



What is Forgiveness? How to forgive? What are the benefits of forgiveness?



Hijab: Scent of Muslim **Femininity** 

Religious tolerance in Islam

Muslims respond to hate with wisdom and grace

Overcoming historical amnesia: Muslim contributions to civilisation Shariah with Chinese

characteristics

And more features inside







learning to forgive

themuslimreade

Published by Muslim Converts'



# mercy

Surely those who believe, those who emigrate and strive in God's cause – they are the ones who may hope for the mercy of God. God is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.

Al-Bagarah (The Heifer), 02:218

"You are our Protector: so forgive us and give us Your mercy; for You are the best of those who forgive. And ordain for us that which is good, in this life and in the hereafter: for we have turned unto You." Al-'Araf (The Heights), 07:155-156

It is your Lord that knows you best: if He please, He grants you mercy, or if He please, punishment: We have not sent you to be a disposer of their affairs for them

Al-Isra' (The Night Journey, or, The Children of Israel),

Excerpts are from the translations of the Quran

# بِسْمِرِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِرِ مَّرَبِّ أَدْخِلْنِي مُدْخَلَ صِدْقٍ وَأَخْرِجْنِي مُخْرَجَ صِدْقٍ وَاجْعَل لِّي مِن لَّدُنكَ سُلْطَانًا نَّصِيرًا مِن لَّدُنكَ سُلْطَانًا نَّصِيرًا

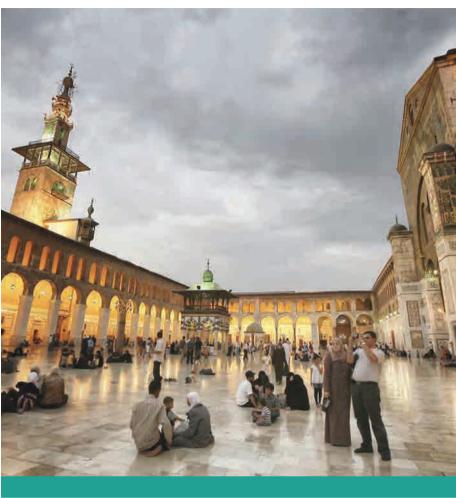
In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

"My Lord! Cause me to enter in a manner sincere and faithful to the truth, and cause me to exit in a manner sincere and faithful to the truth, and grant me from Your Presence a sustaining authority."

From Al-Isra' (The Night Journey, or The Children of Israel), 17:80

\* This prayer was a practice and recommendation of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), when entering and leaving a place. In addition, it instructs us in what manner we should enter a place and leave it. Another interpretation also refers to the entry and exit at every stage of our life.

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# common abbreviations

AS: 'Allayhis Salam (Arabic) Meaning: Peace be upon him Other similar abbreviations: PBUH (peace be upon him), PBOH (peace be on him) Usage: For the Prophets (AS) who came before Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

MCAS: Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore Other similar abbreviations: DA (Darul Argam)

RA: Radiyallahu 'Anhu / 'Anha / 'Anhum (Arabic) Meaning: May Allah be pleased with him / her / them Usage: For the Companions (RA) of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

SAW: Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wassallam (Arabic) Meaning: Peace be upon him Other similar abbreviations: PBUH (peace be upon him), PBOH (peace be on him) Usage: For Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

SWT: Subhanahu Wa Ta 'ala Meaning: Glorified and Exalted One Usage: For Allah (SWT) Note: Arabic terms have been represented by basic Roman alphabet, 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. Thank you for your kind consideration and gesture.

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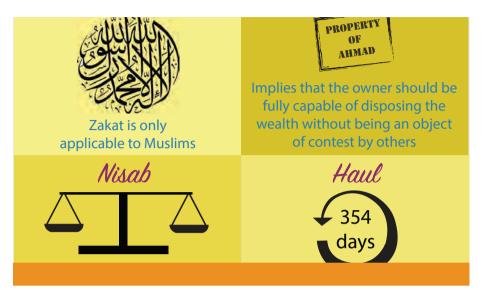
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# common terms

Adhan: The call to prayer

Astaghfirullah: I seek forgiveness from God

Alhamdulillah: Praise be to God Allahu Akbar: God is great

Burkini: A swimsuit that covers the whole body except the face, hands and feet

Da'wah / Dawah: Invitation to understand Islam

Deen: Religion; way of life

Hajj: Annual pilgrimage to Makka

Hijab: Headgear that covers hair and neck, worn by females

Ihsan: Excellence in faith

Jemaah: Congregation

Jihad: Struggle

Masiid: Mosque

Muezzin: Person who leads, and recites the

Salam (greeting): Assalamu'alaikum (Peace

Seerah: History of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

to cover the hair

Sharia / Shariah: Islamic laws

Shirk: Ascribing partners to God

Subhaanallah: Glory be to God

Sunna / Sunnah: Practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

Tudung: Head covering

Umrah: Minor pilgrimage

Zakat: That which purifies; obligatory payment made annually on certain kinds of property



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# editorial note

Resolution is a necessary step towards the healing of our soul. As we learn to deal with our own struggles and the conflicts beyond our reach, it is inevitable to realise that the key to a peaceful resolution is forgiveness. Forgiving, easier said than done, has an effect similar to breaking out of a trap and tasting freedom upon escape. Embracing solace in that newfound freedom while abandoning the prison of fury, we can feel forgiveness override our hearts with the sweetest sense of tranquillity.

The hadith, which states that the nobility of character is to treat well those who treat us badly, motivates us to take the first step towards forgiveness. In it, there is empathy, warmth, and hope - virtues, which in itself are nurturing rewards for us.

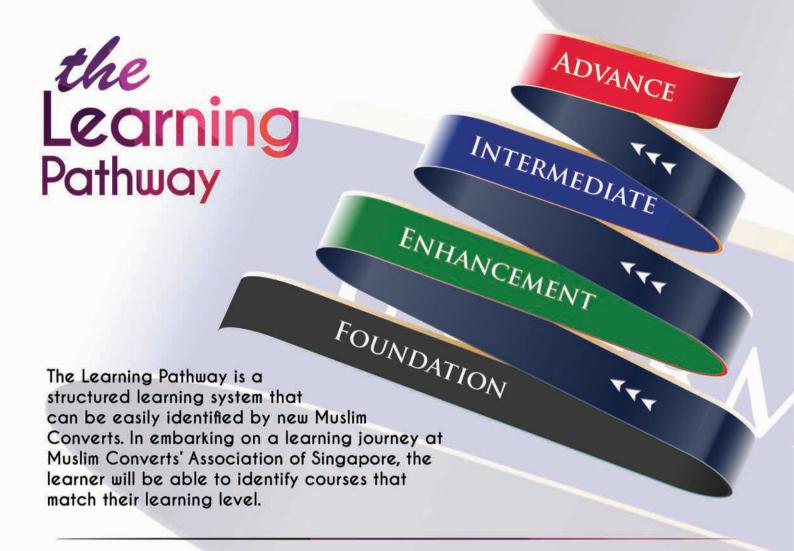
Every day, as we take in the realities of Muslims facing various hardship in different parts of the world, the pressure to reciprocate with anger, or even speak up with hostility, intensifies. Let us remember that people who restrain anger are those considered as righteous (Al-Imran, 3:133).

The stories in this edition of TMR bring forth the spirit to learn to move on and how we can propel the Muslim community forward in solidarity without succumbing to anger. In UK, Dr Musharraf Hussain Al-Azhari shares on how to learn to forgive others. In Jordan, the wall art flourishes in Zaatari refugee camp inspiring hope for the future of Syrians. In US, the Muslims at SoundVision.com highlight the reaction of Muslims toward Islamophobes. In Gaza, the underground arts movement is helping lessen the pain of residents from wars and destruction. In Malaysia, Dr Yamin Cheng elaborates about the Muslimah's embrace of the Hijab/Tudung/Selendang. In Singapore, Anthony Green encourages us to document our Muslim stories.

These are just some of the positive experiences of Muslims that stemmed from efforts to distant themselves from the negativity around us. I was younger when my dear mother used to say, "If you're the first one to forgive, or ask for forgiveness, it doesn't make you a loser in any way." Today, I found myself wondering why I took that lightly. In the most difficult of times, it is indeed painful to harbour ill feelings towards those who wronged us, purposely or not. Through forgiveness, I found clarity. *Insha'Allah*, I pray for the same resolution for us all, in times when we need that clarity the most.

Linalythusin

managing editor aishah hussein aishah@darul-argam.org.sg





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# **Managing Editor**

#### **Technical Advisor**

ABDUL MALIK MUJAHID ANTHONY GREEN OTHMAN NOREEN YEK NURULJANNAH HISHAM SHAIK KADIR

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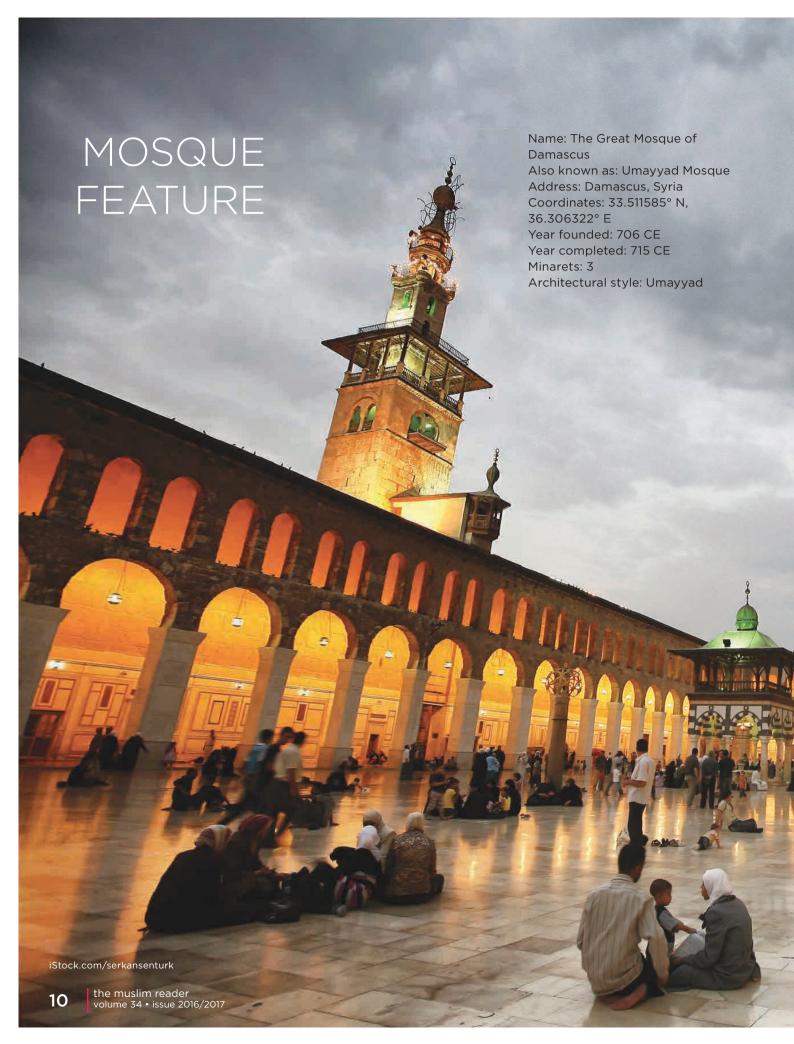
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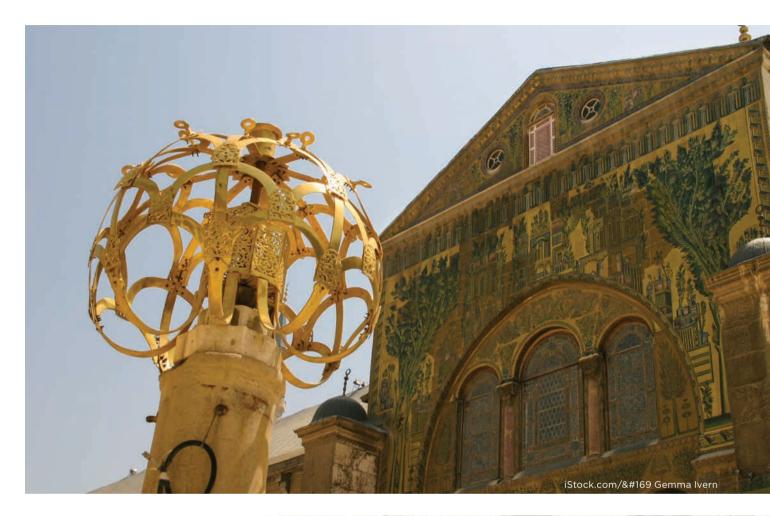
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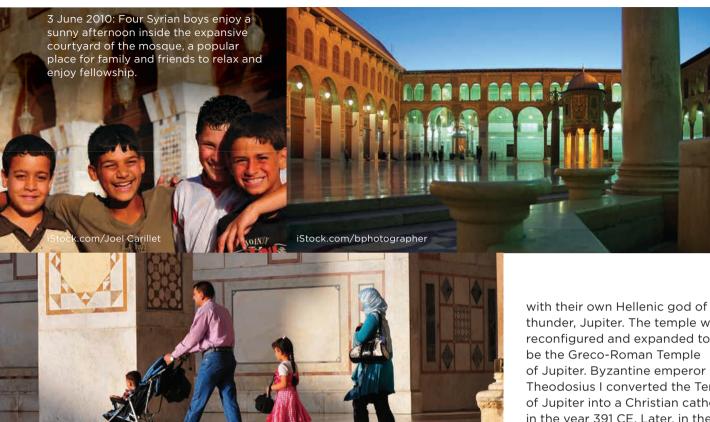


The Umayyad Mosque's ground plan was used as a prototype for other mosques in the region including the Al-Azhar Mosque and Baybars Mosque in Cairo, the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Spain, and the Bursa Grand Mosque and Selimiye Mosque in Turkey.

# TRANSFORMATIONS AT THIS HISTORICAL SITE

The site of the present day Umayyad Mosque was, during the Iron Age, originally the location of a temple built by Arameans of western Syria that followed the cult of Haddad-Ramman, whom they believed was the god of thunderstorms and rain. In 64 BCE, the Romans conquered Damascus and assimilated Hadad-Ramman





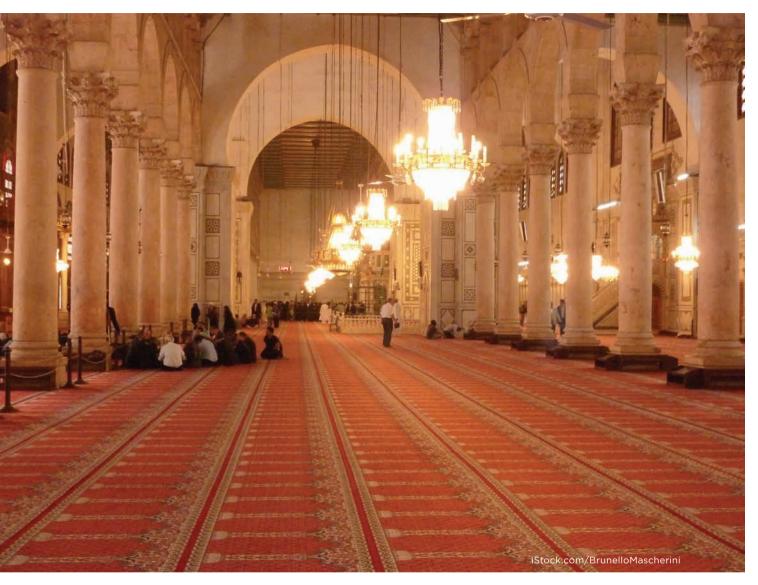


thunder, Jupiter. The temple was reconfigured and expanded to be the Greco-Roman Temple of Jupiter. Byzantine emperor Theodosius I converted the Temple of Jupiter into a Christian cathedral in the year 391 CE. Later, in the 6th century, it became associated to Saint John the Baptist, or Prophet Yahva (AS) in the Islamic tradition. as it is believed that Prophet Yahya's head was interred there. It was also once-called the Basilica of Saint John the Baptist. Damascus became the administrative capital of the Muslim world under the Umayyad Caliphate. The sixth Umayyad Caliph commissioned the construction of the mosque on the site of the Byzantine cathedral in 706 CE.

#### THE THREE MINARETS

The Minaret of the Bride (Madhanat al-Arus) was the first one built and is located on the mosque's northern wall. This minaret is used by the muezzin for the call to prayer (adhan) and there is a spiral staircase of 160 stone steps that lead to the muezzin's calling position.







The Western Minaret (Madhanat al-Gharbiyya) is also known as the "Minaret of Qaitbay" as it was built by Mamluk Sultan Qaitbay in 1488. It is octagonal in shape and is built in receding sections with three galleries.

The Minaret of Jesus (Madhanat Isa), located on the southeast corner of the mosque complex, is around 77 metres in height and the tallest of the three minarets. The main body of the minaret is square-shaped and the spire is octagonal. It tapers to a point

and is surmounted by a crescent (as are the other two minarets). Two covered galleries are situated in the main body and two open galleries are located on the spire. Islamic belief holds that Prophet Isa (AS) will descend from heaven before the Day of Judgement to confront the Dajjal (The False Messiah). According to local Damascene tradition, Prophet Isa (AS) will reach earth via the Minaret of Jesus, hence its name. Ibn Kathir, a prominent 14th century Muslim scholar, backed this notion. TMR

Highest and Noblest Form of

# Courage and Resolution

But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs.

As-Shura (Consultation), 42:43

From the translation of the Quran



uman beings are social creatures, living together as families in neighbourhoods, communities and towns. The infrastructure of cities, roads, transport, institutions and facilities for leisure and recreation all are a testimony of hard work and a long torturous history. This economic prosperity is a result of many compromises where individuals and groups have willingly and unwillingly given and taken. People have been victims as well as perpetrators of injustice. However, people have learnt to forgive and move on. It is the quality of being tolerant to others and the spirit of compassion that has been the force de tour of human civilisation and

prosperity. The progress of Human civilisation is deeply rooted in forgiveness.

Islamic teachings make it obligatory for Muslims to develop the virtue of forgiveness as the Quran repeatedly tells them to forgive. It doesn't just command forgiveness but teaches that God is the Forgiving (Ghafir), the absolutely Forgiving (Ghaffar) and the most oft Forgiving (Ghafoor). Thus, the Quran provides us excellent examples and role models of forgiveness. We will also read how wonderfully forgiving the Messenger (SAW) of Islam was!

"Forgiveness allows us to let go of the pain in the memory and if we let go of the pain in the memory we can have the memory but it does not control us. When memory controls us we are the puppets of the past" (The Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut by A Asseily).

Forgiveness is a powerful virtue for displacing hard feelings; it empowers the victim to release resentment, hatred, malice and thoughts of revenge. What you are doing is dissociating yourself from the negative feelings that keep reminding you of the offence done against you. This diminishes the negative feelings against the other and gives you a sense of control and freedom that results in a happier life.



Research shows that forgiveness has health benefits too. Bitterness, hatred, grudges and desire for revenge is known to increase blood pressure and symptoms of stress. On the other hand, forgiveness leads to improvement in health; this is a result of lower blood pressure, less hostility, less anxiety and depression. Forgiveness is a positive feeling, attitude and behaviour that naturally helps one better manage anger, build better relationships and win more friends. On the whole, forgiveness is a complete remedy for personal, social and health well-being.

Read the following beautiful stories of Forgiveness from the life of our teacher, Prophet Muhammad (SAW). As we practise forgiveness we will become closer to him. This is our Islamic duty! Since forgiveness is a difficult task I have highlighted many examples from the Prophet's life, when forgiveness is challenging and hard work!

The Quran presented the Prophet (SAW) as the most beautiful role model for mankind.

"Indeed, in the Messenger of God there is a beautiful role model for you."

Al-Ahzab (The Confederates), 33:21

He is an exemplar par excellence in all aspects of life: the purity of his beliefs, the goodness of his behaviour, the beauty of his character, a splendid role model. We all recognise the need for role models - children imitate their parents, students reflect the manners of their teachers and those who yearn for perfection in character and devotion to the Lord can find no better model than the Prophet of Islam.

#### THE TRIP TO TAIF

The intense trials and tribulations of the Prophet's trip to the city of Taif, illustrates in abundance the virtues of forgiveness and forbearance, which were the hallmark of his gentle, stoical personality. This trip came soon after the death of his beloved wife and constant, loyal companion of 25 years, Khadija (RA) as well as that of his patron uncle Abu Talib who had been an impenetrable bulwark that stood between his nephew and the brutal Quraish. The Prophet's life was in emotional turmoil at this time with no moral support from Khadija (RA) or protection from Abu Talib. With his uncle gone, the Quraish sensed the Prophet's vulnerability and speeded up their vicious and relentless campaigns of hatred against him. The Prophet (SAW) decided to try the nearby city of Taif hoping that the call to Islam would find more willing recipients there than Makka. However, the tribe of Thaqif, who ruled the city, not only declined to listen to him but mocked and ridiculed him mercilessly and expelled him from the city. In the face of such a fierce opposition, the beloved Prophet



(SAW) had no choice but to retreat hastily. They ran after him, pelting him with stones which caused him severe injuries. In excruciating mental, physical and emotional pain, bleeding and exhausted, the Prophet (SAW) took refuge in a vineyard. Feeling dejected, forlorn, helpless and humiliated, he (SAW) raised his hands and prayed a prayer which has become an iconic symbol of utter submission to the will of God in the face of complete and total despair. The intensity, the beauty and the very moving humility of this magnificent supplication most eloquent.

# PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S SUPPLICATION

"O God! Please consider my weakness, my shortage of means, and the little respect people have of me. Oh, most Merciful God, You are the Lord of the oppressed and you are my Lord. To whom would you leave my fate? To a stranger who insults me? Or to an

enemy who dominates me? Would I that you have no wrath against me! Your pleasure alone is my objective."

# THE PROPHET SENDS CHARITY TO FAMINE STRICKEN MAKKA

The Muslims had been attacked three times by the Makkans, at Badr, Uhud and third time when they gathered all their allies to wipe out the Muslims. However, look at the goodness of the Messenger of God (SAW), when he heard that people in Makka were facing a famine, he (SAW) immediately sent them a supply of food and 500 gold coins as charity from the Muslims of Madinah.

#### THE CONQUEST OF MAKKA

The conquest of Makka is perhaps the most striking example of the Messenger's forgiveness and moral character. After twenty years of hostility and persecution, he returns to Makka with a mighty army the likes of which the Quraish had never seen. However, he entered with utmost humility, with a bowed head, no swagger, no trappings of an all-mighty conquering hero, no revenge or retaliation. Not a single person was killed in this phenomenal conquest. Haykal, in The life of Muhammad, describes the general amnesty as follows:

'O! The beauty of pardon and forgiveness on the part of the mighty and powerful! How great is the soul of Muhammad which rose above hatred and above revenge, which denied every human feeling and ascended to heights of nobility that man had never reached before! There were the Quraysh among whom were people whom Muhammad knew had plotted to kill him, had persecuted him and inflicted upon him and his companions all kind of injury and harm, who fought him at Badr and at Uhud, who blockaded him in the campaign of al Khandag, who incited the Arab tribes to rise against him and who





"Forgiveness is a positive feeling, attitude and behaviour that naturally helps one better manage anger, build better relationships and win more friends."

would even then tear him apart if only they had the power. There, the whole of Quraish stood totally under Muhammad's hand, indeed under his feet, totally subject to his command. His heart was absolutely free of injustice, of malice, of tyranny or false pride. In the most decisive moment, God gave him power over his enemy. But Muhammad chose to forgive. thereby giving to all mankind and all the generations the most perfect example of goodness. of truthfulness, of nobility and magnanimity'.

# A POWERFUL LESSON ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Once a college professor was teaching on the high cost of being unforgiving, he asked each of his students to bring a sack of potatoes to class. For each person they refused to forgive, they had to select a potato and write the date on it beside that person's name. Then for a month, without fail, they had to carry that sack of potatoes

with them everywhere they went. After lugging those sacks around for a while each student began to recognise how much weight they were carrying; the amount of energy it took to focus on their bag; and that they had to be careful not to leave it in the wrong place. Eventually, as the potatoes began to rot and stink, they realised that getting rid of them was the only smart thing to do.

A good question, how would you like God to forgive you in the same way you forgive others? If that thought makes you uncomfortable, do something about it!

You will have played and re-played your personal tragedy and betrayal and hurt movie so often as you know it inside out. Here are four powerful reasons why you should let go of the grudge, the complaint, the bitterness, the resentment and hatred that you have held against someone:



#### FOUR POWERFUL REASONS TO LET GO OF GRUDGES, COMPLAINTS, BITTERNESS, RESENTMENT AND HATRED

- Letting go of past hurts gives you the freedom to secure the present and prepare for the future; the offender can no longer hurt you.
- 2. When you're not spending time and energy feeding a grudge, you can nourish new, healthy ideas. On the other hand, a grudge takes time and energy. How can you afford to waste time and energy on futile and hurtful activity?
- 3. Unfortunately holding a grudge feels like a form of control,

because you falsely think that by harbouring resentment you can stop him from hurting you again, since he can't get close to you. Actually you're the one who is being controlled.

4. We are often reminded that the offender has done nothing to deserve forgiveness, but God mandates us to forgive since He is the All Forgiving. You've held onto it long enough; it's time to let it go and enjoy the freedom that comes from forgiveness.

Once you lower your defences you can start to heal, love, and be loved.

Feeling angry feels good temporarily, but being healed

feels so much better. Letting go of your bitterness or hurt means you have cleansed yourself of all toxic relationships, and people that you had grudge against can now be warm friends.

Kristin Armstrong says, "after you forgive... you get to work out the process. It's a collaborative effort of God's power and your hard work. Letting go isn't always as simple as opening your tightly clenched fist, yet deliverance often is immediate." TMR

Dr Musharraf Hussain al-Azhari is the chief Imam, Karimia institute, Nottingham, UK. (www.karimia.com)

# Ray of Hope **BY SHASEL** Trapped inside the darkest moments, calmly face the highest heaven. A warm ray of hope is exquisitely inlaid in each prayer that is earnestly said. Even if you were in the brightest hours still solemnly praise the Most Glorious. And as your prayers are raised to the sky may a swift aye be the sweet reply. In gloom or caught within the spotlight to the Almighty Lord we should confide. For we are nothing but a lowly creature a mite upon the hair of mother nature. the muslim reader



# HIJAB: SCENT OF MUSLIM FEMININITY

#### BY DR YAMIN CHENG

hy do Muslim women put on the hijab or headscarf? Surely there must be something about donning the scarf that attracts Muslim women to wear it. The scarf is not only a piece of cloth covering the head and hair. It is something through which the Muslim woman finds her femininity and dignity as a human being. It is about wearing an outward garment that by it a woman also wears the values and virtues of a woman's shame and shyness the moment she puts on the scarf. It is what the Quran calls *libas al-taqwa*, garment of piety.

In the scarf, a Muslim woman finds her meaning as a human being. But this meaning is not something that happens immediately the moment the person wears it. It is only the beginning of a journey of discovering how the values and virtues of humanity can blossom in a person's personality that takes many years to happen and the scarf is the beginning point of that journey.

The scarf becomes obligatory not because there are legal precepts commanding it but rather, it is because the person donning it finds a magical touch transforming her personality and refining her femininity that she makes it obligatory upon herself to do it. Obligation of wearing the scarf does not happen from the outside of the Muslim woman but it occurs from within the soul in her that yearns for her to do it because of what it can do to her human meaning.

Ask Felixia Yeap, the former Playboy model from Malaysia, why she felt there was a transformation happening to her when she put on the hijab and yet there was nobody who told her to do it. And after wearing it, she found a sense of serenity and security in her life, and decided to become a Muslim and since then, she has not lifted the hijab from her body because she saw how her femininity and dignity was put back into her humanity with it.

# HER MOST PRECIOUS VIRTUE OF HUMANITY

Wearing the scarf is thus fundamentally and originally about discovering the meaning of womanhood through which a woman understands what it is to be her as a woman and how she is different from man but both need each other to make humanity complete and life realisable. In the

# musings





scarf a woman discovers her most precious virtue of humanity and it is shame. In shame, she becomes polite, respectful, and humble. In being polite, respectful, and humble, she knows how to place herself in relation to others, in the way she speaks, the way she moves her body, and the way she does things. That is why a Malay girl brought up in a traditional upbringing knows how to blush, how to distinguish between giggling and laughing, how to behave at home and outside the home, and when to raise the tone of her voice, and when to whisper.

In days of old, it is the *selendang*, a long piece of cloth wrapped over the head and laced around the neck that through it, the Malay girl learns to be a Muslim woman. Through

the selendang, she knows when to leave home and return home, not to talk to strangers except when asking for directions, and when it is time to go for Quranic classes and learn her religious lessons. Today, the selendang has moved on to become the tudung, fully covering the head and hair. Yet the very meaning of the scarf remains steadfast to her shame, her safeguarding of it, and the way she goes about her movements with it.

NOT A HINDRANCE BUT A
POSITIVE ELEMENT THAT
RAISES THE VALUE OF HER
HUMAN DIGNITY AND EMPOWER
HERSELF

Muslim women in Singapore, Malaysia and other nations have moved from living in villages

to living in cities, from being housewives to becoming lawyers and entrepreneurs, and from mere teachers to becoming heads of colleges and universities. At the same time, they also become more exposed to all kinds of challenges in workplaces and in business dealings. But in the tudung, they find sanctuary and security to protect, preserve, and even enhance the meaning of their femininity and womanhood in an increasingly aggressive and ratrace society. Through the tudung, they show that they can be soft but firm, humble but vocal, interact with strangers but know the scope of their bodily contacts and their barriers. In other words, the scarf is not a hindrance but rather a positive element through which the woman can raise the value of

# musings



"Obligation of wearing the scarf does not happen from the outside of the Muslim woman but it occurs from within the soul in her that yearns for her to do it because of what it can do to her human meaning."

her human dignity and empower herself with more freedom to move around and express her thoughts and ideas.

# THE HARMONY OF SUBSTANCE AND FORM

It is in the *tudung* that the woman strikes a synchronicity between her femininity and the rules for living and behaving. It is not a question of substance over form which is a rather Western way of perceiving things that must halve things into dichotomy, opposition, and tension. The Malay and Asian way instead sees everything as the harmony of substance and form such that by the substance, the form becomes externalised and actualised for living and, by the form, the substance becomes

internalised and cognised for identity.

In the same way, shame is that by which the proper way of doing things is brought into existence as rules for living, what we could call law, and through the law, the ethics and moral of living are digested to become dimensions of shame. Law in this sense is not thought of as commands or restraints acting from the outside upon a person's behaviour and actions but is the realisation from the depth of a person's psyche that structure and order are necessary to hold passions. desires, and ambitions in place so that we would know our rightful place in the scheme of our human and social interactions and that we would not transgress into the

boundaries of dignity that each of us possesses individually.

The tudung in this regard plays this harmonising role for the Malay woman to bring substance and form of her shame into structure and order, resulting in a harmonious connection between intention and law, mirror reflections of one another, two sides of the same coin, about what femininity should be intended as and thought to be, and what law should do to draw it into the space of open living.

In this regard, the Malay way of living as expressed through the *tudung* is the symbiosis of *adah* and *Shariah*, what is thought of as unique to one's customary and cultural practices, and what is thought of as coming from divine

# musings

"A Malay woman is not going to sit and listen to all the arguments about what legal justifications are there for wearing and not wearing the scarf, and whether it is in public space or in prayer that this or that part of the body has to be covered, and whether this is old Arab custom and whatever."

A Malay woman is not going to sit and listen to all the arguments about what legal justifications are there for wearing and not wearing the scarf, and whether it is in public space or in prayer that this or that part of the body has to be covered, and whether this is old Arab custom and whatever. For a Malay woman, and to quote William James who said, 'Truth is what works,' and thus, for her, the truth of religion lies in the practice of her tudung that would be evidence that covering the aurah is to bring her femininity into fruition in everyday living and enhancing her human dignity and meaning of her human being.

To close this discussion, I would like to cite a Zen story about how

someone came to a Zen master and asked what 'hot' is and to which he replied by putting the questioner's hand around a hot pot of water. Needless to say, there is no need to argue and go into lengths in words about what 'hot' is. When a person asks, just put his hand on a boiling pot of water and he will know what 'hot' is. For the Malays, 'agama adalah rasa, dijelma dalam penghayatan, dinikmati dalam keindahan,' meaning 'Religion is to feel it, live it, adorning it.' Such is also the way of the Chinese and other Asian ethnicities in our taste of religious meaning, feeling, and becoming Muslim.

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providence. This symbiosis lies in the fact that between adah and Shariah, there are overlapping concerns that hold them together as a unity, so that as adah moves in and through time and space, it moves within the orbit of Shariah. The selendang and the tudung may be two different forms of the Malay women's headgear as each has its own history but both exhibit a common property, and that is the shame of a woman that defines her inward femininity and her outward appearance and movement. Abdul Hamid Sulayman, the former rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, discusses this symbiosis as the relation between Asalah and Muasirah, Principle and Historical Contingency.

# Greeting Women

Asma' bint Yazid (RA) relates:
The Holy Prophet (SAW) passed
by us, a party of women, and
greeted us. (Abu Daud)
The version of Tirmidhi is: The Holy
Prophet (SAW) passed through the
mosque one day and there was a
party of women seated in the mosque.
He signified his greeting by
raising his hand.

From Imam An-Nawawi's Riyadh As-Salihin (Gardens of the Righteous)

# 'THE WAY PEOPLE LOOK AT US HAS CHANGED': MUSLIM WOMEN ON LIFE IN EUROPE

BY LILLIE DREMEAUX

he storm over bans on burkinis in more than 30
French beach towns has all but drowned out the voices of Muslim women, for whom the full-body swimsuits were designed. The New York Times solicited their perspective, and the responses
— more than 1,000 comments from France, Belgium and beyond
— went much deeper than the question of swimwear.

What emerged was a portrait of life as a Muslim woman, veiled or not, in parts of Europe where terrorism has put people on edge. One French term was used dozens of times: "un combat," or "a struggle," to live day to day. Many who were born and raised in France described confusion at being told to go home.

Courts have struck down some of the bans on burkinis — the one in Nice, the site of a horrific terror attack on Bastille Day, was overturned Thursday — but the debate is far from over.

"For years, we have had to put up with dirty looks and threatening remarks," wrote Taslima Amar, 30, a teacher in Pantin, a suburb of Paris. "I've been asked to go back home (even though I am home)." Now, Amar said, she and her husband were looking to leave France.

Laurie Abouzeir, 32, said she was considering starting a business caring for children in her home in Toulouse, southern France, because that would allow her to wear a head scarf, frowned upon and even banned in some workplaces.

Many women wrote that anti-Muslim bias had intensified after the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015, and in Brussels, Paris and Nice more recently. Halima Djalab Bouguerra, a 21-year-old student in Bourg-en-Bresse, France, dated the change further back, to the killings by Mohammed Merah in the southwest of the country in 2012.

"The way people look at us has changed," Bouguerra wrote.
"Tongues have loosened. No one is afraid of telling a Muslim to 'go back home' anymore."

Here are some excerpts from the comments we received. They have been condensed and edited for clarity, and translated for those who wrote in French.

"When the burkini came out, I was happy for my sister, who was on vacation and could finally play with her children on the beach instead of sitting in the shadow. At the beginning of all the drama, I thought, 'Never mind it, Dina, it's just a couple of small-minded people who don't have anything else to do than hate on everything.' But this? Really? This is everything I thought Europe was against. ... How is it possible that in a 'modern' world, tanning naked is accepted but keeping your clothes on at the beach is not?"



- Dina Srouji, 23, Lebbeke, Belgium. Student and student reporter at the University of Gent.

"This reminds me of my first days in high school after French law banned the hijab in schools. My teacher forced me to take off my head scarf in front of all the other pupils. I was humiliated. ... Today, I felt my heart broken again. I just looked at this woman taking off her clothes and asked myself, when will it end?" — Hajer Zennou, 27, Lyon, France.

Designer. She was referring to a woman who was surrounded by police officers on a beach in Nice.

"I am insulted, spat on (literally) every day in the subway, on the bus, at school. Yet I have never insulted or hit someone. No, I am just Muslim. I am seriously thinking of going to live elsewhere, where cry every night in my bed.

other people's looks won't make me "I am afraid of having to wear a yellow crescent on my clothes one

day, like the Star of David for Jews not so long ago."

- Charlotte Monnier, 23, Toulouse, France, Architecture student.

"I was curious to see if, in the cities where they forbade women in burkinis, dogs could swim. The answer was yes for some of them. Personally, I am scandalised that dogs can have more rights than a scarfed woman."

- Samia Fekih, 36, Paris. Digital project manager.



"I am a social worker and I do my best to strive for a fair and free society. To me, wearing the veil does not mean being enslaved by a man. On the contrary, it means reappropriating the body and femininity."

- Nawal Afkir, 25, Brussels

"Every time I visit Morocco, I feel and see more freedom than here in the West."

Souad el Bouchihati, 26, Gouda,
 Netherlands. Social worker.

"I don't mind removing my veil to work. What bothers me is hiding it from my colleagues. ... Of course, I did not hide for very long. I ran into my colleague as I was shopping with a friend, and I was wearing my veil. We said hello, and I whispered to her I would explain. I felt so bad about lying to her all this time. It was hell! So I sent her a text message to tell her the truth. She told me that she understood, and that she wouldn't repeat it."

— Hadjira Skoundri, 22, Toulouse, France. Administrative agent in the local government.

"Even if we make every effort and try to be 'integrated,' we are constantly reminded that to be properly and completely integrated, we must give up our principles and our religion. In our homes, at work, or among our friends, there is a kind of pressure. We don't dare accept invitations from friends because we're sick of having to say no to alcohol and to politely justify ourselves, walking on eggshells while making sure we don't say anything that could be taken the

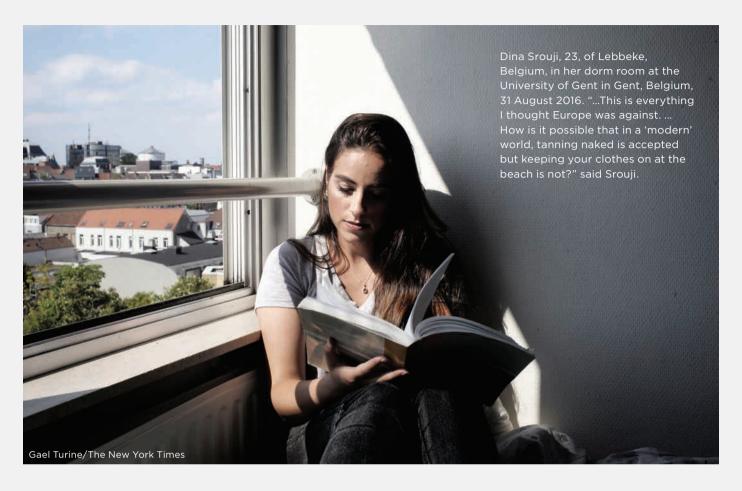
wrong way. At work, there have been little jokes along the lines of 'Did you help your cousins?' after the terrorist attacks. And our families who curse the terrorists at mealtime are then insulted by these new laws.

"So then what? We isolate ourselves. And once you start isolating yourself, you're no longer integrating."

Mira Hassine, 27, Orléans, France.
 Administrator at a construction company and a practising Muslim who does not wear a veil.

"To be a Muslim woman in France is to live in an apartheid system of which the beach bans are just the latest incarnation. ... I think that French Muslim women would be justified to request asylum in the United States, for instance, given

# iournal



how many persecutions we are subjected to."

 Karima Mondon, 37. French teacher who recently moved to Casablanca, Morocco, from Lyon, France.

"I am a Muslim French woman. I live in London. As a Frenchwoman, I would never have achieved what I have in London while wearing the veil. I am a politician in local government, deputy leader of my borough, and I wear the scarf. If I were in France, forget about it." Saima Ashraf, 39, London. Twitter: @saimaashraf25

"I am a nurse and I wear the veil. At work, it is impossible for me to wear my veil. I remove it upon arrival. Nothing on the head, no long sleeves, nothing that might

cover me up to adhere to my way of living. ... We are denied the possibility of going to the pool and now to the beach. What is the next step? Are we going to wear crescents to be recognised?" - Linda Alem, 27, Paris. Nurse at a dialysis center.

"I feel unwell to the point of becoming paranoid! As a student, I had a classmate call me a Salafist and make a death threat against me. Why? Because he saw me wearing a veil in the street. When I went to see the school's assistant principal, the only solution she found was to expel both of us if we did not lessen the tensions that he had caused. A real nightmare, where all roads lead to injustice. ... I have tears in my eyes as I write these words, and while I don't

want to present us as victims, their relentlessness is such that I am going to leave this country sooner or later. They will surely have obtained what they wanted, but I don't have the strength of Rosa Parks. One less engineer in France

- that's their punishment."

Nora Mahboub, 21, Paris. Engineering student.

"Even though I have a master's degree, I couldn't find a job related to my studies. ... I see no hope for our future, and like many others, I intend to go abroad. My heart is 100 percent French, but it feels like I have to prove my 'Frenchness,' and with everything happening currently, I'm tired of justifying my identity."

- Siam Ferhat-Basset, 29, Drancy, France. Former receptionist.



"During my studies, I was someone who worked hard. I loved to learn. But as I continued my schooling, I lost all motivation. I knew that as a veiled Muslim woman, I had no future in the professional world. We are being asked to integrate, but unfortunately, they don't integrate us."

— Saadia Akessour, 31, Liège, Belgium. Stay-at-home mother who had to remove her veil during a midwifery internship and has since abandoned her studies.

"This summer, I went swimming near Hendaye, in southwestern France. I was a bit of a local curiosity, but I found that people were kind. It seems that the news media and politicians are not in sync with what the people think." — Fadoua Hachimi, 41, Les Lilas, France. Purchasing assistant.

"I feel like an outlaw, a kind of criminal who is demanding something illegal, even though I am demanding nothing but the right to be free."

Nadia Lamarti, 35, Zellik, Belgium.
 Mother of four daughters who has trained as a social worker.

"I find it crazy that the French appear to be discovering Islam and are still talking to us about integration, even though we are now in the third or even fourth generation of Muslims of North African descent living in France." — Assia Boukhelifa, 22, Lille. Political science student.

"I am a woman who wears this full-coverage swimsuit. ("Burkini" is a term that is too loaded.) I used to settle for watching others enjoy the

pleasures of swimming — at most I would go into the water in my street clothes, which is absolutely impractical. This piece of clothing has broken my chains."

— Ennaji Loubna, 30, Perpignan, France. Studying for a master's in sociology.

"Thank you ever so much for viewing us as human beings and for taking into account our opinions. In Belgium, as in France for that matter, we never get the chance to speak, even though we Muslims (veiled or not) are the main people concerned by these recurrent controversies on Islam and women. We are seen as brainless bigots who are submissive to our husbands or fathers. I myself am a Muslim, a teacher, tolerant, feminist AND veiled."

#### journal



Khadija Manouach, 29, Brussels.
 Teacher in an elementary school.

"As a Muslim young woman, I do not feel safe anymore. ... I am preparing to go to the UK, where I can work and live normally — which makes me sad, because I do love my country."

— Sarah Nahal, Grenoble, France.

Student in economics and management.

"My father has lived in France since age 8, and he has been working since age 14, but despite everything, this isn't enough for France to view us as ordinary fellow citizens, since my veil bothers them. ... What can we do? Take courage

into our own hands and fight with the weapons that we have at our disposal: knowledge, diplomas and willpower!"

— Nadia Benabdelkader, 25, Roubaix, France. Student. TMR

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# God's Unlimited

# Mercy and Forgiveness

Those who avoid the major sins and indecent, shameful deeds (which are in fact included in the major sins), only falling into small faults, surely your Lord is of extensive forgiveness. He knows you well when He originates you from (the particles of) earth, and when you are hidden (fetuses) in the wombs of your mothers. So do not hold yourselves pure (sinless; it is vain self-justification). He knows best him who keeps from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety.

Al-Najm (The Star), 53:32

From the translation of the Quran



# ECONOMIC INCLUSION THROUGH ISLAMIC MICROFINANCE (PART 2)

- Providing 'Smart' Money to people in need

BY SYED HASSAN ALSAGOFF

slamic Microfinance sets out to provide 'Smart Money' unlike the typical loans given by creditors. In Part 1 (published in TMR2015|2016, Volume 33), we provided a conceptual understanding of Islamic Microfinance which was to go beyond the provision of credit and to conduct trade and investment with their clients. We established that Islamic Microfinance institutions (IMFIs) were fundamentally different. Conventional Microfinance institutions were only allowed to provide arm's length credit, while Islamic Microfinance Institutions had the freedom to engage in the value chain and conduct business with their clients. While

the purpose of conventional microfinance was to formalise money lending activities with hopefully lower cost of funds, the purpose of Islamic Microfinance was not only to formalise the provision of credit but also to formalise trading activities of middlemen who have often taken advantage of the poor bargaining power of farmers in rural areas.

In this edition, we will explain how Islamic Microfinance is able to add value beyond credit provided to clients. The third edition of the article will share some innovative examples in Sudan and Palestine that have received international recognition and have attracted the interest of academicians, policy

makers, donors and practitioners. Financing can be broadly grouped into two categories: 1) Debt and 2) Equity. Similarly, Islamic Finance categorises them into two-1) Trade (debt-oriented) financing; and 2) Investment (Equity-oriented financing). This section introduces the different Islamic financing instruments and highlights how IMFIs can provide trade financing which is debt-oriented which is different from the debt provided by creditors. Similarly, while Islamic Microfinance provides equity oriented investment, they do not purchase the shares of the company. By engaging in the value chain. Islamic Microfinance institutions help to share the risks with participants in the value chain.



By doing this, Islamic Microfinance serves not just to provide financial inclusion, but it also serves to democratise business opportunities.

#### PROVIDING 'SMART' VALUE ADDED TRANSACTIONS IN TRADE FINANCING

While there are many types of Islamic Financial instruments, most are variants of the main ones explained below. We will also focus on the two main trade financing transactions that are most commonly offered by IMFIs.

### MURABAHA (COST PLUS FIXED TERM LOANS)

In Murabaha transactions, the Islamic Microfinance Institution (IMFI) purchases the asset on behalf of the client and sells it to the client at a profit. The client approaches the microfinance institution with an invoice from the supplier that they need to purchase

(e.g. seeds, fertiliser, etc.). The bank transfers the funds to the supplier and sells it to the client at a profit which is to be repaid on a deferred basis. Murabaha transactions are popular because they are easy to implement and simple to understand. At the same time, they are often most criticised as a repackaged conventional loan, substituting interest rates with profit rates. This criticism is unfair, because if properly practised, Murabaha transactions are much better structured to help the poor client given their 'Smart' Value-Added features.

#### 'Smart' Value added features of Murabaha

Murabaha has three main distinguishing 'Smart' features. Firstly, it has to be asset backed. Conventional microfinance institutions often provide cash to their clients and are unable to control how the funds are utilised. Since research has shown that

women are more trustworthy borrowers, Microfinance Institutions often target them not knowing that many of these women were forced by their male counterparts to borrow leaving them to undertake the burden of repayment. By ensuring that the funds are asset backed, Islamic Microfinance institutions are able to verify that the funds are utilised for the declared purpose of financing. This is an important safeguard which protects the clients as well as the microfinance institution and ensures that the financing is used for productive purposes.

Secondly, the selling price of the asset transacted is fixed. In a conventional loan, if the there is a delay in repayment, the delay will incur interest charges. Some microfinance institutions charge further penalty fees to the client. When we accumulate these charges, it is not uncommon for the interest and penalty fees charged to the client to be higher than



the principle amount borrowed. Islamic Microfinance prohibits this practice. The profit earned by the bank is clearly defined at the time of transaction and cannot be modified. Islamic Microfinance institutions are allowed to charge a limited amount of penalty fees as a deterrent, but these fees cannot be absorbed by the bank as income and have to be distributed to charity.

Thirdly, IMFIs are able to better negotiate for lower price of assets that they are purchasing on behalf of their clients. The invoices received contribute to the market knowledge that they gain as a trader. Over time, they would better understand the demand from their clients. They can identify popular products and suppliers and negotiate a preferential trading agreement as a wholesale agent. Alternatively, they can directly purchase seeds or fertilisers from the suppliers in bulk and sell them to their clients when the demand arises.

"Murabaha transactions are much better structured to help the poor client given their 'Smart' Value-Added features."

#### SALAM (ADVANCED PURCHASE CONTRACTS)

Salam transactions are excellent for providing working capital to small businesses especially in the field of Agriculture. The Islamic Microfinance Institution will purchase the product from a farmer (e.g. 100 tons of tomatoes) at a discounted price, and advance the cash to him for purchasing inputs, labor, etc., to be delivered during harvest 6 months later. In order to profit from the transaction, the IMFI will negotiate with a buyer to sell the harvest that it is expecting to receive.

#### 'Smart' Value added features of Salam

Salam not only provides working capital to farmers, it assures them of a market. Unlike a conventional loan, farmers are not repaying the financing with cash. Instead, farmers are required to sell their harvest as agreed with the Islamic Microfinance



Institution. The Islamic Microfinance Institution helps the farmer gain access to markets and plays the role of an 'aggregator'- buying the produce of small farmers in order to sell them to a large buyer. As an aggregator, it is in a good position to negotiate with the buyer for better prices that ordinarily would not be enjoyed by farmers. Such benefits are usually shared between the farmer and the bank.

#### PROVIDING 'SMART' VALUE ADDED TRANSACTIONS IN FINANCING INVESTMENTS

Islamic Finance encourages profitsharing among financiers that invest in the small companies ensuring that dividends in such companies are shared with the 'shareholders'. Since investors are technically not the owners of the company, entrepreneurs do not lose any control of the company, but they are required to share the profits of the venture over a period of time. Profit-sharing financing instruments, such as Mudarabah, Musharakah, and Diminishing Musharakah advocated by Islamic Microfinance, has enabled greenfield investments within the value chain. In a Mudaraba transaction, the financier provides all the funding for the project while the entrepreneur contributes his/ her effort. When the project makes a profit, it is shared between the financier and the entrepreneur in a pre-determined profit sharing ratio. In the case of loss, the financial loss will be borne by the financier while the entrepreneur will lose compensation for his effort.

**Musharakah** is similar to Mudaraba except that in a Musharakah transaction, the entrepreneur also contributes a portion of the capital committed to the venture.

# A **Diminishing Musharakah** is another variant financial instrument where the financier's majority share of the capital is

gradually reduced over time by the entrepreneur through regular repayments.

The Islamic Microfinance sector has demonstrated the ability to employ the three profit sharing arrangements through collaborating with the poor, providing them the opportunity to realise their economic potential. In such instances, the Islamic Microfinance Institution plays the role of a venture capital investor, providing them not only access to money, but also access to markets, management and know-how. Since the Islamic Microfinance Institution is highly incentivised to ensure that the venture is profitable, it has to take an active role in ensuring that the venture is running in an efficient manner and that it achieves its revenue targets by providing it the needed assistance and support.

Venture Capital investments are not new. It is a high risk investment







Raw Materials Finance by Advance Purchase (Salam)



Woman Cooperative



Repayment in kind to MFIs



Exports to EU

platform where investors hope to earn a high return from purchasing shares in a private small and medium sized company. However, venture capitalists typically invest in high technology start-ups where the possibility of exit through Initial Public Offering or mergers and acquisitions are high. Since there is a clear plan for profit sharing, Islamic Microfinance Institutions have been able to conduct venture financing by investing in start-ups that are not necessarily technology based such as Agriculture-based start-ups. We will share some innovative examples in the third and final edition of this article (Insha'Allah to be published in TMR2017|2018, Volume 35).

## RISK-SHARING BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS IN THE VALUE CHAIN

Many articles on Islamic Finance promote the concept of profitsharing as a fair and just equitable partnership that demonstrates the risk-sharing relationship between the financier and the entrepreneur. However, profit sharing assumes that the invested venture is profitable. What if the venture is not profitable? Let us demonstrate this with an example in Palestine under the Islamic Microfinance programme called the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Program (DEEP) financed by the Islamic Development Bank.

Palestine women are well known to have the expertise in producing Maftoul (Palestinian Couscous). In this value chain, the Islamic Microfinance Institution (IMFI) supported by the Islamic Development Bank will provide raw materials and working capital through a Salam (Advance) purchase agreement with women cooperatives. The IMFI orders the amount of Maftoul to be produced and pays the cooperatives upfront. After the agreed period for delivery, the IMFI which receives the Maftoul will export it to the EU.

#### ROLE OF IMFI IN THE MAFTOUL VALUE CHAIN

- IMFI will provide Salam (Advance) Financing for Maftoul raw materials
- IMFI brands, labels and packages the Maftoul so that it is ready for export
- IMFI ensures that product quality meets high European standards
- Maftoul is collected and exported by IMFI to exporters for a profit

## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE EVENT OF UNDER THE CONVENTIONAL MICROFINANCE MODEL?

- Women cooperatives have to pay
  - Principal loan due to MFI; and
     Interest due to MFI
- MFI continues to try to collect payments (principal + interest).
   May blacklist client.
- MFI has incentives for clients to pay more interest which can



eventually exceed principle amount.

## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE EVENT OF UNDER THE ISLAMIC MICROFINANCE MODEL?

- Women cooperatives lose income that would have been generated from Advanced sales
- IMFI loses potential profit from sale of Maftoul to exporters

Even in a trading (debt-oriented) instrument like Salam, we can see how risk is being shared between the women cooperatives and IMFIs in the value chain. In the case of loss, the women cooperatives will lose the potential income that would have been generated from selling to the IMFIs. The IMFIs will also lose the potential profit from their sale to exporters. Here we can see that each stakeholder in the value chain bears some

form of real economy risk which goes beyond credit risk in the conventional model. By being an active actor in the value chain, the IMFI helps to manage part of the risk of getting the Maftoul to the exporter. The risk managed by the IMFIs complements its role as an aggregator of Maftoul from women cooperatives, reviewer of product quality and most importantly marketer of the Maftoul products.

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) as an entity provides trade and investment oriented financing facilities to governments and large private sector institutions as partners in development. As a supra-national donor institution, it is unable to directly provide microfinance products. However, through supporting IMFIs, IDB is able to downscale such facilities to the poor. Just like how IDB supports Agricultural Projects that

enhance Agricultural Productivity, IMFI can make smaller scale local investments in Agriculture. By developing the capacity of IMFIs to conduct trade and investment with their poor clients, the Islamic Development Bank has been able to change a credit-oriented MFI to a development-oriented financial institution that provides value in addition to the financing. A mini- Islamic Development Bank is created. The world needs more development and not more credit. In the next, third and final part of this series, detailed examples of how this is done in Sudan and Palestine will be highlighted. TMR

The author is Senior Micro & Rural Finance Specialist for the Islamic Development Bank.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions of the article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Islamic Development Bank.

# ADDAMA ALL ABOUT COCCERT



The third pillar of Islam



**Obligatory** unlike sadaqah or charity



Given in a calculated amount



Mentioned 30 times in the Qur'an



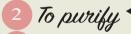
Zakat ul Mal Zakat on wealth

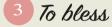


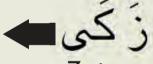
Zakat ul Fitr Zakat on the individual

### >>>> DEFINITION CCCCC

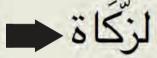
To grow







Zakaa



Az-Zakah

#### **BENEFITS OF ZAKAT**



Heals your heart from stinginess



Reminds you that you are managers of wealth in dunya, not owners



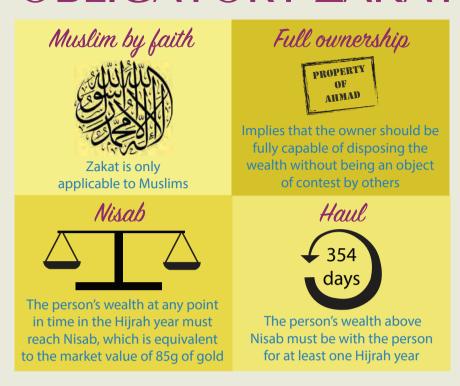
Lessens the burden of the needy

Alhamdulillah

Instills values of gratefulness and compassion

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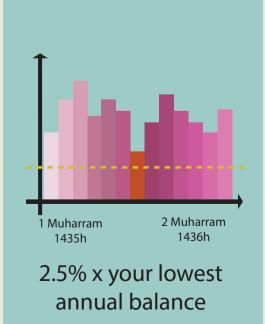




#### 

Let's use an example for zakat on savings (money that is kept in all types of savings accounts including fixed deposit and current account)





\* The yellow dotted line on the graph represents the nisab

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#### **Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore**

Darul Arqam Singapore
32 Onan Road, The Galaxy, Singapore 424484 Tel: 6348 8344 (press 4) | Fax: 64406724 info1@mcas.sg | www.mcas.sg

#### **ZAKAT / DONATION FORM**

		-
FULL NAME		
RESIDENTIAL ADDRES	·	
RESIDENTIAL ADDRES	Singapore (	
CONTACT	: (Home)	(Mobile)
EMAIL ADDRESS	· (Home)	(iviosiic)
NRIC / FIN		
11111071111	•	
	ZAKAT	
Enclosed herewith is r	my Zakat contribution for this year:	
Muallaf (Converts	·	\$\$
2. Other Asnaf:	Fisabilillah	\$\$
Z. Other Ashar.	Amil	S\$
		\$\$ \$\$
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#### spotlight

# 'ZAATARI CAMP IS MY GREATEST EXHIBITION': IN EXILED ARTIST'S MURALS, A GLIMPSE OF HOME

#### BY

**Mohammad Abdulssattar Ibrahim**. He is from Amouda in Hasakah province. He moved to Jordan in 2004. Mohammad started work with the Syrian Revolution LCC in Amman by doing reporting and coordinating protests. After that he did volunteer work for refugees in Amman.

Maria Nelson. She was a 2014-2015 fellow at the Center for Arabic Study Abroad program (CASA I) in Amman, Jordan. She holds a BA in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University, with a certificate in Arabic Language and Culture.

(This article is reprinted with the kind permission of Syria Direct, a non-profit journalism organisation that produces in-depth reporting of Syria.)

n the side of what is called a caravan where families live in the Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan, artist Mohammad Joukhadar's brush paints the sea.

The undulating waves in the painting provide a stark contrast to the harsh reality of the desert camp, where the unrelenting sun reflects off the desert floor in a way that can be blinding for hours a day.

Some 79,000 Syrians currently live in the Zaatari refugee camp, which has become a city of caravans—simple tin structures with a window or two that are scorching in the summer and bitingly cold in the

winter. The camp, initially set up as an ad hoc response to the flood of refugees moving south from Syria, once housed as many as 120,000 people.

Today, it more closely resembles a small city, with sewage pipes and paved roads. In Zaatari, Joukhadar has a barbershop and a small painting studio.

The artist's latest commission is an unusual one: The UNHCR and Norwegian Refugee Council hired Joukhadar, who now has a team of 15 assistants, to decorate the camp with his murals and colour-code the camp's 12 sectors.

#### spotlight



The camp itself has been Joukhader's canvas—first the tents, then the trailers—for years. He estimates he has around 1,200 paintings in the camp, many speaking to "our current situation, what's happened to us."

In one of his murals, a Bedouin man pours Arabic coffee, the thick, dark brew, into a small finjan; an offering for unseen guests. Another shows a scene that could be from the streets of old Damascus, all jasmine vines and old stone. One wall becomes a window with a view of the sea. An elderly woman, her city behind her, holds keys aloft: A sign of imminent return.

Joukhadar, a lifelong artist, fled to Jordan from his home in Homs city's Bab a-Sabaa neighbourhood in early 2013. First passing through the Zaatari refugee camp—then a settlement of canvas tents just south of the border—he moved to the Jordanian capital, Amman. After one year, he returned to Zaatari, "to be with my people," he tells Syria Direct's Mohammad Abdulssattar Ibrahim.

"My paintings bring joy and delight to the people here," says

Joukhadar. "Zaatari camp is my greatest exhibition."

#### Q: Zaatari is gradually changing from a camp into a city, towards permanence. As an artist, do you deal with this?

Of course, the camp is now very different from what it once was. All of the people in the camp are living in caravans now, in an organised fashion, and now we have a sewage system and all of the roads inside the camp are paved.

# Q: To you, what is the importance of culture and traditions at this time specifically? Why do you focus on them?

The people who come to the camp, the delegations that visit us, it is so they learn about our history, culture, heritage and traditions.

# Q: Why do you draw on the caravans when you could make paintings and sell them in a studio?

In our role as artists, we've been trying through our paintings on the caravans to please those who live in them. We take their suggestions into account, and they've been happy with these works, especially the children. The most common request we get is something to remind them of Syria, mostly nature scenes that they miss a lot.

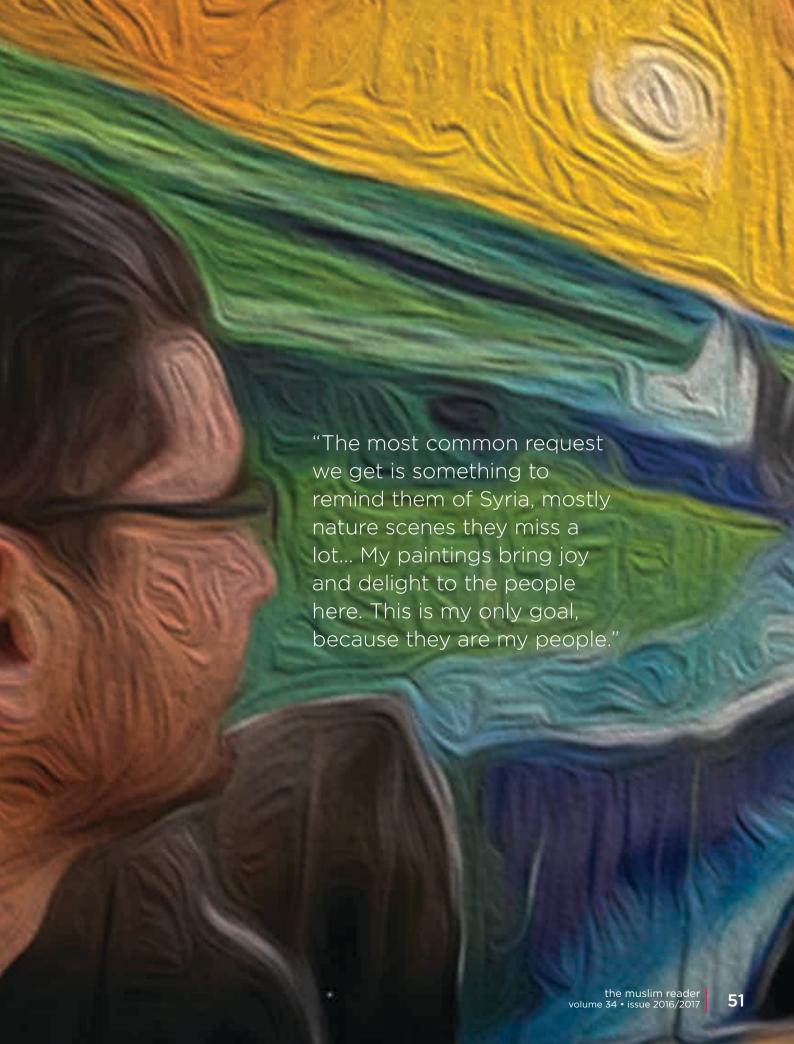
I've become well-known in the camp as "Abu Laila the Painter." I've participated in many exhibitions inside and outside the camp, and in foreign countries. Zaatari camp is my greatest exhibition.

My paintings bring joy and delight to the people here. This is my only goal, because they are my people.

# Q: What inspires your paintings on the Zaatari caravans? What are you aiming for?

The goal is to decorate the camp and delineate its 12 sectors, each one with its own colour and motif. Ultimately, the project is completely removed from politics.

Sector one's colour is deep blue, for seas and oceans. Sector two is orange, for cities. Seven is brown, for heritage and culture. Eight is light green, representing health. Sector nine is light blue, and that is water. Sector 11 is turquoise for education.



#### spotlight



#### Q: Why did you leave Amman to return to Zaatari camp?

I lived in Amman for a while, but decided to return, to be with my people, my blood. At first, I painted on the canvas of the old tents. The paintings spoke to our current situation, what has happened to us and the oppression of this war. Everybody liked these paintings. I found a lot of encouragement from the people here, so I went back to painting.

#### Q: How many tents or caravans have you painted on?

The number is something like 1,200, more or less. I don't know exactly. Of course, I have a complete team, made up of 15 people.

### Q: What are your favourite paintings?

I love traditions and heritage, anything old. I've painted these things on the caravans.

#### Q: Does painting in Zaatari pose any unique challenges?

As an artist here in the camp, the difficulties I face are the place itself and its somewhat cruel nature.

I have created many paintings in participation with galleries [outside the camp], and many of them have been sold. I currently have five or six [being shown]. TMR

Photos courtesy of Hovig Etyemezian and Mohammad Joukhadar.

#### Seeking knowledge eases the

# path to Paradise

Abu Darda (RA) relates that he heard the Holy Prophet (SAW) say: For him who adopts a path seeking knowledge, Allah eases the way to Paradise and angels spread their wings for a seeker of knowledge, being pleased with his occupation, and all that are in the heavens and the earth, including the fish in the water, ask for forgiveness for a learned one. A learned one is superior to a worshipper as the moon is superior to all the planets. The divines are heirs of the Prophets and the Prophets do not leave an inheritance of dirhams and dinars but only of knowledge. He who acquires knowledge acquires a vast portion.

(Abu Daud and Tirmidhi)

From Imam An-Nawawi's Riyadh As-Salihin (Gardens of the Righteous)

#### house of argam



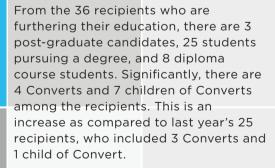


## MCAS BURSARY PRESENTATION 2016





n 6 August 2016 (Saturday), MCAS held its annual bursary presentation ceremony at its auditorium. A total of 36 qualified recipients have been selected to receive a total of \$84,250 for the bursary programme, which aims to help ease the financial burden of students pursuing tertiary education, this year.



Besides having the opportunity to get to know the recipients at the ceremony, the members of the Bursary Sub-Committee





also presented the bursary to the recipients or the representatives of the recipients who are currently studying overseas.

The Bursary Sub-Committee is headed by MCAS President Faiz Edwin Ignatious, and included Ridzuan Ng, Anwar Pillay @ G Tayvanathan Pillay, Nooreen Wong, and Tavamani d/o Arumugam @ Nur Aisyah. TMR



### house of arqam







ery often when I moved around in my neighbourhood, taking my 2-year-old grand-daughter for a walk, some of the Bangladeshi cleaning workers in the area, noticing that I wear a Haji cap, smiled and greeted me with "Assalamu-alaikum" (Peace be on you). I responded to their salutation, raising my right hand to my forehead and giving them a warm smile. Malays and Indian Muslim strangers too had given me

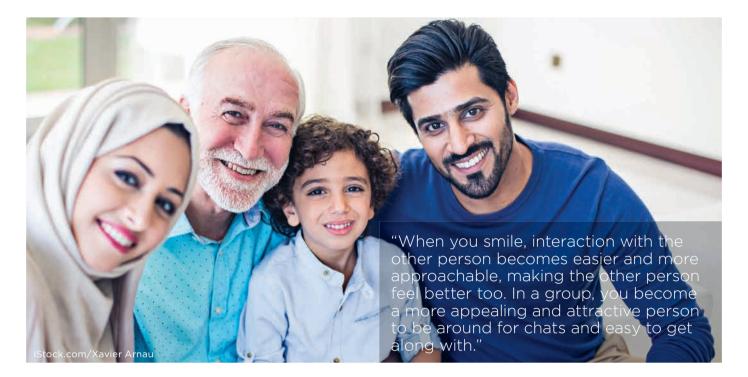
their smile and greeting of salam, and received mine.

Smiling when you meet someone for the first time indicates to the other person that you honestly want to be friendly with them and that you are a positive person. Smiling is an important ingredient for establishing genuine friendship. When someone smiles at you, it indicates that that person likes you, so you reciprocate and a friendship is established. You feel good, you

feel better, you feel pleased. The other party gets the same feeling.

Also, a sincere smile makes people to whom you smile feel happy. And they will happily greet you again with the smile and salam the next time they see you.

Flashing a smile as a form of greeting is the easiest thing to do, and it is the source of showing kindness. It demonstrates our Islamic courtesy and humility.



While no animal is given the ability to smile, Allah (SWT) has given human beings that ability. Thus, we must use this gift from Allah (SWT) very frequently – with family members, relatives, friends, and others.

Indeed, smiling has many benefits. Some of them are:

- It helps widen your circle of friends easily.
- 2. It makes you look friendly and approachable.
- 3. It makes you humble and modest.
- 4. It helps you change your mood positively.
- 5. It helps enhance courtesy and kindness.
- 6. It helps you relieve your stress and be more relaxed.
- 7. It helps in exercising your face.
- It helps boost the function of the immune system which, in turn, helps in reducing a number of ailments. In other words, smiling is a kind of medication.

- 9. It makes you attractive and sociable.
- 10. It makes you happy and also makes others happy.

Of course, like any other actions, one has to be cautious of the context: smiling unbecomingly or at inappropriate situation will not invite appreciation but repercussion.

Regarding the intrinsic value of smile, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "To smile is charity." (Hadith from Bukhari)

Our Prophet (SAW) asked us to always smile when talking or meeting with anyone. He himself had a ready-smile for everyone. Thus, smiling is a Sunnah of our Prophet (SAW). Smiling is the easiest charity to offer. It is an investment without the need to place any capital to reap benefit over time. No capital is required, yet the benefit is immediate.

In this regard, as Muslims have been instructed to use the charity of smile, they have the biggest opportunity to offer it even to total strangers and become friends, raising the fortitude of Islamic brotherhood to a greater height.

When a Muslim man wears a Muslim cap and goes to the mosque on Fridays for prayers, he is easily identifiable as a Muslim. Here is an opportunity to initiate a smile with a total stranger who is your brother-in-Islam.

A couple of years ago, when my son-in-law, who is a Caucasian and Muslim Convert, and I were on our way to the mosque for Friday prayers, he asked me if I knew the man with whom I smiled and gave the salam, (and followed up with an exchange of a few words). When I said "No, I didn't know him", he wondered why I smiled and gave the salam to a total stranger, and this gave

me the opportunity to explain our Islamic spirit of courtesy and brotherhood to him.

However, we often see the following scenario at the busstop or in the bus: Muslims, who are total strangers exchanging the physical salam (handshake) but soon after fell silent like total strangers again. This situation ought to be improved as it presents a good opportunity to make friends, and reinforce Islamic brotherhood.

Thus, the physical salam (handshake) alone would look strange if it is not complemented by a smile of friendship and exchange of a few conversational words.

The smile displayed on your face as you give the salam (greeting) would reduce the "feeling of being strangers" and serve as a tool for a follow-up – exchanging a few words to start friendship.

Once, because of the smile and exchange of friendly words at the bus-stop after Friday prayers, I discovered that the man to whom I smiled and gave the salam is the brother-in-law of my friend, who was a long-lost former colleague. That made me get his telephone number to renew the friendship. A smile is the beginning of discovery of old friends and acquaintances, even of situations.

Our women folk are even more easily identifiable as Muslims as most are in hijab (wearing of the Islamic attire, including the tudung or headscarf). They too should be charitable with their smile to initiate acquaintance among them.

In the mosque, we often sit between two Muslim strangers. And what happens? We extend our hands to the person sitting on the right and left, giving the physical salam (handshake) often without looking at their faces, and often done mechanically as if the contact of hands is enough to bring blessings!

What should be done is that when you extend your hands to give your salam to those around you, do look into their faces and give a brotherly smile too, so that when you happen to meet again the following week or in the near future at the wudhu area, for instance, a smile of recognition could follow with a physical salam (handshake) there too.

So, be always ready with your smile; give it easily and whole-heartedly when you meet him again and again – at the bus-stop, in the bus, and in the mosque, or elsewhere.

When you smile, interaction with the other person becomes easier and more approachable, making the other person feel better too. In a group, you become a more appealing and attractive person to be around for chats and easy to get along with.

Three years ago, I saw a man and his family at the Hong Kong Airport and I approached him with a smile and the salam. Now, we are friends.





Smile - that's the way to extend Islamic courtesy and strengthen brotherhood.

Smiling, a simple facial expression is a universal language of happiness. Researches show that

many health benefits are gained from smiling. They say, a number of physiological changes occur in your body without you being conscious of them, so offer your smile and gain the benefits.

Here are some quotes on the value of smile:

- A smile has a tremendous effect on people. It can win their hearts.
- Smile begets smile. If you smile at someone, they would certainly smile back.
- The shortest distance between two people is a smile. Everyone smiles in the same one language. It has no cultural or religious barrier.
- A smile beautifies your face. Put on a smile - one size fits all.
- Smiling enhances a positive effect on your well-being.
- Wear a smile and have friends; wear a scowl and have wrinkles. (George Eliot)
- Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy. (Thích Nhat Hanh)
- Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing. (Mother Teresa)
- Peace begins with a smile.
   (Mother Teresa)
- You're never fully dressed without a smile. (Martin Charnin)
- A smile costs nothing. It takes but a moment and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.

Our physical health is tied closely to our emotion. So, since smiling indicates that you are happy, you will feel more relaxed, and a relaxed life is good for boosting your immune system in healthy ways.

A smile, done in good faith and proper conduct, is the core of the Islamic mannerism and courtesy and this ought to be the means of strengthening ties among Muslims as well as among all people, irrespective of race, culture or religion.

# Greeting non Muslims

Anas (RA) relates that the Holy Prophet (SAW) said: When the people of the Book greet you, you should respond with: And on you (i.e. be peace).

(Bukhari and Muslim)

Usamah ibn Zaid (RA) relates that the Holy Prophet (SAW) passed by a company of people which comprised Muslims, idol worshippers and Jews, and he greeted them with the salutation of peace.

(Bukhari and Muslim)

From Imam An-Nawawi's Riyadh As-Salihin (Gardens of the Righteous)

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## SENDING GREETINGS TO NON-MUSLIMS ON THEIR FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS

**BY PERGAS** 

(Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association)

s Muslims in multi-racial and multi-religious Singapore, the Muslim community must understand the need to interact and engage with people of different backgrounds, cultures and faiths. At times, Muslims will come across uncertainties regarding the religious ruling on complex issues, for example sending greetings to non-Muslims on their festivals and celebrations.

It is important to acknowledge and understand that Muslim scholars differ in their opinions with regards to this issue. This difference of opinion is a result of *ijtihad* 

(independent reasoning) of the scholars, based on the evidences found in Islamic legal sources and tradition.

#### THE RELIGIOUS POSITION ON RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL GREETINGS

There are several scholarly opinions regarding this issue, opinions that allow for, such as the views of Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Ridha, Dr Wahbah Al-Zuhayli, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, Dr Mustafa Al-Zarqa and the declaration made by the European Council for Fatwa and Research on 31 January 2014.

The same opinion is held by Dar Ifta' Al-Misriyyah (Egyptian Fatwa Council) with the following statement:

It is permissible to congratulate non-Muslims on their religious occasions, using words that do not contradict the Islamic creed.

This point is further asserted in the Quran, Allah (SWT) says:
Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.



Al-Mumtahanah (The Women to be Tested), 60:8

Based on the above-mentioned verse and points that we have propounded, it has highlighted the importance of maintaining good relations and character with other faith communities; this opinion supports the permissibility for a Muslim to send greetings to non-Muslims on their religious festivals as long as the greeting does not contain any religious messages that are contradictory to the Islamic teachings. Such action does not only help build good relations with others, but it is also a form of welfare between humankind.

At the same time, there are also opinions from past scholars on the prohibition of sending greetings to non-Muslims, such as the opinion of Ibn al-Qayyim in his book

AhkamAhl al-Zimmah:

"Congratulating the non-Muslim on the rituals that belong only to them is haram (forbidden) by consensus, as is congratulating them on their festivals and fasts by saying 'A happy festival to you' or 'May you enjoy your festival', and so on."

Among the reasons for impermissibility of sending religious greetings, is based on *maslahat* (common good) of guarding one's belief due to the fear of glorifying and embracing of sentiments within the religious festival.

#### RELIGIOUS GUIDANCE FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Thus, it is understood that the issue of sending greetings to non-Muslims on their religious festivals is an issue of *ijtihidiyyah* and *khilafiyyah* (differing

opinions) among Muslim scholars. Furthermore, we should understand that each opinion has its basis within our rich Islamic traditions. It is thus our responsibility to consider and evaluate a religious opinion wisely, that is more suited to our country's multi-racial, multi-religious context.

On that note, Pergas is more inclined to the opinion that allows the sending of greetings to non-Muslims on their religious festivals as agreed by Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah and Sheikh Mustafa Al-Zarqa as it is more relevant to the context of our Muslim community living in a multi-racial and multi-religious country.

Islam is a religion that is full of mercy and compassion, and emphasises good and warm relations among humankind - "Islam is a religion that is full of mercy and compassion, and emphasises good and warm relations among humankind - both Muslims and non-Muslims."

both Muslims and non-Muslims. Hence, it is evident that being compassionate to others is not limited to simply sending greetings, but Islam encourages Muslims to be merciful and compassionate in all matters when dealing with others, including responsibilities at work, at the community level, and so on.

Islam teaches its followers to be compassionate in all matters of life, as long as it leads to goodness and prosperity, and not to evil or destruction. Allah (SWT) says:

"But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters."

Al-Qasas (The Narrative), 28:77

One of the examples of *ihsan* is to respect the rights of our neighbours and maintain good relations regardless of their faith. In fact, respecting and honouring the rights of our neighbours is deeply entrenched within the Islamic tradition. Respecting our neighbours is also a Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) and a practice of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and is agreed upon by all Muslim scholars. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

"Jibril kept recommending me to treat my neighbour well until I thought that he would tell me to make him one of my heirs"

[Hadith reported by Bukhari]

Moving forward, it is hoped that the Singapore Muslim community continues to play its role in building and maintaining good relations and harmony with other communities. Let us take Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a role model.

Though a scholar is able to deduce a religious opinion, it is important to understand that it is considered as an *ijtihad* and recommendation. Imam Malik (RA) said: "Everyone's opinion could be accepted or rejected except that of the one buried in this grave (pointing to the grave of the Prophet (SAW)".

May Allah (SWT) bestow the Muslim community with strength to fortify our religious life not just through acts of worship to Allah (SWT), but also in building social bonds as well as increasing our understanding of true Islamic teachings and tradition in order to be a community that is successful in this world and the hereafter.





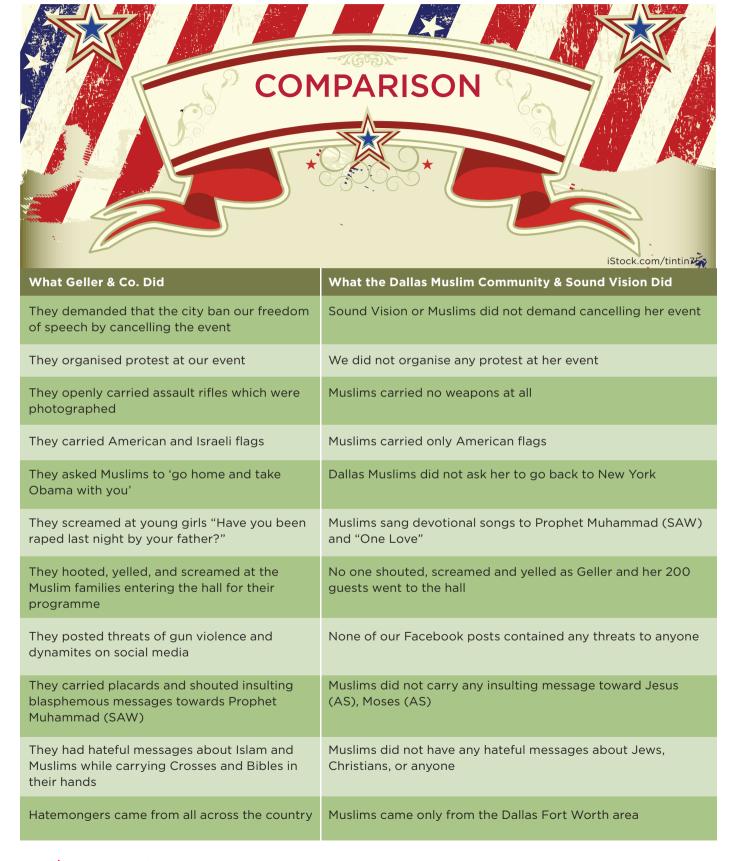
am amazed at the restrain demonstrated by the Muslim community despite tremendous amount of hate.

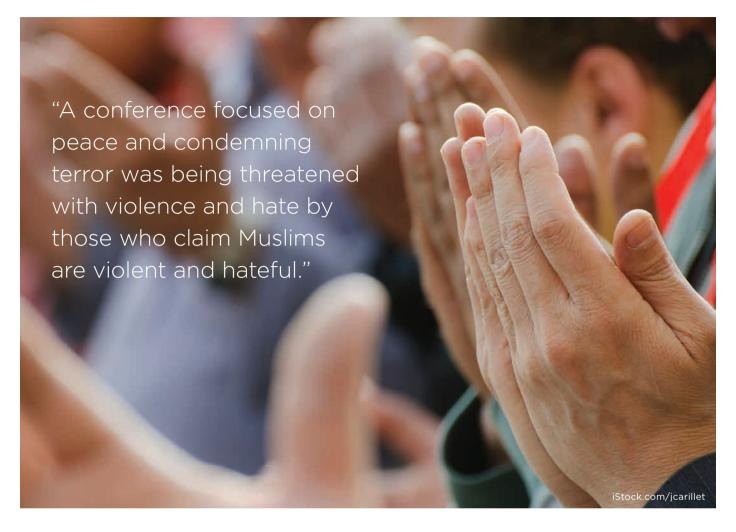
Much is being made of the two Muslims who took Pamela Geller's bait and were killed in Garland, Texas (US), where she was hosting her hateful "Draw Muhammad" art contest on 3 May 2015. However, what is not being discussed is the stellar way the Dallas area Muslims have dealt with her hate, and the Islamophobia movement in general.

Given Geller's history as the public face of a multi-million dollar Islamophobia campaign in the United States, Muslims have largely chosen to ignore this attention-seeking bigot. Her campaign to plaster hate against Muslims on public city buses in San Francisco and New York, for example, was not met by any protest by Muslims. They calmly made their statements opposing the ads. Then they went on their way, most likely taking these same buses to work and school as they went about their business.

I found a similar dynamic at play in January 2015, when Sound Vision hosted a Seerah conference entitled, "Stand With the Prophet Against Hate and Terror". This was also held in Garland, Texas.
Unlike other, similar events we have organised across the country, this one became a target for Pamela Geller and her cohort in the Islamophobia campaign, Robert Spencer. Online, they mobilised hundreds of protesters to stage a hateful protest in front of the event.

Here is a comparison of how Pamela Geller and Co. targeted the Stand with the Prophet Conference in Garland, Texas, on 17 January 2015, and how the Dallas Muslims reacted to hate-mongers at the Seerah Conference and the "Draw Muhammad" hate event at the same location on 3 May 2015.





Given that the conference (which had been organised months in advance) was held just days after the Charlie Hebdo murders, it became an easy target for Islamophobia's stalwarts. Prior to the event, a Facebook page was launched featuring threats to blow up the convention centre the conference would be held in, along with reminders to bring guns and other ammunition to the event.

Sound Vision notified local law enforcement, who took the threats seriously and beefed up security. We have never hosted an event that required attendees to go through safety checks. But we had no choice. A conference focused on

peace and condemning terror was being threatened with violence and hate by those who claim Muslims are violent and hateful.

Perhaps this should not come as a surprise. For all of the culturally entrenched ideas about "violent Muslims", statistics point the other way.

A large number of Americans believe it is justifiable to intentionally attack civilians. A World Public Opinion (WPO) survey done in collaboration with the University of Maryland published in January 2007 reported that 51% of Americans believed "bombings and other types of attacks intentionally aimed at civilians are sometimes justified." According to a 22 May 2007 PEW survey, only 13% of American Muslims hold a similar sentiment when asked about bombings against civilian targets.

An FBI study about terrorism committed on US soil between 1980 and 2005 found that 94% of the terror attacks were committed by non-Muslims. In actuality, 42% of terror attacks were carried out by Latino-related groups, followed by 24% perpetrated by extreme leftwing actors.

But, statistics aside, I was deeply impressed and proud of the way

Muslims conducted themselves the day of the conference. In response to hate, they responded with the Quranic teaching that

"The Servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on Earth, and who, when the foolish address them, they avoid them saying 'Peace'"

Al-Furgan (The Criterion), 25:63

And foolish they were. "Did your father rape you last night?" - Some of Geller and Spencer's supporters called out to Muslim girls entering the Seerah conference. "Go home and take Obama with you" they screamed with their placards advertising the same message.

Some interfaith people responded with counter-protests in January 2015. But these were peaceful, and to my knowledge, attendees were unarmed. This was in stark contrast to the Geller-Spencer crew, who were heavily armed, and included at least one motorcycle gang that threateningly kept circling the Muslim attendees waiting outside the event.

For the Geller & Co. hate cartoon exhibit on May 2015, Sound Vision surveyed our supporters in Dallas Fort Worth area about a possible response. Most of them suggested that we simply ignore them. That is what 100% of the Dallas Fort Worth area Muslim community did. So did our interfaith and peace movement followers. We all stayed away from it. That is restraint of a highest possible level.



This has been the consistent response of the Muslim community throughout America. Many papers have published Charlie Hebdo's cartoon about the Prophet (SAW) including the Washington Post, USA Today, LA Times, Wall Street Journal, The Daily Beast and CBS News. Charlie Hebdo's first issue

after the attack was brought into the US for distribution.

Muslims, who were deeply offended, remained calm, praying for the Prophet (SAW) and hoping that our country extends the Prophet (SAW) a respectable discourse.



Normally, it is stated in the media that drawing the Prophet (SAW) is considered blasphemous by Muslims. But this is only a part of the story. Muslims with the memories of Christian missionaries and the colonial masters for the last several hundred years see a continuity in which the Western media and Islamophobes depict the Prophet (SAW) in writing and drawings in a very offensive manner, which perpetuates the falsehood about the Prophet (SAW).

Muslims have much to be proud of in terms of how we are handling

Muslims with the memories of Christian missionaries and the colonial masters for the last several hundred years see a continuity in which the Western media and Islamophobes depict the Prophet (SAW) in writing and drawings in a very offensive manner, which perpetuates the falsehood about the Prophet (SAW)."

ourselves in the face of an onslaught of Islamophobia. We have debated online and offline; we have ignored the hate or engaged it in a way that was calm and deliberate, as opposed to shrill and hateful; and we have not wavered or backed down in proudly declaring that we are American Muslims and very much part of and proud of our country and what it stands for: freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and respect for all.

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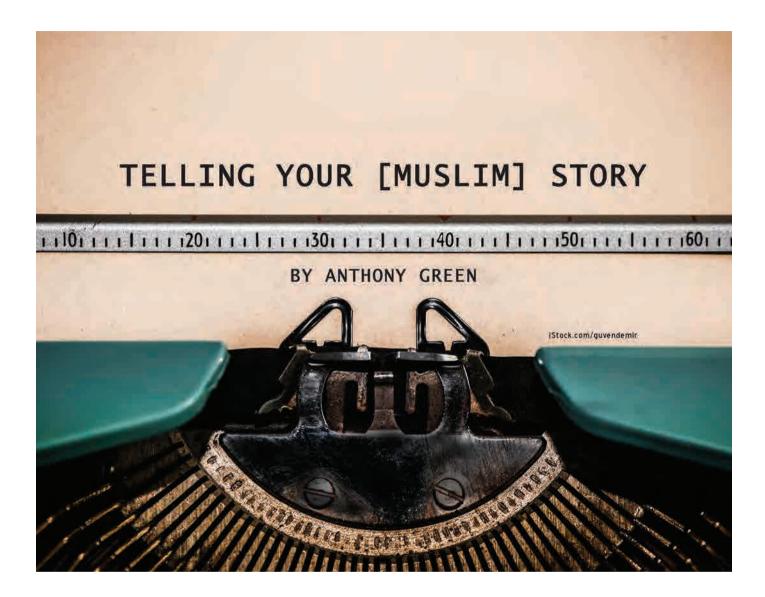
# Truth and Reminder

All that We relate to you of the exemplary narrative of (the lives of some of the earlier) Messengers is in order that whereby We make firm your heart. In all these accounts there comes to you the truth, as well as an instruction and a reminder for the believers.

Hud, 11:120

From the translation of the Quran

#### opinion



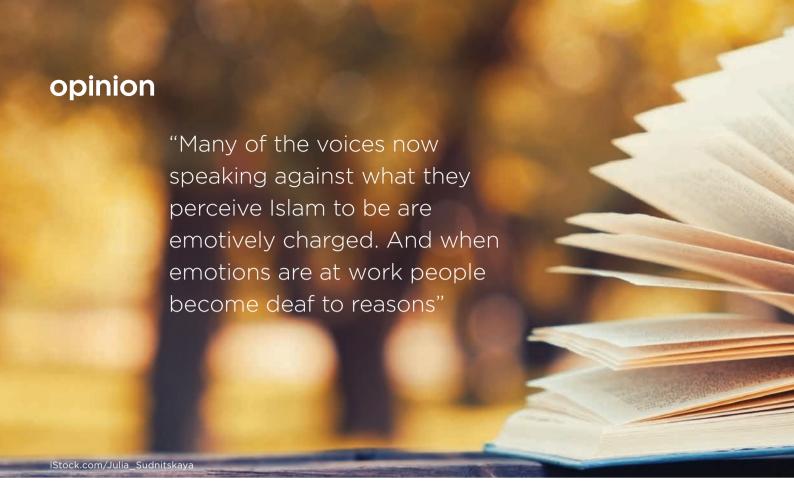
orking on a book on the life of a community, you get to listen to many voices. Whether that's in a modern interview or an historical record, you hear people speak of the issues they faced and of how they were challenged. Some sort of measure comes through of the sacrifices that were made – in terms of both money and time. You see how aspects of life were addressed as individuals and groups responded

to the needs of their communities – all according to the values they held.

For a full life, our needs – alone and together – are many: the need to learn and to earn; the need for care for one another and for recreation and culture; for spiritual growth and teaching; for a sense of shared existence and responsibility; and for business and justice. All of it – what we do and what we say – comes together to form the

picture of who we are and what we hold dear.

We are reminded often enough that Islam is a 'deen.' So we know that a Muslim is not just a Muslim in the moments when they prostrate, or when they enter a masjid, or when the month of fasting begins. It is a full-time business. The faith is a way of life that runs like a stream through everything so its influence should appear in the words that Muslims choose and the responses



they make. If that is clear to those who are guided by the faith, it may not be obvious to those outside, but showing the values of Islam; showing what it means to you – communicating the message to others – is part of our task.

# THE MUSLIM IS THE WITNESS OF ISLAM

That instruction - to be a witness to the message - becomes urgent if you feel that things being said about you and your community are unfair or untrue. Or when others claim to speak for Islam through the kind of savagery that is itself an injustice or something that is offensive to the sense of what is right and true. Right now the global image of Islam and Muslims is too often clouded by dark negativity and stories of aggression. At its worst, it's as if this is a belief system alien to all that is good; as if the only safe position to take toward Islam and Muslims is one of suspicion and rejection. So if

you don't recognise yourself in the public descriptions, if you find yourself shaking your head in some sadness and saying "that is not who I am," what can you do?

Speaking of the consequences of colonialism in Africa the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe turned to the need for each to tell their own story:

No foreigner can tell 'my' story for 'me,' no matter how talented, or knowledgeable. Stories are not innocent; they can be used to put you in the wrong crowd, in the party of the man who has come to dispossess you, who with determined earnestness, lays a claim to your territory, then carves out a space for you, and wants you to be content with that slice of life.

The 'foreigners' are those outside the lived experience; those who have not experienced how life is shaped in a web of mutual responsibilities and support.

# HOW TO EXPLAIN HOW THE VALUES OF ISLAM SHAPE YOUR LIFE?

One quote attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson is that "what you do speaks to me so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." We may talk a great deal, but it is often our actions and our behaviour, as individuals or as members of a group, that are far more persuasive. More than that, if fine words are not matched by good deeds or right conduct then the message sounds hollow, shrivels and dies, and the messenger runs the risk of being a kind of *munafiq* - a hypocrite. Yet if the best parts of our behaviour and our responses are not spoken of they will not be known to others. And that's not just non-Muslims. Muslims, too, may be ignorant of the best work and of the real contributions made by other Muslims to the wider good.

In 1919, the different communities in Singapore marked 100 years from



the time when Raffles arrived, armed with a British flag. Speaking of the Muslim community, the Singapore Free Press commented that,

There is a saying common among the Mohamedans that what the right hand gives the left hand should not know. Modesty, moreover, plays a great part in the career of a Mohamedan. I believe that they have not therefore used the press to make public what they have done to celebrate the Centenary of the founding of the "Jewel of the East," Singapore. But I think that the doing of each community should be fully recorded so that it may make history for the information of future generations.

What then might be missing from the picture; what kinds of 'doings' of our community can we point to? What might persuade?

# CHARGE YOUR STORY WITH EMOTION

If you want to convey a positive message when others are hostile you must first change the way you're seen; make the ground more receptive. And in the challenge of changing perceptions, emotion is a powerful force. Many of the voices now speaking against what they perceive Islam to be are emotively charged. And when emotions are at work people become deaf to reasons and your energies are best employed in quiet stories that 'show' rather than 'tell.'

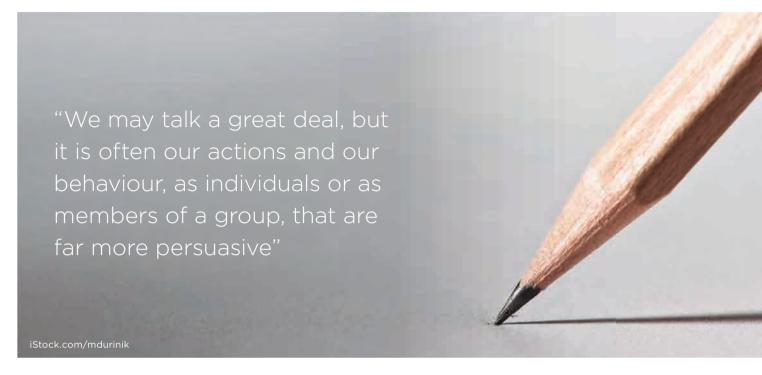
Muslims have been criticised as being either inward-looking, focused on their own community or outward-looking in aggression. Yet in Singapore, as in so many places across the world, time and again the history of the community offers a very different picture.

First, then, know your history.

In April 1926, The Singapore Free Press published an obituary. It spoke very respectfully of how on the 5th of April, "there passed away one of the great old Moslem citizens, in the person of Syed Alwee bin Ali Aljunid, Justice of the Peace, at the ripe age of 81 years": of how "His father and grandfather were the most respected earliest settlers in this Colony." And it talked of Syed Alwee's father, Syed Ali. It described the bridges built with his money, the "large pieces of land" he had given so the income could go to Tan Tock Seng Hospital. And, in a time when water was scarce, the wells he had paid for so that the public could drink. All that, and much more.

It remarked on how "Syed Ali Road, now known as Newton Road" was named after Syed Alwee's father; how Syed Alwee Road (now written as Syed Alwi) is named after the son; how "Bencoolen Street Mosque and Omar Road Mosque were erected by the deceased's grandfather" and how the family

#### opinion



"largely subscribed towards the building of the Town Hall."

Each day Syed Alwi Road will take its share of Singapore's traffic yet one can wonder how many know the significance of that family's name and work.

This story of public spiritedness, of thinking of others, takes us back 90 years but this translation of faith into deed has never died off in the Muslim community. It has appeared throughout the years in the work of individuals and in the guiding principles of organisations.

In the destabilised days after the Second World War when young brides might find themselves uneducated, abandoned and impoverished as their husbands took on new wives, and when newspaper reports could speak of some of those responsible for conducting marriages being downright casual about doing

things properly, there were many women who turned in desperation to begging and even prostitution. And then you read of a woman like Che' Zaharah binte Noor Mohamed who gave over her house for sanctuary and for women's education across the races and spoke up for their greater dignity. That same drive was there in the work and drive of the ladies who established PPIS - the Singapore Muslim Women's Association.

That work has not been confined to benefitting just Muslims. Jamiyah has a long history of operating free medical and legal services for all. Add to that its "Exemplary Mother Award" which, for over twenty years, has chosen one mother to honour, regardless of race or religion. A focus on motherhood speaks to the emotions.

Mercy Relief is described as "Singapore's only homegrown independent, non-governmental humanitarian charity, established to respond to human tragedies in Asia." Yet the roots of this organisation lie in an initiative of the Muslim organisation, Perdaus.

The values of Islam can appear in many ways and the evidence of that modesty spoken of in 1919 – an instinct that is not driven by any desire for self-praise – can come through in quiet personal anecdotes.

A report on a pottery exhibition of Iskandar Jalil, Singapore's master potter described an exhibition at the Japan Creative Centre which featured his own pieces but which "put the spotlight on the works of a selection of his students, whom he hopes will take his place one day and carry his artistic philosophy on."

Yusnor Ef, the lyricist, speaking of the young, has said:

#### opinion



"I want to share. So what I have I give to the younger generation. I cannot be selfish. I cannot say, 'this is mine. If I give it now they will know everything.' That is not my type. Whatever you ask me; whatever you want to know I will give to you... Because, anytime we can go."

Selflessness, sharing, respect, and that important recognition that life passes – all life-affirming and a long way from the life-denying image with which Muslims are sometimes taunted.

A proper record of the doing of the Muslim community by the community itself has real value but how do we make sure that the positive stories of others in the Muslim community are there, richly documented, to challenge the negativity?

In 1994, after he'd made the movie "Schindler's List," Steven Spielberg founded the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. Its first focus was on recording the stories of Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust. One aim was "to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry – and the suffering they cause – through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies."

To achieve this, interviewers were trained and over 50,000 testimonies in 32 languages have been filmed, digitised and turned into an educational resource. Each story now has a face and a name and a personal telling.

"To challenge prejudice and intolerance" seems a necessary task even if experiences are not on the deadly scale of the concentration camps but the value of that work must be recognised and supported by those who can offer proper financial backing. Muslims do not seem to have any similar organisation so the task

right now seems left to individuals. As people grow older they can find themselves wondering who they are and where their ideas and values came from or how their people came to a place. You look around with a question that you would love to ask – just as there are many I would now love to ask of my mother and father or my grandparents – and you realise that they are gone from this world.

In an interview in 2016 the late Cikgu Muhammad Ariff spoke of a newspaper column he had written. "It's all in my Berita Harian column Sembang Pendita with Raman Daud. This is all so that the people of tomorrow cannot say that they do not know what we did."

Cikgu Ariff understood the importance of recording and reporting what was done, what was aspired to, what difficulties were confronted, however small the achievement might seem in later times. It may be down to each of us who can feel something felt by the British poet, Brian Patten, who wrote,

There was so much I ought to have recorded,

So many lives that have vanished - Families, neighbours; people whose pockets

Were worn thin by hope.

They were

The loose change history spent without caring.

Now they have become the air I breathe.

Not to have marked their passing seems such a betrayal. TMR

Together with Ibrahim Tahir, the author worked on **Hand to Heart** - a book that set out a picture of many of the organisations that arose in Singapore's Malay/Muslim community.



Abu Darda (RA) relates: I was walking along with the Holy Prophet in the rocky plain of Medina when we saw Uhud in front of us. The Prophet (SAW) called me and I said, "At your service, Messenger of Allah."

He (SAW) said, "if I had as much gold as Uhud yonder, it would not please me to have a single dinar out of it by me after the passage of three days, unless I were to retain something for the repayment of a debt. I would distribute it among the servants of Allah like this and this and this to the right and left and rear."

He (SAW) then walked on and said, "Those who have much will be ones who will have the least on the Day of Judgment, except those who spend their wealth like this and this and this, to the right and left and rear, and they are few."

Then he (SAW) said to me, "Remain where you are and do not move till I come back to you."

The Prophet (SAW) walked into the dark and disappeared. Presently, I heard a loud voice and was afraid lest he (SAW) should have encountered something untoward. I wanted to go to him but recalled his admonition: Do not move till I come back to you. So I did not move till he came back to me, and I said to him, "I heard a voice which made me afraid but I remembered your direction to me.

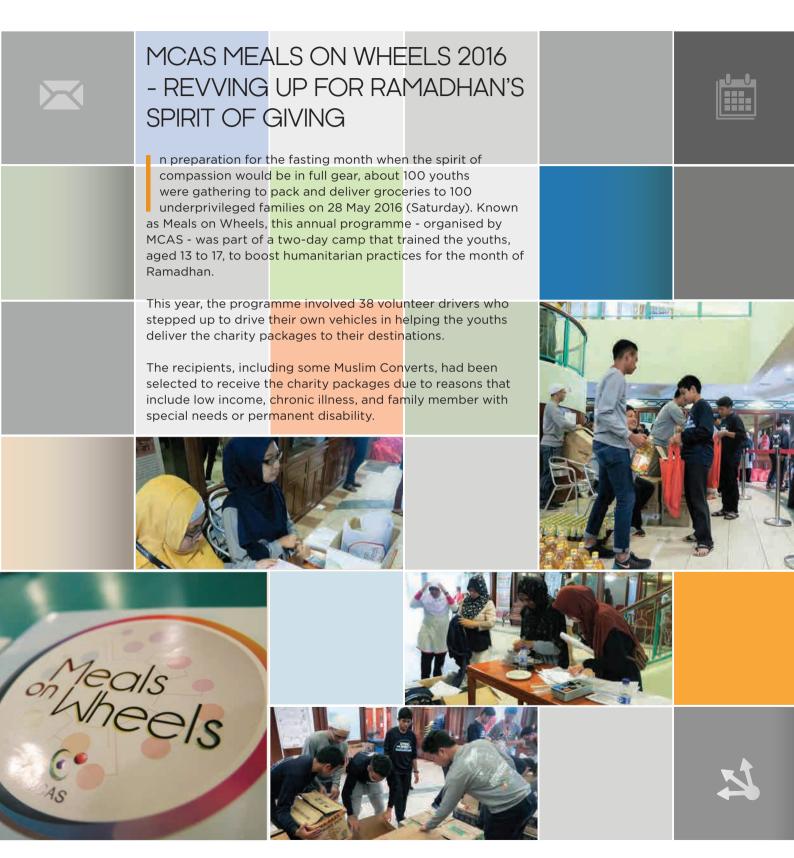
The Prophet (SAW) asked, "Did you hear him?" I said, "Yes."
He (SAW) said, "It was Gabriel who came to me and said, 'He who dies from among your followers, not having associated aught with Allah, will enter Paradise'."

I inquired, "Even if he should have been guilty of adultery or of theft?"

The Prophet (SAW) said, "Even if he was guilty of adultery, or of theft."

(Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim) From Imam An-Nawawi's Riyadh As-Salihin (Gardens of the Righteous)

#### house of argam



# house of argam



Objective of Meals on Wheels programme

- To expose youths to the opportunities
  - in reaching out to the poor and needy in the community, and
  - in earning the first-hand experience of helping the underprivileged
- To instil the essential principles of Ramadhan
  - Self-discovery through action and reflection
  - Responsibility to serve the community
  - Strengthen faith through acts of worship

This annual event was programmed with a different twist this year as it became part of the youth camp themed "Living the spirit of Ramadhan". With its largest manpower to-date (of 100 camp participants, 38 volunteer drivers, and 40 facilitators), the Meals on Wheels programme had been a platform for its participants to directly connect to the poor and needy by visiting them at home and delivering some essentials to help reduce their burden.















# house of arqam



# house of arqam





# house of argam









"Alhamdulillah, with the community's generosity, we have also expanded the number of recipients to 100 families; each receiving groceries and vouchers. InshaAllah, more needy Converts, needy family of Converts, and the chronically-ill would be able to benefit. This will, InshaAllah, cultivate the spirit of giving in our next generation."

Excerpt from speech by MCAS President, Faiz Edwin Ignatious









Converse is a column in TMR dedicated to inspire everyone towards understanding, speaking, and appreciating the Arabic language.



BY MADRASATI

Hayá yá Ahmad Ethab ilá an-naume mubakkiran allailalah!

هَيَّا يَا أَحْمَد اذْهَبْ إِلَى النَّوْمِ مُبَكِّرًا اللَّيْلَة!

Oh Ahmed, go to bed early tonight!

Hasanan yá wálidí. Ghadan yaumu al Eídi alaisa kathálik?

حَسَنًا يَا وَالِدِي!غَدَّا يومُر العيدِ أَلَيْسَ كَذَلِك؟

Okay daddy! Tomorrow is Eid, isn't it?

Naam háthá sahíh!

نَعَمْ هَذا صَحِيح!

Yes, that's right!

Hal tasmahu lí bi suál?

هَلْ تَسْمَحُ لِي بِسُؤَال ؟

May I ask you a question?

Tafadal yá waladí!

تَفَضَّلْ يا وَلَدِي!

Please do, my son!

Máthá t'aní kalimatu al Eídi ya abí

<mark>ماذا تَعْني كَلِمَةُ الْعِيدِ يا أَبِي؟</mark>

What does the word "Eid" mean, daddy?

Al Eíd yaumun yajtmi'u fíhi-ennas wa huwa

العِيدُ يَومُ لِيجْتَمِعُ فِيهِ النَّاسِ وَهُ وَ

ya'udu ileiná kulla sanah

يَعُودُ إِلَيْنَا كُلَّب سَنَة.

Eid is a day in which there is a gathering that keeps returning every year.

Wa nahnu hal sanahtafilu bil Eídi

وَ نَحْزُ مَلْ سَنَحْتَفِلُ بِالْعِيدِ

assanata al qádimah

السَّنةَ القَادِمَة ؟

Do we know if we will be celebrating Eid next year?

In shá Allah yá waladí

إِنْ شَاءَ اللهُ يَا وَلَدِي.

With Allah's permission we will, my son!

Ad'u Allah an umiddaka bi-issihhati wa

أَدْعُو اللهَ أَنْ يُمِدَّكَ بِالصِّحَّةِ وَ

al-'áfiyah dá-iman yá abí!

الْعَافِيَةِ دائِمًا يَا أَيِي!

May Allah grant you good health and wellness always, daddy!

Ámeen! Barak Alláhu fíka yá waladí!

آمِينِ! بَامَلَ اللهُ فِيلَ يَا وَلَدِي!

Ameen! May Allah bless you, my son!

Tusbih 'alá khair yá abí

تُصْبِحْ عَلَى خَيْرٍ يَا أَيِ

Good night, daddy!

Tusbih ʻa<mark>lá kha</mark>ir y<mark>á w</mark>aladí

تُصْبِحْ عَلَى خَيْرٍ يَا وَلَدِي

Good night, my son!

Fí sabáhi yaumi al Eidi yastaikithu jami'u

فِي صَبَاحِ يَوْمِرِ الْعِيدِ يَسْتَيْقِظُ جَمِيعُ

afrád ilusrati bákiran.

أَفْرَادِ الْأُسْرَةِ بَاكِرًا.

In the morning of Eid, all family members wake up early.

Hayá yá abí asri'a linalhaka biabiabnái

هَيًّا يَا أَبِي أَسْرِعْ لِنَلْحَقَ بِأَبْنَاءِ

'ammí, lakad sabakuná ilá al masjid

عَمِّي لَقَدْ سَبَقُونَا إِلَى الْمَسْجِد

Let's go, daddy. Hurry up so that we can catch-up with my cousins who are already at the mosque!

La 'alaika ya waladi. Antahi mina

لَاعَلَيْكَ يَا وَلَدِي، أَنْتَهِي مِنْ

al ightisáli thumma nantaliku fi alhál

الْاغْتِسَالِ وَنَنْطَلِقُ فِي الْحَالِ!

Don't worry, my son. After I'm done with my shower, we will leave home immediately!

Ba'ada 'ashri daká'eka kharaja al-abu

بَعْدَ عَشْرِ، دَقَائِقَ خَرَجَ الْأَبُ

mina al-hammam.

مِنَ الْحَمَّامرِ.

After ten minutes, the father comes out from the bathroom.

Kabla an nantalika hayya linurá ji'a

قَبْلَ أَنْ نَنْطَلِقَ هَيَّا لِنُرَاجِعَ

al-a'amala allatí tentathiruná al-yaum?

الْأَعْمَالَ الَّتِي تَنْتَظِرُنَا الْيَوْمرِ؟

Before we depart, let's go through the things that we need to do today.

Hasanan ya abí! Elaika ma yantathiruná:

Okay daddy! Here's what we need to do:

Ba'da ádáe' solati al-Eídi najlisu wa nastameu' likhutbati al-imami.

After performing the Eid prayer, we sit down and listen to the imam's speech.

Hala intiháe al-khutbati nagumu wa nuhanneu

man gábalná min ikhwániná al-musollina man

'arafná wa man lam n'arif

As soon as the speech is over, we stand up and greet everyone me meet regardless if we know them or not.

Thumma na-'udu ila al-baite hatta nasta'edda

lethabhi kharufiná

Yes, that is correct! Well done, my son!

#### Different kinds of Eid greetings:



Are you a madrasah student who would like to polish up your Arabic or simply an individual who's interested to learn the Arabic language? For more information, please feel free to contact Madrasati. Email: mu3allime@gmail.com
FB: facebook.com/mu3allime



#### PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

- Weekend classes spanning over 1 year
- Interactive classes with practical elements
- Commencement in January 2017

#### CORE MODULES

- **Quran Recitation (Qiraah)** Selected chapters from the Quran
- Rulings in Quranic Recitation (Tajwid) Rulings, articulation points & characteristics of arabic letters
- **Quranic Exegesis (Tafsir)** Selected chapters from the Quran
- Sciences of Quran (Ulumul Quran) Etiquettes & Quranic classification

\*Prerequisite: ability to read the Quran

**REGISTRATION OPENS NOW!** (ONLY SHORTLISTED APPLICANTS WILL BE NOTIFIED)

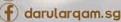
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# RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN ISLAM

**BY FANAR** 

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

#### **TOLERANCE IN ISLAM**

One of the unique features which led Islam to disseminate its teaching very rapidly is its tolerance. Throughout history, Islam has exhibited its matchless tolerance to the followers of other religions, permitting them to practise their religion and protecting them from harassment in doing so.

Confirming this unique position of Islam in differing examples are the following verses from the Quran:

#### NO COERCION IN RELIGION

Islam teaches there is to be no use of force in the propagation of its message.

The Quran orders:
"There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion..."
Al-Baqarah (The Heifer) 2:256

"And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed – all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?"
Yunus (Jonah) 10:99

# TO BE JUST AND KIND TO THOSE WHO ARE PEACEFUL

Islam advocates good treatment, justice and being kind to those who are peaceful, irrespective of their religion.

Allah says in the Quran:
"Allah does not forbid you from
those who do not fight you
because of religion and do not

expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly." Al-Mumtahanah (The Women To Be Tested) 60:8

# TO SHOW THE BROTHERHOOD OF PROPHETS

Islam teaches that all prophets belong to one spiritual family and there is no distinction between them:

"Say, [O believers], 'We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants [al-Asbat] and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."

Al-Baqarah (The Heifer) 2:136

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "I am the closest of people to Jesus, son of Mary, in this world and in the Hereafter. The prophets are brothers although they have different mothers, and their religion is one."

(Bukhari and Muslim)

Places of worship are sacred Islam assures the sanctity of places of worship by saying:

"[They are] those who have been evicted from their homes without right - only because they say, 'Our Lord is Allah.' And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned [i.e.,

praised]. And Allah will surely support those who support Him [i.e., His cause]. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.'" The Hajj (The Pilgrimage) 22:40

History witnessed this religious tolerance when the second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA), received the key of Jerusalem and said:

"...he has granted them security for themselves, their possessions, their churches and crosses, their sick and healthy and all their coreligionists. Their churches shall not be taken for residence and shall not be demolished. Nothing shall be damaged from them or from their surroundings; nor shall their crosses be removed or anything taken from their property. They shall not be harassed because of their religion..."

#### TO HAVE GOOD INTERFAITH RELATION

As Islam is the religion of all the prophets, it encourages its followers to develop good interfaith relations with others:

"Say, 'O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you – that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].'" Al-Imran (The Family Of Imran) 3:64

# TO OPEN CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Islam shows its tolerance in dealing with others in wisdom and constructive dialogue:



"And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.""

Al-Ankabut (The Spider) 29:46

#### THE GOLDEN ERA OF ISLAM

From the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), we can see how he generously treated the Najran Christians and gave them full protection to practise their religious rites. Apart from this, when he sent his Companions on expeditions, he used to order them to respect the sanctity of monasteries and churches.

One of the Muslim commanders, Khalid ibn Walid (RA) wrote a treaty with the people of Ânâh, in which he says:

"They have the right to ring their bells at any time they want, night or day, except at the time of (Muslims') prayer, and to bring out their crosses on the day of their festivals."



When Sultan Muhammad victoriously opened Bosnia & Herzegovina in the 15th century, he declared:

"...let them dwell in peace in my empire...let them settle in their monasteries...let nobody attack, insult or endanger their life or their property or their church."

#### WHAT OTHERS SAY?

The famous novelist H.G. Wells says in his discussion of Islamic Teaching:

"The Islamic teachings have left great traditions for equitable and gentle dealings and behaviour, and inspire people with nobility and tolerance. These are human teachings of the highest order and at the same time practicable. These teachings brought into existence a society in which hard-heartedness and collective oppression and injustice were the least as compared with all other societies preceding it...Islam is replete with gentleness, courtesy, and fraternity."

Gustave Le Bon a French social psychologist and sociologist once said:

"The world had never seen conquerors who were merciful and compassionate like the Arabs nor any religion that was tolerant like their religion."

Robertson says in his book 'The History of Charlemagne':

"The Muslims are the only ones who combined pride in their religion with a spirit of tolerance towards the followers of other religions."

Thus, tolerance in Islam does indeed originate from its teaching, bestowed by Allah (SWT) to the last Messenger (SAW) and his followers, and is demonstrated throughout history.

"Religious Tolerance in Islam" is published with the kind permission of FANAR.





# THE HIJAB MEMOIR - INSPIRING PHOTOS AND STORIES ABOUT MUSLIM SISTERS

BY NOREEN YEK BOUSSETTA

ho would have thought that a simple conversation between a mother who was doing her courses at Darul Arqam and her son years ago had ignited an idea for the latter to start a modest project? Thus, the birth of a multi-coloured

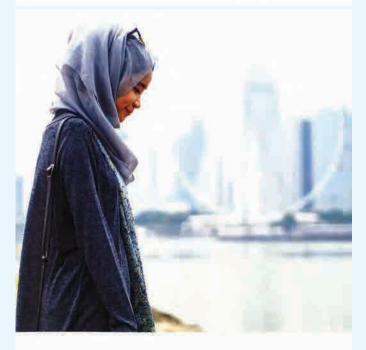
photo book entitled **"The Hijab Memoir"**. It is a compilation of pictures, stories and encouraging words from Muslim sisters.

"It struck and reminded me that my mum is a convert and that she has been overcoming umpteen challenges as a convert. So a thought came to my mind and I was wondering how tough it could be for her to don the hijab as a convert as it's a huge leap. Having a sister prompted me further to help her indirectly. So, both of them inspired me to make an initiative to start something to help inspire Muslim sisters don the hijab," says

# spotlight



My hitter started wearing hijab on my father's birmosy finee years ago (†1/1/2011). She's finee years bloom than me. I had the chancs of not wearing it yet since I was just entering polyrectrinic and there wasn't ribid) thought about it. I wanted coloured hairs and having different kinds of haststyllis. Thum My dad did ask me price, when was I going to start wearing? I told him I'll wear it on my birthday bluring my first year of polytechnic. Months later, my birthday came and I lold my dad I was not ready for a change

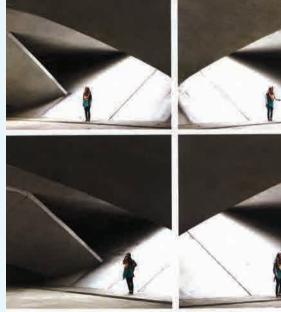


It's akey to not be ready now, because it is a big life decision. Be confident, never ever let anyone else's opinions affect you. Have faith that He will guido you. There will be times where it's a struggle to keep it on, but Inshaa Allah with his guidance you'll get through it. Remember, you are not alone



I started emboacing the hijab in late august 2014. The thought of domining the *hijab* full-time started around March 2014, During that period, if hat like *Allah* s. w.f. was giving mail many small signs of encouragement!

I feel shallered and explected whenever (in) wearing the high, it is common to see muslimens wearing the hijab in Singapore and there is comfort knowing that we all share something peauliful. Even though it took me quite awhile to emorace the high, I have never regretted wearing it. I still find it challenging but I balleve He will guide me on this new journey a //w is the best of all planners. Ameen.



When I list donned the hijab, I will felt a tad of awkwardness wherever I go out and have that piece of cicth on my head. Few other challenges areas. People started to comment about me being conservative and me tooking old with my hijab on. For a person who loves tushion ut oces affect me in a way or another, but with the grace of Allah s.w.t. i recalled pack my intermon of why i donned the hijab in the first place.



Whatever challenges He bestowed upon me is there for a resson. As time passes, I learned and grew to love the thing I once distilke and eventually excepting fell into place. Alhamdullilah there's samething beautiful about keeping certain aspects of your life hidden. In this case, modesty Hijab is not only a statement of rain, but it is more than just covering modestly, it's a vell on the heart.

#### spotlight

Cover artwork for the photo book 'The Hijab Memoir' by Muhammac Afig Muhammad Fairuz.

'The Hijab Memoir' is a compilation of pictures, stories and encouraging words from Muslim sisters.

Muhammad Afiq bin Mohamad Fairuz, at the start of our interview.

A full-time National Service (NS) man, Afiq has been working on **The Hijab Memoir** for about a year and a half now and hopes to tie everything down once his service is over. He dreams of receiving "sponsorship and support to get the photo book published and distributed to the Darul Arqam sisters that are in the process of converting..." and eventually having copies of it sold at Darul Arqam bookstore and various Islamic newsstands for fundraising.

When asked why would a young man like himself be interested in the hijab issues which are synonymously attached to ladies, he answers, "I admit that I'm doing something against the odds but I feel that if my intentions are clear and I want to help inspire the sisters and prevent them from straying away from the real path, why not? A man like me can also help them in a different way."

According to Afiq, the objectives of **The Hijab Memoir** are to give the converting Darul Arqam sisters encouragement and more experiences to relate to and also to motivate other sisters and raise awareness about the importance of donning the hijab. All the models featured in the photo book are his own friends and also strangers who had written to him, eager

to share their stories. The photo shoots were done island wide and each shoot lasted about an hour or shorter. Besides photography, Afiq also travels a lot and does sports such as rock climbing, Muay Thai and mountain hiking.

Before getting enlisted for NS, he did landscape architecture at Temasek Polytechnic and was involved in multiple projects in building schools and a library in Indonesia for humanitarian work. The eldest of three siblings, Afiq will be leaving Singapore for Australia after completing his NS service to further his studies under the National Parks Board's Scholarship.



# THE HIJAB MEMOIR

#### spotlight



I have been taught by my parents since young to wear the hijab, Alhamolulilah, because of that it was'nt as difficult for me to continue practicing it out of my own freewill. Hijab has become a part of me that as I grew older. I began to understand the importance and significance of it. It is an act of bellet and form of self-respect, it makes me value my worth as a woman and I am to be respected according to my own intellect and character rather than by my looks and physical features.



What we go through as a muslimath while dons the fired is a rest that Allah sure has bestowed upon us. Some of us struggle with the stares or segregation. Know that you are not the only arrest feeling this way this should not woulden you. Our sisters in faith all over the world feels the same way too. Herremose trial you are oldeady the strongest being when you that took that step of domining this high. It is not easy and that is something people should whow.





I was one of those people in besign school who had wacky hair colors. I've had brown, red, purple, blue and even green hair. I wanted to by many new and unique things. At the beginning of 2014, istanted to have thoughts of wearing the hijab.

Whenever I see someone who dons the hijith, I will be thinking to myself, "When will it be my turn?" Of course, as a human being I also had negative thoughts like, "What II book til judge and treat the differently? What II don't til in anymoris?" But slowly, I told my family about it and they gave me all their support. I decided that I would start wearing the high distinct Proveys, to familiarize myself with all the different scarte and styles, I started wearing it a week before.

No doubt, it was rough. When I went to school people started treating me differently, For a few days, I became distant from my own friends and it was a really horrible leeling but no matter what I don't regret wearing the hijab because in a way, it makes me feet closer to Allah s.w.t. and I'm constantly trying to change myself to not only become a bottom mustiman but a better person too. I may not be good enough to be a role model and I may not be perfect but I will try to improve myself inshaa Allah with his guidanca.

Concurrently, there is another project that he is working on with his group of friends. "It's still very fresh but the idea is to set up an organisation that will bring the community together through creativity and make it a tool to help volunteers do humanitarian work. Tentatively it'll be called 'Stitch'," he shares.

Describing himself as a "people oriented person, enthusiastic, joyful and love to help in anyway", Afiq credits his family as the source of inspiration that have been giving him the motivational force all this while.

An ambitious individual who dreams big, Afiq hopes to "receive more support from the society and work as one to strive ahead together to have a more cohesive Islamic community in Singapore".

He concludes the interview by sharing his philosophy in religion: "A Muslim believes in the great importance of intention, and its importance as the reminder of his deeds, both of this world and the Hereafter. This is so because all deeds are based on intention. Due to it, the deed is strengthened or weakened. Depending on the intention, the deed is either valid or void." That is a meaningful quote indeed! We wish Afiq all the best for his future endeavours!



#### Saturdays & Sundays, 10am - 12.30pm Except Public Holidays

Do you have a non-Muslim friend who wants to know more on Islam?

Are you afraid that you cannot answer their questions?

Would you like trained and knowledgeable individuals to guide them instead?

Why not refer them to our **Knowing Islam Session**?

Everyone who wishes to know Islam at an introductory level is encouraged to attend this course. It serves as the basis to other courses at Muslim Converts' Association Of Singapore (MCAS). It is open to public & requires no registration.

#### Topics Include:

- The existence of the creator
- · The need of having religion
- · What is Islam and why Islam
- Prophets in Islam
- Overview of MCAS & its services



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#### AL-MAWRID RESOURCE LIBRARY ESSAY WRITING COMPETITION 2016

Congratulations to the following writers for their achievements in this competition.

(44444)

#### FIRST PLACE

Sia Jingyun Erna Sharida

#### SECOND PLACE

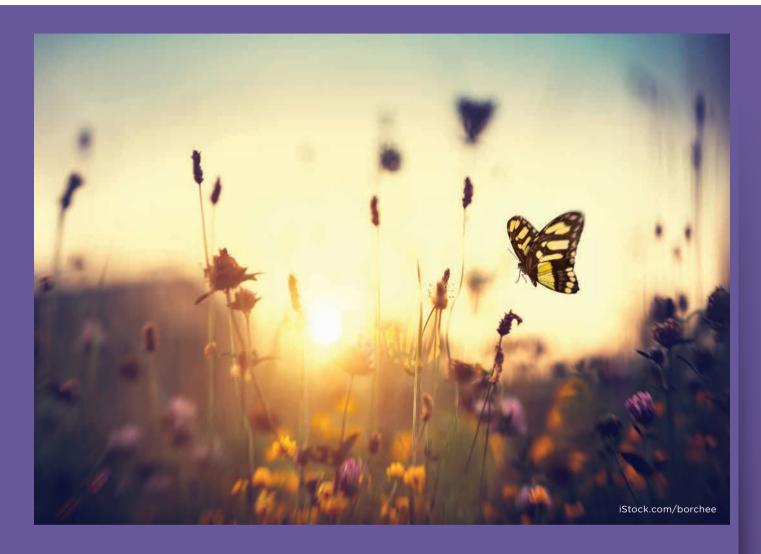
Muhammad Idaffi Othman

#### THIRD PLACE

Nuruljannah Hisham

#### About the competition

Participants of this competition were to submit an original essay on the topic 'Islam - A Bridge to Peace' between 1,300 and 1,500 words. All submissions must be in the form of continuous writing or essay format. The essay had to be typed and emailed by 20 May 2016. The competition was open to all residents of Singapore aged between 15 to 25 as of 1 January 2016.



# ISLAM - A BRIDGE TO PEACE

BY SIA JINGYUN ERNA SHARIDA

First place winning entry of Al-Mawrid Resource Library Essay Writing Competition 2016

#### PREFACE

All gratitude and praise belong to Allah, Glorious and Exalted is He; Allah's peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad who is an exemplar beyond compare. Whatever I have written was in an attempt to synthesise multiple readings in tandem with my personal understanding, and I hope to come out of it knowing more than I did before. My admiration and respect to those that do not let differences in religions erect walls of hate; those that seek to understand through mercy and compassion, through love; and those that continuously seek to build bridges amongst other faith groups because of the very teachings of Islam, and to follow in the footsteps of our beloved Prophet (SAW). Allah's mercy, guidance, forgiveness, and pleasure upon them, and upon all that strive on His path. Aamiin.

#### leap of faith

#### **ISLAM - A BRIDGE TO PEACE**

hen we picture a

bridge, we picture a connector from one place to another. A bridge to peace is, therefore, a means by which we can get from conflict to peace. There are, of course, many bridges to peace but can Islam be one of these bridges? Since the September 11 attacks, the world perceives Islam as being a religion that advocates violence. Yet, many too have converted to Islam as they understood its true teachings: that Islam is a religion of peace. This paper will hence attempt to extract the teachings of the Quran and the Prophetic examples, to illustrate what makes Islam a peaceful religion, how does it preach peace, and why Islam is a bridge, among many bridges, to peace.

Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion..." (An-Nahl, The Bee, 16:90). "... do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief" (Hud 11:85). "...let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety..." (Al-Ma'idah [The Table] 5:8).

The Quran is filled with numerous verses revealing the intrinsic nature of Islam when dealing with fellow human beings. In order to achieve peace, there must be justice. God calls upon man to

uphold justice and not to spread corruption because man was created as vicegerents on earth (Al-Bagarah [The Heifer] 2:30). One of God's attribute is Al-'Adl. The Just: the Prophet (SAW) taught us that nothing could justify being unjust to mankind, be it discrimination, social injustice, or racism (Ramadan, 2007). The Quran is filled with verses saying that Allah loves the doers of good1. Why? To encourage mankind to be good. In fact, Islam and salam (peace in Arabic) share the same root words (Soliman, 2009); one of the attributes of God is As-Salam, The Giver of Peace; the greetings of Muslims to each other is "peace be upon you". Therefore, what is Islam? Islam is a religion that admonishes man against doing evil, calls mankind to establish justice, to be good towards one another, and to spread peace.

Westerners fear Islam because of our violent reaction to perceived insults; Rodgers (2009) gave the example of the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, for making a documentary critical of Islam in 2004, and the riots and bombings after a Danish newspaper published cartoons that depict the Prophet (SAW) in 2005. It is disappointing, and appalling, how some Muslims, in a heated moment blinded by anger, react so hastily failing to see the repercussions of those acts, or to consider whether the Prophet (SAW) himself would have reacted similarly. We tend to fight over issues that are not central as if they were, and we demonstrate legitimate concerns in ways that are wrong and damaging, doing more harm while thinking we are actually doing good (Baig, 2007, p. 334). This is a flaw and Muslims must seek a way to rectify this, which is to bring ourselves back to the core teachings of Islam.

Islam does not justify extremists who fight in its name, but review history and realise how often religion has been used as a political tool. Many Muslim societies lack the sincere application of the Quran, often manipulating its interpretations to protect the interest of the political institutions: also Quranic interpretations are often bound to social, historical and political realities (Soliman, 2009). Moreover, numerous Muslim communities have limited access to different interpretations of the Quran; not able to understand nor speak the language, they depend on a certain clergy; many Muslims are also resentful towards the West. thus influenced easily by violent and radicalised interpretations of the Islamic beliefs and core values (Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, and Abu-Nimer, 2005). Such conditions of widespread frustration, and lack of alternatives, cause extremism to breed; jihad is primarily seen as a cause to war and not a spiritual strife, and retributive justice is overemphasised, belittling compassion (Soliman, 2009).

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was sent "as a mercy to the worlds" (Al-Anbiya [The Prophets] 21:107). The Prophet (SAW) exuded

# leap of faith



#### leap of faith



mercy, gentleness, and compassion in his daily dealings with Muslims and non-Muslims (Ramadan, 2007). In the early years when the Muslims were treated harshly, he (SAW) never took arms. But when injustice exceeded its limits, then the call to battle was made by the command of God. War in Islam is permissible only under very strict conditions; the aim is not to terrorise people nor to cause destruction and corruption on earth (Soliman, 2009). "And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, and do not exceed the limits..." (Al-Bagarah [The Heifer] 2:190). Here, God reminds mankind not to go beyond the boundaries set, to avoid doing more harm. "... whoever slays a soul... it is as though he slew all men..." (Al-Ma'idah [The Table] 5:32), a reminder that human life is sacred.

The Prophet (SAW) dealt with other faiths justly in post-battles,

leaving thrones with their territories, economies, and political structures almost untouched (Haykal, 1976, p. 588). A fine example of the very careful nature of Islam in its ethical conduct during wartimes is cited by Abu-Nimer (2000):

Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman or an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services, leave them alone. (Sahih Muslim)

Hence, with such sublime traits of the Prophet (SAW) and the basic law of not transgressing, how then is Islam not a bridge to peace? When Muslims truly uphold what the Quran admonishes and how the Prophet (SAW) lived, then surely peace can be achieved, God willing.

In Islam, there is no compulsion in religion (Al-Bagarah [The Heifer] 2:256). In fact, the positive value of different religions and communities is that they may compete with each other in goodness (Rahman, 1999) (Al-Ma'idah [The Table] 5:48). Islam even encourages constructive dialogue in interfaith dealings: "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner..." (An-Nahl [The Bee] 16:125); but in order for dialogue to be constructive, the communities involved cannot learn about and from each other through sources



"... with such sublime traits of the Prophet (SAW) and the basic law of not transgressing, how then is Islam not a bridge to peace?"

that are unauthentic, or just plain critical (Badawi, 2016).

Moreover, in all matters of conflict, multiple verses highlight the preference towards peace (Al-Anfal [Gains of War] 8:61), and often, God emphasises the doing of good, to be patient, and to forgive (Ash-Shura [Consultation] 42:43). The early Islamic history jurists even developed legal structures and institutions that use a variety of techniques to resolve conflict amicably (Mufti, 2014). The Shariah itself teaches us to never lose sight of the big picture; to avoid heated arguments; have interest in closing the gap, not widening it; and to consider unilateral withdrawal (Baig, 2007, pp. 335-336).

Therefore, when the criterion (the Quran) given to mankind encapsulates strong commands to

uphold justice, to do good, forgive. be merciful... and the example of the Prophet (SAW) whose traits are sublime, does Islam not then prove itself as a bridge to peace? There is nothing wrong with the Quran, what is wrong is with how the people manipulate it to suit their own selfish gains. Extremism needs to be bred out, and its solution is proper, religious, Quranic education, and the seerah of the Prophet (SAW) (Khan, 2016). As Muslims, we must continue to spread the religion of peace, to spread the good word (teachings of the Quran); we must not underestimate the power of a good word, a seed that will grow into a tree (Ibrahim [Abraham] 14:24-25) (Khan, 2016). Islam is a bridge to peace, but only when its teachings are applied sincerely and truly. TMR

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# ISLAM - A BRIDGE TO PEACE

BY MUHAMMAD IDAFFI OTHMAN

Second place winning entry of Al-Mawrid Resource Library Essay Writing Competition 2016

rymoronic, it may seem. Ironic, it may sound. Contradicting, it may look. To some even, 'Islam' and 'Peace' are antonyms that should never exist in the same sentence. It is intriguing to notice that at the current aiguille of academic intelligence that we are at, albeit the almost effortless access to definitions of 'Peace' and

'Islam', skewed perceptions are still more subscribed than actual essence of those words.

The prism of looking at Islam has almost become single-facaded, with violence entering the equation incessantly. Muslims, all around the world, are battling a bigger fray in their own settings - that is to battle inaccurate depictions

of Muslims as violent individuals who do not yearn for harmonious living with our friends of other faiths. While some extremists are violently intruding the lands of others deemed as infidels and into the homes of others deemed as enemies of Islam, the vast majority of Muslims who embrace peace - in all sense of the word and in all nooks of the world - have become

invisible to both the media and to the world.

Renowned speaker Yasmin
Mogahed cited in one of her
conferences, "There is something
interesting about the ocean. The
huge wave that can soothe a
heart can also kill a person if he
does not know how to fight the
currents. Water, which is needed for
sustenance of living things, can also
drown a person. The ocean that
keeps ships afloat can also break
that ship." Islam is no different from
that ocean. The shape of Islam will
depend on how Muslims utilise
Islam and the Holy Quran.

#### **WALK THE TALK**

In today's climate of continual terror attacks, more often than not, following each attack, many Muslims will join the bandwagon of social media posting with messages to effectuate the point that Muslims are peaceful people and Islam is a peaceful religion. Some would even include hash-tags such as #PrayFor(InsertNameofCityHere). In all fairness, this reflex is a laudable albeit short-lived counter to a potential negative portrayal of Muslims in the media.

Instead, to warrant a lasting response against attribution of violence to Islam and to provide a more concrete evidence that we truly are agents of peace, Muslims must realise that Islam is more than just words and Muslims must do more than idle talk. Muslims need to walk the talk and supplement social media postings or any form of idle talk with real actions that prove we are indeed peace advocates.

For as long as we are bad neighbours, rumour-mongering colleagues, racist friends, inconsiderate public transport commuters, rude customers, no amount of talk can convince anyone about our peace-loving nature. It is paramount for Muslims to realise that we are not doing the above just to impress or to fake a persona for the sake of convincing. The very essence of Islam is being merciful and mercy is manifested through our daily interactions with humans around us, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

#### **EMULATE THE PROPHET (SAW)**

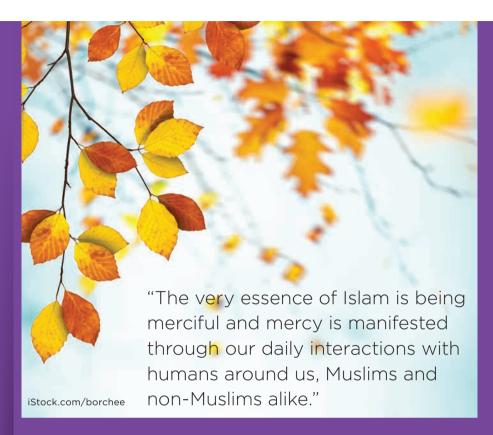
Muslims, like any other humans, look for role models in their lives whom they can emulate. Some take years to look for individuals they can relate to while others take a lifetime to scout for the most suitable role model that is able to holistically shape their worldview. What some Muslims fail to realise is that for us, we need not look across the horizon. Born about 1384 years ago, our Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was sent to this Earth as Rahmatan Lil Alamin - Mercy to All Creations.

The term Rahmatan Lil Alamin - from Surah Al-Anbiva (The Prophets), Chapter 21 Verse 107 - is an endorsement from The Almighty himself to believers that indeed our Prophet is a role model that transgresses all boundaries, ethnicities and time. Some may contend that with time, circumstances change, modes of living evolve, and responses must thus be altered from the Prophet's and his Companions'. Though that can be the case, Muslims must realise that what should be emulated is not solely actions. More essentially, Muslims must learn the worldview, the essence and the values that were subscribed by the Prophet (SAW).

Whether or not we eat, we sleep or we walk like him is just frosting. The focal point of our strive to emulate him include his interactions with humans and even things around him, his perspectives of how humans should behave in a plural world, his humility in viewing himself as a servant of God, among others. That said, the study of his actions (*Syamail*) must be coalesced with the study of his worldview (Tasawwur) and his life journey (Seerah). By observing his actions beyond the movement of limbs, Muslims will value add our lives by responding to circumstances, parallel to his teachings, values and personality.

At the core of our Prophet's being, it is almost hermetic to deny his merciful and loving nature to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In spreading God's message, which was his dominant mission, he weaved his other roles - neighbour, nephew, friend, husband, leader of the *Ummah* - seamlessly. An essay like this will not do justice to the list of love stories revolving around interactions with his neighbours. strangers and even his enemy. From feeding a blind Jewish neighbour daily who resented him and his teachings, to standing in front of a non-Muslim's funeral procession out of respect and solidarity, to retreating to Medina when his journey for pilgrimage was stopped by the Meccans just so that he could avoid war. Muslims who study his endless list of tender-hearted acts will be enthused to uphold cordial relationships with others.

The issue of violent Muslims will not be entirely construed if Muslims start emulating the Prophet (SAW). It is paramount that Muslims learn from credible sources and scholars



who accentuate his loving nature, rather than nitpick practices of the Prophet (SAW) that are aligned with their self or political interests or even their hidden agenda. Should all Muslims emulate our Prophet (SAW) with wisdom, it is no surprise if we hear no more reports of Muslims ironically bombing places in the name of God.

#### **GET CONNECTED**

Upon deeper investigation of the term "Peace", one would realise that it concerns more than one party. One of the definitions of "Peace", as suggested by Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "harmony in personal relations". As such, for Islam to be a peace-promoting contrivance, Muslims cannot be disconnected with the larger community. Of late, research has shown that many individuals involved in terror plots and attacks are those who cannot connect with

the larger community and feel that they are marginalised. In fact, it is due to this fact that the United Kingdom government proposed an absurd yet arguably-needed policy to coerce all Muslim immigrants to learn English or be deported out.

There are many knock-on effects when individuals divorce themselves from the community. Not only will they perceive that their needs are marginalised, they gravitate less to revenue-generating activities such as working or starting a business, culminating in lower income and even more unfulfilled needs. Academicians warn that terror attacks are partially rooted by income inequality and poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Islam does not warrant us to cast ourselves out of the community. Responsible Islamic scholars should teach how Muslims can be devoted

servants and progressive members of the community simultaneously. It is unsettling when some big-gun Islamic personalities consciously or unconsciously depict a division between 'us' and 'them' as though we have to be different from non-Muslims in all aspects of life. While we are unique in our faith practices and beliefs, consistent expressions that speak of division will indoctrinate Muslims that we are different or even against non-Muslims, consequentially resulting in a less than cordial relationship between these two parties.

#### CONCLUSION

It is most, if not all, Muslims' dream that their children and grandchildren need not learn the ways to defend themselves against Islamophobia, that they no longer have to melt their Muslim identities and symbols away to blend into the melting pot. that they do not have to vote in an election against the likes of Donald Trump who plans to relegate all Muslims out of the United States' borders. Muslims who practise bona fide Islam, just like individuals of other faiths, aspire to embrace their identities yet live harmoniously with anyone else in a common space. Like a salad bowl comprising of many different colours, forms and dressings, yet still taste delicious and refreshing.

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# ISLAM - A BRIDGE TO PEACE

#### BY NURULJANNAH HISHAM

Third place winning entry of Al-Mawrid Resource Library Essay Writing Competition 2016

slam is supposedly the religion of peace, commonly touted as a slogan, as a defence against the rising Islamophobia, used as a statement whenever terrorist attacks are immediately equated to Muslims and Islam. The nature of this reiteration, having to remind the world that Islam is really a religion of peace, seems very contradictory. Peacefulness speaks for itself, does it not? Iceland is known as one of the most peaceful countries in the world, but they certainly do not have to say it themselves. Yet countries with the most conflicts happen to be countries with a majority of Muslims - those of the religion of peace.

To Muslims, the Quran and Hadith are evidence enough that Islam is the religion of peace, where Surah Al-Ma'idah [The Table] Chapter 5 Verse 32, says that: "If anyone slew a person—unless it be for murder or spreading mischief in the land—it would be as if he slew the whole people. And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people." And there are countless examples of the Prophet's examples of peacefully calling people to Islam despite being insulted and hurt, never retaliating unless when life is threatened and even during war still showing mercy to the enemies1.

However, there is an enormous amount of evidence on the internet that quotes various proofs about

how Islam is far from being a religion of peace, but instead encourages terror attacks and promotes murder. There are various verses that implicate the Quran as encouraging Muslims to kill their enemies, such as in Surah An-Nisa [Women] Chapter 4 Verse 89, where He commands Muslims to "slay [enemies] wherever you find them!", and even hadeeth where the prophet is involved with, encouraged or allowed the killing of others<sup>2</sup>. This justifies the actions of ISIS and other terrorist attacks as stemming from the teachings of Islam.

It is no wonder that the general public is more than confused by the two versions of Islam that are presented to them. The outrage of the Muslims towards the actions of al-Qaeda and ISIS and claims that they are as far away from Islam as one could be does not discount the fact that these extremist groups do in fact follow instructions from the Quran; albeit using literal translations and using only the words of God that they deem right. This was stressed upon countless times in a lengthy article written by Graeme Wood about ISIS and their ideologies:

"It would be facile, even exculpatory, to call the problem of the Islamic State "a problem with Islam." The religion allows many interpretations, and Islamic State supporters are morally on

the hook for the one they choose. And yet simply denouncing the Islamic State as un-Islamic can be counterproductive, especially if those who hear the message have read the holy texts and seen the endorsement of many of the caliphate's practices written plainly within them."<sup>3</sup>

This is neither supporting the cruel regime of ISIS nor agreeing with their interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and the blazing path they are taking in chasing apocalypse, but understanding the motivations behind the perpetrator is just as important as understanding the victims, and acknowledging this rift is the first step to shape Islam to being a bridge to peace.

It is pointless to engage in keyboard wars, lurking in comments to shoot down the non-Muslims who only comment based on what they see and hear reported by the biased media, and nothing can change the position of the anti-Islamists who scour the Quran just to find incriminating evidence that show how Islam promotes violence. They cannot be faulted for fearing the unknown, and even their efforts to learn are rewarded with wrong sources that demean Islam, further cementing their suspicions.

Sitting idle is not a suggested option either, seeing escalated attacks fuelled by Islamophobia<sup>4</sup>,

"There needs to be more openmindedness rather than rigidity, understanding instead of judgement, and acceptance rather than stubbornly insisting on change that people might not be ready for."

especially in America and the United Kingdom. Rather than engaging and fuelling counterattacks against efforts focused on bringing Muslims down, there should be more material that can be made available to the public about Islam and its teachings, and promoting to make knowledge of Islam more available to both Muslims and non-Muslims, informing them that Islam is in fact a religion of peace, not only for Muslims but for all humans.

Tim Black chooses to describe Islamophobia as nothing more than a fear of the unknown and the immediate reaction to a threat of terrorism, which leads to irrational actions that are instinctive and destructive, and he labelled it as an 'elite fear', promoted by politics and media, which causes social disconnect between those who believe in this idea and those who do not<sup>5</sup>.



It is this chasm then that Islam should bridge, instead of making it worse through the careless comments and angry backlash towards those who have no knowledge of the religion, or worse, little or no interaction with Muslims and only know of them as the bigots promoted by the media. Brandon O'Neill talks about Islamophobiaphobia, which teaches the world that criticism or even opinions against Islam is evil and removing Muslims from the rest of the society by convincing them that the world hates them.

"It's the great irony of the fashionable concern with Islamophobia: it presents itself as a stand against prejudice, yet it's fuelled by prejudices of its own. It is built on a view of ordinary people as irrational, easily switched to violence, itching to burn down a mosque... The Islamophobia industry censors and divides,

making whites feel they can't express moral concerns about Islam and making Muslims feel like an utterly removed group."

This does not mean that insults are welcome or that Muslims should accept it quietly and encourage demeaning things like the articles from Charlie Hebdo. The hate crime against Charlie Hebdo just goes to show how hurtful a manifestation of strong discord in an extreme form can take, which ends up justifying everything reported and pictured by it. This emphasises the importance of educating the masses rather than reprimanding their need to know, then letting them decide which course to take.

This is in line with the very first verse that was sent down to the Prophet (SAW), which places such an emphasis on knowledge, and it seems such a shame that questions are frowned upon in today's



education and the web. Rather than intellectual discussions, where once the Muslim Scholars discussed even the essence of Allah, Muslims today are more comfortable in taking defensive attitudes towards even slight curiosity, effectively shutting down the avenue most reliable in getting knowledge about Islam.

Instead, Muslims seem to take a very aggressive approach, both towards non-Muslims and Muslims alike, where preaches about hellfire and sin seem to be the favoured approach, combined with a holierthan-thou attitude where anything other than Islamic practice is deemed beneath them, like the cross protests in Malaysia, an oxymoron in demonstrating religious intolerance while complaining about the intolerance towards Islam. Even among Muslims, the lack of understanding is saddening, as homosexuals are shamed and shunned, cross-dressers are

immediately rejected by the Muslim society, despite their intentions of wanting to learn about Islam.

Even in the Singaporean context, where racial disparity and Islamophobia may not be as glaring as in the Western countries, there is still a strong need for change in the attitude especially in dealing with sensitive issues, and a shift in the ways used to spread Islamic teaching that are used on the youths today, who are more exposed to the various material on the internet, as compared to the previous indoctrination of Islam which encourages the ask-not attitude among the generations before us.

There needs to be more openmindedness rather than rigidity, understanding instead of judgement, and acceptance rather than stubbornly insisting on change that people might not be ready for. Allah states in Verse 256 of Chapter 2, AlBaqarah [The Heifer] that, "There is no compulsion where religion is concerned." Freedom of thought and belief are the very heart of Quranic moral values, and this is the attitude that needs to be adopted, where open discourse about Islam should be embraced, only then will we be able to address the concerns faced by the general masses.

Just saying that Islam is a religion of peace is slowly but surely making it a tired cliché, especially if there is nothing in the behaviour of Muslims that even begin to reflect this. Adopting the correct attitude is the foundation that needs to be laid when attempting to use Islam as a bridge to peace, and education and knowledge play a big role in decreasing the chasm that divides Muslims from the rest of the society.

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#### spotlight



hile many youths out there spend their time with their counterparts by hanging out together like catching movies, ice skating, window shopping and focusing just on their studies, there are a handful of them who choose to dedicate their time and energy doing the "adult thing", i.e. immersing themselves into the world of business. We spoke to two young ladies who have dedicated their lives and youths to running their family businesses, upholding their family's pride and image high whilst involving in their own personal interests.

Both M (who doesn't wish to reveal her real name), of An Nisaa Muslimah Hairdressing Salon, and Juyda Noor Mohamad, of Noor Mohamad Services & Travel, are graduates, have a full-time job, and at the same time are involved in the daily operations of their respective family businesses.

Currently Juyda is the Head-of-Department (HOD) of English and Malay at Madrasah Al-Ma'arif Al-Islamiah, while M is in the design industry.

An Nisaa Muslimah Hairdressing Salon is one of the leading and pioneer beauty salons that caters to the Muslimah market. Strategically located next to the Sultan Mosque, it has been around for 12 years. Founded by M's mother, the salon is also co-run by M herself, who is the eldest in the family. M is in-charge of the accounting, logistics, administrative tasks, marketing and managing the salon's social media platform.

"Growing up, I spent a lot of my time at the salon rather than going out with my friends. My life revolved around school and the salon," recalls M.

# spotlight



She says it is important to have the right people as friends. "Only a few of my close friends know that I help out in the family business. They are very supportive of me and I make sure I surround myself with positive and encouraging friends."

She enjoys and treasures the moments spent with her customers at the salon. What she loves most about the business is being able to have "customers bonding and supporting each other about their challenges".

M juggles her time between the salon and her work by carefully organising her schedule. She says, "at the end of each work day, I write down everything that I must accomplish tomorrow."

Taking Chef Niki Nakayama, her grandmother and the customers

as her inspirations, M says that running a family business has never been easy. It involves "emotions, role confusion, paternalism and compensation problems," she confides. She also laments about how different her business visions are as compared to her mother's. Believing that her mother is "overly conservative" and "resistant to ideas and changes", she vows to make adjustments. Five years' down the road, she dreams of taking An Nisaa to a greater height. Aiming to make a business revolution, she says, "The business will further break walls and stereotypes of Muslim women by reaching out to more non-Muslim ladies."

On the other hand, Juyda does not have any concrete plans for her travelling business that she helps to run. She says, "We don't have a five year plan. That's too long. We leave it up to Allah. He is the best planner."

Noor Mohamad Services & Travel was founded in 1998 by Noor Mohamad bin Abdul Rahman and Julia binte Abdul Samad - the parents of Juyda. Specialising in Hajj and Umrah packages, the travel company has seen a growing trend of travellers, from the younger age group, travelling with them for the past five years.

When asked what the perks are of running a family business, Juyda replies, "I feel ecstatic and syukur (glad) when I see our jemaahs' (pilgrims') happy faces the minute their Hajj or Umrah visas get approved, thus enabling them to proceed with their ibadah (ritual)."

Life isn't a bed of roses as Juyda admits that she does feel the

# spotlight



pressure from her parents as they have high expectations of her. "My parents are in this business for a long time. Therefore, there's the rapport between my company and the clients that I must take care of. There's the image of the company that I must not tarnish. However, I'm an academician. I love teaching. I'm not the business type of person who's into costing and profits but Alhamdulillah, since our nature of business is about doing Hajj and Umrah, at least that helps me a bit, knowing that I am doing a good thing. I'm helping others to do their ibadah."

This busy lady has a jam-packed schedule. She is at school Monday to Friday from seven-thirty in the morning until five in the afternoon. She heads to her office in the East side of Singapore after Maghrib every weekday and stays there till late. Juyda takes care of the operational side of the company. Each time when she's not committed to any school activities, especially during the school holidays, she leads a group of *jemaah* for Hajj or Umrah.

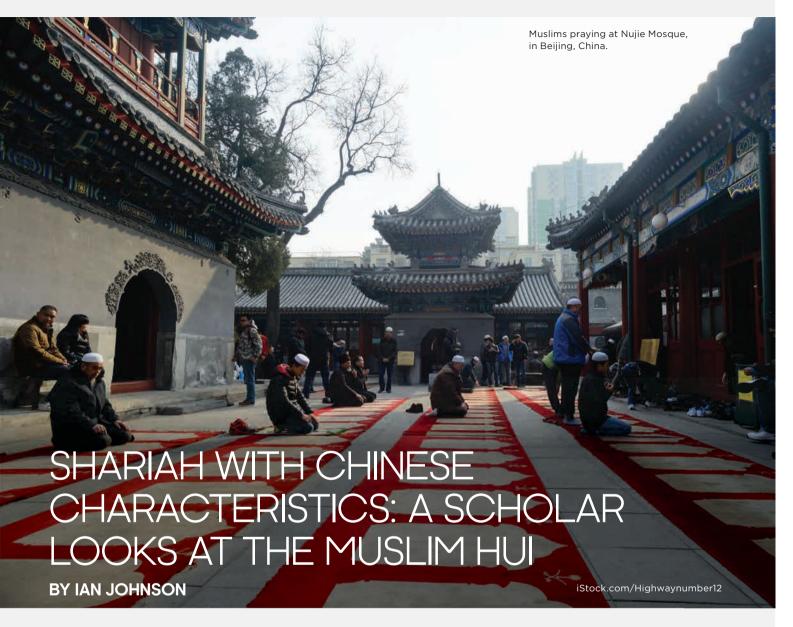
Apart from taking charge of the English and Malay departments at her school, she is also involved in the weekly school debates, programmes and futsal trainings. "Time management, knowing your priorities and being *ikhlas* (sincere) are very important," she answers

when asked how she manages to do all those at one go.

To unwind, she meets up with her good buddies who have been her friends since Primary 1 once in awhile – "just to vent out our frustrations together".

Despite having different goals in life, Juyda does not take that as a reason to go against her parents. On the contrary, she tries very hard to be a filial daughter. Taking her mother as an inspiration and role model, this one and only child believes that it is a duty to make one's parents happy. "Only when your parents are happy, will you be happy," Juyda says confidently. TMR





atthew S. Erie, a trained lawyer and ethnographer who teaches at Oxford University, lived for two years in Linxia, a small city in the northwestern Chinese province of Gansu. Known as China's Mecca, it is a centre of religious life for the Hui, an ethnic minority numbering 10 million who practise Islam. Along with the Turkic Uighurs, they are one of 10 officially recognised ethnic groups that practise Islam, making the total population of

Muslims in China around 23 million, according to the 2010 government census.

Erie's recently published book, "China and Islam: The Prophet, the Party, and Law," is a look at how Shariah — Islamic law and ethics — is implemented among the Hui. In an interview he discussed his findings, which confound many preconceptions about Shariah, Chinese law and the rigidity of the communist state.

Q: How should we understand the statistics on Muslims in China? Officially there are 23 million, but this assumes that Islam is an ethnicity, and that all Hui, or all Uighurs, must be Muslim.

A: It's a problematic issue because it's an ethnic category that is used to define members of a religion. Hence, it can be both over-inclusive and under-inclusive. For the former, Muslims outside China may not consider every Hui to be a Muslim. Many Hui are very pious. They



The Muslim market in Xian, Shaanxi Province.

attend mosque regularly and go to the Hajj. And then there are people who say they're Hui, meaning they just don't eat pork. For the latter, it's possible that some Chinese citizens who are ethnically Han [the dominant ethnic group in China] or Tibetan are, in fact, Muslims. It's a very loose category.

#### Q: How about Converts to Islam? Can one change one's legal ethnicity?

A: There are Converts, for sure. The motivations are interesting. I met a Han labourer who worked on the railway. He had injured his arm and did not receive benefits. He became disaffected and found solace in Islam. He was also looking for a wife. Poor Han

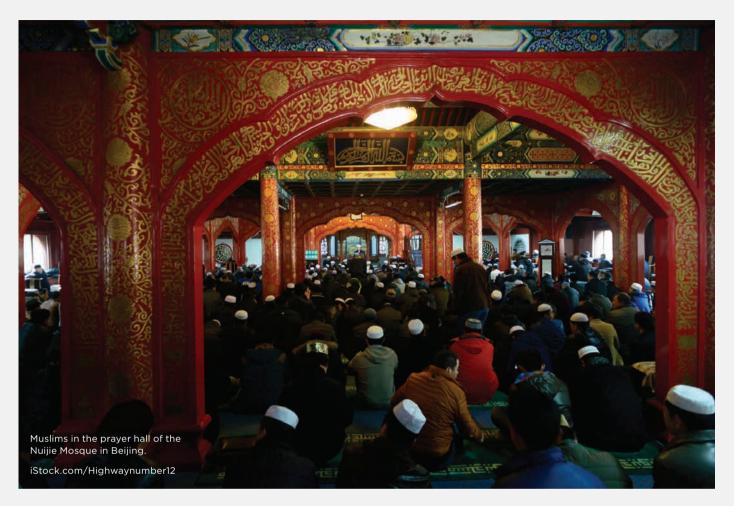
men sometimes convert if they're looking for a wife, because there are Hui networks that will help out. Hui will help you convert and marry. But changing one's ethnic identity, officially, is very difficult. It can happen, but it's hard.

#### Q: One sees in China a huge spiritual hunger and need for traditional values, which some find in religion. Is Islam part of this religious revival?

A: Absolutely. The vacuum created by the end of Maoism has led to a commercialisation of Chinese society that is in its own way spiritually void. There's no question that people are searching for meaning. What's really important is that some people are doing it through Islam. These are people who were born Hui but not part of that spiritual tradition, and who are returning to it. They find a group of fellow believers and discover strength in that community. Many of these people travel to places like Linxia and study Islam for the first time in their lives.

#### Q: You report that China had 20,000 mosques in 1994 and 34,000 in 2010. That seems like solid evidence for a growth in the religion.

A: The region from Lanzhou to Linxia is often called the Quran belt. When you're on the highway, it's impossible to go a minute without seeing a new mosque under construction. What's



driving this is an accumulation of wealth, and people are willing to allocate some of it, because they see mosques as a centre of their community. It's not just where people pray or study but also where they socialise and share news and gossip.

#### Q: Is this government-financed?

A: Almost none of it. Almost all comes from donations. Donors are businesspeople using the money they've saved to benefit their communities.

#### Q: What about overseas donations? In the West, many big mosques are financed by the Saudis or Gulf states.

A: That rarely happens in China.

The government keeps tight control over this. They don't want to have these sorts of ties overseas.

# Q: Is there any international dimension to Islam's revival?

A: The revival has two aspects.

One is almost always personal: a marriage that didn't work out, or interfamilial strife. And then they learn about larger phenomena through translated texts, social media or on-the-ground missionary activity. Saudi Arabia is a natural pole star. Egypt has major pull given its academic institutions and religious scholars. Missionary work increasingly comes from the Dawah movement. These activists are primarily from South Asia. The idea is that Muslims should return to

the pious behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad [SAW]. This can mean a variety of things, from daily prayer to rejecting chopsticks in favour of eating with one's hands. These people interact with the Hui trying to find themselves. That's where the rekindling occurs.

#### Q: Some of this seems to parallel Christianity's rise in China. It also benefits from overseas missionary ties.

A: True, but Islam is different in that you have this global discourse on terrorism, which is oppressive and limits the capacity of Muslims inside China to interact with Muslims outside of China. Islam is so politicised that it's quite different.



Q: Does that hamper Islam's ability to function as a force for soft power? China makes much of the fact that it is the world's biggest Buddhist nation. Couldn't it also win friends in Central Asia or the Middle East by pointing to its vibrant Muslim population?

A: There's no doubt that the state looks at Islam in a different way than it does Taoism or Buddhism. It makes it hard for them to participate in even a nationalistic revival — even slogans of Xi Jinping, such as the Yidai Yilu [the One Belt, One Road initiative to link China to Central Asia and South Asia through overland and sea routes]. I was in China this summer and everyone was talking about it, but the question is if Muslims can

participate in this. That would be good for the state, but the anxieties are great, too.

# Q: Your book has rich descriptions of Linxia, a dry, remote city with so much religious life.

A: It's the base of Islam in the northwest. Muslims have built mosques and prayed there since at least the 14th century. Some say certain Muslim tombs there date to the Tang dynasty. That's hard to prove, but it shows how important it is. It's a place where Islam took hold.

Q: Your book challenges the idea that the Hui are the "good" Muslims, while the Uighurs are the "bad" ones, engaged in terrorism.

A: The Hui have had numerous uprisings, most notably during the second half of the 19th century from Yunnan to Gansu and beyond. Not all of these were necessarily against the state. There were a number of local conflicts that often snowballed. They are not submissive lackeys of the state.

Q: You show this through the fascinating paradigm of Shariah. In the West, people often think of Shariah as a rigid Muslim legal system from the Middle Ages, with stoning and amputations. Here we see it as something alive and very flexible. What does it encompass?

A: The parameters are wide, from dietary considerations to interpersonal relations. Some of it









is deciding what halal food is. But it's also what we would call torts in the US — when someone driving a vehicle strikes a pedestrian. A lot of time the authorities will ask the mosques to aid in evidencegathering. We have a localised sense of Hui morality, that may be inflected with Shariah and that might affect the outcomes — the amount of the settlement, for example. The ahongs [Hui term for cleric] will help determine an amount.

# Q: But this consultation has its limits.

A: Definitely. It's not used in criminal law, where the state has the monopoly on using its own legitimated force. But in social

relations, the Hui are part of this local dynamic — the clerical authority and the authority of the local state.

# Q: This is a more pragmatic exercise of power than many might expect.

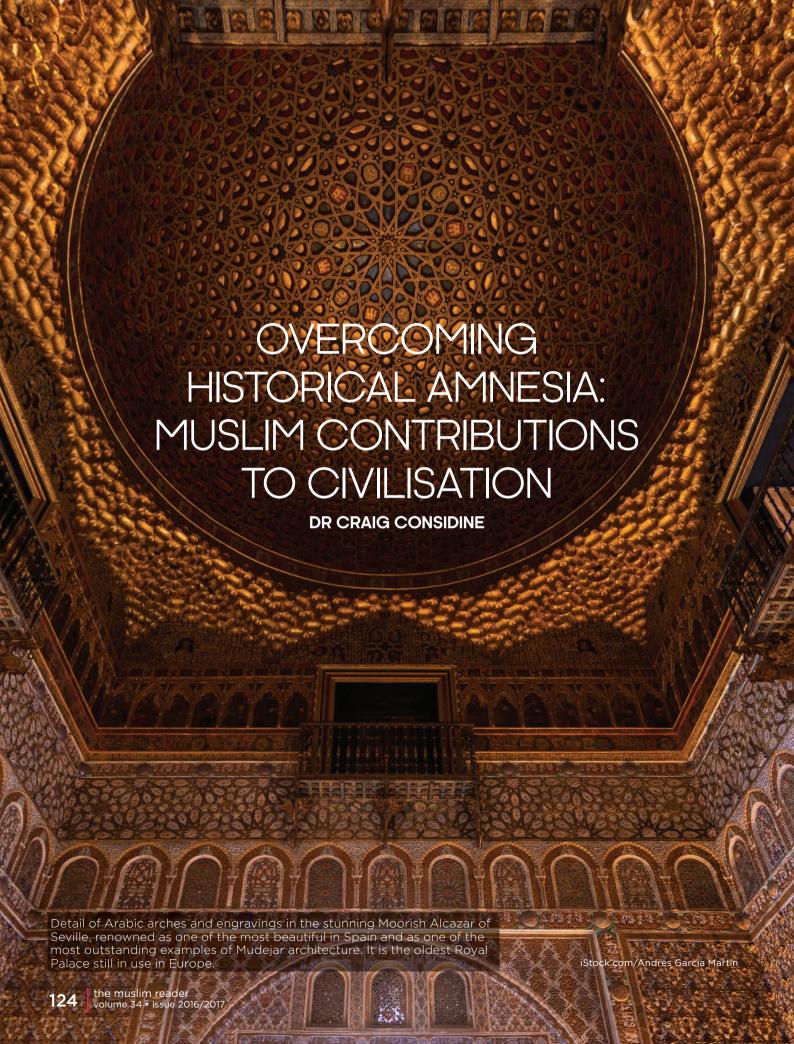
A: The state realises it needs the local clerics. If the state were to consciously exclude the local religious authorities, it would lose legitimacy in the eyes of the believers.

#### Q: Are Hui satisfied?

A: There is a spectrum of opinions. They push for more autonomy and decision-making ability but are not always allowed to. In this, I think their struggles parallel those of

Muslim minorities elsewhere — in France, Germany or the US — but in China they do not have recourse to formal law, political institutions or even civil society. Rather, they rely on their ties to the government and increasingly transnational networks to protect their personal and collective interests.

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n his recent article, Sam Harris, a popular critic of Islam, referred to Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani education activist, as "the best thing to come out of the Muslim world in 1,000 years." Hidden in this comment is the idea that Malala's fellow Muslims are backward and that her religion, Islam, is not conducive to change or progress.

Conversely to the beliefs of Harris and others like him, Muslims have actually made enormous contributions to civilisation. perhaps due to the heavy emphasis that Islam places on knowledge. People who forget or blatantly ignore major trends or events in world history can be said to suffer from "historical amnesia." Though this mindset cannot be cured in one short article, I hope to dispel some of the stereotypes and misperceptions exacerbated by Harris and other anti-Islam activists by highlighting the contributions that Muslims have made to civilisation over the years.

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION**

Malala's quest for universal education follows in Muslims' long and proud history in the field of education. Two Muslim women. Fatima and Miriam al-Firhi, created the world's first university, Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, in 859 CE. For several years, students were schooled here in a plethora of secular and religious subjects. At the end of their education, teachers evaluated students and awarded degrees based on satisfactory performances. The concept of awarding degrees would spread from Fez to Andalucía, Spain, and later to the Universities of Bologna

in Italy and Oxford in England, among other places of learning.

Spanish Muslims of Andalucía were especially strong advocates of education and helped to dispel the gloom that had enveloped Europe during the Dark Ages. Between the 8th and 15th centuries, Andalucía was perhaps the world's epicentre for education and knowledge. Spanish universities such as those in Cordoba, Granada, and Seville, had Christian and Jewish students who learned science from Muslims. Women were also encouraged to study in Muslim Spain. This educational environment that stressed tolerance would not reach the "Western world" until the 19th and 20th centuries.

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILOSOPHY**

One of the greatest Muslim contributions to civilisation began in the 8th century when Muslim scholars inherited volumes of Greek philosophy. The wisdom in ancient Greece texts, which had been lost to Europeans, was translated from Latin to Arabic by Muslim scholars, thus creating one of the greatest transmissions of knowledge in world history. Muslims scholars would eventually bring the ideas of great ancient Greek minds such as Socrates, Aristotle and Plato into Europe, where their philosophy was translated into other European languages. This is why Muslims are the main threshold behind the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment, two movements that resurrected Greek philosophy and gave new life into a European continent that was bogged down with religious dogma and bloody internal conflicts.

Many Muslim scholars made acquiring knowledge their life goal. Perhaps the most notable of these scholars is Al-Ghazali, a Sufi Muslim who in the 11th and 12th centuries revolutionised early Islamic philosophy by helping develop Neoplatonism, which is often described as the "mystical" or "religious" interpretation of Greek philosophy. At the time of Al-Ghazali's writing, Muslim philosophers had read about the ideas of ancient Greece, but these ideas were generally perceived to be in conflict with Islamic teachings. Al-Ghazali helped synthesise these elements by adopting the techniques of Aristotelian logic and the Neoplatonic ways to diminish the negative influences of excessive Islamic rationalism.

Ibn Khaldun is another one of the most important Muslim thinkers in history. Recognised as one of the greatest historians ever and the founder of sociological sciences in the 14th and 15th centuries. Khaldun created one of the earliest nonreligious philosophies in history in his work, the Mugaddimah. He also paved the way for our expectations of modern-day Presidents and Prime Ministers by creating a framework for evaluating "good rulers," stating "the sovereign exists for the good of the people... The necessity of a Ruler arises from the fact that human beings have to live together and unless there is someone to maintain order, society would break to pieces."

# CONTRIBUTIONS TO HEALTH CARE

Medicine is another crucial contribution to civilisation made by





Muslims in addition to education and the university system. In 872 CE in Cairo, Egypt, the Ahmad ibn Tulun hospital was created and equipped with an elaborate institution and a range of functions. Like other Islamic hospitals that soon followed, Tulun was a secular institution open to men and women, adults and children, the rich and poor, as well as Muslims and non-Muslims. Tulun is also the earliest hospital to give care to the mentally ill.

One hundred years after the founding of Tulun, a surgeon named Al-Zahrawi, often called the "father of surgery," wrote an illustrated encyclopaedia that would ultimately be used as a guide to European surgeons for the next

five hundred years. Al- Zahrawi's surgical instruments, such as scalpels, bone saws, and forceps are still used by modern surgeons. Al-Zahrawi is also reportedly the first surgeon to perform a caesarean operation.

Another significant Muslim discovery came in the 13th century, when the Muslim medic Ibn Nafis described the pulmonary circulation almost three hundred years before William Harvey, the English physician who is believed by many Westerners to have "discovered" it. The technique of inoculation, or the introduction of an antigenic substance or vaccine into the body to induce immunity to a disease, is also said to have been designed by Muslims in

Turkey and brought to Europe by the wife of England's Turkish ambassador in 1724.

Protecting and cleansing the body has always been a priority for Muslims. Perhaps then it is no surprise that Muslim scientists combined vegetable oils with sodium hydroxide and aromatics such as thyme oil to create a recipe for soap, which is still used today. Shampoo was also introduced to England on the Brighton seafront in 1759 at Mahomed's Indian Vapour Baths.

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE**

There is also little doubt that the development of astronomy owes a great deal to the work of Muslim



astronomers. As far back as the early 9th century, the Caliph Al-Ma'mum founded an astronomical observatory in Shammasiya in Baghdad and Qasiyun in Damascus. Five hundred years later, in 1420, Prince Ulugh Bey built a massive observatory in Samarqand, which was then followed in 1577 by another observatory built by Sultan Murad III in Istanbul.

The Ottomans had particularly wellorganised astronomical institutions such as the post of chief-astronomer and time-keeping houses. Taqi al-Din, a 16th century Ottoman astronomer, created astronomical tables and observational instruments that helped measure the coordinates of stars and the distances between them.

Muslims have also made contributions in the field of chemistry by inventing many of the basic processes and apparatuses used by modernday chemists. Working in the 8th and 9th centuries in Andalucía, Jabir Ibn Hayyan, the founder of modern chemistry, transformed alchemy into chemistry through distillation, or separating liquids through differences in their boiling points. In addition to developing the processes of crystallisation, evaporation, and filtration, he also discovered sulphuric and nitric acid. The historian Erick John Holmyard stated that Hayyan's work is as important, if not more, than that of Robert Boyle and Antoine Lavoisier, two European chemists who are frequently attributed to creating modern chemistry.

Indeed our very modern and globalised world today would not be able to move so quickly if it were not for the genius of Ibn Firnas, a Muslim engineer of Andalucía who in the 9th century constructed a flying machine, thus becoming the

world's first aviator. In 852 CE he jumped from the minaret of the Grand Mosque in Cordoba, Spain, using a loose cloak stiffened with wooden struts. Although he hoped to glide like an eagle, Ibn Firnas did not, though he is credited for creating the first parachute.

Muslims have also influenced the study of physics, a closely linked field to flying and aviation. Mohammad Abdus Salam, a Pakistani theoretical physicist, shared a 1979 Nobel Prize for his contribution to the field of theoretical physics, specifically in unifying electromagnetic and weak forces.

I have only scratched the surface of the contributions made by Muslims to the development of civilisation. Children around the world should be taught about these contributions to dispel the misperception that Muslims are backward and stagnant. Muslims worldwide must also invest more in education, medicine, and other sciences in order to continue their tradition of being pioneers for knowledge. TMR

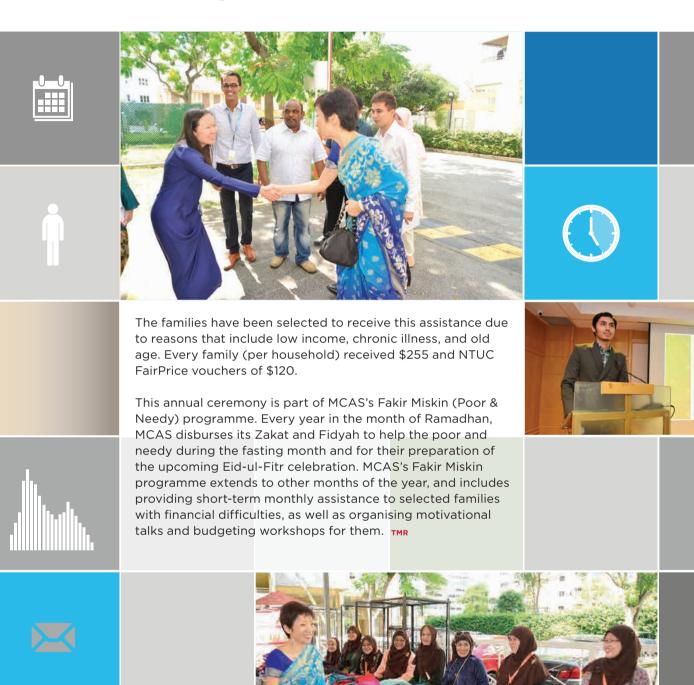
The author is a Catholic American of Irish and Italian descent, who studied in Washington DC, London, and Dublin. Currently teaching in the Department of Sociology at Rice University (Texas, US), Dr Considine has published several books and often speaks to a wide audience, focusing on religious pluralism, Muslims in America, Islamophobia, Christian-Muslim relations, the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), race and ethnic relations, and the intersection between religion and nationalism. Follow him at https://twitter.com/CraigCons.

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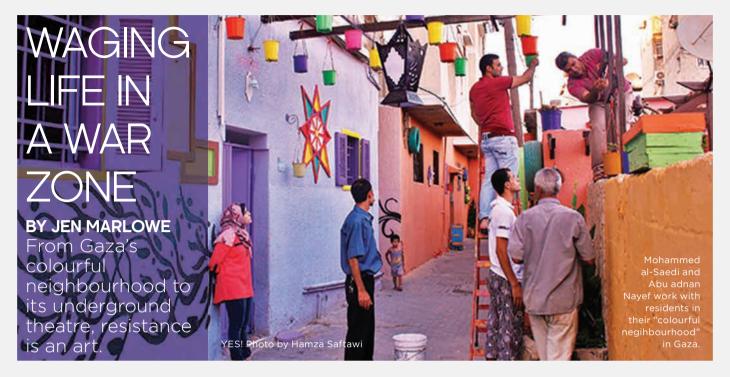
All Are Welcome!!











ohammed al-Saedi leads me through the densely populated Gaza City neighbourhood of al-Zaitoun. Walls are painted in blues and pinks, with wooden shutters of purple and yellow. Plants are potted in colourful buckets at each corner.

"Colour and flowers give the human positive energy, relax him, and provide much-needed comfort to the soul, heart, and mind," says al-Saedi, a slender man of 57, wearing a paint-splattered shirt.

"Our idea became bigger: to make all Gaza Strip as beautiful as possible."

The initial idea had been small in scope: to beautify his home with flowers and paint. But neighbours took notice and encouraged al-Saedi to spread the beauty. Some donated funds, others labour or ideas. Abu Adnan Nayef was experienced with

wood and iron and offered to partner with al-Saedi. "Our idea became bigger: to make all Gaza Strip as beautiful as possible."

Nayef points to an overhead lattice with colourful bucket planters and lanterns dangling from hooks. "These are broomsticks. Don't be surprised! We make beautiful things with simple materials." Tires, wood, iron—all are salvaged and recycled to adorn al-Zaitoun.

"Paintings and flowers are psychological treatments to reduce the severity and pain of poverty. It brings self-reliance," al-Saedi says. They believe the beautification project helps lessen the pain in Gaza from wars, siege, and destruction, especially for children.

Throughout Gaza Strip, painters, photographers, theatre artists, musicians, and filmmakers are using their art not just as a form of therapy, but also as a tool of resistance.

"What we did in the street is a strong reply to the occupation," al-Saedi explains, referring to Israel's 48-year military occupation of the Palestinian territories. "The occupation insists on killing the Palestinian people and destroying us psychologically, culturally, and scientifically, in addition to destroying our civilisation, history, and future. But the occupation will figure out that the Palestinian people can make life from death." He points to war debris that had been converted into planters. "We say to Israel: Destroy as much as you're able, and we'll build and plant [again]."

Nayef receives Facebook messages from people all over Gaza Strip who want to start similar projects, but lack of resources limits expansion. Tamer Institute for Community Education, a local non-profit established during the first Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation, and Kinder USA, founded by American physicians



and humanitarian relief workers, have provided some much-appreciated support, but much of the funding has come from the pair's pockets. "We have many talented people," al-Saedi says. "[With enough resources,] you'd see something new daily."

A large tank shell lies overturned next to a community garden that they planted. The shell is a remnant of last summer's war on Gaza, in which 2,205 Palestinians and 71 Israelis were killed. Nayef lifts the missile upright and places a pink rose on its nose. "I'm going to make something beautiful from it," he says.

Tamara and Sarah Abu Ramanda, 20- and 23-year-old sisters from Gaza City, are also committed to making something beautiful: music.

Tamara began playing violin two years ago, primarily teaching herself with YouTube videos, and Sarah is a singer. "The violin is small but makes a large sound," Tamara says in her soft yet confident voice. She relates to the instrument. "Even if you're small, you can create a lot of music. You can make others really hear you." It's not easy for young people trapped in Gaza to be heard outside, Tamara explains. "I can talk through my violin. I can tell the world that we exist."

Music provides the sisters an escape from the pain of war, the injustice of occupation, and the isolation from living under the siege

imposed by Israel when in 2007 the Islamic party Hamas wrested control of the coastal enclave. It's also how they fight back.

"The main purpose of any entity who wages wars on a weaker country is to break the will of the people," Tamara says. She practised violin during the 2014 war despite criticism from friends who thought it inappropriate to play music while people were being killed. "I have to continue to [play violin] to show the world that the occupation can't destroy our will and determination," Tamara insists. "It's a kind of resistance not to give up. We don't want to submit to the occupation."

Israel wants Palestinians to be regarded as primitive and backward, Tamara says. Through music, she feels she challenges those stereotypes. And traditional music is a vehicle to claim Palestinian heritage in the face of an occupying power that expropriates Palestinian land, resources, and also culture. "It's a way to say we've existed for a long time, and our culture will continue to exist," Tamara explains.

The sisters are also resisting internal oppression through their music. "Because both the occupation and [the Hamas] government," Sarah begins, "oppress talents," Tamara finishes.

Sarah recalls months of rehearsal in 2013 for a project called Gaza Singing for Peace. The morning of the concert, the Ministry of Interior in Gaza informed the group that they couldn't perform "because boys and girls in the group were singing together in front of people,"

Sarah says. After placing calls to various high-level officials, the young musicians eventually obtained government permission and performed in front of an enthusiastic audience. But the incident served as a reminder that culture in Gaza is controlled by Hamas.

Theatre artist Ali Abu Yassin and filmmaker Khalil al-Muzain are well aware of Hamas' control of cultural expression. There can be no overt sexuality in their scripts or screenplays. Women's costumes must adhere to conservative Islamic values. In one film, al-Muzain didn't follow these norms. "The day of the screening, [government officials] took all the material, the machines, and closed the venue," he says.

Friends warned Abu Yassin against producing his play "The Cage" because it was critical of the political leadership. He produced it regardless and escaped consequences, but believes it was because he is well-known. "If someone else produced this, I think that Hamas would arrest him," he says.

Mustafa Sawaf, Hamas' acting minister of culture in Gaza, admits that artistic work might be censored if it doesn't "match the culture of the society" but claims that political criticism is welcome. "Any government has to accept criticism," Sawaf says. "We are human, we make mistakes, and the aim of art is to deliver a message about societal improvement and evaluation."

Abu Yassin also used to criticise the former ruling party, Fatah. The difference between criticising Fatah then and criticising Hamas now? "Now I feel afraid," Abu Yassin says.

"The aim of art is to deliver a message about societal improvement and evaluation."

Censorship of Palestinian culture is not new. According to Palestinian theatre historian Samer al-Saber, the Israelis practised it (and in some ways still do). In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Israeli military governor (or his appointed committee) censored plays either because the content invoked Palestinian nationalism or because "performances constituted public gatherings, which were often banned without regard to content," al-Saber says.

On matters of principle—freedom of women, political pluralism, human rights—al-Muzain doesn't compromise. But he avoids triggering Hamas' censorship by expressing his ideas diplomatically. It's either that or clashing with the Hamas authorities, staying silent, or emigrating—options he's eliminated. "I know my society; I want to develop it," he says. "France doesn't need me, America doesn't need me. But Gaza needs me."

"In 1970, Gaza had 12 cinemas," Abu Yassin says. Today there are none. Gazan society has become increasingly conservative over the years, a trend that has intensified since the Islamic Hamas movement came into power, Abu Yassin says.

The absence of liberal culture left a void, he says, in which intolerant, inflexible viewpoints have flourished. Abu Yassin believes his art will ultimately lead to more freedom, cultural awareness, self-respect, tolerance, and knowledge about how to defend one's rights, but it's a long, uphill struggle. "I don't think that we can have a country, a [Palestinian] state without theatre and cinema," he says.

According to Sarah, one of the musical sisters, young women in Gaza rarely sing, especially in public. "[Many people believe] it's forbidden for a girl to sing, for people to see her. So this is what silences us, but I refuse this. When I sing, I feel freedom."

The number of female actors has also decreased. One of Abu Yassin's apprentices, a vivacious 19-year-old named Yasmeen Katba, joined his Ashtar theatre troupe at age 11, but in 12th grade, her father forbade her to continue. "[People in Gaza think] what we do [in theatre] is impolite," Katba says. Community members often assume that acting is akin to belly dancing or that their plays include love scenes, "but that's wrong," she continues. "And when they come to see our plays, they change their minds." Eventually, Katba found the confidence to confront her father. "I told him I'm old enough and I know what I'm doing. He accepts—I can't say 100 percent-but he's accepting it because he knows it's part of my life."

Katba and Ehab Elyan (another student of Abu Yassin) both believe that theatre can tackle the internal social problems facing Gaza's economy, education system, youth, and women, as well as powerfully communicate Palestinian suffering and humanity to the world.



"Theatre doesn't fix problems," Elyan says. "We only highlight them." Though Elyan would love to act in comedies or romances, he says, "We are a nation under occupation ... this is the issue we must talk about, not love."

According to Abu Yassin, people appreciate theatre if their issues are portrayed and actors "express things ordinary people cannot say." The reality that Abu Yassin's art reflects is often defined by war, blockade, and crushing poverty. But his plays also provide temporary relief from those hardships. "When I see someone laughing because of my words, I feel that I own the world," he says.

"More than anyone else, artists must have hope and must create hope for the people."

Al-Muzain wants audiences to leave his films affirming humanity and wants his art to support Palestinian unity. Isolating Gaza from the rest of Palestine, as if it were an independent kingdom, only serves the agendas of both Hamas and Israel, he insists. But the enforced separation between Gaza and the West Bank makes it difficult for al-Muzain to create relationships with other Palestinian artists, and the nearly sealed borders with both Egypt and Israel make it almost impossible for him to travel with his films to international festivals.

Though Skype has opened to Abu Yassin some level of communication with fellow artists, and YouTube has allowed him to view artistic work from around the world, he's rarely able to bring his productions to the outside world. "Our work is kept locked here," he says. "Our dreams are killed."

The siege means a lack of construction materials for sets and props, and there is a dearth of trained actors, especially women. Gaza's chronic electricity shortage brings an ever-present hum of generators—making it challenging to record clean audio. Damaged film or a broken stage bulb might take weeks to replace. During the 2014 war, al-Muzain happened to bring home his external drives with all his footage, which he kept in an office in the Basha Tower. The Basha Tower was bombed that night; the director's lifework

narrowly missed being buried under rubble. "The best movie to make in Gaza is about making a movie in Gaza," al-Muzain jokes.

He recently produced an outdoor human rights "red carpet" film festival in the war-devastated neighbourhood of Shejaiya. Rubble from destroyed houses provided a backdrop for the projection, and a resident whose family had been wiped out in the assault cut the ribbon. Those honoured by walking down the red carpet? Children who had endured profound trauma. Al-Muzain says the audience was brought to tears. "The stars were the people of Shejaiya."

Al-Muzain's love for his people is matched by his apprehension about their future. "I'm afraid for Gaza," the filmmaker says. "I don't know where we, as a society, are going."

Abu Yassin shares Al-Muzain's trepidation, yet refuses to surrender hope. "More than anyone else, artists must have hope and must create hope for the people," he says. "[My art] is community resistance and political resistance—resistance by insisting on life." TMR

Jen Marlowe wrote this article for 'How to Create a Culture of Good Health', the Winter 2016 issue of YES! Magazine. Jen is the communications associate for Just Vision and the founder of donkeysaddle projects. Her award-winning books and films include Witness Bahrain, I Am Troy Davis, The Hour of Sunlight, One Family in Gaza, and Darfur Diaries. You can follow her on Twitter @donkeysaddleorg.

Fadi Abu Shammala contributed reporting for this article.

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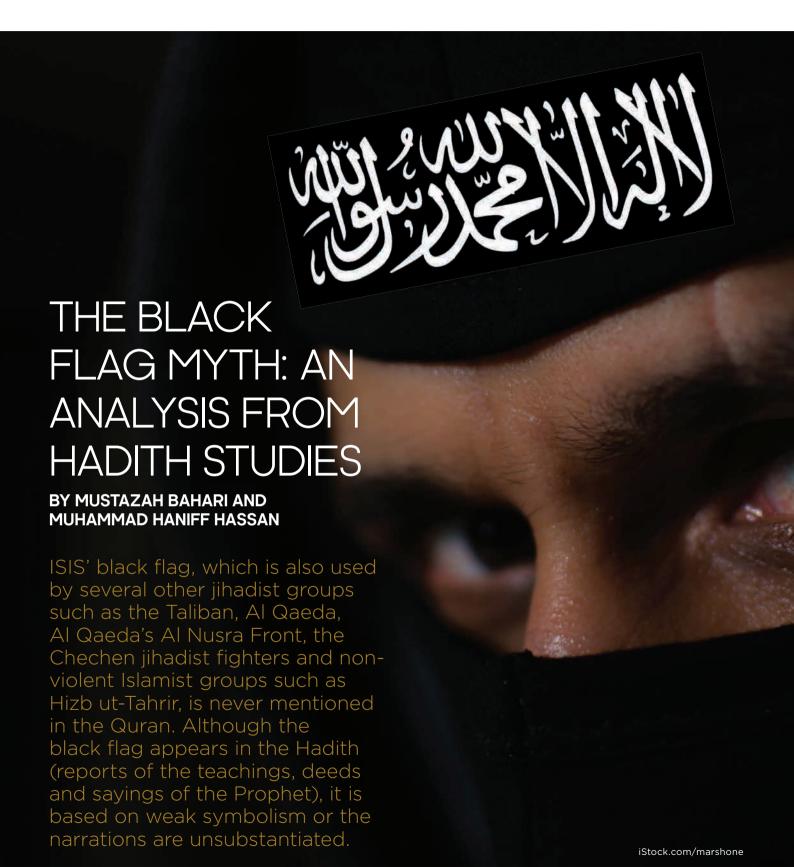
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# **EXCLUDED FROM** HIS MERCY ARE THE wrongdoers Who is greater in doing wrong than he who fabricates falsehood in attribution to God? Such will be brought before their Lord, and the witnesses will say, 'Those are they who lied in attribution to God. Surely it is the due of the wrongdoers that God has excluded them from His mercy.' The ones who bar people from God's way and seek to make it crooked (wishing they could distort it); and they, they are those who persistently disbelieve in the Hereafter. Hud, 11:18-19 From the translation of the Quran the muslim reader



#### Group Black Flag **Taliban** - armed movement that KINSKE was founded in 1996 by Mullah Omar and ruled Afghanistan Translated text from flag: until the US invasion in 2001. 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger' Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) movement originally founded in Iraq by Abu Mus`ab Al-Zarqawi in 2004 to wage an armed Translated text from flag: 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is resistance against the coalition forces led by the United States. Allah's Messenger' Jabhah Al Nusrah (Al Nusra Front) - Al Qaeda's official affiliate in Syria, fighting Translated text from flag: 'There is against the Assad Government; no God but Allah and Muhammad Jabhah Al Nusrah declared its is Allah's Messenger'; 'Jabhah Al formation in January 2012. Nusrah' Al Qaeda - global jihadist group founded by Osama bin Laden in 1996. Translated text from flag: 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger' **Hizb ut-Tahrir** – non-violent global Islamist movement founded by Shaykh Tagiuddin Al-Nabhani in Jerusalem in Translated text from flag: 'There is 1953. no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger'; 'Party of Liberation' Chechen jihadist fighters who began fighting in the North Caucasus in 1999. Translated text from flag: 'Jihad in the way of Allah'; 'Allah is the Greatest

Lately, images of black flags have become a prominent feature in the media. It is proudly displayed by militants of the Islamic State (IS), formerly known as the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)/ Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), during their victory parades and are flown across vast Sunni territories in Iraq that have fallen into their hands.

In fact, the black flag is not exclusively used by the IS. It is used for its symbolic value by a number of radical and militant groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Jabhah Al Nusrah/ Al Nusra Front (a branch of Al Qaeda) in Syria, Al Qaeda central in Afghanistan/ Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Chechen jihadist fighters and the Hizb ut-Tahrir ('Party of Liberation', an unarmed international Islamic political movement headquartered in Lebanon), as depicted in the previous table.

By and large, the general public is not aware of the symbolic meaning behind the said flag. More perceptive individuals would speculate that the flag's black colour may not be a coincidence, and that it may hold some significance that they are left only to ponder upon. Thus, this article is written to provide a brief explanation of the symbolic meaning behind the black flag used by Islamist groups, as well as to discuss the validity of this meaning from the Islamic theological viewpoint.

#### USE OF THE BLACK FLAG IN HISTORICAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

The use of the black flag by Muslim revolutionary movements is not new. Prophet Muhammad

(SAW) used the black flag as his military flag. However, the Prophet's black flag was never a 'symbol' of his movement; it was used merely for the purpose of identification, to differentiate between his army and the enemy's. It has also been reported that the Prophet (SAW) used other colours in his military flag.

The black flag was prominently used by the Abbasid ('Islamic') revolutionary movement which was based in Khurasan (what is today the region covered by Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iran and parts of Pakistan). This movement rebelled against the Umayyad caliphate, reportedly as the Abbasid felt that they had the utmost right to lead the caliphate state due to their direct family connection with the Prophet (SAW), while the Umayyad were from the Quraish tribe. The Abbasid movement was successful in bringing down the Umayyad caliphate to found the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad in 750 CE. The black flag then became the official flag for the Abbasid.

Thus, many historians argue that the Abbasid revolution is the major contributor to the contemporary popularity of the narrative of and mystical meanings surrounding the black flag. It should be noted that even during the time of the Abbasid revolution, fabricated stories and narratives were disseminated until they became part of accepted popular tradition and legend in the name of Islam for the purpose of winning over the people's support for the revolution.

# THE BLACK FLAG IN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

The black flag is nowhere mentioned in the Quran. There

is not even a single intimation in the Quran that promotes the use of the black flag or regards it as holy or sacred. What then makes the black flag a positive symbol to be capitalised by contemporary radical movements?

The answer is in a few Hadith (reports of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Prophet [SAW]), recorded in Books of Hadith ('Prophet's Tradition'), Islam's second most authoritative source. The Hadith prophesise the emergence of an army from an area known as Khurasan (the region constituting Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iran and parts of Pakistan today) flying the black flag before the end of this world. From this army, the Muslim Mahdi ('Messiah') will arise and lead it to achieve decisive victory against enemies of Islam, to finally restore the glory of Islam. The Hadith also call on Muslims to support and join the army of the black flag when it appears.

Thus, the Hadith provide a group carrying the black flag with the metaphorical meanings of:

- a truth-bearing group
- a legitimate struggle
- a victorious group
- a group which Muslims are obliged to support and join

However, the Hadith do not provide details of the actual design of the black banner, and consequently jihadist groups carry different versions of the black flag. Different Islamic (Arabic) expressions such as 'La ilahailla Allah Muhammad Rasul Allah ('There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger'), 'Allahu Akbar' ('Allah is the Greatest'), Al-Jihad Sabiluna ('Jihad is our way') and others have

been included by contemporary groups to enhance the flag's allegorical power.

Since the theological basis of the black flag is derived from the Hadith, it would be appropriate to analyse the authenticity of the relevant Hadith in order to ascertain their validity in Islam. This article will not be able to discuss all of the many Hadith pertaining to the black flag, but will analyse a selected few, key Hadith in relation to the meaning given to the black flag in line with the approach used in Hadith Studies. The analysis will conclude with the general theological position held by Muslim scholars on Hadith relating to the black flag.

#### Hadith #1 (Note: This Hadith is not found in the Books of Hadith, but has been referred to by Islamic scholars historically)

Abdullah bin Mas`ud (RA) narrated that the Prophet (SAW) said: "A Nation will come from the east with a black flag and they will ask for some charity ['khair'] (because of them being needy) but the people will not give it [charity] to them. Then, they will fight and win over those people (who did not give them what they asked). Now the people will give them what they asked for, but they [the army] will not accept it until they [the people] will hand it [charity] over to a person from my progeny who will fill the world with justice just as it was previously filled with oppression and tyranny. So if anyone of you finds this nation (from the east with black flags) then you must join them even if you have to crawl over ice.

This Hadith is narrated by Sunan Ibn Majah and Musnad Al-Bazzar from



Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad, from Ibrahim Al-Nakha`i, from Abdullah bin Mas`ud (RA) to the Prophet (SAW).

However, Al-Bazzar (827-904 CE), a scholar of the Hadith and author of Al Musnad ('A Collection of Authoritative Narrations') has said that Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad (the narrator of the above Hadith) was not known to receive the Hadith from Ibrahim Al-Nakha`i. Waki `ibn al-Jarrah (746-812 CE), and a Hadith scholar born in Iraq has said, "This Hadith is not known."

Ahmad Bin Hanbal (780-855 CE), founder of the Hanbali School of Jurisprudence, held the same view.

Hammad bin Usamah, a narrator of the Hadith, as reported in Al-Dhu`afa ('A Collection of Weak Narrators') by Al-`Uqaily, declared that he will never accept Hadith from Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad, even if he swore (upon its truth) fifty times in front of him. Al-Zahabi said in his book Siyar Al-A`alam

('Scholars' Biographies') that Yazid is a Hadith narrator with a flaw, and Ibn Hajar in his book Taqrib Al-Tahzib ('Simplified Refinement of Biographies'), regarded him as a weak Hadith narrator (with a Shi'ite inclination).

#### Hadith #2 (Note: This Hadith is not found in the Books of Hadith, but has been referred to by Islamic scholars historically)

Abdur Rahman Al-Jarshi, narrated from a companion of the Prophet 'Amr bin Murrah Al-Jamli (RA) that the Prophet (SAW) said:

Surely black flags will appear from the Khurasan until the people (under the leadership of this flag) will tie their horses with the Olive Trees between Bait-e-Lahya and Harasta. We asked: 'Are there any Olive trees between these places?' He said, 'If there isn't then soon it will grow so that those people (of Khurasan) will come and tie their horses there.'

This Hadith was narrated from Abdul Rahman Al-Jarshi whose real identity is unknown. The text cannot be traced to any sources, which thus makes it unverifiable.

Hadith #3 (Musnad Ahmad, no. 8775; Sunan Al-Tirmizi, no. 2269; Al-Awsat, no. 3560; Al-Dalail, no. 6/516)

Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (SAW) said:

(Armies carrying) the black flag will come from Khurasan. No power will be able to stop them and they will finally reach Eela (Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem) where they will erect their flags.

This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad bin Hanbal, Al-Tirmizi, Al-Tabarani and Al-Baihaqi from Rusydain bin Sa`ad, Yunus bin Yazid, Ibn Shihab, Qubaishoh bin Zuaib, to Abu Hurairah.

#### opinion

Al-Tirmizi, author of Sunan Al-Tirmizi ('Collection of Hadith by Al-Tirmizi'), ruled this narration as weak because the actual chain of narrators is doubtful: some narrated from Yunus - from Ibn Shihab, while others narrated from Rusydain - from Ibn Shihab.

#### Hadith #4 (Note: This Hadith is not found in the Books of Hadith, but has been referred to by Islamic scholars historically)

The Prophet (SAW) reportedly said:

When you see the black flag coming from Khurasan, join them even if you have to crawl over the snow ... that is the army that will liberate the Holy Land, and there is no power that can stop them.

Hadith scholars such as Al-Zahabi, Ahmad bin Hanbal, and Al-Tabarani have concluded that this Hadith cannot be accepted because the content has been intermixed with other narrations on the black flag of Khurasan.

#### Hadith #5 (Sunan Ibn Majah, no. 4048 and AlMustadrak, no. 4/502)

Ibn Majah and Al-Hakim recorded that the Prophet (SAW) said:

If you see the black flag coming from Khurasan, go to them immediately, even if you have to crawl over the snow, because indeed amongst them is the Caliph al-Mahdi ... and no one can stop the army until they get to Jerusalem.

This Hadith was also narrated by Imam Ahmad from the path of Sharik bin Abdillah - from Ali bin Zaid bin Jad`an - from Abu Qilabah - from Thauban. According to Al-

`Ijli, in his book Ma'rifatAl-Rijal ('Biographies of Narrators'), the chain of this Hadith is disconnected because Abu Qilabah never heard a narration from Thauban.

Ibn Al-Jauzy, in his book Al-'Ilal Al-Mutanahiah ('Microflaws of Narrators'), stated the same path for this Hadith and concluded that Ali bin Zaid bin Jad'an is a narrator with a flaw.

This Hadith was also narrated by Ibn Majah and Al-Bazzar from Abd Al-Razzag Al-San`ani - from Al-Thauri - from Khalid Al-Hazza' - from Abu Qilabah - from Abu Asma'Al-Rahbi - from Thauban. Scholars, however, differ on the validity of the Hadith from this path. Al-Bazzar and Al-Hakim considered it as authentic. Ibn 'Ulayyah, Al-'Ugaili and Ibn Qudamah ruled it as "weak and similar to the chain of Khalid AlHazza", as reported in the books Al-`Ilal ('The Flaws') by Imam Ahmad and Al-Dhu`afa ('The Weak Narrators') and Al-Muntakhab Min 'Ilal Al-Khallal ('Selections of Flaws from al-Khallal) written by Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdasi.

#### Hadith #6 (Note: This Hadith is not found in the Books of Hadith, but has been referred to by Islamic scholars historically)

Muhammad, son of Al-Hanafiah said:

The black flag will come out for the children of AlAbbas. The other black flag will come from Khurasan. Their turbans will be black and their clothes white. On their front will be a man named Shuayb, the son of Salih, from Tamim. They will defeat the companions of the Sufyani until he comes to the House of

Jerusalem where he will establish his power for the Mahdi, and he will be supplied with three hundred (men) from Syria after his arrival and the matter will be settled for the Mahdi in seventy-two months (six years).

Contemporary scholars such as Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Turaifi, Sheikh Adnan Al-`Ar`ur, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mutlaq and many others rule that this narration cannot be traced to any source.

There is a possibility also that the content has been mixed with other narrations associated with the black flag and Al-Mahdi ('Messiah').

#### CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions can be made based on what has been presented above. First, the black flag has no clear figurative meaning in Islam due to the absence of strong evidence to support it, as the authenticity of the narrations are considered weak or are rejected by scholars of the Hadith. The key basis for their rejection is a 'flaw' in a narrator or due to a narration being fabricated.

Ahmad bin Hanbal (founder of the Hanbali School of Jurisprudence) prohibits all narrations on the black flag because they are not reliable or authentic. Sheikh Al-Sharif Hatim bin Arif Al-`Auni, an expert in the field of Hadith Studies from Umm Al-Qura University has said, "Symbols such as the black flag has been fabricated by liars for their own personal agenda from the past till today." His view is consistent with that of Al-Zahabi, author of Al-Siyar and Al-Tarikh Al-Kabir, who said that history has recorded how Abu Muslim al-Khurasani (718 - 749 CE), an Abbasid reformist who

#### opinion



became the governor of Khurasan, was the one who raised the black flag during the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate and similarly, Yazid bin Mahlab, a rebel at the time of Umar bin Abdul Aziz, raised black flags calling upon the people to give him a pledge of obedience.

Second, in addition to the above reasoning that the said narrations are not acceptable, it can be concluded that no one should believe, support or join any group that makes use of the black flag to legitimise their struggle simply on the basis of the symbol. Muslims should not regard them as the trustworthy group representing Truth simply because they carry the black flag.

A third conclusion to be made is that history itself has provided proof of the invalidity of the black flag claim: Al-Mahdi did not appear and the Day of Resurrection did not come about after the black flag was raised by the Abbasid rebellion or the various groups that came later. Even if, for the sake of argument, the narrations are considered acceptable based on a few 'authentic' Hadith or the narrations mutually strengthen each other, no one can give assurance that a group that raises the black flag represents the group prophesised by the Prophet (SAW). It is possible that the Prophet (SAW) refers to a group which has not emerged yet.

The use of the black flag or banner by jihadist groups such as IS has been an act of manipulation of popular folklore among Muslims to support their political agenda. However, contemporary militant groups have understood very well the weaknesses of the black flag Hadith within Islamic theology, and that the religious meaning of the black flag is just a myth. Thus, they have never used these Hadith as a basis for or a part of their ideology. A search on the Minbar Al-Tawhid and Al-Jihad website, which is considered to be the largest repository of jihadist ideological materials, does not produce any results on black flag Hadith or related materials used by militant groups.

It is important for Muslims to understand that Truth is not defined or represented by symbols such as a flag, turban, colour or clothing style. Truth in Islam is based primarily on evidence found in the Quran and Hadith which can be supported by reasoned arguments. It must also be manifested through right behaviour according to the religion. Thus, no symbol or slogan, can justify acts of terror and extremism.

Mustazah Bahari is an Associate Research Fellow and Muhammad Haniff Hassan (PhD) is a Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU.

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## Building Friendship nd Borders

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Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Messenger of Allah saw said, "When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: Sadaqah Jariyah (ceaseless charity); a knowledge which is beneficial, or a virtuous descendant who prays for him (for the deceased)." [Muslim].



## MAINTAINING SPIRITUALITY POST-RAMADHAN

BY AZOORA ALI

Start thinking about the next Ramadhan today: where do you want to be when the next Ramadhan comes? Set the targets early, and start working towards your new goals.



e've celebrated
the great Eid, gone
through a 30-day
mental and physical
test controlling the desires (nafs).
The long nights of prayer and
worship in congregations are now
over.

The month of Ramadhan was historical around the globe, and for some more special than others. It was some children's first ever attempt at fasting, and others who had newly embraced Islam had their first month of fasting.

What next? How do we maintain our spiritual highs? The first point to note is that only Allah (SWT) gives this feeling of bliss, and only He will grant us this serenity, and therefore it is Allah that we must try to get close to and not the feeling itself. Below are some tips that may guide us towards maintaining and reviving the spirit of the holy month, InshaAllah.

#### **EVALUATE**

Whilst Ramadhan is fresh in our minds, let's analyse how we have done in the training zone. Try to answer the following questions and reflect as you read them. Even better, write down the answers as you go.

- Has your behaviour changed in any way or form?
- What do you feel you have achieved spiritually?



- Which areas could have been done better, and what goals would you revise?
- Compared to last Ramadhan, where do you feel you stand this time?
- Did you strive in increasing your charity, by way of volunteering and monetarily?
- · Have your sleep routines

changed to accommodate earlier starts?

 Behaviourally, can you list the areas you've improved in terms of backbiting, honesty, etc, and areas you felt you got caught out?

For those of us who have had a great Ramadhan, the above should be a relatively quick and easy exercise, and hopefully we are able to see more pluses than minuses in our analysis.

The Prophet (SAW) said, "And the most beloved of deeds to Allah are those that are continuous, even if they are few" (An-Nasai). Let us try to maintain the good achieved in Ramadhan, and progress to make our good deeds better. Every small improvement made counts and helps the bucket fill up.

Now that we have a list of the positives and negatives, revisit the goals and write down how you can make them better. Try to identify the root cause of anything that you haven't achieved. Ask yourself why they weren't achieved.

#### TAKE UP FASTING REGULARLY

Try to fast the six days of Shawwal. Take up fasting three days a month or even twice a week.

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, "Fasting Ramadhan and following it with six days from Shawwal is like continual fasting." (Muslim)

Usamah ibn Zayd (RA) narrated, "The Prophet (SAW) of Allah used to fast on Monday and Thursday. When he was asked about it, he said, 'The works of the servants (of Allah) are presented (to Allah) on Monday and Thursday.'" (Abu Dawud).

Also, Abu Dharr (RA) said, "The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said to me, 'When you fast three days out of a month, then fast the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth'" (At-Tirmidhi).

There have been many recent research projects that prove the benefits of fasting regularly. The Express¹ online newspaper published an article last year entitled "Secret of living longer is to fast twice a week". The article conforms to our Islamic belief of fasting regularly. The research showed fasting has the added benefit of reducing obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and perhaps dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

#### LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER

One of the great elements of

Ramadhan is the spirit of giving. If you have been giving not only your money but also your time in the month of Ramadhan, then look to maintain this spirit. If you haven't, then it's not too late to begin!

Do you know of a cause that needs assistance? Can you give up a small portion of your time to benefit a cause? Charities are always overworked and under-resourced, and will open their arms to a volunteer. You only need to look around and see if you can assist. Give your time for a good cause, and you will see that it will have positive benefits on yourself and your relationship with Allah (SWT).

#### PREPARE FOR THE BEST AND THE WORST

"O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient" (Al-Baqarah [The Heifer], 2:153).

Life is full of ups and downs, and especially after Ramadhan, it will be very easy to hit the spiritual lows again. If you ever feel you are slipping away and losing the habits formed, commit yourself to the minimum you will do in any one day, without making too much effort. This way, you will feel better that you have maintained your state and be able to measure vourself too. Ensure that you have a minimum expectation of yourself so that you don't get overwhelmed in those days which don't go according to your plan.

Allah (SWT) says in the Quran, "Do not despair of the mercy of Allah" (Az-Zumar [The Companies], 39:53). Have faith in this ayah (verse) and always remind yourself of His mercy, even when things don't go according to your plan.

Remember that the Companions (RA) used to prepare for the holy month six months beforehand. Start thinking about the next Ramadhan today: where do you want to be when the next Ramadhan comes? Set the targets early, and start working towards your new goals; before you know it, the next Ramadhan will be here again.

#### REFINE YOUR DUAS (SUPPLICATIONS)

Write down all the duas you would like to make and maintain. How did you do with the duas you made during Ramadhan? Did you constantly use them? This is a goal-setting opportunity. Based on your evaluations and reflections, review and rewrite what you want to achieve from today onwards.

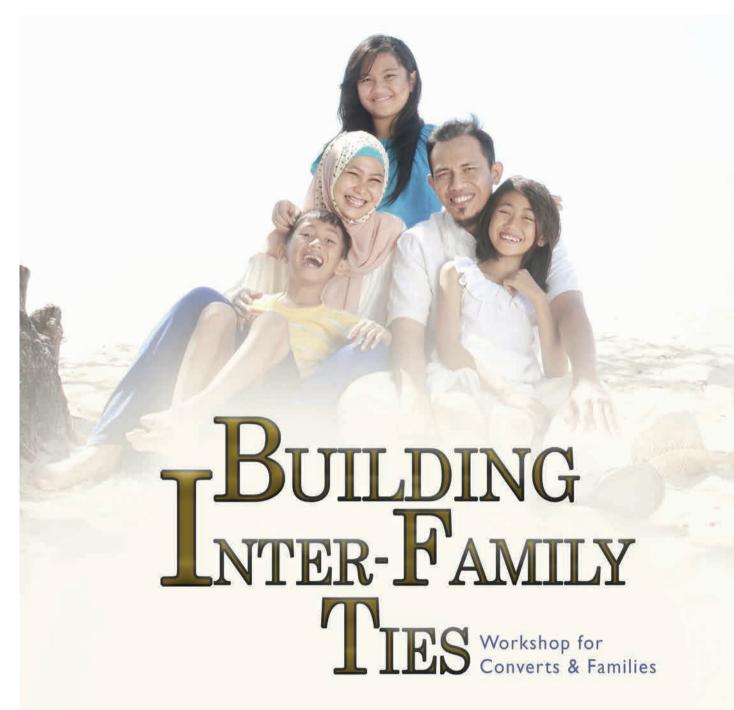
Remember, duas are a powerful tool. When used in the right manner, they should be accompanied by proactive action.

Imam Shafie (RA) once said, "There is nothing more sacred after the fundamental obligations of faith than searching for knowledge" (Kitab al-Um). May Allah (SWT) increase our knowledge and help us to reach the highest levels of iman (faith). TMR

#### Reference

<sup>1</sup> Jo Willey (26 April 2013). Secret of living longer is to fast twice a week. Express online. www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/394824/Secret-of-living-longer-is-to-fast-twice-a-week

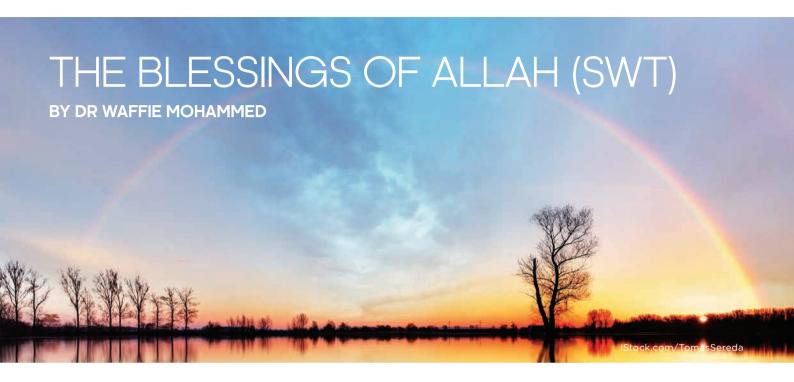
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"Can I still perform the rites and rituals for my non-Muslim parents who have passed away? I love and respect my in-laws but i don't know how to fit into their family culture and tradition that are non-Islamic."

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llah (SWT) says in Surah An-Nahl (The Bee): "If you would count up the favours of Allah, never would you be able to number them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful." (16:18)

Allah (SWT) is telling us that it is near impossible to count the number of favours He has bestowed upon us. From a religious point of view, we know that the favours from Allah (SWT) can be of a material nature, spiritual nature, and moral nature. The material blessings Allah (SWT) bestows to all of His creatures, out of His Compassion. He connects Himself to His creation on the basis of His Divine Compassion.

So, whether people realise the blessings they are receiving or not; whether or not they are thankful to Allah (SWT) for His blessings, He still bestows out of His grace and mercy. Take for example, the relatively simple action of breathing

which is done tens of thousands of times a day. And this important action is done with relative comfort and at no cost.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) used to pray as follows: "O Allah! All praise is due to You, without being able to sufficiently thank You, nor ever wish to be cut off from You, nor ever feeling rich from relying on You, our Lord!"

The Prophet (SAW) acknowledged that he could not have sufficiently thanked Allah (SWT) for the many favours that He bestows.

It is also reported that Prophet Daud (AS), or David, used to say in his supplication: "O Lord! How can I ever duly thank You, when my thanking You is also a favour from You to me."

Allah (SWT) answered him: "Now, you have thanked Me sufficiently, O Daud."

This teaches us that even the ability to thank Allah (SWT) is also a favour and blessing that He has afforded us.

Allah (SWT) is the embodiment of wealth and we are all destitute. Allah (SWT) is the Possessor of everything and we are in dire need of Him; and He is so generous that whether or not we show gratitude to Him or not; He still bestows upon us. And yet there are the shortsighted people who believe that their blessings are as a result of their 'hard work'.

#### WHY BE THANKFUL WHEN EVERYONE IS BLESSED

Material blessings are bestowed on all, the Muslims as well as the non-Muslims. How then are we, the believers, different? And why then should we be thankful if everyone is being blessed in a similar manner by Allah (SWT)?

Some people use their material acquisitions for good and others

for evil. Those who are guided and possess the understanding of using their wealth for good will gain benefit in both words, and they are the ones that are truly blessed. In connection with this Allah (SWT) says, "What is with you must vanish: what is with Allah (SWT) will endure and we will certainly bestow, on those who patiently persevere, their reward to the best of their actions." (An-Nahl [The Beel. 16:96)

So whatever little material blessings you have will vanish one day. The wise person will send a bit for 'Allah (SWT) to keep'. Do not waste what He has blessed you with in this world. If you have this knowledge you should act in accordance with it. Be extremely thankful to your Lord; because not only has He blessed you with some material gain, but He has also enlightened you in the appropriate manner of how to utilise it to its maximum.

Morally speaking, Allah (SWT) has blessed the Muslims in a special way; in that, we possess the strength that enables us to follow Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The Prophet (SAW) came to perfect moral character. The Arabs lived in a very barbaric manner before the advent of Islam. And these uncultured tribesmen began following him because of his moral character. And if you can uphold your morals, be thankful to Allah (SWT) because He has assured us of the just reward for the morally conscious ones.

Spiritually, Muslims are blessed in such a manner that no other nations possessed this unique blessing. When Musa (AS), or Moses, and Isa (AS), or Jesus, wanted to meet Allah (SWT), they had to meet certain requirements and then ascend a mountain. We, ordinary slaves of Allah (SWT) have the unique opportunity of meeting our Lord and Master a minimum of 5 times a day in the discipline of solaat (prayer). As taught by our beloved leader Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Allah (SWT) comes between a Muslim and the Kaaba when they stand for solaat. And in it, we have the blessed opportunity of glorifying and praising Allah (SWT). And we can also beg of Him for forgiveness, comfort, etc.

It is indeed a difficult task to quantify the blessings being bestowed upon us by the Merciful One. And He has also informed us about the blessings we can obtain in the next world if we adhere to His guidance. In Surah An-Nisa (Women), He has mentioned four stages in blessings: "All who obey Allah (SWT) and the Apostle are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah (SWT),- of the Prophets (Who teach), the sincere (lovers of Truth), the witnesses

(Who testify), and **the righteous** (Who do good): Ah! what a beautiful fellowship!" (04:69)

This is further strengthened by the Prophet (SAW) in the Hadith: "Amongst my followers some will have the status of the Messengers of the Bani Israel." Can you imagine walking amongst the Messengers of Allah?

A lot of emphasis is placed on material blessings; to the true believer, this is neither here nor there. What is important is for us to understand the importance of showing gratitude to Allah (SWT). Even though we can never count His favours upon us and even though we can never thank Him as He ought to be thanked, we should still demonstrate submission and understanding.

Whether or not you see or experience the favours being bestowed, always remember that Allah (SWT) will never let you





down. We beg of Him to forgive us, bless us, and bestow on us His divine grace and mercy and may He enable us to rise with the righteous.

WHEN ARE YOU DENIED OF ALLAH'S BLESSINGS?

Satan had a taste of Paradise and he also had the good experience of attaining closeness to Allah (SWT), so he knows how beautiful it is. He would therefore have some sort of inclination to go back there. Besides he likes to know what is going on or taking place in the heavens. As such, Allah (SWT) has protected the lower heavens from Satan and his minions. "But those who reject Our Signs and treat them with arrogance,- they are companions of the fire, to dwell therein (for ever)" (7:36)

In the Quran, a lot of chapters are named after things of nature, and this is one of the means by which we can understand the greatness of Allah (SWT). He showed so many signs to Pharaoh and his followers but still they took no heed. Pharaoh never thought that Allah (SWT)

was giving them signs. And even today we see that some groups of people feel as though that they do not need God.

About them, Allah (SWT) says that they will be confined to the earth. When Pharaoh and his followers did not take heed to the message of Moses (AS), Allah (SWT) sent His wrath upon them. Meanwhile the Bani Israel was prospering. One of the consequences of not submitting humbly to Allah (SWT) is that such people will be denied of Allah's blessings. He says, "Verily, those who reject Our Signs and treat them with arrogance, (for them) there will be no opening of the gates of the skies, nor will they (be able) to enter Paradise, until the camel can pass through the eye of a needle." (Al-'Araf [The Heights], 7:40)

It will be impossible for the materialistically inclined to penetrate the skies in order to go back to Allah (SWT). It is reported in one commentary that when the souls of the inhabitants of hell

"Whether or not you see or experience the favours being bestowed, always remember that Allah (SWT) will never let you down."

are being taken up to the heaven, the angels will block them from proceeding any further.

If we aspire to do good Allah (SWT) will open up the skies and bestow His blessings upon us. Allah (SWT) tells us about this in the following verse: "If the people of the town had but believed and feared Allah; We should indeed have opened out to them all kinds of blessings from the skies and the earth. But they rejected the truth, and We took them to task for their misdeeds. (Al-'Araf [The Heights], 7:96)

#### **ASCEND THROUGH GOOD**

When Allah (SWT) made the skies and the earth, and He thereafter sent man and jinn to reside on the earth, He made evident that the entrance to and from the skies is like one-way valve. It means that only certain things can ascend back to Him. And what are they: "To Him mount up (all) Words of Purity." (Al-Fatir [The All-Originating], 35:10)



Nothing but good can pass that barrier. This is important for us to understand because firstly, it shows that good and evil are not equal. Even the places in which they are recorded are different. Allah (SWT) says, "Surely the record of the wicked is (preserved) in Sijjin. And what will explain to thee what Sijjin is? (There is) a Register (fully) inscribed." (Al-Mutaffifin [Dealers in Fraud], 83:7-9)

Good is therefore recorded in the sky, and evil, which cannot ascend, is recorded in a dungeon. That is why on the Day of Judgement some people would raise with nothing to take to their Lord.

Allah (SWT) is the embodiment of good. This means that impurity cannot ascend back to Him.

There is a barrier that prevents impurity from going further. We are returning to Him and we have to pass that barrier in order to get back to Him. So if we do not qualify ourselves to pass this barrier.

our meeting with Him would be impossible.

Allah (SWT) has shown us the way with the *mir'aj* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He was so pure and clean that he was able to pass through all the barriers when he ascended. And he went further than any other creatures. Being our model and exemplar, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is someone we must pattern from, especially as we strive to remove any form of impurities in our personality. And Allah (SWT) gives us the formula in Surah Al-Kahf (The Cave): "Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness." (18:110)

Doing good is comprehensive and it applies in every aspect of our lives. One of the stations in spiritual growth in our meditation is to ascend. Spiritual ascent is possible but it takes a lot of effort and dedication. This is why Prophet (SAW) told his Companions (RA), "I have returned from the small Jihad (Jihad Asghar) to the big Jihad (Jihad Akbar)." The Companions (RA) enquired, "What is the big Jihad?" Prophet (SAW) said, "The Jihad al nafs (inner desires)."

Control of desires, control your tongue, and control your emotions. If you can't, how do you expect to ascend? The real jihad is to control your *nafs*. If you do, you would have qualified yourself to return to, and Insha'Allah, meet with your Lord.

All the Messengers of God took great care in what they said and did. They never acted outside of their mission. Our mission in this life is to get back to Allah (SWT). Therefore, take care in all your doings. Those who criticise spirituality claim that spirituality is a cult; they do not know that it is an effort to purify yourselves and make you conscious of your personality.

It takes time, effort, honesty, dedication and sincerity. How is it possible for the *ruh* (soul) to ascend while the *nafs* is fighting to stay down? We want to be able to pass through these barriers.

This struggle won't be easy and rest assured that Satan would try his best to divert you. He will even attack you with good, which we unfortunately are seeing happening today. May Allah (SWT) protect us from Satan and whatever means he may use to divert our focus. Work to refine your personality so that your ascent to Allah (SWT) would be easy, and in the end, successful. Keep in mind that you only have one life to live and we are not sure of what is in store for us tomorrow. Make use of the time as it comes and do not wait until you are older to 'start following the religion'. Remember, we will never have this time again, so use it wisely now. TMR MUSLIM CONVERTS' ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE

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Age Range: 7 - 17 Years Old

Time: 09:30am = 01:30pm

Madrasah Al-Ma'arif, No 3 Lorong 39 Geylang Where:

Singapore 387865

Term 1: January Term 2: April Intake:

\* All information are subject to changes. Please refer to our www.mcas.sg for more details



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# ORIGIN OF IDOL WORSHIPPING BY UST BANI ALI iStock.com/Whiteway the muslim reader volume 34 • issue 2016/2017

ince after the time of Prophet Idris (AS), or Enoch, men began to entertain the idea of creating images which later turned into objects of reverence and worship. In the era of Prophet Nuh (AS), or Noah, the people indulged in Paganism (Idol Worshiping) and it became widespread as the leaders condoned this practice. They believed in the powers of these gods that would bring them good, protect them from evil, and provide all their needs. The names of the gods they worshipped were Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq, and Nasr (these idols represented: manly power, mutability, beauty,

brute strength, swiftness and sharp vision). When Prophet Nuh (AS) called upon them to worship Allah (SWT), the One and Only God, the chief amongst the idolaters bitterly opposed him. They have said, "You shall not leave your gods nor shall you leave Wadd, nor Suwa, nor Yaghuth, nor Ya'uq nor Nasr." (Nuh [Noah], 71:23)

These names were actually names of pious men who had lived before the time of Nuh (AS). After their deaths, statues of them were erected to keep their memories alive. After sometime, however, people began to worship these statues. Later generations did not even know why they had

been erected. They only knew their parents had prayed to them. That was how idol worshipping started.

Ibn Abbas (RA)
narrated that the
Prophet (SAW) said,
"Following upon the death
of those righteous men,
Satan inspired their people
to erect statues in the places
where they used to sit. They
did this, but these statues
were not worshipped until
the coming generations
deviated from the right
way of life. Then, they
worshipped them as
their idols."

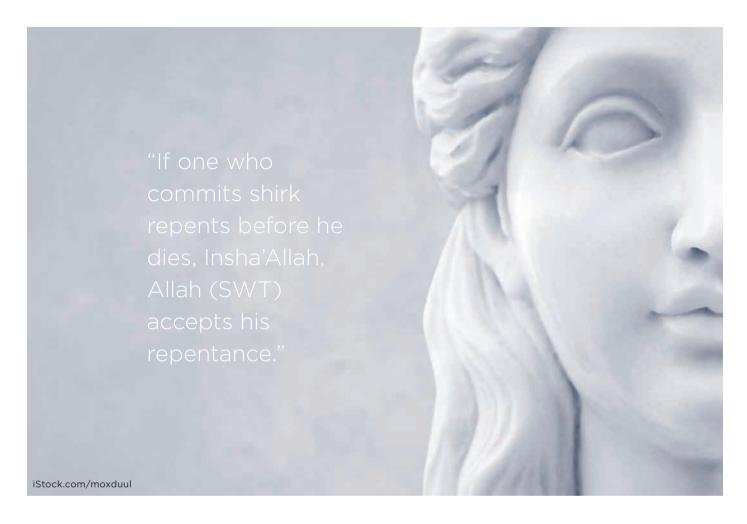
In At-Tabari's version
of narration, there were
righteous people who lived
in the period between Adam
(AS) and Nuh (AS), and, who
had followers who held them as
models. After their death, their
friends who used to emulate
them said, "If we make statues of
them, it will be more pleasing to

us in our worship and will remind us of them." So they built statues of them and after they had died and others came after them, Iblis crept into their minds saying, "Your forefathers used to worship them, and through that worship they got rain." So they worshipped them.

Ibn Abi Hatim related this story. that Waddan was a righteous man who was loved by his people. When he died, they withdrew to his grave in the land of Babylonia and were overwhelmed by sadness. When Iblis saw their sorrow caused by his death, he disquised himself in the form of a man saying, "I have seen your sorrow because of this man's death, can I make a statue like him which could be put in your meeting place to make you remember him?" They said, "Yes." So he made the statue like him. They put it in their meeting place in order to be reminded of him. When Iblis saw their interest in remembering him. he said, "Can I build a statue of him in the home of each one of you so that he would be in everyone's house and you could remember him?" They agreed and their children learnt about it, and saw what they were doing. They also learnt about their remembrance of him instead of Allah (SWT). So the first to be worshipped was Waddan, as the idol which they named so. The essence of this point is that every idol from those earlier mentioned was worshipped by a certain group of people. It was mentioned that people made pictures, and as the ages passed by, they made these pictures into statues, so that their forms could be fully recognised. Afterwards, these were worshipped instead of Allah (SWT).

It was narrated that Umm Salmah (RA) and Umm Habibah (RA)





told Prophet Muhammad (SAW) about the church called "Maria", which they had seen in the land of Abyssinia. They described its beauty and the pictures therein. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, "Those are the people who build places of worship on the grave of every dead man who was righteous, and then make therein those pictures. Those are the worst of creation unto Allah." (Sahih Bukhari)

None whatsoever is worthy of worship except Allah (SWT). Therefore, if humans worship any other, or another, it means that worship is propagated by Satan, whose most lethal ploy is to misguide human into committing shirk (association of partners to Allah). Allah (SWT) created man with a sound logic to accept the simplest of truth and that is, God is One and Only, Allah the Lord, the Creator, and all the rest are His creatures. Oneness represents Absolute Almightiness free from any needs, while duality represents the need for one another. This is the simple logic.

Thus it is unbecoming of human to commit *shirk*. However, in his imperfection human may commit sins which can be forgiven without punishment or atonement. But *shirk*, associating partners with Allah (SWT), i.e. Polytheism or Paganism, is singled-out by Allah (SWT) as a sin that is un-forgivable.

Surely Allah (SWT) does not forgive that a partner be ascribed to Him, although He forgives any other sins for whomever He wills.

He who associates anyone with Allah (SWT) in His divinity has indeed forged a mighty lie and committed a great sin (An-Nisa [Women], 4:48). This is to impress upon those who regard *shirk* as a trivial matter, to be aware that *shirk* is the most grievous sin. But if one who commits *shirk* repents before he dies, Insha'Allah, Allah (SWT) accepts his repentance.

Verily, joining others in worship with Allah (SWT) is a great Zalm (i.e. grievously wronging oneself). (Luqman, 31:13) TMR

## Humility in the words of Prophet **muhammad** (SAW)

Narrated 'Umar (RA)

I heard the Prophet (SAW) saying, "Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Slave. So, call me the Slave of Allah and His Apostle."

'Iyad bin Himar (RA) said:

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, "Verily: Allah has revealed to me that you should adopt humility. So that no one may wrong another and no one may be disdainful and haughty towards another."

From Imam An-Nawawi's Riyadh As-Salihin (Gardens of the Righteous)

Abu Hurairah (RA)) reported:

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, "Wealth is not diminished by giving (in charity). Allah augments the honour of one who forgives; and one who displays humbleness towards another seeking the pleasure of Allah, Allah exalts him in ranks."

Sahih Muslim, Number 556



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