



CASH FLOW

*THIS TALK AIN'T CHEAP -
INTERVIEW WITH LEO2196*

YODA - CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

*THE TRANSLATOR -
DISCOVERING THE MUSLIM FEMALE
VOICE IN AN ISLAMIC LOVE STORY*

tc

teens' crossroads



Abu Hurayrah (RA) narrated that
Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

"Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day
either speak good or keep silent, and
let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day
be generous to his neighbour, and
let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day
be generous to his guest."

(Sahih Bukhari and Muslim)

Imam Nawawi Forty Hadith
Hadith no 15



teens' crossroads

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Cash Flow

"And whoever places his trust in God, He is sufficient for him." (At-Talaq, or Divorce, 65:03)

This edition of TC reflects on the financial experiences of our volunteer who reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of her and her family's purchasing powers while growing up. Through delightful as well as embarrassing incidents of her childhood, we are reminded that the effect of money on our attitude and frame of mind is a factor that needs our attention.

A special feature on the Cultural Exchange programme by the Youths of Darul Arqam (YODA) marks another successful annual event for our young volunteers. The presentations by the youths from Pakistan, Myanmar and Algeria provided insight into the beautifully diverse backgrounds of the Muslims from around the world.

Insha'Allah, it is hoped that our Muslim youths in Singapore are blessed with His guidance in coping with their challenges and issues, while they learn to better understand other people (and their

challenges) in different parts of the world and gain better appreciation for others' traditions, lifestyles, and experiences.

"To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: to Him do all questions go back (for decision)." (Al-Imran, or The Family of Imran, 03:109)



TEXT BY NUR AZEEMAH KADIR

COVER

Cash Flow

Our writer shares about how having or not having enough money influences her mindset and spending attitude since young.

If you were born in the 1990s, you would have been raised by baby boomers who were used to live in hardship. Times were hard for your parents, and consequently, they possibly raised you up in frugal ways. This was definitely the case for me. This, however, changed as Singapore's economy started to pick up in 1995. While eating out was once a rare luxury, nowadays, a home-cooked meal is a novelty not to be taken for granted. This article outlines my family's story of how the changing times affected our own lifestyles.

1. Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)

To allow ourselves a meal at KFC, my mother and I would hunt every corner of our house to search for loose coins. Perhaps these coins slipped out of someone's pockets unknowingly, but there were oddly always some coins to be found in the nooks and crannies of our home. These coins would magically emerge from between the cushions of our worn leather sofa, under the thick Persian carpets and in the baskets where all our random belongings went.

Only when we found \$5 worth of coins would we then proceed to KFC. The walk to KFC always felt like a victory march to me. My mother and I would discuss our findings on our way there, marvelling over the amount of loose change we managed to uncover. The meal at KFC might have begun as a way to satiate our cravings, but it ended as a rare, celebratory meal to mark our ability to conjure up treasures when we thought there were none.

2. Classic Chocolate Cornetto

My siblings and I would always fight for the last bit of the Classic Chocolate Cornetto cone. The thick block of chocolate at the end of the delicious icy treat was the best part of the creamy indulgence. We would try to keep track of who had the bite the last time round, but somehow never managed to peacefully agree whose turn it was for the glorious finish.

In my years growing up, I don't recall having had an entire cone of ice cream all to myself. Whenever my siblings and I were treated to the occasional cone, it was always a three-way divide





between my sister, brother and me. I had always assumed that this sharing system happened because our parents wanted us to learn how to share. I never did feel deprived with this arrangement of splitting ice-cream. Only in the years of my early adulthood did it occur to me that the sharing happened out of necessity; my parents could not afford the luxury of buying my siblings and I each an individual cone.

3. The Case of the Missing Fifty Cents

My mother would visit my grandmother at her home every Sunday. Being the youngest child of the family, I was always dragged along to accompany her as my older siblings were busy with other school commitments. My grandmother's two-room flat was cosy, but it did not have internet or cable TV so I was always restless while I was there. Sensing my anxiety, my grandmother would always offer me an excuse to step out of her flat for a while - mostly to the shop below to buy household items.

One day, while I was lying on a mattress conjuring up unlikely scenarios in my mind, my grandmother waved a 10 dollar bill at me and told me to buy some detergent. I grabbed my liberation ticket happily and proceeded to the shop below, unglamorously clad in my faded nightgown and slippers.

I pressed each button of the elevator just so the doors would open at each door, opening and closing the opportunity of respite from my overwhelming boredom. When I finally reached the lift landing, I lingered around the area for as long as I could stand it; tracing the corners of the metallic letter boxes. I'd always secretly hope that someone left their box unlocked so that I would be able to read the contents of their private lives.

Reaching the shop came with a sense of excitement and dread, I was excited for having arrived at the most exciting

part of my "adventure", but on the other hand, having arrived meant that I was much closer to the end of the journey.

The shop was housed in the modest corner of a HDB void deck, selling just the basic necessities of a typical household. It held the same items for as long as I could remember, yet, each visit to the shop offered a whole new experience. Upon entering the vicinity of the shop, there were rows of colourful snacks waiting for the customers; crackers, chips, chocolate bars, sweets. Beside the dieters' nightmare, there were two large refrigerators consisting of soft drinks, flavoured tea and milk. There was also the random half eaten bar of chocolate which probably belonged to the shopkeeper. Adjacent to the cases of beverages was a shelf containing a whole column of different types of bread and buns, packs of instant noodles and lastly, the daily newspaper. The newspaper sold out fast in this shop, so that row was perpetually empty unless the shop was patronised in the early hours of the morning. On the counters nearest to the shopkeepers were the perishables; onions, potatoes, dried chillies and garlic. Under the counter lied my purpose for the visit that day; detergents, soaps and shampoos.

I reached out for the detergent and placed it on the wooden counter, which could also be flipped open to enter the shopkeeper's area. The elderly Indian lady wearing an usually large pair of reading glasses smiled at me as I handed her the 10 dollar bill. With a whisking arm movement, she plunged her hand into a container of coins and proceeded to hand me my change. 50 cents.

I walked slowly towards the lift, saddened by my short-lived excitement. I took lingering glances at the items on display to savour the final moment of my freedom. Before I could leave the shop proper, a golden object caught my eye.



The sun rays were shining directly at it, as though the universe wanted to direct my attention to the object. It was a rectangular object with printed red lettering: "TOP". I knew the contents' taste by heart; with the first bite, there would be an explosion of creamy chocolate, followed by a chewy and slightly salty caramel paste, and lastly, crunchy wafers stacked luxuriously between chocolate cream. In that moment, there was nothing I could think about but to banish my overpowering chocolate craving.

I picked up the chocolate bar and handed what was supposed to be my grandmother's change to the shopkeeper. As a mild-mannered girl, this deed was excitingly wild to me. My heart was thumping furiously as my hands shook to tear open the wrapper. I quickly devoured the bar and licked my lips clean so there would not be any leftover evidence of my crime.

I entered my grandmother's home again after my heartbeat had settled to a normal pace.

"Any change?" my mother asked.

I shook my head and entered "my" room, nervously evading any eye contact.

"Zee, what's this?"

I approached them, feeling faint. My mother pointed at a sticker pasted neatly

at the bottom of the detergent bottle. \$9.50. The price of the detergent was clear, concise and perhaps waiting to give my 7-year-old self a heart attack.

"Um, I don't, um, know, um.. she said there wasn't any change..."

"What? She must think she can lie to you just because you're a little girl! How dare she! Come, follow me, I'll go down with you and demand that she give us back our change" My mother was furious.

I must have looked as though I was about to cry as I waited for my mother to get ready. I kept looking around, hoping that inspiration would descend and provide me a way out of my ordeal. While this internal state of turmoil took place, my grandmother watched me silently.

"Zee, pass me my tudung!"

I scurried to the dining area to look for my mother's headscarf. As I was frantically searching for her veil, I wondered why I was in such a hurry to hand myself my own punishment. I played around with the headscarf once I found it, as though the way out of my predicament could be found on the prints of the Pashmina shawl.

"Ji, forget it. I remember her saying that prices would increase soon so this might be an old price tag," I heard my grandmother's voice bellow from the living room.

"No, Mak, the price tag says the price clearly! I don't want the Achi to think she can trick Zeema just like that."

My grandmother flashed me a teasing smile as I shot her a desperate look. It was clear that she knew I was lying, so I silently pleaded her to save me from this torment.

"Forget it, Ji. I don't want any strained relationship because of this. How am I going to face her after both of you quarrel?"

My mother finally calmed down. She walked towards me and pinched my right ear.

"Next time, don't be so silly. It's so easy for people to fool you!" I gulped in response to her ironic statement.

From that incident on, I returned every cent to my grandmother, not wanting to swindle any more money from her. The guilt that followed this incident remained for several months; I skipped a few recess time snacks to save up some money so I could return her the 50 cents. When I attempted to pass her this money, she chuckled and proceeded to take her coin purse out. Instead of keeping my money, she took out another 50 cents and placed it in my palm.

4. The 2007 Household Expenditure Survey Report

According to this published report, households across all income groups in Singapore experienced an increase in monthly household expenditure. Even the lowest 20% of household incomes increased their spending by 1.1%. This survey compared spending habits and patterns of households in the year 2007 against households in year 2003.

There was an increase in spending in almost all areas of life; food, transport, healthcare and communication. The only slight decrease happened in the area of recreation and culture, namely, spending on overseas holiday trips. Analysts attribute this decrease to the lowered airplane prices offered by budget airlines.

To me, the increase in spending was brought on primarily by the increase in spending power. Once I entered secondary school, the assumption was

that I was old enough to travel to school by myself. My mother then took over my aunt's canteen stall at a neighborhood primary school. This was her first job that lasted longer than 3 months. It was not a highly paid position, but it did reap humble profits which led to more spending power in the house.

Soon, my sister also entered the Singapore workforce. I knew our pocket-tightening days were over when my sister had the ability to easily bribe me with my favourite food when she needed a favour from me. My parents worked hard to ensure my sister received quality education up till university; and my sister expressed her gratitude by reassuring them that they no longer had to work as hard once she became a working adult.

If my household was representative of other households, the reason for the increase in spending of food, transport, healthcare and communication was because we ate too much, depended solely on the car, bought healthier (and more expensive) products in the name of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. We then complained about it to the rest of our friends using our mobile phones. All of this happened, of course, because we could finally afford to do so.

5. Monthly Mishaps

The first time I received my allowance as a monthly pay-out was when I entered polytechnic. Up till then, my father would give me my allowance daily because he felt I did not possess enough sense to manage my funds appropriately.

My daily allowance meant that the bulk of my money would have to be spent on food. Only if I was patient and determined enough would there be a substantial amount from the minute savings of my daily allowance. I was rarely patient enough to save any money, and besides, there was always a delicious cheap snack to be bought from the balance of my allowance. Any value in the delay of gratification disappeared with the sighting of Oreo cookies.

However, with the monthly allowance, I had enough money to buy whatever I wanted without having to go through the hassle of saving. I could splurge on an expensive meal if I wanted to; I could buy clothes that I only previously dreamt about.

And I did. The first time I got my monthly allowance, I spent the entire amount within the first week. I attempted to cover myself up by waking up early to prepare food for school but after 3 days, my father caught me rummaging through the kitchen cupboards at 5 in the morning. Instead of reprimanding me like I thought he would, he just shook his head without saying a word.

The next day, there was 10 dollars on the dining table. My father reverted back to giving me daily allowance for the next 3 months. I did not protest this move for the sake of having a hot meal in school.

6. Hitched

My sister's wedding was extravagant, to say the very least. A typical Malay wedding would be held under the void deck or in the halls of the community centre but my sister was not one for typicality. She opted for a multipurpose hall situated on Fort Canning hill despite the inaccessibility of the venue. She also made sure every detail of her wedding was perfect; from her impeccable makeup of her bridesmaids to the fresh roses on the tables for her guests.

Her wedding was magnificent with a grand bill as substantial evidence, if the crystal encrusted sofa on the wedding stage was not proof enough. As someone who was brought up in a household that could be deemed as frugal, I felt uneasy at my sister's lack of concern towards the lavish amount she was spending. Was she not raised by the same mother who would travel to three different shops in different neighbourhoods just to purchase cheaper versions of each household item?

My sister insisted that spending the money was a good investment as her wedding was a once in a lifetime ceremony. I would have much rather spent the money on a luxurious honeymoon or towards building a solid savings account for a stable marriage, but I then rationalised neither the wedding nor the money was mine. As uncomfortable as I was, I did not want to get in the way of my sister's dream wedding. The preparation phase was a source of great stress for everyone in the


family: My parents had to pull off a great event as my sister was their eldest, my sister wanted an unforgettable day for her guest and I had to silently breathe fumes of anger and frustration over their ridiculous behaviour of forgetting their roots. No matter how much the dissonance of having to waste hard-earned money bothered me, I knew I had to brush my beliefs aside for the sake of my family.

The one essential component of the wedding that even I could not counter was my sister's photographer. The photographer (who asked for average rates) managed to capture the proud smiles of my parents, envious looks on the faces of my sisters' friends and the tired postures from the uniformed waiters but she did not manage to capture my vow to not replicate my sister's ephemeral ceremony.

7. Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)

Today, my mother has to physically shove some cheese fries in my mouth for me to have some KFC. This drastic change might have been due to a shift in my dietary preferences, but to be honest, I think the novelty of having a meal from KFC disappeared when my coin-hunting days ended.

Funnily enough, the building that housed the KFC my mother and I normally frequented to was torn down recently to make way for a new shopping centre. It was as though the universe finished its task to ensure the end of my childhood was welcomed with spectacular new skylines and sensible new habits.

Having that said, old habits die hard. Frugality, as annoying as it may be, has its merits. As a child, I learnt to appreciate non-materialistic goods better and the rare materialistic ones even more. My imagination brought me to more places than money ever could. As an adult, I am always scouring around for the cheaper deals. With this keen eye for deals of great value, I get to spread my dollar to make sure its worth is fully utilised. As exasperating as it gets for people who favour convenience over costs, their irritation diminishes once they realise that they get to buy their cake, eat it, and then wash it down with a cup of coffee too. 

INTERVIEW BY SYEDA ADIBA HUSAIN

FEATURE

Kamal Saleh, better known on YouTube as "lebo2196" or "the poet guy", is the 22-year-old resident of Sydney, Australia, who uploads visual-effects poems - including rap - that address a variety of issues like the purpose of life, oppression, justice, and misconceptions of Islam.

His videos pack a punch as he does not waste time sugar-coating or diluting the messages; instead he clearly states things as they are. With his response video, #MUHAMMAD, to the 2012 movie that tried to defame Prophet Muhammad (SAW), he gained much popularity and respect from people all over the world.

In this interview, Lebo2196 shares a little about himself, 'Talk Islam' and his YouTube mission.

Teens' Crossroads (TC): Tell us about yourself.

Kamal Saleh (KS): I'm born and raised in Australia with Lebanese migrant parents. I'm currently studying Media and Law at Macquarie University and am almost done. I've always had a passion for film and media ever since I was a child, however only until the end of high school did I decide to take my media a little more seriously.

TC: Have you always been trying to practise Islam?

KS: Alhamdulillah, I've always been practising to a certain degree, however I just never really had the motivation at certain points in life. I used to love listening to rap music as a teenager until a beautiful friend of mine slowly pulled me away and gave me a few Islamic poems to replace them. It was a slow process but it eventually gave me a love for Islam enough to leave behind most other distractions. It even gave me inspiration to start doing my own poetry so I could encourage

This Talk Ain't Cheap

Our writer interviews the young poet who raps about Islam and spreads awareness about the Quranic message on YouTube.

others to get involved with their religion. It was through my friend's persistence and of course Allah (SWT) - Alhamdulillah.

TC: What are the benefits and challenges of living in Australia as a practising Muslim? And how do you cope with these challenges?

KS: Australia gives us too much, I can't complain - we just don't give back enough of this beautiful religion Allah has given us to the Australian community. I speak for myself on this. We have mosques, Halal food, Islamic institutions and everything else to practise our religion; we are even able to give Da'wah in public without facing persecution. Any obstacles we have are minor compared to what others are going through.

TC: Tell us about Talk Islam, the Da'wah organisation that you helped to start.

KS: Talk Islam started with a group of friends who were interested to start Da'wah on the street and online. The brothers would get together and chip in money for a weekly stall and a website. The brothers went out to different market places and set up a stall on the weekend where they would discuss Islam with passers-by and hand out free Islamic material. The brothers would also attend Islamic Awareness Week events at different university campuses. It was a very humble movement Masha'Allah.

Slowly I realised I could use the skills I had acquired at university in media to contribute to the online video side of Talk Islam as well and we started producing our own videos.

YouTube SG

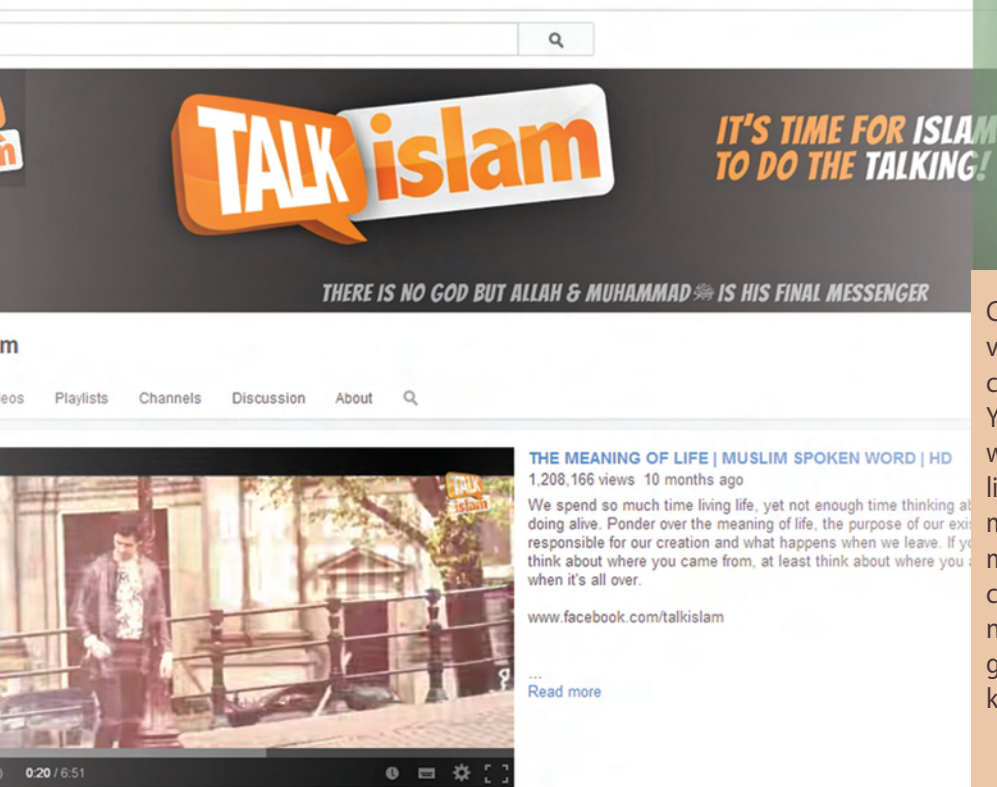
Sports
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Browse channels

Sign now to see your
channels and
recommendations!TALK
Islam

Talk Isla

Home Vid



Check out Kamal Saleh's videos, subscribe to his channel 'lebo2196' on YouTube and spread the word. Insha'Allah. Even kids like us today can spread the message of Allah's book and make a difference. (This, of course, is after we do the necessary homework, and getting some guidance from knowledgeable teachers.)

TC: When and why did you decide to start making YouTube videos?

KS: When I first got into university and chose to do media, the last thing on my mind was doing Islamic YouTube videos; if anything, it was the opposite. It wasn't until I went on Hajj (Pilgrimage) in November 2011 that I decided to really pull up my socks and make a change, so I asked Allah to help me use the skills He had given me to make Islamic YouTube videos. One month later, I had produced my first Islamic spoken word video and Alhamdulillah, it went well.

TC: Have you even been discouraged from making videos?

KS: It happens all the time. The trick is to try and find out whether or not this is from the Shaytan (Satan). Usually I seek counsel from a Sheikh (Teacher) or a few friends before I decide to make a video, as sometimes it's not wise to release certain videos on certain topics. But for the majority of the time, it's due to lack of motivation, which I try my best to counteract, as the reward could potentially be huge in videos that spread quickly - Shaytan will try his best to stop this.

TC: Out of all the videos you produced, which do you think has had the most impact?

KS: I'd probably say it was 'The Meaning of Life' video, only because it tried to sum up the entire purpose of our existence into such a short video. Alhamdulillah, through the help of Allah, I was able to use the work of various daei's, such as Abdurraheem Green and Hamza Tzortzis, to summarise the purpose of life in an elaborate and strategic way, which would have otherwise taken forever to get through. The majority of it was also based on the Quranic concept of asking deep questions and getting people to think. It was also not only a video for non-Muslims, but Alhamdulillah, also for many Muslims who were slowly losing touch with their faith. May Allah keep us all steadfast.

TC: Religion is usually a very sensitive topic, how do you communicate with Muslims and non-Muslims on issues related to Islam?

KS: This is a struggle we all go through to present religion to an irreligious audience. However the best way is to understand your audience - what are their interests and values, etc. Once you know whom you are speaking to,

you can speak to them in a manner that befits them and also speak on topics that are suitable and of interest to them. This is all part of the wisdom of Da'wah that we struggle to attain.

TC: Any future plans or projects you don't mind sharing?

KS: I'm interested in making a few short films for the time being, insha'Allah. Make doa (supplication) for me.

TC: What is your advice to our generation of Muslims?

KS: Chase as many good deeds as you can in a way that suits you best. We are all different. There are many paths to Jannah (Paradise) - we have to pick one and chase after it. I know people who are amazing writers, they have written up amazing blogs. I know people that have amazing people skills; they have actively invited so many people to Islam. I know people that are too shy to do anything in public - they have secretly shared links on Islam to big celebrities who have actually shared the links after watching them. We are all capable of doing something for this religion. Find your capacity, find your talent and chase after it. And most importantly, struggle to stay sincere. 

**Don't judge each
day by the harvest
you reap**



teens' crossroads



**but by the
seeds that
you plant.**

Robert Louis Stevenson

IMPRESSION

REVIEW BY LULU RAHMAN

Discovering the Muslim Female Voice in an Islamic Love Story

Sammar is a Sudanese widow living in Scotland. Four years ago, her husband, who was also her cousin, died in a road accident and that has left her depressed and jaded. A few months after his death, she gave birth to their son and left him in the care of her mother-in-law in Sudan, and came back to Scotland to take up a job as a translator at a university. This is where she met Rae and both fell into a love story that changes their lives forever.

The Translator is a story that looks at the subject of love and devotion from various fronts – Sammar's love for Rae, love for her home country and culture and her love and devotion to Islam. It also looks into the sacrifices the two main characters had to make to be together and the ways in which they will eventually find the courage travelling the unknown path by letting themselves 'go' with the absolute faith in the hands of the Almighty.

Sammar's Twin Devotion

Rae is a twice-divorced agnostic Scottish Islamic scholar. He is empowered, mobile and a highly masculine figure who participates in an academic area

Leila Aboulela's 1999 novel lifted the veil to the readers, allowing them to hear from the new generation of Muslimahs.

of study and is a well-respected scholar in his field. As much as he supports and knows Islam through his years of studies, he has yet to find it in his heart to accept Islam and convert. This form of detachment, he feels, authorises him to make objective knowledge claims on the religion. And thus, this presents a challenge to Sammar, a woman whom he admires and loves for her beauty, sincerity and intellect.

Sammar's devotion to Islam and Rae is touching in its certainty yet uncompromising in its fierceness. Both her faith and feelings for Rae offer freedom to her constricted life after the

death of her husband. To her, Islam is part of her life - praying five times a day, fasting, wearing the veil and consuming halal food. She is sustained by this faith and her prayers provide a quiet rhythm to her daily life. Islam is simple, chaste and pure, and she simply cannot understand why Rae, who is an expert on the subject, refuses to submit and say the shahada (testimony of faith). On his side, Rae believes his credibility as a scholar lies in his detachment:

"I believed the best I could do, what I owed a place and people who had deep meaning for, was to be objective, detached. I wanted to be one of the few

who was saying what was reasonable and right" (p.128)

Sammar is now at a loss as she is caught between her faith and growing feelings towards Rae. Her faith, which she thought as unwavering, is slightly shaken by the circumstances. Though she had avoided any discussion with Rae on this issue, as both fell more deeply in love, she knows they will have to address his lack of faith in all that she holds sacred. It doesn't matter how connected they are on intellectual and emotional fronts, they are still separated by layers of cultural difference and Sammar's unyielding faith in Islam.

An Islamic Love Story

Unlike the usual romance stories where both characters felt a fierce instant attraction towards one another, Sammar and Rae's love develops slowly and delicately. They were introduced by Sammar's friend and Rae's colleague, Yasmin, and their initial interactions were full of restraint and caution, mostly due to Sammar's shyness and Rae's respect towards her as a Muslimah (Muslim female). Through the long conversations on the phone and at work, they began to respect the other's intellectual and personal thoughts.

It is almost inevitable then that they will fall in love. She admits her growing attraction for Rae is due to his serious kindness and extensive knowledge, and she knows Rae feels the same way though their feelings remain unspoken even as they get closer. The main reason they do so is because they know they will have to address their differing faiths and if they want to proceed further in the relationship, something drastic will need to be changed.

Sammar struggles with her newfound love because as a religious Muslim she can't marry a non-Muslim and won't have a relationship with him outside marriage, so either Rae has to convert or they must part. Sammar refuses to compromise on her belief even though she knows this will eventually lead to heartbreak. The critical moment comes when Sammar, before departing on an overseas assignment, proposes to Rae and appealed that he converts.

"If you just say the shahada, it would be enough. We could get married, if you just say the words..." (p.127)

Rae, though expecting it to come eventually but didn't suspect it will be that soon, responded by pushing her away. Converting as a token gesture is not acceptable, he knows, and thus rejects this route.

"We are not like that. You and I are different. For them, it is a token gesture." (p. 128)

On Sammar's part, she eventually realised her folly and selfishness. She had wanted Rae to convert only to serve her own needs and desires and that is simply unacceptable, as it could lead to future problems in their relationship. It was much later that she realised that they can only be united after he has embraced Islam in heart and mind.

"She had never, not once, prayed that he would become a Muslim for his sake, for his own good. It has always been for herself, her need to get married again and not be alone." (p. 171)

Voice of the Islamic Woman


Sammar's narration allows the readers to discover the voice of a new generation of Muslimahs. Sammar is an educated scholar, independent, and exposed to the Western culture, but she is also someone who is devoted to her religion and traditions. Previously, the Muslimah's worldview is unknown to most people but this book has so-called lifted the veil to the readers. One can see the emergence of the Muslim women's identity, how they can and do empower themselves through Islam in contemporary societies.

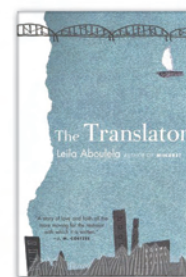
Turning back to the religion is definitely not a return to the past or Middle Ages as it is widely believed. In fact, it's the opposite - it liberates the women in their behaviour and thinking, as there is no need to conform to the idealistic norms of the current society. Donning the hijab (headgear that covers hair and neck) becomes a personal choice rather than being imposed on as was previously portrayed. It gives a new dignity to women, acting as a sign of awareness of their right not be judged by their looks but solely by their personality and

intellect, as evidenced when Rae fell in love with her through their long telephone conversations and interactions at work.

Sammar's independence and devotion allows her to defend her convictions despite the fact that it caused her heartbreak and is not willing to compromise for the sake of love. And while nursing her heartbreak, never once did she blame the religion for it. Instead, her faith is even more strengthened as she seeks solace in her prayers and supplications. The resting point is and always has been her Islamic faith.

Yet, in spite of all this, she is not a perfect Muslimah - she ponders on donning the veil and she is far from being the model mother, as she abandoned her baby while struggling with depression after the death of her husband, running away to Scotland. Through her narration, readers discover how Islam reshapes lives and behaviour of its believers. It shows the state of mind and feelings of an ordinary Muslim trying to practise their faith in difficult circumstances.

This is an endearing love story with a simple storyline. However, it is not the kind of book that one can breeze through as Leila Aboulela highlights various issues that require the readers to ponder and reflect. There are parts of the book where you might have to put the book down, close your eyes and ask yourself - if my faith was put on the line, what would I do and where will I find the courage? Such is the emotion that this book provokes, as it keeps on nudging and prodding its readers to question the depth of one's faith and devotion to the Almighty. 



Title:	The Translator
Author:	Leila Aboulela
Published:	1999
Price:	\$21.00 (Wardah Books)

SPOTLIGHT

TEXT BY NAZEERAH MOHAMED
PHOTOGRAPHS BY QURRAH SHUMAR

Celebrating Diversity

YODA's annual cultural exchange programme brought the flavours of Pakistan, Myanmar and Algeria to SMU.

Youths of Darul Arqam (YODA) collaborated with Singapore Management University (SMU) to organise its Cultural Exchange programme on 22 February 2014. Held at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business (SMU), YODA's Cultural Exchange programme maintained its objectives to impress and expose our youths with a cultural perspective of Islam, to empower them with the diversity from within the religion, and to inspire them with the drive to contribute to the ummah (community).

Every year, YODA gathers speakers of diverse backgrounds from various countries to speak about Ramadhan and Eid as they experienced in their native lands. Although technological advancements have created unlimited access to information, some youths may remain oblivious to the splendour

of the global Muslim community. As diversity reminds us of Allah's Mercy, a heightened sense of awareness towards the vibrant Muslim community can infuse esteem in one.

This year, YODA invited speakers from Pakistan, Myanmar and Algeria, to speak to the participants, who are mostly local and international students.

YODA's chairperson, Nur Hani Nasir, spoke about the tagline of YODA's Cultural Diversity programme, which is "Share, Enlighten, Experience", to accentuate the goals of the programme. In addition, a painted 'tree' was pasted on the wall of the venue for participants to add their "leaves" of inputs using post-it notes. The participants shared their perspectives and what naturally came to their minds when talking about cultural diversity.





Anam Hussain from Pakistan

The first speaker, Anam, currently is an undergraduate at the National University of Singapore (NUS). In her presentation, Anam elaborated on the various ethnic groups in her home country, and described the colourful scenes of Ramadhan, Eid and weddings as celebrated there.

Anam's refreshing presentation exposed the participants to the ethnic diversities in Pakistan including how the food, as well as language, would vary accordingly. The detailed wedding customs left many in awe of the beautiful outfits and ceremonies. Given a chance to try 'Gulab Jaman', a traditional deep-fried fritter soaked in spiced sugar syrup, the participants experienced an energetic boost of sweetness, enough to be hyped up for more from the next speaker.

Wai Min @ Saifullah from Myanmar

Wai Min @ Saifullah is also pursuing his studies at NUS. He opened his presentation with the daily menu of the common meals that they had back at home. It was during this point that the first speaker, Anam, noted the similarity in some of the foods mentioned to Pakistani ones - especially when the names sounded almost the same although in a different language.

Myanmar has a huge number of ethnic groups and its similarities in culture with other countries within the region are remarkable. Wai Min's presentation was accompanied with a demonstration of making the traditional 'Pickled Tea Leaf Salad', also known as 'Lahpet Thohk'. Participants were slicing cabbages and tomatoes to make their own Lahpet,

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SPOTLIGHT

continued from page 13


which they sampled together. Overall, this dish garnered mixed reviews from the participants. The nutty flavours blended deliciously with the spicy, strong flavours of the leaves, which could have been overpowering for the less adventurous.

Yassine Hamidouni from Algeria

The third speaker, Yassine Hamidouni, has been residing in Singapore since 2010. As his presentation was about a country from a region different than Singapore, many of the participants were amazed by the different ways that certain customs were practised. During weddings, the groom normally has to ride on a horse on his way to the wedding.

He showed beautiful pictures of the landscape in his country and had also included the various outfits different people in different parts of the country would wear.

Yassine also showed pictures of a traditional Algerian outerwear for women to cover themselves. His presentation was followed by a demonstration of how to put on the outerwear, with his lovely wife as the model. Participants had a chance to learn to put it on, as well as learning to put on the traditional Berber turban normally worn by the men in the country. Many struggled with the twisting and tucking-ins of the cloths, but it was certainly fun trying to figure it out.

Wrapping up the event, participants spoke about important takeaways, which we could implement in our daily lives. While religion is fundamental in understanding the way we function as human beings, we often forget that we have commonalities as one human body, or humankind. Notably, the participants shared sentiments about being more compassionate towards those around us, regardless of how different we may seem, and to better appreciate our existence as Muslims, with the beauty of diversity that Islam offers us with. 



POEM BY DR YAMIN CHENG

IMPRESSION

A little birdie has just learned to fly
Its heart so excited it soars to the sky
Its wings glide smoothly as it waves goodbye
To all in the nest so dear to its eyes

Our dear little birdie just loves to fly
High in the sky where the soft clouds lie
It chirps so happily for the gift of life
So joyful is our birdie that its eyes would cry

Tears of joy roll down the sky
And down to earth where the land is dry
Then our birdie begins to sigh
If one day I am going to die

When someday I leave this life
I no longer have the joy to fly
Is there something for me as guide
So that life has a meaning to abide

In Allah our life resides
So fly little birdie do not hide
But seek in Allah as your guide
And chirp happily Ahad! Ahad!

(*Ahad in Arabic means 'one', 'unique', or
'matchless'.)

Little Birdie Says Ahad



IMPRESSION

"In each of us, two natures are at war – the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. But in our own hands lies the power to choose – what we want most to be we are."

"Everyday courage has few witnesses. But yours is no less noble because no drum beats for you and no crowds shout your name."

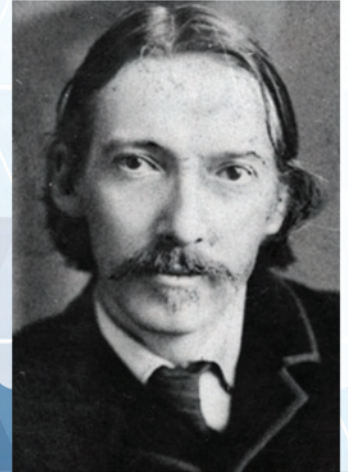
"Keep your fears to yourself, but share your courage with others."

About this author

At the age of 17, he enrolled at Edinburgh University to study engineering, with the aim - his father hoped - of following him in the family firm. He abandoned this course of studies and made the compromise of studying law. He "passed advocate" in 1875 but did not practice since by now he knew he wanted to be a writer.

When on holiday in Scotland in the summer of 1881, the cold rainy weather forced Stevenson and his twelve-year-old stepson, Lloyd, to stay indoors and they drew, coloured and annotated the map of an imaginary "Treasure Island". The map stimulated Stevenson's imagination and, he began to write a story based on it as an entertainment for the rest of the family.

Treasure Island marks the beginning of his popularity and his career as a profitable writer.



Robert Louis Stevenson

born
in Edinburgh, Scotland
13 November 1850

died
3 December 1894

A novelist, poet, travel writer, and a leading representative of Neo-romanticism in English literature, he was greatly admired by many authors, including Jorge Luis Borges, Ernest Hemingway, and Rudyard Kipling.

And do not mix the truth with falsehood or
conceal the truth while you know [it].

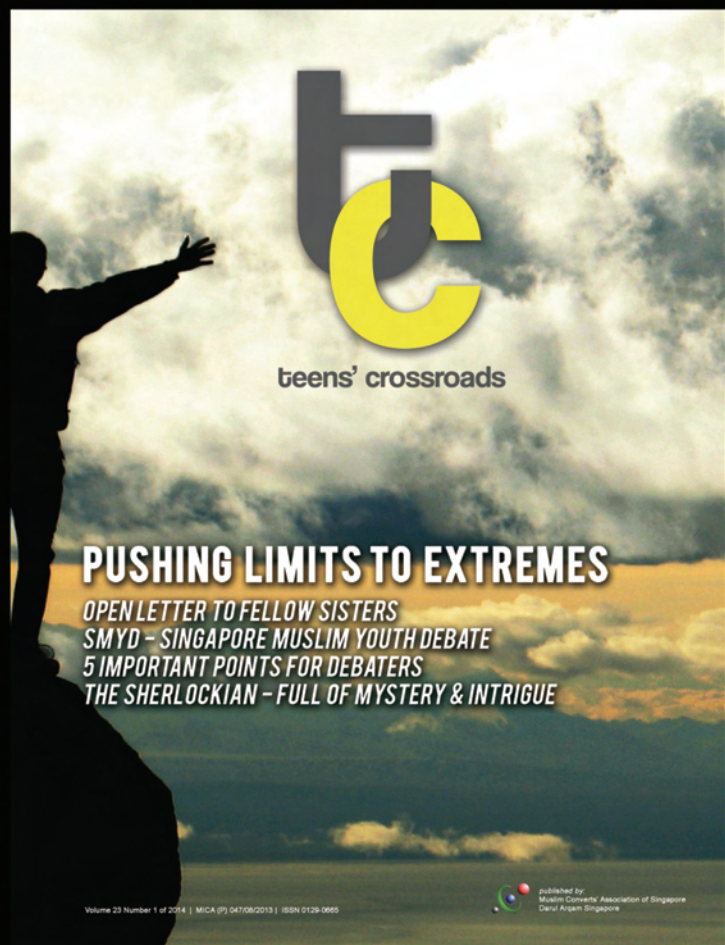
02:42
Al-Baqarah
The Heifer



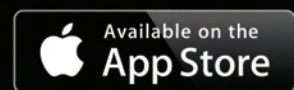
teens' crossroads

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