

# Putting it into Context

We asked Petra and Catherine, intercultural workers serving in completely different cultural and religious contexts, the same question, "How would you share the creation story?" Their short answer was, "Context matters."



The K people of the Silk Road ascribe to being Muslim by religion, culture and identity. As such, their creation story from the Quran has a lot of similar elements to it, and of course some significant differences.

The fact that the Almighty God created everything out of nothing is a familiar concept, one they are very comfortable with. In fact, our experience when sharing stories where there is overlap between the two holy books such as this, is that they really enjoy the Biblical account.

The Bible uses stories and poetry, a mode of communication close to the K people's heart.

The rhythmic flow of Genesis 1, "God said... it was... it was good," is a good example. Our stories also fill in some of the details the Quran skips over.

But of course, there are major differences. The primary one is the way the Bible describes the relationship between God and Adam. Adam, a man, who in their mind is fundamentally flawed, destined to sin and shame, has been made in the image of the Righteous God. And as if that weren't enough, God then goes on to honour Adam further by asking him to name God's creatures. **These points of difference are somewhat of a head-spin for the K people and they take time and care to work through.**

**This is why as intercultural workers we are committed to learning the language and culture of the people we work with. Doing so enables us to communicate the Gospel in a way that is meaningful for them.**

An example of doing this with the creation story would be addressing concepts around work. There's nothing a K person loves more than to sit for hours, reclining at a low table, eating, drinking tea and spending time with others. To be able to do so is an indicator that God is blessing you. So when we get to, "God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15), there would be a conversation about how the Almighty God honoured Adam by entrusting His creation to Adam's care.

**The K people's reverence for the holiness of God makes the concept of a personal God unfathomable. What we seek to do is to help them maintain their high view of God, while introducing Jesus as the one who removes shame and restores us to the Garden with Him.**

Petra



Silk Road Area, Muslim Context



He tells me, “The water and the land are like the lifeblood of our country. From the water and the land come everything we need for life – rice, fruit, animals, shade for rest, materials for building and making. The Neak Da are the Guardians and Owners, the Spirits of our water and our land. If we honour the Neak Da, we see the beauty and the goodness of the fields, the rivers, the trees, the animals and of people, and we receive the fruits of fertile land, long life, peace and prosperity. If we do not honour and respect the Neak Da it is like we do not take care of our water and land and we lose our lifeblood; our water and land have illness, we have illness, and our peace and prosperity are taken from our families.”

As my friend’s father shares, I sit at the edge of a rice field where harvesting is beginning. Looking across the hues of green and gold I indeed see the beauty and the goodness of this land. I ponder the presence of the Neak Da – Guardians, Owners, Spirits of the water and land. As I do so, I ponder another story. In the beginning God created, His Spirit was present, relationship between people and people’s connection to creation brings forth care and ongoing fruitfulness... And it was all very good.

**The blending together of Hinduism, Buddhism and animism throughout Cambodia’s history, and the intricate interweaving of spirituality into the rhythms and relationships of daily life create beautifully rich aspects of culture that connect with the story of creation.**

Yet this tapestry can also make the creation story difficult to accept. The Neak Da are the Guardians of a particular place, for example, of a particular village. In this context, therefore, the creation story as we know it can seem to be a story from outside.

**So how do we share this story?** A Khmer Proverb provides insight, instructing, “Enter the river by its bends, enter a district by its country”. We move into the flow of our neighbourhood, learning, growing and becoming a part of the intricate interweaving of relationships and rhythms of daily life and spirituality. We move into the stories of our communities, being present and attentive, allowing our stories to be drawn into the interweaving. And then, as we in deepening ways become a part of this rich fabric, in our living, our words and our actions, we share the story of the One Guardian, the Master God of sky and land who gives life and breath to everything and satisfies every need (Acts 17:24 – 25).

