and you are the only sane person...." My Egyptian colleague learned this golden rule during her first driver's lesson. "Driving in Cairo is like dancing on a tightrope," she added. A striking description of driving in Cairo.

In the crowded city with a lot of traffic jams the law of the jungle applies. If you are too modest you will probably not reach the place where you need to be. Honking is an often used tool while driving. While in many other countries you would risk a fine when you use your horn 'unnecessarily', in Egypt it is more often used than not. The sound of horns is a main ingredient of the street noise in Cairo. One thing I know for sure: if you are able to drive a car in Cairo you are able to drive anywhere. I have respect for people who dare to drive a car in Cairo.

As an outsider (especially when you are used to structured traffic) most of the time it looks like chaos. The majority of the people driving in Cairo hardly ever use their indicators. On the many roundabouts Cairo has, the cars do not stick to their own traffic lane (do lanes actually exist?) but cars just mix and mingle. And if you have to turn left or right you just go. It is amazing how often this works out well... At the same time there are many scratched and dented cars driving around in Cairo. That is really not surprising.

Swimming in Cairo

28 June 2016 | [Blog](#)



A day out to the swimming pool in Cairo can require quite some effort. In the city of millions there are swimming pools, but most of them are owned by clubs for which you have to pay an expensive membership fee. I was however fortunate to have a Scottish friend, who works for an international school, which provided her with a free membership for one of these clubs.

We took a taxi. Most of these clubs with a swimming pool are located in the more expensive neighborhoods of Cairo, like Rehab, public transportation is in that case not very handy. Even with the taxi it was still a half hour to 45-minutes drive. We were almost there. The taxi driver asked my Scottish friend which entrance he should take. I thought he meant the entrance of the swimming pool, but he was speaking about the entrance to the neighborhood where the club with the swimming pool was located.

There happened to be several entrances with checkpoints, and at certain entrances taxis are not allowed to enter. When my friend gave him directions, he immediately replied: "Are you sure I can enter there with my taxi? Because I've been here many times before and each time I was refused to enter there." My friend however also often went often by taxi and each time she was allowed to enter at that entrance. "Don't worry I'm sure we will be able to enter, I've been here thirty times with a taxi", she answered him in Arabic.

After having waited in a traffic jam we arrived at the desk of the entrance, the employee told us what the taxi driver already had foreseen: "No entry, you need to enter at entrance 17." My friend showed she was not amused but as always this didn't help. So we got out of the taxi, after my friend had given some extra money to the taxi driver for the inconvenience. We decided after entering the gate to take a taxi from inside, as the employee had suggested. But there was no taxi to be seen... I asked if we could walk. We could, but not with this heat my friend told me. Fortunately we met one of her acquaintances 'by chance' who had a car with airco. She didn't mind dropping us off at the club.

Now we still had to make sure we entered the pool, because officially I wasn't a member and so I wasn't allowed to enter. My friend told the guard that we only wanted to enter the club and we wouldn't go to the swimming pool. It worked. Then the last obstacle. The real entrance of the swimming pool. My friend showed her membership card and told that she wanted to pay my entrance fees... and no problem I could easily enter! My friend said: "They probably thought due to your white skin that you are one of the foreigners working for an international school." Whatever it was, after all these troubles we finally could cool down in the pool. Just a day out to the swimming pool in Cairo, it's not like going from A to B in a straight line. But swimming is everywhere the same: a pleasure!

28.06.2016 - Cairo Taxis

Nine times out of ten the streets of Cairo are crowded with taxis. Just when you need one to go to church it is that tenth time where you have not a single taxi nearby... which happens rarely, but after waiting a little while I notice a taxi coming... Phew!

In Cairo you have three kinds of taxis: the black ones, the white ones, and the white ones.



The first category consists of taxis with the door hanging by a thread and the plastic inside the car contains quite some holes. The advantage is that most of the times you only have to pay EP5 at the most per ride. The opinions vary about how safe it is to drive in these black taxis but from my own experience I can say that they are safe enough, although I prefer taking a taxi from the second or third category.



The second category consists of white taxis, of the same model as the black taxi but the white taxis are in better shape.

The third category 'the white taxis' are the robust ones, quite luxurious and the price of one ride mostly starts with EP5. The taxis of the third category can still vary a lot in quality, ranging from second-hand to very luxurious. If you stop a taxi and you actually don't trust it you can always dismiss it again.



The other way around happens in Cairo too actually. When you are on a very busy street during the rush hour and you want to take a taxi to a part in Cairo where there is a lot of traffic most of the times, the taxis are simply passing you. Really! You would think the customer is king but Egyptian taxi drivers think differently. If you then end up in a bus and finally reach your destination, you are able to laugh about it after all.

Middle East crisis entirely predictable

21 July 2016 | [Blog](#)



“Sir John Chilcot was right to say hindsight was not required”, writes Elizabeth Kendal in her blog of Religious Liberty Monitoring. She continues, “How often do you hear it said that the current crisis in Middle East is ‘unprecedented’? Despite being routinely parroted by our political, academic and media elites, this assertion is absolutely false.”

Read the [complete article](#)

Rice-straw burning

18 October 2016 | [Blog](#)



When you get off the airplane you notice it immediately: a strange smell, like something is burning. Apparently my face showed some bewilderment, and a kind Egyptian man addressed me and said: "This is the smell of Egypt, when I smell this I know I'm home."

I have to add that this goes mainly for Cairo and specifically in the month of October. During this period many Egyptian farmers surrounding Cairo burn their rice-straw and the smoke drifts to Cairo, which causes this peculiar smell. Dark clouds often cover the city for days. All of that on top of the smog which is a year long environmental issue here. Some days the sky is clearer than others, but the smog is a constant presence. This is not surprising when you know that there are more than twenty million inhabitants in Cairo who daily use cars, taxis and busses. Pollution is immense.

When you have just arrived, it can often give people a sore throat. But after a month you don't notice it anylonger – you have got used to it. The smell may even come to mean that you feel at home ...

You can read more about this straw burning [on the site of Egyptian Streets](#).

Christmas in Bethlehem

20 December 2016 | [Blog](#)



As a Westerner living in Bethlehem, especially during the time of Christmas, I can't help but think that perhaps not a lot has changed. While Palestinians have a level of deep joy and resilience like I've never seen before, they understand the plight of living under occupation and oppression. Very close to the same journey I walked home from Jerusalem the other night would have been similar to the route that Joseph brought Mary as they entered Bethlehem for the census that was issued by Caesar Augustus.

Read more in [Bethlehem](#)