



# themuslimreader

## TOWARDS INNER PEACE

Through work, a Muslim is able to see what kind of person he is, and ultimately, what human identity he is carrying.

### features

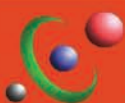
Work and the Human Meaning

Finding the *Straight* Path

Discovering the Meaning of Tawakkal (Part II)

Islam in Taiwan

~ An Interview with Ust Ishaq Ma



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

Iyaz ibn Himar (RA) relates that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

Allah has revealed to me that you should be courteous so that no one should hold himself above another nor transgress against another.

(Muslim)



Riyadh as-Salihin  
(Gardens of the Righteous)  
Chapter 71, Number 605



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#### common terms

##### ABBREVIATIONS IN TMR

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

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

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

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

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

##### TERMS IN THIS EDITION

Alhamdulillah: Praise be to God  
Da'wah: Invitation to understand Islam  
Deen: Religion; way of life  
Halal: Permissible  
Hijab / Tudung: Headgear that covers hair and neck  
Iman: Faith; Belief  
Insha'Allah: If God wills  
SubhanAllah: Glorious is God  
Sunnah: Practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)  
Ummah: Community  
Ustadz (Ust): Teacher

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

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



# editorial note

## Towards Inner Peace

Every religion has its own definition of inner peace. Generally, inner peace is described as the feeling of mental and spiritual calmness that is opposite to anxiety and stress. For Muslims, inner peace is a blessing from God that grows in our hearts and minds, only when we sincerely realise the gratitude and contentment for everything in our lives. That is Everything - from the good things to the 'bad' things. No matter how we see the unfortunate or the 'bad' incidents happening to us or anyone, ultimately, only God knows what is best for His creations. And we can learn to embrace inner peace by depending on Him and, accepting His Guidance in all the different ways that it may come.

In this edition, TMR shares writings that detail the human experiences in work and life, which eventually reveals the calm and satisfaction that the writers gain through Islam. The perspective on the significance of our jobs and actions towards our Muslim identity is reflected in *Work and the Human Meaning* (by Dr Yamin Cheng). *Finding the Straight Path* (by Rachel Pan Yijun), the winner of Al-Mawrid's Essay Competition 2012, shows the transition to Islam by a new Muslim as part of one's life journey, and not a different life started anew. In addition, the continuation of our volunteer's experience in discovering *Tawakkal* reveals the journey towards blessings of peace and surrender in various life situations.

Having faith leads us towards inner peace. For every journey towards a meaningful destination, there will be ups and downs, smooth and rocky roads. When we embrace the ease and the difficulty of every experience - with God in our hearts and minds, *Insha'Allah*, we will be moving deeper into the folds of Islam, which is the path of true surrender to serenity.

"Truly, in remembering God do hearts find rest"  
(Al-Rad, 13:28).



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# Work and the Human Meaning

WHILE WE FIND MEANING  
AND SATISFACTION IN LIFE,  
THE WORK WE DO LEADS US  
TO OUR PURPOSE ON EARTH.

text | yamin cheng



What is 'work'? Ask anyone, and the answer may vary from one person to another. Put simply, work is anything that we do. But this answer is too broad and general.

### WORK = SATISFACTION OF LIFE?

Work may mean a career. We tend to think of the rituals of modern life – from childhood to adulthood, getting up from bed very early in the morning, going to school, going to tuitions after school, doing homework at night, and burning midnight candles when exams are near, hoping to get into a good college or university, doing a program of study of our choice, getting a promising job that offers great income, and, spending the money on a life of comfort. For many young people of today, this is what 'work' means. Work is material satisfaction of life.

Work can also mean the menial jobs done by the blue-collar workers, people who work less with their brains and more with their brawns – those factory workers, janitors, or mechanics, for instance, following instructions than giving them. In this sense, work is labour, the use of the hands and legs.

### MOTHERS WORK?

Mothers who stay at home and take care of their little ones are said to be not working. They are called housewives. Are they not working? They wake up early in the morning, prepare breakfast for their children, dress them for school, wash the clothes and dishes, clean the floor, cook for the family, going through the school work with their children, prepare the bed, and make sure the family is in order and the children all behave well. Mothers are not getting a cent for what they do. But are they not working?

Can thinking be 'work'? What about those town planners, who busy themselves day in and day out, trying to figure out how best to make the towns into the best places to live?

Work thus is doing, but also thinking. It is using the body, the hands and legs, but it is also using the mind. It is done by everybody, by little children, as well as elderly people. Even beggars are said to be doing work. And, not to leave out the priests and monks who pray, for prayer too is work.

### PURPOSE OF WORK

Why do we work? What do we achieve with work, or, what do we gain by working? For many living in today's society, work is survival of livelihood. Debts are more than earnings, as prices of things have soared beyond the skies. Basic necessities of life have become more and more difficult to obtain unless one has the money to afford them. Food has become rather expensive, and if one is someone who has the habit of eating out, this could be a problem.

Education has also become expensive because education is no longer about being a good human being, but about how

much money one can make. Health is also another area of concern as hospital bills are skyrocketing; if one does not have insurance, how could one pay for these bills?

In today's world that is characterised by the computer craze, new and more sophisticated products are churned out every now and then, and the young ones especially, do not want to miss out on these. Where is the money coming from to afford these gadgets? Parents have to work, students have to work, and even the children now have to start looking for jobs during school holidays; otherwise one will slip into poverty and cannot even afford what beggars could. Thus, to work is to be able to eat, sleep, and find a place to shelter.

### PRIDE IN WORK

For some, work is self-pride, that something giving us the drive, enthusiasm, and spirit to show others what we are made of. Getting straight A's, or getting four flat on the CGPA, or getting into Cambridge, Oxford, or Harvard is self-pride, not only for one, but for the parents and family members. It speaks a lot about the workload, focus, and hard work put into the efforts to achieve such results. It also speaks a lot about the parents' role in their children's success story. Thus, self-pride is to be able to compete with others and come up on top of them.


For some, self-pride is to practise a high level of virtue and morality, so that one is recognised as an upright person in society, and be trusted in any business dealings. And for some, self-pride is to hold public office, such as becoming a magistrate, or a policeman, or a teacher, because public servants put the interest of others before self, and sacrifice their time and energy for the well-being of others.

For some, work itself is religion. Hindus, for instance, see work as the outcome of one's previous life. It is the karma of work that determines what one's next life would be, for better or for worse. If the good karma overweighs the bad karma, one who is a bellboy could well be on his way to become a priest, the highest and most noble human dignity in the Hindu view of life. For Christians of the Protestant faith, work is the measurement of whether one is elected into heaven. Good works do not guarantee salvation as it is faith alone that guarantees it, but good works are indications that the faith one professes is an acceptable one, and thereby salvation is assured.

To summarise, work is that by which we get to realise our desires, wants, and even dreams. These are needs that we seek to fulfil without which life falls short of expectations and meaningfulness. We have basic needs to fulfil, such as food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare. These are *biological* needs.

### FOR AESTHETICAL NEEDS

As human beings, we are not contented with having only shelter. We want to make the shelter a home that has nice

A photograph of two men in business attire. The man on the left, with a beard and wearing a dark suit over a light blue shirt, is holding a white document. The man on the right, wearing a light blue shirt and a dark tie, is looking down at the document. They are standing in front of a desk with a black briefcase and some papers. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the image, containing white text.

Being humans, we have ambitions, we desire to be motivated, we want to achieve things, and we wish to turn dreams into realities



designs and decorations, and looks colourful too. In short, as humans, we crave for things pleasant, lovely, and beautiful. These are *aesthetical* needs.

We also need warmth, love, and affection. These are *affective* needs. We need to feel safe and protected from harm and danger, to our life, property, and mind. These are *safety* needs.

We need values for our life, about what is right and wrong, good or bad, so that decisions that we make will have positive consequences as well as avoid putting ourselves and others in harm's way. These are *axiological* needs.

## WITH ASPIRATIONS

As human beings, we seek not only what is basic and sufficient, but we aspire to bring the basic to the level of sophistication and complexity, so that we comprehend and understand things at the highest and deepest level possible that would reveal to us their true and real nature. These are *intellectual* needs.

Being humans, we have ambitions, we desire to be motivated, we want to achieve things, and we wish to turn dreams into realities. We are not contented with only having to eat, having a place to stay, or having clothes to wear. We look at the world around us, and we want to transform the world into much more than what we could imagine. These needs, the drives to turn something into something more, are *self-esteem* needs.

## REALISING OUR SELF

Through the self-esteem needs, we want to end up as somebody with an identity, to be able to tell others this is what I am. This is *self-realisation* need, and for many, it is religion that shows the way. All the needs as mentioned are necessary for us to be an all-round human being. They are all related to one another without which, our human identity will not take shape. Work, through the fulfilment of needs, defines our human identity, about who we are, about who I am.

In the same way, work defines the meaning of a Muslim. It is through work that a Muslim is able to see what kind of person he is, and ultimately, what human identity he is carrying. In Islam, work is called '*amal*'. '*Amal*' may refer to individual acts, or activities, or livelihood. The Quran mentions '*amal salih*' or works that are righteous, virtuous, good, and praiseworthy, all the time. All of us humans are required to do not just '*amal*' but '*amal salih*'. Why is the emphasis on works that are *salih* (righteous)?

In the first place, for a Muslim, work carried out must be predicated, or based, or grounded in God. God is the point of reference for work. God is the point of departure for work. God is the point of return for work. What does this mean?

## GOD IS THE FOCAL POINT

When a Muslim works, he is governed by a set of guidelines about how he fulfils his needs. These guidelines are intended to protect, preserve, and promote the well-being of the essential aspects of his humanity, so that he will become, as well as function, as a wise, true, good, virtuous, and beautiful human being, thus echoing what the Prophet (SAW) said concerning his mission to mankind that 'I was not sent except to bring the noble qualities of humanity into fruition'. These guidelines are collectively known as the *Shariah*. The guidelines' purposes, namely, the protection, preservation, and promotion of the essential aspects of humanity, are known as *maqasid al-Shariah*, or objectives of *Shariah*. The well-being i.e. essential aspects of humanity that the *Shariah* seeks to protect, preserve, and promote are known as *maslaha* or *masalih*, and these are the well-being of religion (*deen*), self and life (*nafs*), mind ('*aql*'), kin and kith (*nasl*), and property (*mal*).

Religion (*deen*) is the constitution, blueprint, and guideline of a person's life, purpose, and destiny. It is the reference point for the answers that one seeks pertaining to his human identity. Through religion, one knows his origin, life, and purpose in this world. Through religion, one knows how one relates to all that exists, from God to everything in the Unseen world, to everything that we could see in this world. Religion puts us in proper perspective of our beliefs, thoughts, actions and interactions.

## OUR BODY – REGION OF OUR SELF-RESPECT

The self (*nafs*) is our body and the vitality of life that comes with it. It connects us to everything around us, from humans to animals to plants. The body is a fragile entity that could succumb to harm and injury, and great care has to be taken of it. The body, apart from being a biological and physical entity, is also the locus of our personal worthiness so that nothing can wrest the rights that come with it, such as taking the life of a person without just cause or slandering the physical appearance of a person. The body is the region of our self-respect, and we must do the things to make our body a respectable part of us.

Besides us, we have our parents and children, kin and kith, all related through a common bloodline (*nasl*). These are our flesh and blood, as well as our laughter and tears, pain and joy. Thus, taking care of our body also means to take care of our loved ones, because we and our loved ones are, biologically and psychologically, related. We are the body extension of our parents; our children, our progeny, are the body extension of us.

## RELIGION SPELLS OUT WISDOMS

Therefore, all care must be taken in relation to how we are related to our kin and kith in terms of flesh and blood, and how we behave towards one another in this relationship. Thus, intermingling between opposite sexes must be such



that both sides must know what they should and should not do that will not result in undesirable consequences to the body, which will then have psychological and social implications. Religion spells out the wisdoms for the respect of the body, and carves out boundaries for the relationship, along with the joys if one follows or the threats and pains if one refuses to do so.

Property or wealth (*mal*) is usually thought of as what individuals possess, and is often identified with riches, in such things like money, houses, and cars, that come with a luxurious lifestyle. This understanding of property or wealth is, however, partially true. Property or wealth, in its broadest sense, refers to whatever that contributes to the material fulfilment of life without which life could not be possible.

Property or wealth could be tangible things, such as land, cattle, homes, and the likes, or intangible ones such as knowledge, technology, services, or even money. Property or wealth, tangible or intangible, is thus the abundance of resources surrounding our well-being, be they natural, technological, or human resources.

### ACQUIRING WEALTH

In our acquisition of them, as well as our use of the property or wealth, we are confronted with the questions about how we acquire them, whether rightly or wrongly, about whether the things we acquire are beneficial or harmful to our well-being, and about whether we share a portion of our property or wealth with others, especially the underprivileged.

There are those of us who are wealthy but not thrifty and spend our wealth unnecessarily. There are those of us who are wealthy but nevertheless stingy and find it hard to even share a little of our wealth with those in need. But there are those of us who are wealthy but see joy in sharing their wealth with others, and are generous with their contribution to the well-being of others. Thus, we are of diverse

personalities when it comes to how we treat property and wealth. In order that we get the best from the property and wealth we possess, there are rules about how we acquire them, use them, and share them with others. With these rules, we will be guided and moulded into a society that cares, and shares.

### THE MIND – OUR OWN VALUABLE RESOURCE

Besides a body, we have a mind. Our mind (*'aql*) is our resource for thought, imagination, and creativity. With the mind, we explore the rich resources of our world to make it a wonderful place to live in. With the mind, we imagine turning the world into some kind of Foreverland that we hope would be our paradise on earth. With the mind, we become creative about what we eat and drink, what we wear and display, and what we use and benefit. But most importantly, with the mind, we seek answers to the most fundamental questions about our human existence – about where we came from, what we are doing in this world, what is the best life, and where we are heading in our afterlife.

To be enlightened about these questions is to be enlightened about why, in some of our actions, there are commands to do them, the prohibitions to avoid them, and the choices to do or not to do them. Through the mind and the answers we get from these fundamental questions of life, we will be able to know why there are boundaries to the way we deal with our identity, body, progeny, property, mentality, and activity.

We should realise that in work, in fulfilling our needs, there are guidelines to be observed, objectives to be achieved, and a personality to be shaped, such that by the end of the day, our life becomes satisfied and also meaningful, as the work we do delivers us to the realisation of what it is to be human, and, ultimately, the wisdom of being God's vicegerent on earth. TMR



# The Great Healer

SHASEL

A physician  
saves a heart,  
while a sage  
soothes a soul.

A poet-doctor  
sure knows better,  
he does treat both  
hearts and souls.

The healer is  
often ignored  
as the celebrity  
is celebrated.

All souls outlast  
its frail temples,  
the healed ones  
will go to heaven.

The wise will try  
to make an effort  
to duly submit to  
The Great Healer.



**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO THE 2012 AL-MAWRID  
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special prize: Sia Jingyun Erna S



# Finding the Straight Path

AL-MAWRID ESSAY  
COMPETITION 2012  
WINNING ENTRY FOR THE  
THEME OF MY SPIRITUAL  
JOURNEY DESCRIBES HOW  
CHRISTIANITY LED THE  
WRITER TO ISLAM.

**text** | rachel pan yijun

### *In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*

In Christianity, it is mentioned in the Bible that the gate is small and the road is narrow that leads to life, and few have found it (Matthew 07:13-14). Similarly in Islam, the road to *Jannah* (Paradise) is not easy. Many have fallen, many do not understand, many do not take heed nor care. My *doa* (supplication) is always for Allah (SWT) to keep us on the Straight path – guiding those who sincerely and earnestly want to know Him on this path.

As a Christian, I love Jesus. (Present tense, because I still do). To understand the story, I realise I do have to take you back to why I even became a Christian.

### ANCESTRAL WORSHIP IN FAMILY

I was raised in a Taoist/Buddhist family where there was always ancestral worship going on. We were made to hold joss sticks and pray to the “Heaven God” and the “Goddess of Mercy” occasionally. My parents brought us to temples during festivals and we were always made to pray to the numerous gods, which according to my limited knowledge, were in charge of different matters. Some gods were in charge of giving you luck in buying lottery, some were in charge of health, some were in charge of studies, etc. I did not have an inquisitive mind then, so I just took things as it was.

Then I went on to a missionary school where I was exposed to Christianity. The concept of One God was made clear to me, and it was here that I understood we were all created by One Creator. I came to understand sin and temptation. I came to understand the love that God has for humans. I came to understand grace, salvation and mercy. And it was here that I learnt about Jesus being the Son of God. I was overwhelmed by the love Christians showed to one another, and I felt like I had finally “found” a God which made sense. There is only One God, and One Creator, and I had found it. Sad to say, my faith was not strong enough to keep me growing. I deviated from the path and even though I still believed in God, my actions showed that He was the least priority at that moment.

### DISCOVERING TRUTHS ABOUT GOD EVERYDAY

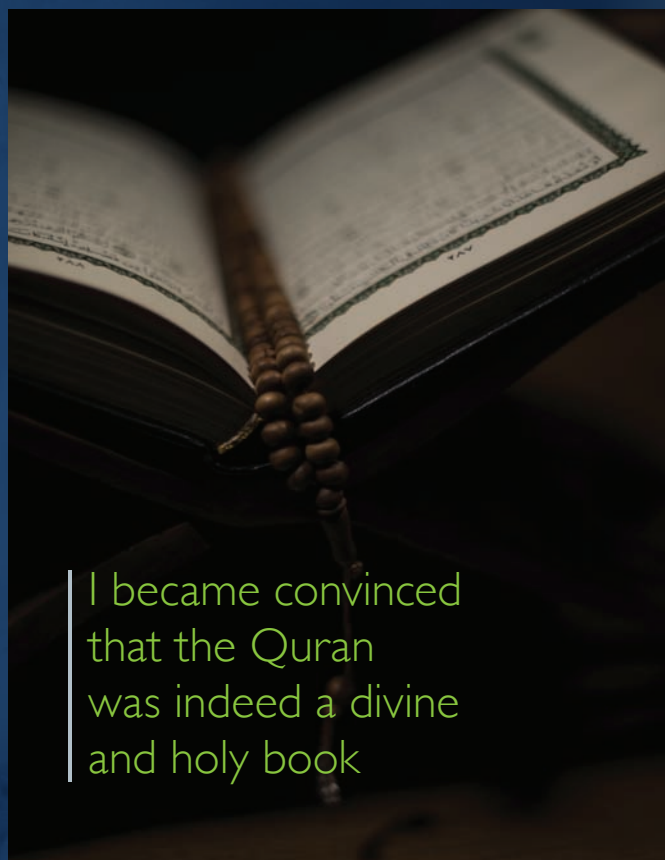
In 2008, God called me back once more. It was then that I started learning about Christianity from scratch. I started to know who Jesus was, who God was. My faith and love for God grew with such a burning zeal, that people in church often testify and said that God was indeed doing something mighty in my life. I started teaching Bible studies to young adults, serving in the worship ministry, going for mission trips and teaching Sunday school. As I read the Bible every day, I discovered new truths about God.

The Bible was my guide in life, and Jesus, to me, was my everything. I spent many hours praying, writing my thoughts in journals, meditating in the presence of God. I loved Jesus fiercely and I would go around talking and telling friends how much God loves them, and that life on earth is temporal.

In the span of just two years, I had my secondary school and primary school best friends convert to Christianity, in addition to my sister (who was really against Christianity), her boyfriend, one of my students and another close friend of mine. These are all of whom I have personally tried reaching out to and seen how magnificently God opened their hearts.

### CRYING FOR STREET CHILDREN

As the years go by, I knew I wanted to be a missionary. The burden grew stronger and fiercer. I always had a burden for street children – those who were oppressed, abandoned and left to fend for themselves. I remember nights crying as I prayed for these children, and pleading with God to use me in whatever little way that I could contribute. I knew that I would go if He called, because God had gifted me with a heart of compassion. Similarly, I knew that God blessed me with a gift of evangelism. I could not stand to see people not know the Truth. I could not stand to see people walking down the path to self-destruction. At the



I became convinced  
that the Quran  
was indeed a divine  
and holy book



heart of it, I wanted everyone, literally everyone to know that God (or Jesus then) loves them and that life was indeed worth living when we know who we belong to.

And it was this evangelical heart that guided me to Islam.

Sometimes I look back, and I felt that God/Allah has guided me to where I am now. I was always seeking for Truth. I was always seeking for the One who created me and the vast universe that often leaves me in awe. I was always yearning for people to know the Truth as well.

### TEMPORAL LIFE ON EARTH

And perhaps, in the midst of it, Allah (SWT) must have heard the silent plead for the guidance to the Straight path, because I knew deep down in my heart, even before anyone even taught me, that this world I lived in was temporal. I knew somehow, that this world was not the ultimate end, and that people do NOT just disappear after death. We belong somewhere greater than this. I also knew that life on earth was not meant to be spent frivolously, without a thought of the consequences. And all of these are only gifts from Allah (SWT). Indeed, I can only say *Alhamdulillah* that Allah (SWT) has opened my heart.

I went into the National Institute of Education (NIE) and for the first time in my life, I met practising Muslims in my class. *Alhamdulillah* that Allah (SWT) placed three Muslims in my class who prayed the five prayers daily. *Alhamdulillah* also that one of them is engaged to a Chinese Convert (which led me to explore even more about Islam).

### WHERE HAVE THE MUSLIMS BEEN HIDING?

As I watched them pray, I was in awe. Nobody told me that Muslims prayed this way, at such a stipulated time. (Deep down in my heart, I was thinking – Where have all the Muslims been hiding for the past 23 years of my life?) But what touched me most, was this deep sense of peace in them, and this yearning to know the God who had created them. I find it a blessing that Allah (SWT) placed one of the Muslims to talk to me about Islam, and allowed me to also share about Christianity. We had long discussions, question and answer sessions, and “debates” about both religions.

It was then that I passed him a Bible and he passed me a Quran. My first ever Quran, *Alhamdulillah*! Speaking to him opened up my mind about Islam and challenged the pre-conceived notions that I had about Islam (...and boy, they were many). From there, I started asking questions about Islam, asking fellow Christians at times too.

### FELT BURDENED FOR THE MUSLIMS

I was confused, because the world's two largest religions are Christianity/Catholicism and Islam. It was either one

group was correct, or the other was. Both cannot be correct. More so, I felt so burdened for the Muslims. In them, I see people who sincerely and earnestly want to worship God and please Him. They were not people who did not care about how they lead their lives. It was not fair that they were going to go to Hell just because they did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God!

This spurred me to start reading about Islam; because I wanted to understand what the Muslims believe and come in at a better angle to tell them that Christianity is the Truth, and not Islam. I did not think that God would deliberately mislead either group. Hence, I started reading books and websites on my own. However, I made the error of reading sources that came from a Christian's point of view. My idea of Islam was tainted by what the media said, and what the Christians wanted to propagate.

### SOMETHING DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT

I was at the crossroads. On one hand, I told myself to have faith in Jesus and all the things that God has brought me through over the years (and there were plenty of answered prayers and guidance from Him).


On the other hand, I felt that something was not right. Suddenly the Trinity, which I have always preached about, does not seem to make sense to me; nor did Jesus being the Son of God make sense. A religion by God should be simple and comprehensible. (Even though we may say that not everything that God does has to be understood by our limited human minds), I am sure God has also given us this capacity to think, discern and see what the Truth is.

“O People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a Messenger of Allah, and His word, which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His Messengers. And do not say, “Three (Trinity)””; desist – it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs” (An-Nisa; 04:171).

### A LITTLE DOUBT

From that moment on, I told myself that I had to take a step back. This was my ETERNAL LIFE at stake. I did not want to follow a path if I was not sure that it was the right one. Even if there was just a little doubt at the back of my mind, that doubt cannot be covered up; it must be tested, explored and expelled.

I started looking at the Bible objectively and I started reading about Islam from Islamic sources. Whatever



Where have  
all the Muslims  
been hiding  
for the past 23  
years of my life

questions I had about the Islamic faith, I asked people who were learned in the religion. And slowly, the walls of false perceptions came tumbling down the more I asked. And I prayed. I cried and I prayed and I cried.

I would love to say that there was a sudden light coming down from heaven, or a vision from Allah (SWT) pointing me towards Islam, but there was not. One day, I found that I did not believe in Jesus having the divine nature of being Son of God/God anymore.

### NEVER WANTED TO DENOUNCE JESUS

No matter how I tried to reason and explain to myself, I could not force myself to believe it anymore. And I was devastated. I was grieving because Jesus was my life! I had gotten through life with him (to me he was God) by my side. There were many times before when I questioned myself the basis of my love for him, by asking if someone were to point a gun at my head and asked me to denounce him, whether I would. I had reached the stage where I told Jesus I would never denounce him, because I cannot forsake He who has created and given me life.

Thus, to reach the point where I could not see Jesus as God, I was utterly shattered.

I made the decision to send a long email to my pastors and elders in church, to tell them I had to step down from my ministries because I did not believe in the doctrine of Christianity any longer. It came as a shock to many, and many were still not able to understand my reasoning for making such a drastic step in such a short time; yet I knew I cannot be a hypocrite. I could not force myself to stay in church if I did not believe in the basis of the faith any more. I hurt many, disappointed many, and shocked many, and it was still a struggle to mend the broken relationships in this process. (*Insha'Allah* one day, it will all be okay.)

### STEPPED AWAY FROM CHRISTIANITY

And so I left Christianity. But I was not a Muslim. The *Shahadah* (Testimony of faith) for Muslims to recite consists of two parts:

*La ilaha illallah, Muhammad-ur- rasulullah* (in Arabic)

*There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God* (in English).

I however only believed in the first part. I believe there is only One God, but to believe Muhammad (SAW) was the last messenger of Allah – I was doubtful. However, *Alhamdulillah*, I found it in myself to continue reading and asking about Islam. The more I read, the more fascinated and drawn to the religion I was.





## I prayed and I found what I was looking for – the Straight Path

I continued praying, often pleading with God (not sure whether it was Allah or the Christian god then). I just prayed to the One I knew moulded me in my mother's womb, the one that has protected me throughout the 23 years of my life, the One whom I knew I will have to face at the end of this life.

Bit by bit, step by step, I became convinced that the Quran was indeed a divine and holy book. My *iman* (belief) grew and grew - through the various talks organised by Darul Arqam that I attended; through the Muslims – brothers and sisters – that Allah (SWT) placed in my life for me to direct my questions to; and through the verses and guidance of the Quran.

Until one day, I knew I accepted the Quran as the Word of Allah (SWT). By accepting the Quran as the Word of Allah (SWT), I also accept Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as His Messenger who brought and communicated the Quran to all of humankind.

### LEARNT SO MUCH ABOUT GOD FROM BIBLE

I said the *Shahadah* deep down in my heart and I knew I believed in it with my whole heart. I prayed and I found what I was looking for – the Straight Path. Leaving Christianity did not make me lose respect of that religion in any way. In fact, I learnt so much about God from the Bible.

“There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in false deities and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower” (Al-Baqarah 02:256).

“When they hear what was revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes flooding with tears as they recognise the truth therein, and they say, “Our Lord, we have believed, so count us among the witnesses. “Why should we not believe in GOD, and in the truth that has come to us, and hope that our Lord may admit us with the righteous people?” GOD has rewarded them for saying this; He will admit them into gardens with flowing streams. They abide therein forever. Such is the reward for the righteous. As for those who disbelieve and reject our revelations, they are the dwellers of Hell” (Al-Ma’ida 05:83-86).

*Christianity, it seems, is a path leading me into Islam.*

*I have finally come home.*

Oh Allah (SWT), I pray that you give me courage to face the challenges ahead. Increase my *Iman* to stand up for this faith, and to cling onto it, come what may.

May Allah (SWT) guide me and keep me on the Straight Path always. Ameen. TMR



# Reflections from Yasmin Mogahed's Talk

OUR VOLUNTEER  
HIGHLIGHTS KEY LESSONS  
FROM THE INTERNATIONAL  
MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER,  
YASMIN MOGAHED, WHO  
WAS IN SINGAPORE LAST  
APRIL.

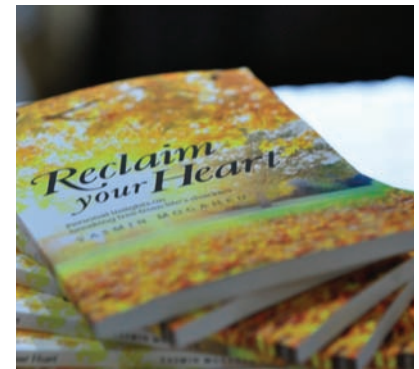
text | mehmutha beevi kutus



**Y**asmin Mogahed was introduced to me by a dear friend early last year who had encouraged me to like her Facebook page as her writing was very insightful. Somehow, by the will of Allah (SWT), her book landed in my hands when I needed it most. *Alhamdulillah*, her book indeed provides us with a new perspective on love, loss, happiness and pain. Allah (SWT) gives us help from where we least expect. I was drawn to her book, which used many analogies and examples from the Quran and the *Sunnah*, encouraging readers to reflect about their life.

I used to read Yasmin's book in the quietness of the night. I felt her speak to my soul, and many times, her powerful use of words gripped my heart and left me in tears. This is one book I felt does justice to its title, *Reclaim Your Heart*.

Looking forward to attending her talk in Singapore, I was able to get tickets for her talk entitled "Faith and Facebook: Challenges of Our Globalised Society". It was indeed an evening to remember. Yasmin Mogahed started her speech by reminding the audience on how our world has changed over the years because of technological advances. With the use of iPhone, iPad, iPod, etc, the focus has shifted to the individual self. Advertisements are appealing, and they excite our inner desires – making us feel all important and mighty – in order to sell. They feed our ego and motivate us to follow the latest trends and fashions, and urge us to succumb to standards set by the 'world at large'.



Yasmin Mogahed

## GOOD AND BAD OF FACEBOOK

Facebook also has the capacity to feed our ego. Being an active user of Facebook herself, Yasmin touched on both the good (that such platforms have on people) as well as the evil (that could lurk in it). Facebook, if used wisely, can be a form of motivation and inspiration for us to progress in our *Deen*. We share and unite with people.

However, there are those who practically document every activity on their Facebook timeline. They crave for 'likes' on their status or pictures, and get affected by comments made on their postings. Many invest a lot of time and energy analysing what people say. Yasmin encouraged us to look at our newsfeed and reflect on the kind of company we have on Facebook because what they post would have either positive or negative effect on us. It could even shape our thoughts and influence our beliefs. We need to strike a balance. If we are active Facebook users, we need to make it a positive addition in our lives. We must not let it distract us and move us further away from Allah (SWT).

## PAUSE AND THINK BEFORE POSTING

We need to always pause and consider two aspects before we post, share or comment on Facebook. Firstly, ask ourselves about whether we are speaking the truth and secondly, consider whether what we write would hurt or harm anyone. Yasmin reminded the audience on our responsibility to enjoin good and forbid evil. She gave a real life example of a sister who once used to wear

*hijab* and had posted a photo of herself without one. Her friends had given her comments on how gorgeous she was in that photo and that she looked great without the *hijab*. Eventually, the sister removed her *hijab*. One can only wonder if those comments made by her friends have encouraged her to remove her *hijab* and put her in a state of disobedience to Allah (SWT).

This is one example of such incidents among Muslims when their action is based on the reaction of people around them. Falling into this group of people means we are orbiting around the creations of Allah (SWT). We would be consumed by the world and we would be overwhelmed by it. We would never be contented and our affairs would just be scattered. Often, we would find ourselves affected by people, their actions and their opinions. We need to come out from orbiting around the creations and seek to grow closer to the Master of all creations, Allah (SWT).

Yasmin highlighted a beautiful Quranic verse, "Indeed in the creations of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Who remember Allah while standing, sitting or (lying) on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying), 'Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You (above such a thing); then protect us from the punishment of the Fire'" (Al-Imran, 03:190-191).



I was awed by how Yasmin encouraged the audience to reflect on the signs of Allah (SWT) and ponder over His creations. We need to find our purpose in life and strive in this world so as to elevate our status in the hereafter. Allah (SWT) says that those who reflect and ponder over His signs are those with insight, intellect, understanding and sense. *Subhanallah*. We should strive to be placed amongst His righteous, obedient and faithful servants who are constantly in His remembrance. We have to excel in the world and do it for the sake of Allah (SWT).

### WORK ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATOR

Everything comes from Allah (SWT). He blesses us with good and when He afflicts us, only He can remove the affliction. We could be so absorbed in trying to fulfil our desires in this world that we forget this truth. We lose sight of the source of our happiness and our sorrow. We get ourselves attached to all that we love and desire in this world, some, to the extent of neglecting or disobeying Allah (SWT). We need to work on our relationship with our Creator who knows what is best for us. We fail to seek Him and ask Him for guidance.

I remember the example shared by Yasmin about a sister looking for a spouse. If the sister thinks that wearing *hijab* and covering up her beauty make it harder for her to find a spouse, then she does not understand that, in the first place, it is Allah (SWT) who is the source of provision. It is through His Mercy that she would be able to find herself a spouse who would be the best for her.

In trying to attain our goals and fulfil our desires, we cannot show disobedience to Allah (SWT) because no good would come out of it. We will not have real contentment in our hearts. Obedience to Allah (SWT), our Creator, is of utmost importance. If our focus is sincerely in pleasing Allah (SWT), He would make our affairs in this world good for us. We would have contentment in our hearts as we submit to His Will, knowing that with His infinite knowledge, He knows what is best for us. It might not be what we might have expected, but He is the Best Planner. We thank Him in times of happiness and when He tests us, we persevere through patience and prayers.

### NATURE OF THE HEART TO TURN

Yasmin explained about the condition of the heart. It is interesting to note that in Arabic, *qalb* is the general word for heart. It comes from the root word that means 'something that turns around'; it is the nature of the heart to turn. And Allah (SWT) is *Muqallib al Quloob* (Turner of that which turns). We need to seek Allah (SWT) to make our hearts firm upon His religion and direct our hearts to Him.

The virtue of forgiveness was raised so as to remind us that we should forgive anyone who intentionally or unintentionally hurt us. Yasmin reiterated this point by citing the incident between Abu Bakr (RA) and the man who slandered his daughter, Aishah (RA). Abu Bakr (RA) was providing financial assistance to the slanderer and when the incident happened, he withdrew the money that he was providing the slanderer – which was the only thing Abu Bakr (RA) did and which is something anyone would do).

### LESSON FOR FORGIVENESS

However, soon after, Allah (SWT) revealed the following, "And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give (aid) to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allah, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (An-Noor, 24:22).

Upon hearing this, Abu Bakr (RA) not only continued the charity but he also gave the slanderer an increase in provision. This incident is an excellent example for us, Muslims, to remember about the virtue of forgiveness for the sake of Allah (SWT).

This article highlights only a small fraction of the materials that Yasmin shared that evening. My family and friends gained many valuable points of reflection from her talk and we sincerely pray that Allah (SWT) protect Yasmin Mogahed's *iman* and honour. May Allah (SWT) be pleased with her *Da'wah* efforts for the community and grant her *Jannat-al-Firdaus* (Paradise). TMR



# Exploring Islam in Taiwan

TMR INTERVIEWS UST AL  
IBRAHIMI ISHAQ MA CHAO  
XING, OR SIMPLY KNOWN  
AS UST ISHAQ MA, ABOUT  
MUSLIMS IN TAIWAN.

interview | aishah hussein  
transcription | carol 'aliya widjaya

**TMR:** How much do the Taiwanese identify with religion?

**IM:** There are different religions in Taiwan of course. Taoism and normal Buddhism are quite popular. For the Muslims, the number is quite small. It is around 50,000 registered Muslims since 10 years ago. But the ones connected to the *Masjid* (Mosque) are around less than 10,000.

**TMR:** Does religion play a big part in a Taiwanese's life?

**IM:** Normally it is. Religion is a big importance for Taiwanese, but Taiwan has several different major religions.

**TMR:** What is the idea of Islam or Muslims that the Taiwanese have?

**IM:** For the Muslim himself or herself, they think it [Islam] is a belief. Some of them think, 'This is my parents' religion as I am born into a Muslim family'. For some Muslims, they really do practise Islam in their life and they really think of Islam as their life and their everything. So, there are two kinds of Muslims in Taiwan.

For the non-Muslims, they wonder why the Muslims' belief in Islam is stronger than most other people's beliefs in their religions. For example, non-Muslims believe in many different religions, like Buddhism or other kinds of religions, but they practise a variety of different things. Like normally in a year, there are different celebrations of different religions' temples. They will go to the different temples that they know of or if they hear that the temple can bring them luck, health or fortune, they would go to that temple. This is how most of the non-Muslims believe in their religion in Taiwan.

**TMR:** And they are just curious why the Muslims are stronger in their beliefs?

**IM:** Yes.

**TMR:** You said about 10,000 Muslims go to the Mosque in Taiwan, although there are about 50,000 registered ones. When you break it down as such, there seems to be less and less Muslims in the community.

**IM:** It is possible. Because the Muslims were a big group in Taiwan half a century ago, in 1948, when there was the Taiwanese government. After the war between the mainland Chinese and the Communist government, some of those mainland Chinese left the mainland and came to Taiwan, forming the Taiwanese government. Among them were the soldiers, generals, teachers, and more – a big group of Muslims came with that government. After one generation, two generations from that time, the number of Muslims became less and less due to the lack of education of Islam and lack of *Da'wah*. But recently we began promoting diligently in different areas, and we are trying in different ways.



**TMR:** How active are the Muslims in *Da'wah*?

**IM:** Basically, Taiwanese Muslims do not have committees or organisations, such as Singapore's Darul Arqam, that work specifically in *Da'wah*. They promote Islam and do their *Da'wah* in the *Masjid*, or on Sundays, when we have different classes including children's classes. Now and then, we have discussions of varying topics. Depending on the attendance and topic, Taiwanese Muslims invite their non-Muslim friends when we announce such events through the website, or through the media.

Another way is by speaking at the colleges or universities. We are invited sometimes by the professors or the college that ask us to give a lecture related to Islam. At that opportunity, we do some *Da'wah* and introduce them to Islam.

The third way is by talking about Islam in the media. I myself have several times been invited by the media, specifically the television channels, to talk about Islam and Islamic cultures. That way, I managed to do a little bit of *Da'wah* too.

**TMR:** What are the challenges faced by Muslims, such as your self, in Taiwan?

**IM:** There are many challenges. We are a small number such that, normally, for a Muslim who is practising Islam well, he or she must feel that he or she is alone. It can get so lonely because the big environment is not Islamic. According to the





Western media, Islam is a bad religion, Muslims like to kill and Islam always damages. These negative notions are normal to the Taiwanese people who are Muslims. They would feel so lonely and feel people around them look down on them or look at them from a different view.

Secondly is the food. *Halal* meals. We cannot find many *Halal* things in Taiwan. Even in restaurants, we cannot find many *Halal* meals in Taiwan. But *Alhamdulillah*, these days we in the Chinese Muslim Association (CMA) are trying to promote *Halal* restaurants. We are the ones training the chef, management and service crew so that the restaurant can be certified as *Halal* by CMA. We offer them training, and after the training, there is a process of audit.

Thereafter, we offer them the status of *Halal* restaurant. *Alhamdulillah*, we already have 20 *Halal* restaurants around Taiwan, which provide *Halal* food to the Muslims.

The third challenge is youth education. Youth education is a big problem we are facing as we do not have Islamic *Madrasah* except for the weekend schools and the summer camps. But *Alhamdulillah*, anyhow, for Taiwanese youth, they have a different lifestyle when compared with youth of most other countries. They are pressured for their studies, especially since they have to study many things. We can only arrange Islamic education for them during the weekend. We can have six *Masjids* in Taiwan, and five are already doing this, *Alhamdulillah*, although we lack specific *Da'wah* organisations to promote Islam.

**TMR:** Do Taiwanese have this tendency to perceive a connection between Islam and terrorism?

**IM:** Basically for most non-Muslim Taiwanese, a Muslim is a terrorist, or they are close to the terrorists, or they used to be terrorists. Unfortunately, the Taiwanese media is always led by the Western media.

**TMR:** Do they assume, when they see a Chinese Muslim on the street such as your self, to be just as bad as an Arab Muslim terrorist?

**IM:** Not all of them, *Alhamdulillah*. The one who knows something about Islam sees us just as followers of a religion. The ones who do not know will ask questions or state things like, 'Why is your Islam so willing to kill people?', 'In the Middle East, we are just seeing in the media that you Muslims are always bombing and killing each other', 'Why you Muslim can have 4 wives, as this is not fair – this is Islam looking down at females', and 'You guys do not have any freedom for females'.

**TMR:** I understand you are also in touch with the new believers of Islam. What kinds of difficulty, in terms of family acceptance, social circles, etc, are affecting them?





**IM:** For some people, after they convert, they face family problems and food problems as well. Another problem is when they face the local Taiwanese culture. For example, annually, there is a period for cleaning the graveyards. In Chinese, we say 'sau-mu' or 'pai-pai'. Every member of the family must go to the graveyard, clean up, and offer fruits or something to the dead, and worship, as in Chinese tradition. If you do not do this, the Chinese family sees it as you going against the ancestors. If you do not respect them, you are just alien. Another instance is for the females who are trying to wear *hijab*. During job interviews, the interviewers will give suggestions such as you can go to that company, or that other company for them to find a nice job. Of course, there are new Converts who experienced difficulties but at last they get good jobs as well, since they have their own skills.

**TMR:** You specialise in the *Halal* restaurant affairs and authentication. How big is the *Halal* food trade there? Do you see it growing?

**IM:** Now it is growing because the Taiwanese government is trying to promote tourism. The fast targets are Malaysians and Singaporeans. These are the big customers, and many of them are Muslims. Since the government did not understand much about Islam and Muslims, they came to us [CMA] and wanted us to work with them. They want us to certify the restaurants that are available to be *Halal* certified. Of course our target for CMA to be doing this *Halal* certification, besides the promotion of *Halal* food, is for the convenience of the Muslim brothers and sisters. We are open to welcome the overseas Muslims as well, to provide convenience for the Muslims in Taiwan. For local Taiwanese who run the restaurant business, they are wishing to be certified as *Halal*. Now they are seeing many tourists coming from Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, parts of Thailand, and Brunei. They come to Taiwan and they cannot find *Halal* food. The Taiwanese are realising the big market for *Halal* foods.

**TMR:** What is the most common misconception that people have about *Halal* food in Taiwan?

**IM:** Most Taiwanese non-Muslims do not know or understand what '*Halal*' is. It can be funny at times when I get phone calls in the office by the business people who run companies or restaurants and they say, 'I want to have the *Allah* certification' in Chinese.

Some of them think foods that are *Halal* contain animal meat that the Muslims must pray for before killing it. Some think that *Halal* food is the Muslim's food that they cannot eat because the Muslims already read the Quran over it. This thinking is relevant to the Chinese, of the common Buddhism tradition, whereby if a monk read something for

the food, it has a different content and served a specific spiritual purpose for the consumer.

**TMR:** Is there any effort on the CMA's part to re-educate the Taiwanese?

**IM:** It is very hard, but at the same time it can be easy to do as well because the Taiwanese are willing. Any requirements that we impose on them for the *Halal* certification are followed.

Basically, we train them and start from teaching about what *Halal* is first, to the ones who run the business. Secondly, we explain why Muslims need to eat *Halal*. Thirdly, we tell them about how they can make their environment conform to *Halal* standards. Fourthly, we inform them about how they can serve the Muslim customers. These are what we have to teach them.

**TMR:** You have a whole system to educate the business folks about *Halal*?

**IM:** Yes, we just began in February 2012. It is quite a hard job.

**TMR:** How do you get *Halal* meat in Taiwan?

**IM:** We get imported *Halal* meat from Australia and New Zealand. The local Taiwanese beef that Muslims rear are more expensive than the imports because it is not much in quantity and the fresh meat is more expensive.

**TMR:** What is your future plan with the CMA?

**IM:** *Insha'Allah* I have many wishes and plans for the future, and for all of Taiwan. For around seven years, we have been doing *Da'wah* in the *Masjid*. Now I want to promote the *Halal* environment, for any Muslim, locally and from overseas. This way – we can get people to understand the way of Islam – is the way of *Da'wah*.

Secondly, I would like to see all local [Taiwanese] Muslims, especially the youth, crowding the summer camps, discussing Islamic topics, and promoting more Islamic messages.

The third is to get more support from any other Muslim organisations, financially. We do collaborate and cooperate with other agencies too. The Taiwanese government's tourism office in Singapore came to us with several agents from Singapore and had a meeting with us in Taipei. Since we have connections and they need news about Muslims and *Halal* food, the meeting was fruitful to all. In the future, *Insha'Allah*, we hope to have more connections with overseas travel agencies too. **TMR**

# Discovering the Meaning of **Tawakkal** (Part II)

OUR WRITER LEARNS TO  
EMBRACE THE HIDDEN YET  
BEAUTIFUL PLAN ALLAH  
(SWT) HAS AHEAD OF HER.

text | sim khadijah mohammed

*“If Allah helps you, none can overcome you; and if He forsakes you, who is there after Him that can help you? And in Allah (alone) let the believers put their trust” (Al-Imran, 03:160).*

As the lyrics of the famous Alanis Morissette song go, “life has a funny way of sneaking up on you when you think everything’s okay and everything’s going right; and life has a funny way of helping you out when you think everything’s gone wrong and everything blows up in your face”. Just when I thought that my life had gotten back on track, and the dust from my divorce had finally settled, I was posed a new and unexpected challenge.

At the start of January 2013, everything seemed to have finally fallen into place in my life. I was no longer grieving over my failed marriage; I was excelling at my full-time job in a large law firm, as well as my part-time job teaching at the law university; my financial burdens that had carried over from my divorce were gradually beginning to ease; and all in all, I was more than contented with Allah’s blessings.

I had begun to look forward to the prospect of becoming a partner in the firm, and was hopeful for the financial stability such a promotion would ultimately mean for my family. Once again, however, it appeared that Allah’s plan was vastly different from the one that I’d had in mind.

In late January 2013, I fell violently ill. Being as stubborn as I was, I had refused to see a doctor, thinking that my

chest pains were merely the result of ordinary work stress, and choosing instead to focus on the endless tasks ahead of me that required my immediate attention. By the time I made an appointment to see the doctor, I was bent double in excruciating pain and gasping for air. Instead of the usual MC and medication combo the doctor would often prescribe, I was given advice that I could not have anticipated.

The doctor informed me that my chest pains were symptomatic of a deeper root cause; that I was suffering from a mild anxiety disorder and have, in all likelihood, been grappling with it for most of my youth and adult life. What was harder to swallow were the options presented to me post-diagnosis – either: (1) be prepared to be medicated for life; or (2) undergo a drastic lifestyle change that included a change in my career path.

### CHALLENGED TO CHOOSE


I was stumped. It was as if the game had been changed while I hadn't been paying attention and I was now ill-equipped to make a next move, having but a limited understanding of the new rules. Once again, Allah (SWT) was posing me a seemingly insurmountable challenge: to choose between my health and a job I had come to love and that had provided so well for my family.

I took time off from work to process my thoughts (much to my bosses' and colleagues' surprise, as taking long vacations from work was not quite my style). Over the next few days, I grappled with the full weight of the information that had been presented to me. It was an emotional roller-coaster ride to say the least: shock at the thought that I had been ill for some time but had not realised it; fear that everything I had accomplished in my legal career would now go to waste; guilt at the thought that my family would have to take a major pay cut should I decide to leave my current position at the firm; and anxiety in relation to the uncertainty of the future.

As any ordinary person would when faced with a painful experience, I questioned the rationale behind it and wallowed in self-pity for a while. I then gathered myself and performed *istikhara* prayers (a prayer for guidance from God on an impending decision) and hoped for the best. That very evening after I had performed my *istikhara*, I attended at the university for my night class.

### IN MY SORROW, HIS LOVE CAME TO COMFORT

To my surprise, I was greeted by a whiteboard full of love and support from my students who had not known the details of my condition, but had sensed that



To choose between my health and a job I had come to love and that had provided so well for my family



I was overexerted from work (see picture below). I was overwhelmed – in the depths of my sorrow and confusion, Allah (SWT) had reminded me of His grace and beneficence. I was not alone, for He would send His love and support to me in all forms, if I only let go once again and trusted in His greater wisdom, as I had done before.

In a move that was both uncharacteristic and inconceivable, I resigned from my position at the firm without having secured an alternative full-time job. I wanted to take the time to heal and really get a handle on my condition while weighing my options, and it seemed somewhat insincere to have received the call from Allah (SWT) to trust, and yet to continue clinging tightly to the handrails. For the first time in my life, I did not have a plan, and the experience was both terrifying and oddly liberating at the same time.

I continued teaching at the university and took on ad hoc training opportunities in order to supplement my income. On days I was not teaching, I worked on projects that had been put on the backburner due to my previously gruelling schedule. I began to cook again – a pastime I had not indulged in since my divorce; I sat in cafes to read, colour or write in my journal; I practised my drums that had gathered dust from the months of inactivity and neglect;

but most importantly, I caught up on sleep – a luxury I could not afford previously.

## CHANGING MY MINDSET

Together with my counsellor's assistance, I began to develop coping mechanisms that would reduce my reliance on medication. This involved not only a change in lifestyle, but a change in mindset. I no longer allowed myself to "sweat the small stuff" – if, in the larger scheme of things, it didn't matter, then I should let it go.

I dealt with the grief from my divorce and told myself that if I had truly believed and trusted in Allah's plan, then I would stop blaming myself for every single thing that had gone wrong. While there may have been detours in my plan, there had been none in His – everything had happened exactly as it should, just as I was exactly where I was meant to be.

Former colleagues who met up with me for lunch began to see the marked change – I had an inexplicable glow about me. It was as if the grey clouds of gloom and doom had been lifted, and now the sun shone brightly, even when it rained. I was no longer concerned by uncertainty; with uncertainty came hope in a greater and brighter future, one beyond my own limited vision.


## RECOGNISING OUR PROVIDER

Allah (SWT) had not failed me before, and He would not fail me now, *Insha'Allah*. I just had to wait patiently for His beautiful plan to unravel with time. Thankfully, my family was understanding and supportive, as we all recognised that it had not been me providing as much as it had been Allah (SWT), and as always, Allah would provide, *Insha'Allah*.

As I reflected on the crazy ride that I'd had in the last three years, it dawned on me that Allah (SWT) had wanted me to change my life, from the outside in. It was not enough for me to change the entire course of my life; I had to change my entire outlook. True trust and gratitude in Allah's blessings could only come with me "losing" everything I had thought I had control over – my chosen marriage, my chosen career path, my chosen attitude toward life.

When my marriage had fallen apart, I had sought solace in my job – the one constant I had thought was within my power to control. But Allah (SWT) had shown me, over the course of a few life events, that nothing is truly within my power to control, and that I should seek solace in Him and Him alone. *Alhamdulillah*, Allah (SWT) is Most Wise and has truly brought me to my knees in submission to His greater plan – whatever that beautiful plan may be. TMR

*The author is a born-Muslim of Chinese-Malay descent. Her father was a Convert to Islam in the 1970s. Discovering the Meaning of Tawakkal (Part I) appeared in TMR Vol 30 No 2 of 2012.*



I wanted to take  
the time to heal



# Rustic Perfection

Stunning sunset

DISCOVER THAILAND'S QUIET PARADISE OF TRANG, AN UNASSUMING TOWN AT SOUTH OF KRABI, BRIMMING WITH ADVENTURE AND UNDISCOVERED BEAUTY.

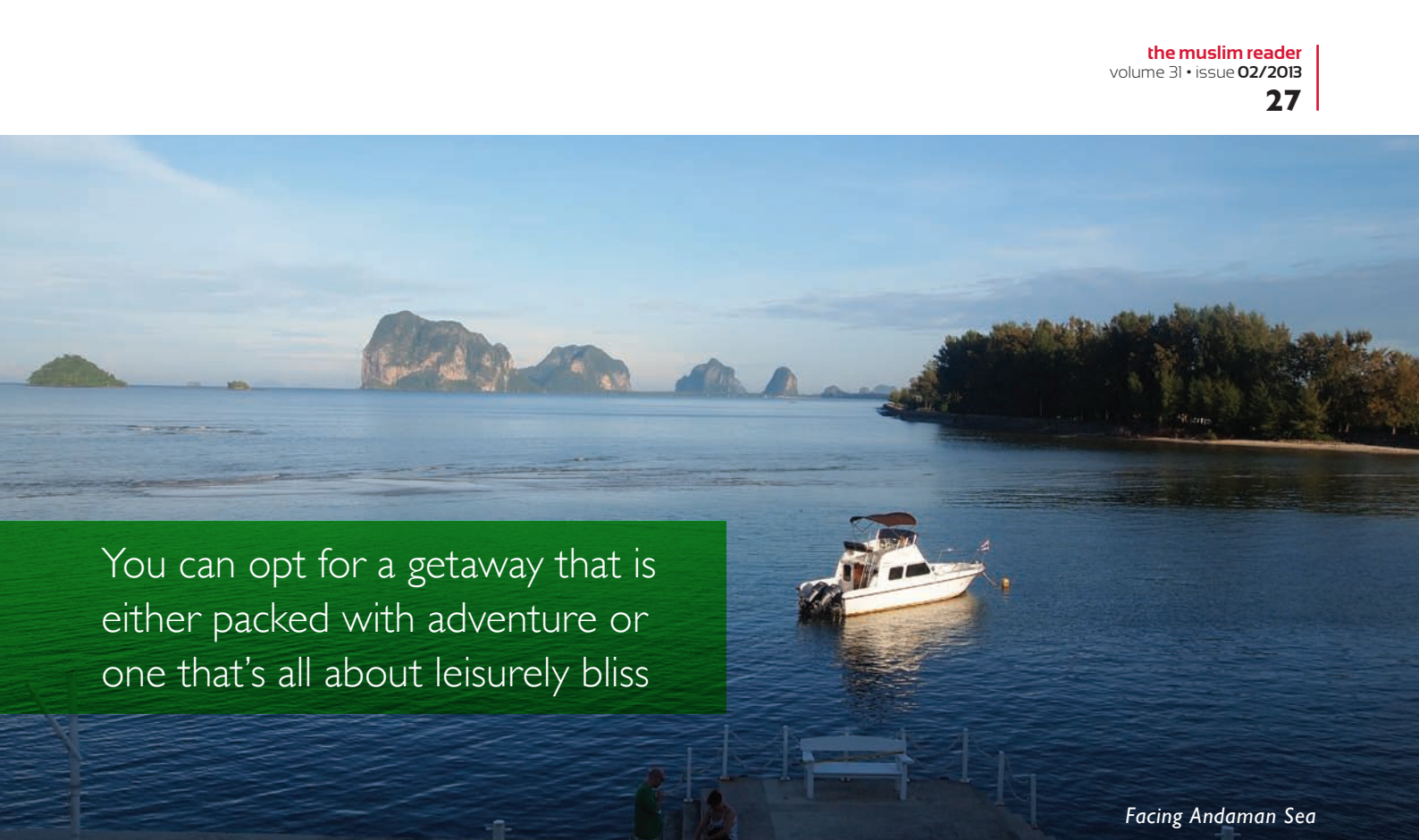
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**M**y husband and I agreed on one thing for our year-end holiday. We wanted absolute serenity, a rare thing in bustling Singapore. We also wanted a getaway that lets us escape the chaos of the city so we can make peace with our frazzled minds and bodies. Meticulous research and careful deliberation pointed us to a clear winner: Krabi, a beautiful province at the south of Thailand. Not only is this province exceedingly gorgeous, it is unlike a crowded tourist hotspot as compared to the other more popular retreats in Asia.

Within Krabi, there is a selection of destinations favoured by tourists, from your average day-trippers to adventurers, scuba divers and snorkelers looking for a rush of adrenaline. Most swarm to Ao Nang, Railay, Ko Phi Phi National Park and even islands like Koh Lanta and Ko Phi Phi Don. As we wanted quiet, we opted for Trang, a rustic town located at South of Krabi. After consulting the reliable *Trip Advisor*, we decided on a stay at the luxurious Anantara Si Kao Resort and Spa located along the edge of Chao Mai National Park.

## A WARM WELCOME

It is not just marketing that branded this country the land of smiles. We were surprised that the locals were genuinely generous with their sunshine beams. Day one started as we stepped out of the airport terminal and into the rented van that led us to our hotel.



You can opt for a getaway that is either packed with adventure or one that's all about leisurely bliss

Facing Andaman Sea

It took an hour to reach our hotel, but we relished the sights of buildings and nature that buzzed by. Our resort was situated on the powdery soft sands of Changlang Beach and shrouded by protected forests. We noticed there were other beaches with quite a number of resorts scattered within proximity. One of the more popular resorts in the area is Pak Meng Beach. It was sunset by the time we reached Anantara Si Kao and the most glorious sight greeted us: a panoramic view of the sky lit by the fiery reds and oranges of the setting sun. It was a magnificent sight that was incomparable to any sunsets we had ever seen.

Most hotels offer a variety of activities to take part in within their compound, whether organised or do-it-yourself. You can opt for a getaway that is either packed with adventure or one that's all about leisurely bliss. In our case, we wanted to go slow. The menu of activities featured at our resort tempted us. It included diving, sailing, snorkelling amid colourful corals around Koh Kradan, exploring an Emerald Cave where a deep lagoon awaits and even a seafood picnic surrounded by towering limestone cliffs. There was also the Anantara Spa, a haven that lets you unwind into pure bliss and tranquillity. We opted for a slice of paradise by pampering ourselves with a massage and an indulgent aromatherapy treat.

### OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Day two saw us exploring the resort's proximity on bicycles that were rented out by the hotel. It was a cool morning and we were raring to see the sights and taste the

local delicacies at the nearby town that's located a mere 10-minute car ride away. As we pedalled on, we soaked in the picturesque surroundings, the view of the Andaman Sea with towering limestone cliffs that rise like granite giants as well as the random wandering cows that placidly stare at passers-by.

We started to feel slightly peckish as we neared the quaint seaside town. With rows of stalls that tempted us with the tantalising smell of grilled seafood, who wouldn't? These stalls stood right beside the road so we simply slowed down and made a pit stop at the stall that called out to us with its delicious array of seafood. Traffic was slow and there were hardly any vehicles on the road, making the trip a leisurely one. We were served piping hot sticks of grilled squid and prawns as well as ice cold Coke straight from the classically curved glass bottles by a *tudung*-clad lady. The best part was that we savoured these on a couple of lounge seats that faced the sea. We love how food came easy for us, as the Muslim community in Krabi is strong. Look out for the *Halal*-certified stamp at the front of each stall, and you're good to go! Not just hearty bites, these roadside stalls also offer a range of items from apparels and home wares to Krabi's traditional titbits.

### A DIFFERENT SORT OF THERAPY

We did not expect to shop much at Krabi, as it was not as renowned for its retail industry as Bangkok. However, we still indulged the hedonistic in us with a visit to Trang City to scout for souvenirs on day three.





Bicycles for rent



Engraved leather keychain



Old school bottled drinks



Trang city sights



Food 'stall' at pasar malam

With a driver to chauffeur the two of us wherever we wanted to go, the 2,000 Baht (S\$82) bill for the hotel's rented van was worth it. As huge thrift stores and flea markets buff, we wanted less conventional shopping spots. Our driver took us to a *pasar malam* (night market), a large tented bazaar situated right beside the town's Robinson Mall. It was a bargain hunter's paradise with sunglasses going for as low as 100 Baht (S\$4), ridiculously cheap moustache watches, t-shirts with embroidered detailing, pants weaved from the country's traditional cloth, and food - glorious food.

We opted for fresh fruits and an unusual yet yummy strawberry milkshake made from shaved ice and sprinkled with toppings of your choice; a dessert popular in most parts of Thailand. The second stop was a large warehouse along a row of shophouses that sells only OTOP products. OTOP stands for 'One Tambon (meaning sub-district) One Product', a local entrepreneurship stimulus programme that supports the sale of local made products in Thailand. This included intricate handicrafts, cotton and silk apparels, unique pottery and traditional delicacies.

Although he hardly spoke fluent English, my driver was friendly and accommodating. After much vigorous hand signals, we agreed on our next destination. There were two weekend night markets in Trang City that were regularly visited by tourists and locals alike. The first night market was literally packed with street food from grilled fish, marinated chicken, fresh oysters and green mango to crispy little meringue filled pancakes and sweet coconut balls. We each had a packet of chicken briyani, which tasted like a cross between chicken rice and glutinous rice, from a *Halal*-certified Muslim stall and wolfed it down.

The second weekend night market we went to was my favourite. Located at Muang Trang district beside the railway station, this was a vintage lover's cloud nine! Not only do these stalls stock second-hand threads and vintage-inspired pieces, there were also affordable apparels with styles that were likened to Singapore's very own Bugis Market. Stalls were clustered together but it was easy to get around. I purchased two blouses for a mere 100 Baht (S\$4) in total and a leather keychain engraved with my name for 120 Baht (S\$5). A downright steal! This spot is





Trang City



Trang market sights



Trang market sights

also perfect for craft lovers and those who adore all things kitschy. Nevertheless, most crowd to this market because of the entertaining live music performed by buskers, the gastronomic delights and the bustling ambience.

Three days were too short to experience everything Trang had to offer. We truly feel this town is one of the destinations in Krabi that has been overlooked and underrated. With its unhurried pace of life and scenic surroundings, it is the perfect place for us to relax and unwind. In short, we will definitely return for a second helping of Thailand's quiet paradise.

## KRABI ESSENTIALS

Situated at the west coast of Southern Thailand and covering an area of approximately 4,709 sq km, Krabi is the perfect starting point to the wonderful destinations surrounding it. Ko Lanta and Trang are at its South, Ko Phi Phi is at its Southwest and Ao Nang, Railay and Tham Phra Nang at its West. The province faces the Andaman Sea so it is subject to a six-month rainy season between May and November. Krabi's landscape is undulating and dotted with

hills and mountains, with bays and capes along its 160 km coastline.

## WHERE TO STAY

Tourism is an important industry in Krabi. This is why there is nothing short of extraordinary when it comes to hospitality and accommodation. Take your pick from the many wondrous destinations in Krabi and make your choice of stay, whether it's a luxurious 5-star resort or small bungalow, based on needs, budget and range of activities. Do take note that it is best to enquire about the halal certification within the hotel prior to booking.

## WHEN TO STAY

December to March marks the ideal time to visit Krabi as this is when hotels, resorts and bungalows tend to fill up. The rainy season happens between June to November so you can expect fewer crowds and accommodation costs to drop by almost 50 percent – if you're willing to take the risk. Despite the wet weather, you might just luck out with several days of intermittent sunshine. TMJR

Mufti Ismail Menk from Zimbabwe lectured in Singapore on 7 and 9 June 2013 on *The Holy Quran - the Book of Guidance for Mankind and Misconceptions Of Islam*.

The Imam of Masjid Al Falaah in Harare, Mufti Menk attained a degree in Shariah Law from the University of Madinah Munawwarah. He is now Head of Fatwa Department of The Council of Islamic Scholars of Zimbabwe (Majlisul Ulama Zimbabwe).

\*Look out for the videos of his two lectures on the The Muslim Reader app available on the App Store.



Mufti Menk speaks to the audience at Shine Auditorium



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI  
& DA'WAH VOLUNTEERS

Lectures by  
Mufti Ismail Menk









Islam4All Workshop is planned as a bi-annual event to be held in June and December every year by Da'wah Division.

Designed for the Muslim youth to engage in interactive lectures and discussions, this workshop addresses the fundamental aspects of Islam, studies of cross-cultural da'wah and comparative religions, and contemporary issues facing Islam and the community.

Held from 14 to 16 June 2013 at Mydin Mosque Auditorium, it served as an excellent platform to educate, train and engage the young generation in pursuit of *Da'wah*. The next workshop is targetted for December 2013.



Participants in June 2013

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

## Islam4All Workshop



Presentation by Nuruddeen Lemu

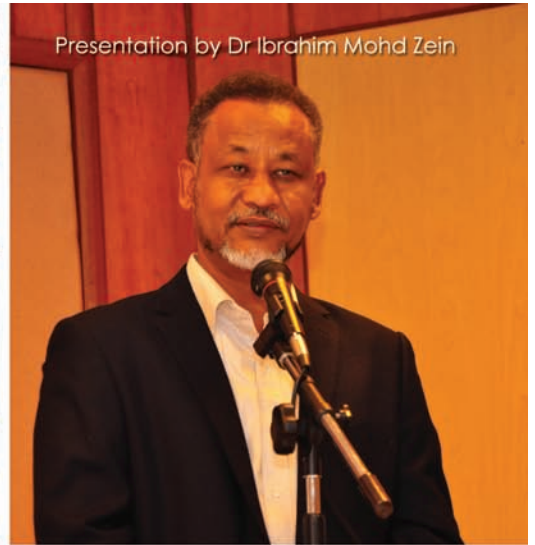
To believe or not to believe?

\*Importance of the right beliefs,  
right habits and character (map  
& compass)





Presentation by Dr Ibrahim Mohd Zein



Participants also shared their discussions in the workshop



Nigerian Salatu Sule shared her experience





Darul Arqam Singapore took part in the Singapore Book Fair at Suntec City, from 5 to 10 June 2013, and engaged with people from different walks of life to create a better understanding of Islam.

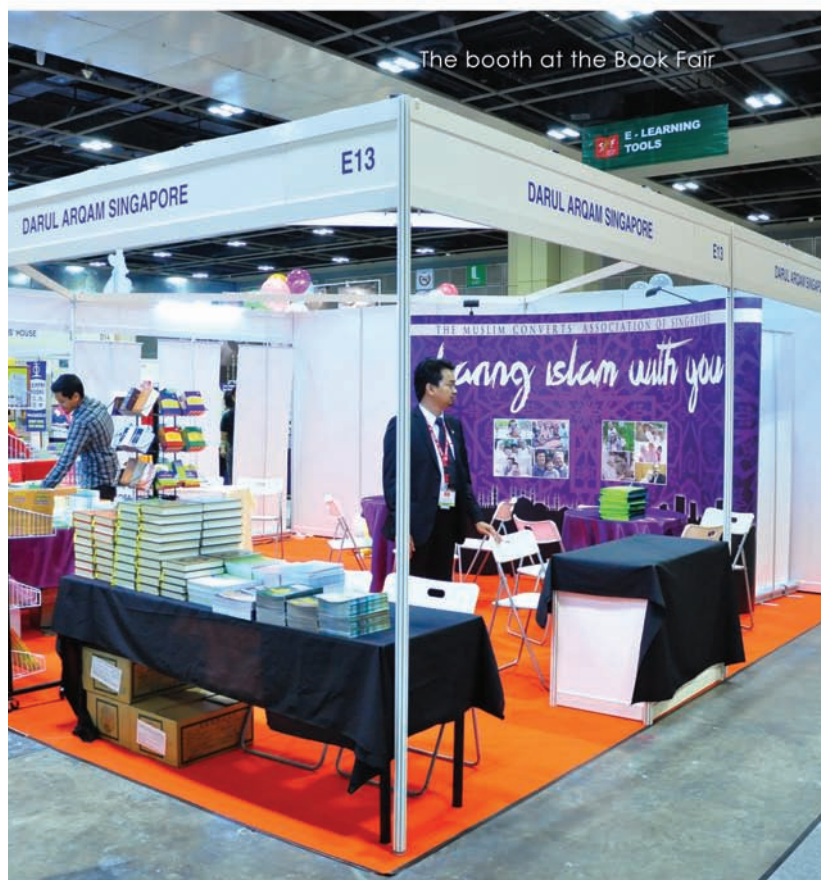
Renowned Islamic Calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang, was invited to demonstrate the flair of Islamic Calligraphy. Based in Henan Province, China, Haji Noor Deen has travelled to different parts of the world, including to Harvard University, to speak about the art.

\*Get Darul Arqam's 2014 calendars that feature exclusive calligraphies by Haji Noor Deen. (while stocks last)

Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang



The booth at the Book Fair



Translations of Quran for distribution



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAZALI TOMPANG

## Darul Arqam at the Book Fair





PHOTOGRAPHS BY YODA

YODA Camp 2013





Rozelle Elizabeth Sicangco, or Queenie Padilla, was a rising star in the Philippines film industry. Now, she is a student and an active *da'ie*.

Darul Arqam organised a series of lectures and sharing session in Tagalog by Queenie from 28 to 30 June 2013 during which she shared with the audience in Singapore about her journey to Islam and why she gave up acting.

She is the eldest daughter of renowned Filipino actor Robin Abdul Aziz Padilla and Lizzle Sicangco. After performing *Hajj* in 2011, Queenie quit showbiz, concentrated on pursuing her studies and actively engaged in spreading the word of Allah (SWT).



Tagalog lecture by Queenie Padilla



Queenie Padilla



The Mabuhay Club monthly discussion

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

Visit by  
Queenie Padilla



Qur'anic recitation before the lecture



Speak in a most kindly  
manner even to those  
who do not share your  
beliefs



“And say to My servants  
that they should always  
speak (even when  
disputing) that which is  
the best.”

Al-ISRA'  
THE NIGHT JOURNEY  
(17:53)

