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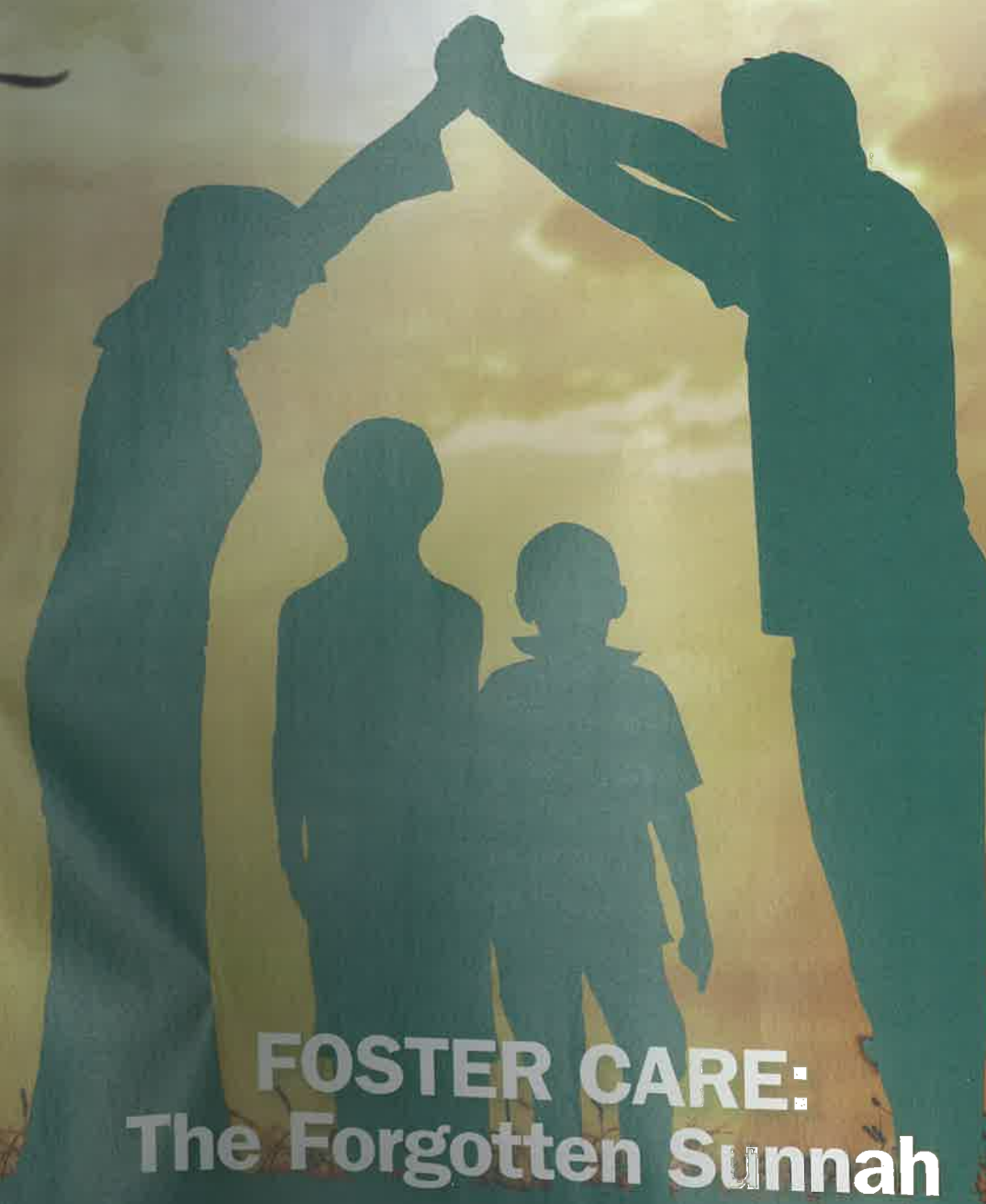
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ISNA LAUNCHES POLICY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM



(left to right) Fellows Sara Ahmed, Sara Swetzoff and Kamil Jamil

ISNA'S OFFICE FOR INTERFAITH AND Community Alliances (IOICA) launched its inaugural Policy Fellowship program in January. The program provides three selected individuals with hands-on experience as regards the inner workings of federally focused faith-based advocacy. Fellows will focus on issues such as health care access, wealth inequality and gun violence prevention, as well as work with a host of interfaith partners to shape federal policy. In addition to gaining experience working with faith advocates, congressional staff members, and top administration officials, they will advise the Muslim American community on how to engage more effectively with the political process from a faith-based perspective.

MEET THE FELLOWS:

Sara Ahmed, a native of Egypt and recipient of a Fulbright and a USAID MBA scholarship, respectively, completed her MBA at Southern New Hampshire University. She has interned for Sen. Jeanne Shaheen's (D-N.H.) office, served as a communications intern at the Brookings Institute and

taught Arabic at Rice University. She plans to pursue a doctoral degree in international affairs upon completing her fellowship.

Sara Swetzoff, who was raised in Arlington, Va., and lived in Egypt and Tunisia during college, earned an MA in Islamic studies from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, after which she worked for the publishing company Fons Vitae. She is currently pursuing a PhD in African studies at Howard University. Upon completing her fellowship, she will conduct dissertation-related fieldwork in Ethiopia and plans to teach international affairs at the university level.

Kamil Jamil, who hails from Peshawar, Pakistan, graduated with a BA in political science from the Lahore University of Management Sciences. In addition to working as an advisor in the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN, he was a researcher for the Inheriting Harappa joint UNESCO-Lahore Museum exhibition. A recent recipient of a scholarship to earn a law degree in the U.S., he plans to pursue this path after completing his fellowship program. *ih*

DIALOGUE EXPLORES TRANSLATING PROPHETIC CONCEPTS INTO ACTION

IOICA DIRECTOR COLIN CHRISTOPHER joined Dr. Kyle Tau, ecumenical staff officer for the Faith & Order and Theological Development, in Washington, D.C., of March 6 for an enriching examination on prophetic stories and traditional scriptures in Islam and Christianity that highlight peace and justice. Joined by seminary students from across the country, the group exchanged ideas about how to authentically translate religious concepts within a policy

setting, grappling with difficult scriptures, the dangers of contemporary political and economic thought co-opting both religions' foundational values of equity and justice, and other subjects.

This gathering was part of an ongoing interfaith series within the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill and an introduction to the new Scriptural Reasoning project that IOICA will participate in during the spring of 2018. *ih*

ISLAMIC HORIZONS WINS AWARD

OMER BIN ABDULLAH, EDITOR OF Islamic Horizons, received the DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards (category A1, National Magazines) at the Religion Communicators Council's (RCC; www.religioncommunicators.org) annual convention in Atlanta, April 5. This is the third time he has been recognized.

The DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards are given annually to active RCC members who demonstrate excellence in religious communications and public relations.

The RCC, founded in 1929, is this country's oldest public relations professional organization. Its awards honor the late Victor DeRose and the late Paul M. Hinkhouse, leading lithographers in New York City and longtime friends of the RCC who shared a strong interest in and concern for excellence in communications. *ih*

LUBABAH ABDULLAH JOINS ISNA BOARD



LUBABAH ABDULLAH, A ST. LOUIS, MO.-based attorney who concentrates on immigration law, family law and estate planning, was appointed to the ISNA Board of Directors in February.

A two-term vice president, a Board of Advisors member for MSA National and board member of the Al Salam Day School, she has served on ISNA's Legal Affairs Committee for the past five years. Earlier, she was an ISNA Executive Council member.

ISNA President Azhar Azeez said: "We are honored to welcome Sr. Lubabah to the Board of Directors. Her talents, experience and knowledge will be tremendously beneficial for ISNA." *ih*



ISNA Seeks Transformative Leader

Search for Executive Director Announced

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) has announced a search for an Executive Director (ED) to lead the organization at a very historic point in its history. The ED is a new position created as a result of the historic overhaul of the organization's bylaws effective January 1, 2018. The former position known as Secretary General has been abolished.

In consultation with the Executive Committee and more broadly the ISNA Board of Directors, the ED will provide visionary and strategic leadership to build on ISNA's history of service to Islam and Muslims in North America. Dr. Asra Ali, chair of the ED search committee emphasizes that "the new ED will use her or his skills and proven senior level management experience to position the organization to achieve excellence in the creation and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of our diverse and growing Muslim community."

To learn more and apply:
www.ISNA.net/EDsearch

ISNA BOARD MEMBERS ATTEND WORKSHOP



DR. ASRA ALI, SEHRISH SIDDIQUI, ZEYN Patel and 40 other Muslim leaders from around the country attended an intensive weekend training program at the El-Hibri Foundation (www.elhibrifoundation.org) in Washington, D.C. The program focused on best practices for nonprofit governance

and equipped the attendees with the tools needed to implement what they had learned. Several field experts, among them Asma Mirza, ISNA Strategic Reorganization and Planning Committee member, and Farhan Latif, president of the El-Hibri Foundation, led the training.

MUSLIM-EPISCOPALIAN TALKS



Colin Christopher hosted Dr. Margaret Rose of the Episcopal Church

IOICA DIRECTOR COLIN CHRISTOPHER hosted Dr. Margaret Rose, ecumenical and interreligious deputy to the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, on March 5 at ISNA's Washington, D.C., office. They discussed the important roles that Muslims

sponsored by IOICA. They also talked about structural racism within religious communities and formulating a substantive racial reconciliation process. They plan to meet later this year to consider and explore possible joint program opportunities.

FAITH LEADERS MEET IN ROUNDTABLE

THE CENTER FOR FAITH-BASED AND Neighborhood Partnerships, a community initiative of the Department of Veteran Affairs, hosted various faith-based communities at a Neighborhood Community Roundtable on Feb. 26. Representing the Muslim community were Rizwan Jaka, chair, Board of Trustees and co-chair, Interfaith/Government/Media Committee, ADAMS; Ali Salar Khawaja, senior program manager, United States Army; Imam Talib Shareef, president and imam of the historic Nation's Mosque, Masjid Muhammad; Chaplain AbdulRashid Abdullah, Islamic Center Northern Virginia Scouting; and Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad, ISNA director, chaplain services and Islamic endorsing agent.

The featured speakers were led by Dr. David Shulkin, secretary, Department of Veteran Affairs. Other speakers were from various agencies within the department, such as the Veteran Health Administration, the Veteran Benefits Administration and the Veteran Cemetery Administration. They provided valuable insights into their agencies' role in providing professional services and programs. The Q&A sessions focused on issues relevant to local veteran populations. Each speaker discussed healthcare management, mental health and substance abuse treatment programs, programs designed to reduce homelessness, education support benefits, survivor benefits, burial services — just a few of the department's many veteran-related supportive services.

The event ended with a consensus that follow-up on the local level and continued collaboration between the department and additional faith-based organizations could make the difference as regards reducing homelessness and dealing with the many other physical, social, economic and spiritually based challenges facing our veterans.



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ISNA SUPPORTS SNAP

ON MARCH 1, IOICA DIRECTOR COLIN Christopher and IOICA Economic Justice Fellow Sara Swetsoff joined Jewish, Christian and Muslim faith-based advocacy organizations on Capitol Hill to ensure that funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) remains at current levels in the upcoming Congressional Farm Bill. The nation's single most effective anti-hunger program, SNAP feeds nearly one in eight Americans who would otherwise not have access to enough food.

In coalition with members of the Washington Interreligious Staffing Committee Domestic Human Needs Working Group, IOICA staff spoke with congressional policy directors and other staff from eight Republican and Democratic Senate and House offices. Discussions ranged from unwavering support for SNAP and a desire to increase funding to this program as an important part of the larger anti-poverty landscape. Most offices also



expressed concern about the program's fate and stated their interest in advocating for it in the Farm Bill. Congressional Republicans will introduce mark-ups for the bill in the coming weeks.

IOICA meetings included in-person discussions with Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), and Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Miss.) and Representatives Rodney Davis (R-Ill.), Vicky Hartzler (R-Mo.), Roger Marshall (R-Kan.), Jeff Denham (R-Calif.) and Jodey Arrington (R-Tex.). **ih**

ISNA CONTINUES DIALOGUES WITH THE BRUDERHOF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

IN EARLY FEBRUARY, IOICA DIRECTOR COLIN Christopher spent two days living with the Bruderhof (<https://www.bruderhof.com>), an intentional Christian community that follows a unique model of work and worship. Its 2,700 members live in 23 intentional communities and share equally in the profits generated by their numerous global businesses. Children are schooled based upon the Biblical teachings of generosity, honesty and peace. Upon graduating from high school, they are given the choice to remain in or leave the community.

The low attrition rate has enabled the movement to spread to new locations and has provided greater opportunities for interfaith exchange. Their foundational principal

of pacifism sparked persecution in Germany in the early 20th century, a reality that caused them to emigrate to the U.S. in 1920.

Christopher joined Alexei Laushkin, founder and director, Kingdom Mission Society, to screen Unity Productions Foundation's "The Sultan and the Saint" and hold interfaith dialogues about peacebuilding within Islam and Christianity. Over the two-day period, Christopher and Alexei held nine discussions with over 150 members, including 120 high school students and teachers at their stunning Mount Academy High School in upstate New York. Conversations ranged from thematic concepts in the film to who American Muslims are and what Islam is. Bruderhof elders also shared their groundbreaking work on forgiveness and

IOICA IN INTERRELIGIOUS STAFF RETREAT

ON FEB. 2, ALL IOICA STAFF MEMBERS joined more than over 120 Christian, Jewish, and Muslim partners in Washington, D.C., to analyze the 2018 legislative calendar for the Washington Interreligious Staff Community's (WISC) annual retreat. Discussions centered on strategic faith-based engagement in a challenging political climate, practical tips for adhering to a humble yet principled faith voice in the face of hostility and hate, and the most likely openings for bipartisan movement on legislation that cares for the least among us.

Sara Ahmed, a 2018 IOICA policy fellow, participated in an interfaith recitation inspired by African-American poet Langston Hughes (d. 1967). IOICA director Colin Christopher announced the office's sponsorship of the new WISC website, which is set to be launched next month. Rooted in the 1960s civil rights movements, WISC is a network of approximately 70 Washington D.C.-based offices of national religious bodies and faith-based organizations. WISC offices join with others to advocate for U.S. government policies that advance a more just, peaceful and ecologically sustainable world. Today, its staff members are organized in various working groups. IOICA participates in the Domestic Human Needs as well as the Energy and Ecology working groups. **ih**

the need for more effective engagement on gun violence prevention. IOICA is currently working with the Bruderhof to establish an interfaith youth exchange with an upstate New York Muslim community. **ih**

Biloo talked about doing our job as best as we can, regardless of what it is. She emphasized that everyone has an important place in society and that while we cannot change the world on our own, we can at least use our time and influence to change our surrounding community's perception.

Members of Austin's refugee community served a lunch of delicious *shawarmas*, which was followed by Q&A breakout sessions comprised of "college sisters," "college brothers" and adults. The program concluded with a celebration banquet honoring Mohsin Lari, co-founder/treasurer, Muslim Community Support Services. ISNA president Azhar Azeez was the guest speaker, and Wajahat Ali delivered the keynote address. **ih**

ISNA Hosts Regional Conference in South Florida

BY FARYAL M. KHATRI

HUNDREDS OF FLORIDIANS AND THEIR regional neighbors flocked to Davie, Fla., on March 10 to participate in ISNA's South Florida regional conference. The conference had something to offer the whole family — national speakers like Imam Tahir Anwar, chairman of the board, North American Islamic Shelter for the Abused (NISA; <https://www.asknisa.org>), ISNA president Azhar Azeez, Ustadh Ubaydullah Evans, ALIM's first scholar-in-residence, Dr. Altaf Husain, ISNA vice president-U.S., Imam Mohamed Magid, religious director, ADAMS and a former ISNA president and Hassan Shibly, CAIR Florida executive director as well as local speakers like Florida school principal Ustadha Rabia Khan, Imam Azhar Subedar, director of outreach at Divine Connect (<https://www.divineconnect.com>) and Dr. Aisha Subhani — all of whom provided spiritual nourishment and practical takeaways.

Patricia Salahuddin and Laila Shatara led parallel sessions for Islamic school educators. Daniel Alvarez, director of the Center for Muslim World Studies at Florida International University, and attorney Wilfredo Amr Ruiz, CAIR-Florida communications director, conducted the Spanish-language forums. The Muslim Youth of North America presided over the youth development events.

The conference also featured a matrimonial event, which one attendee described as "giving [single] Muslims a platform to meet."

"The primary purpose of this event was to reconnect ISNA with the thriving South Florida Muslim community by offering a program, led by a cross-sectional group of dynamic speakers who promoted ISNA's services, to provide a future opportunity to partner with local leading organizations and centers," noted Farhan Syed, steering committee member and former ISNA Executive Council member.

JUSTICE AS AN ISLAMIC TENET

"Justice is one of the most important elements of Islam," stated Dr. Abdul Hamid Samara, a local Steering Committee member and a former ISNA Majlis-ash-Shura member, during the first session. Imam Dr. Nasir Ahmad of Masjid Al-Ansar echoed his message of the importance of upholding justice for everyone, not just Muslims.

Dr. Altaf Husain concluded the session by discussing how ISNA is working toward justice in terms of ending torture and hunger, climate change and environmental justice. He ended by urging Muslims to act in accordance with their words, as the Prophet (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) did, for "there was no gap between what the Prophet preached and how he lived."

HOPE AND FAITH IN A TIME OF RISING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Throughout the conference, attendees participated in conversations on developing a Muslim identity during these troubled times and increasing their civic engagement. "In America, God is with us and the law is also with us. We have no excuse not to practice our faith, not to represent our faith and not to share our faith in public," Hassan Shibly proclaimed in one of his sessions.



Azhar Azeez, ISNA president

Florida leaders Imam Azhar Subedar and attorney Maha ElKolalli talked about such hidden opportunities as teachable moments to show Islam's true teachings and to reclaim our narrative. The rise of new chances for dialogue and interfaith cooperation give us hope and bring us closer together as a community.

During their youth session, Imam Magid and Ustadh Evans encouraged the attendees to root their activism in spirituality because their activism must be driven by Islam. Evans also noted the importance of self-care to avoid burnout, for "you don't want to be a candle that shines a light but burns itself out."

JUSTICE WITHIN THE FAMILY

ISNA president Azeez, Rabia Khan and Imam Tahir Anwar spoke on fostering family relationships as part of a panel discussion. Using the Qur'an and Sunnah, the panelists analyzed the practical steps of fostering relationships among spouses, parents and children, siblings, and youth and elders. Imam Tahir cautioned

attendees on the dangers of sharing too much information on social media, as well as the importance of privacy and how too much sharing can impact relationships.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SOUTH FLORIDA EDUCATORS

The conference convened South Florida Islamic school educators and administrators for professional development and networking. Upon reflection, CISNA board member Patricia Salahuddin said. "The participants in the weekend session were excited to receive teaching strategies to enhance their teaching skills and Sister Naimah (Ghany-Khan) and Sujood (Bdaiwi) did a great job, alhamdulillah. Sister Leila (Shatara) and Br. Naseeb (Khan) provided the audience with characteristics of effective leadership and statistics related to Muslim schools. The round table was an opportunity for school leaders, principals,

board members and community leaders to come together and identify ways to collaborate. alhamdulillah! The door is open and insha Allah, we will move forward from here."

CELEBRATING SOUTH FLORIDA LEADERS

The conference concluded with a celebration banquet featuring a keynote address by Imam Magid and entertainment by *nasheed* singer Ibrahim Caba. During the

banquet, ISNA recognized Muhammed Mukhtar Hasan and Physician Aisha Subhani with its Community Service Recognition Award in honor of their lifelong dedication to community service.

Hasan retired as chief of the Traffic Engineering Division of Metropolitan-Dade County's Department of Traffic and Transportation. The mayor proclaimed the day of his retirement "Muhammed M. Hasan Day." His wife Nasim Hasan has been involved with Sunday school and summer camps for more than 30 years.

Subhani has directed the Deen Intensive Foundation (www.deenintensive.com) for over a decade. This foundation organizes and manages Islamic educational programs both at home and abroad, including the popular Rihla program.

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf shared a beautiful message via video for Dr. Aisha Subhani. **ih**

Faryal M. Khatri is ISNA Communications Coordinator.

Muslim Officer Sacrifices Life Protecting Woman



PHOTO © PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Corporal Mujahid Ramzziddin

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING MARYLAND Gov. Larry Hogan (R), Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), civic and Muslim community leaders, and police officers from across the region gathered at the funeral to mourn Prince George's County (Md.) officer Cpl. Mujahid Ramzziddin, 51, killed while helping a woman during a domestic dispute.

The 14-year member of the police department was recalled as a dedicated public servant and a hero. The father of four and former Marine and Medal of Valor winner was also lauded for his commitment to serving the Muslim community.

After the funeral prayer at the cemetery, Ramzziddin was honored with a 21-gun salute and his badge number was called out over the police radio one last time — #2770. The funeral prayer was held Feb. 23 at the iconic suburban Washington, D.C. mosque, the Diyanet Center of America.

Ramzziddin, an only son, was a devoted husband and father of four.

County Police Chief Hank Stawinski, said Ramzziddin's death was a "selfless act in a time of selfish violence." Stawinski said, "Mujahid stood his ground to defend the life of the individual who had come to him for help."

Ramzziddin, who was off duty, was shot Feb. 21 by Glenn Tyndell, estranged husband of a neighbor, who had requested his presence as she was collecting belongings and was having the locks changed after domestic disputes at the home the couple shared.

Shortly after the officer went to the nearby home in his neighborhood, Tyndell appeared to confront her. He shot Ramzziddin five times with a shotgun before taking Ramzziddin's police-issued weapon and fleeing in an SUV, police said. Later, the alleged attacker, Tyndell, was killed in police confrontation.

CAIR Opens Baltimore County Office



THE COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC Relations (CAIR; www.cair.com) opened an office in Catonsville on Jan. 29 to serve as the hub of its work in Maryland. Before this, its Maryland outreach activities were run from the organization's Washington, D.C., headquarters. At a ribbon-cutting ceremony, Baltimore County Executive Kevin B. Kamenetz (D) presented the organization with an executive citation of congratulations.

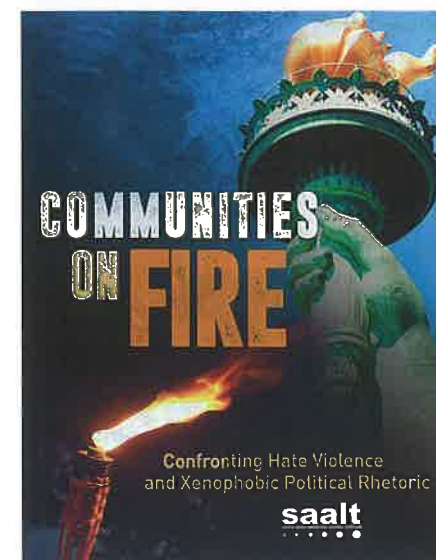
The office is expected to host media events, training sessions and meetings with CAIR's partners. It will also serve as the site for client meetings with those who seek its free legal services, which are offered to those targeted by hate crimes or subject to employment discrimination, said Zainab Chaudry, CAIR's Maryland outreach manager.

Xenophobic Political Rhetoric Rising

MEMBERS OF SOUTH ASIA'S MUSLIM, SIKH and Hindu communities, as well as Arabs and Middle Easterners in general, are the targets of increasing levels of hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric in the U.S., according to the South Asian Americans Leading Together's (SAALT) "Communities on Fire" report (<http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Communities-on-Fire.pdf>). Released on Feb. 1, it asserts that these communities have experienced a record number of attacks ever since the election of Donald Trump. This uptick in anti-Muslim attacks runs parallel to the ongoing surge of anti-Muslim policies and rhetoric.

The report documents hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric from Election Day 2016 to Election Day 2017. Of the 302 incidents detailed, an astounding 82 percent were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment. This represents a more than 45 percent increase from the year leading up to the 2016 election cycle — levels not seen since the year after 9/11.

The report, which draws a direct line



between this administration's anti-Muslim agenda and the increasing attacks, reveals that of the 213 incidents of hate violence documented, one in five perpetrators invoked President Trump's name, his administration's policies or his campaign slogans during their attacks.

SAALT executive director Suman Raghu-

nathan said that "through its policies and rhetoric, this administration's incessant demonization of Islam has created an environment of hate and fear-mongering for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. Deadly shootings, torched mosques, vandalized homes and businesses, and young people harassed at school have animated an acutely violent post-election year. This administration must break eye contact with white supremacy if our nation is to live up to its highest ideals of religious freedom."

Women were the targets in 28 percent of the 213 documented hate incidents post-election. Those who wear hijab are particularly vulnerable — they accounted for 63 percent of the documented hate incidents targeting women.

"The growth of white supremacist hate groups and mounting attacks on our communities are proof positive that this administration's anti-Muslim agenda is not making America great, it's making Americans afraid," Raghunathan stated. "The daily decay of our democracy can only be repaired by dignity and full inclusion for all Americans, regardless of faith, race, or national origin. SAALT and our allies are going to go the distance to see this demand realized."

Indiana Mosque Wins Zoning Approval



THE CARMEL, IND., BOARD OF ZONING AND APPEALS VOTED ON Feb. 27 to approve the permit for the 28,000 sq. ft. Islamic Life Center (ILC). This house of worship and civic community space, which will be built on a 15-acre corner lot, is being sponsored by the Al Salam Foundation. The foundation, which is represented by Muslim Advocates and the Krieg DeVault LLP law firm, welcomed the vote and said: "The ILC applauds this fair decision on the merits. This is an example of the power of democratic process of this country: its ability to have hard conversations, to stay together, and to foster fairness and dignity for all residents. We thank the people of Carmel for their broad support at every step of the process, and we look forward to having our own house of worship at last. Our doors remain open to any valid concerns and we will continue to be good neighbors."

Although support for the mosque was both broad and deep in the community and the ILC's permit application complies with all

applicable rules and regulations, a vocal minority of residents had opposed its construction.

Unlike the City Council, the Board of Zoning Appeals is a quasi-judicial board whose members are appointed by the mayor, council and Plan Commission. It was stated that the mosque meets all zoning requirements and will not harm area property values. In practice, city officials said similar-sized churches routinely have been approved in residential areas, as shown by a list of 17 houses of worship that have received permission to build alongside neighborhoods.

Long Island Mosque to Expand

THE HEMPSTEAD (N.Y.) Town Zoning Board of Appeals voted 4-1 on Nov. 29, 2017, to approve the Long Island Muslim Society's expansion plans.

This calls for adding a second story as well as a staircase to connect the two levels. The mosque, which now has an occupancy rate of 116 people, was built in 2006 and has about 250 members, including children. The group said in August that it is not seeking to increase its capacity or membership, but rather to give female congregants more space.

To deal with concerns of congested traffic, the society has added an extra Friday prayer service.



Concord Mosque Gets New Home

THE ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF GREATER CONCORD, WHICH HAS MET and prayed in the East Concord Community Center for more than



15 years, finally moved into its new home during March — a renovated building that had stood vacant for five years.

"It's just like when you've been renting forever and then getting your first home," said society president Hubert Mask. He added that the community center was a good host, but that it was just a building.

The society, which still needs another \$200,000 to turn an adjacent abandoned building into a parking lot, for now has signed an agreement with the neighboring church to use their lot for overflow.

Imam Mustafa Akaya told the Concord Monitor on March 3 that having a building of their own is more than just about having space to host their approximately 70 member congregation, some of whom drive more than an hour to attend the busiest Friday services and additional events. While thanking the local community for its support, he remarked that the society is looking forward to partnering with other Greater Concord Interfaith Council members on events.

Bayonne Muslims Win Mosque Approval



THE CITY OF BAYONNE, N.J., REACHED A \$400,000 settlement on Jan. 31 with the Bayonne Muslims that will allow the community to build its mosque and community center on the lot they purchased in 2015 for \$1 million. The city, which was facing the lawsuit and an ongoing investigation by the U.S. Justice Department, moved quickly

to settle the case. The Bayonne Muslims, formed in 1999, had been searching for a permanent home since 2008. On May 25, 2017, they filed a federal lawsuit asserting that the zoning board had violated the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) by denying the plan's approval based on factors that the board members

were not legally permitted to consider. The city faced a particularly daunting legal fight, considering that the lawsuit cited two similar approvals the zoning board made in 2011 and 2012 for two churches.

"American Muslims around the country are standing up for their constitutional rights in the face of discrimination and bigotry and winning," stated Adeel A. Mangi and Muhammad U. Faridi, counsel for Bayonne Muslims to NJ.com. "Municipalities that give in to local hatred and treat Muslims unequally should know that they will be held accountable and will face the full weight of the law."

"We are so grateful for the support of so many of our fellow Bayonne residents through this long struggle, and we commend the City of Bayonne for moving now to correct the wrong that was done to Bayonne's Muslims," said Abdul Hamid Butt, the organization's president. "We look forward to welcoming Bayonne residents of all faiths to the City's first mosque." *ih*

Educators Elect New Leaders



DR. SEEMA IMAM, PROFESSOR AND CO-chair of the College of Education at National Louis University, was elected chairperson, and Dr. Patricia Salahuddin was elected vice chair of the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA; <https://theisla.org>) during January 2018.

Imam, who has been with ISLA since 2003, has served as the founding principal of one of the nation's oldest Islamic schools for five years. Salahuddin has taught middle and high school students in both Islamic and public school, where she worked as team leader and department chairperson. A former lecturer at Florida International University, she currently serves on the board

of directors for several local, citywide, and national level organizations, among them the Council of Islamic Schools of North America (www.cisna.org).

Rasha El-Haggan, founding head of the school and International Baccalaureate Coordinator at Tarbiyah Academy in Elkridge, Md., was elected board member during December 2017. In addition to having 12 years of experience working in Islamic, public and international schools, she has worked with various curricula ranging from the Common Core State Standards to the College Board's Advanced Placement to all three programs within the International

Baccalaureate (Primary Years Program, Middle Years Program and Diploma Program).

Kathy Jamil, the out-going ISLA chair and vice chair, who is also director of Elmwood Village Charter School's Hertel Campus, Buffalo, N.Y., along with Mathew Moes, school development lead at Razi Education, stepped down after serving in the positions for nearly ten years. During this time, ISLA's school membership increased dramatically, and its professional development services expanded to include the Leadership Academy, Leadership Retreat and customized professional development for schools. Both individuals remain board members-at-large. *ih*

Minneapolis Mosque Grows

CITY LEADERS APPROVED A ZONING change on Feb. 23 that will allow the south



Minneapolis-based Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center to add an additional building to its property as well as renovate the existing structure. The plans include new classrooms for a K-12 school, a large gymnasium and a multi-purpose space. The mosque has until 2020 to complete the expansion and renovation.

There is currently no timeline for when construction will begin. "Since we are a non-profit organization, it depends on the donations," explained Abdullahi Farah, the center's executive director. *ih*

U.S. Physicians Help Patients in India

FIFTEEN PHYSICIANS FROM THE U.S. VOLUNTEERED WITH THE California-based Indian Muslim Relief and Charities (IMRC) during its ninth Annual India Health Initiative. This program, which ended on Feb. 11, treated some 7,000 people over a three-week period.

Working in Hyderabad, Assam and Manipur and nearby villages, patients lined up for hours to be seen and treated by a doctor. They received free medicine, vitamins, prescription medication and follow-up treatment at the IMRC Indo-U.S. Hospital (if needed) in Hyderabad.

The team members were Jawad Ahmed (general physician), Irfan Moin (geriatrics), Jerome Stefenko (general surgeon), John Rosenberg (ER physician), Farida Ghogawala (gynecologist), Mohammad Gafoor (family practice), Sabiha Gafoor (pediatrician), Moustafa Abouelkheir (surgeon), Jowairia Qadri (gynecologist), M.K. Ahmed (pediatrician), M. Y. Ahmed (surgeon), Sana Ahmed



Dr. Mohammed K. Ahmed from Ohio treats a patient at a Hyderabad medical camp.

(pediatrician), Mir Mumtaz Ali (internal and pulmonary medicine), Mohammad Haq (internal medicine), Reshma Mohiuddin (general physician), Noreen M Haroon (ophthalmologist) and Shaheda B. Ahmed (pathologist). *ih*

ACHIEVERS



Dr. Faisal H. Cheema and Dr. Jeffrey A. Morgan

DR. FAISAL H. CHEEMA, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH and Innovations at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Heart Institute in Houston, and his colleague Dr. Jeffrey A. Morgan were awarded \$4 million by the Brockman Medical Research Foundation to lead cutting-edge research on heart transplantation.

Cheema's mission is to make heart and lung transplants and artificial devices for end-stage heart failure and lung disease a reality in Pakistan. He also aspires to develop a national organ donation and allocation system for that country through strategic partnerships with academic, corporate, governmental and philanthropic institutions.

After graduating from medical school in Pakistan, Cheema trained and worked at Columbia, Loyola, the Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland and the University of California, Berkley.

As University Senator (2009-11), he served on several important senate committees representing the researchers of Columbia University. In addition to being involved with several professional, academic, community and philanthropic organizations, he has worked to establish the Committee for Young Physicians within the Association of Physicians of Pakistani-descent of North

America (APPNA), on which he served for more than a decade and also chaired.

Cheema, who has published more than 110 scientific manuscripts in high-impact journals, continues to collaborate with various health institutions in Pakistan and guides students from medical schools all across that country.



IN FEB. 2018, TAHERA RAHMAN BECAME the first hijabi to work as an on-air reporter for American television.

Rahman joined the WHBF-TV, a CBS affiliate based in Rock Island, Ill., which serves the Quad cities — a five-city region located in northwest Illinois and southeastern Iowa — as a producer in May 2016. Her shift from making the decisions behind the scenes to telling the stories on the scene represents the fulfillment of a childhood dream. She will now decide which stories will be aired, write scripts and keep tabs on timing and other decisions during live newscasts.

Before joining Local 4 News, the Chicagoland-area born and raised Rahman was a producer for a downtown community radio station. A graduate of Loyola University Chicago, she holds a degree in

► COMMUNITY MATTERS

journalism and international studies and also became the first Muslim editor-in-chief of the university's weekly student paper, the Loyola Phoenix. She interned at the Chicago bureau of the CBS Evening News and Al Jazeera English.

Rahman was host-producer of Radio Islam, the nation's only daily Islamic radio program, which is produced by Sound Vision.



BAASIT KAZI OF TROOP #114 WAS AWARDED Eagle status, scouting's highest rank and honor, after completing his Eagle Board of Review on Jan. 19.

Saffet Abid Catovic, Scout Master Troop #114, thanked Assistant Scout Master Ahmed Abdelfattah, Mike Moriarty, Paul Endler and the other Eagle Advisors from the Monmouth (N.J.) Council. All of them had advised Kazi and officiated at his review, which was attended by Muhammad Arif and Adnan Sidiqui from the Troop Committee.

Kazi joins fellow Troop #114 Eagles Ibraheem Catovic, Zain Haq, Atif Salahudeen, Ismael Catovic, Aman Haq, Omer Syed, Noor Rostoum, Ali Tahir, Omar Shaban, Omar Qari, Ali Shamshad, Yousuf

AbdelFatah, Zeeshan Chugtai, Mustafa Maner Khalid Alnadi and Ammaar Ahmed.

A Eagle Scout (or Eagle) holds this rank for life, thus giving rise to the phrase "Once an Eagle, always an Eagle." Since its introduction in 1911, more than 2 million young men have earned the rank. It is estimated that less than 6 percent of those who join the Boy Scouts ever attain this rank, which requires earning at least 21 merit badges and demonstrating "scout spirit" through the Boy Scout Oath and Law, service and leadership.



ON APRIL 11 SHAEZMINA KHAN ('19) OF The Lawrenceville School (N.J.) was recognized with a Certificate of Accomplishment from the Princeton Prize in Race Relations (PPRR; <https://pprize.princeton.edu>) at a ceremony held at Princeton University for serving as the lead youth coordinator for CAIR-New Jersey's first annual Muslim Youth Leadership Symposium. The event was held at Rutgers University on Dec. 9-10, 2017.

Khan, who is president of Lawrenceville's MSA, organized the school's first Islam Awareness Week — a three-day series of on-campus events geared toward promoting a better understanding of Islam and more

familiarity with Muslim culture. She also gave a Ted-ex talk on "The Future of the Hijab in the West" — what the hijab means to those who wear it and how Westerners most commonly view it.

Along with being actively involved in the Women in Leadership at Lawrenceville, the Diversity Council and other diversity initiatives around campus, she is the managing editor of Lawrenceville's international news publication, The Contour. In January 2017 she facilitated a Community Day workshop on the "Role of Women in Islam."

The PPRR recognizes and rewards high school students who have made a significant positive impact through volunteerism on race relations in their schools or communities. Prize recipients receive \$1,000, an all-expenses-paid weekend to a national symposium on race at Princeton University, are honored at a regional ceremonies and, if possible, at their schools.

PPRR operates in 27 regions nationally and is growing at a steady pace.

ZAINEB ABDULLA, VICE president of Deaf Planet Soul, Dr. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, scholar, artist, activist, author and founder of Sapelo Square, and Arshia Wajid, founder of American Muslim Health Professionals, were recognized on March 11 with the 2018 MWA Inspiring Woman Award at the Muslim Women's Alliance's annual "Celebrate Muslim Women Gala" held in Chicago.   

Macy's Launches Hijab-friendly Line



MACY'S LAUNCHED A NEW LINE OF HIJAB-FRIENDLY clothing after teaming up with Lisa Vogl, founder of Verona Collection (<https://www.verona-collection.com>), an Islamic fashion brand to create modest designs. The new collection, which has a price range of \$13 to \$85, features full-coverage stylish garments like sweaters and long coats that mix modesty with style. It was released on Macy's website on Feb. 15.

Vogl founded Verona Collection in 2015 due to her frustration over the lack of fashionable modest clothing for herself

and other Muslimahs. She is a graduate of The Workshop at Macy's minority- and women-owned business development program. May 2017's run of this workshop represents the seventh year of this initiative, which was designed to grow the department store's partnerships with designers and entrepreneurs.

"Verona Collection is more than a clothing brand. It's a platform for a community of women to express their personal identity and embrace fashion that makes them feel confident on the inside and outside," Vogl said in a press release.

While the campaign is aimed at Muslimahs who want a choice when it comes to fashion, the collection is also bound to have widespread appeal for all shoppers. Last year, Nike and American Eagle released hijab-friendly lines. According to the 2015-2016 State of the Global Islamic Economy Report (www.dinarstandard.com), Muslim consumers spent an estimated \$230 billion on clothing — a number that is projected to grow to \$327 billion by 2019. 

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As Houston is scheduled to host ISNA's 55th Annual Convention this September, we are introducing a six-part series highlighting the city's uniqueness by interviewing extraordinary Houstonians and exploring various scenes in the country's fourth largest city. This article, the fourth piece in this series, focuses on the Risala Foundation, a grass-roots organization that brings diverse viewpoints to the Greater Houston Muslim community.



Dalia Mogahed

Minds Alight

Risala Foundation arises as Houston's only Muslim civic speakers organization

BY SAMAN ESSA

RISALA FOUNDATION (WWW.RISALA.ORG) BEGAN OPERATING in 2008 when a group of eager-to-learn, working professionals realized there was a lack of relevant Islamic lecture programming for what board member Faiza Patrawala refers to as "young professionals."

Islamic Horizons interviewed Patrawala, along with her fellow board members, Rehan Farooq, Hina Syed and Zeyn Patel, to better understand Risala's mission.

The members of Risala wanted to bring "high quality scholarship" to a city that, historically, had been a place that nationally renowned leaders, speakers and scholars did not visit, despite its large and ever-growing Muslim community. Risala had two goals

in mind: to bring a different crowd to the masjid through unique programming and to make the lectures completely free.

"Our events have brought different parts of the Muslim community together who otherwise might not be in the same room," Patrawala said. "At the end of the day, we are all facing the same challenges as Muslims living in America." Syed also commented on the community's growth and diversification: "To keep up with the changing demographics, Risala has taken pride by reaching out to diverse groups of scholars who offer different perspectives of our faith. We have seen a beautiful range of people from different groups in our community attend our events."

Through its interfaith events, Risala has also established long-lasting connections with the city's non-Muslim community. "The beautiful connections made when people [of all faiths] come together make us realize that we aren't that different, and [that] we aren't alone in our struggles" Patrawala remarked.

Not only is Risala's demographic unique, but its model is also unique. Many lecture programs now charge for attendance, a practice that Risala has always strongly opposed. "Throughout Islamic history, scholarship has been free and available to the masses," Farooq began. "We made it one of our founding principles to remove as many barriers to entry as possible. Can you imagine Imam Malik

or Imam Abu Hanifa charging for lectures? Of course times have changed, but the idea of a marketplace of ideas that was open to absolutely anyone in a mosque — that was very foundational."

The idea of revisiting this tradition is deeply rooted in Risala's philosophy and is visible in its speaker line-up, all of whom address present-day problems with solutions from the past. More recently, in light of the 2016 elections, Risala's speakers have focused heavily on social and political change. The first two events of 2018 featured Dalia Mogahed, director of research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (www.ispu.org), and Wajahat Ali, a writer, attorney and consultant. They addressed the community's concern of what it means to be Muslim and American in the current political climate, and, ultimately, urged the attendees to become politically involved and aware.

"When choosing our speakers, we try to gauge what our community members might be struggling with or might want/need to hear about and try to bring in speakers who can address that," Patrawala commented. Patel said Risala likes to bring people who "speak to us. For example, in March we will be bringing Chris Blauvelt, the founder of LaunchGood (<https://www.launchgood.com/#/>). He is doing great things for the community, and that resonates with us. We wanted to bring him to Houston to tell his story, and hopefully inspire others. The different speakers and topics that we bring in are still quite unique to our city."

Risala has hosted both highly sought-after scholars and those whom Farooq calls "hidden gems." In any and all cases, Risala does due diligence in selecting speakers who will connect well with the community and offer unique insights both in Islamic and socio-political perspectives.

As one can imagine, bringing a new perspective to a traditional space like a mosque can sometimes be met with push-back. "Masjid committees are sometimes hesitant to embrace certain speakers we want to bring in. In those cases, we have a dialogue with them to show that the speakers are relevant to the American Muslim community, and that their perspective is needed for the Houston community," Patel explained. Despite the occasional opposition, Risala has become a solid cornerstone of Houston's Muslim community. The organization has become a household name in the short amount of years it has been around.

Like any organization, the mission evolves over time. Risala's name comes from the book "Risala," written by Bilali Muhammad, an African slave brought to America in the nineteenth century. This book, the first Islamic text written in America, is now preserved at the University of Georgia, the state in which he lived. The

to engage with us, inspire us and to propel us to action," Farooq explained. "Over the past decade, there has been an amazing amount of activity, new organizations and events in Houston. We like to think of ourselves as 'firestarters' — the ideas and inspiration our platform provides propels others to do great things."

“OUR EVENTS HAVE BROUGHT DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY TOGETHER WHO OTHERWISE MIGHT NOT BE IN THE SAME ROOM,” PATRAWALA SAID. “AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE ARE ALL FACING THE SAME CHALLENGES AS MUSLIMS LIVING IN AMERICA.”

origins of the name itself reaches deep into the history of Islam in America, examining an oft-forgotten piece of Islamic history: Islam came to America through slavery.

The spirit arising out of Risala's name reflects the rich dialogue initiated by the scholars and audience alike, often driven by contemporary but deeply rooted socio-political issues. "There continues to be a glaring need for an organization that can pose the questions of the day to thinkers, scholars and activists who are best-positioned to answer them," Farooq stated. "Our guests know that if Risala invites them, they get a thoroughly professional experience, from the minute we engage with them to how we meticulously plan every detail of their visit down to the event itself. We have developed a playbook that hopefully raises the bar for how we treat our guests and attendees."

Despite Risala's initial mission of catering toward a young professional crowd, Risala attracts people of all ages. "In our most recent event, we had a typical (for us) but uncanny slice of Houston: young parents with their kids, college-age students, elder uncles and aunties and many community leaders. In addition, we had friends from the Shia community attend," Farooq recalled.

Risala encourages audiences to ask questions and keep an open mind in order to propel great ideas, discussions, and implementation of these thoughts into action. "Over time, Houston has gotten used to a more elevated discourse, with people who are making the headlines coming to our city

What started as a lecture-platform was quickly transformed into something much greater. Risala has invited those running for office to their masjid events, held *nasheed* concerts, planned weekend retreats and hosted several *qiyaam* during Ramadan, to name a few unique events. "As long as there's a need and people benefit from our events, Inshallah we will continue our work," Patel concluded.

Many Risala Foundation members will help plan and run ISNA's convention this year in Houston. They look forward to welcoming attendees and ensuring that they will have a beneficial and fun Labor Day Weekend 2018. **ih**

Saman Essa, who is majoring in psychology and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Houston, plans to become a psychologist with a focus on immigrant and refugee populations in the U.S.



FOSTER CARE: THE FORGOTTEN SUNNAH

Our community's invisible minority —
children who need foster parents

BY OMAMA ALTALEB

DURING FEB. 2012, SAMEENA ZAHOOR RECEIVED THE long-awaited phone call — the foster care agency had located a 5-year-old Muslim boy who needed a Muslim home. Two hours later, he walked into Zahoor's home carrying only a small backpack that contained a pair of pants, a tiny blanket and some toys the agency had given him.

"I remember how scared he looked when he first arrived, and how he refused to eat at first. When it came time for bed, my foster son wanted to go home and cried for his mother for hours," said Zahoor, co-founder of the Muslim Foster Care Association (<https://muslimfostercare.org>), a Michigan-based nonprofit that provides a support network for Muslim foster families.

Although fostering isn't easy, Zahoor and other Muslim foster parents in the U.S. are welcoming the opportunity with open arms. At the end of Fiscal Year 2016, 437,465 children were in foster care in the U.S., a number that has increased every year since 2012, according to a government report (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport24.pdf>) published by the Administration for Children and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services.

While the exact number of Muslim children within the U.S. foster care system is unknown, those who work closely with the agencies say there aren't enough Muslim foster homes in which to place all of them.

Zillehuma Hasan, former executive director and a founding member of Wafa House Inc., worked with the Division of Child Protection and Permanency in New Jersey to help find temporary homes. She relates that in March 2014, Wafa House Inc. (www.wafahouse.org) heard from a state-level resource specialist that there were only 32 identified Muslim foster parents in New Jersey, only one of which spoke Arabic. The 31 others were African American.

On any given day, several Muslim children become displaced and, because there aren't enough Muslim foster homes, are placed in non-Muslim homes. While the non-Muslim community is extremely nurturing, Hasan says, its members don't have the know-how and cultural competency to raise them as Muslims.

"There are times when these children are being fed pork products, and not because these people are deliberately feeding them, but they don't know that these children are not supposed to eat pork, and sometimes these children are being taken to church," she states. "That's where I think our community really needs to step up to the plate."



OVERCOMING MISCONCEPTIONS

Foster parent Yasemin Saib posits that one reason for this tragedy is that not enough imams and community leaders are addressing the issue. "Many people are made to falsely believe that fostering or adopting is prohibited in Islam, which is sheer insanity," she remarks.

Zainab Alwani, a scholar and vice president of the Fiqh Council of North America who realized that the Muslim community wasn't doing enough to address foster care, created the Orphan Care Project (<https://www.orphanproject.com>) to educate and inspire Muslims to provide care for orphaned and abandoned children through fostering and guardianship. As part of the project, she collaborated with the council and the Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America to issue appropriate guidelines (<https://www.orphanproject.com/fcna-amja-guidelines-orphan-care>) to help eliminate such misconceptions.

Alwani says most people get caught up in the issue of *mahram*. According to Q. 4:23 and 24:31, a *mahram* is a blood relative and therefore can't marry the person under their guardianship. This system establishes certain rules to protect the sanctity of the family in society. However, Alwani argues that being a non-*mahram* to a potential foster child should not stop Muslims from fostering. "If you take in a child who is not a *mahram*, your responsibility is to take care of the child and provide them with everything they need. The only difference is that there are boundaries."

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A FOSTER CHILD

According to Alwani, Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) created a culture in which almost every family in Madina had a foster child who was treated as one of their own biological children. But, she contends, our community has lost that spirit and compassion,

FOSTER PARENT YASEMIN SAIB POSITS THAT ONE REASON FOR THIS TRAGEDY IS THAT NOT ENOUGH IMAMS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS ARE ADDRESSING THE ISSUE. "MANY PEOPLE ARE MADE TO FALSELY BELIEVE THAT FOSTERING OR ADOPTING IS PROHIBITED IN ISLAM, WHICH IS SHEER INSANITY," SHE REMARKS.

dark shades of brown and black, she replied, "Why not? Sometimes I color my brothers brown."

"She's just so welcoming, so loving and doesn't really see the differences of color," Shbeib remarks.

Shbeib does note, however, that fostering has also been a big challenge for her birth children, for it has changed their home atmosphere and their family dynamic. "It's hard for them sometimes to grasp the bigger picture of why we are doing this, and especially when they don't see other families doing it. A lot of times, because I will encourage them with the concept of there being a lot of reward in this and how to be patient, they'll say, 'Well, how come no one else is doing it if there's a lot of reward in it?'"

Through the Muslim Foster Care Association, Shbeib and Zahoor have held many panel presentations about foster care at mosques throughout southern Michigan. Although hundreds of people have attended, the number always drops dramatically when it is time to become licensed. "It's hard because a lot of people reach out and say that they are interested, but very few people will actually go through

which is why many Muslims living in the U.S. feel like they are raising their children alone. The burden falls entirely on the nuclear family.

She presents one possible solution: Create an extended support system in each community, similar to the one that existed during the Prophet's time, one in which each family, foster or not, can lean on each other for help. But our community's perspective and attitude toward foster care also needs to change, for "It's a blessing to have a child to take care of. It softens our hearts and changes our attitudes toward everything."

Saib, who has fostered three children, says that wanting to become a foster parent requires a mind shift. "It's not about the perfect time. It's about fulfilling arguably the most important virtue of our faith — to care for the orphaned child — and foster children fall into that category as they have no stable parents who can care for them."

Ranya Shbeib, who co-founded the Muslim Foster Care Association with Zahoor, has fostered four children consecutively and has three birth children of her own. She reports that it's been a rewarding experience for both her and her family: "It's very eye-opening. Especially I see it in my youngest child, my daughter, who has grown up fostering."

This daughter, who is now 8 years old, was once coloring with some of her friends. When one of them asked her why she was coloring her people

the process and then actually foster," Shbeib related. "It's very disheartening. We live in big communities — very resourceful and wealthy communities."

Like Alwani, Shbeib says she wishes people would understand that fostering is a communal obligation. "It's a forgotten sunnah. It's not something that just falls on one family and then we say, 'Oh well, this family is doing it so none of us have to do it.' You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child? Well, what if that child is a foster child?"

Zahoor's first foster son had never attended a Friday prayer in a masjid, or the *tarawih* and Eid prayers until he was placed with her family. "These children are the unseen and unheard in our communities. They need to know that there is a large Muslim community that cares about them."

OTHER WAYS TO HELP

Both Shbeib and Zahoor understand that not everyone is able to foster, which is why they dedicated a section of their website (<https://muslimfostercare.org/other-ways-to-help>) to ways people can help. For example, licensed families can provide the much-needed respite care for a foster family who has to go out of town or just needs a short break. As Shbeib points out, "Even if people aren't licensed, they can help with transportation, buying things that the child needs, even mentoring or tutoring. There are so many other ways to support foster children."

Saib, founder of the Live It Up Foundation (<http://liveitupfoundation.org>), has published four children's books in 2016 and is working on a fifth one as a way to generate funds to support the foster children in the organization's care.

Another way to contribute is by becoming involved in the foster care system itself. Hasan says that people can serve on their local county's Child Placement Review Board, whose members help the presiding judge ensure that the parents are doing everything they are supposed to in order to be reunified with their biological children.

MOVING FORWARD

Shbeib is hopeful about the community's future in this area, but cautious that it's going to take time. "Fostering is still a relatively new topic that's just recently coming to the surface again and being talked about again, so inshallah with time, people will start to realize the significance of the need for people to be licensed. And then, hopefully, people will start acting on that."

Saib agrees. "Slowly but surely, I am hopeful that more Muslim families will go the extra mile to foster children."

Omama Altaieb, a digital journalist and media entrepreneur in Washington, D.C., is the founder and editor-in-chief of Layali Webzine, a digital lifestyle magazine and blog for millennial Muslim women. She also works as the social media editor and Digital Engagement Specialist for WTOP News, a local radio station in D.C.,



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Would You Adopt Muhammad?

Unfortunately, there are nowhere near enough Muslim foster families in the U.S. to meet the needs of Muslim children



BY NAAZISH YARKHAN

SOME CHILDREN, THROUGH NO FAULT of their own, find themselves in situations that would emotionally and mentally traumatize even adults.

Being removed from the only home one has known is stressful enough, but it may very well be amplified when children are placed in homes that aren't culturally similar or where practicing their faith is a challenge. With families being targeted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other authorities, in today's climate children are at even greater risk of being left without parents. For a community whose very Prophet (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) was an orphan raised first by his grandfather and then his uncle, being a foster family would seem to be a most natural way for Muslims to practice their faith.

"Muslim children are not immune from homelessness, and homelessness among Muslims is not restricted to refugees," says Abdullah Mitchell, executive director of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (<https://www.ciogc.org>). "Muslim families, like other families in this country, experience divorce, financial

hardships, mental or physical disabilities or even death. In these situations parents lose the ability to provide for their children, and that inability can be temporary or long term." He elaborates, "When extended family members cannot or will not care for them, these Muslim children become wards of the state, and, as wards of the state, options for care are limited. Unfortunately, there are not enough registered Muslim families to meet the demand the State of Illinois has for Muslim foster families."

The need of the hour in Illinois, as well as across the U.S., could not be stated more clearly.

Foster parenting and the necessary requirements for certification were on many minds as more than 150 community members packed the Islamic Center of Wheaton (Ill.) on a cold February night this year for ICNA Relief's "Learn What it Takes to be a Foster Parent" workshop. Many had heard of the organization's success at helping the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS; <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/Pages/default.aspx>) find a Muslim foster home for two children of Jordanian descent/origin in January 2018: a 9-year-old boy and his 12-year-old sister.

DCFS's earlier outreach to the Muslim community resulted in ICNA Relief Chicago's first workshop, held in 2016. With ICNA Relief's goal being stronger communities, creating awareness and helping Muslim families learn more about becoming foster parents seemed timely. The "Learn What it Takes to be a Foster Parent" workshop offered a panel featuring DCFS Resource/Recruitment Specialist Chuck Dorothy and Imam Hassan Aly of Mecca Center (<http://meccacenter.org>), Willowbrook, Ill. The latter provided an Islamic perspective on foster care and together they answered almost an hour's worth of questions. Over half of the attendees signed up with DCFS to schedule a follow-up call to learn more. By 2017, that one workshop had resulted in four families becoming foster parents. DCFS representatives were impressed with the Muslim community's interest and the urgency.

START WHERE YOU ARE

While Muslim social service organizations across the U.S. offer several initiatives, help with getting licensed as foster parents often isn't one of them. Two foster mothers, Ranya Shbeib and Sameena Zahoor, initiated the Bloomfield Hills, Mich.-based Muslim Foster Care Association (MFCA; <https://muslimfostercare.org>) in 2016 when they found themselves at a loss for foster parent resources in the local Muslim community. Their organization assists Muslims in the foster care system, helps families who are interested in getting licensed and provides the Muslim community with ways to help foster children even if they aren't interested in becoming foster families.

Like ICNA Relief, their first steps were creating awareness in the community in collaboration with local imams. Their presentation at ISNA in 2015 was very appropriately called "Would You Adopt Muhammad?"

Foster children may have one or both parents, but are often neglected, abused and at-risk should they continue to live under the same roof. MFCA works closely with Samaritas (<https://www.samaritas.org>) to connect with Muslims in the foster care system. Besides Eid drives for them, MFCA also helps Muslim foster families adjust to their new responsibilities.

EVEN ONE PERSON CAN TOUCH MANY LIVES

When children are removed from their homes, it is literally with just the clothes on their backs.

Speaking to the idea that even one person can make a difference, attorney Farrah Qazi of Aurora, Ill., mother of four, raises donations to prepare suitcases filled with clothing, bed sheets, blankets and other essentials.

"One of the driving forces for me to pursue the legal profession was the ability to help children, specifically orphans and foster children," says Qazi. "The more I read

SINGLES, MARRIED INDIVIDUALS AND EMPTY NESTERS, AMONG OTHERS, CAN QUALIFY TO BE POTENTIAL FOSTER PARENTS. BESIDES PROVIDING A STIPEND TO THE FOSTER PARENT ONCE THEY TAKE IN A CHILD, THE STATE ALSO PAYS FOR THE CHILD'S SUMMER CAMPS, THERAPISTS AND EVEN ACTIVITIES.

about it, the more convinced I became that there is a void that can be filled by good people stepping up and helping out. Once we recognize that any neglected child is our collective responsibility, we can progress as a society. I do my best ... I advocate, represent and care for needy children because I take their suffering personally. When a child suffers, it means we have failed, in some way, as adults. All of us hold that responsibility. We can be observant neighbors and caring and trusting adults whom children should feel comfortable with. As a lawyer (<https://www.qazilawoffices.com>), I lend my voice to kids lost in the mad shuffle of divorce or those who don't have anyone to advocate on their behalf for their health and education. I am a firm supporter of CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates; www.casaforchildren.org) and Together We Rise (www.togetherwerise.org). Both organizations allow ordinary citizens to create a direct impact into the lives of children. And as a Muslim, I take this onus even more seriously because our Quran and our beloved Prophet repeatedly state how critical it is that we care for orphans."

Given that we will be held accountable for our blessings, any and all efforts to make a difference count. Pajama Program (pajamaprogram.org) is another effort to reach kids in shelters. You can contribute books and new pajamas, even read to them.

WHO CAN BE A FOSTER PARENT?

With thousands of children in the system,

the need for homes is dire, especially for sibling groups of three or more children, teens and Spanish-speakers. Singles, married individuals and empty nesters, among others, can qualify to be potential foster parents. Besides providing a stipend to the foster parent once they take in a child, the state also pays for the child's summer camps, therapists and even activities.

Dorothy stresses that potential foster parents can specify the age, race, faith and gender of the child they can best care for. Certified foster parents also have the right to decline to take in a child. He spoke of a foster family that accepted an infant only to be disinclined to adjust their schedules — they returned the infant 10 days later. "Being a foster parent is more than offering food, clothing and shelter," he said. "It's in the child's best interest not to be bounced from home to home, so we want foster parents to be really sure about who they can raise."

AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

From an Islamic perspective, adopting a child is laudable and being a foster parent even more so, given that it impacts the entire family, notes Imam Hassan. When it comes to opposite gender interaction between adults and adolescent children, Imam Hassan mentions ways to show affection that need not include physical contact: showing interest in a child's interests or activities, listening to what's on their mind, reading together, talking gently and sitting close.

Having the child accompany their foster family to a place of worship, especially if he or she can't be left home alone, is acceptable, Dorothy remarked. That said, "Islamically, we can suggest that our children observe certain religious practices, but we can't force them to do it. Similarly, while foster children can observe us, we cannot force them to


participate in our religious practices," added Imam Hassan.

Aliyah Banister, a licensed therapist specializing in the Muslim American population, touches on the psychological repercussions of unstable homes and spoke of Muslim American children in the foster care system. She discusses the importance of them developing a sense of attachment, especially in the early years, and how related neurological wiring atrophies when that bond is absent. "But," she adds, "the brain is very elastic and even teens and tweens from troubled backgrounds and those facing behavioral problems can flourish when shown love, patience and understanding. That's why I am not just a counselor for young children, but for teens as well."

In the Muslim community, there is particular interest in fostering refugee children. So long as a refugee child is in the system, they are available for placement in certified foster homes. However, if a child is overseas, the application process is completely different and independent of DCFS.

WHAT IS FICTIVE KIN?

Rules vary with states. In Illinois, under the Fictive Kin program, families do not have to be currently licensed as foster parents if they have an existing relationship or emotional connection with the child, whether as a neighbor, teacher or community member. The children can be placed with them. However, when DCFS is looking for families with whom to place these children, their names cannot be divulged due to rules governing confidentiality. So how did an organization like ICNA Relief help find a home that may have a relationship with the Jordanian children when they had practically no personal information about them?

"We asked members of our community to please spread the word, to help identify a family who may know these children. If the leaders, imam or anyone in the community knows of a family where there are issues, chances are they are likely to have heard of these children. There are definitely Allah's blessings involved in making this happen," said Dr. Saima Azfar, director, ICNA Relief Chicago. 

Naazish YarKhan, an internationally published writer, is director of www.writersstudio.us and a college essay coach.

NOTE: Those interested in becoming foster parents should visit the websites of their state and county social services to download and complete application forms and requirements for foster parenting.



Working Together for a Better World

Islamic Relief USA marks 25 years of service to all

BY CHANCEY JUNE GANNETT

IT WAS AROUND 1994, AND THE TINY, about 3-year-old Syrian girl holding her donation box wasn't much older than the brand new organization, Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA; <http://irusa.org>). Anwar Khan still remembers her name — Mariam — and when he met her: The future president of IRUSA was talking with her father about how to get more humanitarian aid to the suffering Bosnians. She approached him, holding a little house-shaped box full of forgotten coins she had collected from around the house. "She wanted it to go to her brothers and sisters in Sarajevo," Khan reminisced.

Today Mariam is all grown up and IRUSA is celebrating its 25th year of serving others. Growth has been remarkable, and the organization's reach has expanded exponentially. Still, it has always been just one name that holds the power to keep that spirit of service alive.

It was knowing that Amran's family would have food to eat for *suhoor* in Somaliland, the self-declared state internationally

recognized as an autonomous region of Somalia; that Zahafa's village would get a well and fresh drinking water; to provide shelter for Esmeralda after a typhoon destroyed her home in the Philippines; and learning that Amina could finish school in Pakistan — she later became a teacher in her home village.

Twenty-five years and millions of names later ... and today so many are close to our own homes in the U.S., ringing out from poor Chicago communities that can't afford health care; from shelters for abused women in Maryland and low-income schools in Virginia; and from communities trying to put their lives together after a tornado or a wildfire.

IRUSA is a story that began with a call for help.

IRUSA IS BORN

In the fall of 1993 while the war in Bosnia was still raging and thousands of families were fleeing, a small group of mostly recent college graduates, inspired by Islamic Relief

affiliates in other countries, founded IRUSA in California. That first year they raised money and worked day and night in the founders' living rooms, stuffing envelopes by hand.

"It was a dream for us when we started ... that Islamic Relief would be at least the equivalent of the Red Cross for the Muslim community as well as for the larger community," remarked co-founder Ahmad El Bendary. "Alhamdulillah, this is the beauty of being an active Muslim — that you don't know how to dream small."

The workers first reached out to youth groups and Muslim student associations. Khan recalls that the first event they attended — an Orange County, Calif., youth conference in December 1993 that was full of enthusiastic and energetic high school and college students. "We decided to work with youth groups from the beginning, because we believed the most important resources were being overlooked: human resources," Khan said.

The students spread the word, and small donations for Bosnia began to roll in. They sent everything they could and worked some more. In summer 1994 they opened their first office in Downey, Calif., just southeast of Los Angeles. "There were sisters and young brothers, all different ages, sitting down, filing envelopes and sending fliers," El Bendary relates. "Everyone was working to do whatever needed to be done. It created a beautiful family and brotherhood/sisterhood environment."

Khan recalls that sometimes a staff member would work so late that he/she would fall asleep in the office, get up in the morning and continue working. El Bendary laughs, remembering that parents would call him and ask if there was any adult supervision. He spent many nights there in those early years just to supervise volunteers.

IRUSA was growing a grassroots network of volunteers that one day would number as many as 3,000, one of whom was, during the late 1990s, Azhar Azeez (currently volunteering as ISNA president). Now director of IRUSA's fund division, he remembers the days of driving from community to community and sleeping in mosques or people's homes. In the process, the young workers and community members built long-lasting bonds.

"The people who grew up with Islamic Relief in the 1990s — many of them are our volunteers and donors today," Khan adds.

"Many of them learned activism through Islamic Relief. It made them more socially aware and active. I would like to think of Islamic Relief as a school to teach people to go out there and make the world a better place, and not just talk the talk but walk the walk."

Their goal was to complement what other groups were doing for, as El Bendary notes, "good doesn't compete. If you have a dark room and you light a candle — if you light one more candle, it will make the room brighter."

DOWN TO BUSINESS

Throughout the 1990s, IRUSA responded to various emergencies. The first major one was the Oklahoma City bombing (1995) — the group sent \$5,000, more than its members had collected during Ramadan. When the Bosnian conflict spread to Kosovo, the young workers helped set up a refugee camp and arranged hosts for refugees coming to the U.S. They responded to earthquakes in Afghanistan (1998) and Turkey (1999) by sending emergency supplies.

Right from the beginning, the young activists took seriously the mandate to care for their neighbors. One early project was supporting the UMMA Clinic in Los Angeles to provide free care for low-income and homeless Americans. Upon learning about the 9/11 attacks while driving away from the office, Khan pulled over in tears and then turned his car around and returned to the office. IRUSA's office phone rang off the hook all day with threatening and frightening calls, and a vandal painted an obscenity on the door. But then messages of support began coming in, and their Armenian neighbors grabbed a brush and repainted the door.

Through it all, the staff kept working and donations that year only increased. Patients at UMMA Clinic lined up to give blood for survivors. One donor told UMMA volunteers, "You guys came to help us when nobody else came. Now we want to support you."

That time was rocky for all Muslim American organizations, but IRUSA emerged stronger. A few years later, the organization earned its first 4-star rating from the watchdog Charity Navigator (<https://www.charitynavigator.org>) — an honor it has maintained nearly every year since then.

Their work never paused. In 2002, staff reached out to local communities by holding the first — and now annual — "Humanitarian

Day" to provide food and other necessities to homeless and low-income Americans. Now called the "Day of Dignity," these events are held in partnership with local organizations and offer everything from health screenings to clothes and haircuts.

IRUSA'S ADVOCACY REACH HAS ALSO GROWN, FOR ITS PUBLIC AFFAIRS TEAM NOW MEETS WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND INTERNATIONAL GROUPS TO PROMOTE HUMANITARIAN VALUES AND PUSH FOR POLICIES THAT REDUCE HUNGER, POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS.

Meanwhile, staff began forming partnerships with other major nongovernmental organizations, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When a tsunami struck Indonesia and the coastal regions of nations bordering the Indian Ocean (2004) and an earthquake devastated Pakistan the following year, such partnerships helped IRUSA quickly dispatch large deliveries of clothes and hygiene necessities.

These tragedies were massive, and repeated TV images of the devastation raised widespread public awareness. Donations poured in, and staffers were so busy that once again they were sleeping in the office.

GROWING TO SERVE

After operating from California for more than a decade, Islamic Relief opened new offices in Dallas, Washington D.C. and Totowa, N.J. to keep up with all of the work. Another office in Chicago would open a few years later. These new regional offices allowed staff members to become more deeply involved with communities nationwide.

Even though emergency work continues around the world, this growth has enabled IRUSA staff to pursue their goal of focusing more heavily upon development work. The organization's goal has always been to improve lives year-round based upon the local communities' priorities.

Thus, staffers have built wells and water systems from Mali to Pakistan to remote Albanian villages; health facilities, the latest one being the cancer wing of South Africa's Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital, to

which it delivered medicine and medical supplies; and schools. They have helped widows start businesses, repaired farmland in Palestine, cared for orphans worldwide and helped communities prepare sustainable solutions to everything from drought

to earthquakes. IRUSA, which has grown nearly every year, now reaches more than 10 million people annually in approximately 48 countries.

At the same time, it has diversified into new types of special events. In 2004, singer Sami Yusuf drew thousands of people on a nationwide tour in order to launch an annual "Evening of Inspiration" to help needy children. New events — some planned by IRUSA and others by the donors themselves — combine fun and activism along with team fundraising. For example, "Skate for Syria" brings communities out to ice rinks to raise money for Syrian humanitarian aid, while "Walk for Water" draws diverse crowds to walk a 5K and help build water systems. Volunteer projects have likewise been expanded and diversified.

A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

IRUSA's advocacy reach has also grown, for its public affairs team now meets with government agencies and international groups to promote humanitarian values and push for policies that reduce hunger, poverty and homelessness. In 2010, an IRUSA representative was appointed to several State Department and USAID working groups. Shortly after that, IRUSA staff began receiving invitations to speak at United Nations forums and other international events.

"Our faith causes us to bear witness on behalf of our beneficiaries to share their stories, to call for solutions to those with authority and power in our nation," said Jihad Saleh Williams, IRUSA's government and public affairs manager.

Timeline

- Fall 1993:** IRUSA is incorporated in Los Angeles County.
- Dec. 1993:** IRUSA representatives attend first event, a youth conference in Orange County.
- Feb. 1994:** First Ramadan: Islamic Relief workers make about 30 visits to at least 10 mosques in Los Angeles and raise roughly \$3,000.
- Summer 1994:** First official office opens in Downey, Calif.
- Throughout 1994:** First relief campaign: Bosnia War Relief. Volunteers stuff 3,000 mailers by hand.
- April 1995:** The Oklahoma City bombing. IRUSA staff, despite threats, raises and sends \$5,000 for relief.
- 1996:** IRUSA has five employees.
- 1997:** Staff delivers Qurbani meat to families in need for Eid al-Adha.
- 1998:** A 6.1 magnitude earthquake strikes Afghanistan; IRUSA sends relief.
- 1999:** The Kosovo crisis begins in March; staff initiates a major relief campaign. IRUSA workers travel to Albania in April and help set up the first Islamic Relief camp for Kosovo refugees.
- 2000:** IRUSA delivers emergency aid to Chechnya and continues to garner support for campaigns to help eastern Europe.
- September 2001:** After 9/11, IRUSA office receives threats. Workers respond by organizing blood drives and launch a major campaign for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan.
- 2002:** The first "Humanitarian Day" is held. This annual tradition is now called the "Day of Dignity." IRUSA spent \$6.6 million on programs to help people in need.
- 2003:** As of January, U.S. donors were sponsoring 513 orphans. A major earthquake strikes Iran (Dec. 26) and staffers set about organizing a relief campaign.
- 2004:** In the spring, IRUSA receives its first 4-star rating from Charity Navigator. It launches its still-operating global "Children in Need" campaign and responds to the tsunami that struck the coastal regions of the countries bordering the Indian Ocean, especially Indonesia and neighboring countries on Oct. 26. IRUSA donors sent aid, such as temporary homes, health clinics, schools as well as water and livelihood support.
- 2005:** IRUSA opens offices open in Texas and New Jersey. Hurricane Katrina hits the Gulf Coast, and IRUSA enters the field of domestic relief work. Pakistan is rocked by an earthquake (Oct. 8), and IRUSA sends large-scale relief.
- 2006:** Famine spreads in Africa and Lebanon is rocked by violence; Islamic Relief donors send humanitarian aid. Development projects include water in Mali and health initiatives in Afghanistan. Singer Sami Yusuf joins Islamic Relief to launch a national "Evening of Inspiration" tour to benefit people in need.
- 2007:** Bangladesh is devastated by a cyclone; IRUSA donors send relief. IRUSA expands its focus on development projects, such as education in Mali.
- 2008:** IRUSA donors are now providing relief in more than 20 countries.
- 2009:** IRUSA expands again and moves its headquarters to a new Virginia office. As an emergency spreads in Palestine, IRUSA sends aid for medicine, food and clothes.
- 2010:** IRUSA CEO is appointed to USAID advisory committee. IRUSA hosts first Capitol Hill iftar. Massive flooding submerges large portions of Pakistan; IRUSA sends aid that will eventually assist hundreds of thousands over next two years.
- 2011:** IRUSA CEO is appointed to U.S. State Department working group. IRUSA expands domestic disaster relief work, forming Disaster Assistance Relief. As political unrest spreads throughout the Middle East, IRUSA sends aid to people in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and, later on, Syria. Drought and famine strike East Africa; IRUSA donors provide food, water, medical care and more to hundreds of thousands of people in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. IRUSA CEO addresses the UN on providing appropriate aid.
- 2012:** IRUSA spends \$36.5 million on emergency relief, food, water, development projects and more to help people in need; 9,239 orphans are sponsored in 22 countries. Ramadan food packages are distributed to feed 318,731 people in 23 countries. Udhiah/Qurbani meat is distributed to feed 431,506 people in 26 countries.
- 2013:** The organization has grown to 89 employees, has more than 10,000 sponsored orphans and is working in more than 30 countries.
- 2014:** IRUSA signs memorandum with the American Red Cross, becoming its first Muslim partner.
- 2015:** Donors provide humanitarian aid in more than 50 countries for the first time, helping more than 100,000 people living in the U.S. IRUSA co-sponsors the World Bank's first summit on religion and sustainable development and takes part in U.N. summit on sustainable development goals.
- 2016:** IRUSA responds to eight U.S. emergencies, including delivering water in Flint, Mich., for six months. The team takes part in two U.N. summits, focusing on housing and women's empowerment. Donors share Ramadan food with more than 390,000 people and Eid meat with more than one million people.
- 2017:** IRUSA hosts InterAction forum and earns its 11th 4-star rating from Charity Navigator.
- 2018:** IRUSA celebrates 25 years of service and hope.

In 2011, IRUSA added a volunteer-based Disaster Response Team to its domestic activities. This team quickly began mobilizing to respond to emergencies from tornadoes to wildfires to assess damage, staff shelters and deliver relief, often together with the American Red Cross. This team is now involved in rebuilding houses for those who remain homeless long after the public attention fades.

Efforts like these not only help our neighbors, but also help change stereotypes. For example, on one deployment a fellow relief worker tapped an IRUSA staff member on the shoulder and said, "You know, I've never met a Muslim before, but now I see they're just like us!" The team hears this sentiment repeated on each deployment.

SO MUCH MORE TO DO

Emergency work remains ongoing amid a massive and ongoing international refugee crisis. Meanwhile new creative projects are applying innovative approaches to old problems. For example, in Bangladesh an old slaughterhouse, once a source of pollution, now provides free clean cooking fuel to nearby residents.

IRUSA partners with local organizations to distribute food during Ramadan, Eid al-Adha meat and zakat funds. The latter proved to be a lifeline for Brandy in Las Vegas when she lost her job and her baby was born with major medical problems. "He was two pounds eight ounces," she said. "They did not expect him to live, but we prayed on it, and Allah answered our prayers."

With no job and medical bills mounting, she faced eviction and had nowhere to go. IRUSA zakat donors put a roof back over her head by paying for a temporary apartment while she looked for her next step. "I don't even know where I would be," Brandy sighed. "I wouldn't really have anywhere to go if they didn't give me this apartment."

Ten million people being helped, and yet that one name still moves the heart. "Indeed, whoever saves one life, it is as though he [or she] has saved all of humanity" (5:32).

Today, IRUSA celebrates a legacy. While thanking its tens of thousands of donors, they remember that it all started with one person at a time — with hearts like little Mariam's and her box of forgotten coins. Chancey June Gannett is content creator, Islamic Relief USA



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The Teacher App

The Quranic app helps those who can recite the Quran but who have no idea of what the words mean

BY JANET KOZAK

A NEW APP CALLED “QURANIC” IS breaking records. In fact, as of this writing it is the highest funded mobile app to date on the LaunchGood platform (<https://www.launchgood.com/#/>) — a crowdfunding platform primarily used by Muslims for Islamic projects. Their record-holding status is not something Quranic co-founders Hani Khan and Ustadh Adam Jamal were expecting to achieve; however, they’re excited about working with an amazing development team and hope to launch their full app soon.

Hani and Adam began working on the app in 2017. It’s been just the two of them from the beginning. As Hani says, “Adam brought the Arabic knowledge and I brought product design experience to the table. We thought this would be a great partnership and help us think through the problems we wanted to solve with the idea. We’ve been a two-man team since day one.”

MIXING A LOVE FOR TECHNOLOGY AND TEACHING

While both of them grew up loving technology and video games, they took divergent paths as young adults. Adam turned what is usually a two-year Quranic memorization program study into an eight-year journey in pursuit of Islamic knowledge. “I quickly realized I didn’t just want to memorize. I wanted to understand,” he explains.

It was a journey that totally changed his career path — he became an imam and a teacher. “I’ve taught on YouTube, at the masjid, and at Bayyinah Institute, which has millions of followers. I’ve taught short week-long classes and nine-month 1,000-hour Arabic programs,” Adam shares.

Hani also had a change of heart after earning a degree in computer information systems from the University of Houston. After working for an oil and gas company for three years, he realized it wasn’t what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. “I found the design of digital products to be a potential career opportunity,” Hani explains.

“I knew I didn’t want to continue helping oil and gas companies make more oil, so I pivoted my career path. I applied to different masters programs and was accepted into Cornell University to study human-computer interaction. It’s a degree that studies the intersection of people, technology and behavioral science.”

Hani uses his degrees to fuel his design strategy for Quranic. He also loves examining other business ideas to understand the problems they’re solving in the world. After all, he relates, “good design should solve actual problems people face.”

Adam also enjoys the moments of clarity and resolution that he sees on the faces of his students when they finally understand. He delights in the moments when they realize that they can actually understand the words of God if they make the effort and have access to the right tools and teachers.

“I’m a big believer in simplifying things, going back to the basics and asking strong

THE QURANIC TEAM IS BUILDING DATA COLLECTION INTO THE APP SO THEY CAN TRACK AND UNDERSTAND WHERE USERS ARE MOST CHALLENGED. AS ADAM RELATES, “THE NUMBER ONE GOAL OF THE APP IS FOR PEOPLE TO LEARN ON A MASSIVE SCALE.”



Adam Jamal

questions about what the actual goal of a student should be. I’m also striving for constant improvement by developing a rapid feedback loop to improve what I’m doing,” Adam explains. “I think this genre, Arabic studies, has been in need of reiteration for a long time. Some curricula in use today are 200 years old! However, students’ needs and expectations of how they learn have changed tremendously even in the last five years, let alone the last 200.”

THE QURANIC EPIPHANY

It was originally Adam’s idea to create a Quranic Arabic learning app with bite-sized student lessons. “I was using an app to learn Spanish. I realized how effective it was in helping me to read Spanish and understand it. But I couldn’t speak the language. That’s a problem for Spanish, but it’s not as much a problem for Quranic Arabic,” Adam remarks. He recalls his epiphany in the following terms, “Somehow my brain connected the dots. For the Quran, most Muslims don’t need to speak or recite it, they only need to understand what they’re reading.”

Adam knows there are a lot of people (including himself back in the day) who think they can never learn any Arabic. “I’ve shown my students that this doesn’t have to be the case,” he says. “I believe this app will reach a whole new world of people.”

And the proof is in the numbers. With the support of the LaunchGood team and platform, they have raised over \$95,000 from more than 1,000 supporters. Even though they’re a U.S.-based app development team, support has streamed in from Canada, Singapore, the U.K., Australia and other countries.

Amany Killawi, co-founder of LaunchGood, has offered help and support throughout. “We featured it in our



Hani Khan

newsletter and generated over \$10,000 for the campaign,” she remarks. It was a move that surely helped tip the scales in favor of a successful campaign, one that also helped get the word out to more potential Quranic Arabic students.

The two friends’ success can also be attributed to their obvious understanding of what busy Muslims want and need. “The interesting thing about this idea is that I’ve felt the need for it multiple times in my life. I’ve met so many people in similar situations,” Hani states. “Every single Arabic class I’ve attended in the past was an excruciating experience. Sometimes classes started with super dry lessons about grammar or were crammed into a few days so I forgot everything after a week or two. There were also classes I wasn’t able to attend because I can’t take a few months off work. We knew there had to be another better way to connect with the Quran.”

“It’s what led us to Quranic,” he notes. “With Quranic, people can take short lessons whenever and wherever they want. The lessons have interlaced stories to make it easier to understand all the information. After all, who doesn’t like to learn about stories in the Quran?”

The Quranic team is making the learning Quranic Arabic fun and interesting for people on the go. It’s for those who can recite the Quran but who have no idea of what the words mean, for those who’ve studied Arabic part-time but don’t have a strong vocabulary and helpful for those who’ve studied Arabic but want to maintain or brush up their skills.

BUILT-IN ANALYTICS

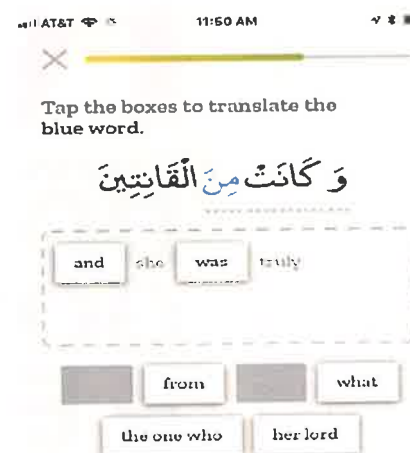
The Quranic team is building data collection into the app so they can track and understand where users are most challenged. As Adam relates, “The number one goal of the

app is for people to learn on a massive scale. We’re incorporating lots of analytics within the app to see exactly where people are getting stuck, what’s getting them frustrated, and what questions they have.”

Hani hopes that the app will enable Muslims to understand the Quran’s language, strengthen moments when people are praying or making *dua*, for “we believe that the ripple effect from learning Quranic vocabulary and basic grammar concepts over a long period can significantly enhance an individual’s relationship to their *deen*.”

USING STORIES FROM THE QURAN FOR CONTEXTUAL LEARNING

Coming to the idea to use stories from the Quran to teach the Arabic was a process. As Adam was putting the app idea together, he



Tap the boxes to translate the blue word.

وَكَاثِبٌ مِنَ الْقَاتِبِينَ
and the was truly
from what
the one who her lord

tested it on his younger brother who doesn’t understand any Arabic. Adam gave him a traditional grammar piece. However, his brother recommended something that even their parents could complete, something without the complicated grammar technicalities. And so he went back to the drawing board.

The second time, he shared a lesson based on Surah al-Fatiha. “My brother enjoyed it because it’s a surah he is familiar with, but said it felt repetitive.” The next time, he tried something different. “I brought him the story of Musa, and he was eager to see the next lesson. I knew I was on to something,” Adam relates.

Hani agrees stories are a powerful way to engage people and help them understand certain concepts, for they give people contextual examples of how the Quran uses certain words. “We want this app to help

people connect with the Quran. Threading this information with stories will make it easier for them to retain all of this new information. We want this app to be practical and immediately applicable in their everyday life.”

QURANIC APP IN SCHOOLS?

Hani and Adam want to learn more about how their app can fit into a typical Arabic or Quran learning environment. “It will be interesting to see how teachers use the app to supplement the learning going on in class,” Hani enthuses. “Or perhaps it could be used to deliver homework lessons! There are a lot of interesting use cases around our idea. We’re excited to see where it takes us.”

Adam shares the enthusiasm, “We’re open to meeting with institutions and discussing ways we can implement this app as a solution to some of the more common problems facing Islamic schools. Islamic schools suffer from a huge gap in their Arabic curricula. Many classrooms have four or five levels of students in one classroom. Quranic can revolutionize how they learn and interact with their teachers.” Hani adds, “We’re excited about the possibilities this may bring.”

The app’s beta version was launched in March, and its full version is scheduled to be released before Ramadan. Please check out https://www.launchgood.com/project/quranic_arabic_for_busy_people#!/ for updates.

Janet Kozak, a content strategist and copywriter (JanetKozak.com), is also the community manager at Noor Kids (<https://noorkids.com>) and content manager for the Muslim Writers and Publishers Association (<http://muslimwriters-publishers.org>).

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Run, Rahaf, Run!

A marathon runner, sets to show that you can take your message to the world in more ways than one

BY HABEEBA HUSAIN

IT'S MID-JANUARY, AND A runner from Michigan readied herself to add a significant checkmark to her list of accomplishments. Rahaf Khatib, a Syrian American hijabi runner, already has four of the six major marathons under her belt — Berlin, New York, Chicago and Boston. Just a few days ago, she had received the green light to participate in No. 5: London.

The preparation for this upcoming race in April will require far more than her normal training routine. It will be physically strenuous, mentally challenging and, this time, perhaps emotionally overwhelming, for she is raising money for a charity that hits very close to home.

This past Thanksgiving, Khatib's father was diagnosed with brain cancer.

"This is not how I imagined to be running London, but *Subhan Allah*, this is how it worked out," says the mother of three. "Ever since my dad's diagnosis of brain cancer, I [thought] 'What if I can do something? What if I can help in some way?'"

And so she decided to run for a charity that supports brain cancer research. With the London Marathon 2018 right around the corner, Khatib is fundraising diligently in an effort to help her father and those suffering from the same illness. To help her reach her goal, visit <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/rahaf-khatib>.

"It's hard to see your parent sick and struggling. My father is really proud of me, what I've accomplished and what I'm doing," the marathoner remarks.

"[Running London is] one more thing he can witness."

Since her running career began in 2012, Khatib's father has witnessed her build up an impressive list of accomplishments. She transformed herself from a mother who enjoyed physical fitness and didn't know what a 10K was into an avid runner who has completed nine full marathons (that's 26.2 miles each), over 15 half marathons (13.1 miles) and several other 10K races (6.2 miles). In addition, this Damascus-born super athlete has finished two sprint triathlons and even a few 30-mile biking events.

It all started when her son's gym teacher approached her to run in a 10K six years ago.

"I thought it was a great idea because I'm the type that likes to challenge myself, and I found that fitness and going to the gym wasn't fulfilling enough for me," she states. "I did my best at the time as an amateur runner in April 2012 and actually crossed the finish line. Ever since then, I've been hooked on running."

Not only did Khatib become a familiar face at the races in her home state, but she also made national news on more than one occasion. The first was during her campaign to be on the cover of *Runner's World* Magazine. She beat out thousands of entrants and became a top ten finalist to be on the cover. The contest was based on garnering votes from people all over the world, and Khatib did great thanks to the help of her Instagram page (@runlikeahijabi) that, at the time of writing, has 15.3 thousand followers and counting.

But she faced a dilemma: *Runner's World* wanted to have her on its cover while posing with a man who runs in a speedo. Needless to say, she turned down

the offer. Little did she know that she had also come to the attention of a different publication. A few months later, *Women's Running* Magazine wanted her as one of its top 20 game changers in the sport and its cover girl for October 2016.

"*Subhan Allah*, going from one magazine to the other," Khatib reflects. "God works in mysterious ways. He took away something from you, but then He gave you something even better."

I'm one of the first hijabis ever to be on a magazine [cover], period."

From grocery store stands to your crammed social media feed to your Muslim friend's Snapchat story — Rahaf Khatib donning her hijab and running gear on the cover of *Women's Running* Magazine was everywhere. The milestone was yet another accomplishment added to her already lengthy list.

"It's not very common to see a hijabi running in a

predominantly white sport," she says. "Most people run for numbers. They chase time, a pace, goals. For me, running is so much more than that. I feel like I run for social change."

While Khatib mentions that she gets funny looks from fellow

sukoonactive.com), a modest activewear apparel line. A fellow gym goer expressed her love for the covering shirt. On another occasion during the Bayshore Marathon in upper Michigan in May of one year, the weather was particularly hot, humid

refuse it?" she asks. "Even if I can change one person's mind about Muslims, I feel like I've accomplished so much."

Gracing the cover of a worldwide magazine in hijab, crossing countless finish lines in epic fashion, raising \$16,000 during

KHATIB SAYS LOTS OF MUSLIMS ARE TEACHING QURAN AND EXPLAINING ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE AS THEIR METHODS OF DA'WAH — AND RIGHTFULLY SO. BUT FOR HER, THE SPREADING OF HER FAITH TAKES A DIFFERENT FORM.

runners, she understands that her peers are naturally inquisitive and curious. She gets it — she looks different. With her long tights, long sleeves, skirt, athletic hijab and cap all incorporated into one ensemble, how could she not?


More than the negative remarks (those usually rear their ugly heads on Twitter), however, she gets compliments. At one of her workouts in the gym, she sported a long top from Sukoon (<https://www.sukoonactive.com>), a modest activewear apparel line. A fellow gym goer expressed her love for the covering shirt. On another occasion during the Bayshore Marathon in upper Michigan in May of one year, the weather was particularly hot, humid

and rainy. Khatib dressed as she usually does and heard one man hilariously comment, "Well, aren't you dressed for the rain!"

"That's the *da'wah* part of it; it kind of comes automatically," she tells me. "Every opportunity I get, I feel like it's from God."

Khatib says lots of Muslims are teaching Quran and explaining Islamic jurisprudence as their methods of *da'wah* — and rightfully so. But for her, the spreading of her faith takes a different form. "It just came to me. How can I

the Boston Marathon for Syrian refugees in her home state and being well on her way to fulfilling every marathoner's dream of running the six majors — all while crushing Islamophobic stereotypes of Muslim women...

Yes, Rahaf Khatib has accomplished so much. 

Habeeba Husain, a freelance journalist based in New York/New Jersey, contributes to *SLAM* Magazine, blogs for *Why-Islam* and is a social media manager for *WuduGear*. Her work has also appeared on *Narrative.ly* and *MuslimGirl.com*, among other online and print publications.

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An Entrepreneur's Secrets to Success

There is nothing “wrong” with becoming a financially successful, even wealthy, Muslim

BY RUBINA ALI

IT'S SOMETHING WE'RE TAUGHT AT A young age; “Work now, relax later.” If you're like most people, the daily grind includes waking up early to get ready, rushing out the door and trying to make it to work on time. At the end of the work day you come home tired and left with little energy for activities with your loved ones. Most of us put money away every month to pay for trips or other large expenses, which means sacrificing time with the people we want to be with the most. And anyway, when is “later”? When we retire? When we're so old that we don't have the energy to do the things we've always wanted to do?

Entrepreneur Naeem Randhawa contends that it doesn't have to be that way. “The middle-class is struggling,” he says, “because most of us don't have the financial freedom to do what we want to do.” Instead of just talking about how that reality can be changed, he is actually helping Muslims leave their 9-to-5 jobs and putting them on the path to becoming millionaires.

Naeem, who made his first million while he was still in his 30s, is among the contributors to Amazon's bestseller “Muslim Entrepreneur Mind” (2016), the CEO of six businesses and the creator of HalalSky.com (<http://halalsky.com>) — the first Shariah-compliant real estate crowdfunding platform for Muslims. While his first few jobs may have not been so desirable — in high school he sold fish door-to-door and, after that, pens — they ignited his passion to become an entrepreneur.

His family moved from Pakistan to Canada when he was 5 years old, and like most South Asian children he had two career options: doctor or engineer. He chose engineering and, after getting married, moved with his wife Sonia to Dallas. During his career he has worked for prestigious firms like KPMG and BearingPoint, implementing multi-million dollar IT projects around the country. He has consulted for companies like Pepsi, Boeing, Wal-Mart, FedEx and the State of Texas, reaching the height of his career as



WITH ALL OF HIS BUSINESSES AND PROJECTS, IT MAY SEEM THAT NAEEM IS IN CONSTANT WORK MODE. BUT THAT'S NOT THE CASE, FOR BEING HIS OWN BOSS MEANS THAT HE GETS TO MAKE HIS OWN SCHEDULE — ONE THAT ALLOWS HIM TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH HIS FAMILY AND ON HIS HOBBIES.

vice president of a data company in Austin. “The reality is, though,” Naeem states, “deep down it didn't feel any different. I just felt I had inherited more work, more responsibility and more time away from my family, and was even more at the mercy of those above me.”

When their son Zakaria was around 4

years old, something happened that changed Naeem's life path. As he was working on-site for most of the week, he was constantly traveling. A yellow taxicab would pick him up at home and take him to the airport early in the week. He would come home a few days later, again in a yellow taxicab. One day his son, upon seeing a yellow taxicab, excitedly yelled, “Papa!”

Naeem's heart became heavy when he realized that his son thought he was the taxi's driver. And it was this awareness of how little time he actually got to spend with his son that pushed him to start his first business. Eventually, this business would do well enough to allow him to become his own boss.

In 2014 Naeem started HalalSky.com, which gives real estate opportunities to people with little capital. In “Muslim Entrepreneur,” he states that “I'm bringing the once reserved for the wealthy, very lucrative business opportunities to every day people who can start in real estate with as little as \$5,000.” And it's not just meant for small investments. Some choose to invest millions.

“Real estate is not a Cryptocoin that may not be around tomorrow,” he remarks, because “it's hard and tangible, which makes it worth investing in.” While most people are interested in investing, the truth is that it takes time and energy to do the research necessary for making good investments. Take the guesswork out of investing and, as Naeem suggests, “find someone who has the know-how, time and experience to invest in real estate.” More impressively, HalalSky.com enables Muslims to invest their money with no interest, which is why it earned the 2016 Global Islamic Award.

“We live in this amazing country where we have opportunities to gain financial freedom,” says Naeem, “I'm just here to help.” As a national speaker on entrepreneurship, e-Commerce and teaching people how to attain financial freedom, Naeem asserts that he doesn't want Muslims to fall behind in gaining their financial freedom.

As a successful entrepreneur, Naeem now focuses his efforts on projects that are meaningful to him. For example, Naeem and his wife challenged themselves to raise \$1 million for their favorite charity, Islamic Relief (<http://www.islamic-relief.org>) — so far they have raised over \$600,000. They've also sponsored four orphans for the past 10 years, giving them opportunities that they may never have had. One project that he holds close to his heart is building and supporting a school in rural Afghanistan. After visiting it, he proclaimed that he “can't express how much that drives my passion to be more, want more and [grow] 10X my business.”

“The reality,” explains Naeem, “is that wealth is not important. It's what you do with the wealth that is important.” That thinking has fueled his philanthropic efforts. And those efforts have not gone unnoticed — Naeem and his wife were awarded ISNA's Humanitarian Award for their charitable work. And as he helps other Muslim entrepreneurs make their first million, he hopes that they will use their success to give back and to help others.

Another passion project is directing and producing “American Ramadan,” a documentary that follows the lives of five Muslim families and shows how each one practices their faith during the holy month. “American Ramadan” aired on PBS and has won several global awards. Naeem is currently working on his next documentary, “Tea with the Taliban.” While it may seem odd for an entrepreneur to be directing and producing films, this actually goes along with his philosophy: “Don't make making money your goal. Make living your passion your goal — the money will follow, I promise you.”

With all of his businesses and projects, it may seem that Naeem is in constant work mode. But that's not the case, for being his own boss means that he gets to make his own schedule — one that allows him to spend more time with his family and on his hobbies. He admits he's not a morning person, so instead of rushing out the door mornings he spends those hours in such activities as prayer, reading the Quran, breakfasting with his wife, and working out. On any given day, don't be surprised if you catch him with the wind in his hair on his Ninja 1000 motorcycle. He also has the freedom to take a vacation when and for how long he wants — a reality that he definitely takes advantage of.

If being your own boss and making your own schedule is something you aspire to, Naeem points out the three things that you need to have:

Time. In the beginning you'll have to devote a lot of time to building your business, which may mean sacrificing time with your family and giving up some weekends. But not for long, for as you grow your business you'll be able to devote more time to things about which you are passionate.

Patience. People get caught up in making a lot of money as quickly as possible. But because this isn't a get-rich-quick scheme, patience is necessary.

Support. Naeem relates that he started his new career only after talking with his wife. “Sit your family down, tell them what you're doing and how much time you need,” Naeem urges. He offers the much-known advice that we make sure that everyone understands what your goals are so they can help you work toward them.

The significance of owning your own business is evident. In Shaykh Abdul Nasir Jangda's “Life of the Prophet: Muhammad, The Businessman & A Marriage Proposal” podcast, we learn that owning your own business is actually a sunnah of the Prophet (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) and that he was a successful businessman. Al-Tirmidhi also relates the following hadith: The Prophet is quoted as having said: “An honest and trustworthy merchant will be [raised] with the prophets, the truthful and the martyrs” (cited on the authority of Abdullah Ibn 'Umar; Ibn Maja no. 2139; al-Hakim; no. 2142; ad-Daruquthni, no. 17; at Tirmidhi; no. 1209).

In today's financial world, it is hard to take out a loan or make an investment that doesn't involve interest. Naeem's Shariah-compliant platform HalalSky.com now makes doing so possible. Muslim entrepreneurs can rest easy, knowing that their hard-earned paychecks are going toward investments that are both honest and halal.

Rubina Ali, who has a passion for reading, and writing, owns the online Alina's Boutique that sells Islamic books and gifts.

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Understanding the Rohingya Tragedy

Once again genocide raises its ugly head in an overwhelming indifferent world

BY AZEEM IBRAHIM

OF THE MANY GENOCIDAL CAMPAIGNS that the world has seen during the past century, few have been as effective at removing an entire people from their birth country as the Myanmar army's assault on Rakhine state's Rohingya Muslim minority. Of the approximately 1 million Rohingya living in Myanmar at the beginning of August 2017, over 700,000 have fled to Bangladesh. And even though this exodus has slowed down a little in recent weeks, it remains ongoing. How did we get here?

As is often the case with such large-scale humanitarian disasters, this crisis has been a very long time in the making. Genocide is not an event, but rather a process that unfolds on a historical scale. By the time this crisis had emerged into the public consciousness of the international community, it was already too late.

Perhaps this conflict's earliest clearly identifiable roots lie in the dark days of WW2.

The lands of Myanmar were part of the Raj — imperial Britain's South Asian empire. As with other parts of the Raj, these lands also had growing national independence movements. But unlike in India and other British colonies, the Burmese nationalists who sought independence had no qualms about aligning themselves with the Japanese and assisting their invasion of Burma.

Not everyone in Burma/Myanmar was on board with this, however. The most notable dissenters were perhaps the Muslim minorities, which, along with all of the other minorities that cooperated with imperial Britain, enjoyed a great deal of protection under the colonial legal system. They were also more culturally comfortable with the institutions of the Raj, given how it had originally evolved to supplant the Muslim Mughal empire in northern India. Unsure of what an independent Burmese Buddhist-majority state might mean for their security and status, they aligned themselves with the British defenders.

After the war and the ensuing independence of South Asia's colonies, two things happened: (1) Burma became independent in 1948 based on the borders of 1824 (before the first British-Burmese colonial wars) and (2) the Japan-allied Burmese-nationalist independence fighters became the core of the new country's armed forces. The Muslim "British collaborators" in the northwest therefore found themselves on "the wrong side of the border." The largest of these groups were the Rohingya.

Just over that border was East Pakistan, which would, in 1971, become the independent country of Bangladesh. In the years around 1948, at least some Rohingya leaders felt that their people and lands would more naturally belong to East Pakistan. In fact, some abortive attempts were made to change the border settlement so that the Rohingya and their lands would become part of a Muslim-majority country, as opposed to a Buddhist-majority one.

As if the antagonism of Burma's military

toward the country's Muslim minorities were not already bad enough due to the WW2-related conflicts, these moves cemented the related perception that the Muslims were "outsiders" in the new Burmese national project.

This was not immediately problematic, however, for the Rohingya moves toward East Pakistan were peaceful and sought to follow legitimate political channels. Moreover, at this point the new country of Burma was a British-style parliamentary democracy. Once it was settled that the Rohingya would be part of Burma, they would have the same standing as any other minority, including political representation in the national political bodies.

Everything began to change in 1962, when the army took control of the government following a political crisis. Burma was still not a "nation" with a definite sense of shared identity. Demographically, it remained what it had been in the pre-colonial era: a Burmese core surrounded by a periphery of diverse ethnic and religious groups. But this was no longer the pre-colonial era, and some of these groups thought they should not be ruled by a more powerful neighbor. Many of them, in fact, harbored ambitions of autonomy or even independence. The new political leadership, however, was in no mood to tolerate any secessionist drives.

These demographic dynamics explain much of the country's post-war — and ongoing — internal political dynamics. Myanmar has the longest running civil wars in the world due to the military forces' decades-long legacy of trying to impose the Burmese national and religious identity on the independently minded borderland ethnic groups.

Unfortunately for the Rohingya, they have a special place in this dynamic. After the abortive attempt to join East Pakistan, they have been far from the most rebellious group and certainly nowhere near the most violently belligerent. However, they were the largest borderland minority and deviated most visibly from the national identity promoted by the central government: They are Muslims in a Buddhist-majority country and a brown-skinned people in a land where virtually all other groups are fair-skinned. They thus became a totemic for Burma's "struggle" to secure its identity as a nation because they were the most obvious "foreign" presence against which that national identity could define itself.

In practical terms, this meant that the Rohingya were steadily marginalized politically up until the 1982 Citizenship

Law, which effectively precluded the vast majority of them from the right to citizenship. Incidentally, international law strictly prohibits rendering people stateless in their birth country in this way.

The Rohingya began to see growing restrictions placed on their right of movement, until most of them had been ghettoized in specific rural areas or specific neighborhoods in cities. Building mosques became increasingly difficult, as newly enacted building permit requirements forbade the construction of new ones. In addition, state policy and the Rohingya's civilian Buddhist neighbors increasingly boycotted their businesses.

LOOKED AT FROM THE PROPER HISTORICAL VANTAGE POINT, THE ROHINGYA SITUATION CAN BE UNDERSTOOD AS A POLITICALLY DRIVEN DECADES-LONG EFFORT TO REMOVE AN ENTIRE PEOPLE FROM THEIR ANCESTRAL LAND — AN EFFORT THAT IS NEARING COMPLETION.

Policies that, according to international law, veered into the territory of genocide were also introduced: They could not marry non-Rohingya, had to obtain state pre-approval before getting married and could have no more than two children — which is, of course, below the natural replacement rate. By the 1990s and early 2000s, Myanmar state policy was already committed to a genocide of attrition.

Despite all of this, their situation only really came to world attention following several vicious episodes of communal violence between Rakhine state's Muslim and Buddhist inhabitants in 2012 and 2013 — episodes that led to hundreds of thousands of the former being internally displaced and hundreds of thousands more fleeing the country altogether. Subsequent episodes of violence recurred periodically, most notably in 2015 as the South East Asia Migration Crisis, which saw large new outflows of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, strained the entire region and made international headlines.

This latest crisis, which has seen approximately 70 percent of the 1 million Rohingya flee Myanmar, obscures a number that is far more indicative of the ongoing genocide: There are approximately 2 million, not 1

million, Rohingya in the world. One million of them had already been pushed out during the previous decades. This latest crisis is by no means something new, but merely the natural continuation of a long-established and accelerating trend.

Looked at from the proper historical vantage point, the Rohingya situation can be understood as a politically driven decades-long effort to remove an entire people from their ancestral land — an effort that is nearing completion. But this genocide was neither inevitable nor unstoppable until last year, when both the international community demonstrated its unwillingness to intervene and the country's Buddhist army

retained its firm control of the situation. And so now we are witnessing a sacrifice on the altar of Myanmar's "national identity" as well as a crime of omission committed by a morally bankrupt international community.

What will become of the nearly 1 million Rohingya now languishing in Bangladesh's refugee camps? This really is the most important question at this point in time. And the answers are not entirely obvious. Although Bangladesh has been very helpful so far, it understandably has been far from enthusiastic about this particular development. A poor country with plenty of its own problems, it doesn't have enough resources to cope with such a large, rapid and unexpected influx of destitute refugees. The official political discourse about "repatriation" is just political posturing. The Rohingya now need a sustainable solution for the future, as well as the international community's efforts to step in, guarantee and underwrite such a solution. The problem is that we have not even begun to develop solutions and don't seem to be in much of a hurry to do so. *zh*

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim is a senior fellow at the Centre for Global Policy (<https://www.cgpolicy.org>) in Washington, DC, and author of "The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide" (2016; Hurst Publishers & Oxford University Press).

Life Inside a Refugee Camp

Muslim American health professionals reach out with help to Rohingya refugees



PHOTO: LOVE ARMY

BY RUBINA ALI

CLICK. YOU'VE JUST RECEIVED A telephone call from a relative in another country and can't believe the conversation you've just had. New laws have gone into effect — laws that clearly state that Muslims can no longer go to school, get jobs, marry without government consent or have more than two children. Furthermore, their citizenship has been taken away and so they effectively have no place to call "home." In fact, they are fleeing to refugee camps in neighboring countries. No, this isn't a dystopian society from a novel; this is exactly what is happening to Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims.

The Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA; www.imana.org), which provides medical relief in over 26 countries, has recently started providing aid for these new refugees. IMANA Medical Relief (IMR) comprises a team of volunteer medical professionals who serve for two-week missions in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Most patients are dealing with treatable diseases or infections; others have more serious ailments, among them open wounds and fractured bones that they received while fleeing

their homes. Some arrived in boats while others climbed over mountain ranges, trying to escape this latest persecution campaign.

Since 2012, Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh in what the U.N. states is "the world's fastest growing refugee crisis." This is in response to what Amnesty International describes as a "targeted [state] campaign of widespread and systematic murder, rape and burning." According to a recent U.N. estimate, almost 1 million Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh to escape what is considered "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Before the refugees' arrival Bangladesh was not only the world's most densely populated country, but also the poorest. And yet it has provided them a temporary home. Life in a refugee camp has meant no electricity, running water or functioning sewage systems. Needless to say, the need for medical aid is crucial.

IMR chair Dr. Ismail Mehr says, "In the two-dozen medical missions I've been on, Rohingya Muslims are dealing with, by far, the worst living conditions I've ever seen. The criticalness of disease in the refugee camps is much worse than in other disaster areas

like Syria and Haiti." He relates that "70 percent of water consumed by refugees is contaminated. And with no sewage system in place, disease spreads quickly."

While the IMR is working with other medical organizations currently in the region, they are taking the lead in providing medical care to as many people as possible. Every day a mobile clinic is set up in a different area, some of which can only be reached by walking two to three miles. The clinic is equipped with a full pharmacy, and patients receive a full physical examination. A rotation plan has been mapped out that makes it possible for the teams to circle back to the original point after 30 days, which enables patients to follow-up on their medical care and refill any prescriptions.

Between 10 and 12 doctors are now seeing 40 to 50 patients a day. By the end of each day, the clinic has served between 500 and 600 patients. Each day it receives a handful of critical patients who need to be transferred to a nearby hospital. IMANA has two ambulances on site to transfer them immediately.

Dr. Tasneem Hoque, a pediatric cardiologist from New York who volunteered for an IMR mission, remarks that the experience "transformed me... In America, when you get sick you see a doctor and you get better. But in a refugee camp it's not that simple. Death is such a part of their lives that it's [no longer] traumatizing."

Hoque recalls two separate occasions when babies who needed emergency care were brought in. The first was a 45-day-old infant who only weighed two pounds and was not latching. Right away she could see that the infant was severely dehydrated and did not have the strength to feed. She advised the mother to take the infant to the nearby hospital; however, the mother refused on the grounds that she needed to stay near her home — U.N. workers were registering refugees, and if she missed her chance she wouldn't be able to receive rations for herself and her family. After 30 minutes of convincing — a typical patient-visit lasts about 10 minutes — Hoque was able to get the mother on an ambulance heading toward the hospital.

The second was a 15-month-old boy who was running a high fever, had protruding ribs and was breathing very heavily. He was in obvious respiratory distress. Hoque advised the father to take him to the nearby hospital; he refused to do so. "How," she wondered, "could a father refuse his child medical care?" He had a wife and two children at home, he informed her, and women and children were often kidnapped if there

excitement was palpable. When she was able to get a closer look, she realized that the man was showing them how to farm. Despite the hilly terrain, which was not ideal for farming, he wanted to give them something they could nurture with their own hands and watch it grow as the days passed. "Despite what these children have been through," muses Khan, "they still want to bring beauty around them."

BEFORE THE REFUGEES' ARRIVAL BANGLADESH WAS NOT ONLY THE WORLD'S MOST DENSELY POPULATED COUNTRY, BUT ALSO THE POOREST. AND YET IT HAS PROVIDED THEM A TEMPORARY HOME.

was no one to care for them. The possibility of having to leave his family for an extended period of time could mean losing them forever. Hoque explained, "He was choosing the livelihood of his family over the child's life." Women and children in the camps are at high risk for gender-based or sexual violence, and there are countless stories of attacks, kidnapping, rape and even undercover sex-trafficking.

A few days later, knowing that the 15-month-old needed care, Hoque had one of the young translators help her track down his family. They walked for miles to reach them with medicine and water in hand. The child's mother was hesitant at first. But once she realized that the doctor was there to help, she let Hoque show her how to make and administer medicine to help nurse her baby back to health.

Dr. Fariha Khan, a mother of four children all under the age of 11, spent two weeks volunteering with IMR in the Rohingya camps. She was amazed by the resilience that she saw there. "What these people have endured is absolutely horrific," she states, "from seeing someone being raped, to a child watching their own house being burned down. Yet they carry themselves with such patience, grace and dignity. They don't dwell on their pain."

While taking some videos of the local children, she recalls one incident that made her smile. An adult had gathered some of the young children together, and their

know. But what about the elderly? "They've seen better," Khan remarks. "There are graveyards here [in the camp]. It must be hard living your final years in a refugee camp."

Since IMANA began medical relief in Bangladesh in late December 2017, volunteer doctors have treated a total of 28,352 patients. Treatment costs about \$3.75 per person, which is less than what most Americans pay for lunch every day. The volunteer doctors sacrifice time with their loved ones to help those in need. Not only do they pay their own airfare to make that happen, but they also commit to raising a minimum of \$1,000 to put toward medical relief efforts. Some doctors raise far more than that. For example, Hoque created a travel diary and put up pictures and stories of her daily experiences on her Facebook page. By the time she left Bangladesh, she had raised over \$23,000 through donations from family and friends.

Founded in 1967, IMANA has treated over 2 million people in need around the world and has completed 65 medical and surgical missions. IMANA is currently taking applications for volunteers in Bangladesh, Syria and Haiti.

According to Mehr, IMANA will continue its mobile medical camps as long as there is enough funding to do so. There are trips scheduled to Bangladesh through the end of April, and more may be added in May and June if donations continue to come in. *ib*

Rubina Ali, who has a passion for reading and writing, owns the online Alina's Boutique that sells Islamic books and gifts.

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OF AYODHYA
BEING RAMA'S
"BIRTHPLACE" IN
ANY HISTORICAL
OR RELIGIOUS
TEXT FROM THE
FIRST CENTURY
BCE TO TWELFTH
CENTURY CE.**

Heritage Babri Mosque Destroyed in the Name of a Myth

The dream of India's Hindu extremists — a pure Hindu India

BY MOHAMMAD AHMADULLAH SIDDIQI

EVER SINCE MY CHILDHOOD, WHEN—ever the Gorakhpur to Lucknow bus passed through the twin cities of Faizabad and Ayodhya I would wonder about the magnificent Babri Masjid, one of the province's largest mosques, whose front door I always found locked.

Today Ayodhya is a city of temples along the banks of the Sirju (Ghaghra) River. But long before British colonialism, it was the thriving capital of a large Mughal-ruled province and home of the large Babri Masjid, built in 1528. Two Persian inscriptions, one on the pulpit and the other longer one on the

entry gate, confirm the construction dates but say nothing about it being built on or near a temple site.

But ever since British historians, who colluded with London's "divide and rule" strategy, wrote conflicting stories about the site of the mosque and the city being the birthplace of the mythical Hindu deity Rama, there have been communal clashes. The first one broke out in 1855.

Fast forward to Dec. 6, 1992. Scores of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) *kar sevaks* (helpers) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) members, led by the Bharatiya Janta

Party (BJP) leaders Lal Krishan Advani (deputy prime minister of India [2002-04]) and Murli Manohar Joshi (now a BJP MP), climbed atop the mosque's central dome and, in about eight hours, destroyed the entire structure. The police did not intervene, and both the BJP-led state government of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and the Congress-led government did nothing.

Muslims, who organized as the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC; www.india.com/topic/babri-masjid-action-committee), and some Hindu priests filed court cases challenging the claim that the site and the land belonged to the Hindus. The case, which the BMAC is still pursuing, is now before the Indian Supreme Court. The BMAC has said that Muslims will accept its judgment.

Jesuit missionary Joseph Tiefertaler (1710-85), one of the earliest European geographers to write about India, visited Ayodhya before 1768 and claimed, without citing any evidence, that a temple had been destroyed to build the mosque. Hindus brought idols (*Sita ki Rasoi*) and placed them outside the mosque. Some Hindus believe that Sita ki Rasoi is the place where Sita cooked food for the first time after she married Lord Ram.

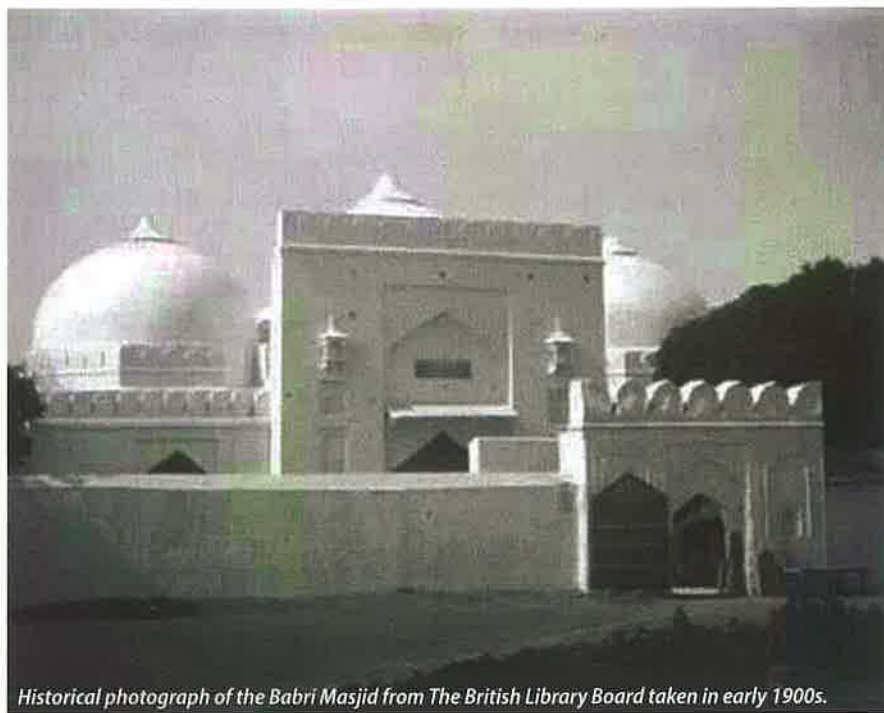
However, researchers have found no mention of Ayodhya being Rama's "birthplace" in any historical or religious text from the first century BCE to twelfth century CE. The first known Sanskrit text to place Rama's birthplace in a locality of Ayodhya is the *Skanda Purāna*, which has varied versions but was not composed earlier than 1600.

In 1884, the dispute was heard by Pundit Hari Kishan Singh, sub-judge, Faizabad, and then in 1885, on appeal before W. Young, judicial commissioner, Awadh. Both decided in favor of Muslim possession of the mosque; Young also allowed the *Sita ki Rasoi* to be retained by Hindus. The property issue was thus settled in the eyes of law.

In his judgment, Singh wrote: "This place is not like [any] other place where the owner has got the right to construct any building he likes [...]. If a temple is constructed on the *chabutara* [platform] at such a place then there will be the sound of bells of the temple and *sankh* [sounding shell] when both Hindus and Muslims pass from the same way and if permission is given to Hindus for constructing a temple then one day or the other a criminal case will be started and thousands of people will be killed."

A timeline of the Babri Masjid dispute:

1528	Mir Baqi constructs the Babri Masjid on the orders of Emperor Babur.
1949	In the early hours of Dec. 23, 1949, Hindus allegedly place Ram idols inside the mosque. There are widespread protests. Hashim Ansari and Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, chief of the Ram Birthplace Trust, file suits for their respective communities. The government declares the site disputed and locks its gates.
1950	Mahant Das and Gopal Singh Visharad, head of the Hindu Mahasabha's Faizabad unit, file suits in Faizabad to pray before the idols. The court allows the holding of a <i>puja</i> ceremony. The inner courtyard stays locked.
1959	Nirmohi Akhara, a Hindu religious denomination and a main party to the dispute, and others seek permission to hold prayer ceremonies again.
1961	UP's Sunni Central Board of Waqfs stakes its claim on the grounds that the area surrounding the mosque is a graveyard.
1984	The VHP establishes a group to continue the movement, and BJP leader Advani is put in charge of the campaign. VHP organizes a massive procession from Sitamarhi (supposedly where Rama's wife Sita emerged from the ground) to Ayodhya in late September. At least 50,000 Hindus join the 12-day procession. According to participants' accounts, they take an "oath" at Sarju River.
Feb. 1, 1986	BMAC was constituted after Faizabad's district judge ordered the gates opened so Hindus can pray before the idols.
1989	Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi allows a groundbreaking ceremony at a nearby undisputed site. Afterward, the case hearing was shifted to the Allahabad High Court.
Sept. 25, 1990	Advani launches a pilgrimage from Somnath to Ayodhya to mobilize countrywide support.
November 1990	Advani's vehicle is stopped at Samastipur; he is arrested. The BJP withdraws its support of V.P. Singh's government, thereby triggering fresh elections.
Dec. 6, 1992	Hundreds of <i>kar sevaks</i> destroy the mosque and erect a makeshift temple. During the ensuing massive countrywide riots, at least 2,000 people are killed. The P.V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress government asks the court to reinstate the status quo.
March 5, 2003	The Allahabad High Court orders the Archeological Survey of India to examine the disputed site and submit its report.
Aug. 22, 2003	The report finds that there are features of a 10th-century temple beneath the site.
Aug. 31, 2003	The All India Muslim Personal Law Board says it will challenge the report in court.
July 26, 2010	The court reserves its judgment and recommends all parties to settle the issue amicably.
Sept. 8, 2010	The Allahabad High Court announces that the verdict will be pronounced on Sept. 24.
Sept. 14, 2010	It quashes a writ petition seeking deferment of the judgment.
Sept. 23, 2010	The Supreme Court, after receiving a plea for an out-of-court bargain, says it will hear the case again on Sept. 28.
Sept. 28, 2010	It rejects the petition for deferment and requests the Allahabad High Court to deliver its judgment. That court announces it will do so on Sept. 30.
Sept. 30, 2010	The Allahabad High Court pronounces a three-way division of the disputed area among the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and the party for "Ram Lalla."
Feb. 26, 2016	The Supreme Court permits BJP leader Subramanian Swamy to intervene—he seeks permission to build a Ram temple at the site of the demolished mosque.
April 19, 2017	The Supreme Court orders the State High Court to reopen the case against the main individuals accused in the Babri Masjid destruction case: Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi (former education minister of India), Uma Bharti (a minister in the current federal government), and Kalyan Singh (the then-UP chief minister).
Feb. 8, 2018	The Supreme Court hearings continued with new dates being fixed till this magazine went to press.



Historical photograph of the Babri Masjid from The British Library Board taken in early 1900s.

The RSS was banned after Nathuram Godse, a follower of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, assassinated Mohandas K. Gandhi on Jan. 30, 1948. After its leader Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar gave some assurances, the ban was lifted in July 1949. Immediately thereafter, both groups looked for an issue to revive their base. During the night of Dec. 22-23, 1949, the mosque's locks were broken and the idols were placed near its pulpit. As Muslims could not offer prayers there, the district administration locked the mosque again and waited for the dispute to be resolved.

During the 1980s, when the BJP suffered several devastating defeats in state and national elections, it made the Babri Masjid a central issue and began planning to replace it with the Rama Temple. When the BJP-led government came to power in UP in 1992, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the RSS and the BJP started advance planning. The mosque was destroyed on Dec. 6, 1992, large-scale countrywide riots erupted, several thousand Muslims died and others lost their personal properties and businesses.

Since 1949, several court cases have been pending at various levels of the Indian judicial system. It took the Indian judiciary 61 years to recognize that the idols had been placed in the mosque by human hands — although K.K.K. Nair (1907-77), an Indian Civil Service officer, district magistrate of Faizabad, had informed the higher authorities in December 1949 that

“a few Hindus entered the Babri Masjid at night when the masjid was deserted and installed a deity there. (Krishna Jha and Dharendra K Jha, “Ayodhya, The Dark Night: The Secret History of Rama's Appearance in Babri Masjid,” 2012. New Delhi: Harper Collins).

On Sept. 30, 2010, the Allahabad High Court awarded two thirds of the land to Hindus for a temple, less than one third to Muslims and the remaining to the third party claiming ownership of the land. All parties have challenged this verdict in the Indian Supreme Court. On April 19, 2017, it ruled that senior BJP leaders L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti would face charges of criminal conspiracy and that the matter would have to be decided in two years. The Court stated that hearings would begin on Feb. 8, 2018 and re-set it to March 14.

VHP joint general secretary Surrinder Jain stated: “We have been celebrating Victory Day [Shaurya Diwas] for the past 24 years since that structure was destroyed. It's natural that we celebrate. The monuments of slavery have to be destroyed.” For Muslims, it is a black day in the history of secular India.

“When they talk of solution they mean we should surrender our claim, and that's not possible. That will never happen, we will not surrender,” BMAC convener Zafaryab Jilani told Al Jazeera, Dec. 5, 2017. “They are causing damage to the nation. The country

has to revive its old values of secularism. Ultimately, they will not be victorious.

The Babri Masjid has become a symbol of identity and survival for India's more than 180 million Muslims. Extreme right wing Hindu organizations, however, are using it to spread hate and violence and to ensure that India becomes a *Hindu Rashtra* (a pure Hindu nation). The lynching of Muslims, the killing of peaceful citizens in the name of “cow protection,” the incitement of the majority community's sentiments against minorities and the growing intolerance and communalization of politics are becoming the norm.

Muslims have an uphill task before them. While more than half of them live in poverty and are largely illiterate, the other half is confused. Less than 10 percent of the wealthiest Muslims are concerned about the fate of their coreligionists. Others, mostly middle class, are struggling to survive and sustain their families. The community seems to be caught between incompetent leaders and ignorant followers. ■

Dr. M. Ahmadullah Siddiqi taught public relations and journalism at Western Illinois University for more than 28 years, where he was chair of the Department of English and Journalism.

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The Stranded Can Never be Forgotten

A humanitarian initiative brings hope to Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh

BY SAIMA HASSAN

THE URDU-SPEAKING COMMUNITY has been living in makeshift camps since the 1971 civil war between East and West Pakistan, which led to East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh. Various known as Urdu-speaking, Biharis or stranded Pakistanis, they were temporarily accommodated in camps after Bangladesh was created, so that, according to their wishes, they could be repatriated to Pakistan.

Forty-seven years later, approximately 350,000 inhabitants of the former East Pakistan still live in the same dismal circumstances and in the same decrepit shelters set up for them in the newly independent Bangladesh. The natural growth in population and the limited resources being shared among

them have made the living conditions in these camps even more harrowing than before.

A common sight is severely underfed children, piles of rotting trash, open sewers, rundown and semi-functioning community bathrooms being used by countless people. Families of 6-8 people live, eat, cook and sleep in a single, cramped, 8 ft. by 10 ft. space fashioned out of junk, such as tin and bamboo. A lack of access to clean water, health facilities or education is the norm. Disease, illiteracy and miserable poverty continue to plague and mar their lives.

Pakistani-American Anwar Khan, moved by these conditions, founded OBAT Helpers (<https://obathelpers.org>) in 2004 to help alleviate the residents' sufferings by meeting their basic needs in terms of

education, health care and providing skills and economic opportunities that would ultimately lead to financial self-sufficiency.

PROVIDING HOPE

Since its inception, OBAT has achieved several milestones. It now runs eight schools, 34 preschools and health clinics, as well as several tutoring, computer training and vocational centers. About 1,000 students receive scholarships. Special basic literacy classes, held before the workday begins, facilitate the ongoing education of working children and illiterate adults. About 5,000 students currently study in the organization's educational programs.

OBAT's now self-sustaining microfinance program has enabled 1,600 women to start

small businesses. Various camp improvement projects, such as constructing water and sewage facilities as well as bathrooms, have given 85,000 people access to clean water and sanitation facilities. The health area comprises clinics, a cataract surgery

residents on how to become change agents and problem solvers. Through this platform, young people are encouraged to take ownership of the problems surrounding them and devise simple solutions for them via the concepts of human centered design —

FORTY-SEVEN YEARS LATER, APPROXIMATELY 350,000 INHABITANTS OF THE FORMER EAST PAKISTAN STILL LIVE IN THE SAME DISMAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND DECREPIT SHELTERS SET UP FOR THEM IN THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH.

program and a maternity service that offers pre- and post-natal care to mothers and their infants. These programs, which can be found in 79 camps in 14 cities, extend assistance to more than 32,000 families. Assistance is also provided to needy families during Ramadan, and meat is distributed on Eid-ul-Adha.

To help promote empowerment, OBAT has created youth think tanks that, it hopes, will produce leaders by training camp

a design and management framework that develops solutions to problems by involving the human perspective in all steps of the problem-solving process. Students are also being trained in media, computers and new technology so that they can acquire relevant skills that will make them competitive in the job market and assist them in finding good employment opportunities, wherever they are allowed to venture outside of the camps.

47 years later, why are we still suffering? Three generations of the people, commonly known as, "Urdu-speaking," have been living in the same 116 decrepit camps that were created in 1971 to serve as temporary shelters. Together, we have been transforming their lives since 2004 by creating hope for a better future through our programs focused in education, empowerment, health and infrastructure. Together, we can and will continue to create a brighter future for the forgotten.

Share your blessings with the less fortunate. Your zakat and sadaqah can help educate, heal and empower the forgotten and destitute camp residents in Bangladesh.

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The Crisis of the Modern Age

What happens when profit and self-interest, as opposed to the market's "invisible hand" that supposedly helps the demand and supply of goods in a free market reach equilibrium automatically, determines the world's winners and losers?

LUKE MATHEW PETERSON

SINCE THE 1970S, A NUMBER OF authors and critics have locked on to the theory of neoliberalism, the creeping, globally exploitative trend that proscribes the privatization of all human endeavors. Some go as far as to label it the single most compelling and pervasive political phenomenon of our time. Jan N. Pieterse calls it a "universalistic ... economic regime [in which] (free markets are the sole effective system) ... [and in which] the United States [is given] the exclusive and combined roles of prosecutor, judge, and executioner" throughout the world ("Neoliberal Empire," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 21(3), 2004, 121). He goes on to connect neoliberalism and the neo-imperial oeuvre being conducted by American policymakers, as well as American military and intelligence officials, since the middle of the last century:

The core of empire is the national security state and the military-industrial complex; neoliberalism is about business, financial operations and marketing

(including marketing neoliberalism itself) ... Neoliberal empire is a marriage of convenience with neoliberalism indicated by [the] inconsistent use of neoliberal policies, and an attempt to merge the America whose business is business with the America whose business is war (ibid., 123).

According to these parameters, and along with the definitions provided by other leading scholars in this arena, whenever political leaders speak of the importance of legislation, taxation or policy in terms of "national security," we should begin to look for the profit motive and payment details in order to see through the political rhetoric and answer the simplest and most meaningful question with which political organization has ever provided us: "qui bono?"

We should begin to follow the trillion-dollar trails of money when issues of "national security" are asserted and question robustly, if not automatically doubt, the leaders of the military-corporate state when they speak of the importance of their international policy

priorities. Ultimately, we should be deeply suspicious of the moral compass that comes into play in our state and national capitals in order to justify the blatantly and obviously hypocritical international alliance system for which so much military expenditure, blood and treasure have been so callously spent.

It is through these lenses that we should view the ongoing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its incorporation within the aggressive, global profiteering system known as neoliberalism. Although Israel's more than half-century of military and civil domination of Palestine is most often described in terms of conflicting nationalisms, the global forces of both corporate and military domination have become flexible enough to monetize the Palestinian quest for self-determination and to profit from the ongoing status quo. In fact, this is so much the case that it has actually created nuanced, new dimensions within this political conflict that enable the profit motive and corporate domination inherent in these current neoliberal policies to thrive.

Among these driving profit motives are

newly created markets that seek to exploit the subjected Palestinians by virtue of capitalizing upon their status as an occupied people. U.S. and European companies, including SodaStream (which was obliged by boycotts to close its occupied West Bank factory in early 2016), Veolia and Caterpillar, have set up shop in the Occupied Territories so they can actively take advantage of the expenditure allowances provided by Tel Aviv, allowances that are designed to raise their profit margins to unprecedented levels. In a particularly macabre twist, they can increase their profits even further by using cheap Palestinian labor to build and extend Israeli settlements in the West Bank that the global community has declared illegal or perhaps, worse yet, the Separation Wall.

Harvard economist Sarah Roy, author of "The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development" (1995), has described the severe and prolonged rate of Palestinian unemployment, combined with the lack of stable investment in the Occupied Territories' education or infrastructure sectors, as economic "de-development" due to Israel's total military and civilian occupation of all Palestinian cultural areas. This process has transformed Palestine into fertile ground for being incorporated into the profit model dictated by the neoliberal ideal: occupy, destroy and rebuild with contracts doled out exclusively to private concerns.

In the scenario described here, like many, many others being enacted elsewhere in accord with the tenets of global neoliberalism, the so-called "market" simply reveals itself to be an extension of the military, political and diplomatic institutions present within the operational mega-state. These institutions work in tandem, often with the very same overseers trading positions of power among themselves, in order to design, extend, exploit and then justify various forms of profit-making activity regardless of the human, social or environmental consequences.

For Israel, the implications of these relationships are profound. The actual, legitimate security threats posed by children playing soccer on a beach, old women sitting on their veranda or by a 16-year-old girl defending her own home while standing on her own driveway are plainly non-existent. Rather, what is critical is the assertion that these individuals are a security threat, precisely because they are the only existential justifications left to a state that has built itself into a military and technocratic giant upon the backs of a captive population of test subjects tormented with newer, more adaptable and ever deadlier military and intelligence technologies.

But what becomes of the hyper-militarized, conscription state once it confesses that

all of these alleged threats are just so many fictions contrived to create and extend markets for military and espionage technologies? What becomes of the state if it confesses that all of the many wars that it has enacted were wars of its own making created in order to provide manufacturers, analysts and technicians with a justification for their own existence? Or

Britain with the surging stock prices of Dow, Raytheon, Bechtel and Halliburton. It may seem tangential to diagnose the water crisis in Flint, Mich., as somehow connected to the militarization of American police forces and their indiscriminate use of violence against minority communities. But all of these phenomena, all of these social, political, economic


IN THE SCENARIO DESCRIBED HERE, LIKE MANY, MANY OTHERS BEING ENACTED ELSEWHERE IN ACCORD WITH THE TENETS OF GLOBAL NEOLIBERALISM, THE SO-CALLED "MARKET" SIMPLY REVEALS ITSELF TO BE AN EXTENSION OF THE MILITARY, POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTIONS PRESENT WITHIN THE OPERATIONAL MEGA-STATE.

closer to home, what of the robust, self-justifying, militarized state that confesses to its people that the its current, continuous state of war is a phantom, a bloody and unfathomably costly exercise enacted to provide meaning to its own mightiness, to provide succor to its baying nationalists and, most importantly, to create and expand markets for its hungry military industrialists, all of whom are eagerly waiting to demonstrate their newest piece of murderous technology?

Today, Gaza is a subjected territory bound by the Israeli war machine and the oppressive rise of neoliberal strategy. It is poor, having been denuded and de-developed by years of Israeli settler colonialism and deliberately uneven resource exploitation. It is isolated from its co-nationalists and co-religionists by several hundred miles of stark, impenetrable space. It is hungry, for the "magnanimous" occupying power denies its people the lowest limit of per capita caloric intake, which enforces a slow starvation on the people. Its traumatized children experience post-traumatic stress disorder, subsequent to regular Israeli bombardment of their homes and villages, at a rate of 70 percent — even more by some estimates. It is the ultimate liminal space, neither state nor sovereign, neither occupied nor bound (according to their occupier), one that continues on a confined trajectory with no end in sight.

It may seem contradictory at first to connect the ongoing occupation of Palestine with the opioid crisis in the Midwest, or incongruous to connect the Tory government's sabotage of the National Health Service in

and moral transgressions, are actually cousins to one another. In fact, they are encouraged, lauded, championed and pressed forward by the unrepentantly avaricious free market that seeks to ensure the "privatisation of all things" inherent in the growing, international neoliberal system (David Harvey, "A Brief History of Neoliberalism," 2005).

And if we recognize these policies as part and parcel of the same insidious market phenomena, then we must also acknowledge that by opposing one aspect of the neoliberal ideal, we can oppose them all. By standing up for First Nations Water Protectors at Standing Rock, we sing the song of Mahmoud Darwish and the Palestinian paradise he cherished until his final breath. By demonstrating against the clearly unjust sentences that punish poor and marginalized communities throughout private prisons in the U.S., we open our hearts to the Bakr family, now missing four children who committed no other crime than playing soccer on the beach while Israel bombarded their homeland. If we deny our own economic and political elites ever more crumbs from the table of public well-being here at home, then we stand with Ahd Tamimi, riding the wave of her unstoppable bravery when she denied the invasiveness of the occupier on the driveway of her own home. 

Luke Mathew Peterson (Ph.D., Middle Eastern studies, University of Cambridge) is a professor of Arabic, history and politics in Pittsburgh. His book "Palestine-Israel in the Print News Media: Contending Discourses" (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) is available on Amazon, and his piece "Palestine-Israel and the Neoliberal Ideal" was released in the fall 2017 volume of *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*.



The principal architects of Neoliberal Empire would see market systems govern the whole world, and everyone in it. (left to right) Milton Friedman (economist at the University of Chicago, pioneer of Neoliberal Theory, and advisor to U.S. Presidents from Nixon to Reagan), Margaret Thatcher (Britain's first female Prime Minister, 1979-1990), Ronald Reagan (President, 1980-1988), Tony Blair (British Prime Minister, 1997-2007) and David Cameron (British Prime Minister, 2010-2016).

Ramadan in American Prisons

The difficulties and ease of fulfilling an obligation while incarcerated

BY ABDULMALIK NEGEDU

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS NEW inmates realize is that prison is a different from the outside world, that it is a more surreal world in which to live and an even more difficult one in which to observe Ramadan, because its very nature and environment are often antithetical to Ramadan's spirit. Prison is neither intended nor designed to be an easy place. Existing difficulties are further compounded when the accommodations made for it are construed as more of a privilege than a right. I have experienced Ramadan in at least two prisons, and in my opinion such a challenge is generally about making the best of a bad situation, for "Surely, with every difficulty there is relief" (94:5).

Prison is more than a melting pot of people of different races, beliefs and creeds. It is, in fact, a melting pressure cooker in which individuals of varying characters, personalities, temperaments and proclivities are compelled to live together in a constricted space. A young adult who made a dumb mistake may be paired with a career criminal in a bunk bed situation, a non-violent white-collar criminal may share a cell with a gang leader, and a non-violent drug possessor may end up in the same dormitory with convicted serial rapists and murderers.

Living in this space places one in a state of constant uncertainty and hyper-vigilance, for one never truly knows the other guy and/or why he is in prison. And yet he dare not ask, for to do so is to risk serious personal injury. But as the risk of assault is ever present, inmates must always be on guard — sometimes to the point of paranoia. As

a result, a palpable and ever-present underlying tension permeates almost every aspect of prison life. Muslim inmates seeking to observe Ramadan have to find a balance between being constantly on guard and dropping their guard so they can reflect more deeply upon God's words and signs.

All inmates are watched and controlled 24/7 by prison guards or corrections officers (COs). The COs plan out and track their activities, tell them when to sleep and wake up, when and what to eat, when to remain inside or go outside, when to speak with and receive visits from friends and family and for how long. This unnatural situation is unnerving and distressing and has an adverse effect upon their mental health — one that creates a lingering feeling of despair and/or helplessness as well as an increased sense of dependency.

These feelings are exacerbated during Ramadan, for the status quo is not relaxed. Religious services remain subject to the prison's logistics and operational management, the number of inmates who can pray together in a cell or dormitory outside of prison-sanctioned religious services remain limited, and censorship of religious and other literature is still strictly enforced.

For example, religious services are cancelled if the Muslim chaplain or CO are unavailable — the reason for their absence doesn't matter. Services are suspended during shakedowns and lockdowns. Shakedowns are when COs conduct a systematic check for such "contraband" as handcrafted weapons, drugs, unauthorized property, tattoo equipment and cell phones. At such times, prisons

are placed in lockdown, which involves confining prisoners to certain areas for a few minutes or up to 30 days and restricting most privileges and activities, such as religious services, library, school or work.

Prison units are also locked down when prison security is breached within the prison facility, such as when fights break out between inmates, someone's actions may be construed as inciting a riot or someone commits suicide. One can imagine the impact that these shakedowns and lockdowns have on religiously sincere inmates whose Ramadan routine is suddenly interrupted, which severely disrupts their focus on the spiritual.

Praying the five daily prayers, the Friday prayer and *tarawih* in congregation when the chaplain and CO are absent is considered a security risk and therefore limited to two inmates or prohibited altogether. The justifications given include the possibility that inmates will use the time to organize for a protest or a riot, prepare for confrontations with other faith groups or gangs, or to recruit and radicalize other inmates. Inmates, of course, insist that they merely seek to maximize the spiritual rewards of praying together. Consequently, some inmates suffer from loneliness, especially during Ramadan, because there is no religious companionship and spiritual bonding while fasting.

In one situation, an English translation of the Quran was denied during Ramadan because the authorities considered it a potential tinderbox between Muslim and Jewish or Christian inmates. Ramadan is known as the month during which the

Qur'an began to be revealed (2:183), and censorship is one way to deny access to its guidance. The fact that the approved alternate translation was overpriced, compared to the literature of other religions, only reinforces the perceptions that Muslims are being selectively exploited or that artificial barriers to God's word are being imposed upon them. This aggravates or disheartens many of the fasting inmates, particularly those who have the intention to read the entire Qur'an during this month.

How can their rights be restricted when the Constitution protects the right of free exercise of religion? The boilerplate rationale is "maintenance of safety and security." While the First Amendment protects the right of free exercise of religion, according to various court cases it also permits certain restrictions to be placed on religious practices in prison if they are considered to threaten a prison's safety, security or smooth operation. However, arriving at such a determination has caused a great deal of contention between prison officials and those who advocate for and seek added protections for religious exercise in prison.

Ultimately, the facility wardens have the final say because they essentially view their facilities as security institutions in which safety and security take precedence over everything else. Therefore, COs commonly contend that allowances for practicing Islam beyond the individual level, particularly making accommodations for Ramadan, is more of a privilege and less of a right. Nowhere else is this attitude more obvious than in the provision of the *sahur* and *iftar* meals.

Some COs believe that fasting is a matter of conscience between a person and his Lord and so don't make an issue of the extra effort that Ramadan demands. Others, however, employ provocation, vindictiveness and heightened vigilance in the hope of getting as many fasting Muslim as possible

off the Ramadan food service list, which they consider a roster of the privileged. In this perception, every inmate is seen as a person who resorts to strange and manipulative behavior to exploit opportunities for favors and/or protection, and therefore they should be treated accordingly. In the case of Muslims, this can involve reminding them that they are receiving "unwarranted preferential treatment," watching them extra carefully to see if they break the fast early, supplying cold food and delivering food late or just leaving it by the bunk bed and not waking them up.

of the *taqwa* that inmates attain thereby is liberating, for it imbues them with a sense of purpose that counterbalances incarceration and inspires feelings of hope that rise beyond the prison's walls. And whatever they can read of the Qur'an during Ramadan can imbue them with a sense of actual reality, for the reality described in the Qur'an transcends the surrealism of prison life and of the illusory "outside" world.

That reality provides an inner sanctuary, one in which real human normalcy exists and there are moments of ease and peace. As the Quran states, Ramadan is the month

WHILE THE FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTS THE RIGHT OF FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION, ACCORDING TO VARIOUS COURT CASES IT ALSO PERMITS CERTAIN RESTRICTIONS TO BE PLACED ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN PRISON IF THEY ARE CONSIDERED TO THREATEN A PRISON'S SAFETY, SECURITY OR SMOOTH OPERATION.

Ramadan in prison is a test both of and for the faithful. This insight is one of the hidden benefits that manifest themselves during Ramadan. Inmates know that this world is the proving ground for a person's faith in God. Abu Hurayra (*radi Allahu 'anh*) narrated that the Prophet (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: "The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever." This hadith has a deeper significance for imprisoned Muslims, for their surreal life makes Ramadan a supercharged intensive learning experience in terms of God-consciousness (*taqwa*).

The U.S. prison world is like the outside world on steroids. Some of the fasting inmates understand the world's illusory nature more deeply and the values of self-discipline and restraint better. The discipline of fasting provides them with an inner sense of personal control beyond the prison officials' reach, regardless of their attitudes, and the appreciation that only God has true power and strength. Consequently, their aspirations often become higher as they strive to draw closer to God and grow in faith.

God prescribed fasting Ramadan as a way for people to attain *taqwa* (2:183). Much

of mercy and during it God grants ease and peace. Its teachings provide actualities, wisdom and practical knowledge that can enable inmates to navigate the difficulties of prison life. This knowledge, with faith, can become the light that helps lead them through the darkness of their imprisonment for its duration or at least until the next Ramadan. This light empowers them to make the best of a bad situation.

Those of us on the outside, where Ramadan is relatively much easier to observe, are obliged to advocate for Ramadan in prison as a right and not a privilege, to seek added protections for fasting inmates and to continue striving through the judicial system for less-stringent security restrictions on prisoners' right to exercise their religious practices during Ramadan. We are also obliged to provide programs for those reentering society that continue to re-enforce the Qur'anic teachings post-incarceration so that the light of faith will continue to lead them through the smoke and mirrors of this worldly life. *in*

AbdulMalik Negedu is a community chaplain with Malik Human Services, Inc. of New Haven, Conn., and has worked with people in re-entry.

Auburn (N.Y.) Correctional Facility



God Commands Justice

Despite being a divine command, and despite the countless assertions that “we are working toward it,” only rarely does justice seem to prevail.



BY SAFFET A. CATOVIC

THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES, MANY speakers have concluded their Friday sermon by reminding the faithful that “God commands justice and the doing of that which is most excellent, that which is best and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality and bad conduct (injustice) and oppression. He admonishes you so that perhaps you will be reminded” (16:90).

Many of the congregants, who have heard it so many times over the years that they can recite it from memory, are, unfortunately, unmindful and often neither reflect nor act upon this verse as they leave the mosque and resume their daily activities.

The Arabic dictionary gives two primary words for justice: *adl* and *qist*. *Adl* is defined “as what the soul sees as straight,” the opposite of deviation from a well-established moral and ethical norm. It is to be in a state of equilibrium, to be balanced. Just as balance is inherent in the cosmic order, it needs to be present in our spiritual and ethical values as well as our very being and lives as lived in the world.

Adl is ruling by truth, not by that which is false and fake — something that is extremely relevant and timely given the “fake news” phenomenon, alternative facts

and even the outright denial of truth and facts in the frenzied world in which we find ourselves today. *Adl* is giving equal things — equal rewards. In an economic sense, it calls for an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work, a living and sustainable wage that allows hard working folk to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their families during times of both sickness and health.

Islam’s teachings on justice, as they apply to those who have been placed in power and make decisions that affect us all, call upon them to not follow their base desires and latent prejudices, which may hinder them from dealing justly and fairly with those under them. *Adl* is about restoring a thing or a matter to the place where, and to the situation in, which it rightly belongs.

Qist (equity) lends itself to a far more

WE NEED TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE FOR THOSE AMERICANS WHO ARE UNFAIRLY TARGETED AND RACIALLY PROFILED DUE TO THEIR SKIN COLOR AND THEN SUBJECTED TO EXCESSIVE FORCE BY SOME OF THOSE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT.

refined and nuanced understanding of justice, one that implies going beyond “doing that which is most excellent and best.” In other words, one must go beyond restorative justice in order to place a matter or a thing in an even better place and situation than it was before.

It is imperative that humanity follow God’s command to establish justice, for *Al-Adl* (The Just One) is one of His 99 Most Beautiful Names and refers to the one from whom just action emanates. We know the Just One through knowing His justice, which, in turn, is realized through knowing His action. The Just One orders and arranges matters in such a fashion that there is no fault in them. We human beings, who in the Quranic reading are “infused with the Divine spirit” and in the language of the Old Testament “made in the image of God,” need to strive to do the same.


We need to establish justice for our neighbors, friends and, in some cases, our own relatives — the many who have called America home for so long. But despite working hard, paying their dues by doing their fair share, paying their taxes and contributing to our country’s general wellbeing, growth and prosperity, some of them are denied the right to call themselves citizens because they lack a certain piece of paper. They need sanctuary now as well as a clear pathway to citizenship, as do their children — the Dreamers who dared to have a dream not unlike Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream. After all, they have also worked hard to realize the American Dream and its promise in their own lives and that of their families.

We need to establish justice for those Americans who are unfairly targeted and racially profiled due to their skin color and then subjected to excessive force by some of those in law enforcement. In this regard, we applaud and recognize the consistent efforts and hard work of all those, including Faith in New Jersey (<http://faithinnewjersey.org>) and its partner organizations that,

by God’s blessing, pushed the Independent Prosecutor bill (S 2469) through the New Jersey State legislature. When Gov. Phil Murphy (D) signs this bill, which calls for investigating every fatal police shooting, it will be a big step forward and an important milestone in the long-term process of rebuilding trust between our communities and law enforcement.

We need to establish justice and work to end the policies and practices of mass incarceration that disproportionately affect African Americans and Latinos and deprive them of the right to vote. Let’s be clear — In order for all human lives to matter, black and brown lives must matter. In his Farewell Sermon, delivered during his last hajj, Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) stated to all of those who were with him, as well as to all future generation, that an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab just as no non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab, and that a white person has no superiority over a black person just as a black person has no superiority over a white person — except through piety, righteousness and good action. All human beings are from Adam (*‘alayhi as salam*) and Adam is from earth — dirt.

White supremacy has no place here in our America.

All people need to establish justice in the most basic area of human rights, as articulated in all of our faith traditions and as found in the lofty words of the nation’s foundational documents — which affirm and guarantee freedom of conscience, the right to believe as we choose and the right to freely practice our respective faiths and religious traditions in safety and security without fear of prejudice or harm. In a time of growing religious intolerance and bigotry, as manifested in hate speech and hate crimes run amok, we must speak out and organize against the forces of xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and the like until Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of a “beloved inclusive community” is realized, at which time we will finally be judged and judge one another on the basis of the content of our character as opposed to our skin color, religious affiliation or gender. 

Saffet A. Catovic, Muslim chaplain at Drew University, is a member of Faith in New Jersey Statewide Clergy Caucus.

[Editor’s note: Excerpted from the author’s talk at the Annual Statewide Faith Leadership Summit of Faith in New Jersey held on Jan. 28, 2018 at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick, N.J.]

Translating Verse Through Brushstrokes

BY HAMZA ZAFER

LUBNA ZAHID IS A FINE ARTIST trained classically in Pakistan and in the United States. Her art is a modern American expression of Islamic artistic forms, both inscriptional and architectural. In her oeuvre, Lubna seamlessly fuses together an eclectic set of aesthetic values that reflect her experience as a modern American woman of color. Her pieces reflect the hopes and anxieties of a Muslim navigating this period of heightened Islamophobia, as well as a woman confronted by the endemic misogyny in American popular culture.

Lubna’s artworks are engagements with an American audience increasingly apprehensive about the space of Muslims in American society and of Islam in American socio-political discourse. Her work is very timely — a bold assertion of the place of Islamic voices in mainstream American culture and the place of immigrant women in the world of high art.

Lubna works in mixed media, bringing together watercolors, oils, acrylics, clay, fiber and glass beautifully in her pieces to an arresting visual effect. Her compositions are neither subtle nor restrained. They are theatrical — full of movement and drama. Her artistic voice has developed over several years of studying visual art under various teachers including, importantly, master calligrapher and illuminator Abbas Al-Baghdadi from Iraq, the renowned modernist Mansoor Rahi from Pakistan and master gilder William Adair from the U.S. Lubna is also herself a dedicated teacher of art, training students currently in Reston, McLean and Alexandria in the Washington, D.C., metro area.

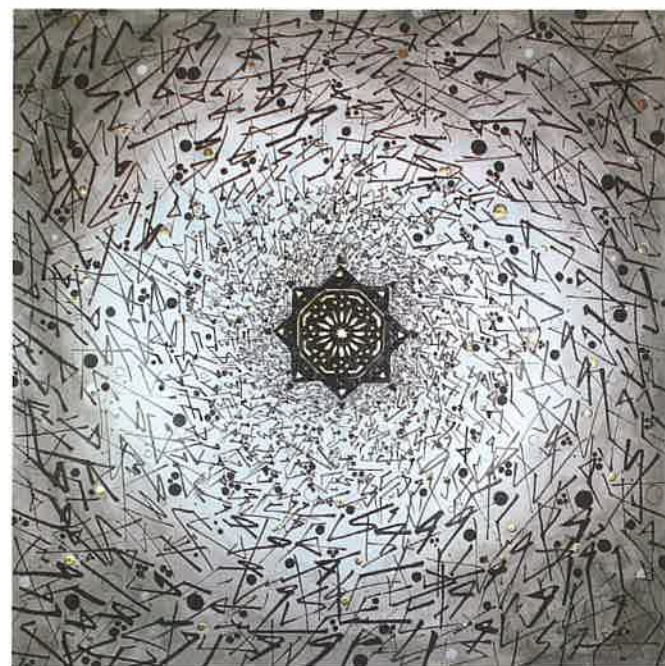
Script and typography are central elements in Lubna’s oeuvre. She brings a uniquely modern and bold voice to the hallowed pan-Islamic tradition of calligraphy. Many of her pieces include philosophical



HER WORK IS VERY TIMELY — A BOLD ASSERTION OF THE PLACE OF ISLAMIC VOICES IN MAINSTREAM AMERICAN CULTURE AND THE PLACE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF HIGH ART.

texts in Urdu, Arabic, Persian and Punjabi that she selected from various classical sources such as the Quran and the writings of Rumi. Included in other works are the philosophical writings of contemporary thinkers such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz (d. 1984) and Allama Iqbal (d. 1938). The texts are not to be read as much as experienced as visual forms.

One of her most recent works, a six-piece set titled “Bol” or “Speak,” visualizes a short Urdu poem by the revolutionary poet and thinker Faiz Ahmed Faiz, a contemporary and close friend of Chilean Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda, who wrote the poem as an



anthem against Pakistan's suppression of free speech in the 1980s. It became the rallying cry of Lubna's generation, the first post-colonial generation in the Subcontinent that had to contend with the state authoritarianism that gripped the developing world during the Cold War. Lubna beautifully renders the curt and powerful verses into an American visual idiom, including the text of the poem (in the "nastaliq" font) as an element within the compositions.

Lubna's other recent collection, the "Exploding Shamsas," is a modernist and deconstructive rendering of a traditional motif in Islamic art, the *shamsa* or "solar disc." Shamsas are geometric circular medallions that are frequently embossed on the covers of the Quran and in classical and contemporary Islamic architecture. Their geometry and arabesque represent the ordered yet complex expanse of the cosmos — a continuous outward expanding pattern. Lubna has taken this ubiquitous symbol and reconfigured it to bold

effect by infusing chaos and unpredictability into the geometry and balance.

Her large piece "Dareecha" (42"x42", 2017), which is part of the Shamsa series, features an Urdu verse by Faiz during his lengthy imprisonment, interspersed in a jagged font and fixed between aquamarine and black streaks: "How many a crucifix is anchored before my cell window / each stained by its very own Messiah's blood." Another one of her pieces in the series "Sinai" (42"x42", 2018) features verses written by Faiz during his exile in Beirut when the first Lebanese-Israeli war broke out. The *shamsa* is constructed with the line in Urdu, "Yet again lightning and thunder rages over the mount of Sinai!" that revolves around an affixed octagonal structural piece constructed of clay and gold leaf. In Islamic art, the octagon represents a fusion between the circle and the square, the two perfect forms.

In her piece, Lubna surrounds Faiz's line hearkening to a Quranic verse regarding the first revelation to Prophet Moses ('alayhi



as *salam*) around the octagonal shape of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The "Exploding Shamsas" is a rich collection of paintings that capture the socio-political questions of the modern age, expressed through a long revered symbol.

Currently, Lubna is teaching at various institutions in the D.C. metropolitan area. She conducts workshops and seminars on art and on art history as well, most recently at the "Script 'N' Scribes" and the "Art of the Quran" workshop series at the Freer and Sackler Galleries at the Smithsonian. Her work has appeared in various publications, including most recently in the Letters Arts Review, the leading international journal for calligraphers and lettering artists. Lubna is preparing to exhibit her series "Exploding Shamsas" and other pieces in the U.S. by the end of this year. Her work can be seen at her website: www.lubnazahid.com.

Hamza Zafer is an assistant professor of Islamic History at the University of Washington, Seattle.

NEW RELEASES

Islamic Wealth Management: Theory and Practice
Mohamed Ariff and Shamsheer Mohamad, eds.
2017. Pp. 416. HB. \$175.00
Edward Elgar Publishers, U.K.

ARIFF AND MOHAMAD OFFER A COMPILATION COMPRISING 21 chapters under five sub-themes on how to comply with Islamic principles when managing one's wealth.

The book defines wealth from both the secular and Islamic perspective and describes how it needs to be earned in lawful ways, preserved and used to meet the community's needs. They remind the readers that a small part of it is to be given as charity and the remainder managed according to the laws and common practices established by the majority consensus of scholars of Islam.

Each section contains relevant chapters on the theory as well as the application and challenges of Islamic wealth management in real and financial markets. This book will be useful for academicians, scholars, students, researchers, practitioners and policymakers.



The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition

John Kaltner and Younus Mirza
2018. Pp. 184. HB \$88.00. PB \$26.95
Bloomsbury, New York, N.Y.

THE AUTHORS PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIGURES AND groups mentioned in both scriptures, one that centers on the similarities and differences of their presentations, with special emphasis on how they appear in the Quran. References are also included as to how many of them are treated in other Islamic sources.

Each figure or group includes a list of relevant Quranic passages, a description of how the individual/group is presented in the Islamic texts, questions and issues to consider and suggestions for further reading. An introductory section provides a basic orientation to the Quran and other Islamic sources.

This book should also help those who deride Islam and are unaware that the Quran includes those Biblical figures whom they also respect and follow.

Great Muslims of the West: Makers of Western Islam

Muhammad Mojlum Khan
2018. Pp. 500. PB. \$24.95
Kube Publishing Ltd., Markfield, Leics., U.K.

MUSLIMS HAVE LIVED IN THE "WEST" FOR HUNDREDS OF years, and yet the lives of all but a few of them are relatively unknown. Khan, who argues that the makers of Western Islam have enriched both Islam and humanity, brings together accounts of the lives and contributions of over 50 significant Muslims, from the founder of Muslim Spain to the Champ — Muhammad Ali.

At a time when Islamophobia continues to boil, this volume should not only be welcomed by both Muslims and non-Muslims, but also offers a much-needed sense of belonging to all Muslims born and raised in the West.



The Other Side of the Wall:
An Eyewitness Account of the Occupation in Palestine
Richard Hardigan
2018. Pp. 185. HB. \$34.95. PB. \$19.95
Cune Press, Seattle, Wash.

HARDIGAN WORKS ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE PALESTINIAN-Israeli conflict with the International Solidarity Movement (<https://palsolidarity.org>), a prominent organization of peace activists that documents the acute suffering and injustices imposed upon the Palestinians by both Israeli soldiers and settlers. During his stay in the West Bank, the author experienced two momentous events: the collective punishment imposed by the Israeli army upon West Bank residents for the kidnapping of three teenaged Jewish settlers, and the subsequent military assault on the Gaza Strip, which killed over 2,000 Palestinians.

Latino Muslims: Our Journeys to Islam

Juan Galvan, ed.
2017. Pp. 242. PB. \$11.95
CreateSpace Independent Publishing, North Charleston, S.C.

A COLLECTION OF STORIES ABOUT LATINO MUSLIMS' personal journeys to the truth, this book comprises their struggles, discoveries and revelations during their journey along with how they found peace within Islam.



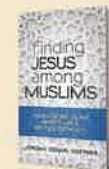
Non-Latino Muslims should welcome this book, as it enables them to hear the voices they may never have heard so clearly. Galvan's compilation of his community's experiences enables this country's numerous Muslim communities to draw closer to each other.

Finding Jesus among Muslims:
How Loving Islam Makes Me a Better Catholic
Jordan Denari Duffner

2017. Pp. 162. PB. \$19.95
Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.

DUFFNER ADDRESSES A RANGE OF QUESTIONS, SUCH AS whether Christians should engage in interfaith dialogue with Muslims, if Islam has anything to offer Christians, what is Islamophobia and what should Christians do about it.

Drawing from church teaching and her experiences of living among Muslims in both the U.S. and the Middle East, Duffner explains why Christians are called to participate in a "dialogue of life" with Muslims. She calls for not just learning about Islam and Muslims, but also for learning with Islam and Muslims. This book could be of help during a time of division and fear, as some politicians and the media never seem to tire of painting Islam and Muslims as the other.



Politicizing Islam: The Islamic Revival in France and India

Z. Fareen Parvez
2017. Pp. 288. HB. \$78.00
Oxford University Press USA, New York, N.Y.

PARVEZ ANALYZES THE CHALLENGES BEING FACED BY Muslims in France and India, which host the largest Muslim minorities in Western Europe and Asia, respectively, due to the crisis of secularism. Her in-depth examination of how these communities have responded focus on Islamic revival movements in Lyon and Hyderabad — a state whose Muslim character was demolished after India invaded and occupied it in 1948.

For her comparative view, she concentrates on middle-class and poor Muslims in both cities, showing how Muslims from every social class are denigrated but nevertheless continue to struggle to improve their lives and make claims on the state. In Lyon's *banlieues* they have retreated into the private sphere, while in Hyderabad's slums they have created vibrant political communities.

The author explains how these divergent reactions originated in France's militant secularism and India's flexible secularism, as well as in specific patterns of Muslim class relations in both cities. This fine-grained ethnography pushes beyond stereotypes and has consequences for public debates over Islam, feminism and secular democracy.

Visit the Old City of Aleppo: Come with Tamim to a World Heritage Site
Khalidoun Fansa (Design: Mamoun Sakka). Illustrator: Abdalla Assad
2017. Pp. 152. PB. \$19.95
Cune Press, Seattle, Wash.

THE GUNS IN ALEPPO, ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST continuously inhabited cities, have fallen silent, leaving its eastern part in rubble and empty. Aleppo's U.N.-designated World Heritage Site has been damaged or destroyed. How can Syria and the world recover this one-of-a-kind treasure?

In their book, Aleppo-native and author Khalidoun Fansa and illustrator Abdalla Assad, who lives in nearby Homs, remind Syrians that their country's ancient cultural touchstones belong to each one of them. If Syria is to be restored, the international community needs to value Aleppo and other one-of-a-kind Syrian treasures.

This children's book, meant for adults as well as children, is rich in both historical and contemporary color illustrations and photographs. It brings Aleppo's ancient city alive by means of a story set just before the 2011 troubles through the eyes of Tamim, a boy who visits its historic neighborhoods.

Royalties from book sales will be donated to restoration and relief efforts.



Mommy's Khimar
Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow

Illustrated by Ebony Glenn
2018. Pp. 40. (Picture book. 4-8). HB. \$17.99
Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster, New York, N.Y.

IN THEIR DEBUT PUBLICATION, THIS AUTHOR-AND-ILLUSTRATOR TEAM presents a glimpse into a young Muslim African-American girl's family and community as she walks around in her mother's hijab. The star of this book finds her joy in imagining that her mother's hijab transforms her into a queen, a star, a mama bird and a superhero. At the core of the story is the love between the girl and her mother. Her grandmother, apparently a Christian, reminds readers that "we are a family and we love each other just the same."





For Muslims, Jerusalem is Never off the Table

Muslims can regain their stature and liberate their third most holy mosque if they repent sincerely and return to God's way

BY OSMAN AHMED



ONE CENTURY AFTER LONDON TOOK Palestine off the table with its Balfour Declaration, Washington claims that its Dec. 6, 2017 announcement has taken Jerusalem off the table. However, Muslims contend that Jerusalem is *never* off the table, and the Quran 17:1-10 clearly defines its centrality to them.

Q. 17:1 proclaims: "Glory to (God), Who took His servant [Muhammad] for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs, for He is the One Who hears and sees (all things)."

This relates the miracle of the Prophet's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) night journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and back

and God's sanctification of Jerusalem's Masjid al-Aqsa — the first *qibla* and where Muhammad had led the prayer for all of the earlier Abrahamic prophets and messengers (*'alayhum as salaam*).

In Q. 17:9-10 we read: "Verily this Qur'an guides to that which is most right (or stable) and gives the glad tidings to the believers who perform deeds of righteousness, that they shall have a magnificent reward. And to those who do not believe in the Hereafter (it announces) that We have prepared for them a grievous penalty."

Accordingly, Muslims are responsible for preserving it forever, keeping it as holy as possible for Christians and Jews and will be generously rewarded in the Hereafter for doing so. The ninth verse reveals how to

keep it holy (following the Qur'an's teachings), while the tenth verse warns them of the severe consequences of disbelieving in the Hereafter.

The chapter's second to the eighth verses discuss the Children of Israel, who at certain times were considered the only believers in God's oneness and were expected to believe in all His messages and messengers. By presenting their history in several places, God establishes for the Muslims that His general rules apply to those who claim belief in Him and His messages. Looking at what happened to the Children of Israel indicates what can and will happen to other believers.

Although some may consider Q. 17:2-8 as no more than history — in fact, this chapter is sometimes entitled *Bani Israel* (The Children of Israel) — this passage is actually a warning and prophecy for the Muslims.

"We gave Moses the book and made it a guide for the Children of Israel, (commanding): 'Take no other than Me as Disposer of (your) affairs.' O you who sprung from those We carried (in the Ark) with Noah! Verily, he was a devotee most grateful" (17:2-3). Let's ponder this passage for a moment. The Quran was revealed to guide Muhammad's followers to belief in His unity. The Muslims are the descendants of those carried in the Ark with Noah (*'alayhi as salam*), and both Moses (*'alayhi as salam*) and Muhammad are among Abraham's (*'alayhi as salam*) descendants — yet another descendant of Noah.

"And We gave (a clear) warning to the Children of Israel in the book, that twice they would spread corruption in the land and be

elated with a mighty arrogance (and would be punished twice)!" (17:4). Tyranny and arrogance arise when individuals, groups or nations become mighty, rich and powerful. Such a situation is usually followed by God's wrath and destruction.

But for those who claim sincere belief, the consequences in this life are greater. For example, the powerful and prosperous Children of Israel became tyrannical, extremely arrogant and caused trouble to themselves and to others. Although this happened several times on a small scale, on two occasions God's punishment hit them hard in their hearts, as the next verse indicates.

WHAT SPIRITUAL TOPICS MATTER MOST TO YOU?

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Mosque in the area blessed by God. Thus, the city became Islam's third official holy site. On July 15, 1099, the Crusaders captured it and slaughtered its inhabitants.

"Then We granted you the return victory over them. We gave you increase in resources and sons, and made you the more

BY PRESENTING THEIR HISTORY IN SEVERAL PLACES, GOD ESTABLISHES FOR THE MUSLIMS THAT HIS GENERAL RULES APPLY TO THOSE WHO CLAIM BELIEF IN HIM AND HIS MESSAGES. LOOKING AT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL INDICATES WHAT CAN AND WILL HAPPEN TO OTHER BELIEVERS.

"When the first warning came to pass, We sent against you Our servants given to terrible warfare. They entered the inmost parts of your homes. It was a warning (completely) fulfilled" (17:5). In other words, God punished them severely by sending against them unbelievers who defeated them and even entered their Temple, the symbol of their honor and dignity.

Israel, with its capital Samaria, lasted more than 200 years (10th-8th centuries BCE), and King David's descendants ruled the Kingdom of Judah from Jerusalem for 350 years. The Assyrians (722 BCE) crushed and carried off Israel's people into exile and oblivion. More than a century later, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, exiled most of its inhabitants and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple (586 BCE).

Muhammad's followers soon created a strong and prosperous empire stretching from the Atlantic to the western borders of China. But within a few centuries its rulers had become tyrannical and arrogant, especially to their own people. Accordingly, what had befallen the Children of Israel now befell the Muslims.

Jerusalem was conquered in 638 during reign of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (*'alayhi rahmat*), who went on to build the Aqsa

numerous in manpower" (17:6). God forgave the Children of Israel after they repented and returned to His way. He then rewarded them with the great wealth and numbers they needed to regain their former strength, defeat their enemies, establish another strong kingdom and rebuild the Temple.

Exactly the same thing happened to the Muslims. Having weakened themselves through internal divisions and some groups allying themselves with the Crusaders, their eventual repentance and return to God's path enabled them to unite under Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin), defeat the Crusaders, liberate Jerusalem and erect a new strong Islamic empire that flourished and conquered additional parts of Europe under the Ottomans.

"If you did well, you did it for yourselves. If you did evil, (ye did it) against yourselves. So when the second warning came to pass, (We permitted your enemies) to disfigure your faces, to enter your Temple as they had entered it before and to destroy all that fell into their power" (17:7). Clearly, this verse applies to both faith communities.

Both the Temple and Jerusalem were about to be destroyed when General Titus began his siege of the city during April 70 with four legions. He posted the 10th Legion

on the Mount of Olives, directly east of and overlooking the Temple Mount; the 12th and 15th Legions on Mount Scopus, further to the east and commanding all routes to Jerusalem from east to north; and held the 5th Legion in reserve. The Romano-Jewish scholar, historian and hagiographer Flavius Josephus recorded a legend that sprung up about the Temple: A tremendous amount of looting, killing and raping accompanied its burning. Many rushed to there to die rather than become slaves.

For the Muslims, the event of the second promise and punishment started with the Ottoman Empire's destruction in 1918 and its division among the Crusaders' descendants. Upon entering Jerusalem, the victorious British commander General Edmund Allenby declared the Crusades complete. The Balfour Declaration put the first nail in the coffin of Muslim rule in Palestine, and, of course, the humiliation that would befall most of the world's Muslims.

The fall of Jerusalem came at the hands of despotic Arab rulers. During June 1967, the Israeli Jews "liberated" Jerusalem's Old City. On the war's third day, Israeli paratrooper Motta Gur, mounted on a half-truck, announced that the Temple Mount had been regained. On June 7 of the same year, Israeli troops moved into the Old City and prayed at the Western Wall (Wailing Wall).

Ever since, the Palestinian case has been worsening due to the unconditional help of the Crusaders' descendants and the wasting Arab rulers. In fact, one can consider it is another Crusade albeit with a Zionist facade. At the same time, the Muslim world is growing in numbers — but its growth is like the foam of the floods that the Prophet foretold.

"It may be that your Lord may (yet) have mercy on you. But if you revert (to your sins), We shall revert (to Our punishments). We have made Hell a prison for those who reject (all faith) (17:8). This verse emphasizes the divine rule established in the previous verse and confirms what will happen to us if we continue to do evil here. Verses 9 and 10 remind Muslims to repent and return to God, and inform the unbelievers that there is still hope for them if they follow the Quran. There may arise from among them those who will help liberate Al-Aqsa Mosque. *ih*

Dr. Osman Ahmed, ex-officio president of the Islamic Society of Essex County, retired from Raritan Valley Community College as a professor emeritus of engineering. He is among the pioneers of the Muslim Students Association of the U.S. and Canada (now MSA National).

A Condiment Favored by the Prophets

Does every type of vinegar meet the halal test?

BY ASMA JARAD

PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SALLA ALLAHU 'alayhi wa sallam) is reported to have remarked that all the prophets who preceded him liked to season their food with vinegar (Narrated by Ayesha; cited by Muslim and Ibn Maja).

Indeed, this useful and healthy condiment has been passed down for thousands of years, for its versatility is beneficial in so many ways. It can be consumed in both hot and cold dishes, is a natural food preservative and is a cost-effective efficient and natural cleaning agent. The Prophet told his Companions that as long as a house has vinegar, it will never suffer from poverty (Reported in "Sunan al-Tirmidhi" and "Sunan al-Bayhaqi").

Now the question arises: Is there a difference between vinegar, a halal food promoted by the Sunnah, and wine-flavored vinegar? To begin with, vinegar is defined as a liquid produced through the natural fermentation of sugars. Fermentation occurs when micro-organisms such as bacteria or yeast convert carbohydrates into alcohol or acids under anaerobic conditions. In vinegar, the alcoholic fermentation occurs when yeast converts sugars into alcohol. After this, a group of bacteria known as acetobacter converts the alcohol into acetic acid, which is then diluted with water to achieve an acidity level between 4 and 8 percent. Vinegar retains virtually no alcohol after this process.

Vinegar can be sourced from many types of fruits, vegetables and grains. Distilled white vinegar is sourced from corn or apples, whereas unfiltered apple cider vinegar is naturally created during the fermentation process. This latter type of vinegar is made by crushing and squeezing the juice out of the apples and then adding bacteria or yeast to initiate the alcoholic fermentation. The ensuing sugars produced are then turned into alcohol and converted into vinegar by acetic acid-forming bacteria.

It is narrated that Jabir said: "I entered the Prophet's house with him and there was some bread and vinegar. The Messenger of Allah

said: 'Eat; what a good condiment is vinegar'" (Reported in "Sahih Muslim," "Sunan Abu Dawud" and "Sunan al-Sughra"). Most likely they dipped their bread in unpasteurized vinegar, which was not heat-treated to kill the mother culture and thus formed a jelly-like dip. In modern times, vinegar is heat-treated (pasteurized) to prevent such a formation. The heat also stops bacteria from continuously growing so that a consistent mass-produced product can be obtained.

In addition to the standard distilled white vinegar, plenty of flavorful vinegars line market shelves, among them wine-flavored vinegars. For instance, red wine vinegar is made when diluted red wine is fermented until it sours.

The site www.winespectator.com states: "If it's real Balsamic, it's all in the aging process. Balsamic vinegar is made from syrup (not wine) that comes from the juice of white grapes (typically from Trebbiano, Italy). This syrup is then fermented and aged slowly in barrels so its flavors become sweet, viscous and concentrated. The oxidation, evaporation, aging and exposure to barrels also turns the color that wonderfully glossy dark brown, and gives it a rich, sweet, pungent flavor." However, never give up reading labels, as some brands are wine vinegars.

Rice vinegar, a popular salad dressing because of its mild and somewhat sweet flavor compared to distilled vinegar, is made by fermenting the sugars from rice into alcohol and then into acid. However, it should not be confused with rice wine vinegar, as www.thekitchn.com notes: "While both products are made from fermented rice, the difference is in the manner in which each one is produced, as well as how they're used. These two can easily be confused, since rice vinegar is sometimes also labeled as rice wine vinegar (which is a vinegar, and not wine)."

For Muslims, the point of contention is not the vinegar's sour, sweet or mild taste, but whether these wine-flavored vinegars are halal or haram. We know that since the Prophet consumed vinegar and advised his followers to make it part of their daily diets, it's a sunnah that we should follow. But with modern technology and the manufacturers' often financial-benefits led options to infusing from different sources, how can we be sure that we are doing so without deviating into a gray area under Islamic guidelines?

Depending on which school of thought you follow, you will hear differing opinions. The majority of religious scholars have concluded that vinegar derived from wine is halal due to the physical and chemical transformation (*istihalah*): The vinegar-making process changes the nature of the wine and thereby produces a substance that is different in name, characteristics, qualities and properties.

According to the European Department of Halal Certification (<http://halalcertification.ie>), the Hanafi and Maliki schools have ruled that wine vinegars are permissible as long as the oxidation of alcohol present in

the vinegar changes its molecular structure and removes the intoxicating factors. In plain English, if the wine is transformed into vinegar, then it has become a different substance and is therefore permissible.

This coincides with the opinion of Sheikh Dr. Jaafar Al-Quaderi, a prominent Islamic


In the end, we know that God's prophets consumed and revered vinegar and that the Prophet told his Companions that God has put a blessing into it. As long as wine is not added to flavor the final product, the majority of Islamic scholars and studies consider it halal. For more specific

IT IS NARRATED THAT JABIR SAID: "I ENTERED THE PROPHET'S HOUSE WITH HIM AND THERE WAS SOME BREAD AND VINEGAR. THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH SAID: 'EAT; WHAT A GOOD CONDIMENT IS VINEGAR'" (Reported in "Sahih Muslim," "Sunan Abu Dawud" and "Sunan al-Sughra").

scholar who has served as advisor to the Islamic Food Council of North America (www.ifanca.org): "Wine is haram as long as it remains wine. However, if the same wine is turned into vinegar, it becomes Halal. The use of the vinegar derived from wine is Halal, as long as no wine remains in it" (*Istihala*: Change of State; www.daganghalal.com).

According to Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi's "The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam" (American Trust Publications, 1999 [trans.]): "Muslim scholars unanimously agree that if wine turns into vinegar by itself, it is lawful. Most scholars say that it is pure and lawful because it has changed from its original state; others say that it is still impure and, thus, must be avoided. In the books of the Maliki jurists, it is stated that it's permissible to treat wine so that it becomes vinegar" (also see Haider Khattak. Is Vinegar Halal? Halal Consumer, p. 15, Winter 2008).

A minority opinion argues that since wine is not completely converted into acetic acid during the chemical process, wine-derived vinegar should be shunned. Those who hold this opinion contend that the forbidden does not become permissible just because its characteristics, qualities and properties have changed. They cite the hadith that when Abu Talha asked the Prophet whether orphans who inherited wine could use it to make vinegar, he replied that they could not. Caliph Umar (*radi Allahu 'anh*) prohibited it if it had not turned into vinegar by itself and suggested that Muslims buy vinegar from non-Muslims if it was known that they had not intended the wine to turn into vinegar.

information, contact individual companies and inquire about their manufacturing process or consult with local scholars. And, of course, always approach such topics with a moral intention. When in doubt, trust your heart. 

Asma Jarad is a Chicagoland-based freelance writer and editor.



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Is Boiling Live Lobsters to Death Halal?

Why be cruel to lobsters when there are practical and humane alternatives to the usual way of preparing them for our dinner?

BY ASMA JARAD

IF YOU PINCH A GOAT'S EAR, HE WILL bleat and scurry away. If you stroke a cow's back too roughly, she will grunt and snort at you. If you startle a chicken, she'll squawk in distress and flutter away. What about lobsters? Science has long told us that these animals have no cerebral cortex or central nervous system, and thus they neither have emotions nor feel pain.

The Lobster Institute of Maine likens lobsters to insects. Dr. Robert Bayer, the director's executive director and professor of animal and veterinary sciences at the University of Maine, has been studying lobsters for thirty years. He contends that they have no brain or vocal cords — that “cooking a lobster is like cooking a big bug.”

On the other hand, animal rights activists and some scientists argue that lobsters suffer in silence. They assert that lobsters have complex nervous systems and react wildly to being dropped into boiling water by thrashing their bodies against the sides of the pot. The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) claim that lobsters are similar to other animals in that they feel pain, suffer from stress and have a full array of senses. Dr. Jaren G. Horsley, an invertebrate zoologist, remarks “a lobster has a rather sophisticated nervous system that, among other things, allows it to sense actions that will cause it harm.”

One thing we do know from these drastically different points of view is that there is no conclusive evidence to indicate whether lobsters do or do not feel pain.

It has long been assumed that dropping a live lobster into a pot of boiling water is a quick and painless journey to the table. Recently, however, the Swiss Federal Council issued an order stating that effective March 2018, boiling live lobsters will be considered inhumane. In an effort to improve how animals are treated, the Swiss government says that lobsters must now be stunned through electricity or have their brain mechanically destroyed before being put to death. The

cutting off all circulation to the brain. So, what is the most humane way to kill a lobster so that Muslims can eat it knowing that the creature was not unnecessarily tortured before it was put on their plate?

Given the goal behind their method of slaughtering livestock, it makes sense for Muslims to use a similar method for lobsters. Since their internal and external structures differ completely from those of other animals, we must consider the quickest and least painful way of slaughtering them. Wouter van der Ven, an Amsterdam-based sous-chef with experience in preparing seafood, notes, “Before I cook lobster, I put a knife in its head, right through the skull. Then I immediately cook the lobster in the pan. I don't feel any sorrier for lobsters than for other animals” (see *Munches NL*, Aug. 2016).

Indeed, the speed and simplicity of this method appears to inflict the least amount of pain, if any, upon the lobster. It is similar to the Muslim method of slaughtering livestock because eaths is instantaneous and there is therefore no need for any mechanical brain destruction, boiling, freezing or electrical shocks. Lobsters and other shellfish have dangerous bacteria in their flesh, which multiply

COMMON SENSE DICTATES THAT SUBMERGING A LOBSTER — A FELLOW LIVING CREATURE — IN A POT OF BOILING WATER AND THEN BOILING IT DEATH SO THAT WE MAY EAT IT IS PAINFUL BOTH FOR IT AND FOR MANY OF US WHO WATCH THIS PROCEDURE IN ITS ENTIRETY.

and release toxins upon death. So cooking the lobster alive (or very shortly after being killed) avoids a nasty case of food poisoning.

Sam Vreeke, chef at Mossel & Gin in Amsterdam, rightly points out, “I think it's important to realize that meat comes from living animals and you have to treat it with respect to make a nice meal.”


Some may turn away from eating slaughtered livestock and seafood after reading about these preparation methods. However, keep in mind that God has blessed humans as the highest member of creation and thus has permitted them to use animals for their benefit. But along with this blessing comes the responsibility to treat all living creatures

as humanely as possible: “And the grazing livestock He has created for you; in them is warmth and numerous benefits, and from them you eat” (Q. 16:5) and “To hunt and eat fish of the sea is made lawful for you, a provision for you and for seafarers” (5:96). Furthermore, Abdallah ibn Omar (*‘alayhi rahmat*) narrated that the Prophet (*salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said: “Two types of dead meat and two types of blood have been made lawful for us to consume: the two dead meats are seafood and locusts, and the two types of blood are liver and spleen.”

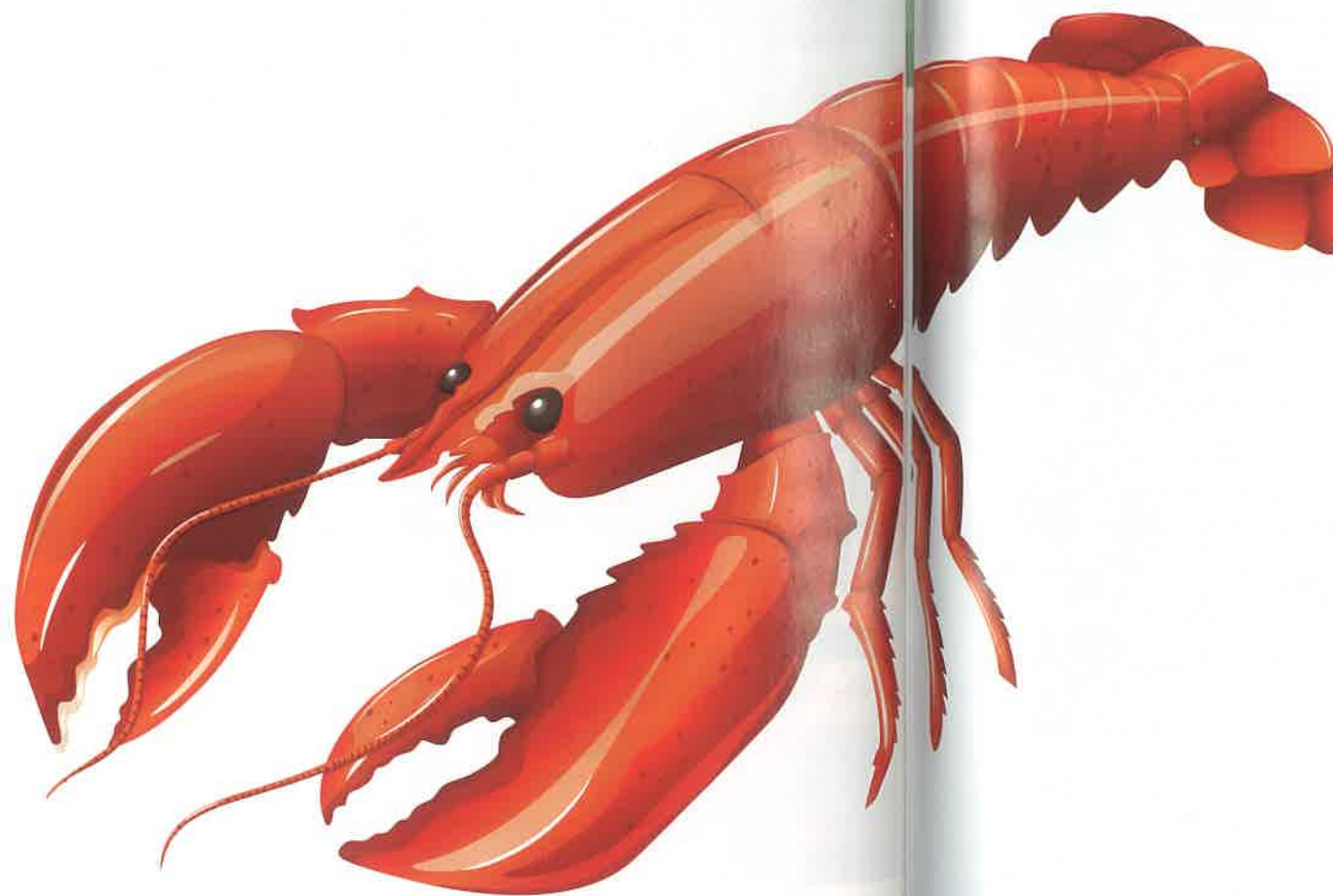
For the majority of Muslims, eating seafood makes a halal, healthy and a delicious dinner. However, is boiling a lobster to death halal? You will be hard-pressed to find an Islamic scholar to give you a straight and clear answer to this question. Instead, Mufti Sheikh Hatem Al Haj, who has a PhD in comparative jurisprudence from Lebanon's al-Jinan University, advises each Muslim to do his/her own research on this topic and reach his/her own conclusion: “It is on you to figure out if it hurts or if it does not hurt. The principle here is that you should do kindness to every living creature. If you think that this is not kindness, then do not do it. If you think that there is no pain involved in this process, then it may be permissible for you to do it.”

Since lobsters cannot survive outside of water for more than two days, most Muslims consider them part of the marine family and thus halal for consumption. The influential theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi concurs in his book, “The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam,” that while marine animals are halal, we must avoid mistreating them: “The Most Generous Lord has opened wide His bounty upon His servants by permitting them to eat all marine animals, without the requirement of bleeding; man has been left free to catch them in whatever manner he is able, avoiding any unnecessary cruelty as far as possible.” And as the Quran states: “And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender

meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it, and He subjected it that you may seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful” (16:14).

Before you decide whether boiling a lobster to death is halal or not, ask yourself whether it is necessary to do so. Since there is a humane alternative, namely, using a sharp knife to slice through the creature in one swift move, why not use it instead? Whether or not lobsters feel pain, our Islamic principles command us to treat all living creatures with respect, especially those from which we attain some benefit. Common sense dictates that submerging a lobster — a fellow living creature — in a pot of boiling water and then boiling it death so that we may eat it is painful both for it and for many of us who watch this procedure in its entirety. According to a *hadith sahih* narrated by Shaddad bin Aws, the Prophet said: “Indeed God has decreed *ihsan* [excellence] in everything...when you slaughter, then do the slaughtering well. Comfort the animal (before slaughtering)” (Tirmidhi, vol. 3, book 14, no. 1409). 

Asma Jarad is a freelance writer and editor. She's currently working on a YouTube channel narrating books and creating videos to help instill pride and confidence in Islam and personal heritage among the youth. Catch her on YouTube and Facebook: Sami & Amro Reading Time.



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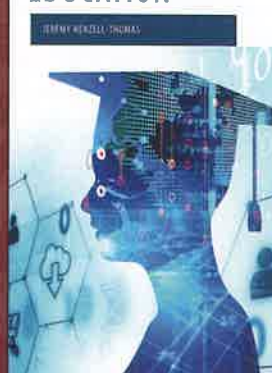
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