



themuSLimreader

DOWN TO EARTH

knowledge has got to do with all
that is virtuous and nothing to do
with those contrary to virtuousness

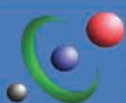
features

Three Jewels of the Praiseworthy Muslim

What *God* Means to Me

City of Mosques - Istanbul

Exclusive Interview
with Mufti Ismail Menk



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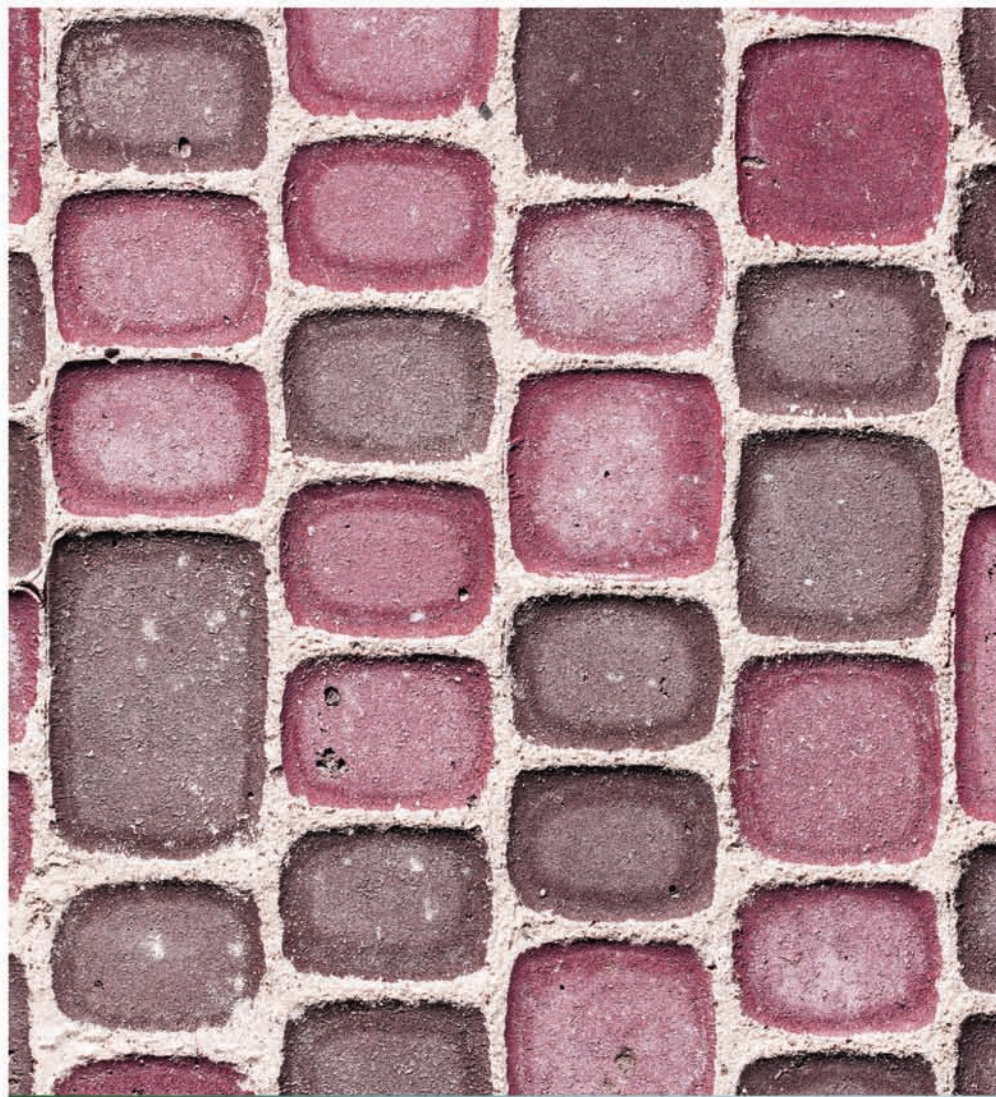
Gardens of the Righteous, in the original Arabic, is a compilation of verses from the Quran and Hadith by Imam Nawawi.

Abu Said Khudri (RA) relates that someone asked Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

Who is the best man?
He answered: A believer who strives in the cause of Allah with his self and his property.

The man asked: And next after him?
He said: One who is mindful of his duty to Allah and safeguards people against his own mischief.

(Bukhari and Muslim)



Riyadh as-Salihin
(Gardens of the Righteous)
Chapter 69, Number 601



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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
Hadith: Narrations about the words and deeds of
Prophet Muhammad (SAW)
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

Down to Earth

To be unpretentious and staying grounded in humbleness, regardless of the luxury of blessings we have - whether in terms of material assets or intangible wealth, is a constant test for us. This is especially since we, as individuals, seek and discern what is beneficial and what is detrimental to us while striving towards betterment, so that we can learn to boost our strengths and alter our weaknesses.

TMR brings forward, in this edition, thoughts relevant to the concept of humility, which every Muslim - in the efforts to improve - should often remind ourselves. The *Three Jewels of the Praiseworthy Muslim*, by Ust Bani Ali, highlights notable traits towards righteousness and reflects on our weakness to slip through the cracks of pride. *What God Means to Me*, by Dr Yamin Cheng, explains about what it means to be human and how this acceptance of our humanness can intensify a deep sense of modesty in our being as one of God's creations.

It is hoped that the readers of TMR continue to receive blessings for the knowledge that the contributors have shared within these pages, just as we hope for the previous and future editions of TMR. And with humility, the team for TMR extends supplications of peace for every reader who has been touched, in any possible manner, by the contents of our magazine.

"And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, 'Peace!'" (Al-Furqan, or The Criterion, 25:63).



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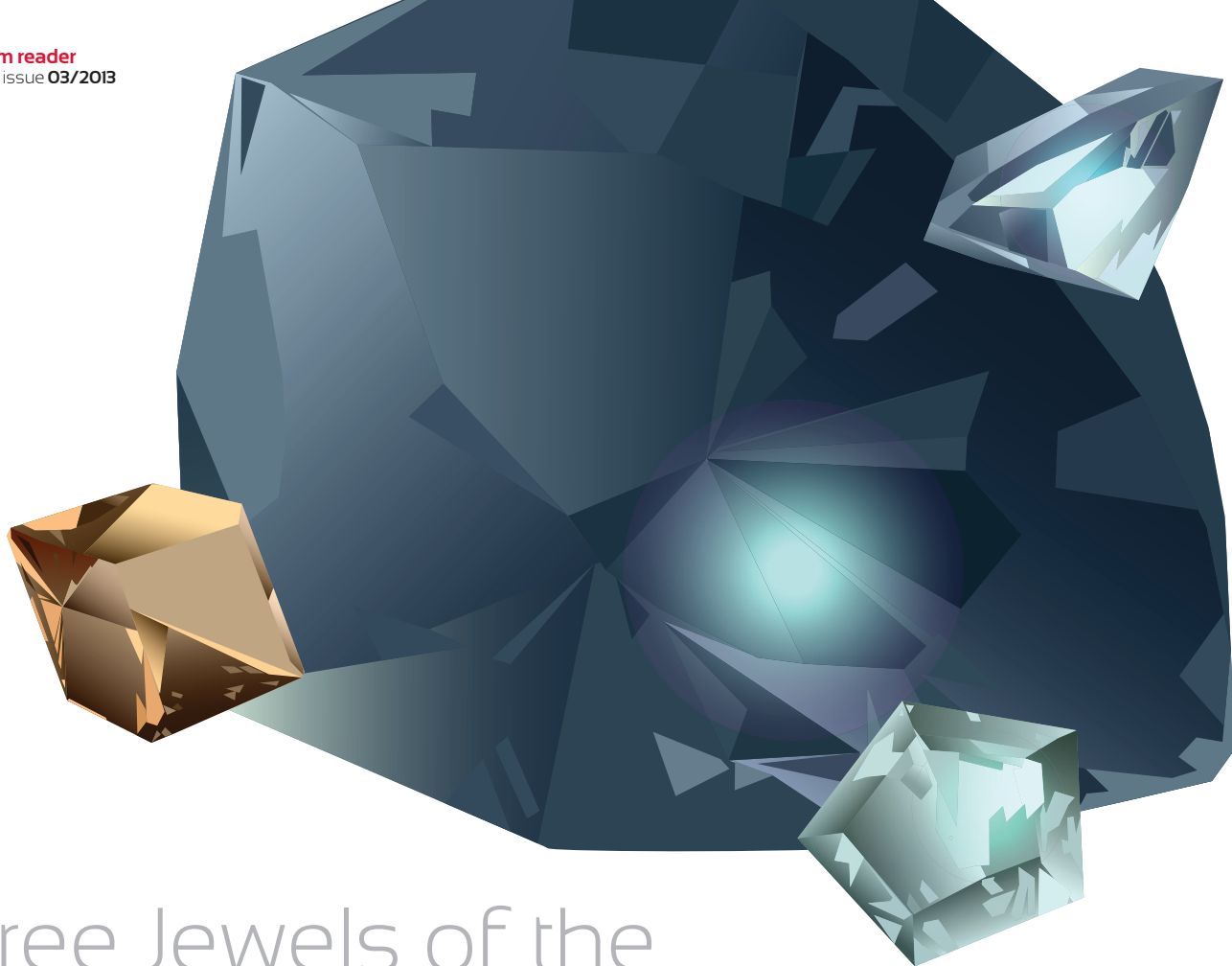
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Three Jewels of the Praiseworthy Muslim -


'ilm, akhlaq, adab

GOODNESS IN MANNERS
AND ETIQUETTE IS A VITAL
COMPANION TO THE
KNOWLEDGE WE ACQUIRE.

text | ust bani ali

We can be successful human beings only by being humans – purely. The key to success in humanity begins with the human's need to embrace and enjoin humanitarian values. For instance, this is when the powerful protects the weak, the wealthy rescues the poor, and the intelligent guides and educates. We are in a state of least humanness when the powerful oppresses the weak, the wealthy exploits or ignores the poor, and the intelligent deceives or manipulates. Being human first of all, requires that we have the knowledge about what humanity is, and then work on it upon our human meaning.

Knowledge (*'ilm*) is issued from the Creator for humans to gather and benefit from, which is vital for life. In its essential nature, knowledge is goodness and the true seeker of knowledge must strive for goodness in his human nature.



If your intention is one of these three,
do not seek knowledge:

- to shame the ignorant
- to argue with the scholars
- to cause people to turn their faces
in your direction

“And by the soul and by Him Who perfectly proportioned it and imbued it with (the consciousness of) its evil and its piety. He who purifies it (soul) will prosper and he who suppresses (soul) it will be ruined” (Ash-Shams 91:07-10).

Muslims are taught to inculcate sincerity to such an extent that our innermost intention (*niyat*) to seek knowledge must be pure. This means seeking knowledge solely for the sake of obedience to Allah’s command and His Messenger’s advice. This obedience thus manifests faith (*iman*) and makes us be true to our nature as humans. We then need to maintain the goodness in our nature through our character (*akhlaq*) and excel in being human.

This *niyat-iman-akhlaq* must first be in place within our soul, in order for us to benefit whatever we do in life, and inculcating

etiquette and moral values in our conduct (*adab*).

Knowledge is essential to humans in living life, and it must be pursued constantly and consistently. “Allah will raise to high ranks those of you who believe and are endowed with knowledge” (Al-Mujadalah 58:11). Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim” (At-Tirmidhi).

ALL THAT IS VIRTUOUS

Its importance shows that knowledge has got to do with all that is virtuous and nothing to do with those contrary to virtuous. To seek knowledge for the purpose of debating, accusing, alleging, or deceiving is wayward and far from the virtuous purpose. This is something that a person devoid of *akhlaq* and *adab* would do. Ibn Mas’ud (RA) advised his

students, “If your intention is one of these three, do not seek knowledge: To shame the ignorant, or to argue with the scholars (*fuqahaa*), or to cause people to turn their faces in your direction. Intend with your actions and words that which is with Allah, for indeed that which is with Allah shall remain and everything else shall perish.”

We need to examine these and rectify ourselves prior to learning and engaging with others about the knowledge we are acquiring or have acquired. Ignoring this advice could result in confusion, chaos and ultimately, failure to achieve virtue or goodness.

An analogy for this is like making preparations before embarking on a journey. Basically the sequence or the correct order on how humans live life virtuously is first to Recognise, then to Acknowledge, and so to Act in accordance to what has been recognised and acknowledged. Thus, the starting point is the search for knowledge - in order to recognise, in order to acknowledge, and in order to act correctly.

BETWEEN THOSE WHO KNOW AND DO NOT KNOW

We should not be distressed with comments from the critics of Islam. We should understand that they generally may be devoid of *akhlaq* and *adab*, thus the “knowledge” they possess are fragmented information, which do not help them understand.

So as Muslims, we should find a better way and not get drawn into futile debates; rather refresh and restart the situation by addressing the core issues with Knowledge, *akhlaq*, *adab*.

Seek knowledge ethically. Listen thoroughly, read extensively from references, taking all things in context and not out of it, engage in questions-and-answers for clarification, and so forth.

Muslims must also seek knowledge, with justice for himself and for others. For example, a person who is sober should not debate with the drunkard, a person who is mature and of sound mind should not argue with the immature or the mentally challenged. Why is this so? Because there would be injustice to both!

“O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal unjustly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty” (Al-Maa'idah, 05:08).

It is best for Muslims not to hate but to educate. Muslims are required to refrain from arguing with critics of Islam, but are encouraged to invite them to learn. And this is priority. “Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom

Lesson from the earliest story

It started when Allah (SWT) decreed, “I am about to place a vicegerent on earth” (Al-Baqarah, 02:30), and Adam (AS) is created for this purpose.

“Recall when We said to the angels: ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam’; all prostrated themselves save Iblis. He refused. Then We said: ‘Adam! He is an enemy to you and to your wife. So let him not drive both of you out of Paradise and plunge you into affliction, (for in Paradise) neither are you hungry nor naked, nor face thirst or scorching heat’. But Satan seduced him, saying: ‘Adam! Shall I direct you to a tree of eternal life and an abiding kingdom?’ Then the two of them ate the fruit of that tree and their shameful parts became revealed to each other, and they began to cover themselves with the leaves from the Garden. Thus Adam disobeyed his Lord and strayed into error. Thereafter his Lord exalted him, accepted his repentance and bestowed guidance upon him” (Ta Ha, 20:116-122).

and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious...” (An-Nahl, 16:125).

Critics have existed since the days of the Prophets (AS) of Allah (SWT) in the past. If we study, we know that criticisms about Islam are all too common. The Satan’s way from the very beginning is to cast doubts and to “shake up” the believers’ *iman*. It begins with enticement to engage in a thought provoking proposition and follows it with deception, where the listener is fed with false assumptions that are not from sound knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE DEVOID OF AKHLAQ AND ADAB IS FUTILE

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) used to pray, “O Allah, I ask You for Beneficial Knowledge, acceptable action and good provision” (At-Tirmidhi).

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY?

There are those who start their learning with deliberate refusals and denials of certain things using their own justifications. From this, we need to understand that the individual has started with the wrong action. We first need to purify our hearts with sincere intentions to learn, e.g. not with intent to prove deficiencies or wrongs of others; and follow it with ethical ways in learning for clarity. We then can recognise and acknowledge the truth as much as God guides us, and naturally the right action - based on our

Angels, pure beings with intellect and capabilities, exemplified total obedience, while the Devil (Iblis or Satan) with intellect, capabilities and desire, exemplified disobedience. Adam (AS), the human being with intellect, capabilities and desire, learnt from the whole episode.

Adam (AS) and Hawa (Eve) were 'affluent' from the start, with needs provided for, knowledge and lessons in being obedient shown, and reminder to preserve innocence, all given by Allah (SWT). When Adam (AS) made a mistake, he reflected on what he had learnt, recognised his good *akhlaq* and *adab* in his nature, and acknowledged it with the right course of action.

"Both cried out: 'Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and do not have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the losers'" (Al-A'raf 07:23). Adam wished for goodness in life, so he chose to repent and seek forgiveness with hope in Allah's *rahmah* (infinite mercy) and was granted.

What did Satan choose? Given the chance to use his intellect, Satan was questioned and subsequently gave his reason. "Allah said: 'What prevented you from prostrating,

when I commanded you to do so?' He said: 'I am better than he. You created me from fire, and him You created from clay'. Allah said: 'Then get you down from here. It does not behove you to be arrogant here. So be gone. You will be among the humiliated.' He (Iblis) replied: 'Give me respite till the Day they shall be raised.' Allah said: 'You are granted respite.'" (Al-A'raf, 07:12-15).

Clouded with superiority complex, Satan was haughty and based his reason on a false assumption that fire is better than clay. Contrary to Adam (AS), Satan chose to ask for respite in despair of Allah's *rahmah* and Allah (SWT) granted him respite.

Even though with intelligence, Satan failed to recognise and refused to acknowledge the command of Allah (SWT), including the position of Adam (AS) as *Khalifah* (Vicegerent) for the planet earth and the exemplary conduct of the Angels. Devoid of good *akhlaq* and *adab*, Satan enjoined enmity and hatred. Satan chose to rebel and make Adam (AS) his enemy. No self-reflection, no consideration, no remorse. Totally devoid of virtues, Satan spearheaded adversity in his life.

knowledge - will follow, which will be a delight for the soul of the learner.

Erratic behaviours and actions are caused when there is wrong acknowledgement, stemming from the failure to recognise. Failing to recognise is caused by the unethical way of learning. This is derived from a flawed *akhlaq* and *adab*. At this point, we can recognise the similar characteristics and the similar sequence that Satan had also followed in the historical incident with Adam.

"We said: 'Get you down from here, all of you [Adam, Eve and Satan], and guidance shall come to you from Me, then, whoever will follow My guidance need have no fear, nor shall they grieve'" (Al-Baqarah, 02:38).

A chance and reminder was given - while Adam was responsible and reminded his progeny, Satan vowed, "Since You have led me astray, I shall surely sit in ambush for them on Your Straight Path. Then I will come upon them from the front and from the rear, and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them thankful" (Al-A'raf, 07:12-15).

Today, we can see the effects of history; some of us are with Adam being true to his nature, thus benefitting from *akhlaq*, *adab* and intellect. But some of us are adverse and relentless in their pursuit (of adversity), like Satan.

THE PROBLEM WITH CRITICS

There are people who follow these adverse traits, which are of the same nature as the typical anti-Islam polemics, such as some of the argumentative Orientalists since colonial times. This old method of malice is kept alive by people who ignore the goodness in human nature and ethics.

Muslim scholars have soundly refuted all criticisms ever since. But criticisms are being recycled and today, there is an 'industry' publishing books critical of Islam. What triggers such behaviour, envy, prejudice, bigotry, Islamophobia, or xenophobia?

These are diseases that corrupt the goodness in human nature. Without or before enjoining righteous conduct in seeking knowledge, they embark on criticism, doing 'research' and picking up points to be used in refutations. They did not study the Quran; instead they pick verses from the English translation of the Quran, to suit their arguments. They 'cut and paste' from Quran, *Hadith*, and writings of Muslim scholars, without learning extensively. Some studied extensively, but with ill-intent, vested interest or hidden agenda.

In any case, they spend a great deal of time and effort to produce something malicious. Alas, there is nothing to benefit themselves from such efforts, because there is no increase in knowledge and understanding, but only increase



Show the way forward by
reconciliation and re-education
in a virtuous manner

in the prowess to criticise blatantly, incite, irritate and upset others. This amounts to hate-mongering.

Did the critics bother to look at *akhlaq* and *adab* in learning, which is to recognise, acknowledge and act in accordance to the spirit of learning? Why should Muslims bother listening to the uncouth, the unethical, the uneducated and the unqualified? The 'cut and paste' work need not be taken seriously, because it is not of quality intellectual value. This is just one example of intelligence devoid of *akhlaq* and *adab*. It is the key to failure in resolving arguments and the crux of problems.

The human soul is inspired with goodness that has the potential to flourish towards *ihsan* (righteousness). Suppressing this potential corrupts the conscience. Enmity and wars happen because many of those having intelligence and vested with power and influence, such as politicians, activists, educators, writers, journalists and religious figures, are devoid of *akhlaq* and *adab*. These result in the loss of moral values, and immoral values take its place. As a result, the propagation of hate-mongering, and even, war-mongering become prevalent.

CHOOSE ADAM, SHUN SATAN

For a peaceful state of mind, Muslims should avoid polemics who offend. Remember the two sides – (1) Adam representing good *akhlaq*, *adab*, intelligence, faith and hope (2) Satan represents adversity, flawed intellect and disparity. Who should we emulate, Adam or Satan?

Humanity must stand together with Adam in enjoining and upholding goodness, and be aware of discord and hatred advocated by the adversary. Muslims should continue to invite others to an intellectual discussion. Show the way forward by reconciliation and re-education in a virtuous manner. This helps to establish relationship based on mutual respect and tolerance.

“Human beings, We created you all from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another (not to despise each other). Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware” (Al-Hujurat, 49:13). TMR

Children of War

poem | siti syuhada faizal

They tell us not to cry
But they didn't tell us why.
They tell us not to cry
But it was really just a lie.

We just want to go home
But still we have to roam.
We just want to go home
But we hide under a dome.

Our hunger knows no bounds
But our parents cannot be found.
Our hunger knows no bounds
But what is that sound?

They tell us not to cry
But this time they told us why.
They tell us not to cry
But our eyes just can't comply.

Another loud sound is heard
But from our mouths not a word.
Another loud sound is heard
But will we hear a third?

his poem is dedicated to all the children of Syria, Rohingya, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other war-torn countries where conflict is strife and children are suffering needlessly. Please visit www.wfp.org and www.islamic-relief.com to see how your donations can help these children.

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What God Means to Me

SEEK IT FROM THE PLEASURE
OF THE SENSES TO THE
PLEASURE OF THE MIND,
AND TO THE PLEASURE OF
REALISING OUR ORIGIN.

text | yamin cheng

When God gave us this life, He also gave a world for us to dwell in. What is the purpose of the world to our existence?

For most of us, the world is a reservoir of supplies for our everyday uses. We need food and water for our body, and that is why God gave us the birds and beasts, oceans and rivers. We need oxygen to live, and that is why God gave us the air as well as the plants to give us fresh oxygen to breathe. We need places to shelter and to sleep, and that is why God gave us the trees and stones for us to build homes to live in. God, in this sense, is a God who provides, for, after bringing us into existence, He gave us a world through which we are able to construct a life.

Why did God give us a world and yet we have to construct a life out of it? Why didn't God give us a world that is a furnished place to live, such as having trees to give out fruits without us having to plant the seeds, water the trees, get rid of the pest enemies, and knowing which soil to use and what weather to choose? That would be a wonderful God indeed!

FINISHING TOUCH

God gave us a world as an unfinished place to live so that we could put the finishing touches to it and turn it into a wonderful place to inhabit. God gave us a mind so that with it, we can look for the knowledge that helps us to build our life. If we do not use the mind and only hope for things to happen without our participation, we can hope all day long and nothing is going to happen.

Besides the mind, God also gave us a will, namely, that burning desire to push our hands and feet to get hold of the raw material of Nature and transform them into the goods for our use. God, in this sense, is a God who shares, for, without our participation in making life happens, we would be wondering what worth do we hold as human beings, for all we do is to watch God doing all the work for us and we, on our part, only wait to enjoy the fruits of God's work. Therefore, in getting us involved in constructing life for ourselves, God wants us to see that we have self-worthiness, self-pride, and self-respect that define our nature as human beings.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

For some of us, life is not only about enjoying the basic things of everyday living, about having to eat and drink, shelter and sleep. True, we need to do all these, but we also ask questions about what doing all these means to other things in life. So what if I have enough to eat? So what if I have a place to live? So what if I have enough of everything? Am I happy even if I have the world before me? Needless to say, in fulfilling the needs of our everyday living, we are confronted with questions about what they

mean to our human meaning, about what it means to be human.

Are we just like the animals that eat and sleep, or, are we just a degree above them, having a mind and a will that animals do not have? Do we, as humans, in fulfilling our needs, live by the rule of the survival of the fittest and competing with one another to be able to have the things that fulfil our needs, or do we work together to get them? Do we need values and virtues to guide us in our conduct of life, about what we must and must not do in the way we fulfil our needs? There are many things that we desire. The question is: what among them can we have, how can we have them, and what purposes do they satisfy?

GUIDELINES TO MAKE US AWARE

God, in this sense, is a God who guides. God gives us a world, gives us a mind, gives us a will, but God also gives us guidelines about how the world, the mind, and the will can form a coherent relationship to make earth the best place for living. God lets us know that there are things we desire but we cannot have them because they are not beneficial to our body, and should we consume them, they could affect our behaviour that will cause grievances not only to ourselves, but also to others. God wants us to know that these guidelines are not meant to cause hardship to our life, but are intended to instil in us awareness, sensitivity, and responsibility regarding our wishes and actions, about what consequences they bring to us and others.

Irrespective of how much we try, we humans always fall short of being perfect. Perfection, it seems, is something we strive to achieve all the time, not a ready-made quality that we put on, like a nice-looking shirt or dress that makes us look beautiful and delightful the moment we put it on. Although perfection is something we strive to achieve, it is what we humans want because perfection is the crowning witness of our ability to overcome the deficiencies and insufficiencies that make us look incomplete, hence, unsatisfied.


PERFECT, BUT IMPERFECT

But why did God create us humans perfect in our physical appearance but from our human character, God puts up a little disappearance? Perhaps God wants us to know that imperfection is what makes us perfect! What a way to frame our human character. When we see what is lacking and less in ourselves, that invokes a sense of humility in us to be ready to admit that to bring perfection to fruition, we need to turn to others for us to learn and seek help from. No wonder God sends Messengers (*Rasul*) and Prophets (*Nabi*) to show us the way in becoming human being in the true sense of its meaning – Prophet Muhammad (SAW) himself being the epitome of the perfect man, the *insan kamil*.



God gave us that burning desire to push our hands and feet to get hold of the raw material of Nature and transform them into the goods for our use





Perfection, it seems, is something we strive to achieve all the time, not a ready-made quality that we put on

God, in this sense, is a God who perfects. Through our insufficiencies, God brings out humility from the depth of our soul and with it, shows how dependence upon others is an important trait that makes perfection a possible achievement.

NEEDING ONE ANOTHER

We need others, and others need us too. We need one another not only for the purpose of getting the pieces of Nature together and make them into things that we could live by, the food that we eat and the places that we live. We need one another for affection, for friendship, for trust, for security, for strength, for unity, and for identity. In this sense, God is a God who unites. Through making us bonded into a group, we get to understand how we are just one piece out of the many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that when each and every one of us are put together, we get a picture of how we all appear collectively, and from this collective appearance, we get to know how each and every one of us looks like individually.

So, what does God mean to me? For some of us, mention God and what comes to mind is a watchful deity looming

over our activity, looking at what we are doing, and looking at whether we have sidestepped life's destiny. God is a fearful sight to think. As such, worshipping God is a pain rather than a joy. It is about guilt rather than about intelligence and compassion.

For a Muslim, God is a joy to be with, not a sorrow to lament from. It is with God that he gets to enjoy all the pleasures of life, but through these pleasures of life, he is induced into discovering what is farther and deeper than what these pleasures of life hold for him. When God commands us to worship Him, it is because by Him, we get to enjoy the pleasures of life – from enjoying the thought about life, and eventually, to enjoying the discovery and realisation about the most fundamental questions about ourselves, about who we are, about why we are here on earth, about what we are supposed to do in this world, and about what happens to us after we die. Needless to say, with God, we move from the pleasure of the senses to the pleasure of the mind and finally to the pleasure of realising our origin and end in God, that essential answer about what God means for us. TMR

Harmony of the Way

poem | dr yamin cheng

The way of harmony
Of human and heaven
Is the harmony
Of immanent and transcendent

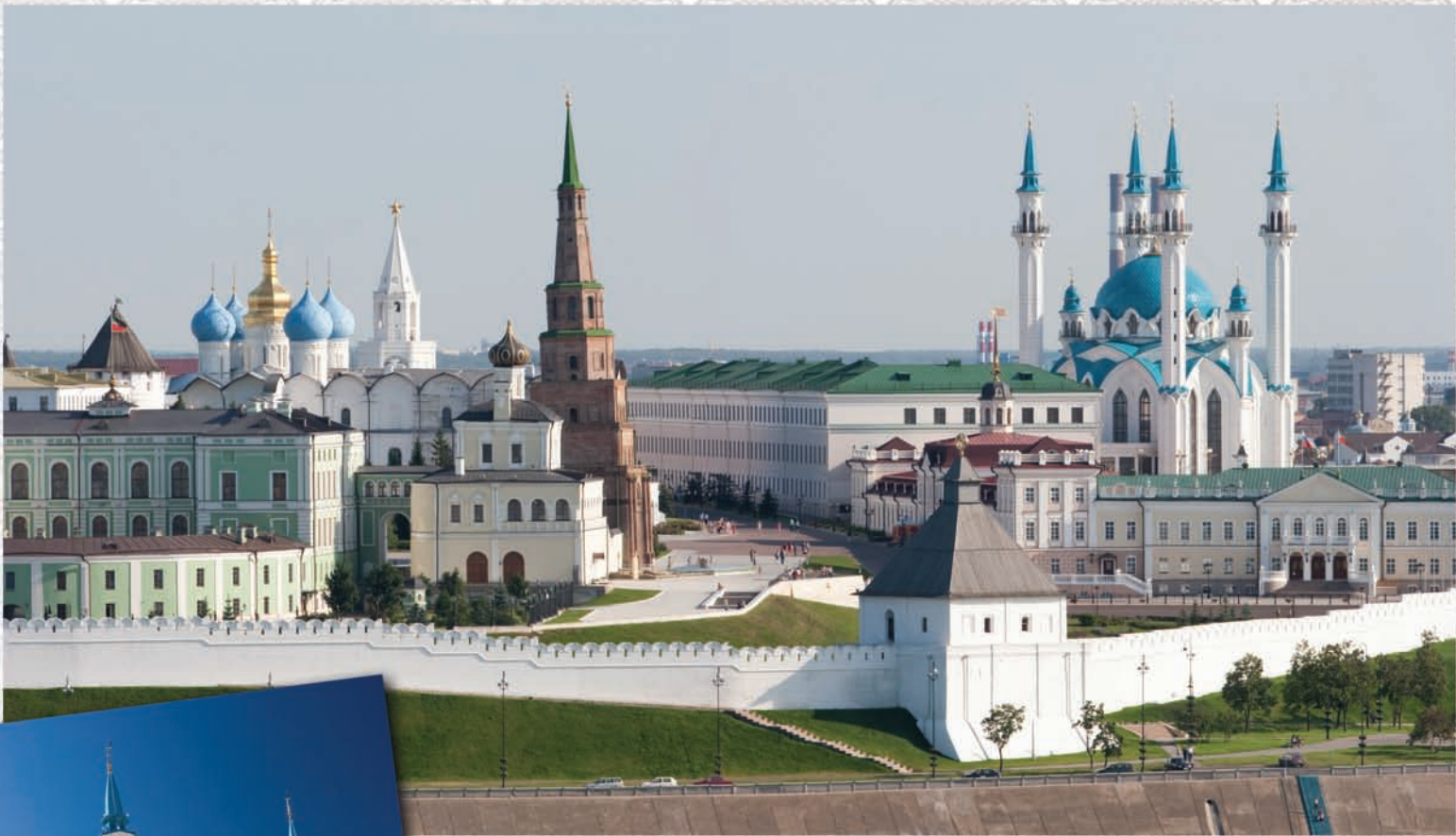
The way of harmony
Of immanent and transcendent
Is the harmony
Of manifest and hidden

The way of harmony
Of manifest and hidden
Is the harmony
Of manifold and principle

The way of harmony
Of manifold and principle
Is the harmony
Of passion and reason

The way of harmony
Of passion and reason
Is the harmony
Of action and intellection

The way of harmony
Of action and intellection
Is the harmony
Of heart and heaven



Qol Sharif Mosque

(Tatarstan Republic,
Russian Federation)

The Qol Sharif Mosque is located in the Kremlin, Kremlevskaya Str 1, Kazan. Its inauguration on 24 July 2005 marked the beginning of celebrations dedicated to the Millennium of Kazan.

It was named after Qolşärif who served and died with his numerous students while defending the city from Russian occupants in 1552.

Designed by local Kazan architects, the building of the mosque is seen as a symbol of the revival of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Tatar people.

It can accommodate 6,000 worshippers.



Exclusive Interview with Mufti Ismail Menk

TMR INTERVIEWS THE ZIMBABWEAN ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE WITH NEW MUSLIMS, THEIR NON-MUSLIM FAMILY, AND ABOUT STAYING OPTIMISTIC.

interview | aishah hussein

transcription | carol 'aliya widjaya

The Muslim Reader (TMR): Upon embracing Islam, the new Muslims are tested with elements of daily life. How can we help them without confusing them further with the issues of the divisions in Islam? How do we actually encourage them to come into Islam with more peace instead?

Mufti Ismail Menk (MIM): I think what needs to happen is happening in some quarters. It's that we need to develop a close link with the Reverts, explaining to them that they need to get their responses from a specific direction, which would enhance their understanding of Islam. There come some times when some of these people - who are our brothers and sisters reverted in Islam, tend to change track. After they reverted with me, for example. And after some time, they get their guidance from someone else. That is obviously their freedom, but we need to make sure from the very beginning that we try to explain this matter to them. Try to get their guidance from one source so that you are not confused because a lot of people say a lot of things that are not always accurate. And so we need to explain to them.

Then, there are other challenges they face - the challenges of their peers and so on. People sometimes look weirdly towards Reverts. Sometimes people look at them with an eye of suspicion in some communities. I think it is our duty as people who are *imams* (leaders of the community) or people who are religious personnel, to educate the current Muslims of the importance of opening their arms

to those who have reverted. And going the extra mile to ensure that they are comfortable, they feel the acceptance, and they are not let down. For some people, when they revert, there may be no one supporting them. People look at them with the eye of difference. So *Insha'Allah* if we can educate the Muslims in this regard, I think this will be very beneficial.

TMR: How do you stay optimistic in a world that may seem cynical and critical of Islam?

MIM: We are living in a country, which is not an Islamic country. And over and above that the globe has become very open for everyone to say things. That should make us more tolerant. At the same time, we should educate ourselves more. And we need to use the same method to convey the correct message with a palatable, acceptable, argument that people would look at and immediately digest. With all religions, there is a certain point beyond which you need belief in order to comprehend it. That is with every religion. There is a certain point beyond which you may not understand things. This means someone might ask you 'prove to me something of the unseen, of the angels'. And then you say 'look, we can prove to you but we need an element of belief in order to look at those signs'. So that's just one example. Up to that point, we can use common knowledge, we can use logic, we can use religious text, to prove our point in a very beautiful manner. I, for one, have noticed that a lot of what is out there is based on ignorance. A lot of the hates or the negativity about Islam is based on sheer ignorance about what the Muslims are and what Islam is.



TMR: What is the most important thing a new Muslim needs to remember constantly when they are tested with all these questions and influences that create more doubt in the face of Islam?

MIM: Whenever we make a big decision like reverting to Islam for example, we would need to know that the initial stages would be much more critical than later on. Just like if you were to open a new business, a supermarket, in a new area. The initial hours of work or days or months or even the first years might not be as fruitful. They are critical, in the sense that you need to be on your toes, you need to watch your competition, you need to see the prices. I'm giving an example of a business. The same would apply to anyone. Say a dentist want to open here. Initially he would need to build his customers. He might be discouraged because he might not make ends meet the first few months, and so on. And I'd like to draw a parallel between that example and what you are asking me. When a person has reverted to Islam, the initial challenges are great. But they need to know that it is a decision 'I've made'. The fruits will only come after I've educated myself, put things into practice, and enjoy the comfort or the peace of this beautiful faith. I've come across and even of late, people who are great enemies of Islam who have reverted miraculously. And they have said that they receive instant peace. I've known of people who have been hooked on heavy drugs, who said, 'The minute I declared my *Shahadah* [testimony of faith], I did not need anything else as my rehabilitation', because they were serious. And they changed their lives. I enjoy watching youtube clips of those who answer the question 'why I became a Muslim'. And I invite not only the newly reverted people but even born Muslims to watch these clips. You would be surprised what you learn.

TMR: How important is the family in Islam, based on the Quran and *Sunnah*?

MIM: I think the importance of family cannot be understated because it is extremely high. Parents are mentioned straight after the obedience of Allah (SWT) in the Quran in many places. And even if they are non-Muslims, they are mentioned in the Quran, like in Surah Luqman and in various other places. So obviously family is what Allah (SWT) has chosen to bring us into existence. And it will be the circle that we will be connected to by blood in a way that is inseverable, although sometimes there may be religious or other lines that may separate an individual beyond a certain level. What that would mean is Islam teaches us to fulfil the rights of our parents even if they are non-Muslims. Their command becomes a command for us. Their instruction becomes a complete command for us even if they are non-Muslims.

But there is one condition. If they were to ask us to do something sinful, we abstain. So that's the line I'm talking about. So beyond that we really have to go out of our way to ensure that our family is living harmoniously. This would require a lot of tolerance - sometimes of varying opinions in the family, sometimes of inclination of material items of the world, opinions and so on. Without much maturity or perhaps understanding each other, I think we won't be able to progress as well as we should. So family is given great importance in Islam and we need to go deeper into that to see how best we can fulfil that into your house as Muslims.





TMR: What are the values that we as Muslims or new Muslims should embrace more, to counter the negative connotations and stereotypes of the Western family etiquette?

MIM: Firstly, what we need is definitely education regarding the Islamic teaching. Without that, we cannot encounter anything. On top of that, we need values, Islamic values. We need perseverance, and a lot of patience with that perseverance.

It's the same word in Islam, '*sabr*'. *Sabr* includes perseverance and patience. So if we are going to give up easily, we will not be able to do something about it. We have seen, and like I said, if you watch the clips on youtube of 'why I became a Muslim', you will learn that a lot of people, after they become Muslims, their families become very sceptical of them. But in a short space of time, a lot of them succeed in convincing, without speaking, their families that they are actually better people now. So it took a lot of time, it took a lot of remaining on values, a lot of perseverance and patience.

At the beginning, one would need to forgive their [family's] statements and comments. If we were to retaliate and react to the statements made by our own family, if we were to revert to Islam; that reaction would probably give a very wrong picture of who we have become. Because remember with Muhammad (SAW). He was instructed initially to remain silent. He was instructed not to retaliate.

He was instructed in so many different ways but in stages. Initially, there were no reactions. After that, mention some words, say a few things, with politeness, with respect, and so on. And these were the stages. And for us, as a person new to Islam, they would definitely face words of hate, and hurtful words. If we react to those hurtful words with hurtful words, we would only increase the injury. But if we react with goodness, we would be able to respond to those words, proving them wrong. That takes a little bit of time.

TMR: Any advice on approaches to parents or siblings on those instances?

MIM: I think sometimes we can select some booklets and perhaps some DVDs, because nowadays people are more into audio visual material than into only the reading of it. What I would feel is if we could select some material that they could probably look into and let them have a peek at it, introduce them to it, even if it's at the workplace.

Today, we are talking about the home, for example, and maybe to your friends. Say: 'You know what, this is only for you to know what I have chosen, that's all'. This is exactly what I have chosen. I don't want to convert you, I don't want to convince you. All I want you to do is understand me a little better, that's all. So take a look at it please, take a peek at it.

Sometimes we can look at it together if they are family members. That would really educate them. Like I said at



the beginning of the interview, and even now, it's all about education, it's all about knowledge. It's all about how much you know and what you know that actually makes you a better person. If you see people who are barbaric, they know very little about Islam. Or sometimes they allow their emotion to block their intellect, which is very dangerous.

TMR: Can you share with us your challenges as Mufti in Zimbabwe?

MIM: I have this post for several years now. I haven't stepped in like an authoritative sort of seating. But what I have done is work very calmly, collectively with other scholars as well, and try to come across to the masses as a friend, rather than just a scholar who's trying to doom us in a few moments.

Because I feel today's generation is definitely chased away by the doom approach - the approach where everyone is given a good shouting. In the home, that no longer works in most homes; what makes you think it's going to work in religion? So you befriend your children, so much that they can tell you anything and you can guide them. Before, if something happened to us we could not tell our parents because we were worried how they would react.

Today, we are teaching people to live in such a way that when something happen to the child, the first person they tell is the parent. So I think we need to do the same in

faith. So, we as religious personnel should definitely come across as close by, those who understand the masses, those who relate. This is why most of the times I put up certain tweets, perhaps certain messages on Facebook, to get comments that might even disagree with me. And let them comment. Let them disagree. Let them have their say, let them say things. I cannot doom someone and say 'hey because you disagree with me, you're going to hell'. That's not true. It's a learning process. And our children learn through error. And we learn as well. And there are so many things happening in today's fast growing technological world that sometimes we do not know how it works.

And we are considered old when it comes to the new technology. And so I really have faced challenges trying to deal with them in the most appropriate way because we need to be one ahead all the time. We need to try it. As you know, people look at Islam and the scholars with a lot of scepticism. And we definitely need to win our own people before anyone else. We need to have a good link. I hope I can also be an example for other scholars who might open up a little bit to the masses. I think a lot have already been learnt and seen. I am also still in the process of trial and error in the world of technology and so on. But I think it's a good step. The next generation will have to take it by the horns. **TMR**



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Orange Clouds

poem | shasel

Behold the vast heavens
such cool orange clouds
be humble as a servant
never ever be so proud

Such cool orange clouds
rain water for dry lands
if you are always proud
you will have no friends

Rain water for dry lands
God's blessings in action
we're just grains of sand
never a hulk as in fiction

God's blessings in action
appear in strange forms
sustaining His creations
even in punishing storms

Appear in strange forms
like tsunami over Aceh
thus, after all the storms
calm arrives the next day.

City of Mosques - **Istanbul**

THE LIVING HISTORY
OF THIS ANCIENT
CITY KEEPS OUR
WRITER MESMERISED
DURING HIS MAIDEN
TRIP TO TURKEY.

text | photographs | hyder gulam



I grew up with Turks. But, nothing prepared me for Turkey. I grew up with Turkish foods (Lahmacun, Gozelme, Iskender, Rice Doner, Shish Kebab, Kanafe, and more). But, nothing prepared me for authentic Anadolu food.

I grew up around Turkish mosques in suburban Melbourne (Australia), but nothing prepared me for the majestic splendours of the mosques - a handful of the 3,024 of them - in Istanbul.

The city lives and breathes history in its mighty lungs, and multiculturalism courses through its arteries - the waterways that bisect this sprawling metropolis of almost 14 million in almost 5,500 square kilometres. I travelled to Istanbul for the first time in late November 2012. For my wife, it was her second trip. My Turkish friends in Melbourne had, for many years, asked me to go to Turkey, but a combination of excuses: work, young family and extra-curricular commitments such as being the leader of the Muslim community in Victoria, Australia, meant that I put the trip off each time. This was a regret, which I was longing to atone.

However, I was finally here. We spent the next week exploring the crooked lane-ways, meandering bazaars,

soaring cultural monuments and museums, as well as the pristine mosques, churches and synagogues. I was fortunate enough to pray most of my 5 daily *solats* (prayer) at a mosque, with the blessing of being able to pray *Jumaat* (Friday) and every *Fajr* (pre-Dawn) at the Sultan Ahmed (Blue) Mosque. Besides Masjid Al-Haram in Makkah and Taj Mahal in India, the only places that had taken my breath away, at first glance, were in Istanbul: the Aya Sofya, the Blue Mosque, and Suleymaniye Mosque. They had me struck with awe.

Flight: My first memorable vision of the trip to Turkey was looking down from 39,000 feet over the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent. What I saw was amazing: the Earth had become a mirror of the stars. As far as I could see, the ground was sprawled with the lights of various cities, each twinkling into the night. To see the heavens in the sky and again reflected on the Earth on the ground, was portend of things to come.

Arrival: Ataturk Airport was seamless. Everything was efficient and flowing. My only quibble was the 45 Euro I had to pay for my Visa - given the length of my stay was less than a week. This was the highest charge of any country, and did not make sense to me, given the close ties between Australia and Turkey. Even some Turks from the diaspora



Cooking traditional Turkish bread - pide (flat bread)



Trams in Istanbul: a quick, and cheap way to travel



Turkish tea - wonderful on a cold day



Fairy floss and other exotic Turkish sweets



Basilica cistern - Home of Medusa



Strumming a melodic Ottoman tune: Grand Bazaar

who were travelling on Australian passports expressed their displeasure.

Hotel: Our hotel was in a very central location – either walking distance or a short Metro ride to all the top sites: the Topkapi Palace, the bazaars, Beyoglu, the Basilica Cistern, the various museums and *hamams* (bathhouses), and of course, the ferries across and along the Bosphorus. We were able to relax, enjoy the city, and savour the moment.

Climate: Late November, Istanbul starts to get colder. Coming from tropical and humid Singapore, where I had been working and living for the last 6 months, this was refreshing. I had missed winter in Melbourne, and looked forward to some respite from the humidity and heat.

There are a few remedies if you get cold in Istanbul: the first is a hot Turkish meal, the second is to enjoy a *hamam* (a kind of steambath) and a traditional Turkish massage, the third is to buy a leather jacket which one is constantly implored to buy when you visit a bazaar - incidentally what I noticed some of the locals were wearing, and the fourth is to walk. And Istanbul is a city for walking.

Down every lane-way, alley or *caddesi* (street or avenue), there is always something to attract your curiosity and distract you from your planned destination. You never have to worry about a cool drink - there is always fresh pomegranate or orange juice available to quench your thirst. But the Turkish love their tea - the drink for shoppers, travellers and the faithful after prayers. For me, tea is the drink of friendship and hospitality in Islam. Drinking tea is a shared experience - one that brings people closer together.

History and Museums: Istanbul is the city for history lovers. Every building in the Old City has a story to tell, and as I touched the walls, I could almost imagine the laughter and conversations of centuries old. Its museums and palaces are some of the best in the world in terms of getting close to events that shaped the world. Coming from Australia, the splendours and majesty of the Ottoman Empire was always glossed over - part of the inadvertent Orientalism.

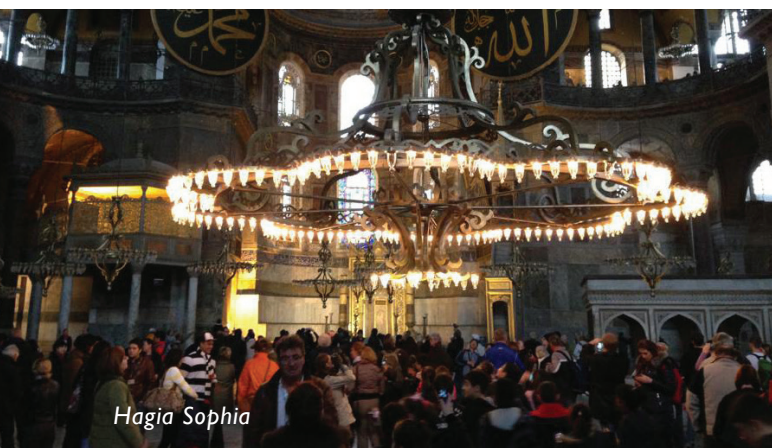
But, to be in Istanbul was a revelation - all the false myths were blown away. Yes, it was a glorious empire, but almost as profound was its decline. Needless to say,



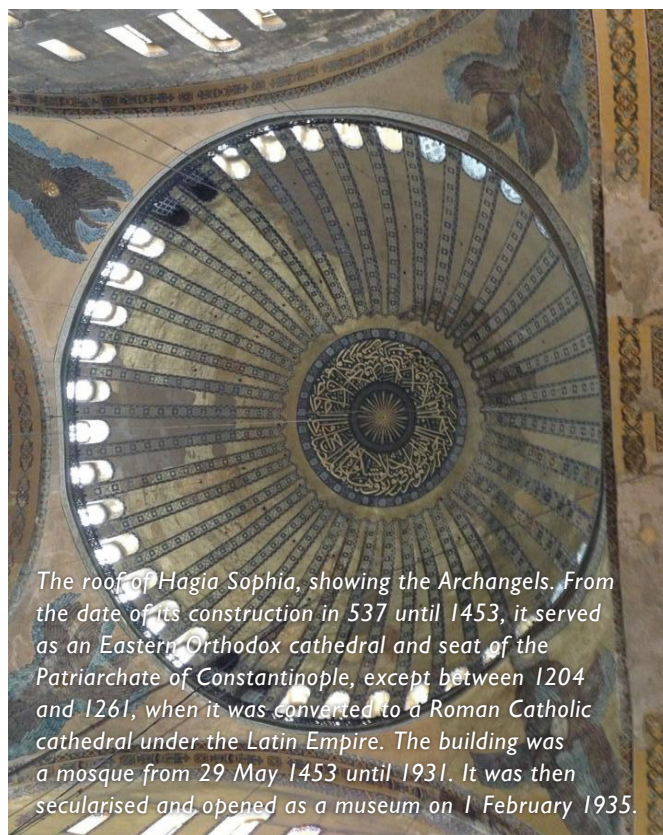
Colour hotels on Yarabeten Cad, Historic Istanbul



Topkapi Palace - Home of the Ottoman Sultans and the finest Islamic artefacts



Hagia Sophia



The roof of Hagia Sophia, showing the Archangels. From the date of its construction in 537 until 1453, it served as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral and seat of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, except between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Empire. The building was a mosque from 29 May 1453 until 1931. It was then secularised and opened as a museum on 1 February 1935.

I was delighted to see the newfound confidence in the Turkish people. A strong economy and a great balance of democracy, rule of law and Islam.

Shopping: If there is a city that that is the best fusion of Europe and Asia, this is it. My wife and I visited both the old and new shopping facilities in Istanbul - from the bazaars to the mega shopping centres. The one consistency throughout Turkey was the hospitality of the people, their friendly smile and their willingness to make conversation. Often, we went away without any purchases, but felt enriched by our interesting conversations with the locals.

Highlight: There were many highlights in Istanbul, but one was most prominent. The serenity of all the mosques was special, but one stood out for me. That is the one at Sayyiduna Abu Ayyub Al-Ansari's Tomb, otherwise known as Sultan Eyup. There was something very special about this place. You can feel it as soon as you walk along the path next to the cemetery along the Golden Horn. Yes, there was a market and thriving shopping precinct next to the Sultan Eyup, but once you cast your eyes on the fountain, you would drawn into the mosque.

Sayyiduna Ayub was one of the Ansar people, who not only offered his home to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), but in his 80's took part in the siege of Constantinople. Such was the courage of this great man, who requested that

he be tied down in his saddle, to avoid falling off his steed when attacking the enemy. It was also his request that his body be buried deep inside the enemy's territory, outside the walls of the city, so that he could hear the victorious footsteps from his grave when the Muslims gained victory against the Byzantium Empire.

Although splendid as all the other mosques we visited in Istanbul were, there was a special presence here – something we thought to be the manifestation of the sacrifices and love of the Prophet's companions (RA) for their God, religion and leader. Their cause was gaining Allah's pleasure - what a truly humbling experience. It seems no less than 29 companions (RA) of the Prophet (SAW) were buried in Istanbul.

Farewell: I was beginning to miss Istanbul even as we checked out of our hotel to return home. I have travelled to many countries, visiting numerous historic sites. Nothing compares to the living history of Istanbul. My wife and I are now in the midst of planning our next trip. On our agenda is the rest of Turkey. However, the mesmerising experience of Istanbul will be hard to replicate. Istanbul – a city of many secrets, a land of disarming smiles. TMR

The writer is the former President of the Islamic Council of Victoria (Australia) and Co-Founder Muslim Legal Network.

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Earlier, in the month of Ramadhan, Darul Arqam disbursed about \$194,250 in cash and vouchers to 555 families on Sunday, 28 July.

Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information, Lawrence Wong, was the Guest of Honour who presented the financial aids to the recipients.

This annual ceremony is part of Darul Arqam's Fakir Miskin (Poor & Needy) programme to help the poor and needy during the fasting month and for their preparation of the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr celebration.



The Guest of Honour, Lawrence Wong



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAZALI TOMPANG

Ramadhan Zakat Disbursement 2013





Staff and Volunteers for the event



Lawrence Wong visited the bookshop



DA President Muhd Faiz Edwin Ignatious presented the token of appreciation to the Minister





DA staff and volunteers



Second from left, DA General Manager, Zainal Abidin and Deputy President, Ridzuan Wu



A performance on the Guzheng

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SEVENTH EPISODE

Eid Fitr 2013 Celebration



Performers from the Myanmar Club



On the left, DA President, Mohd Faiz Edwin Ignatious, with the Guest of Honour, Masagos Zukilli



A couple of the performers for the event



Performers from the Indonesian group



Performance by the DACC students

The Singapore Muslim Youth Debate is an annual event organised by the Youths of Darul Arqam (YODA). The final round was held at Sultan Mosque Auditorium on 28 September (Saturday).

The motion for the final round is "Cultural and religious diversity in Singapore is tolerated but not celebrated" between Team PRAXIS and Team NUS 1.

Prizes

- \$4,500 cash+ SM Jaleel Challenge Trophy for the Champion
- \$2,000 cash for the First Runner-Up
- \$1,000 cash for Overall Best Speaker for SMYD 2013



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

The Singapore Muslim
Youth Debate 2013

yODA
Youths of Darul Arqam



The runner-up - Team NUS 1



The emcees for the day



The organising committee



Light refreshments for all



The adjudicators

Aiming to inspire the youths to create solutions, implement changes, and eventually, be great leaders for the community, organisers Youths Of Darul Arqam (YODA) envisions the Singapore Muslim Youth Debate as the platform where youths can holistically develop their intellect, public speaking skills and creativity.

Importantly, YODA hopes to instil motivation and boost confidence in Singaporean Muslim youths.

The semi-finalists were Team NUS 2, Team SMU 2, Team PRAXIS, and Team NUS 1.

A memorable event for the youths



SMYD is the platform where youths develop creativity and public speaking



The semi-finals on 21 September at Mydin Mosque Auditorium



Sim Khadijah, the trainer and one of the adjudicators for the programme



Some of the debaters this year

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNAIDI ALI

Semi-Finals of the SMYD 2013

Giving just measure and
weight is the best
spiritual and material
advantage for the giver



“Give full measure when
you measure, and weigh
with a balance that is
straight: that is the most
fitting and the most
advantageous in the final
determination.”

Al-ISRA'
THE NIGHT JOURNEY
(17:35)



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