



themu**slim**reader

THE WORLD IN FRONT
THE WORLD IN FRONT



features

Seeing the World for Our Hereafter

Stepping into *Islam*

Remembering Singapore's Literary Legacy - Syed Ahmad Semait

Sauntering Down Spanish Andalusia



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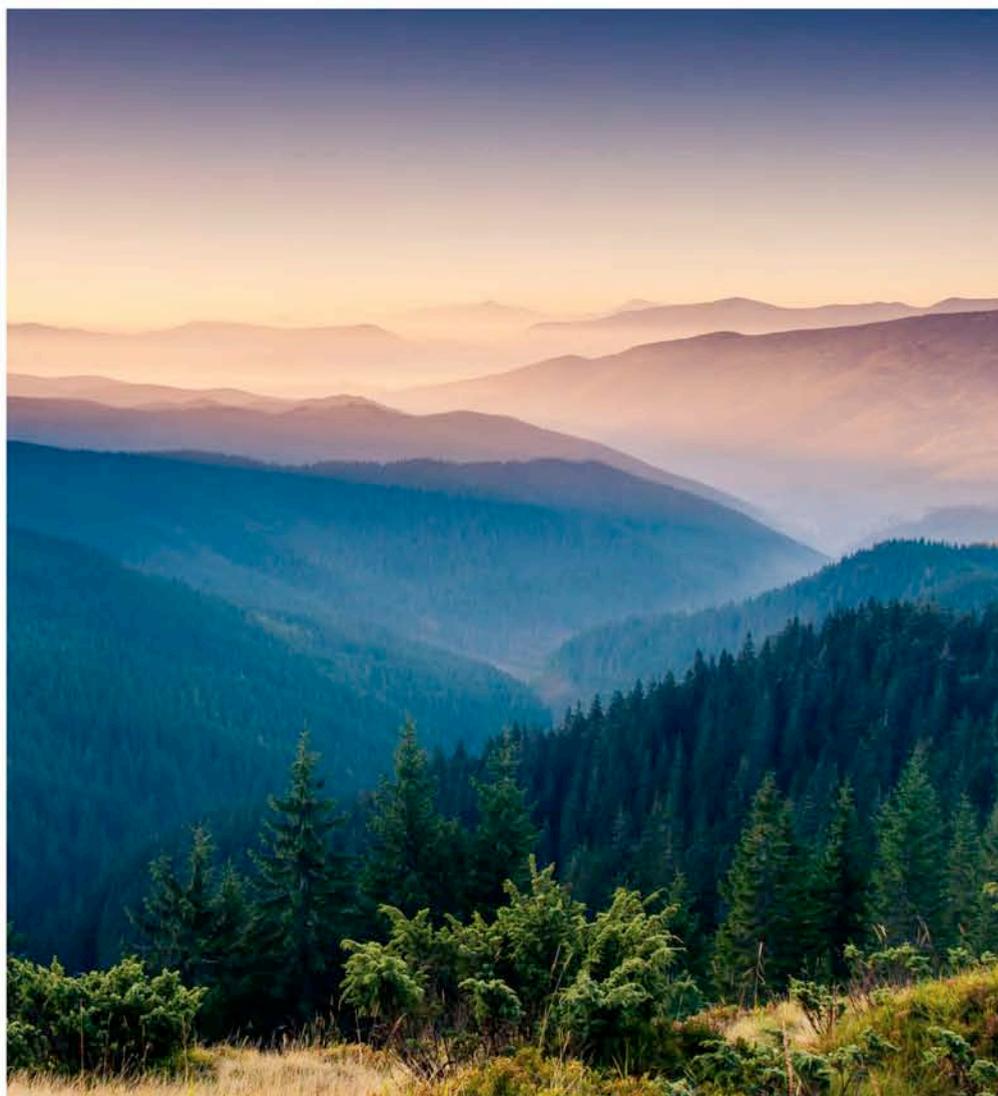
2013

Gardens of the Righteous, in the original Arabic, is a compilation of verses from the Quran and Hadith by Imam Nawawi.

Uthman bin Affan (RA)
reported:

Prophet Muhammed (SAW)
said,

“The best amongst you
is the one who learns
the Quran and teaches it.”



Riyadh as-Salihin
(Gardens of the Righteous)
The Book of Virtues, Hadith 993



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common terms

ABBREVIATIONS IN TMR

AS: 'Allayhis Salam –
Meaning: Peace be upon him;
Used for Prophet who came before Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

DA: Darul Arqam Singapore / The Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore

RA: Radiyallahu 'Anhu/'Anha/'Anhum –
Meaning: May Allah be pleased with him/her/them;
Used for Companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

SAW: Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wassallam –
Meaning: Peace be upon him;
Used for Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

SWT: Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala –
Meaning: Glorified and Exalted One;
Used for Allah (SWT)

TERMS IN THIS EDITION

Alhamdulillah: Praise be to God
Da'wah: Invitation to understand Islam
Hadith: Narrations about the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)
Hajj: Pilgrimage
Imam: Congregational leader during prayers; community leader
Insha' Allah: If God wills
Madrasah: Islamic school
SubhanAllah: Glorious is God
Sunnah: Practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)
Terawih: Recommended night prayers in Ramadhan
Ummah: Community
Ustadz: Teacher

Arabic terms have been represented by simple Roman alphabets, and their meanings briefly provided, to ease your reading. For accurate pronunciation and detailed meanings, it is highly advised to refer to the original spelling and meanings in Arabic.

TMR contains some of Allah's names and Quranic verses. Please do not dispose in the trash. Kindly keep, shred or recycle the magazine.

editorial note

The world in front

These days, without taking one step outside our homes, we already are facing an endless stream of information made up of other people's ideologies, opinions, arguments, rants, and more of such, through the media – that is made convenient for access – at our fingertips.

Despite the high volume of data, good substance may not land right under our noses. As Muslims, we seek to discern materials that are authentic and in line with Islam. While scouring through the widely published biased reports linking terror to religions and the widely shared confusing arguments about Islamic standpoints, we may easily lose perspective on the message of Islam that is closest to our individual hearts.

TMR here features *Seeing the World for Our Hereafter* (by Dr Waffie Mohammed) and *Stepping into Islam* (by Dr Yamin Cheng) that prompt us to re-evaluate the components of our daily life and draw on their significances, to understand our connection to the hereafter and find our balance in this world. TMR also highlights one of Singapore's own distinguished book publisher and respected author, the late Syed Ahmad Semait, who was one of the pioneers of Singapore's Islamic literatures. As we seek understanding for our self, Yohanna Abdullah reminds us, through her interview with Dr Radiah Salim, about building empathy towards those affected by a form of problem common to this modern society – mental challenges.

The world in front of us is a borderless canvas, with a collage of images that keep accumulating every second. And on that canvas, we derive better understanding of our self, and everything around us, while we hope to be blessed with His Guidance and Mercy in our learning process, *Insha'Allah*. Allah (SWT) has said, "... there comes to you Guidance from Me, whosoever follows My Guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery" (Taha, 20:123).



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Seeing the World for Our Hereafter

OBSERVE AND REALISE THE
VARIOUS MEANINGS OF
THINGS AROUND US THAT
GIVE DIFFERENT LAYERS OF
UNDERSTANDING TO LIFE.

text | dr waffie mohammed



The Holy Quran is a beautiful book. Indeed it is very comprehensive too. Allah (SWT) says that if all the human beings and djinns are to combine their resources to produce a book like it, they will not be able to do so; even if they strengthen their resources over and over.

The message of the Quran has many dimensions, and it contains so many benefits for human beings that we really cannot comprehend all of it. There are many shades of meaning in every message of the Quran – such as literal, moral, spiritual, etc. – and any dimension of the meaning you take, there is a message for us to learn and explore.

Allah (SWT) tells us in the Quran about many human beings, “... they have eyes and cannot see, they have ears and cannot hear... they are like cattle, nay more misguided: for they are heedless” (Al-Araf, 07:179).

HAVE EYES BUT CANNOT SEE

Let us take a sample from this simple message: have you seen him who have eyes and cannot see? The literal meaning we can conceive is that there are some people with eyes, yet, they are unable to physically see. If you take a baby who has just now come into the world, the eyes are opened yet the baby really cannot see. At first, they will see within a very short range, and as the baby grows stronger, the sight will also grow until they can see further and further away. Eventually, they begin to associate words with certain people, and shapes, etc. Thus, the living infant has eyes but is unable to see.



There are some people who can only see the physical value of things

There are also other human beings who have eyes and cannot see properly. They are those who are unable to see within a short distance or are unable to read a book properly, that they need to wear glasses to do so. Sometimes, you see them feel all around for their reading glasses.

DEEPER MEANING

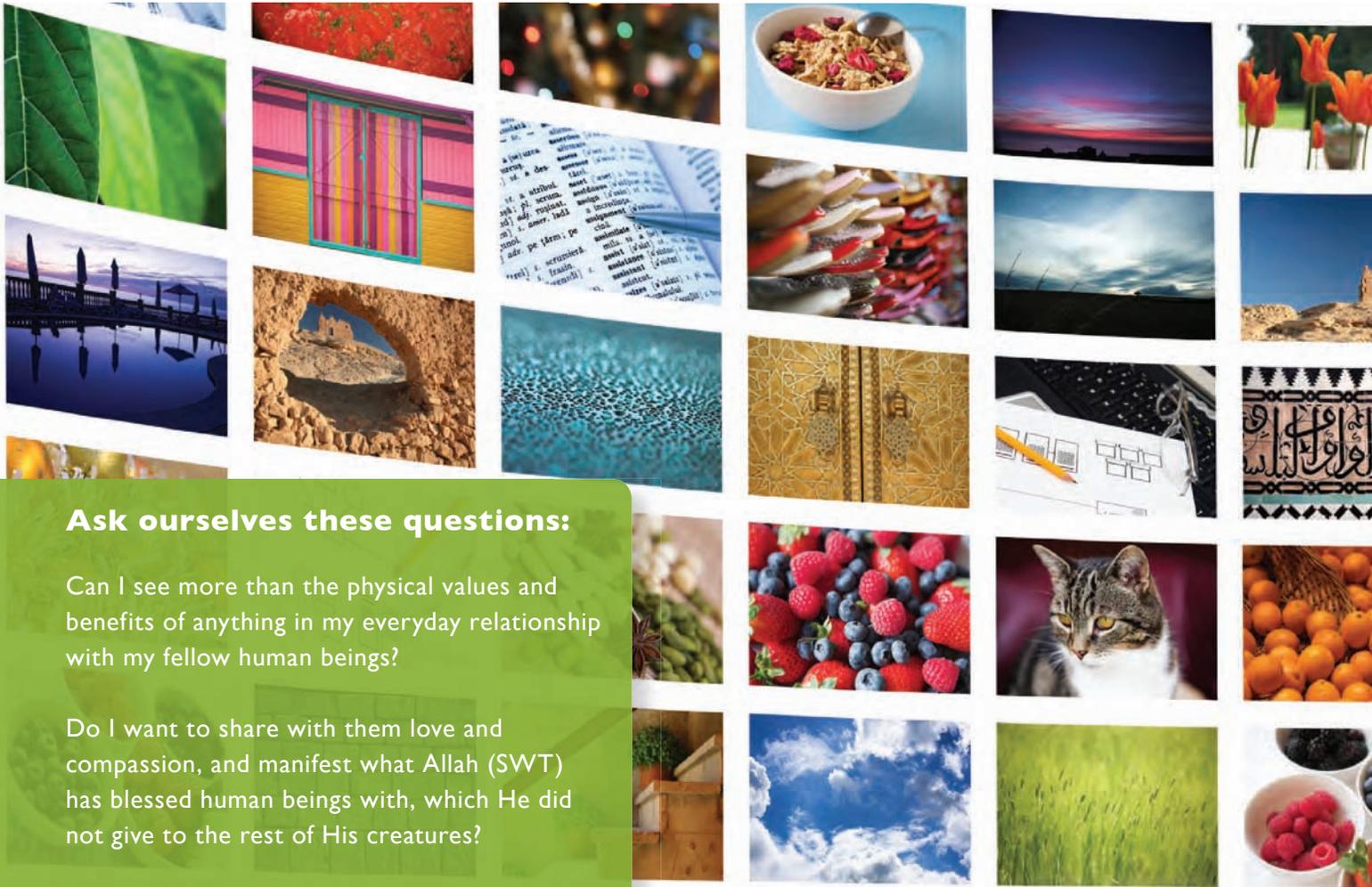
While the Quranic verse seems to describe beings with some physical defects, it is perhaps a metaphor containing a deeper meaning than the mere physical shortcoming of not having perfect 20/20 vision. Perhaps, the verse refers to those who cannot see spiritually and morally, or those who are unable to see the purpose of life, or those who are unable to see the beauty in creation.

Here, this suggests that we are supposed to see *in different ways* – including physically, morally, spiritually, and even aesthetically. There are some people who can only see the physical value of things that when they look at something, it is only seen for its physical benefit. They cannot see

all the other dimensions of the thing, such as the moral consequences from using it.

Every human being has a personality comprising the physical shell, and the non-physical dimension called the soul. The physical side can be deceitful at times. We should try and cultivate our total personality i.e. the physical and non-physical dimensions, so that when we look at something, we will see its physical value, its moral value, and its spiritual value. In other words, we see how it is going to benefit us as a member of society and we see how it is to be of value to us in this life as well as in the next. Although some people have limitations with this power of sight, with continuous nurturing of our personalities, *Insha'Allah*, God can enlighten us to see more than what is physically visible in front of us.

Further in the verse, Allah (SWT) likens the ones, who have sight and cannot see, to be worse than the cattle. The cattle is considered better than the people who cannot or would not grasp the dimensions of things in life.



Ask ourselves these questions:

Can I see more than the physical values and benefits of anything in my everyday relationship with my fellow human beings?

Do I want to share with them love and compassion, and manifest what Allah (SWT) has blessed human beings with, which He did not give to the rest of His creatures?

Am I just trying to get more and more of this physical world, then die and leave it all behind?

Allah (SWT) reminds us about life in this world, “Know you (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children” (Al-Hadid, 57:20).

At the end of the day, the ‘sought after’ things of this world may not be of significant value for us to have been engaged in this world till we forget about the Day of Accountability.

Allah (SWT) continues the verse above with a comparison, “Here is a similitude: How rain and the growth which it brings forth, delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; you will see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And forgiveness from Allah and (His) good pleasure (for the devotees of Allah). And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception?” (Al-Hadid, 57:20)

NOT UNLIKE FLOWERS

Have you ever seen a flower in bloom? It is truly a beautiful sight. Its vibrant colours, sweet smell, untouched natural beauty. What happens to this beautiful flower after it blossoms? After a while the flower slowly begins to wilt and it loses its beauty, its smell, its attractiveness. If this is seen from another dimension, similar is the cycle of life in this world for us. When we are young, we have all the strength, intellect, and potential – just like the flower in full blossom. Thereafter we start the decline. Our health diminishes; our intellect fades and so on. Life in this world is but for a short time.

Islam constantly reminds us that we are not going to be here forever and that one day we would all return to our Creator. How do we start to prepare ourselves for a successful ‘departure and arrival’? Our good intentions can facilitate this. If our intention is good, then Allah (SWT) will take care of our affairs. Never forget that we



Take from your health (a preparation) for your illness; and from your life for your death

are returning to Him and, *Insha'Allah*, we would all meet Him. What must be done so that we could have a beautiful meeting with our Creator? Allah (SWT) gives us the answer in Surah Kahf, "Whoever desires to meet His Lord, let him work righteousness" (18:110).

Towards working in righteousness, we should do good deeds that also mean doing whatever it may be solely for the sake of Allah (SWT), regardless of reward, thanks and recognition.

Life in this world is a journey. When you are on a journey, you cannot be taken up with the things on the side. You have to see your destination, and not be distracted from it. You need to remain focused, in order to successfully reach your destination. There is a popular saying: "Be in the world but be not part of it". In relation to this, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is reported to have said, "Be

in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveller/wayfarer." Also, Ibn Umar (RA) advised, "When evening comes, do not expect (to live till) morning, and when morning comes, do not expect (to live till) evening. Take from your health (a preparation) for your illness; and from your life for your death."

Allah (SWT), the Creator of every single thing, says that this world is 'but goods and chattels of deception'. Inevitably, we will leave the physical world and we are all returning to Him. If we would like to have a beautiful meeting with Him, take a look at what is in the world that could make that meeting happen. Make your intention to Allah (SWT), and *Insha'Allah*, He would continue to guide us to see the different colours and dimensions of life and protect us in our affairs for this world and the one that is to come. TMR

CASABLANCA, MOROCCO



Hassan II Mosque (Grande Mosquée Hassan II)

Facing the Atlantic Ocean, the largest mosque in Morocco ranks the seventh largest in the world.

Hassan II Mosque proudly bears the world's tallest minaret at 210 metres.

Designed by French architect Michel Pinseau, this Arab-Andalusian and Moorish styled mosque was completed on 30 August 1993.

The nine-hectare complex provides up to a maximum of 105,000 worshippers to gather for prayer: 25,000 within the prayer hall and another 80,000 on the mosque's outdoor premises.

Stepping into Islam

UNDERSTAND HOW CHINESE MUSLIMS COULD ACHIEVE P'ING AN (HARMONY AND PEACE) IN LIFE THROUGH ISLAM AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY.

text | yamin cheng

Many Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese think that becoming a Muslim means losing their Chinese identity. These worries are understandable as it is a commonplace view of the Chinese in these countries that becoming a Muslim means becoming a Malay and living a Malay life. Many of them want to know how it is possible for one to be a Muslim, yet is able to connect to his Chinese roots, values, and culture, so that one can speak of a practice of Islam that is Muslim, yet Chinese, but appears Singaporean or Malaysian.

Chinese teachings, values, and practices are, in many ways, in consonance with the teachings, values, and practices of Islam. A Chinese becoming a Muslim will find that Islam does not require him to abandon his Chinese roots and practices, except in areas where these roots and practices need to align with the total outlook of the Islamic worldview.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CHING MING

For instance, every year, during the *Ching Ming*, many Chinese families visit the graveyards of their parents and grandparents and rekindle their relationship with them by offering respects to them through the burning of joss-sticks. They also burn paper money, paper houses, paper clothes, and paper of other household utilities so that their parents and grandparents can continue to enjoy a good life in the next world. The *Ching Ming* is therefore a very important occasion for the Chinese because it brings the living and the dead together in a family and ancestral union,

A man with dark, curly hair, wearing a green jacket and dark trousers, stands in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. He is looking down and to his left. The sky is filled with heavy, dark, grey clouds, creating a dramatic and somewhat somber atmosphere. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

When a son of Adam dies,
everything is cut from him
except three things

reaffirms their ancestral bond, and fosters the reminder about how the living should live their life so as to bring pride, and not shame, to their dead ones. Bad children reflect bad parents who have either neglected or did not bring up their children well. Likewise, good children reflect responsible parents.

A Chinese becoming a Muslim nevertheless does not celebrate the *Ching Ming*. Even though he does not celebrate the *Ching Ming*, it does not mean that he cannot appreciate the meaning of the occasion. He can still appreciate the meaning of the occasion, often reminding himself to do good to his parents and to his dear ones while they are still living in this world.

FILIAL PIETY IN ISLAM

Parents are the closest people to us in the ancestral line, because we are their flesh and blood, their lookalike, their hopes and aspirations, and their pride. Islam forbids children from rubbing pain or hurt into their parents' feelings, precisely because it is their love, care, and sacrifices that make possible our existence and enjoyment of life. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) himself, on one occasion, was approached by a man who so eagerly wanted to join the battlefield. When he came to the Prophet (SAW) for the good news of joining the battlefield, the Prophet (SAW) asked him, "Do you have a mother at home?" The man said, "Yes." The Prophet (SAW) then said to him, "Then go back to her, for heaven lies at the feet of your mother."

The Quran, Islam's source of guidance for human living, highlights the correct attitude that children should display towards their parents. For instance, in Surah Al-Isra' (17:23-24), children are reminded to be kind to their parents, and to not hurt their feelings even with the slightest utterance of a word that could cause it, especially when the parents attain old age.

SIMILARITY OF THE OLD AND THE NEWBORN

Old age is a time by which we become disconnected with the younger generation, thus making us feel more lonely and nostalgic of our younger days. It is this time that we cling on to persons nearest to us, clinging on for assurance, for dependence, for attention. Who else is nearest to us if not our children – our flesh and blood, the grown-ups whom we raised, they who cling on for assurance, for dependence, for attention, as they grew up? Thus, to become old is to be like a new-born, because both are fragile and sensitive creatures who yearn for love, care, and attention, and who can easily be touched by pain and hurt. As such, the Quran directs our attention to this foundation of our living, namely, the need to cultivate, nurture, and develop love for others as the foundation of humanity. In fact, the Prophet (SAW) himself has said, "No person

should think that he is faithful to his religion until he loves for others the way he loves for himself."

On this score, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has said, "When a son of Adam dies, everything else is cut from him except three things – the knowledge he has which he shared with others, his good deeds, and the prayer of his children for him."

When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) passed away, some Muslims at that time could not accept this news. Abu Bakr (RA), the Prophet's best friend and later the first Caliph of Islam replacing the Prophet (SAW) as the leader of the Muslim community, had to calm them and also make this important announcement. He said, "Whosoever worships Muhammad, knows that Muhammad is dead. But whosoever worships God, knows that God is alive." Abu Bakr (RA) then went on to recite a verse of the Quran regarding the love for the Prophet (SAW) as well as being mindful that all which lives must die. The verse from Surah Al-Imran (03:144) states,

*"Muhammad is but a Messenger
 Messengers of God have passed away before him
 What, if he dies or is killed?
 Will you turn back upon your heels?"*

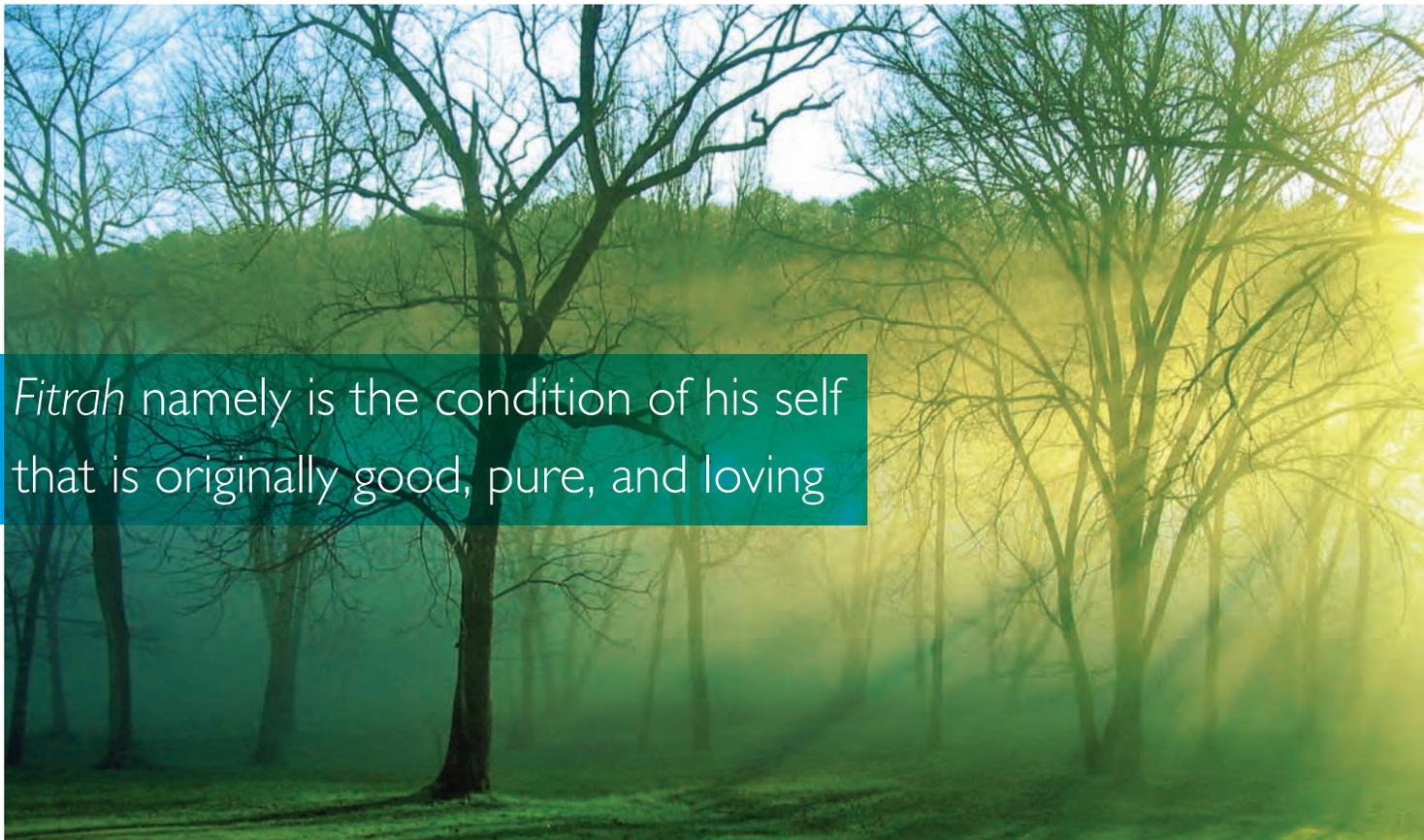
MUSLIM'S SPECIAL ANCESTOR

For Muslims, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is a special ancestor. True, he is the Messenger of God, but more significantly, he is the role model for mankind.

Although the Prophet (SAW) has passed away from this world a long time ago, his teachings, nevertheless, have been faithfully handed down from generation to generation, to the extent that they have become the foundation of the Muslim civilisation.

The Prophet has, time and again, reminded the people that two things are important so that with them, harmony and peace will come to their life. These are, the 'Word of God,' i.e. the Quran, and the Prophet's teachings and life practice of the Quran, called *Sunnah*. On this account, the Prophet (SAW) said, "I have left you two things that, if you hold onto them strongly, you will never go astray. These are the 'Word of God' and my *Sunnah*."

Although the Prophet (SAW) is no longer around, his teachings are. It is his teachings that make his presence alive with us, as if he is walking with us, talking to us, living among us. The Prophet (SAW) appears real to us as long as his teachings are faithfully followed and put into practice. Only then can we feel the Prophet's nearness to us. Roger Garaudy, a Convert to Islam, echoes this sentiment when he said, "To be faithful to our ancestors is not to preserve the ashes of their fire, but to transmit its flame."



Fitrah namely is the condition of his self that is originally good, pure, and loving

CHINESE FESTIVALS

The Spring Equinox and the Winter Solstice are two cultural moments respectively marking the beginning and end of the Chinese calendar year. Between the two, the Spring Equinox is the merrier, because it is the beginning of sunshine, where plants and animals see activities again after a long rest in the cold winter, and life returns to full blood. The Spring Equinox is the time for the Spring Festival, but it is more popularly known as the Chinese New Year.

For the Chinese, the Spring Festival or Chinese New Year is a time where families come together and renew old ties with their loved ones, their relatives, their neighbours, and their friends. In the days of old, where the place of mothers was the home, they would spend many, many days and hours preparing for this big occasion. The Chinese New Year, for mothers, was a moment in which joy and merriment could not be measured with the toil, sweat, and sacrifices they gave to make this moment unforgettable. Months before the festival, mothers already started making the delicacies to be served to their visitors on New Year's day. Traditional food for the Singaporean or Malaysian Chinese was of course the food of those days. Such delicacies like *love letter* or *kueh belanda*, *kueh bangkit*, *kueh bahulu*, and *kueh bakul*, were the popular delicacies, besides the oranges, *kuaci*, *kacang*, and many more. Those days, many families could not afford the modern-day electric baking appliances, and many of these

delicacies had to be prepared by hand and baked with the use of wood and fire.

REVERENCE FOR THE ELDERS

On New Year's day, when the children are awake, the first thing that they do is to greet their parents. In Chinese custom, greeting one's parents is a thing done many times in a day. Greeting one's parents here means calling their name. Thus, when a child sees his father, he would say, 'Pa Pa,' and when he sees his mother, he would say, 'Ma Ma.' This happens also when the family sit at the table for a meal, so that the children will call their father's and mother's name before eating. Besides children, adults also practise this when greeting their aging parents. And this act of greeting the elderly occurs not only upon one's parents or grandparents, but upon the parents' and grandparents' friends as well. For the Chinese, this customary act of greeting the elderly is to cultivate the attitude of respect and reverence for the elderly, an act that adds a lot to the meaning of ancestors for the Chinese.

As part of the festivity of Chinese New Year, young children and unmarried people receive the *ang pow*, a red packet containing money, from their parents as well as from married persons. Visiting relatives and friends is a good time for the young children because they can collect many *ang pow*, which tells why the Chinese New Year is an occasion that is eagerly awaited by the little ones.

Relevance of Confucianism

For a Chinese Muslim whose civilisation is coloured by the rich teachings of Confucianism, he can take heart that the thought on humanity in the conversation between Mencius and an Emperor is something that can enrich his Muslim identity, personality, and psychology.

Mencius, a Confucian scholar who lived in the fourth century BCE (Before Common Era) and regarded as the second most respected Confucian scholar after Confucius, had, on one occasion, called on the Emperor of the Kingdom of Liang. Upon arriving at his Majesty's court, the Emperor said to him, "Venerable Sir, you have come all this distance, thinking nothing that the distance is some one thousand miles. Surely, you must have brought some pleasant news that would profit my kingdom."

Mencius, on hearing this, said, "Your Majesty, what is the point of mentioning the word *profit*? All that matters is that there should be *ren* i.e. human-heartedness, and *yi* i.e. rightness. 'If your Majesty says, 'How can I profit my kingdom,' your great officers will say, 'How can I profit my family,' and the inferior officers and commoners will say, 'How can I profit my own self.' Superiors and inferiors will try to snatch this profit from one another, and the kingdom will be endangered. In the kingdom of 10,000 chariots, the murderer of his sovereign shall be the chief of a family of 1,000 chariots. In the kingdom of 1,000 chariots, the murderer of his prince shall be the chief of a family of 100 chariots. To have a thousand in ten thousand, and a hundred in a thousand, cannot be denied as a large allotment, but if *rightness* be put last, and *profit* be put first, they will not be satisfied without snatching all. No person of *ren* (or human-hearted person) ever abandons his parents, and no dutiful man ever puts his prince last. Perhaps your Majesty can now endorse what I have said, "All that matters is that there should be *ren* and *yi*. What is the point of mentioning *profit*?"

Young children of a Singaporean or Malaysian Chinese Muslim family are not exempted from this joyous occasion. Even if their grandparents, or granduncles and grandaunts, or uncles and aunts, or cousins, are not Muslims; they can still share in the spirit of this joyous occasion. This is the time they get to rekindle their blood relationship with their extended family, get to know their Chinese roots and culture more closely, and reinvigorate their life with vitality and dynamism. Islam does not allow a person who embraces Islam to cut off his relationship with his loved ones even though they may not be Muslims, and the Chinese New Year is a time to show that this spirit of Islam is alive and well.

For a Chinese Muslim in Singapore and Malaysia, the *Eid-ul-Fitr*, or *Hari Raya Puasa* (as it is known in these countries), is an occasion to usher in a new life for him, a life that has gone through one long month of fasting from dawn till dusk in order for him to return to his *fitrah*. *Fitrah* namely is the condition of his self that is originally good, pure, and loving – the condition of his self before his desires overtake him, incite him, and urge him to lose control of his good, pure, and loving person. In the same way, the Chinese New Year is a time for a Chinese Muslim in Singapore and Malaysia to usher in a new life – a life filled with new resolutions for the year that will make him a better person. Thus, the *Eid* and the Chinese New Year connect the Chinese Muslim into a stream of

consciousness and feeling that, between the beginning and end of one year, he is continuously renewing and reinventing his personality so that he can become a better human being, become the *insan kamil* of Islam, and the *sheng ren* of the Chinese human ideal.

THREE COMFORTS OF P'ING AN

A Singaporean or Malaysian Chinese coming into Islam has three comforts to give him *p'ing an*, the harmony and peace, in his life.

First, there is God that is his focal point of worship, devotion, remembrance, inspiration, and guidance.

Second, he has the Prophet (SAW) whom he does not worship, but whose teachings are made alive if and when he puts them into practice.

Third, he has his own ancestors to connect him to his Chinese roots, so that he can synchronise and align his Chinese roots to God and His Prophet (SAW) and in so doing, brings about an image of Islam manifesting through the Chinese culture. A Chinese Muslim in Singapore and Malaysia is therefore a very fortunate Muslim because he is a beneficiary of a rich heritage of civilisations – the Islamic, the Chinese, the Singaporean or Malaysian, all flowing together in the veins of his body. TMR

Beloved

POEM BY MOHAMED SAMEER ZUHOORI

You're trying to be a man of piety
Upon your head is a kufi
People think you've become a goofy
Rather they should get some coffee

What will matter?
Once you have been accepted
As the Almighty's beloved.

Don't feel ashamed of that kufi over your head
Or that hair which makes your beautiful beard
Because the Prophet did say
To follow his way
Which will be the order of That Day
When even childrens' hair will turn grey
And not imitate those who reject his say

Nothing is ours in the first place
So why don't we just listen and obey?
To gain credibility with The Judge,
In the example of the Beloved is the best way.

People can pass exams by copying when
unattended
So can we, get commended
By the One Uncontended
By copying the way of His Beloved
If the only thing you could copy is the outside,
Let that follow through to your inside
Will He allow anyone who reflects His Beloved,
To be shoved aside?

Get Admitted,
As The King's dearest.
Before you are resurrected
Or left stranded

Oh My Beloved, keep us all in your list of interceded.
Our apologies to you
For we left your traditions unappreciated

Dear beloved of Allah,
To your respected soul
May the choicest peace and blessings be delivered.
And May Allah make us all among the succeeded.

Ameen

Remembering Singapore's Literary Legacy

AUTHOR/PUBLISHER SYED AHMAD SEMAIT INSPIRED THE GROWTH OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.



The late Syed Ahmad Semait (standing)

The late Syed Ahmad Bin Muhammad Semait (d. 2006) was born in Singapore, on 21 August 1933, into a large family household of 10 children. At a young age, his father passed away. To ensure that he receive proper education, Syed Ahmad was sent to an orphanage, with his brother Syed Isa Semait – who became Mufti of Singapore (1972-2010).

Syed Ahmad completed his studies to eventually become a top student at Madrasah Aljunied in 1951. However, to assist his mother who was providing for his siblings, he did not pursue further education and instead, decided to work. Although he started working, his learning ambitions were not halted. Syed Ahmad took night classes to learn the English language; he regularly attended Islamic classes at the home of Syed Abdullah Balfaqih, the then principal of Madrasah Aljunied; and he participated in the classes taught by Sheikh Omar Al-Khatib until the Sheikh departed in 1997.

It was Sheikh Omar Al-Khatib whom Syed Ahmad worked for, after his formal studies. He was selling books and distributing magazines to Madrasah students at a shop located at 40 Kandahar Street. Syed Ahmad was an avid photographer and liked to travel. He managed to secure several book distributorships with some Middle-Eastern publishers during his travels, for the book business in Singapore.



His legacies that still have an impact on the Muslim community in Singapore are his writings and the company that he set up

RUNNING A BOOKSHOP

Sheikh Omar Al-Khatib decided to hand over the bookshop to him to run in the 1960s so that Sheikh Omar could concentrate on teaching. In 1963, Syed Ahmad renamed the bookshop to Pustaka Nasional (PN) and started publishing books. He managed to secure publishing rights from several prominent writers, such as Dr Hamka, Bey Arifin, Ust Ahmad Sonhadji, Ust Osman Jantan, and many others.

As the book business was doing well and PN publications were well received not only in Singapore but in Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, a Malaysian publishing arm was set up together with his brother, Syed Omar, called Penamas in Johor Bahru in 1980. This company was handed over to his brother in 1990.

EXPANDING THE BOOKSHOP

Another book distributor company, Pustaka Islamiyah, was set up in Arau, Perlis, to look into distributing PN books in Northern Malaysia in 1990. The company shifted to Kuala Lumpur in 1994 and then in 1996 to Gombak, Selangor. Syed Ahmad also set up a printing company called Kerjaya Printing Industries in 1980 which moved to Klang, Malaysia, in 1986 and then relocated in 2000 to Jakarta, Indonesia, until now. He also set up a trading firm called Huda Enterprise dealing in carpets and fruits in 1977 but this was restructured and renamed as Pustaka Islamiyah Pte Ltd in 2000 to be the publisher of only his writings until his death.

Active in the Malay literary scene, Syed Ahmad joined Angkatan Sasterawan 50 (ASAS 50), also known as the Singapore Writers' Movement '50, which is the first literary association in post-war Malaya. Syed Ahmad published books by famous Malay writers such as Muhammad Ariff Ahmad, A Samad Said, Khadijah Hashim and Shahnnon Ahmad. In 2000, he co-organised a novel writing competition with a few organisations and corporate bodies, such as ASAS 50 and the local Malay radio station Warna, under the group named Persada, which debuted new authors and published 26 books altogether.

ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY

Besides his literary activities, Syed Ahmad was also involved in the Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and served in the Exco for several years in the 1980s. He was one of the founders of Pergas in 1957, was elected treasurer in 1959, and served as advisor to its council. (Pergas was formed to raise the quality of Islamic Education and the welfare of Islamic Religious Teachers in Singapore). Syed Ahmad also was advisor to the RRG council (the Religious Rehabilitation Group), a voluntary group formed by Islamic scholars and teachers in Singapore, primarily towards performing counselling works on the detained Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members. He served

in the MUIS Fatwa Council and the Arab Association Exco for several years.

Within his extended family, Syed Ahmad was the patriarch. He was stern and strict with his younger relatives and children. He was also against smoking and would reprimand any of his younger relatives who were caught smoking. He was known to speak his mind if he felt something was not right, even to his younger brother, the Mufti.

SYED AHMAD SEMAIT, THE TEACHER

As an *Ustadz* (Teacher), Syed Ahmad only taught every Friday night at Abdul Razak Mosque, located on Jalan Ismail. He took over the class of the late *Imam* then and taught using Pustaka Nasional (PN) books since 1990s. He was also requested to teach his translation of *An-Nasa-ih Ad-Diniyah Wal Wasaya Al-Imaniyah* (Malay: *Nasihat Agama Dan Wasiat Iman*/ English: Religious Advice and the Will of Faith) by Imam Abdullah Alhaddad, at Baitul Aman Mosque in Kuala Lumpur (KL) every third Saturday night of the month since 2002. He had many followers although he was often mistaken by Malaysians to be the Mufti of Singapore, who was actually his younger brother, Syed Isa Semait.

His last class was on 11 July 2006 at Abdul Razak Mosque, and immediately after that, he was on his way to KL to conduct another class. That night, he was involved in a car accident along the highway near Pagoh, Johor. Syed Ahmad was buried in Batu Pahat, Johor, [as instructed] following his wish to be buried where he passed away.

ALWAYS LEARNING

Syed Ahmad Semait never stopped learning till his death. He would attend the regular *Usrah* (Islamic discussions) classes on every Thursday night without fail unless he had to travel overseas. He attended reading sessions on Sunday mornings at Abdul Razak Mosque, where students would read books such as *Ihya Ulumiddin* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) and *Fathul Bari* (Grant of the Creator). These sessions were open for all to give comments and feedback after the readings were concluded.

In his pursuit for knowledge, Syed Ahmad never missed to meet visiting scholars from the Middle-East or Indonesia when they came to Singapore. During his spare time, Syed Ahmad would read, write, or translate into the late hours of the night. If there were any passages or texts that he was unsure of, he would meet his teacher, Sheikh Omar Al-Khatib on the very next day to get confirmation or explanation – when his teacher was still alive.

As the regular *Imam* during the *Terawih* prayers at Abdul Razak Mosque, Syed Ahmad would not miss the last 10 nights of Ramadhan for the *Khatam Al-Quran* (conclusion of the whole Quran recitation), bringing along his sons.



To date, Darul Arqam is still publishing and using the Let's Pray series for its students

LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

His legacies that still have an impact on the Muslim community in Singapore are his writings and the company that he set up, PN, now run by his children. Many readers have praised his style of writing and translating as heart-warming, personal to the reader, and easy to understand. Although Syed Ahmad wrote only 12 books, he had translated 26 titles from Arabic to Malay, and was the editor of many books published by PN. Besides *Nasihat Agama Dan Wasiat Iman*, the most popular book written by Syed Ahmad was *Mari Belajar Baca Muqaddam* (Let's Learn to Recite the Muqaddam), a beginner's guide to reading the Juz Amma of the Quran. This was used in many mosques in Singapore and Malaysia as a textbook. During the annual book fairs, Syed Ahmad would be at the PN stalls to talk to buyers and advise them on which book would be suitable for their level of understanding and needs.

PUBLISHING ISLAMIC BOOKS

Under his stewardship, PN published over 600 titles of which 80% were in Malay, 10% in Arabic and the remaining in English. About 80% of the books published

were on religion while the remainder were literary works. PN produced the first quality hardback edition of religious books in Malay which was greatly accepted by the general public. It started reintroducing old Jawi books into Roman script for people who no longer could read Jawi (Arabic alphabets for writing Malay) anymore. Syed Ahmad was the supervisor for the publishing of a standard Arabic curriculum textbooks and workbooks for *Madrasahs* in Singapore in 1996. Under his guidance, PN also co-published several English books with Darul Arqam Singapore and Islamic Book Publishers, Kuwait, in the 1980s. Let's Pray – an English translation of one of Syed Ahmad's book has been printed over 30,000 copies so far since 1982.

To date, Darul Arqam is still publishing and using the Let's Pray series for its students. The latest 2012 edition includes summarised and step-by-step illustrations, alongside the first few words to recite for key positions to help the students memorise the rituals faster. Darul Arqam is grateful to Syed Ahmad Semait for his contributions, especially his prayer manuals that, *Insha'Allah*, will continue to be a useful guide to all Muslims, especially the new ones who have embraced Islam. In memory of his passion and dedication towards the Muslim community in Singapore, let us pray for the blessing and mercy of Allah (SWT) upon the late Syed Ahmad Semait. TMR

Portions of this article were originally written in Malay by Ust Firdaus Yahya as published in a book by Pergas (2011), entitled "Obor Ummah - Jejak Tokoh Agama Islam di Singapura" (The Community Torch – Tracing Singapore's Religious Personages). These have been translated and reprinted as part of this article in TMR with the kind permission of the book publisher.

Reducing Stigma and Dispelling Misconceptions of Mental Challenges

CLUB HEAL SPREADS
AWARENESS FOR THE NEED
TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.

text and interview | yohanna abdullah



Club HEAL is a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping psychiatric patients recover and reintegrate into society through day rehabilitation programme, support groups, and outreach to patients, caregivers and the public. It has two centres, one in Darul Aman Mosque and one in Bukit Batok East. It was registered as a society on 13 February 2012 and started its first day rehabilitation at Al-Khair Mosque in May.

Club HEAL was started by a medical doctor, Dr Radiah Salim, 50, the President of the club, who was inspired to lead this movement as she has a number of family members with mental health challenges. Top on Club HEAL's agenda is to reduce the stigma attached to mental illness, remove the barriers to receiving medical care, and help individuals affected have a good quality of life at work, at home and at play. Our volunteer writer, Yohanna Abdullah, from TMR speaks to Dr Radiah.

The Muslim Reader (TMR): How was the idea of Club HEAL conceived?

Dr Radiah: The idea of starting this was conceived in July 2011. I have many relatives with mental illness and I lost two lives to mental illness. I was a resident medical officer in the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and my work made me want to do more. I realised a lot of people are ignorant about mental illness and the patients need a lot of encouragement, care and understanding. Also, recovery



We started Club HEAL – HEAL means Hope, Empowerment, Acceptance and Love

does not just mean taking medicine; a lot of support is needed.

The person that encouraged me to do something about it was Dr Joseph Leong, a rehabilitation psychiatrist. He was the one who suggested me to set up a club. I was wondering how to go about doing it and at first approached many Malay/Muslim organisations to take up this project but they were not keen. So with help from like-minded individuals, we started Club HEAL – HEAL means Hope, Empowerment, Acceptance and Love, so Club HEAL is a place where these four core values crucial to the recovery process prevail.

TMR: When do you expect people to change their perceptions of mental illness?

Dr Radiah: *Insha'Allah*, not too long I hope. We will come up with films and books to reach out to the public and individuals with mental illness and their families. I hope in five years people are aware, they no longer go to *bomohs* (shaman) for help and immediately see the psychiatrist. At one level, we also hope to expose charlatans who prey on this group and fleece their money for the promise of a cure against evil spirits and such. I am not referring to religious people like *Ustadz*, whom people also approach for help, and who also recommend

to get medical treatment for mental conditions.

Occasionally there may be instances where the affected person is truly 'unwell' due to the work of Satan, in which case the person will need the help of someone who is able to recite relevant verses of the Holy Quran to help solve the problem.

I also hope to change the language on mental illness. We do not refer to these individuals as schizophrenics and bipolar but people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. After all, we do not call people with cancer as cancerous, do we? We want to do away with the labelling.

We want to get rid of misconceptions, the top three of which are: mental illness is the result of disturbance in the spiritual realm, from evil spirits or Satan; secondly, that it cannot be cured; and thirdly, that all mental patients are dangerous. Mental illness is actually due to the imbalance in one's neurotransmitters in the brain, foremost of which are dopamine and serotonin.

TMR: How many people have benefitted so far since Club HEAL was formed?

Dr Radiah: To date, we have 40 participants in the day rehabilitation centre and more have been reached through home visits, caregivers in the caregiver support group and



We have 40 participants in the day rehabilitation centre and more have been reached through home visits

the public. Our approach is three-tier – we want to help patients, support their caregivers and educate the public.

We measure success in terms of the participants. For instance, we have a housewife with schizophrenia, who after attending Club HEAL, is now more confident in her roles as mother and wife – that is success for us. And many others are getting better, like Kamal (not his real name), who no longer spends all his time at home and now interacts with fellow participants at Club HEAL and shares his beautiful poems which we hope to showcase.

TMR: How can the government and employers help in the plight of the mentally ill?

Dr Radiah: The government can help by giving more opportunities to people with mental illness in the area of jobs, working with employers. They can pay the salary of the person with mental illness for the first three months, giving them a longer time to settle into the job. Currently, there is such a scheme with Job Club based in IMH but they only have 50 employers in their list. We want more employers to give jobs to this group of people and realise that they tend to be more loyal employees.

For the problem of getting volunteers to voluntary welfare organisations like ours, the government can pay them a

fee for their work as is done in many countries, such as Australia. This way, everyone is given the opportunity to do volunteer work, not just those who can afford to do so.

Also, there have been instances where employees with mental health issues were sacked just because they suffer a relapse from their illness and had to take some sick leave. This practice is very unfair and legal action should be taken against such employers. I hope our government will look into this unfair practice.

TMR: What is the message that you would like to get across to the society?

Dr Radiah: The most important thing is to get empowered with knowledge about mental health issues, be supportive, look out for anybody, your neighbour or family and friends, who shows symptoms of mental illness and get them to seek treatment and spread the message that these illnesses are treatable. Also, I would like to encourage more people to volunteer for Club HEAL, *Insha'Allah*, they will find the experience meaningful and enriching. **TMR**

For more information about Club HEAL and its programmes, kindly visit www.clubheal.org.sg.

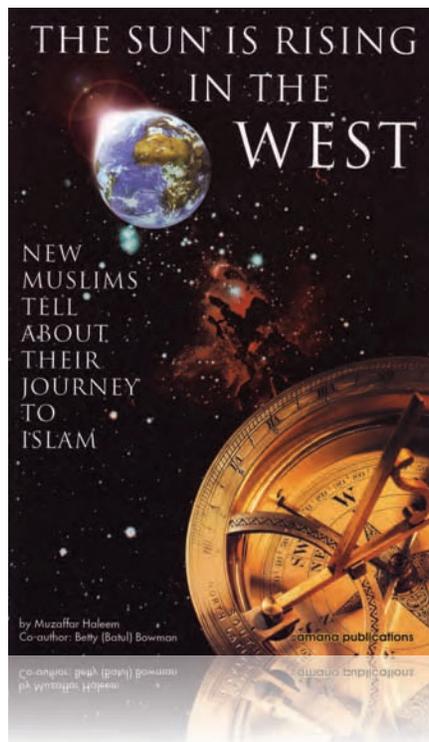
New Muslims' Journey of Faith

review | sk husain

WHAT do a former US presidential adviser, an ex-Klu Klux Klan (KKK) member, a Catholic missionary, an Internet junkie and a woman who read over 1,000 books have in common? They all embraced Islam, and are among 28 remarkable people from diverse backgrounds who converged into the beautiful faith and are featured in *The Sun is Rising in the West: New Muslims Tell about Their Journey to Islam*.

Muzaffar Haleem, a Pakistani immigrant to the United States, and Betty (Batul) Bowman, an American of Christian European origins who later embraced Islam, have teamed up to record the testimonies of these 28 new Muslims (starting with the junior author's own). Haleem migrated to the US in 1980 with her husband and has been active in various Muslim community projects in California where she lives with her children and grandchildren. Ms Bowman embraced Islam in 1993 after reading more than 1,000 books in her search for the Truth. She has major interest in developing materials for new Muslims.

Their joint venture chronicles stories told by new Muslims. The narratives "reflect the strivings and triumphs of the soul, as each person struggled to find a meaningful spiritual existence", and also describe the challenges of acceptance by family and "fitting in" to the Muslim community. All of the stories are written by new Muslims who have come from a Western background, especially America.



*This book
chronicles
stories told by
new Muslims*

read

The first half of the book – published under the auspices of the Human Assistance & Development International (HADI), a non-profit organisation working for the socio-economic, educational and scientific development of people worldwide – contains the accounts by new Muslims and acquaints them with others who have embarked on this demanding new life and with whom they can share their joy in Islam. The second half provides useful information and references, and invaluable short expositions of the basics of Islam. It consists only of a reprinted chapter and introductory materials for new Muslims.

Besides Bowman's *America is Ripe for Islam*, and *Journey to Islam* (an essay), those featured in the book with their stories include:

- Paul O Bartlett (*A Pilgrim's Path to Islam*)
- Dr Robert Dickson Crane (*Patterns of Dawah in America: By the Hand*)
- Clinton Sipes (*I Was a Former KKK Member*)
- Sharon (*Jesus Led Me to Islam*)
- Nuh Ha Mim Keller (*A Quest for Meaning in a Meaningless World*)

Bowman provides invaluable short expositions of the basics of Islam

Dr Robert Dickson Crane, whose Muslim name is Faruq Abd al Haqq, is the former foreign policy adviser to the late US president Richard Nixon, and former deputy director (for planning) of the US National Security Council. From the early 1980s, Dr Crane has worked full-time as a Muslim activist in America. He has authored or co-authored more than a dozen books and over 50 professional articles on comparative legal systems, global strategy, and information management.

Clinton Sipes says he lived “a life of hate, crime and violence” that “changed to one of peace and faith”. He grew up in a dysfunctional family setting in the atmosphere of alcoholism, physical and emotional abuse that came from his father. He found the Light of Islam while in a US prison, where he was sentenced for possessing weapons.

Sharon, a native of Texas, says it was her search for the Pure Gospel of Jesus that led her to Islam, while extensive search for the true Faith on the Internet guided Bartlett to Islam.

In the second half of the book, Bowman provides invaluable short expositions of the basics of Islam. These range from how to perform the obligatory formal prayer, and the role of prayer in the paradigm of Islamic law, key points in the history of Islam, a 60-page glossary of terms, which may be the most useful part of the book for some new Muslims, and selected bibliographies on the Quran, Sirah or life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and Islam generally.

In the Preface, Dr Crane says this ‘how-to’ manual on learning and practising Islam in America helps to fill a long unmet need. Its very existence bodes well for the future of Islam in America and, *Insha'Allah*, for the future moral leadership of America in the world.

“The future of Islam in America will depend on how well American-born Muslims, African-American, Euro-American (including Hispanics), and Native American, can develop leadership within the overall Muslim community or *Ummah*. If the *Ummah* is finally maturing into a positive and creative force in America, capable of bringing out the best of America's traditionalist past, the primary reason is the heroic effort of a few *muhajirin* [immigrants] and *ansar* [helpers], like Sisters Muzaffar Haleem from Pakistan and Betty Bowman, who are the two authors of this book, *The Sun is Rising in the West*.”

A number of patterns stand out from the testimonies in the book. Euro-American Muslims (that is, whites) usually discover Islam via a spouse or at the tail end of a long religious search that encompasses much reading and experimentation; curiously, in more than a few cases, these latter first become Sufi. For African-American Muslims, the usual path is via the Nation of Islam. In both cases, it is striking to see how often the existence of an Islamic infrastructure (mosques, books, Internet user groups and sites, missionary activities) is critical to the process of conversion.

If whites frequently find their world ‘turned upside down’ on becoming Muslim, blacks usually fit into an existing set of institutions and find the change far less radical. This makes the barrier to conversion for the former much higher.

Most Converts agree that America's allegedly terrible moral circumstances render it ‘ripe and ready’ for Islam; some say this time is nothing less than American Islam's ‘golden moment’ (implying that if this opportunity is lost, it may not come again).

As someone said about the book, “When the sun is rising in the West, it is bad news for many, as it heralds the beginning of the Day of Judgment. But when *The Sun* (of Islam) Rises in the West, it heralds more light and warmth.”

But when
The Sun (of
Islam) Rises in
the West, it
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Today, there are some three million Muslims in the United States. A survey in May 2012 revealed the dramatically changing face of religion in America, with the number of Muslims in the US soaring 67% in the decade since the 9/11 attacks. Data released from the 2010 US Religion Census showed Islam was the fastest-growing religion in America in the last 12 years.

In the US, Islam is filling the spiritual void with purpose, guidance, discipline, and support. This book is a welcome and inspiring educational experience to new Muslims and those who are contemplating this great way of life. The authors interviewed so many new Converts to Islam. For each story told here, there are many, many stories left untold, but which are nevertheless happening every day in America.

The Sun is Rising in the West is a very useful book for both Muslims and non-Muslims, as many of the former are deviating from the path of Islam and being fantasised and glamourised by the Western culture, whereas the new Muslims find solace in the teachings of Islam and accept it whole-heartedly. And for the latter, they can see and learn the things that are not true in their religions that lead them in search of truth and they come to Islam ultimately. TMR

Title: The Sun is Rising in the West: New Muslims tell about their Journey to Islam

Authors: Muzaffar Haleem and Betty (Batul) Bowman

Publisher: Amana Publications, Maryland, USA

ISBN: 0915957922

Price S\$20.90

Available at Darul Arqam's English Islamic Bookshop

Ensuring Children's Discipline when performing Hajj/Umrah

text | shaik kadir

During school holidays in Singapore, many people take the opportunity to perform the *Umrah* (minor pilgrimage), some even take their children along with them.

Is it advisable to take little children along with them to the Holy Land?

In the website AmericanBedu, two ladies commented that people should not bring children when going to the Holy Land to perform their *ibadah* (worship). One woman said, "Most people return from *Hajj* or *Umrah* extremely sick from all the germs that they get from people who are sick. It is for the protection of the children that parents should not take their little children along."

The other woman commented: "I love kids truly, but everything has its place. A child should be at home, safe from the heat, the germs, and the crowds that would upset their sensibilities..."

On UmmahForum, a reader said, "There is no point taking children to *Umrah* in the first place, because it won't be of much benefit to them. It will be better to take them when they are older and have a better understanding of *Umrah*. Just leave them behind with close relatives.

Another reader of TripAdvisor, said, "I don't think young children should be taken on *Umrah*. They are too young

to understand it, and the trouble they cause makes it very difficult for the parents to have a spiritual time."

Nowadays, the crowd in Mecca is overwhelming even for the *Umrah*. Little children are more vulnerable to the extreme weather conditions and exposure to people who may not take hygiene seriously. The huge crowd can even frighten little children. Even adults, especially the older folks, can easily lose their way and become panicky.

During my *Umrah* trip recently, I have seen children yelling and playing and becoming a nuisance to other worshippers near them. For those who have no choice but to take their children with them, aside from health protection of their children there, how could they prepare their children for the trip?

During my *Umrah*, I noticed a small girl in our group behaving very well. She is Nur Kharissa, the 6-year-old daughter of Mohd Faisal Ithnin and Hairani Buang. Kharissa's parents, later, told me that they had been guiding her before the *Umrah* and during the *Umrah* as well, especially to ensure that she does not become a nuisance to fellow-pilgrims. "They have come to perform an important *ibadah* which could only be done there and nowhere else, so they need the peace to concentrate," Kharissa's mother, Hairani, said.

Hairani felt that it was a big challenge to bring an active child, like Kharissa to the Holy Land. "Children of her

So, how could parents who bring children as old as Kharissa manage the discipline of their ward? Hairani said she fully prepared her daughter for the *Umrah* in a number of ways such as:

1. Brought her child to her weekly *Umrah* course to make her aware that *Umrah* is not a holiday tour but a holy trip
2. Told her that there would be many people performing prayers in Masjid Al-Haram (the Grand Mosque) and Masjid An-Nabawi (Mosque of the Prophet), and showed pictures of these mosques with the crowds of worshippers
3. Explained the importance of each of these two mosques so that she would be respectful of the worshippers
4. Explained what *tawaf* (circumambulation around the Kaa'ba for 7 times) and *sa'i* (walking between Mounts Safa and Marwah) are, and how pilgrims perform them, and showed pictures of the crowd performing the *tawaf* and the *sa'i*
5. Informed her that she should remain next to her mother, not to run around, play or shout as this would disturb the other worshippers, and that such behaviour would not only annoy the pilgrims but also displease Allah (SWT)
6. Informed her that she will have to wake up early (about 4 am) to go for the *Subuh* (pre-dawn) prayers in the mosque; if she does not want to wake up to go to the mosque, that means she is depriving her parents from going to the mosque and that is not good
7. Informed her that Islamic discipline means that a child should not throw tantrums or show laziness but do the various *ibadah* with the parents
8. Advised her to behave well as she is a "guest of Allah" in the Holy Land, so that Allah (SWT) will love her and reward her with favours throughout her life as a good Muslim
9. Told her that she must behave and conduct herself well to be a good Muslim so that Allah (SWT) will love her immensely
10. Told her that if she behaves well, she would get a gift from the parents when they return home as an added incentive

age can be playful and naughty as to disturb the other pilgrims during the long wait for prayers, during prayers, and when performing other *ibadah*."

A fellow-pilgrim said that, while the pilgrims were praying, he became aware of a child who suddenly dashed out of his position in the *saf* (row), ran between the rows of worshippers and accidentally stepped on the spectacles of a worshipper who had placed his spectacles just in front of him, breaking them.

Hairani said that all these information and advice need to be repeated again and again at appropriate time and occasion as a child would not absorb all of them all at once. She also asked her child to nod in response to indicate that the child has understood, and even makes a promise.

Little Kharissa came home happy after the *Umrah*. She managed to:

- pray right in front of the Kaa'ba, behind Maqam Ibrahim (Station of Ibrahim)
- perform *tawaf*
- perform *sa'i*
- perform two *Umrahs*
- perform two *Qiyamulai* (night prayer) sessions without fuss in Masjid Al-Haram, waking up at about 2 am so as to be ready for the long prayers conducted by our *Ustadz* (Teacher)
- celebrate her 6th birthday in the Holy Land
- receive praises for being so well-behaved from not only members of our group but also from some pilgrims from other countries

Hairani was happy at the accomplishments of her daughter. "*Alhamdulillah*, Kharissa did not miss any of the prayers at the mosque, and other *ibadah*," she said. "Kharissa did not fall sick as we made sure that she had enough sleep and food. I thank Allah (SWT) for making our efforts in guiding her successful."

As more and more pilgrims from all over the world are going for the *Hajj* and *Umrah*, the Saudi government is expanding many of the facilities for their convenience. Hence, massive construction works are being carried out at the Grand Mosque and around it. Parents who bring their children along with them for the *Hajj* or *Umrah* would be wise to be aware of the hazards and inconveniences posed by the expansion and redevelopment projects, and be well prepared to face these challenges. TMR

Sauntering Down Spanish Andalusia



HISTORICAL BUILDINGS
AND TRACES OF MOORISH
LEGACY LINE THE STREETS
OF SPAIN.

text and photographs | siti zubeidah a kadir

Alhambra Granada

Aaah, exotic Spain. Close your eyes to picture it and you might just conjure up different images: a red cape in a bullfighting ring, swinging skirts of flamenco dancers, tapas and paellas, red soccer jerseys, cosmopolitan Barcelona, fashion forward Madrid, and many more visions to suit the fancy of any traveller. With such vast choices, there lies the dilemma for those on a tight schedule – which part of Spain to see? Debate after debate, culturally rich, and quintessentially Spanish Andalusia won. Although a limited schedule only brought us around Sevilla, Cordoba and Granada, it had enough Spanish flavour and history to keep me forever wanting more.

The history of Spain is as complicated as it can get, with ancient Spain dating back all the way to the stone ages, thereafter due to the violent nature of conquering nations, Spain had been under many rulers who in a nutshell left behind traces of life of the Phoenicians and Greeks, Iberians and Celts, Carthaginians, Romans and Visigoths etc. The Muslim conquest started around 711CE (Common Era) when Tariq Ibn Ziyad, the governor of Tangier landed on Gibraltar.

THE MUSLIM INFLUENCE

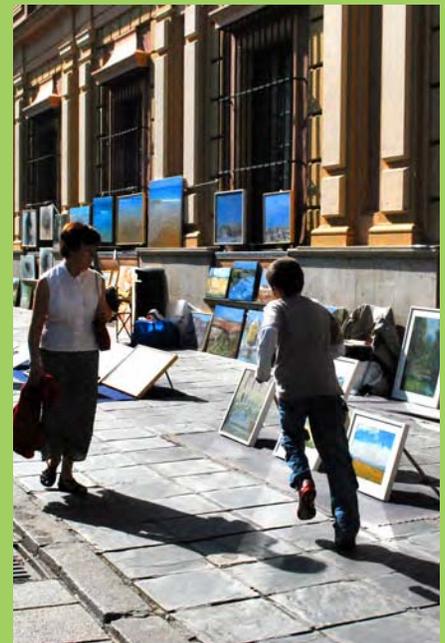
The Muslim Rule of Spain went on for about decades under various rulers before the Reconquista, i.e. the period up to 1492 in which what was collectively known as the Islamic Kingdoms of Al-Andalus, fell to various Christian Kingdoms. Under the Muslim Rule, Al-Andalus flourished and this Golden Age ushered in advancement of technology in agricultural region far ahead of any

other European sector. Cordoba also soon became one of the leading cultural centres, where Muslim and non-Muslim Philosophers and Scientists around the world travelled hundreds of miles just to participate in sharing of knowledge as well as to gain new information in Cordoba's extensive libraries and universities.

First stop on our Spanish tour was Seville (Sevilla is the Spanish spelling, while the English uses Seville), the capital of Andalusia. Previously a bustling trade hub during the times of the Romans and the Arabs, Seville slowly went into decline after traders diverted their wares to another Spanish city, Cadiz. However, since the 19th century with its reputation for beautiful architecture and embodiment of Spanish culture, Seville has transformed itself into a welcoming tourist hub.

There was an unmistakable scent of incense in the air as soon as I arrived on Spanish soil and it immediately gave Sevilla an aura of a serene, religious atmosphere, and I half expected a solemn sombre procession to cross our path. Since it was night, we opted to grab a taxi straight to Casa Y Sol, a guesthouse with architecture so quaint and elaborate and 'authentically Spanish', it left us reeling in delight. The taxi ride was short and brought us through winding streets and dark alleyways, something we assumed we would get used to in broad daylight.

The next morning, all eager to explore the city and to soak in the Spanish culture, we woke up bright and early, armed with maps and comfortable walking shoes, all ready





This page

Wonderfully preserved architecture surround the Plaza de San Francisco, Seville's main public square.

Left page (left to right)

Graffiti art of a Spanish bull in the Plaza de la Maestranza, the bull ring in Seville.

One of the many churches lining the streets of Seville.

A young boy runs through the Sunday art fair outside the Plaza del Museo.



A flamenco costume store in Cordoba.



Luscious gardens within the Alameda de la Alhambra park.



Long queues start very early outside the Alhambra, Cordoba.



A man walking by the Sunday Art Fair outside the Plaza Del Museo.

to wander around the city including look for churros (don't you think the Spanish were geniuses for having chocolate for breakfast?), visit the bullfighting ring and take in the sights and sound of Sevilla Spain.

CROWDED WITH FOOT TRAFFIC

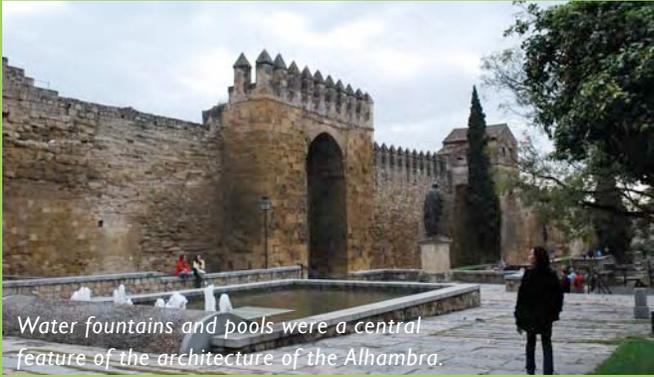
Exiting the guesthouse's gates, we wandered along the alleys, hoping to get a glimpse of a main road. These alleys were surprisingly crowded with foot traffic on the short sidewalk, and the road itself, where there was room for only one car to go by. After almost two hours of wandering around, turning at each corner, we almost gave up all hope of finding the main road. When we came across a grocery store to get a bottle of water, we were hopeful for some directions. Thankfully the friendly store assistant was getting ready to get off his shift and was willing to lead us out of the maze we were in.

And it was obvious that only a local could get us out of the area so quickly and thankfully, he brought us along to escape the winding alleyways, (which by now we learnt were actually streets!) and right to the doorstep of Plaza Del Museo. It was a Sunday; we were greeted with a picturesque art fair. Such a sight for sore calves after all that wandering! Different form of art pieces ranging from quirky comic art of flamenco dancers to life like paintings of the beautiful buildings of Sevilla. We wandered around the booths, appreciating the artwork while listening to the buyers haggle with the artists.

BEAUTIFUL ARCHITECTURE

Wandering past the art fair, we followed the cobblestone path lined with orange trees directly to an open area where many café patrons were seated enjoying their meals alfresco. Somehow it did not seem to matter that we were not on track to the next tourist attraction, the streets were lined with beautiful architecture – each building seemingly with its own story that it was like we were experiencing something new just by admiring them. They were like distinct individuals, but so in sync with each other that the city as a whole comes out as a dysfunctional but complimentary family, and we, as welcomed guests.

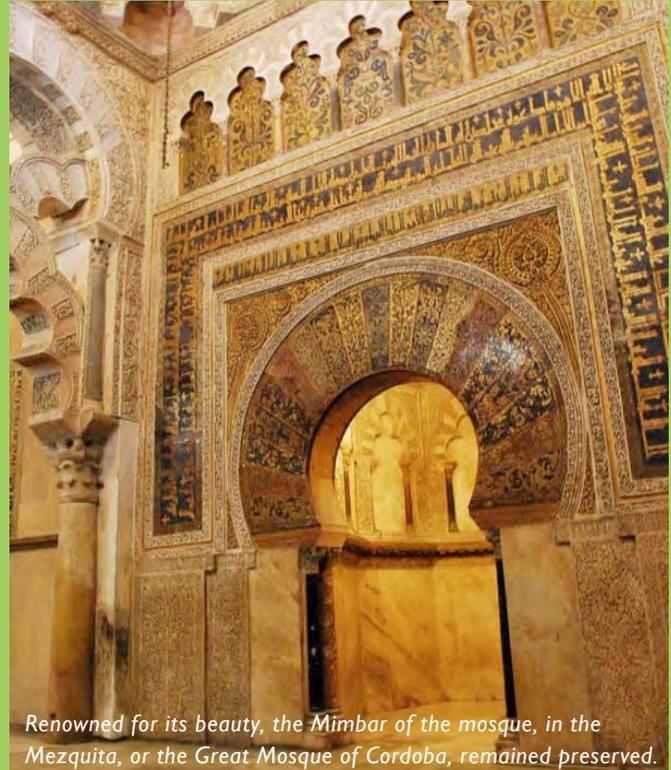
After a vegetarian lunch, (be warned, in Sevilla, most tapas bars had jamon, also known as ham, hanging overhead, not very ideal for Muslims), we proceeded to the Cathedral, a former mosque built in 1184CE, which had been converted to a church in 1248CE. The Giralda or Minaret, with its beautiful intricate façade, was preserved even after the Cathedral's expansion. Just by the design, you could still see the traces of the Moorish legacy in the building, be it the Islamic inscription on the walls or in the orange courtyards. The Giralda is now the bell tower of the Cathedral but climbing the 35 ramped up 'floors' of the tower brought me back to the time where the Muezzin used to do the call to prayer, looking somewhat ironically over the whitewashed walls of Santa Cruz, or the Jewish Quarter, where the Jewish community lived peacefully during the Moorish rule.



Water fountains and pools were a central feature of the architecture of the Alhambra.



The distinctive red and white pillars of the Cordoba Great Mosque.



Renowned for its beauty, the Mimbar of the mosque, in the Mezquita, or the Great Mosque of Cordoba, remained preserved.

The next day, we set out on the Renfe (the Spanish railway network) for a day in Cordoba eager to see the famous mosque-cathedral, the Great Mosque of Cordoba or the Mezquita famous for its distinctive red and white column and arches. This mosque was said to have been modelled after the Great Mosque of Damascus, similar in its features and architectural appearance. It was clear though that the building had undergone many changes at the hands of the different rulers as there were features that were slightly disconnected. However, one can't help but marvel at the architecture and décor that bellies thousands of years of history. The building started out in 600CE as the Christian Visigoth church of St Vincent. When the Moors came in 711CE, the church was razed, and its materials incorporated in the Mezquita. It was converted back to a Cathedral in 1236AD following the Reconquista.

MIHRAB IN THE CATHEDRAL

Even though it has been a Cathedral for hundreds of years, the Mihrab of the Mosque, a semi-circular niche in the wall that indicates the direction of prayer, has been delicately preserved, a testament to its beauty. The building also does not have the distinct church pews sitting between the columns and under its red and white arches; one can only wonder what it was like as a place of worship under the Moorish rule. Within the premises of the Mosque was the beautiful Courtyard of the Orange Trees (Patio de los Naranjos), which according to the guide books, infused the area with a pleasant orange scent during spring. Such a pity, I was there in Autumn!

Sadly, the day we were there, the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, or Alcázar of the Christian Monarchs, located within walking distance of the Mezquita was closed, for details I cannot recall, but by a stroke of luck, that walk brought us to the Roman Bridge, where at the end, situated the Tower of La Calahorra, a building built in 1369 to defend the city from attack.

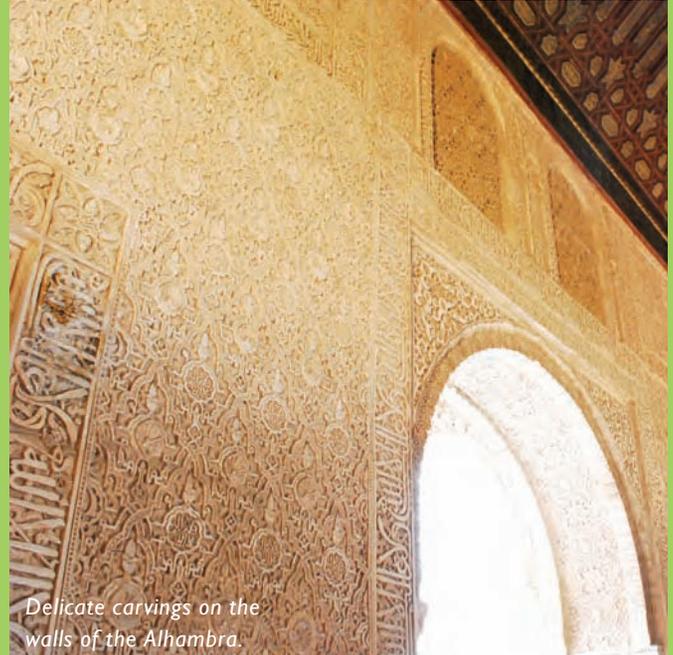
MUSEUM SHOWING PEACEFUL CORDOBA

Used as a prison in the 18th century and a girls' school in the 19th century, the Tower of La Calahorra is currently the Institute for Dialogue between Cultures. This museum is equipped with educational material, from dioramas to audio visual exhibits of characters prominent from the time Andalusia was a bustling centre of education. Displays and paintings portray how life was like in the 10th century under the Moors when the rulers invited scholars of various faiths from around the world to engage in intellectual dialogue. It also emphasises the peaceful life in Cordoba, where three faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, lived side by side.

The next day saw us packing and making our way to Granada, home of the Alhambra. Granada by itself seemed like a very typical city, but the secret lies in the hidden lanes. Make your way to the Al Baicin or the Moroccan Quarter to get your fill of kebab and mint tea in quaint cafes, and you can imagine yourself being transported to North Africa. After meatless meals, I was glad to finally



The courtyard known as the Patio of Orange Trees within the walls of the Great Mosque of Cordoba.



Delicate carvings on the walls of the Alhambra.

get a taste of chicken. Everything you need from Morocco, you can get here, from brightly coloured lamps to sheesha equipment. Need to practise Arabic? Just chat with the shop vendors. The Mosque had opening hours though, so plan in advance if you want to see the interior.

FINDING ALHAMBRA

Bright and early the next morning, even before the sun rose, we made our way to Alhambra. Many sources we read mentioned that tickets to the Alhambra may be sold out within 30 minutes of the attraction's opening, so it was important to get there early (alternatively, you can purchase it in advance online, an option we forgot to consider before the trip!). It was a steep, steep climb to the entrance, not surprising considering the Alhambra was a fortress in 889CE and was converted to a palace in 1333CE by Yusuf I, Sultan of Granada. It is currently a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but its beauty has been the talk of town for ages.

One poet said of the Alhambra,
"A sun dwells in this place and even its shadow is blessed.
In this palace a multitude of pleasures capture the eye and suspend the intellect.
Here a crystal world teaches marvels.
Everywhere Beauty is carved, opulence is manifest."

It was indeed breath-taking – from the luxurious gardens the moment you walk in, to elaborate fountains, intricately carved walls, and ceilings with arches and designs amazing to the human eye. Never having entered a real palace that is not in a state of ruin, (maybe one day if Queen Elizabeth

decides to have an open house), this is probably the closest I can ever imagine royalty to have lived. Hundreds of rooms, rooftop gardens, hidden stairs, and you can imagine the type of life the royalty experienced behind this gilded walls.

The upkeep and maintenance of this palace is impeccable; neatly mowed lawns, trimmed hedges, and clean moss-less fountains reflect the effort put into keeping this monument a sparkling jewel. Everywhere you look, though, you can see the arabesque displaying the degree of faith that rulers had in God during those tumultuous times of constant attack and defence of their land. The walls had repeated inscriptions of "There is no Conqueror but Allah" engraved on it. Other inscriptions were actually a mystery for centuries, only to be looked into intensively and recently deciphered by experts as late as 2009. Most of the inscriptions contain slogans rather than Quranic inscription as previously believed. You can imagine the beauty of the entire place for it to be spared during the Christian Rule.

The five days I had in Spain was fascinating and definitely not enough to satiate my desire to experience the Spanish Lifestyle, but then again, I doubt even a year would be enough. There is just something in what is left of the Moorish legacy that seems to hide a secret, only to be discovered by someone who knows them well enough.

But despite it all, the views I was exposed to, the opportunity to step into places reminiscent of the Islamic Golden Years is something I would not forget, and at the same time, would highly recommend to everyone. TMR

On 10 November 2012, Darul Arqam held another Reading Colours My World session that featured storytelling of several literary works suitable for children between the ages of 4 to 12 years old.

Our volunteer, Sim Khadijah Mohammed, was the storyteller that engaged about up to 40 children at the English Islamic Bookshop with colourful stories that included the one about Prophet Jonah/Yunus (AS) who was swallowed by a whale and lived in its stomach for some time.

The storytelling session was spiced up with quizzes, colouring of pictures related to the theme, as well as fun giveaways for the kids.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAZALI TOMPANG

Fun in Colours and Storytelling



From 8 to 9 December 2012, Darul Arqam's outreach programme for youth - D'Apprentice - had a workshop for the refinement of their Da'wah skills and communication.

About 40 participants, mostly students from tertiary students, attended the workshop, which was held at Mydin Mosque.

The programme uncovered the concept of Da'wah as the youth perceived it. It also explained the use of Da'wah through knowledge, Da'wah through the lens of a Convert, how Da'wah begins with a Word, and reviewed Da'wah challenges while understanding the workings of the changing mindset.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

Nurturing the Young for *Da'wah*

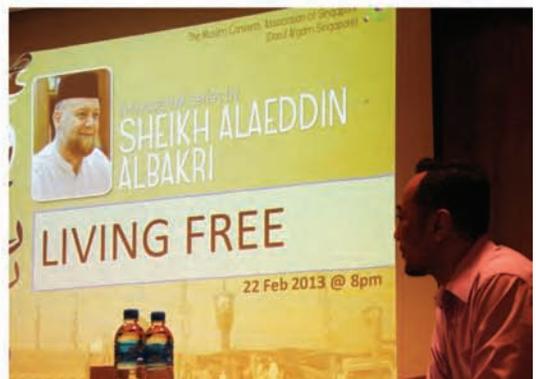
Sheikh Alaeddin Albakri has served the Muslim community in the United States in numerous capacities, serving as Imam at several Islamic centres and establishing full-time and weekend Islamic schools. A founding board member of IMAN (Inner City Muslim Action Network) in Chicago, he is also a book editor for IQRA and an advisory board member in many Islamic organisations.

From 21 to 24 February 2013, he was in Singapore to deliver a series of lectures at Darul Arqam's auditorium. He delivered four lectures based on inspirations from Prophet Muhammad (SAW), respectively entitled *Growing With Our Children*, *Living Free*, *From Merchant to Messenger*, and *The Orphan Who Changed The World*.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

Lectures by Sheikh Alaeddin Albakri



Dr Fatimah Suo Yan Mei is a renowned Arabic Language instructor, with PhD in Arabic Linguistic and Master in Islamic Jurisprudence from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Born in China, she has been staying in Malaysia for more than 15 years and is currently Senior Lecturer Sultan Idris Education University.

Dr Fatimah Suo was invited to Darul Arqam from 19 to 21 April 2013 to deliver several lectures in Mandarin. Amongst the titles of her lectures were *The Rights and Duties of Women in Islam*, *Examples of the Muslimah Scholars in Islam*, and *The Challenges Muslim Converts' Face with regards to Marriage, Family, Personal Relationship and at Work*.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

Mandarin lectures by Dr Fatimah Suo Yan Mei



We present ourselves,
in prayer, humbly to
The Creator without
any arrogance or vanity.

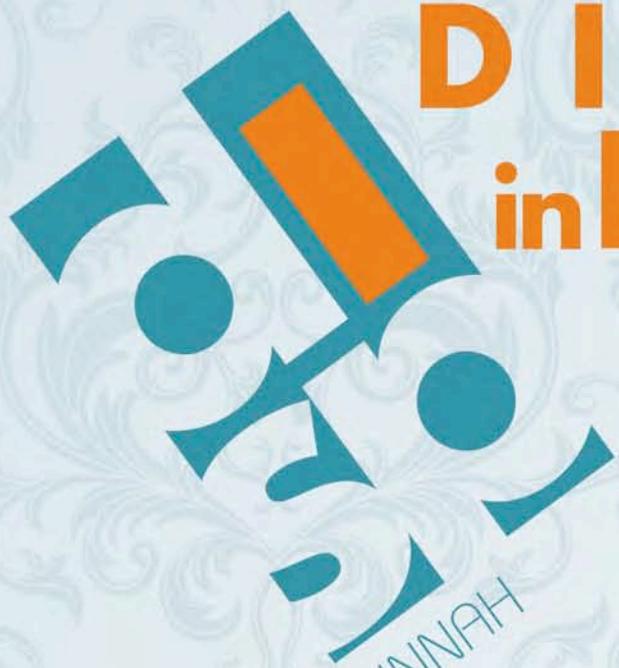


Call upon your Lord in
humility and privately;

indeed, He does not like
transgressors.

AL-'ARAF
THE HEIGHTS
(07:55)





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