



An Islamic Response to the Ecological Challenge

All the creations of God are a Divine work of art. They are all signs of God, indicative of the greatness, goodness, subtlety and wisdom of the Creator.

The gifts of Nature that come from God are in plenty. As the Quran (16:18) says: "If you try to count God's blessings, you would never be able to number them. God is ever forgiving and most merciful."

The bounties of Nature need to be used judiciously. Extravagant and mindless use of these bounties has resulted in the environmental crisis that we are beset with today. Lavish lifestyles, unjust consumption, waste and extravagance are not compatible with true religiousness. Thus, the Quran says: "O Children of Adam, dress yourself properly whenever you are at worship: and eat and drink but do not be wasteful: God does not like wasteful people." (7:31).

Working for Balance

Extravagant lifestyles, based on untrammelled greed, wasteful production and heedless consumption, are at the root of the current global ecological

crisis. Islam links *israf* or extravagance to *fasaad* (chaos, disorder, imbalance and mischief in society) and forbids it. It declares that the extravagant are corrupters of society and spoilers of social order and harmony. It forbids people from following such people or systems. Thus, it says, "...do not obey the bidding of those who are given to excesses, those who spread corruption in the land instead of putting things right" (26:151-52).

The bounties that God blessed this planet with have an inherent balance. Even a slight change can upset the balance. We know, for instance, how even a small increase in the level of carbon dioxide can lead to climate change. Whenever the balance in the elements occurs, there is *fasaad* pollution, chaos or disorder. Human beings' extravagant misuse of Nature's resources, fuelled by greed, has resulted in widespread *fasaad*, manifested in the ecological crisis that we are faced with.



By Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz

The word *fasaad* and related terms are used several times in the Quran. In Arabic, the word *fasaad* has a wider connotation than in Urdu. In everyday Urdu, *fasaad* is often equated with generally as violence, particularly rioting. But in Arabic, the word has a much broader meaning. It includes depravity, rottenness, disorder and corruption and also connotes damaging something, not letting it remain in its original or proper condition or disturbing its balance. Understood in this way, the

widespread destruction of the environment at the global level today is a very obvious form of *fasaad*. It entails overturning the fine balance that God established in the environment, this process being driven principally by human greed.

Balance in Nature

Balance is one of the most crucial factors operating in Nature. To damage or destroy this natural balance, as is happening today, is to destroy oneself. As the Quran (6:51) says: "He who transgresses God's bounds wrongs his own soul." The destruction of one part of the environment will have repercussions for every component, including human beings. This is almost self-destruction, which is strictly prohibited in Islam, as in many other religious and spiritual traditions.

The Quran condemns every form of *fasaad*. Hence, environmental degradation and destruction are obviously something that people must oppose and seek to overcome. Given the grave

implications this phenomenon has for the very survival of life on Earth, it is a very serious form of *fasaad*. Despite this, however, relatively few of us consider the environmental crisis as a form of *fasaad*. Many of us are not even aware of the existence of such a crisis! In fact, through the reckless pursuit of a consumerist lifestyle, based on mindless exploitation of the bounties of Nature, many of us are actually deeply complicit in this *fasaad*. The Quran clearly condemns those who are engaged in *fasaad*. This means that those who are responsible for the *fasaad* of environmental degradation are also engaged in sin. Such sin can be called 'ecological sin'.

The opposite of *fasaad* is *islah*, which denotes maintaining a thing in its right condition and proper balance. Those who engage in *islah* are known as *musleheen*. They are the opposite of the *mufsideen*, those who engage in *fasaad*. The *musleheen* are rectifiers, correctors or reformers. Such people have been exhorted to engage in acts of correction and reformation that can undo the damage done by the spoilers or corruptors. Thus, it is the duty of people of faith in God to take up corrective measures for improving society and to ameliorate the conditions of people suffering because of inequalities, imbalances and disorders in society, including due to the destruction of the ecology.

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New Cinema Welcoming Women in Kabul

The majority of Kabul's cinemas cater largely to audiences of young men. For some young Afghan men, the cinema is a rare occasion for public expressions of joy: audience members cheer on the films' heroes and sometimes dance along. For most women, however, fears of harassment in a male-dominated space have made cinemas feel unwelcoming. "I can't imagine an Afghan woman being comfortable sitting in a dark room with hundreds of men," said Jonathan Saruk, a photographer who has documented the cinemas of Kabul.

This year, however, in an attempt to revive film culture in Kabul, the documentary maker Diana Saqeb Jamal launched a new venture: I-Khanom, a cinema that aims to provide a safe environment for women and families to watch films. The opening night featured a screening of 'The Orphanage', a 2019 drama directed by the Afghan film-maker Shahr Banoo Sadat, to an audience primarily made up of women. Most had never seen a film in a cinema before. "Going to the cinema has become taboo, especially for women," says I-Khanom manager Shahim Nadery. Most parents, she says, would not allow their daughters to attend.

I-Khanom, the newest addition to Book City Cultural Centre, which also includes a cafe and art gallery, is different. "It all



The auditorium of I-Khanom, which hopes to be a safe space for women and supportive to the Afghan film industry.

started from the environment we build in Book City," Nadery says. While many women in Kabul don't feel secure outside their homes at night, Book City has earned a reputation as a safe space for cultural activities. In 2014, a suicide bomber attacked a film screening at the French Culture Centre in Kabul, killing several people and injuring at least 15. The centre had been one of the few places that was welcoming to both film-makers and female audience members. The bombing was another blow to cinema culture in Afghanistan, a vibrant tradition that has largely been lost over years of conflict.

I-Khanom is an effort to move forward from that blow. It holds special women-only showings every Tuesday afternoon, while

Fridays are dedicated to families with children. Students from the faculty of arts at Kabul University, home to one of the country's few cinematography schools, make up a big part of most audiences.

"We want to give our film-makers an opportunity where they will have an audience, to see that Afghan films have a market in Afghan society," Nadery says.

That idea was partly tested in August when I-Khanom was one of the four screens around Kabul to host the Afghanistan film festival, a 10-day event that celebrated Afghanistan's 100th year of independence with screenings of 100 Afghan and Iranian movies. "People in Afghanistan love cinema," says Aqal Pais, who helped organise the festival.

Historic Jewish-Muslim Partnership



New York: The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) and the Muslim World League (MWL) recently announced an historic partnership for an innovative Season of Twinning program that will bring together rabbis and imams and their synagogues and mosques. For a decade, the FFEU's Season of Twinning has brought together thousands of Muslims and Jews in an effort to create more opportunities for interfaith dialogue. This year, more than 50 events will take place in 35 countries, on five continents. Programs include pulpit exchanges among rabbis and imams and events geared toward Muslim and Jewish student groups, young leadership bodies, families and children. Events focus on celebrating commonalities in the two faith traditions. Together, they show their support in combatting Islamophobia and anti-Semitism by performing acts of social service together in

recognition of the common moral imperative in both Islam and Judaism to help those in need.

"As Muslims and Jews, we share a common faith and a common fate, and it is our single destiny to strengthen our bond and to stand up for one another as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia continue to increase around the world, especially here in the United States," said FFEU President Rabbi Marc Schneier. "Whether it was the attacks on Jews in Pittsburgh or in Germany, Muslims in New Zealand, or on Christians in Sri Lanka, we have seen our houses of worship targeted, the sanctity of our communities violated, and the basis of peaceful and collaborative coexistence threatened," said Muslim World League Secretary General Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa. "To defeat hate, we must speak and listen to one another, learn from one another and unite with one another."

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UNICEF & IDB Launch first Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund



UNICEF and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) recently launched an innovative fund that will open new opportunities for Muslim philanthropy to reach the millions of children currently in need of humanitarian support and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund for Children (GMPFC) is the first fund focused on Muslim giving to be launched by a United Nations organization together with a Multilateral Development Bank (MDB). The fund will enable multiple forms of Muslim philanthropy, including obligatory giving such as Zakat

and voluntary giving such as Sadaqah donations and Waqf endowments, to contribute to emergency response and development programmes.

It is estimated that global annual Zakat contributions alone may reach up to US\$600 billion, making this a significant potential source of sustainable funding to help achieve the SDGs. Funding will be allocated to UNICEF and IDB programmes in the 57 Member Countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which have been identified as eligible to receive Muslim giving, uphold UNICEF core values and deliver the greatest strategic impact for children and

young people. As a lead investor to the Fund, Abdul Aziz Abdulla Al Ghurair, chairman of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, committed to contribute US \$10 million to the Fund over a three-year period. This commitment will support refugee education programmes in the Middle East and North Africa region.

“Global humanitarian needs are at critical levels and rising,” said Dr. Bandar Hajjar, President of the Islamic Development Bank. “Nearly 184 million people, including 89 million children need humanitarian assistance in 2019. Children are especially vulnerable they face the highest risk of violence, exploitation, disease and bear the brunt of climatic events, be they floods or droughts. That is why we need urgent and innovative solutions such as Islamic finance. We are proud to partner with UNICEF to develop this innovative, ethical and sustainable funding solution. Together we can provide help and assistance today and ensure a brighter tomorrow for those who need it the most our children.”

(Extracted from unicef.org)

Jakarta to Set Up Museum on Islamic History, Civilization

Jeddah: The Muslim World League (MWL) and the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI) have joined hands to build the largest-ever museum dedicated to Islamic history and civilization. The huge center, to be established in the Indonesian capital Jakarta, is expected to attract 4 million visitors a year on completion, *Arab News* reported. MWL Secretary-General Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, and Indonesia's minister of administrative reform and DMI vice chairman, Syafruddin, signed an agreement in Jeddah to mark the launch of the ambitious project. The museum will be set up as a branch of its headquarters in Madinah, which



was inaugurated during Ramadan under the sponsorship of Madinah Gov. Prince Faisal bin Salman. Using the latest presentation techniques, the Indonesian museum will house displays highlighting the

biography of Prophet Muhammad and Islamic civilization. When built, the museum is expected to cover an area of more than 100,000 square meters in the Jakarta suburb of Pioppo.

Abu Dhabi

Mosque, Church and Synagogue in One Location



A Historic Project

Embracing its diversity, the United Arab Emirates recently announced The Abrahamic Family House project. The House, will bring a mosque, a church, and a synagogue together. It is a physical manifestation of the Document on Human Fraternity, which was signed by Pope Francis and Dr Ahmed Al Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar during the pontiff's visit to Abu Dhabi in February.

Highlighting Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the three Abrahamic religions, the house will be located on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi. The Abrahamic Family House is expected to be completed by 2022, and is named after revered prophet Abraham. The project is designed by renowned British architect, David Adjaye. The three main buildings, a mosque,

a church and a synagogue will each lead to a central garden, which will include a museum and centre for education. The places of worship are all set to be the same height, however, they will each differ when it comes to exterior and interior design, reflecting each religion.

“There has never been a building that has the three faiths in one form. I wanted to see if we could make a building that has the unique experience of each of the faiths but to connect them all with the one device. And that is the garden,” David Adjaye said.

The mosque will be built facing towards the Kaaba in Makka, while the church's altar will point east towards the sun, and the synagogue's podium and Torah will face Jerusalem. Each building will have its separate street entrance, but visitors of the site will be able to look into all three buildings from the garden.

Women's Empowerment Vital for Saudi Reforms



Amal Yahya Al-Moualami has over 23 years of experience in education, training and social development.

Amal Yahya Al Moualami's appointment as general manager of international cooperation and organizations at the Saudi Human Rights Commission (SHRC) is said to be a major step towards

empowering Saudi women. She was one of six women being appointed to the SHRC, representing 25 percent of its membership. They are the first women to participate on the Commission.

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People of faith in God are supposed to be *musleheen*. They should be engaged in actions of *islah* geared to oppose and overcome *fasaad*. Working for the restoration of ecological balance and opposing efforts to destroy the environment are acts of *islah*. And so, as *musleheen*, people of faith should be actively engaged in meaningful and constructive efforts to help improve the environment and overcome the environmental crisis. That is something that is part of their faith, a part of their role as *musleheen*.

People of faith are expected to engage in virtuous or pious actions that draw people closer to God. And so, they must also engage in the virtuous action of working to oppose the *fasaad* of environmental degradation and of helping promote and preserve environmental balance. We must broaden our conventional understanding of virtuous actions to include such actions as well. Planting trees and looking after them can be a form of virtuous action, as can be joining movements for the protection of greenery or for promoting a minimalistic lifestyle. So too can promoting solar energy to replace the use of diesel or petrol, engaging in clean-up drives in residential localities, saying 'No!' to plastic where possible, protecting disappearing animal

and bird species, avoiding foods painted with chemical colours, and so on.

One could considerably lengthen this list of eco-friendly virtuous actions which we can do in our own individual capacity. Some of these may appear to be 'small' or 'ordinary' steps. But even if they are so, that's alright! On the Day of Judgment, when we appear before God, even our smallest good deed will be presented before us, just as will our smallest misdeed.

Human Beings Along with Other Forms of Life

The importance that Islam gives

An Islamic Response to the Ecological Challenge

All the components of our environment, be they on land, water or the air, are signs of God. These include rocks and mountains, insects, fish, animals and birds, plants and trees and the gases in the atmosphere. Like the verses of the Quran (which are also called *ayats*), they point to God's existence. This being the case, protecting the environment and respecting it is binding on us. To deface, defile or destroy Nature would thus be an impious or sinful act.



to respect for Nature is also evident from the Islamic understanding of the role of human beings on this planet. According to Islam, our role here is that of trustees or guardians. Hence, our relation to Nature should be one of stewardship, not of mastery. We are only stewards,

not owners of this planet. The sole Owner of this planet and everything in it is God. Till not very long ago, some people advocated that human beings were Masters of Nature or Conquerors of Nature. Today, however, there is a growing awareness that we are simply trustees of Nature and that it is our duty to protect it, not only for us humans but for all forms of life.

It is important to note here that the bounties of this planet are not meant only for human beings. Rather, they are meant for every form of life. Planet Earth, with its

many bounties, is our home while we live here, but it is not just for human beings that God created the earth. God prepared and created it for all living beings, for all life forms. The Quran (55:10) says: "He has laid out the earth for His creatures."

All the creations of God are a Divine work of art. In the Quran, they are called *aayaat* (singular: *ayat*) or signs of God, indicative of the greatness, goodness, subtlety and wisdom of the Creator. All the components of our environment, be they on land, water or the air, are signs of God. These include rocks and mountains, insects, fish, animals and birds, plants and trees and the gases in the atmosphere. Like the verses of the Quran (which are also called *ayats*), they point to God's existence. This being the case, protecting the environment and respecting it is binding on us. To deface, defile or destroy Nature would thus be an impious or sinful act. To disrespect Nature by polluting it is to disrespect and abuse a sign of the Creator.

(Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz is presently Vice-Chancellor of the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India. He is the founder-editor of the Urdu monthly 'Science' magazine, founded in 1994. He has written extensively on the interface of Islam, ecology and science. He can be contacted on maparvaiz@gmail.com)

Transformation of a Village

Akbar Khan left his studies after the 12th standard to enter the family business in Kolkata. After he took charge of the village, Akbar Khan has worked dedicatedly to improve the conditions of the village.

By Sadathullah Khan

Bara is a village in Ghazipur district in Uttar Pradesh, near the border with Bihar. A Discover Yourself workshop was recently held by the pradhan in the village. Bara has an approximate population of around 50,000, of which the majority are Muslims. In 2015, Rabia Tabassum, wife of Akbar Khan, was elected as the pradhan of this village, the seat being reserved for women. Akbar Khan left his studies after the 12th standard to enter the family business in Kolkata. After he took charge of the village, Akbar Khan has worked dedicatedly to improve the condition of the village. He accessed government schemes, and the funds allocated were honestly spent. In fact, Akbar Khan also spent from his own money for the village's development. He saw that no



Children in the village

funds were diverted or misused. One such scheme he started to implement is the building of the toilets. Around two thousand toilets have been built till now. Other such schemes that have been implemented in the village include a street lighting scheme, a concrete-blocks pathways scheme, a government ration scheme for the poor, and mid-day



Akbar Khan

meals for school children. Additionally, cycles have been provided to physically-challenged people in the village. Health camps are held frequently for the benefit of the villagers. In a short period of four years, the village has got a virtually new face. The people are now able to access benefits from government schemes which they deserve. Our heartfelt thanks to people like Rabia Tabassum and Akbar Khan, who serve as an inspiration to others.

AMP Award for Dr Sadathullah Khan



The Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Dr Sadathulla Khan, Editor, Islamic Voice and Founder of Peace for You International Foundation for his outstanding service in the field of education and invaluable contribution to the society at large. This is under the aegis of the AMP National Award for Excellence in Education 2019. AMP had started the Education Excellence Awards in 2017, with

an aim to felicitate and recognize teachers who are going beyond their duty and inspiring students to reach greater heights. In 2018 AMP announced the names of 100+ Influential Educators across the country. This year too, AMP aims to highlight the contribution of teachers in Nation Building through the help of this prestigious award. Find the full list on AMP website

http://www.ampindia.org/AMP_Education_Award_2019

By Sadathullah Khan

Muslim Industrialists Association (MIA) MIA is an NGO established in 2004. It is registered under the Societies Act, with its core activity being entrepreneurial development.

MIA is planning to launch an exclusive women entrepreneurs' chapter in Bangalore, and it is hoped that the initiative will soon spread elsewhere in India. Our mission is to empower women by removing barriers to entrepreneurship and accelerating positive change that allows women to become a part of the mainstream Indian economy and be able to contribute towards the country's economic growth.

MIA seeks to encourage women in leadership, innovation, dynamism, risk navigation and in art of balancing to achieve personal and professional success, within the framework of Islamic etiquette.

Traditionally, many women limited themselves to their family life and were satisfied with family, the kitchen and their children. However, now there has been a rise in women entrepreneurs in numerous fields. MIA seeks to encourage women in leadership, innovation, dynamism, risk navigation and in art of balancing to achieve personal and professional success, within

the framework of Islamic etiquette.

Recently, MIA started its women entrepreneurs wing, the primary aim of promoting and encouraging women in entrepreneurship and helping them grow by conducting seminars and workshops on various topics, such as leadership, innovation, dynamism, risk navigation, fund raise, personality development, banking & subsidies, import-export, etc., for the benefit of its members. We also guide entrepreneurs to obtain various statutory registrations as required under the law.

MIA Women's Wing will be headed jointly by the Governing Council Member and a group of established entrepreneurs who are working towards guiding women from our community to grow and become economically strong and independent.

The launch of MIA Women

Good News for Muslim Women Entrepreneurs

The launch of MIA Women Entrepreneurs Wing is scheduled to be held on 30th November 2019.



November 2019. We are looking at a strength of 200 or more participants, who will benefit from being a part of this dynamic forum. It is not just about increasing the number of members, but also about creating a forum that becomes an integral part of every business. Women are key to the growth of any organization. MIA believes that

there are immensely talented women business leaders who could enrich the association in myriad ways.

We kindly invite established women entrepreneurs/business owners and budding and aspiring women entrepreneurs to come and attend the event and learn more about our work and vision and join hands with us. All required mentoring will be provided by MIA for your ventures.

To be united in our focus of growth is the need of the hour. This would enable us to grow economically and become strong as a community and also help contribute substantially to the economic growth of our country.

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Sheikh Osman Sharubutu

Ghana's 100-year-old Grand Mufti Promotes Harmony

“ Sheikh Sharubutu has been Ghana's top Muslim cleric for 26 years, and has always insisted the key tenets of Islam are rooted in peace and love, as his weekly sermons at Friday prayers at the Central Mosque in the country's capital attest. ”



Pictures of Sheikh Osman Sharubutu, sitting attentively in the pews of Accra's Christ the King Catholic Church, went viral on social media some months ago. The grand mufti, leader of the Muslim community in Ghana, in West Africa, wants to ensure that his legacy is peace the fruit of inter-faith harmony. Those on social media championing the imam's approach described him as a light shining in the darkness. Some critics condemned his actions as an abomination, but Sheikh Sharubutu insisted he was not worshipping but moving the relationship between Muslims and Christians from mere tolerance to engagement. "The chief imam is changing the narrative about Islam from a religion of wickedness, a religion of conflict, a religion of hate for others, to a religion whose mission is rooted in the virtues of love, peace and forgiveness," his spokesperson AremeyaoShaibu told the BBC. Sheikh Sharubutu has been

Ghana's top Muslim cleric for 26 years, and has always insisted the key tenets of Islam are rooted in peace and love, as his weekly sermons at Friday prayers at the Central Mosque in the country's capital attest. Another favourite theme of his is a call to shun materialism, saying it only brings greed. At his residence in the poor neighbourhood of Fadama, he has insisted that the gates remain open. For years now, hundreds of township residents troop in each morning to fetch fresh water from taps at the property while others visit at night with bowls to be served hot meals for free. It is the nature of Islamic leaders to give to charity, but his supporters say the scale of his work stands out. He has personally sponsored hundreds of students in their education at home and abroad and has also established an educational trust fund to support talented but needy pupils.

Ghana, where Muslims make up 18% of the population in the mainly Christian country, has no history of religious warfare. But

relations can be fractious and the imam has sought to douse any flare-ups. He is a member of the National Peace Council, made up of 13 mainly religious leaders - but he is also known to intervene personally to resolve tensions. Earlier this year, he reprimanded a group of young Muslim men who attacked a church in Accra after its pastor predicted his death

in the coming 12 months. He told those who had been armed with machetes to forgive the preacher and managed to defuse the tension, something that earned him the thanks of the police chief.

When gunshots reverberated through the streets of Old Tafo in Kumasi in a row over a cemetery in 2016, he immediately made a trip to the Ashanti regional capital. A curfew had been imposed after one person died in clashes. Traditional leaders wanted proof that the Muslim community

owned a section of land in the graveyard to bury their dead. The situation nearly degenerated into all-out war after rampaging Muslim youths slapped the traditional leader of the Tafo community. The slapping of a chief constitutes a desecration of his office, a taboo in Ghana. According to Mr Shaibu, the chief imam went to the palace of the Tafo chief, and without even speaking a word, he calmed the situation by the humility and meekness of his presence, preventing further unrest.

It was the second time that he had interceded in a fallout over a cemetery. In 2012, the corpse of an imam in the Volta Region was exhumed and dumped by the roadside by a community who felt Muslims should not bury their dead in that graveyard. Sheikh Sharubutu flew into the south-eastern region and negotiated a peace deal, saving the state from using force to quell the riots.

“ Ghana, where Muslims make up 18% of the population in the mainly Christian country, has no history of religious warfare. But relations can be fractious and the imam has sought to douse any flare-ups. ”

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In 2005/06, when coal plants were set up in Kutch District of Gujarat district, locals were promised employment. The project, set up by Adani and Tata Groups and backed by international financial institutions, was considered 'efficient' and aimed at selling power to other states too. More than a decade later, locals continue to count the ecological costs of these plants. Tragadi, one of the villages, is home to fishermen who realised that their catch has decreased dramatically after the plants were set up, while the village of Navinal, which was rich in horticulture and agricultural produce, saw damaged date palms and other fruits and reduction in farming.

Adani Power started the region's first coal-fired power plant. The village of Navinal is about 8 km from the Adani Mundra plant. The Tata Mundra "ultra mega power project," built by the Tata Group is also nearby.

The heated wastewater released from the plants containing saline, from the outflow channel of the plant, released in the sea waters at the rate of 600 million litres per hour, was badly affecting marine resources. Apart from this, huge amounts of sand were deposited near wells used for drinking water, turning them saline and non-potable. The coal dust and fly ash and the groundwater now contaminated with saline water have made farming difficult and many people have given up growing crops.

And this is when Budha Ismail Jam, a fisherman from Tragadi, and the people of Navinal came together to form MASS (MachimarAdhikharSangharshSanghathan) in 2010 and act collectively to make accountable the powers behind their woes.

In a conversation with TwoCircles.net, Jam explained

how their lives had been impacted after the power plants were set up. "Earlier, I and my sons used to catch plenty of fish within a short distance of just 2 kilometres with just one fishing boat. But gradually our catch decreased and we had to sail at least 12 kilometres to catch fish. And since one boat was not enough, I had to avail a loan and buy 3 more fishing boats." "Today, our catch from the 4 boats equals the catch of one boat before the power plant was set up," he explained.

They first complained to the companies about the damage to marine life and demanded that the companies switch to a closed-cycle cooling system instead of the open cooling system that required 3 times more water. But the company refused to comply. Then, the people had a series of meetings with the whole community and the leaders approached a Delhi-based NGO called Centre for Financial Accountability'. The executive director of this NGO, Joe Athialy, helped the fishermen and farmers moved the complaint advisor ombudsman of IFC (International Finance Corporation). The ombudsman conducted an internal audit and submitted its report in 2012 and the CRP submitted its report in 2015 but nothing changed.

The Role of the International Finance Corporation

The IFC, which has its headquarters in the United States, has partially funded the TATA power project. The entire project costs \$4.14 billion and the IFC has funded \$450 million, while the remaining was funded by Asian

Budha Ismail Jam

How Budha Ismail Jam, a Gujarati fisherman, challenged multinationals in a US Court.

By Nikhat Fatima



Jam, also the leader of the fishermen community which is mostly Muslim, told TwoCircles.net, "due to the water contamination, many people here keep falling sick frequently".

Development Bank and other agencies. IFC, which is a member of the World Bank Group, focuses

on financing private sector developmental projects in poor and developing countries. The mission of IFC is to "carry out investment and advisory activities with the intent to not harm people and the environment." However while investing in the TATA Mundra Plant; they went against their mission, causing damage to the environment, livelihood and health of the people.

Jam, also the leader of the fishermen community which is mostly Muslim, told TwoCircles.net, "due to the water contamination, many people here keep falling sick frequently".

The Suit in the US Court

Jam, Bharat Patel from the Fishing Union and Joe Athialy sent a petition signed by 30,000 signatories to the World Bank President asking them to withdraw the funds to the TATA project due to the environmental violations caused by the plant. They even wrote to Indian tribunals that worked on environmental issues. They tasted brief victory when the nearby plants were halted. But operations resumed when the plant got environmental clearance a year later. But after their petition

reached the World Bank, their story became known in other parts of the world and soon activist lawyers from EarthRights International came to their village and met the aggrieved fishermen.

And thus in 2015 began the Jam et al v. International Finance Corporation trial. EarthRights International (ERI), an NGO which works extensively in defense of human rights and the environment, supported Jam and the others in suing the IFC in the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia claiming damages and injunctive relief for the harm caused due to air, water and land pollution by the power plant financed by IFC. IFC claimed immunity because groups like the World Bank were exempt from prosecution under the US International Organisation Immunities Act (IOIA), 1945. And in 2016 the court agreed that IFC enjoys 'absolute immunity' and dismissed the case. But Jam and his team did not give up. They appealed again in the court of Appeals (which is like High Court) for the District of Columbia Circuit where again IFC won because the order of the district was upheld. Just when things were becoming bleak, Stanford Supreme Court Litigation Clinic, a law school which offers hands-on legal experience in Supreme Court litigations, offered to help the litigants Jam, Patel, Earthrights

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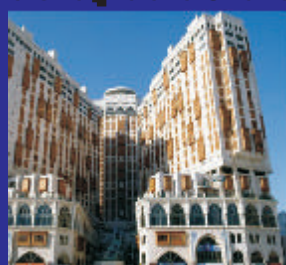
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By Shafiq Nazim Ghabra

A series of trials have taken place of Arab leaders who were overthrown by social movements and their demands for freedom and political reform in the Arab Spring. If we take a closer look at these trials and at their historical significance and impact on Arab countries, we can conclude that they did not deal fully with the injustices of despotic rule and with the crimes which accompanied that era.

The court cases began before the Arab Spring with the trial of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and then after it with the trial of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and more recently with the trials of Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and the leading figures in Bouteflika's regime in Algeria, including his brother. However, these trials did not address the major grievances which accumulated in the modern Arab autocratic era.

Public Treasury

In the past, for example, Saddam Hussein was tried for the killing of a number of people in one particular area of Iraq, whilst Omar al-Bashir is now on trial for the huge funds which he either acquired or which were transferred to him from the public treasury or from other Arab countries.

The Arab dictators have not been prosecuted for "breach of trust" or "betrayal of the confidence placed in them by the people"; nor have they been tried for "abuse of power", for the wars they provoked, the executions they ordered, or for the hasty and reckless decisions they made.

No Arab dictator has been tried for creating a police state and instilling terror and fear in its

Prosecuting Tyranny in the Arab World

In the wake of the Arab Spring, not one Arab dictator has faced charges for creating a police state and inducing terror among citizens. Similarly, none has been prosecuted for destroying state institutions, the essentials of citizenship, or the means of social advancement.

— Arabs today are on a quest for serious reform and comprehensive transformation so that they emerge from this pit into which the tyrants have sealed them.

— Don't the questions about the acquisition of personal wealth and succession in a republic, merit a fair and full hearing? What about the turning of Egypt into a police state?



citizens; nor have any of them been called to account for demolishing the structure of society, for turning brother against brother, son against father, or brother against sister.

Indeed, they haven't faced any charges for turning their societies into places devoid of soul, ambition and any sense of human dignity. The Arab tyrants made every young man and woman dream of emigrating and fleeing these failed states and ossified regimes.

The trial of Saddam Hussein after 2003 should have encompassed the misuse of power after he waged war after war from Iran to Kuwait. Indeed, he should have been tried for mass murder in the uprising in 1991 and for not saving Iraq from one disaster after another, culminating in its capitulation under U.S. occupation.

Military Coup

Saddam should have been tried for his crimes against his comrades and his friends, as well as against the cream of Iraq,

both in and outside the Ba'ath Party. He should also have been prosecuted for the crimes he carried out against the Kurds, the Shia and against his many Sunni opponents. His execution after a show trial was not a wise decision; it was more about revenge than a proper trial to lay bare the true face of tyranny.

In contrast, there is the lawsuit against former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, which should have encompassed the whole period of his rule, starting with the military coup he carried out against a democratically elected government in 1989, through the human rights violations, his responsibility for the loss of South Sudan, for the collapse of the state, for the civil wars and for the massacres carried out by militias he created.

We should not forget that, since 2009, al-Bashir has been facing charges brought by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity because of his army's war in

Darfur.

Where did all the poverty come from?

At the same time, the trial of former President Hosni Mubarak should not have focused solely on a single issue; what was actually needed was a hearing about his whole rule, with all its transgressions and corruption.

Don't the questions about the acquisition of personal wealth and succession in a republic, merit a fair and full hearing? What about the turning of Egypt into a police state?

What about the systematic human rights violations committed by its security services? What about the brutal murder of the blogger Khaled Said who subsequently became the icon of the revolution?

We wonder where the poverty in Egypt comes from. If the regime is not responsible for its spread, is the international aid system or unemployment?

For instance, who was responsible during Mubarak's

rule, for the imprisonment of Karim Amer and for the psychological torture which he suffered in Egypt's prisons for 3 years beginning in 2006? And why were Amer and dozens of others charged with "insulting the president", as well as facing trumped up charges relating to Islam?

The abuse and ill-treatment in prison knew no boundaries, and Amer later wrote about the prison officer who assaulted him and kept him locked up. Where is Amer today and what became of the victims of these brutal regimes?

A few days ago I watched a documentary made by Amer after he quit Egypt and the Arab world for Europe. What Arab rulers don't realize is how the grievances, and what is behind them, stretch across the globe. Moreover, they linger and fester because they have never been addressed.

How can we get rid of a tyrant, if we don't call him to account based on what we know are his duties, role and responsibilities towards his people? Without a trial of his actions, tyranny will return in a new form and shape, and it will take with it the rest of the Arab world.

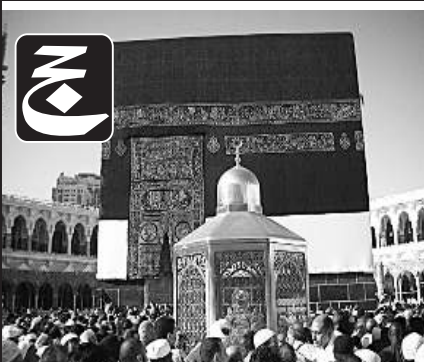
One of the most dangerous and complex issues in the region is the relationship between the people and the state. The state was and continues to be a means of enrichment, repression, subjugation and corruption. This does not mean that the state and the political system have made no advances, but these developments result from the intersection of interests, not because of society's goals or the advancement of its people.

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Bangladeshi Female Workers Leaving Saudi Because of Sexual Abuse

Bangladesh admitted for the first time recently that its female workers are being repatriated from Saudi Arabia because of sexual abuse. In a report submitted by Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to the parliamentary standing committee, the department admitted women had come back because of sexual and physical abuse.

This admission comes after the committee demanded answers on whether women are facing abuse while working in Saudi Arabia. The ministry responded by stating that testimony from 111 women who returned in August 2019 from the Gulf kingdom showed that 35 per cent of returnees had left because of sexual and physical abuse. The report noted 11 reasons why Bangladeshi female workers ran away from their employers. These include physical abuse, deprivation of food and holidays, denial of sick leave, and non-payment of salaries.

BRAC, an international development organisation based in Bangladesh, that has been helping female domestic workers return home from Saudi Arabia, welcomed the Bangladeshi government's findings. Shariful Hasan, programme head for BRAC migration, told Middle East Eye that for the last two years, his NGO had been raising the alarm about Bangladeshi female migrants returning from Saudi



Arabia because of abuse. "Our work has shown that women are coming back from Saudi Arabia because of abuse, non-payment of salaries, work overload and denial of sick leave," Hasan said.

Bangladesh began sending female workers to Saudi Arabia in 2015 after signing an agreement with the Gulf kingdom. The agreement was signed as other countries, including Indonesia, stopped sending female workers to Saudi Arabia due to reports of abuse.

In 2018, Middle East Eye revealed that Bangladesh was forced to set up safe houses inside Saudi Arabia to protect hundreds of women who face sexual and physical abuse inside the kingdom.

Rothna Begum, a senior woman's researcher for Human Rights Watch who focuses on the Gulf, called on the

Bangladeshi government to use this as an opportunity to "educate" its citizens of the dangers faced by women working in Saudi Arabia. "The fact that the Bangladeshi government denied that such was the extent of the abuse of the workers is highly problematic. It suggests that they do not want the Bangladeshi society to know about how bad the situation is," Begum said. "But what the government should really do is ensure that Bangladeshis know about what is going on, but also what they are doing about it. Are they seeking to provide further protections?" "Are they putting pressure on the countries of a destination like Saudi Arabia to ensure that their workers are not treated in this manner and that they have the legal protections and redress available to ensure that they are able to escape where necessary and able to get the justice that they deserve."

Iranian Women's New Strides

Reports in the Iranian media shows a female captain and her co-pilot have flown a passenger plane, a first in the history of the country's aviation industry. The reports published recently showed photos of the two pilots taken from the social media showing them before and after the two-way flight between the capital Tehran and the city of Mashhad.

The pilots were identified as Neshat Jahandari and Forouz Firouzi, both of them apparently working for low-budget airline Zagros, although there was no official confirmation from the carrier. The reports said that it was the first time in Iran's aviation history that female pilots had taken control of a flight

totally on their own.

"My feelings were unexplainable. This historic incident was unprecedented in Iran's aviation industry, and for a first time a domestic flight in Iran was carried out by two women," said Jahandari, 29, who became captain just two months ago after working as co-pilot for five years. Unverified reports suggest Iran

has fewer than a dozen female pilots. Flag carrier Homa allowed them only last year when a former female chief executive said it had become a policy of the company to hire more women for key positions. Female pilots recruited by Homa, known internationally as IranAir, have yet to take control of a plane as they continue to work as co-pilots.



UN Human Rights Experts Urge Saudi Authorities To Release Jailed Women's Rights Activist

A group of United Nations human rights experts have urged Saudi authorities to release jailed prominent Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul, whose arrest more than four years ago marked the start of a crackdown led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman against women activists in Saudi Arabia.

"It is shockingly hypocritical that Ms. al-Hathloul remains in prison for campaigning to change laws which have since been amended. Indeed, she should never have been imprisoned in the first place for exercising her fundamental rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association," the experts said in a statement recently. The statement added, "In spite of recent improvements in Saudi Arabia's male guardianship laws, it is imperative that the



Imprisoned Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul

world [should] not lose sight of the human rights concerns which persist in the country, as human rights defenders have continued to express."

The UN experts then called on the Saudi regime "to immediately release Ms. al-Hathloul and all other human rights defenders in Saudi prisons, and urged Saudi officials "to launch a prompt, effective and independent investigation into whether she has been tortured." "No one should suffer such adversity for exercising their right to defend the human rights of others," they pointed out.

Saudi Arabia Drops Dress Code for Foreign Women



Saudi Arabia will drop its strict dress code for foreign women as it seeks for the first time to lure holidaymakers and the spending that could help develop the country's economy away from its reliance on oil. Foreign women won't have to wear an *abaya*, the flowing cloak that's been mandatory attire for decades, though they'll be instructed to wear "modest clothing," said Ahmed Al-Khateeb, chairman of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.

LETTER TO EDITOR

Website Woes!

I really wish you would do something about the 'Islamic Voice' website. You have published several letters complaining about the website, but despite that I don't know if you have taken any action. In this day and age, if you want your magazine to be read more widely, please do GIVE MORE FOCUS TO HAVING A MORE READER-FRIENDLY WEBSITE. The old version of your website was so much better. You don't know how many prospective readers you may be missing out on with the present shabby website that you have.

'Sulaiman', Bangalore

Meeting with a Noble Soul

Venkatji and his organization called Swabhimaan have been working in a vast slum area near Koramangala, in Bangalore, for many years, among the poor of different communities.

By Shaban Ali

It was 28th September, when we decided to meet Mr. Venkat Iyer, a social worker in his 60s who has devoted himself to serving people in need. It was a blessed moment to meet him. Joyfully he shook my hand, and I felt very happy! Venkatji has a soft heart, is very simple and meets everyone with a smile on his face.

Venkatji and his organization called Swabhimaan have been working in a vast slum area near Koramangala, in Bangalore, for many years, among the poor of different communities. We passed the two clinics that his team runs in the slums, which levy only a nominal charge. Venkatji took us to a couple of places where good, nutritious food was being distributed by members of his team, free of cost, to a large number of poor people. This happens perhaps almost every day of the year!

One food distribution point was at a small room near a mosque. A man named Sulaiman offloaded the good from a mini-truck, with Venkat Sir helping him. Three large steel containers filled with food were offloaded, and then bread, rice, pulses and chutney were distributed to the people. Moments later, many women trooped there for what for many of them may have been their major meal of the day. Ahead, we found the mini-truck loaded with food again, this time near a temple. It was amazing how dedicatedly Venkatji and his team were serving economically poor people without any distinction of creed and caste. The time I spent with Venkatji and some of his colleagues made me reflect on how the poor

A most valuable thing I learnt from Venkatji was that we should serve all people, beyond all distinctions of community, creed, caste and class. As fellow creatures of God, we are all the same; no community and no family is greater than another.



Venkat Iyer, with his colleague Sulaiman at the back

struggle to survive their whole lives.

I asked Venkatji where he managed to procure such abundant food every day. From three software companies, he said. There are many employees in these companies and not all of them eat there and so a sizeable proportion of the food goes waste. So, they have arranged for unused food to be given to Venkatji's team to be distributed among the needy. Venkatji's team also gives loans to needy people (these are mostly women) to set up small businesses money that helps to meet their daily requirements. They also distribute rations, to some 100 families.

On the way back we passed by one of the two clinics that Venkatji's organization runs. Inside, a young woman was tutoring a couple of students, making good use of the clinic space. This woman teaches in a local school, and in the evening she helps students by tutoring them here. This is such a nice idea if qualified and educated young people can share their knowledge with others like that. We also visited M. Ganesh, a member of Venkatji's team who is physically-challenged and who runs a good business of making paper bags. There, we also met a person named David, who is suffering from slight cerebral palsy, working there. He seemed to have a hilarious heart and a smile on his face.

A most valuable thing I learnt from Venkatji was that we should serve all people, beyond all distinctions of community, creed, caste and class. As fellow creatures of God, we are all the same; no community and no family is greater than another. Mosques, churches and temples are not built to create disputes. They are built to unite people and draw them closer to God. In matters of belief and ritual practice we may have some differences, but we belong to the One Lord. We should all seek the Lord's pleasure, even while seeking to do His will.

To meet and spend time with people like Venkatji was a great blessing. We should appreciate people like him and join hands with them.

(For more information about Venkatji, Swabhimaan and their work, see <https://swabhimaanweb.wordpress.com/>)

◀ Page 6

Sheikh Osman Sharubutu

He puts his peaceful philosophy down to a Quranic verse, which says people should be fair with each other to help achieve a harmonious society: "Allah does not forbid you from showing kindness, and dealing justly with those who have not fought you about religion and have not driven you out of your homes. Allah loves just dealers."

As a young man, he made this the central message of his lessons as a Muslim teacher in Accra, going on to become one of the country's most erudite Islamic scholars. He then made history when he was appointed chief imam in 1993, at the age of 74, as until then Ghana had not had a national Muslim leader. There is some

trepidation about finding a successor who can follow in his footsteps, given that he has become so central to sustaining religious peace. But his serene nature seems to be key to his continued longevity, something those who come after him may want to emulate. "I am old, strong and vital. I can see, [am] able to read and write without the support of any gadgets. I am able to walk on my own God has not tested me with weakness," his spokesman quoted him as saying. "I am in perfect control of my mind, I have not grown senile. Placing God at the centre of my life gives me calmness and inner peace in life."

(Extracted from bbc.com)

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Budha Ismail Jam

International to move the Supreme Court of US in 2018.

TwoCircles.net also spoke to Joe Athialy, who had attended the proceedings at Washington on behalf of the litigants back home and he explained, "We understood the importance of our case being heard in the Supreme Court when we learnt that out of 7,000 cases, the Supreme Court agrees to hear only 150 cases. And we were lucky our case was one among these. Here, all the 9 judges sit for all the cases unlike in India."

"But in our case one judge, who was in the Appeals court, excused himself and the other 8 judges heard the case."

He also explained that there were a lot of people present in the courtroom and that the entire proceedings were completed very fast.

And then came the verdict this year in February 2019, wherein the Supreme Court, ruled in favour of Jam and others and ruled that even International organisations can be sued and that they do not enjoy absolute immunity.

This was a landmark judgment and a huge victory, not just for the plaintiffs from India, but to all the people who think that international organisations are not above the law.

On winning the suit, Joe Athialy told TwoCircles.net, "This is a big deal not just for the people of Mundra but for multiple reasons because this is the first time in the world, a case against the World Bank has come to this level, this is the first time the immunity of the world bank is challenged. And this allows people anywhere in the world to sue the World Bank if

there has been damage to the environment and lives of the people."

"We believe this is another step towards holding these institutions accountable," he added. "Now the case has been sent to the district court for further litigation."

Apart from this case against the IFC, Jam, Patel and Joe have also written to the other financial institutions that have funded this project like ADB. They have also written to the pollution control board in India.

"We also wrote to the Indian Banks through whom the project is operating. But none of the banks has even responded", Athialy said. "At least international banks respond. They don't even have such policies".

Jam says, "I am happy that our efforts have paid off and we have won the case. But I have asked for compensation for the losses we have incurred in our livelihood and I hope we will be given compensation."

"I was offered money for not fighting the case but I stood my ground because I was not thinking of just myself but all the fishermen community," he said proudly. But in a sad tone he added, "Earlier when our fish business was good, I had many dreams for my grandchildren. But today we are not earning half of what we did before and I don't give much thought to my dreams." However, he hopes for better days if the courts order the power plant to stop the open cooling system then the wastewater outflow will be reduced and things might improve slightly better.

(Taken from twocircles.net)

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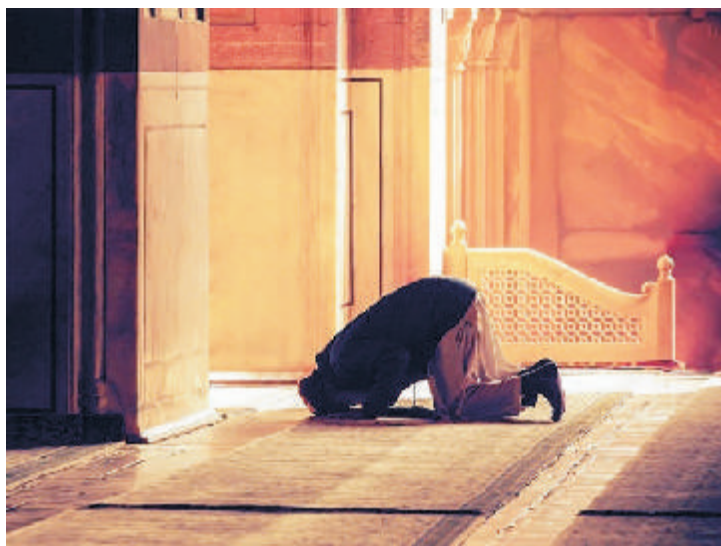
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Masjid Parichay

Mumbai mosque launches initiative to combat misconceptions.

The Jamaat-e Islami Hind has launched an initiative in Mumbai to invite people from other faiths to visit a mosque to weed out misconceptions about Muslims and Islam. The initiative known as 'Masjid Parichay' ('Introduction to the Mosque') is aimed at making people of other faiths aware of Muslims and removing any misconceptions about followers of Islam. The Masjid Parichay was organised on October 6 by Millet Welfare Association at the Mira Road Mosque. The 'parichay' was held in association with Students Islamic Organisation (SIO), a student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind.

Jivajirao Patil, who visited the mosque, said he always used to think that there was no entry for non-Muslims in the mosque. "It's a wonderful feeling. Today, I come to know that everyone can visit the mosque. No one enjoys a special status as a poor can occupy his place in the first row if he comes early, while the



richest man in the world may stand in the last line if he comes last," the report quoted Jivajirao Patil as saying.

JIH volunteer, Dr Parvez Mandviwala, has said that the unfounded fears have created a lot of misconceptions among non-Muslims. The non-Muslims guests were asked to witness 'Wudu' (ablution rituals) before they were taken

to the mosque's main prayer hall. Explaining the importance of 'Wudu', Dr Mandviwala said that the purpose of ablution is to purify oneself before standing in front of God in submission. The Imam at the mosque also delivered a short sermon to the guests on humanity, unity and equality.

(for details, see report on timesnownews.com)

Honesty of two Muslim teenagers spreads Diwali cheer in Jodhpur

By Rajesh Asnani
Express News Service

JAIPUR: At a time when faith in human goodness is quickly eroding, an act of honesty by two school-going boys gives hope that morality and ethics still shine in Indian society. Inspired by their grandfather's teachings on honesty, two Muslim boys showed an exemplary zeal to find the real owner of a lost bundle of notes that they found on a road.

Two 13-year-old Muslim cousins, Abdul Majid and Abdul Qadir, from Bilara tehsil in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district had gone to the market to buy a mobile sim card when they found cash worth Rs 15,500 lying on the road near a petrol pump.

Though it was a huge amount for them in view of their financial status, the boys were not lured into any mischief but instead went straight to their grandfather Fakir Mohammed who had always taught the children to be upright and honest in their lives. Fakir, who works as a rag picker, heard the story from his two grandsons and immediately set out with them to



Both teenagers with their grand father Fakir Mohammad and Mishri Lal (R)

find out the rightful owner of the money.

Heading straight to the place where the bundle of money was found, the three came to know, after several enquiries from nearby shopkeepers, that one Mishri Lal Gurjar had come looking for the money and had left his number with a mobile store.

It was only after Gurjar came and established his credentials by giving the denominations of the notes lost, the amount was duly returned to him.

As Fakir Mohammed says, "I was scared that we might give it to some wrong person then how will we give the money to the right owner. Which is why I asked him about the notes and

amount. When he answered correctly, we confirmed that he was the real owner."

Fakir was delighted that despite their poverty and tender age, his grandchildren have stuck to the honest path that he has guided them towards "These kids live with me and I have always taught them not to lie and to live honestly. I am happy that they have adhered to my teachings practically," he said.

As per Gurjar, he had come to purchase feed for his cattle but probably dropped the amount while taking out his mobile from his pocket.

While he had given up hopes of recovering the money, he saw the good deed of the youngsters at the behest of their grandfather, following which he happily gave Rs 500 to the young boys for sweets and merriment as his token of appreciation and thanks. "Though I stopped him he insisted saying that for such honest kids even Rs 5000 is less. If it had been some other kids, they would have just happily distributed it among themselves," Fakir said.

(Extracted from newindianexpress.com)

Third National Urdu Social Sciences Congress

Third National Urdu Social Sciences Congress

Hyderabad: Centre for Promotion of Knowledge in Urdu (CPKU) of Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) in association with School of Arts and Social Sciences (SA&SS), is organising the third National Urdu Social Science Congress on November 27 and 28.

According to Prof. S M Rahmathullah, Convenor and Dean the main theme of the congress is "Social Sciences in 21st Century – Concerns and Challenges".

The sub-themes are – 'Teaching and Research in Social Sciences'; 'Gender Equity and Justice in globalized world'; 'Public Administration in 21st Century : Theory & Practice';

'Changing contours of Social Work'; 'Politics and Social Justice'; 'Religion and Politics in Islamic Societies'; 'Reading and Writings of History in Modern Times'; 'Society, Religion and Culture in 21st Century'; and 'Debates in Political Economy'. According to Dr. Abid Moiz, Consultant, CPKU and Co-Convenor, papers have to be written in Urdu only. Interested participants can submit the abstract of their papers on email to nusscmanuu@gmail.com. The last date for submission of the complete paper is 20th November.

For further details contact:
040-23008327, 9490377817,
9502044291; e mail:
nusscmanuu@gmail.com

Karnataka State Haj Organisers Association 7th General Body Meeting



The 7th General Body meeting of the Karnataka State Haj Organisers Association (KSHOA) was held in Bangalore on 19th October. It was addressed by Shoukath Ali Sultan, President of Karnataka State Haj Organisers Association, with Guest of Honour, Mr. Sarfaraz Khan, CEO, KSHOA and Shri R. Dayakar, former Ambassador to Iraq and Jordan, also Ex Joint Secretary to Govt. of India. Also present on the dais were Chairman of KSHOA Iqbal A Siddiqui, General Secretary Shafi Ahmed, Vice President Mohiuddin Sharif Aleem, Joint Secretary Maqbool Ahmed, Ex Chairman of Haj Committee Zulfikar Ahmed Khan and other dignitaries of KSHOA. Members from other states' Haj committees also attended.

Shri R. Dayakar mentioned that there are many issues and challenges faced by Haj tour operators.

While addressing the gathering Chairman of KSHOA, Iqbal A Siddique thanked God for giving him an opportunity to serve the Hajis. There were only 2 Haj operators before 1986, and after that year, the number of such operators grew, leading to the formation of an association as a common platform. There is a need for promoting awareness among the Hajis and to deal with the issue of tour operators who lack proper registration and those who try to cheat the Hajis. The KSHOA Chairman stressed the need for proper rules and regulations and strict vigil on cheats.

Haj Tour operators are now referred to as HGOs (Haj Group Operators) instead of PTOs (Private Tours Operators). Among the issues that were discussed at the meeting were some of the challenges faced by private Haj tour operators in recent years.



Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Week

A Unique Community Service and Outreach Model

- Road and Drains Cleaning
- Plantation of Trees in roads / parks
- Sapling Distribution
- Cleaning, Watering, Protecting Trees
- Efforts for Environment Protection and Water Conservation

- Awareness about Cleanliness and Environment.

2. RELATION DAY

'If you cook some soup, add extra water and send some to your neighbour'

- Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad emphasised maintaining and building good relations at all levels. Starting from the immediate family to neighbours, society and even to adversaries, he took that extra step to maintain relations. Under this theme, participants can take up activities to build connection, mutual respect and love in the community. They can include:

- Re-connecting with distant / disconnected family members
- Visit and Gifts to neighbours and friends
- Helping Others (disabled, poor)
- Water / juice / fruit distribution in public

3. ORPHAN DAY



'If you show mercy to those on the earth, He who is in the Heaven will show mercy on you.'

- Prophet Muhammad

Taking care of those who have nobody to take care of them, is a great service and an easy way to win Allah's love. Prophet Muhammad laid the foundation of a balanced, supportive welfare model for the deserving. He emphasised taking care of the orphans, the uncared, the unwell, the forsaken. All those who had no one, had the Prophet. Under this theme, take up activities such as:

- Food Distribution to poor
- Clothes / Blankets Distribution to poor

- Visit to Orphanage
- Visit to Old Age Home
- Visit to Hospitals / Sick
- Distribution of Wheelchairs / Walking Sticks etc
- Distribution of livelihood aids
- Relief to the needy and poor

4. PEACE DAY

Deal gently with the people, and be not harsh; cheer them and condemn them not.

- Prophet Muhammad

Peace is one of the meaning of 'Islam', 'Peace' to one other is also what is wished when the traditional 'Assalamu Alaikum' is spoken. Peace (SALAAM) is also one of the names / attributes of God. Peace is also what Prophet Muhammad came to establish in the world. Under this Theme, strive to convey this message of Peace and Spirituality that is the essence of Islam and the message of the Prophet. Take up initiatives such as:

- Signature Campaign against Violence/Terrorism
- Peace Walk by School Children
- Talks / Literature distribution on Islam's message of Peace
- Inter-faith dialogue events
- Open House / Visits to Mosques / Madrasahs for Public.

5. HEALTH DAY



There are two blessings which many people waste: good health and free time.

- Prophet Muhammad

Health is one of the greatest gifts of God. And to help others recover/ retain it is one of the best ways to serve. Prophet Muhammad adopted a scientific approach and encouraged medicines for every disease. His

emphasis on items like dates, honey and black-seed for medicinal use are being acknowledged by science today. Under this theme, you can take up initiatives such as:

- Medical Checkup Camp
- Blood Donation Camp
- Screening Camps for Cataract, Sugar etc.
- Health / Sanitation Awareness Event
- Events on Prophetic Medicine.

6. EDUCATION DAY

"The best gift to children from parents is their correct education and training"

- Prophet Muhammad

Without adequate education, training and learning, humans are unable to play their expected role in development of society and the world. Starting with the word 'Iqra', Islam and the Prophet placed great importance to correct learning for understanding, good conduct and effectiveness. Under this theme, you can take up events such as:

- Visit to underprivileged schools for books / stationery distribution
- Award and distribution of scholarships
- Undertaking repair / water / toilet provision in an underprivileged school
- Quiz / Essay Contest in Schools on Prophet Muhammad
- Talk in Schools on Prophet Muhammad
- Women's Empowerment / Training Seminar
- Education Awareness / Career Counselling Events.

7. TELLING DAY



"Convey mine (words / teachings), even if it is a single verse"

- Prophet Muhammad

The only way to drive away darkness is to spread light. Hence, spreading the true



message of Islam and Prophet Muhammad can dispel the wrong notions that some people have. Under his theme, you can share Prophet's messages / quotes etc. or organise events based on his teachings and message. Suggested activities include:

- Thank you Cards to those providing public services (police, nurses, fire-brigade etc.)
- Badges / Stamps / Quote Stickers Distribution
- Hoardings / Posters with Prophet's Quotes
- Small gifts / pens (with Prophet Muhammad's quotes) to visitors/customers
- Workshop / Conference on Prophet Muhammad
- Positive articles in Media about Prophet Muhammad
- Slots in Radio/Television

Since 2016 when this initiative was started, there have been more than 100 projects across the country in Kolkata, Howrah, Bangalore, Delhi, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Muzaffarpur etc. with great success. A common logo has been developed which is encouraged to be used by any individual or organization carrying out projects under this initiative. This and other resources are freely available to anyone from the website www.prophetmuhammadweek.com or by email to prophetmuhammadweek@gmail.com

On social media, you can follow at fb.com/prophetweek and it's hashtag is #prophetweek

If you would like to take up any of these projects in November 2019, you can contact 8444057949 / 8100051555 for any assistance you may need.

For the last 4 years, an NGO in Kolkata has developed a unique model of community service and outreach in the month of Prophet Muhammad's birth (Rabiul Awwal). Called 'Prophet Muhammad Week', its seven themes emphasise connecting, serving and conveying the Prophet's message to the people. Conceived in 2016 by Abdul Rahim, founder of The Sirri Saqti Foundation (TSSF) a volunteer-based NGO in Kolkata the message has spread far and wide and is being replicated in several cities across India this year. The premise is simple – instead of just talking about Prophet Muhammad's message, let us live it through seven themes (hence the week reference) during the month of his birth. This year, the programmes under Prophet Muhammad Week will be undertaken during November 2019.

The seven themes are:

1. PLANTATION DAY



'If you have a sapling in your hand, plant it even if it is the Last Hour.'

- Prophet Muhammad

The Prophet's message of doing the smallest good deed to preserve nature, protect the environment and avoid waste are critical in today's context of caring for the planet. Under this theme, participants are to take up activities that will help in cleaning and greening our environment. For example:

Growing up with Catholics next door, and Hindus across the road, Imam Syed Hassan Mohamed Al-Attas has been interacting with those of different faiths his entire life. In fact, a close friend and neighbour in Upper Serangoon, where the 67-year-old has lived since birth, is Reverend Adrian Anthony, the former rector of Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. "Father Anthony's mother was like my mother. When I was young, if I were injured or something had happened, she would run from the house and come to me," he recalled.

Affectionately known as Habib Hassan, the imam received the Berita Harian Anugerah Jauhari 2019, or Achiever of the Year award, from Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat recently for his contributions to interfaith work.

The head of Masjid Ba'alwie for more than four decades has kept its doors open to those of

Singaporean Imam Wins Award



other faiths. He inherited this welcoming legacy from his late father, Habib Syed Muhammad Syed Salim Al-Attas, who started the mosque in 1952. Those of other faiths, including religious leaders, often visit the mosque informally. The mosque also houses a collection of artefacts from different faiths, including

ancient Bibles and Torahs.

Before the award presentation ceremony, Habib Hassan shared what it was like during his childhood years to make an important point: that respect and strong ties between faiths start first with understanding and knowledge. "We grew up together, and this was the 'training' we had in the past," he

said, noting how living and mixing with those of other faiths enabled him to become more sensitive. The imam, one of the longest-serving in Singapore, acknowledged that this sort of natural mixing is more difficult today. "Unfortunately now, it is different. Due to workload, too much schoolwork, people don't mix around as much any more."

His life's work has been to create spaces and encourage opportunities for mutual understanding. In 1979, he was the first Singaporean imam to give the Eid sermon in English here. In 2015, he received both the Inter-Religious Organisation award and the Meritorious Service Medal in recognition of his interfaith efforts. He was also named by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in Jordan as one of the world's most influential Muslims of 2017.

Habib Hassan also praised ground-up efforts that attempt to resolve tensions between faiths. He noted that many conflicts arise out of a lack of understanding, a problem that applies to disputes between faiths as well.

Despite the many accolades recognising his work in building trust between the religious communities here, the imam was modest about his achievements. "I am just a drop of water in the ocean," he said. "We always hope for the best for our country, to get younger generations to be much better than the older generation, more united, with all races and religions working as one." "I have confidence they will be better, inshallah (God willing)."

The Malay-language newspaper's annual award is presented annually to outstanding Malay/Muslim individuals for their achievements in various fields.

(Extracted from straitstimes.com)

Imprisoned Uighur rights activist gets top EU prize

Economist Ilham Tohti, a defender of China's Uighur community who is serving a life sentence on separatism charges, has been awarded the European Union's top human rights award. In a statement announcing the 2019 Sakharov Prize, the European Parliament described Tohti as a "voice of moderation and reconciliation" who campaigned "tirelessly" to encourage "dialogue and understanding" between Uighurs and other Chinese people, as well as for the implementation of regional autonomy laws in China.

The legislature's president, David Sassoli, said the former professor at Minzu University dedicated his life to his advocacy. "By awarding this prize, we strongly urge the Chinese government to release Tohti and we call for the respect of minority rights in China."

In 2014, Tohti was convicted of fanning ethnic hatred, advocating violence and instigating terror through his classroom teaching and a website he maintained on issues affecting Uighurs, a Muslim minority that mainly live in China's western region of Xinjiang. China has lashed out



at any criticism of its policies in the province, despite facing international condemnation for placing up to one million Uighurs in internment-like camps.

Tohti has been in solitary confinement for years, according to liberal EU legislator Phil Bennion, and has not seen his family since 2017. Bennion said he hoped Beijing would allow a delegation of EU legislators to visit him in prison.

It was also not immediately clear if word of the prize would reach Tohti. "I hope this can bring him some peace," Li Fangping, the lawyer who represented Tohti at his trial in 2014, told Reuters News Agency. But he added: "I think it will be very hard for him to learn of this news."

Recently, Tohti was also awarded the Vaclav Havel Human Rights prize by the Council of Europe, which is not an EU institution but acts as Europe's human rights watchdog.

The Sakharov Prize is named after Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov and was created in 1988 to honour individuals or groups who defend human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Sudan Names Woman As Country's

First-Ever Chief Justice

Sudan has named Neemat Abdullah Mohamed Khair as the nation's first-ever chief justice, the latest top appointment for a woman as the Islamist regime of ex-President Omar al-Bashir is slowly dismantled. The choice of Khair was announced recently by Sudan's sovereign council, part of a transitional government set up to share duties between the army and protesters who helped oust Bashir in April. The new government named Sudan's first-ever female foreign minister, Asma Abdullah, in September.

Muslim World League condemns abuse on Jewish students in Australia

The Muslim World League (MWL) has denounced an attack on Jewish boys committed by some Muslim students in Australia, calling it "appalling and barbaric." "This appalling and barbaric act is contrary to the doctrine of Islam," Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, the secretary general of MWL said in a statement, noting that any person who does this is a disrespectful individual who wrongs Islam. In Islam, Judaism is considered a divine religion and Allah called the

Jews and Christians "the People of the Book," Al-Issa explained. Al-Issa reiterated the MWL's condemnation of any abusive behavior toward anyone based on their religion, culture, ethnicity or colour. The MWL statement was issued from Makkah on "behalf of all Muslims and countries affiliated with the organization's secretariat, branch bodies and global councils," it read.

(Extracted from arabnews.com)

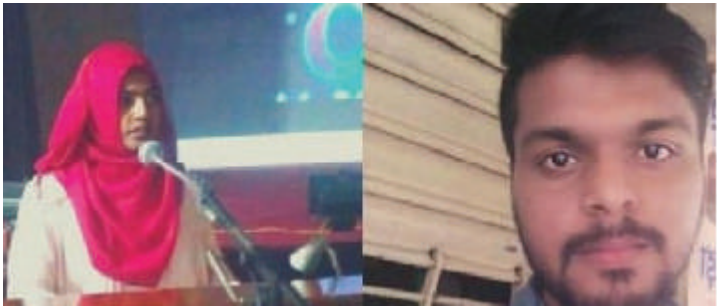
Norway at Top, Yemen at Bottom of Rankings For Women's Quality of Life

Norway and Switzerland are the best countries to be a woman and Yemen and Afghanistan the worst, said research recently. While life for women has improved in some 60 countries, it has deteriorated in Yemen and other war-torn nations, research organizations Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo concluded. The researchers looked at 167 countries since

2017, weighing variables such as access to bank accounts, jobs and security. Rounding out the top of the list were Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Austria, UK, Luxembourg, Sweden and Netherlands tied for ninth place, followed by Canada. At the bottom were Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Iraq, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Mali and Libya.

Nida Akram & Kartik Dora

Nida Akram of AMU and DU's Kartik Dora Selected for Ankit-Junaid Social Harmony Award



New Delhi: Ankit-Junaid Social Harmony Fellowship & Award will be given this year to two students; one Nida Akram from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Kartik Dora is from Delhi University (DU).

The award was launched by Khudai Khidmatgar last year in September in memory of Hafiz Junaid who was killed by a mob in a train and Ankit Saxena, who was killed by a Muslim family for having a love affair with their daughter. This is the first time Ankit-Junaid Social Harmony award will be handed over at AMU's Moulana Azad Library.

"The objective of this scholarship is to nurture the seeds of communal harmony amongst the youth who will become a part of the mainstream in the future. As we all know, it's

the youth who are the torch-bearers of the society, so it's very important to promote brotherhood and communal harmony for a better society," said the Muslim group in their communique declaring two students' names for the award. Akram and Dora are being honoured for their humanitarian work in the society and their campuses. The jury selected these two candidates after scrutinizing hundreds of nominations. The award will carry a memento, certificate and a cash of Rs 5,000.

Nida Akram, who is pursuing her post-graduation from Aligarh Muslim University was elected as the Vice President of Abdullah College Girls Students' Union, AMU for the session 2017-2018. As the V-P of the Students' Union, Nida

organised donation drives for relief work, workshops and seminar on communal harmony and peace-building.

Dora is the 2nd year law student from Delhi University. He hails from Odisha. He is the champion of human rights and adherent believer of the constitutional values, working with the under-privileged children settled at the outskirts of North Delhi. "Moreover, we need to develop creative and innovative methods of peace-building in the society which will help in cementing the gaps between the communities. Therefore, this fellowship also aims at bringing fraternity and unity in the society," said the Khudai Khidmatgar group explaining the aims of the award. The killing of 17-year-old Hafiz Junaid by a mob in Mathura train set off a lot of outrage across the country in June 2017. Similarly, the murder of Ankit Saxena had also become the topic of national discourse. Both the incidents disturbed the communal harmony of the society.

(Caravan News)

FROM HERE AND THERE

Singapore President said to be among 50 most influential Muslims around the world



Singapore's President, Halimah Yacob, has made it into the top 50 in a list of the world's 500 most influential Muslims compiled by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, a think-tank in Jordan. At number 38, Ms. Halimah, who was

elected Singapore's first woman head of state in 2017, is one of only five from South-east Asia in the top 50 of the 2020 edition of The Muslim 500. The annual compilation, in its 11th year, ranks Muslims around the world according to how much impact

they have on their community.

Ms. Halimah was recognised for her efforts in promoting social cohesion and also in championing workers. Her award citation said: "As President she has promoted initiatives for supporting a cohesive society, strengthening interfaith and recognising all workers who contribute to Singapore's growth." Among the initiatives she has mooted as President is an interfaith forum drawing leaders of different faiths from around the world to come together to promote understanding between their communities. She also started a new initiative to show appreciation to workers who are largely toiling behind the scenes, such as transport workers.

A Cab Driver's Heart Warming Gesture

A Cab Driver's Heart Warming Gesture



An Ola cab driver is in the news for all the good reasons. On September 17th, a Bengaluru based man took to Facebook and shared a heartwarming story of an Ola cab driver. The commuter, Sayuj Ravindran, said that the cab driver returned valuables and gadgets worth Rs 2.5 lakh to him after he had left them behind in the cab. He wrote:

"Returning after my cousins wedding, I took an Ola cab (with my family) from KR Puram railway station to home at around 3:30 am. Halfway down, the car tyre got punctured. The driver requested me to book another cab since it will take some time for him to replace the tyre. I got another one in 10 mins and I was about to reach home when I got a call from the first cab driver informing that I left a handbag in the car. I then realized it was my laptop bag which also had some valuables in it. He said he will wait for me right there. I took my car from home and rushed back. He was kind enough to come a little

further towards my home. We met at the Marathahalli bridge and he gave me the laptop bag."

Sayuj also mentioned that the cabbie refused to take money from him as a favour. "Meet Mr Khateeb UR Rahman, who returned my bag (with stuff worth Rs 2.5 lakhs approx). He refused to take any money from me in return of the favour and got back into his cab. But I did manage to slip in the money to his jacket pocket forcefully. Please reward this gentleman for what he has done," he said.

The post had gone viral with over 10,000 people liking the post and over 2,600 people sharing it.

The RT Nagar Old office (SGP Group), who came across the heartwarming act of the Khateeb UR Rahman rewarded him with a cheque of Rs 25,000. This heartwarming gesture once again proves to be an example of how one will be rewarded according to his/her act.

(Full story on

www.newindianexpress.com)

Visit from Vatican representatives boosts Catholic-Muslim interaction

Catholic-Muslim communications appear to be experiencing a positive resurgence, as demonstrated recently by the visit of high-level Vatican representatives to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque. Eight hundred years after Francis of Assisi visited Jerusalem, Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, along with Rev. Francesco Patton, custodian of

the Holy Land of the Franciscan Order, visited Al-Aqsa Mosque on Oct. 3 and met with the Islamic Waqf (Endowment) Council. Both sides issued a seven-point statement that deals with the Hashemite (Jordanian royal family) custodianship of holy places in Jerusalem, the importance of preserving the status quo and support for the two-state solution.

(Extracted from al-monitor.com)

When Hurricane Katrina struck my hometown of New Orleans in 2005, I was tasked with leading a major Muslim relief effort. While Katrina brought many sights I won't forget, one of the most enduring and treasured was members of United Sikhs, a humanitarian and civil rights nonprofit, bolting this way and that across the floor of the Superdome, which had been turned into a massive shelter, assisting distressed people with a zeal unlike anything I'd ever seen before. This despite the fact that the Sikh community in New Orleans is minimal, and I can't recall seeing a single Sikh Katrina victim in any of the shelters. In fact the Sikhs, though they are the fifth largest faith group in the world, number only a few hundred thousand members in the entire U.S., most of whom live around New York City and in California. But in this rising climate of xenophobia, especially Islamophobia, they have become easy targets. Bigots often mistake Sikhs for Muslims due to their highly visible turbans, beards and scarves. Despite the real harm this has caused Sikhs, they have

An American Muslim Imam's Letter to the American Sikh Community

consistently refused to throw the Muslim community under the bus by simply distancing themselves from Islam.

You may have seen the video of Canadian New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh, a candidate for prime minister, being heckled by a protester in 2017 for trying to "push Shariah" and being in "bed with the Muslim Brotherhood." His brother, Gurratan Singh, also a member of Parliament, went viral last month for how he handled an Islamophobic heckler outside a Muslim convention. Gurratan tweeted afterward, "I will never respond to an Islamophobe by stating, 'I am not a Muslim.'"

Instead of protecting themselves, Sikhs have never shied away from their mandate to service and solidarity with others.

The slaying of Deputy Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal in Houston last month reinforced the cost of how Sikhs choose to deal with their impossible situation.



BY IMAM OMAR SULEIMAN

Dhaliwal actively assisted in disaster relief efforts to communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Maria, worked with at-risk communities in Houston and was a source of comfort to his hometown of Punjab, in northern India, where he helped coordinate drought relief efforts. He was an ideal citizen and a source of pride for his community. But as he navigated the streets of Texas with or without his uniform, most people, including the man who is accused of killing him, probably saw nothing more than his skin color, turban and

beard. No matter how American Dhaliwal was on paper, and how remarkable of a human being he was in action, his appearance rendered him conclusively foreign. This not only diminishes the contributions of Sikhs, but our own behavior when tragedies strike them.

These tragedies far outpace their numbers. Sikhs have borne the brunt of Islamophobia since the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Just four days after the terrorist attacks, Balbir Singh Sodhi was murdered outside of his business in Arizona by a man who wanted to go out and "shoot some towel-heads" in retaliation.

When we think of attacks on houses of worship, we often think of synagogues, mosques and black churches that have been targeted recently by white supremacist terrorist attacks. But before these attacks became a hallmark of this decade, we witnessed the horrible tragedy at Oak Creek,

Wisconsin, where six Sikhs were murdered in their temple in 2012.

Muslims owe the Sikhs thanks for this unwavering and inspiring steadfastness in the face of Islamophobia. And as you grieve over the loss of Deputy Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal, we grieve with you.

As an American Muslim who wears a kufi and a beard, I want to take this occasion to say thank you to the Sikh community. Thank you for the constant solidarity you show to my community, and the constant service you render to our country. Your community is too often underrepresented in the discussion of fatal bigotry, uncared for in its grief and unappreciated for its service and solidarity.

(Imam Omar Suleiman, an American Muslim scholar, activist and civil rights leader, is founder and president of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and an adjunct professor of Islamic studies in the graduate liberal studies program at Southern Methodist University, USA.)

Extracted from
religionnews.com/

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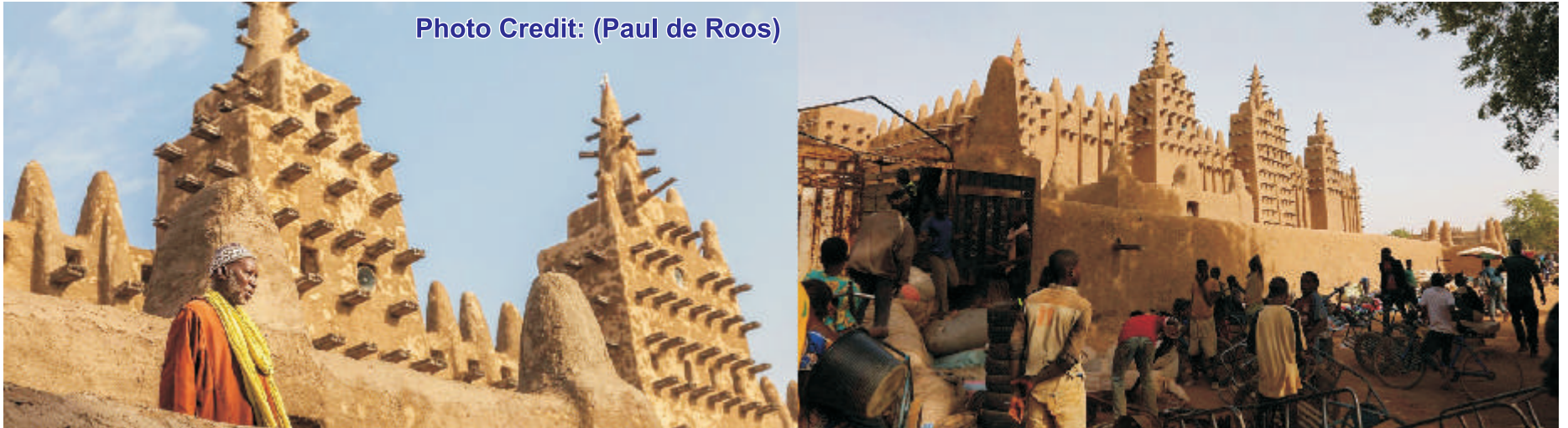
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The Massive Mosque in Africa That's Built Once a Year

Perched on a floodplain between the Niger and Bani rivers, Djenné has been inhabited since 250BC, making it one of the oldest towns in sub-Saharan Africa.

Photo Credit: (Paul de Roos)



Located in the arid hinterland of the scorching Sahara Desert in southern Mali, Africa, the Great Mosque of Djenné is a beguiling structure that instantly captures the imagination. Nearly 20m high and built on a 91m-long platform, it's the world's largest mud-brick building. The gargantuan mosque is the centrepiece of life in the Unesco-protected town of Djenné.

Perched on a floodplain between the Niger and Bani rivers, Djenné has been inhabited since 250BC, making it one of the oldest towns in sub-Saharan Africa. It flourished between the 13th and 18th Centuries as a key transport hub for goods such as salt and gold. Trade caravans also brought scholars and scribes, who introduced Islam to the region. It didn't take long for

Djenné to become a centre for Islamic scholarship, with the Great Mosque's current edifice built in 1907 on the site of the community's original mosque, which fell into disrepair during the 19th Century.

The Great Mosque has three distinctive minarets, with hundreds of sticks of rodier palm, known as 'toron', jutting out from the structure's walls. The Great Mosque remains cool even during the hottest days. A lattice of 90 internal wooden columns supports the roof and the walls, which provide insulation from the sun's heat.



The roof, meanwhile, has several openings that allow a flow of fresh air in the dry season, but can be closed with terracotta lids during the rainy season. The mosque's prayer hall can fit as many as 3,000 people.

An Epic Annual Rebuild

The walls of Djenné's Great Mosque are reconstructed with mud each April in an epic one-

day event called the Crépissage (Plastering). The structure requires annual reinforcement – as do the town's traditional adobe homes – before Mali's brief-yet-brutal rainy season, which mostly occurs in July

and August, when almost the entire average 1,000mm annual rainfall will descend. This immense undertaking ensures that the mosque will survive the rainy season, despite altering in shape ever so slightly each year.

The Waking Night

Not only is the Crépissage an important act of maintenance designed to protect the mosque's walls from cracking and

crumbling, but it's also a festival that celebrates Djenné's community, faith and heritage. The night before the rebuilding, the town hums with anticipation and villagers take part in a carnival of singing and dancing known as La Nuit de Veille, or The Waking Night. Djenné's moonlit streets ring with chants and drum beats before a whistle at around 04:00 signals the beginning of the most important event on the calendar.

Once the Crépissage is underway, teams from each neighbourhood in Djenné race to re-plaster the mosque, albeit carefully and precisely. Under the supervision of a guild of 80 senior masons, a highly revered profession in Djenné, young men scramble up the building's façade carrying wicker baskets dripping with wet clay to smear in thick layers onto the walls,

INSIGHTS

Lunch on an Arecanut Leaf Plate!

By Nigar

Conferences are great opportunities to meet people, to network and to gain new insights on various issues. 'In Search of Well Being; Decoding Economics, Rethinking Education' a conference organised by the Bhoomi College in Bangalore, in the last week of September 2019, was an amazing eye-opener in terms of sensible living.

Normally, at large seminars or conferences, lunch or tea or dinner is one of the highlights, which often becomes a messy pile of plastic plates, spoons, glasses and leftovers after the event concludes. But tea and meals at the two-day Bhoomi Conference were different!

Conferences need not be all about tall talk, tedious lectures and sumptuous lunches. Minimum waste and care for the environment around should also be part of conference logistics.

They were times to treat not just food, but even the way we eat, as a spiritual activity. Participants were requested to bring their own coffee or tea cups from their homes. Metal tumblers were sold at a reasonable price for those who couldn't fetch their cups. The Bhoomi team had stocked bowls of soap-nut powder in the washrooms if the cups had to be washed. At lunch, the fare was simple, healthy, vegetarian



food, which was served on disposable and biodegradable

arecanut palm leaf plates. After use, the plates can be recycled.

Speakers at the conference included well-known national and international environmentalists, economists, social activists and educationists. They focussed on issues such as sustainable living, gaining wisdom from nature, alternate education and climate change. There were interactive sessions with people who are

leading a different sort of life from the conventional rat race, trying to get closer to natural living.

The Bhoomi Conference focussed on walking on the earth gently, living simply so that the animals, birds, trees and mountains can also exist peacefully and we can leave the planet in a better condition for future generations than in the climatic mess it is now.

Conferences need not be all tall talk, tedious lectures or elaborate lunches. Minimal waste and care for the natural environment around us should also be part of conference logistics: that's some of the wisdom I learnt at the Bhoomi Conference on Well Being!

(For more information, log on to <https://bhoomicollege.org/>)

A Jesuit Among Sufis

Name of the Book: *A Jesuit Among Sufis*

Author: Paul Jackson

Published by: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand

(booksgsp@gmail.com)

Year: 2017

Pages: 152

Price: Rs. 150

Reviewed by: Roshan

Born in Australia, Paul Jackson has been living in India for decades, for much of the time in Bihar. He is a Catholic priest, belonging to the Jesuit order, and is at the same time a prominent scholar of South Asian Muslim Studies. He studied History at the Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and Persian in Iran and taught Islamic thought and Christian-Muslim relations at several institutions.

Probably the most interesting part of this book is the description of how a Catholic priest from Australia developed a deep interest in Muslim Studies, dedicating much of his life to this purpose. In 1961, Jackson arrived in Hazaribagh, in Bihar. Then, in 1972, he went to Delhi to do a Master's degree in medieval Indian history and a diploma in Urdu. While in Delhi, he tells us, he attended a seminar held in honour of the noted Chishti Sufi, Baba Farid Sahib. "What struck me," he writes, "was the fact that Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians all gathered to present papers in honour of this famous man. It was a very telling lesson: Sufis bring people together!"

It was at this seminar that the desire to do research into the life of some great Sufi from India was born. For this purpose, Jackson decided to study Farsi, probably because much of the medieval Indian Sufi literature is in that language. So, in 1974, this intrepid traveller made his way to Shiraz, in Iran, where he spent some 13 months. It was in Shiraz that he heard of the 14th century Makhdoom Sharfuddin Ahmed bin Yahya Maneri (d.1381), probably the most well-known Sufi of Bihar. After his final spiritual training as a Jesuit, Jackson went to Patna, to begin his doctoral studies on this Sufi under the guidance of the late Professor Syed Hasan Askari, spending more than three years on this. With his professor's help, he began to translate a manuscript more than 400 years old, a collection of Makhdoom Sahib's letters in Farsi written to his disciple Qazi Shamsuddin in 1346-47, known as the *Maktubat*

e Sadi. This text provides Makhdoom Sahib's basic exposition of the Sufi Path to God as understood by him.

Jackson submitted his thesis in 1979. Shortly afterwards, *Sharafuddin Maneri: The Hundred Letters* was published in the UK and the USA, and later from Delhi as *The Way of a Sufi: Sharafuddin Maneri*. Over the years, Jackson continued to write and produced some other books.

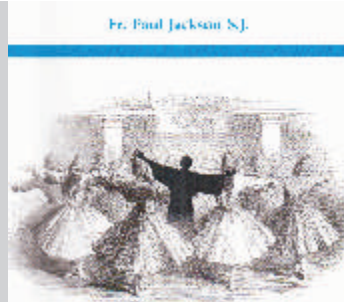
As Jackson pursued his studies on Makhdoom Sahib, he discovered that Makhdoom Sahib's world 'was filled with God'. More than a year after he began working on the manuscript of Makhdoom Sahib's letters, the first draft of Jackson's translation was completed. Jackson writes:

Many changes took place within me during those long months. I can still recall the oft-repeated experience of being astonished at the depth of Maneri's spiritual insight and the beauty of its expression. I realised also that there was a whole process of interiorization going on within me as I met God dwelling in the heart of Sharafuddin Maneri. Deep down, in those recesses of which we are only dimly aware, His presence was striking new roots, which were plunging more deeply within me...the reality of God was[...] entering my life in a new form [...] Time and again the thought had occurred to me, as I edged steadily forward, that the whole enterprise was undoubtedly worthwhile, even if nobody else ever looked at my translation, for it had definitely made a profound impact on me."

Jackson further adds:

When I turned to study his [Makhdoom Sahib's] life and saintly death, all my good opinions were simply confirmed. I had no difficulty in acknowledging him, along with countless Muslims, as one of God's saints. I joined them in rejoicing at the wonders God worked in and through him."

Jackson recognises "the soundness of the spiritual teaching that Maneri presents in



his letters' even as he notes that "here and there statements and positions depend on some Islamic doctrine which is not shared by Christians."

Studying the life and writings of a medieval Sufi hasn't been a mere academic exercise for Jackson. His studies have possibly led to a major transformation in him and perhaps in ways he wouldn't have once expected. He writes:

One thing that strikes me most forcibly as I reflect on all that has happened to me as a consequence of the basic experience as a Jesuit priest, of coming into very close contact with a Sufi. As a result of years of painstaking study of what Maneri has himself written in fourteenth-century Persian, or which was recorded after he had spoken to various groups who had assembled to hear him, is the process of change which has been initiated in me. It might be described as an ever-growing openness.

A fruit of such study across religious boundaries is that one is often able to discover gems of goodness in other religions and communities. Such a process can lead to a marked inner change for the good. And that's perhaps what happened with Jackson through his studying a fourteenth century Sufi from Bihar.

Among the other issues the book discusses are some challenges that a Jesuit studying Islam can face, as Jackson explains, on account of biases against Muslims among some fellow Christians as well as the issue of Christian-Muslim dialogue. A good number of pages are also devoted to Sufism and to some noted Sufis although this perhaps could have been avoided as the same sort of material is perhaps available in numerous other books by other writers and in greater detail.

GUIDANCE

Nine Reasons to Have a Positive View of God

By Sheima Salam Sumer

Many people only focus on the fear of God, when we should balance fear with hope in God's mercy and goodness. God encourages us to think positively about Him. In a *hadith Qudsi* He says: "I am as my servant thinks of Me..." (Bukhari, Muslim).

Here are nine reasons to have a positive view of God:

1. God wants to come closer to us

In the same *hadith* quoted above, God says that when we make an effort to get close to Him, He comes much closer to us:

"I am as My servant thinks of Me. I am with him when he remembers Me. If he mentions Me within himself, I mention him within Myself. If he mentions me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly. If he comes near to Me a handspan, I come near to him the distance of a cubit. If he comes near to me the distance of a cubit, I come near to him the distance of two outspread arms. If he comes to me walking, I come to him running." (Bukhari, Muslim)

2. God wants us to succeed and He gives us extra credit for good deeds. God even rewards us for not doing a bad deed that we thought about doing

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Whosoever intends to do a good deed but does not do it, Allah records it with Himself as a complete good deed; but if he intends it and does it, Allah records it with Himself as ten good deeds, up to seven hundred times, or more than that. But if he intends to do an evil deed and does not do it, Allah records it with Himself as a complete good deed; but if he intends it and does it, Allah records it down as one single evil deed." (Bukhari, Muslim)

3. God says that He does not want difficulty for us; He wants to purify us

"Allah does not want difficulty for you, but He wants to purify you, and to complete His favor upon you, that you may be grateful." (end of Quranic verse 5:6)

4. God does not want to punish us

"Why would Allah punish you if you are thankful and believe? And Allah is Appreciative (of good), All-Knowing." (4:147)

5. God wants us to call on Him

And your Lord said, "Call on Me, I will respond to you." (40:60)

Our Lord (glorified and exalted be He) descends each night to the earth's sky when there remains the final third of the night, and He says: Who is saying a prayer to Me that I may answer it? Who is asking something of Me that I may give it him? Who is asking forgiveness of Me that I may forgive him?

(Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud)

6. God is the Most Forgiving

...And seek God's forgiveness! Truly God is much Forgiving and Merciful. (2:199)

Whoso does evil or oppresses his own self and thereafter seeks God's forgiveness shall find God Most Forgiving, Merciful. (4:110)

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) reported that the devil said to God: "I shall continue to lead Thy servants astray as long as their spirits are in their bodies." And God replied: "(Then) I shall continue to pardon them as long as they ask My forgiveness." (Tirmidhi)

(Allah says) O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it. (Tirmidhi)

7. God is the Most Merciful

When Allah decided (to create) a creation, He wrote a writing which is with Him upon His Throne, namely, "Verily, My mercy has overtaken My wrath." (Bukhari, Muslim)

Learning Lessons at a Village Lake

By Valea

Rehana and Saleem had accompanied their parents to their relatives' home in a village. They hadn't spent their summer holidays in a more enjoyable way before! The children did many fun things. What they enjoyed most was their early morning walk to a little lake nearby. That year, the rains had been abundant, and so the lake was full, attracting many water-birds, who had made it their temporary home.

Living in a city, the children hadn't seen such birds before. There were herons and ducks and different types of storks! As soon as the children had drunk their morning milk, they would

skip off to the lake to watch the birds, returning an hour later, in time for breakfast.

One morning, when Rehana and Saleem got to the lake, guess what they saw? A pair of giant pelicans with the biggest beaks they had ever seen! The children were so excited! They silently watched the pelicans as they silently paddled about in the lake, stopping occasionally to push their beaks in the water and scoop up a frog or a fish. Rehana and Saleem were spellbound by the sight!

After a while, breaking the silence, Rehana came up with a lovely idea. "Papa says that one can learn lessons from everything in life," she said.

"So, let's try to think of what lessons we can draw from the pelicans."

"Wuppy! That sounds interesting!" said Saleem.

"Okay, here's one lesson we can learn," Rehana began. "The pelicans are busy doing their own work, busily wading through the water and searching for food. They aren't affected by what the other birds in the lake are doing. Like them, we too should focus on our duties, and should not interfere in other people's affairs. Also, we mustn't let what other people may do or say cause us to deviate from our work."

"Wow, those are some great lessons we can learn from the



pelicans!" Saleem said. "Ok. Now my turn. Here's another lesson: The birds don't seem worried at all. See how relaxed and peaceful they are, even though they don't know if they are going to get any food today or not! They just do what they need to, and God provides for them. In the same way, we too should do what we have to and know that God will take care of our food and other such things."

"My goodness, Saleem! You sound so grown up! You are so right!" Rehana responded. "Such a nice point you've

made!"

"It's such fun to draw lessons from things around us, isn't it!", Saleem said to his sister.

"Yes, yes! It isn't just at school or from books that we can learn things," Rehana added. "I heard somewhere that life itself is a big school and that one can learn useful lessons from every experience that we go through and every single thing that we may see!"

"Just like we learnt so many things from the pelicans today!" Saleem chimed in.

Shabana Aapa's Activity Classes

By Shahn Ashraf Ali

Under a big old banyan tree, Shabana Aapa holds activity classes for young people. "It is my way of adoring my Allah," she says. Shabana Aapa glorifies the Lord by making the children aware of His creations through 'fun-to-do's'!

Come, join in!

Your Lord Inspired The Bee...

Do you know that Allah told the Bee where to build its hive and what food to eat?! Yes, it is stated in the Quran {16:68}

Unscramble the jumbled words in the paragraph below to find fascinating information on life in a hive.

Thousands of bees may live together in one colony. Every colony has different kinds of bees: **errskow**, **senord** and a **enu eq**.

The **errskow** make **lescl** with **xaw** they produce in their **seidob**. The **oomyhnecbis** made with these **lescl**. The **enu eqsyalges** inside the **lescl**. The **senord**' task is to **etam** with **ewnenu eqs**. They **ied** as soon as they **etam**. **Errskow** **tegoodf** for the colony. They search for **srewolf** rich in pollen **ratcen**. When **aerrkow** finds such a **rewolf**, **ti** returns to the **evih** and **secnad**! Her **ecand**, the **suodor** of the pollen and **ratcen**, tell the other **errskow** where to find the



srewolf!

{workers, drones, queen, cells, wax, bodies, honeycomb, lays, eggs, mate, new, die, get food, flowers, nectar, it, hive, dances, odours,}

After reading the above paragraph, the children were amazed and exclaimed in one voice, "God is great!" Shabana Aapa smiled, nodded and exclaimed, "Allahu Akbar - God is great!"

The Farm Animals

Many animals are used by man as farm animals. Allah in His Divine Mercy has allowed this as written in the Holy Quran "It is He who has made you inherit the earth." {35:39}

Look up, down and across to see if you can find the eleven farm animals playing hide and seek with you right now!

HORSEAHOBZADLPET

OIHUATNUWGOCOWERDONKEYAKONCHICKEGOATPIEYKITTENG

[turkey, cow, chick, donkey, kitten, duck, cat, dog, goat, hen, horse]

The Earth Is For All

The Holy Quran says, "He has laid out the earth for His creatures." {55:10} "Our world will be incomplete without all Allah's creations

in it," Said Shabana Aapa. Then to end her class on a light note she gave an activity to do saying, "Some of our words too become incomplete without our God given earth-mates in them!"

Can you find the missing animals that will complete the words listed below?

1. E D U --- I O N {Knowledge}
 2. C --- {to pack tightly}
 3. P - - - A G E {Part of a book/speech}
 4. S --- L I N G [frowning]
 5. C --- E {a packing case}
 6. N E W S P - - - R {regular publication giving latest news}
 7. B _ _ {container}
 8. - - - N A T E {to be motionless}
 9. S --- R {Underground drain}
- [cat, ram, ass, cow, rat, ape, ox, stag & ewe]

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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful Beneficial and Logical

Al-Rum (The Romans) Surah 30: Verse 7

"They know but the outer surface of this world's life, but of the ultimate reality of the life to come, they are unaware."

This is the essential difference of "knowledge" between those who restrict it to sensory information and empiricism, and those who allow room for higher intellectual practices which may be represented in logic and art, as well as in philosophy and religion. Intuition is known to inspire supersensory art in various fields, and "creativity" is an essential requirement for a genuine artist. Even in science, relativity and potentiality have turned material existence into more than a thick and dry concretism. **Human**



imagination, vision and abstract conceptualization have always inspired scientific progress.

Spirituality is an unmistakable character of the human nature and history, which has proved to be unignorable, indispensable and unsuppressible. Materialism failed to satisfy the human needs and aspirations of the individual and the society,

and its productivity has been obviously hindered by the psychological and social limitations and defects. The belief in the One God and the eternal life to come secures balance and stability within the individual's own self and in the society as a whole, while selfishness and worldliness tear and swing him/her between the extremes of haughty success and desperate failure. **Thus the belief is beneficial as well as logical.**

(Compiled From: "Concepts of the Quran" - Fathi Osman, p. 272)

HADITH ILLUMINATES THE HEART

Refrain From Suspicion

The Prophet (peace be upon him) spoke in very clear terms about misplaced suspicion, giving clear orders to refrain from it.



Suspicion can ruin relations between people, particularly when it is based on flimsy evidence, or hearsay. The Prophet (peace be upon him) spoke in very clear terms about misplaced suspicion, giving clear orders to refrain from it. The following authentic hadith groups together some of the actions that cause discord within the community and make people dislike one another:

Abu Hurayrah reports that the Prophet said: **'Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the worst form of lying. Do not spy against one another, or compete with one another. Do not turn your back on one another, nor envy nor hate one another, but remain - you**

servants of God - brothers and sisters'. [Bukhari, Ahmad, Muslim].

This hadith stresses the importance of maintaining good relations within the Muslim community. The Prophet highlights certain things that would undermine such relations, and he tells us not to allow ourselves to indulge in them. Boycott, envy and hate should never be allowed to exist, let alone flourish in any Muslim community. Relations between Muslims should always be close. All members of the Muslim community should look at one another as brothers and sisters. They must value this tie of brotherhood, because it is established on the best basis,

which is servitude to God and pure faith.

However, the hadith begins with a warning against suspicion describing it as the most untrue of speech. This is an apt description because **whatever is said on the basis of suspicion has no basis in reality.** It is all conjecture, leading to false accusations and ideas. It poisons relations and leads to discord and hostility. It also encourages what the Prophet mentions next, which is spying on one another. People do not spy on their neighbours or competitors unless they have some sort of suspicion they want to explore. Hence, they try to gather information secretly, perhaps through spying. This is again forbidden. The Prophet teaches us that we should help one another not to entertain any doubt leading to suspicion.

(Compiled From: "Al-Adab al-Mufrad with Full Commentary: A Perfect Code of Manners and Morality" - AdilSalahi)

Towards global peace and spiritual living

Interview with Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Q: How should we manage our ego?

It is very easy. It is said that when a peacock sees its beautiful feathers, it becomes proud, but when it sees its ugly legs, it becomes modest. The same is true of man. In every human personality there are plus points as well as minus points. Those who see their plus points become egoists, while those who see their minus points become modest. So, when a plus point comes to mind, turn your attention to the other side of your personality that has a minus point. And you will suddenly become a modest person. This is the easiest formula for maintaining modesty, and avoiding arrogance.

Q: Is it necessary to exercise restraint over our desires? If yes, how can we do this?

Our desires are unlimited, but our capacity is limited. Due to our limitations, we cannot fulfil all our desires. So, it is realistic to control our desires. If we fail to control our desires, we will fall into despair, and certainly no one can afford to follow a path that leads nowhere except to despair.

Q: Restraining desires is often associated with stifling personality development. Is this true?

This is a sheer fallacy. When unlimited desires cannot be fulfilled, trying to fulfil all desires will lead to negative, not positive growth of personality. Any scientific survey can disprove this kind of formulation.

(Extracted from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>)

► Page 18

Nine Reasons to Have a Positive View of God

Umar ibn Al-Khattab reported: Some prisoners of war were brought in front of the Prophet (pbuh), and a woman was among them who was breast-feeding. Whenever she found a child among the prisoners, she would take it to her chest and nurse it. The Prophet said to us, "Do you think this woman could throw her child in the fire?" We said, "No, not if she is able to stop it." He said, "Allah is more merciful to His servants than a mother is to her child" (Bukhari).

8. God is Al Barr, the Source of Goodness

The divine name of God Al-Barr means that God is Kind and Gentle. He is the Source of all kindness and goodness in the world. He is the source of every good deed. God continuously urges us in the Holy Quran to do good deeds, because He is Good and loves goodness.

9. Every chapter (except one) in the Quran begins with Bismillahirrahmanirraheem, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful."

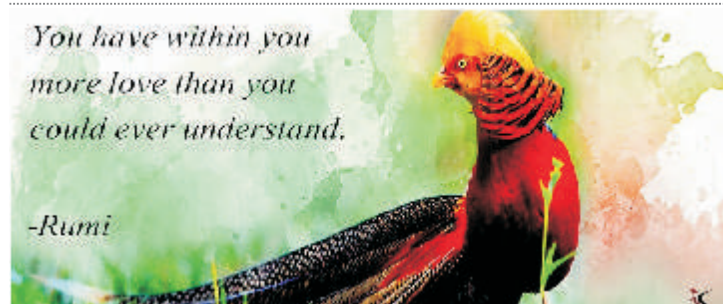
Allah chose to begin every surah (except for one) with His attributes Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem, the Most Compassionate and Most Merciful. He could have chosen attributes such as The Powerful, The Avenger, The Reckoner, The Debaser, etc. He didn't. What does that tell us about our Lord?

(This is a modified version of an article that originally appeared on the blog www.Quranacademy.io)

Sheima Salam Sumer is author of How to be a Happy Muslim Insha'Allah and The Basic Values of Islam. For more details, see howtobeahappymuslim.com

You have within you more love than you could ever understand.

-Rumi



Character-Building

In his famous saying, the Holy Prophet (Pbuh) says that the best of you in Islam are those who are most excellent in character.

By Amin Valliani

As long as we are alive in this physical world, our mind is like an open road for all kind of thought traffic. Thoughts usually pass through the mind but some are strong enough to make a person act upon them. They become actions and if the same action is repeated over time, they turn into habits and finally become part of one's character.

Managing Our Thoughts

Thus, thoughts are key to the whole process of character-building. They are at the bottom of all progress and retrogression, all success or failure, all good and bad happenings and all that is desirable or undesirable. It is a simple psychological law that any type of thought, if entertained for a sufficient length of time, will finally burst forth into action. Many heinous crimes such as murder, theft, robbery, terrorist acts etc are at times committed in this way. Therefore, in the realm of the mind, every individual must learn how to manage his or her thoughts.

Every act of life is preceded and given birth to by a thought. The act repeated forms habits, and habits determine character. *Every individual must learn how to manage his or her thoughts.*

If a wrong action is committed, our character will move in the wrong direction whereas a righteous action will make us righteous. Therefore, each one of us needs to be watchful, mindful, conscious and, above all, courageous enough to nip nefarious thoughts in the bud. Though it is difficult to free the mind from the incessant flux of unwanted thoughts, the Holy Quran suggests to believers: "And if an evil whisper comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge with Allah. Verily, He is All Hearer, All Knower" (7:200).

The spark of a matchstick can be extinguished by a little effort, instead of allowing a flame to leap high and turn into a raging fire.

Similarly, nipping negative thoughts at the first instance would be easy rather than dealing with the eventual consequences. It is further clarified by an example: in a

Though it is difficult to free the mind from the incessant flux of unwanted thoughts, the Holy Quran suggests to believers: "And if an evil whisper comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge with Allah. Verily, He is All Hearer, All Knower" (7:200).

local bank, a cashier handles cash in the millions. He reads about a man who suddenly became rich through speculation on the stock market. A thought surfaces in his mind to invest the funds he has charge of. The very moment the thought of using funds belonging to others enters his mind he instantly nips the thought in the bud, otherwise it would grow into such proportions that it would become more and more difficult to control.

Likewise a young person is out with some of his companions for a pleasant evening. A suggestion is made by one of his friends to dine and wine together in a nearby restaurant. The young person does not realise the fact that the greatest strength and nobility of character always lies in taking a firm stand and doing the right thing. He goes along with his other companions. The act is repeated a number of times and ultimately causes him to become addicted to drinking.

Seek the Right Path

Humans, by nature, are weak and usually remain in a fix. The Holy Quran enjoins man to seek the right path at every moment

of his life. This enhances his true worth by improving his thoughts and subsequently his character.

In his famous saying, the Holy Prophet (Pbuh) says that the best of you in Islam are those who are most excellent in character. If a person bears good moral character, he is dear in his society, likewise dear in the eyes of Allah. This is opposed to one who is undesirable for society, and likewise undesirable in Allah's eyes.

Character is an inbuilt property that defines the apparent individual nature. It is not physically overt to everyone but builds within through right guidance, education and environment. It is manifested in an individual's dealings while interacting with society.

We all are part of society and therefore, society has every right to form an opinion about our conduct. Seventh-century Makkah society, in which Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was born and grew up, was a pagan society. But that society formed an opinion about the Holy Prophet's character.

He was above board in every respect; therefore, society called him As Sadiq (true) and Al Amin (trustworthy).

There are many contributing elements which help form the individual's character but by far the most important underlying element is the force of thoughts. Every conscious human act is preceded by a thought. The dominating thoughts determine dominating action.

The acts repeated crystallise into habit. The aggregate of our habits is one's character.

A desire for noble character is the essence, indeed the sum and substance of all religious teachings. This depends on managing thoughts at the core.

(The writer is an educationist with an interest in religion).

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Seek to Understand People in Need

By Zakir Zulfi

This is a real incident, which I personally experienced. In a mosque in Bhopal after the zohr prayer, a man stood up in order to make an announcement. He wanted to express his condition to the congregation. However, overwhelmed by hesitation and a sense of shame, he was unable to speak.

All of a sudden, the man turned back and headed to the gate of the mosque. I joined him there and asked him what had happened. He did not say anything, but his eyes were full of tears. Then, he revealed, "I wanted to ask people for money because I am in great difficulty.

But I couldn't get myself to beg. My niece is in hospital. She has been there for a month and her father is no more. I have spent my everything, and have even sold off all my property, for her treatment. I wanted to ask the people in the mosque for money for her sake but I couldn't get myself to do that."

This incident teaches us that we should care about people who are suffering. We need to take the time and effort to listen to them and then try and do what we can to assist them.

(Zakir Zulfi was a student of the 18th batch at Darul Umoor Srirangapatna and is currently based in Bhopal)

◀ Page 9

Prosecuting Tyranny in the Arab World

Indeed, the real charge against the Arab despots is that they destroyed their peoples and their states. This does not mean that we should lock up all our presidents as some want; nor does it mean taking them out, as happened to Muammar Gaddafi, or executing them in Saddam's case.

That kind of revenge won't bring an end to tyranny. Rather, it is more important that we should hold to account the whole era, including all its symbols, its culture and its ugliness, in order to build a state which will end

tyranny and the malaise it brings with it.

Arabs today are on a quest for serious reform and comprehensive transformation so that they emerge from this pit into which the tyrants have sealed them.

(Translated from the Arabic by Chris Somes-Charlton. Shafiq Nazim al-Ghabra is a well-known political analyst and Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University).

(Source: en.qantara.de)

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Bonding After a Bitter Lunch

Salma really enjoyed observing human behaviour it was her favourite hobby. It was, she would tell people, a lovely source of learning about life.

By Roshan

Salma was having lunch at the college canteen when the manager of the college's finance department entered. He pushed his way to the counter, placed his order and sat down in a plastic chair.

Salma really enjoyed observing human behaviour it was her favourite hobby. It was, she would tell people, a lovely source of learning about life. As she nibbled at her *dosa*, she scanned the manager's face. He was hungrily munching away at his food, his mouth wide open as he chewed. Occasionally, he stopped to let out a loud burp. A blob of *daal* was stuck on his chin.

Salma didn't like the sight at all! "Hyper-masculine, Rude, Aggressive" were the words that swam about in her mind.

Just then, Parveen, a middle-aged woman who had recently been awarded the contract to run the canteen, appeared from the kitchen, wiping the perspiration on her forehead with the end of

her sari. She looked really exhausted.

As soon as he caught sight of her, the manager barked, "Arey! Don't you know how to cook? The *daal* today is awful! And the rice is still raw. We pay you money for the food it isn't that you're giving it to us free. If you carry on this way, I'll complain to the college principal and have your contract cancelled. And then you can go back to selling *samosas* on the footpath, where you came from."

Salma couldn't believe her ears! How could anyone talk like that! "This man may be the manager of the college finance department," she told herself, "but that doesn't give him the license to be mean to someone, especially to Parveen, who's just lost her husband and ekes out a living by running this little canteen, barely managing to earn enough to maintain her family of three children."

But Salma knew the manager well enough to keep quiet. He behaved the same way with

everyone even, it was rumoured, at home, with his parents, wife and children. If he were working somewhere else, he would have been dismissed long ago. The only reason the college kept him on was that he was, as they say, 'politically very influential'.

The manager pushed himself out of his chair and strode out of the canteen, leaving behind a heap of food on his plate. Salma noted that he hadn't paid for his meal. She was aghast!

Salma turned to look at Parveen, who had now buried her head in the wall, sobbing uncontrollably. Instinctively, she thought she'd do something to cheer Parveen up. And so, instead of waiting for Parveen to clear up the manager's plate, she proceeded to do so herself, in spite of Parveen's pleas not to.

"You really shouldn't do that," Parveen said, wiping her tears.

"Why not? After how that man behaved with you, I won't allow you to handle his left-overs", Salma responded.

"I can't say how the *daal* and rice



the manager ordered tasted," Salma said to Parveen as she paid for her food and was making her way out, "but the *dosa* and the *sambar* you made today were just excellent!"

Salma wasn't trying just to cheer Parveen up. She really meant what she said she hadn't had

such a delicious *dosa* in a long time! As she said this, Parveen burst into a smile and she gave Salma a tight hug! And for as long as they held each other in their arms, they savoured the love that drew them together, expelling the manager from their minds.

OPEN PAGE

Think of Orphans

In the Holy Quran, God emphasises fulfilling the rights of orphans and asks us to be mild with them.

By Shaban Ali

As I observe the world and the gorgeous life of the rich and the menial life of the poor, it pains me that all humans have been created equal, but we have made many boundaries and limits of distinction and privileges among people.

In the Holy Quran, God emphasises fulfilling the rights

laced with pain, passion and love. We know only our own requirements and forget others' needs. The Prophet Muhammad instructed us to like for others what we like for ourselves. The best is he who devotes himself to help the people, the Prophet taught.

But in our society, many orphans are compelled to beg. It is not the

“But, if we view things from the Islamic perspective, an orphan is the most beloved to Allah and his prayers are answered soon. To be an orphan is not a sign of helplessness, because the one who has lost his father, his guardian is Allah.”

of orphans and asks us to be mild with them. He warns the guardians of orphans who eat their wealth by cheating. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself was an orphan. Later, he became a shelter for orphans. He knew how it feels to be an orphan, so he took care of helpless orphans.

Normally, people think an orphan is unblessed and that he is deprived of all pleasures. But, if we view things from the Islamic perspective, an orphan is the most beloved to Allah and his prayers are answered soon. To be an orphan is not a sign of helplessness, because the one who has lost his father, his guardian is Allah. I dare to say that we are really very cruel and treat orphans unjustly. We have a heart that only beats, but is not

age when pious rulers and governors searched for orphans and helped them at midnight. I have read that, years back, people used to go to orphan's house to cater to their needs. But now the people have totally changed. It is a bitter fact now that the orphans visit home after home to meet their needs. Morality is dying, and we are complicit in burying it deep.

In our society, orphans are thirsty for our love and care. Like everyone else, orphans have a heart, and they have needs. They wish to live dignified lives. It is our responsibility to serve them.

(The writer is former student of Darul Umoor, Srirangapatna, now based in Bangalore)

Learnings From Working At An Interfaith Centre

By Roshan

Over the years, I have held several jobs, although I didn't stay in any of them for very long. I had some great experiences while in each of them (and faced some great challenges too!)

One place that I worked at was a centre for interfaith dialogue and harmony. I spent several stretches of time there, over a period of more than two decades. While there were some things about the centre which I had differences with, it was a great space to learn about the ethics of inter-faith or inter-community coexistence.

There were people from all sorts of religious backgrounds at the centre Christian (Catholic and Protestant), Muslim (Sunni and Shia), Sikh and Hindu and perhaps some agnostics and atheists too! Staff, students and visitors came from different ethnic groups and countries. Closely interacting with women and men from such diverse backgrounds on a daily basis working, eating and living under

the same roof was a valuable experience. It provided a wonderful opportunity to overcome negative stereotypes about communities and to learn to discover that goodness exists everywhere, even in people whose belief systems might differ considerably from one's own. Working in this space made it possible to cement friendships across religious boundaries, enabling one to

Living with people who are different from you in terms of religion, ethnicity and so on can be a great way to come out of one's insularity and to learn some of their good things that you can benefit from.

recognise the innate oneness of all human beings and the fact that all of us, without exception, are blessed, just as we are all flawed, thus growing towards a more universal vision and way of life. Living with people who are different from you in terms of religion, ethnicity and so on can be a great way to come out of one's insularity and to learn some of their good things that you can benefit from.

Another great thing about the interfaith centre was how it began its day. We would gather in a space in the garden for a short prayer or reflection, which was led by a student, a visitor or a member of the staff. The sharing would often draw from one or the other religious tradition, or alternatively, someone would speak from his or her own personal experience. After this, when we filed out, people would exchange a few pleasantries. It was a great way to begin the day at work remembering God or sharing some positive thoughts and a smile!

By Mohammad Yacoob

A simple act that can make a dramatic difference and help human beings during the most challenging segments of their lives is smiling. **The untapped powers of smile when uncovered, inspire people during difficult times.** Human beings are part of a naturally smiling species and by using smiling powers can positively impact any situation in life. The three-dimensional ultrasound technology, image shows developing babies appear to smile even in the womb, and continue to smile in response to the sound of the human voice.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) on many occasions demonstrated that smiling is really good for human beings. His companion, Abdullah ibnHaarith, once said in one of the Ahadith, "I never came across a person who smiled as Prophet Muhammad." Prophet Muhammad regarded smiling to a brother as an act of charity. Another companion, Jariribn Abdullah said, "The Messenger of God never refused me permission to see him since I embraced Islam and never looked at me except with a smile (on his face)."

Smiling is an Art

Prophet Muhammad told all of us in a very positive way to smile more, and in the process earn blessings of Allah. A smile is a beautiful and powerful gesture. It conveys the greatest emotional side of life. Smiling is an art. We must change our attitude and frame of mind and learn how to smile better to give the highest positive emotional message to the person we are facing at that very moment. **A genuine smile lights up the world.** Prophet Muhammad taught this.

Prophet Muhammad said that even a smile is charity and this had th I had taken to heart several decades ago and started smiling to display my high Islamic spirits. Putting on a smile while talking to others, reading a book, listening to a humorous anecdote, greeting

Greet Everyone With A Smile

**Prophet Muhammad told all of us in a very positive way to smile more, and in the process earn blessings of Allah.
A smile is a beautiful and powerful gesture.**

others, have helped me become more comfortable with others. I have found that the attitude of others changes when you smile; make things happier. This prophetic tradition has helped me become a better person.

Being an engineer and a physicist, I made a decision more than forty years ago, to put my smile to test and conduct an experiment. People sometimes tend to give you a look questioning a smile, feeling threatened by it, posing



frowning faces of playful boys, hideous glances and taunting

smiled, raised my hand and saluted him. His attitude changed. He rolled down his window and said, sorry.

On one occasion, I noticed the driver in the car on the opposite side of the street, taking a right turn. A driver coming out of the parking lot of the gas/petrol station on the corner suddenly came on the street. I used the horn to warn the driver making the right turn to get his attention not to hit the car coming out of the petrol station or to move in the

I love to smile. May Allah give me the strength to face angel of death Malak al-Maut when he arrives. I like to welcome him with a smile and would like to leave this world with a smile on my face.

Prophet Muhammad said that even a smile is charity and this had th I had taken to heart several decades ago and started smiling to display my high Islamic spirits.

questions, expressing them through their eyes by rolling their eyes or body gestures. My smile must help bring a little happiness and not pose a threat or questions, so, I augmented it with a gesture of salutation by raising my hand and softly touching my forehead, announcing indirectly the absence of a spurious smile.

I would like to give a few examples from my own life that make me say Alhamdulillah and Allahu Akbar. Once, I pulled my car out of the driveway and got on the street. In front of me, approximately 100 feet away, young neighborhood boys were playing hockey on the street using hockey sticks and a puck. A hockey puck is a disk that serves the same functions in various games as a ball does. I had unwaveringly made up my mind more than forty years ago that I would smile in the face of a challenging situation.

I could have blown my horn to alert the boys. My earlier experience, based on watching

words, appeared in front of my eyes, a direct result of horn blowing. The situation needed a smile and a salutation. I slowed down, reduced my speed to less than ten miles, and approached the street crowd. The boys were busy playing. I smiled at one of the boys, who directed others to move. One boy uttered a few words. I turned my face towards him, smiled and raised my hand, positioned it softly on my forehead. His reaction startled me; he shouted directions at other boys. They scrambled and formed two lines, one on each side of the street and saluted me as I was driving away. Allahu Akbar. A smile and the confirmation that I was smiling with sincerity helped communicating with the young boys.

Almost twenty years ago, I got involved in a car accident when a driver cut in front of me and compelled me to blow the horn for more than five seconds. The other driver moved back into his lane and gave a dirty look. I

lane I was about to enter. Hearing the horn, he slammed hard on the car brakes, his car shook; the

other car sped away. I completed the left turn and the other driver took the right turn. I smiled and saluted him while watching his furious look, when we both were next to each other. He changed his mood, rolled down his window and said, "Thank you, you saved my life."

Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was sent down as a mercy to mankind. He showed us ways to achieve Taqwa, greater God consciousness and nearness to God. He made us aware of other ways to improve ourselves to bring tranquility and peace in this world and serve humanity. One of the tools he provided us is use of smile.

I love to smile. May Allah give me the strength to face angel of death – Malak al-Maut – when he arrives. I like to welcome him with a smile and would like to leave this world with a smile on my face.

[Mohammad Yacoob is a retired industrial engineer and engineering proposals analyst who lives in Los Angeles, California]

(source: islamicity Sept 2019)

Renowned Physicist Says, 'There Is A God'

"I have concluded that we are in a world made by rules created by an intelligence," so says, world-famous theoretical physicist Michio Kaku who claimed he has found evidence that God exists. His reasoning caused a stir in the scientific community. Born and raised in California, Kaku is a second-generation Japanese-American who has a long educational history including, the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard University where he earned a Ph.D.

In an interview Kaku surprised his interviewer by making a statement that most top physicists believe in a God because of how the universe is designed. He says the universe is one of order, beauty, elegance, and simplicity. Kaku further stated that the universe did not have to be this way as it could have been something ugly and chaotic. In short, "the order we see in the universe is evidence of a Creator." "Believe me, everything that we call chance today won't make sense anymore. To me, it is clear that we exist in a plan which is governed by rules that were created, shaped by a universal intelligence and not by chance."

When responding to a question about the meaning of life and God, Kaku surprised his interviewer when he revealed that most top physicists do believe in God because of how the universe is designed. Ours is a universe of order, beauty, elegance, and simplicity.

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17th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates



The 17th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates gathered in Mérida, Mexico from September 19-22, 2019, to make an urgent call to all countries and organizations of the world, their leaders and citizens, to build a culture for peace. The Summit gathered around the theme *Leave Your Mark For Peace* and addressed various important issues including: social and economic development, indigenous peoples' cultures and regional peace, global demographics, global media responsibility in peacebuilding, nuclear disarmament, rule of law and international cooperation, and peace education.

Nobel Prize Winners in attendance included: former Presidents Frederik Willem de Klerk from South Africa; Juan Manuel Santos from Colombia; Lech Walesa from Poland; Lord David Trimble, First Minister of Northern Ireland; Shirin Ebadi, first female jurist in Iran; Leymah Gbowee, a peace activist from Liberia who helped

to end a civil war; Tawakkol Karman, Yemeni human rights activist; Rigoberta MenchuTúm, known for dedicating her life to promoting the rights of indigenous people; Kailash Satyarthi, children's rights activist from India; and Jody Williams, American activist known for her work to ban anti-personnel landmines.

The Summit concluded with the **Mérida Declaration**, adopted

by the Nobel Peace Laureates and Peace Laureate Organisations, which calls for a renewed understanding of the concept of peace. The Summit also featured a special address by Pope Francis, a performance by Ricky Martin and a climate strike in solidarity with youth around the world. The laureates in attendance issued a statement in solidarity with the youth-led Global Climate Strike.

Muslims in Athens Finally get a Mosque

Without minaret or dome, the beige, rectangular structure in a former industrial area has none of the ornate grace typical of Islamic places of worship. But for the Muslims of Athens, capital of Greece, it is the result of a long effort, and the city's first formal mosque in more than 180 years. Although there are mosques in other parts of

Greece, the capital has not had a formal mosque since it drove out occupying Ottomans in 1833, and the few that are left have been repurposed.

(<https://in.reuters.com/article/greece-religion-mosque/after-waiting-for-decades-muslims-in-athens-finally-get-a-mosque-idINKCN1T81XF>)

French Institute of Islamic Civilization in Lyon

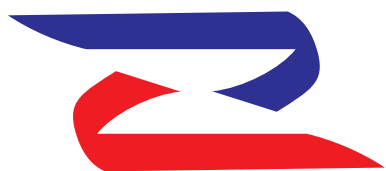
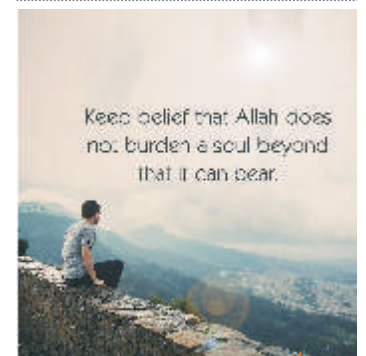


Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, underlined the importance of promoting the culture of dialogue to strengthen human ties and bridge the gaps between peoples and nations. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the French Institute of Islamic Civilization in Lyon (France), Issa emphasized the need for dialogue and cultural exchange to break down barriers and fight extremism. The opening ceremony was held in the presence of French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner. Issa also stressed the need "to respect the constitutions and regulations of the countries in which we reside", calling for tolerance, positive coexistence and the building of bridges of friendship between people. Issa warned against the threat posed by political groups, which he said take advantage of religion "as a cover-up to achieve authoritarian goals, especially

through the use of disinformation to recruit young people."

Castaner, for his part, said that the Institute represented a challenge to understanding and respect, and reflected an accurate vision of Islam as "a religion that respects other cultures and is based on dialogue and tolerance."

He also expressed pride at the strong lines of communication between Muslims and the French government and said the city of Lyon was a symbol of dialogue in the country.



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Somalia Counters Al Shabaab with New Education Curriculum

Somalia's government is implementing a new curriculum for primary and secondary school students, for the first time since the civil war broke out in 1991.

Up to 2 million textbooks printed in Somali have been issued to pupils in most of Somalia since August, the ministry of education said. The new books cover English, Arabic, Somali, maths, Islamic studies, science, physical education, technology, and social studies. "Students have coped well with the new curriculum because it is based on their religion, culture and

vernacular," said Abdul kadir Mohamed Sheikh, a teacher at Banadir Zone School.

Religious education is particularly important, said State Minister of Higher Education and Culture Abdirahman Mohamed Abdulle. The al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab insurgency also regularly launches deadly bomb attacks in Somalia in a bid to impose its own strict version of Islamic law. The government hopes the new textbooks will help counter their message. Clerics helped the government train teachers in Islamic ethics and create a

syllabus that "will produce students who are sound, who are free from terror ideology, moderate students who have Islamic knowledge as well as other subjects", Abdulle said.

However, challenges remain. Only 22% of Somalia's 30,000 teachers are certified, Abdulle said. "The quality of students depends on the quality of the teachers," he said. Somalia has one of the world's lowest enrolment rates, with only four out of 10 children here in school, according to the United Nations. Education accounted for \$16 million out of this year's budget of \$344 million.

Pope Francis Calls for a Global Educational Pact



Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church, has launched a proposal for a global educational pact to educate to

universal solidarity, a "new humanism". To do this, he is inviting the representatives of the main religions, the exponents of international organizations and the various humanitarian institutions, from the academic, economic, political and cultural world to sign the "Global Compact on Education", an alliance to rebuild the global educational pact and deliver a solid and fraternal common home to the younger generations.

INTERFAITH HARMONY

The leader of the largest independent Muslim organization in the world met Pope Francis recently to present his vision for a more peaceful future and greater human fraternity. Indonesia's Sheikh Yahya Cholil Staquf leads the 50 million member Nahdlatul Ulama movement, which calls for a reformed "humanitarian Islam". The Indonesian Muslim leader said that he was "thrilled and excited" when Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed el-Tayeb signed in February the Abu Dhabi declaration on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," because it expresses the vision of "compassionate Islam" his organization has advocated for decades. The Sheikh has specific recommendations for concrete steps to achieve the pope's aspirations of peace and

Global Movement of Humanitarian Islam

Indonesia's Sheikh Yahya Cholil Staquf leads the 50 million member Nahdlatul Ulama movement, which calls for a reformed "humanitarian Islam".

human fraternity. He came to Rome to share them with the pope.

Staquf said that the Abu Dhabi declaration requires "decisive follow-up" with actions, not just words. Just weeks after the Abu Dhabi declaration, Nahdlatul Ulama hosted a conference in Indonesia with over 20,000 Muslim scholars in attendance. At this conference, Muslim clerics and scholars issued an "ijtihad" stating their theological reasoning for prohibiting the term "kafir" meaning "infidel" to describe one's fellow citizens. "We cannot just pretend that there are no problems in Islamic



views. There are problems there. You need to acknowledge that so that we can work for the solution. If you do not acknowledge the problem, you cannot resolve it," Staquf says. "In Muslim-majority societies, you can see more attitudes of discrimination and persecution toward minorities ... so the Islamic world needs to develop the whole religious system that will integrate the Islamic world harmoniously with the rest of the world," he said. Central to these proposed changes to Islamic theology is how Muslims are called to interact with non-Muslims, Staquf explained. "We need for Muslims to view others as a fellow human being, fellow brothers in humanity. We should not attack on the basis of different identities," he said.

Staquf met Pope Francis after the general audience on Sept. 25. He presented the pope with a letter and several documents from Nahdlatul Ulama, containing recommendations as

to how Muslims scholars have sought to address "problematic elements within Islamic orthodoxy" to create a more harmonious world order with "respect for equal rights and dignity of every human being."

"When you think about global harmony, global security, global stability, we see four centers of concern related to Islamic orthodoxy," Staquf said. Within the documents presented to the pope, NU lays out "a practical road map" to achieve the aspirations expressed in pope's Document on Human Fraternity: "prohibiting use of the term kafir (infidel) to describe one's fellow citizens; affirming the legitimacy of the nation state and laws created through modern political processes; committing Muslims to strive for peace as a religious obligation; and providing a detailed framework for bringing Islamic orthodoxy into alignment with 21st century norms." "My hope is that these documents will be examined seriously by the Vatican so that the Vatican can make decisions to engage with us and work together with this," Staquf said.

The Muslim leader also brought a delegation of Indonesian Catholics and young Muslims practising "humanitarian Islam" with him to Rome to attend the

general audience with the pope. Together they asked Pope Francis to visit Indonesia to continue his interreligious dialogue.

Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country historically known for its ethnic diversity and peaceful religious pluralism, which has seen an increase in religious-based violence and radical groups in recent years.

Staquf stressed that the persecution of Christians in Muslim-majority countries around the world must end. He said that when looking at the rise of radical groups, one cannot ignore the theological underpinnings that allow their radicalism and violence to spread. "Let's look at why these problematic views can spread effectively everywhere in the Islamic world in these Muslims communities because it is supported by ... what is considered to be authoritative elements of the orthodoxy. So we need to change that so that people cannot use that elements to make troubles, to make problems," he said.

One of the areas Nahdlatul Ulama is working to reform is religious education for Muslim youth. They are constructing a curriculum for teaching Islamic history that places less of an emphasis on the violence of the past, and more on spirituality.

"We use a creed for this movement, the global movement of humanitarian Islam. Our creed is: 'We choose rahma' ... 'We choose compassion,'" he said.

(Extracted from catholicnewsagency.com)

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By Anuradha Sengupta

On a muggy August Sunday, a group of around 52 people took a walk around the old Kolkata neighbourhood of Zakaria Street, observing the decades-old ittar stores and trying out fragrances, noticing the shop's charming architectural details, and having spontaneous chats with the area's residents. The walk was part of an ongoing initiative between Kolkata's Presidency University and Know Your Neighbour (KYN), a social experiment aimed at promoting communal harmony in Bengal. The initiative was started in 2016 in association with SNAP (Social Network for Assistance to People) Bengal.

Sabir Ahmed of SNAP says he found the need for the initiative after seeing the increasing level of discomfort that other communities had about Muslims. He feels KYN is particularly important now when much of the fear is nurtured on social media and digital platforms like WhatsApp. "My interactions with young participants revealed surprising misconceptions. Something like the practice of Dastarkhan, a traditional space for meals kept on a yellow cloth featuring Urdu couplets, had become the basis for speculation over why Muslims 'eat in bed'. You hear about someone booking an Uber or a meal, finding the delivery person or driver is Muslim and cancelling the ride or order. I had a researcher from a reputed university abroad who wanted to do some study on the Muslim community, but refused to come to Kidderpore to meet me. I'd rather meet you in a café at Park Street, she said. Because she had heard it was not a 'good area'. It's all becoming so strange."

Interactions with Locals

As Ahmed says, there are many people who do not know a single Muslim person in their social circles. Combined with the bewildering array of misconceptions, it becomes a dangerous brew. KYN's walks go deep into specific areas and are followed by interactions with locals. "For instance, we may explore Unani medicine by interacting with families who have been in the business for decades. We find out about Hindu zamindars who used to live in Zakaria Street, the big Durga Puja that happens in Raibari, the Mohammed Ali Library, which has books on the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita* in Urdu. We take non-Muslim women into the masjid, breaking the myth that women are not allowed inside. All this opens people's eyes to the reality, combating their ignorance," says Ahmed.

This is one of the reasons that motivated Garima Dhabhai, an

Meet the Neighbours

Heritage walks and mosque tours, and a database of landlords who won't discriminate on the basis of religion: Kolkata fights back against communal rabble-rousing.

assistant professor with Presidency University to sign up her students for a walk with KYN. "We live in times when stereotyping has become normal," she says. "Today's generation, and, in fact, a lot of us, are fed so many things on social media about a community news, images, videos, memes. Misconceptions happen not because people are from a conservative background but because they are constantly exposed to such images. Then there's an entire discourse about Muslim culture in Kolkata that's associated with biryani, kebabs, Awadhi nawabs and so on, which is stereotypical in its own way. This is where initiatives like KYN become necessary. The idea is to get in there and see the actual reality."

Dhabhai recounts how the ittar shops attracted the students, and how at an imambara, one of the students started telling them about his memories of the space. "He became our guide, in a spontaneous way."

This de facto guide was Farhan Zafri, a Political Science student from Presidency. "This area was a major part of my childhood and I know how most people have a limited view of it. It's been ghettoised as a run-down place, or identified only as an area to go to for kebabs, sevai etc. during Ramzan. But it is so much more." He was excited that his friends and professors were exploring the musafir khanas, the imambargahs, and ittar shops of his old neighbourhood. "I was able to show them where rituals are held, how a traditional majlis is held, the narrative behind Muharram. I was humbled by the appreciation this area so close to my heart drew."

Cultural Food Tours

Apart from walks, KYN holds regular events across the city, including iftar get-togethers and Kolkata Mosjider Kotha (Tales of Kolkata's Mosques). "Mosques are spread across the city but people only know of a handful," says Ahmed. "There are mosques here named after the women of Tipu Sultan's family people don't know about that." KYN also hosts interesting cultural food tours such as Breakfast with Bakarkhani and Dostiki Iftari.

Another initiative in response to the increasing and open distrust between communities is Open The Door. Started in April last



Photo: Anuradha Sengupta

year by voluntary group Sanghati Abhijan ('campaign for people's unity'), it is a citizen-led attempt to create a database of landlords in various cities and towns of West Bengal who will not discriminate on the basis of religion. The group's Facebook page says it is "an attempt to fight rampant discrimination against Muslims' access to housing."

Sanghati Abhijan started off as a citizens' initiative for direct action against communalism when "there was a series of communal flare-ups in Bengal, in places like Asansol, Naihati etc.," says

Kasturi Basu, a filmmaker, who signed up to help with the campaign.

Friendly Interventions

Even as the group was holding its first few meetings, two incidents took place. Four junior doctors were thrown out of their rented home because of their religion, and a student was refused a house after the landlord learned her last name. Sanghati Abhijan took up the cases, spoke to the landlords, and got them to rethink their decisions. That was how Open The Door started.

In the beginning, they were contacted by people who had faced similar issues. "We used to deal with it case by case. We would go and speak to the landlords, and in most cases we were successful in changing their minds. Sometimes, the landlords wouldn't budge. One said, 'It isn't me it is my old mother who has

these biases.'"

Later, Sanghati Abhijan started its Facebook page, where flat or homeowners could post, but only if they agreed not to discriminate. "Later, we also added that there should be no discrimination based on sexual orientation, caste, etc. It has started rolling, and now people don't need to come to us. Many people have found accommodation through the page."

Basu recounts the strange 'Only vegetarians allowed' ads that she and her husband came across while searching for a place to rent in Kolkata. "We were intrigued. What does it even mean in a city like Kolkata where most people are non-vegetarian? Then, after calling up a few places, we found out that it was actually code for No Muslims. They had no problem with non-Muslims who they imagined would eat meat but not beef."

Basu thinks the government needs to step in and declare a no-discrimination policy for the housing sector "or else Muslims will just not get to decide where they can live. They will always have a limited choice and be pushed to live in those few 'Muslim areas', and they will get ghettoised further."

(Taken from www.thehindu.com)

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The Discover Yourself workshops were held in Hyderabad on the 27, 28 & 29th September 2019. In Kolkata on the 4, 5 & 6th October 2019 and in Village Bara, Ghazipur District on the 12, 13 & 14th October 2019.

Some of the Participants Share their Experiences:

- It is excellent and it cleared all my doubts and I feel, I should have attended the workshop long ago.
- The workshop helped me in boosting my self-confidence and I found inner peace.
- My life changed right at the start of the workshop when Sadath sir, said we judge people with our own standards. It changed my thinking from mind to heart.
- It affected my heart and directly connected to the reality that is Allah- Haq. I got positive energy and clarity on how to live in this world in every situation.
- It prevents from damaging self and society and it is practical.
- It is educative, enlightening and helps people clear out the fundamentals of life. It has instilled in me the ability to distinguish.
- Before the workshop, I had a bit of superiority complex about myself, but after the workshop, I felt all are equal. The workshop is excellent, and it made a difference in my life.
- Before the workshop, I was confused. I did not know the evil in me and now, I know and how to control it.
- This workshop has made me realize that my heart will be at peace when your loved ones are happy. Alhamdulillah! It was a life-changing experience.
- Earlier, I was living in darkness and now it brought me into the light. I discovered myself.



IBRAHIM: Before the workshop, I did not believe that the heart should control the mind. Before the workshop, I thought I am important, and all should give importance to me. Now, I realized that we are all human beings created by Allah, we are all equal and hence we must respect all human beings. I learnt to live a life of submission, when we submit to the will/ reality we will be in peace and when we deny, we will be miserable and suffer. I thank you for the beautiful and valuable content, style, and coaching. Jazakallah Khair!

JUNAID: The workshop is multi-dimensional. In every hour, a new dimension, new area, new idea comes up, and finally all are inter-related. Now, I can identify the *waswas* (whisperer), my actions, my language, my words and differentiate between good and evil. I learned to see the reality. I came to know, we are all created as human beings. The whole thing

resolves in being human.

ATTA: I was often confused as to what and who I was, and took refuge in music, sports, yoga, journeying, etc. In the workshop, I was made to free myself from the blames of the past and future. Now, I can distinguish between me and my mind.

IRFAN: Before the workshop, I was sad, angry, rude at every point of time. I used to always think negative about myself. But after the workshop, I am confident and a positive thinker. Attending the workshop changed my entire life. Every individual can change and turn towards the Almighty, if you follow the workshop.

SAIRA: I was born in a Bengali family. Graduated in B.A. in 2011. Now from this year, I am doing MSc in psychology as a distance course, apart from a psychological counseling course from Jadavpur University. I am also learning hypnotherapy course and radionics therapy and

homeopathy now. I have my own small Gym center. I have faced so many difficulties in my whole life. In the last 1.5yrs I was depressed and there was no meaning in my



life. I did many other workshops, but this is one of my best workshop. I found peace for three days. I am a new Muslim.

NAAZ: My journey started when I met Sir in 2017 and it was a great experience when I started to understand his discourse. I got to know that there are two ways in life. One is Allah's way and the other being the Shaitan's way. I



chose to walk on the path of Allah. After attending his workshop, I got the wisdom that I was seeking and was always looking forward to attending his next workshop. His workshop was an eye opener for me as I always feel enlightened and enriched with his discourse. I decided to go ahead with the Train the Trainer workshop in Bangalore to impart my knowledge to others. It is not that I never fell thereafter, but it was with the guidance of Sir that I got to stand up and move ahead. This year too, I attended the programme and the same was imparted to us in a different way and in a different style. Sir is like a Godfather to me as he has always guided me and given me and shown me the light which was like a key to my life's surroundings. He taught me how to use my words when speaking with others. I pray for Sir's good health and may

happiness, peace, and prosperity so that together we can change the world, Inshallah.

RIZWAN: Really, this workshop was remarkable to experience. Before the workshop, I was in darkness. I did not recognize who I am? Why I have come into this world? What should be our purpose of life? But now, after the workshop, the concepts are clear to find a valuable life. First, I will change myself and then I will change my surroundings are. My thanks to Akbar Khan and to my coach for this life-changing workshop.

NAGMA: It was amazing. Before the workshop, my life was full of stress and suffering. After the workshop, I am so happy. I got the real meaning of life and what is Truth.

TANZEEM: Before the workshop, I was selfish, I did not

Allah give him loads of energy so that he can continue to inspire people who need guidance in their lives.

SHAGUFTA: Yes! The workshop made a difference. Earlier I was groping in darkness and was quite puzzled about certain questions like, if the Muslim is '*khairaummah*' then why the conditions of Muslims are so bad? Why Muslims are not getting due respect? How we should get our past glory back? After attending the workshop, I got the answer to some of my questions. I feel I am a confident person now. Although I cannot change other's perspectives, I can change mine, be happy and satisfied with whatever I have. May Allah give you success,

care for others, I was always fighting with my sister and used to scold her. After the workshop, my attitude changed, I started helping everyone. When I was returning home from the workshop, one old man was asking help, but no one was helping him, but I took him to his house and he blessed me. Yes, I have changed my life, I have become responsible and started helping everyone.

ATIF: It is the best workshop in my life. Before the workshop, my life was just like that of an animal and boring, I always would tell lies and never obey my parents. After the workshop, I feel life is simple and I am a human being. Now, I started to speak the truth and obey my parents. My attitude completely changed.





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As climate change threatens the entirety of the world, many people are turning to the religious traditions to find inspiration for the environmental movement. One such figure is Odeh Rashid al-Jayyousi, a 58-year-old Palestinian academic who serves on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel at the United Nations and leads the little-known but fast-growing field of eco-theology, the study of religions' calls to protect the natural environment. Muslim disciples of this idea cite eco-friendly verses of the Quran to argue that Islam obliges its followers to fight environmental degradation, promote sustainable development and stop global warming.

"Islam as a way of life provides remedies to the global debate on growth and sustainability," says al-Jayyousi, chair of the innovation and technology management department at Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain. "Islam views the role of the individual as a value and knowledge creator, a steward, a witness and a reformer who strives to contribute to progress and a good life."

Eco-theology has developed a small following in corners of the Muslim world from Indonesia to

Morocco, but the academic discipline has yet to spark the kind of social movement that Muslim environmentalists envision.

"What impresses me about Dr. Jayyousi is his approach to linking the principles of the current concepts of sustainable development and environmental protection with the teachings and principles of the Islamic religion and Arab heritage," says Waleed Zubari, professor of water resource management at Arabian Gulf University.

Born in the West Bank city of Tulkarm in 1961, al-Jayyousi has spent much of his life in a region in turmoil, but the Middle East's history of conflicts has never detracted from his lifelong love of nature. In the ruinous aftermath of the Six-Day War the 1967 battle between Israel and its Arab neighbors he distracted himself by catching grasshoppers and playing in orchards, an extension of his wider love for interacting with the natural environment.

Al-Jayyousi's academic and professional career took him far from the insects and orchards of the West Bank. He got a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Yarmouk University in Jordan in 1983 before moving to the United

Islam and Ecological Protection

Leveraging his position at the U.N. since 2015 to capture a larger audience, Odeh Rashid al-Jayyousi has called on the international community to build an Islamic financial endowment for combating global warming.

States, where he earned a master's degree and a doctorate in urban planning from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Prior to arriving at Arabian Gulf University in 2015, al-Jayyousi taught environmental science at a Jordanian university for 11 years and launched the Middle Eastern office of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, an environmental organization headquartered in Switzerland. al-Jayyousi even dabbled in writing children's literature as a hobby.

Al-Jayyousi's academic and professional career took him far from the insects and orchards of the West Bank. He got a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Yarmouk University in Jordan in 1983 before moving to the United States, where he earned a master's degree and a doctorate in urban planning from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The Palestinian professor's expanding list of accomplishments has included advising the United States Agency for International Development, establishing a doctoral program of 50 students at Arabian Gulf University and overseeing an initiative that encourages Syrian refugees in Jordan to start green businesses. *Islam and Sustainable Development* is the 2012 book where he first made his case for an Islamic approach to environmentalism. Since then, al-Jayyousi has evolved into one

of eco-theology's most prominent advocates.

Leveraging his position at the U.N. since 2015 to capture a larger audience, al-Jayyousi has called on the international community to build an Islamic financial endowment for combating global warming. "Civil society activism in the Muslim world should support and nurture a green way of life in line with the Islamic worldview," says al-Jayyousi. This activism is one form of struggle to ensure balance and harmony between humans and nature. His work has earned a

theology. brahim Özdemir, founding president of Hasan Kalyoncu University in Turkey and author of *The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude Towards Nature: A Muslim Perspective*, notes that Muslim environmentalists often face the accusation that they "serve Western and colonialist agendas."

On a wider level, al-Jayyousi will have to make eco-theology accessible to Muslims less steeped in its sometimes esoteric teachings. "These Muslims adopt secular approaches to most problems, including the environmental one, and it's not easy for them to switch gears and see that the Islamic tradition itself, which they have known only superficially, has wonderful solutions," says Tarik M. Quadir, an assistant professor of philosophy at Necmettin Erbakan University in Turkey and the author of *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*.

In the face of these challenges, al-Jayyousi remains steadfast, asserting that eco-theology can pave the road to an eco-friendly future after the modern world led us astray. "It is imperative that we rethink educational systems that neglect the beauty and majesty of the powers around us in nature," says al-Jayyousi.

Fireflies: Where Squirrels & Centipedes Party Together!

In times of climate change, Fireflies is playing an inspiring role in conserving nature and by being home to many birds, animals and insects.

Tucked away on the outskirts of Bangalore, in Dinnepalya village, is Fireflies Intercultural Centre. Set up by Siddhartha, a writer and an activist, this island of greenery is like a rainforest, with picture-postcard scenery like something straight out from the pages of *National Geographic*! With accommodation facilities for 80 people or more, Fireflies is an ideal place for NGOs and other groups to hold workshops, as well as for individuals looking



for a short getaway or writers who wish to spend time in peace and quiet to work on their manuscripts.

Fireflies is home to a variety of

trees, birds, animals and insects, which is one of its major attractions. One can spend many joyful hours inspecting the centipedes, caterpillars and snails here or the water birds in the village pond beyond. One can take short walks in the countryside, which still retains much of its rural past, despite the expanding city.

For more information about Fireflies, see www.fireflies.org.in

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(Translation from English to Hindi/Urdu and vice versa also done)

By Valea

Shen lived in a huge mansion in a village. The house, which was located in the middle of a sprawling compound, dated back two centuries or more. It had more than ten bedrooms (in addition to many other rooms) and was meant to accommodate a large joint family. It was the most prominent structure for miles around.

Once home to almost forty people spanning four generations, the only people who lived in the mansion now were Shen, his aged mother and three domestic help...along with a dozen or so what Shen's mother called 'guests of God': 'stray' dogs and cats who wandered in and out of the house as they pleased. "God sends these creatures to us to feed and love," Shen's mother would explain. "Serving these guests of God is a way to serve God."

Shen didn't agree with his mother's views about the animals. He thought they were an utter nuisance. "Why waste money on feeding them?" he would badger his mother. But she would give the same reply, about the animals being 'guests' sent by God who should be loved and served.

When Shen's mother died and he became the 'owner' of the house, among the first things he did was to instruct the 'servants' to strictly forbid the dogs and cats from entering the compound. The 'servants' didn't like the idea they remembered what Shen's mother had taught them about the animals being guests of God but they were too scared of Shen to question him.

Shortly afterwards, Shen hit

upon an idea. He decided to convert the mansion into a money-spinning hotel. He got professional designers to do up the building, spending for this purpose a good portion of the money he inherited from his mother. Then, he hired an advertising firm to run a media campaign, promoting the mansion as a 'tropical resort', an ideal getaway from the urban chaos.

The hotel proved to be an instant hit to begin with, that is. Urbanites with plenty of cash to waste flocked to the hotel, on the weekends especially, when there was much dancing and feasting and heavy drinking. For the so-called celebrities of town, it was the place to be and to be seen.

Now, it had been just a few weeks since Shen's mother had died, and so the guests of God, who had been visiting the mansion for years, hadn't realised that they were longer wanted there. Every day, a couple of cats and a pack of dogs would slip into the compound which had been their home for years in the hope of being fed, only to meet with stones and sticks and fiery abuse from Shen. "Chase them all out. Break their legs and beat them black and blue if they dare come in" he would

TALE TIME

Bringing Back Home the 'Guests of God'

One day, Shen spotted a mother-dog at the gate of the mansion, with four little puppies behind her. He rushed towards the gate to drive the dog away.



Shen's strong-arm tactics had already caused the death of a puppy. Two dogs had turned lame and a cat had lost an eye as a result of Shen's stone-pelting.

bark at his 'servants'. "If they hang around here, we'll lose our customers they don't want these creatures here."

Shen's strong-arm tactics had already caused the death of a puppy. Two dogs had turned lame and a cat had lost an eye as a result of Shen's stone-pelting.

The hotel did brisk business for some months. But soon, the flood of customers turned into a trickle, and not even half a year after it had opened business turned so bad that it was with difficulty that the hotel would get a single customer in a week!

Shen was at his wits' end, unable to understand why. The fact that he had spent much of the money he had inherited on the hotel made things even worse for him. The collapse of his hotel venture rapidly turned him into a psychological wreck. He would spend hours locked up in his room, drinking heavily and not wanting to face the world.

One day, Shen spotted a mother-dog at the gate of the mansion, with four little puppies behind her. He rushed towards the gate to drive the dog away. But before he got there, Muji, the gardener, called out to him. "Sir, please don't chase away the dog. It has innocent hungry babies with it, and they haven't eaten for days. You can see their ribs sticking out! It's such a pathetic sight. If your mother were still here, she would never have sent them away. She would have instructed me to call them in and give them milk and bread and things like that. You remember, don't you, that she would call them 'guests of God'?" Muji said.

Muji was an old man, who had come to the mansion to work as a young man, even before Shen was born. He had spent many years in Shen's mother's service and was one of her few trusted

confidantes. That is why although he was, as Shen considered him, 'simply a gardener', Shen couldn't dismiss him lightly or answer him back. He stopped in his tracks while Muji continued.

"And Sir, now that I have at last spoken out, let me tell you something else. You've completely wasted your mother's money, turning this beautiful house into a cheap hotel, where all sorts of shady characters flock. Your mother and all your ancestors would have been appalled," Muji berated Shen.

"And do you want to know why almost no guests come to your hotel now?" Muji went on. "It is because you have turned away the 'guests of God', like this dog and her hungry babies, who have been coming here all these years and whom your mother served with love and devotion till her last day."

Muji's words struck Shen like a bolt from the blue. An image of his mother feeding the cats and dogs and lovingly conversing with them flashed in his mind's eye for a brief moment, and he realised how right Muji was.

"You may accept my words or reject them," Muji continued, "but I know well that your misery won't end unless you receive back into this house with honour and love the guests of God these cats and dogs to whom this house belongs just as much as it does to anyone else." Saying this, Muji went towards his room in order to fetch some bread for the dog and her puppies. And after a brief moment of hesitation, Shen turned around and silently followed him.

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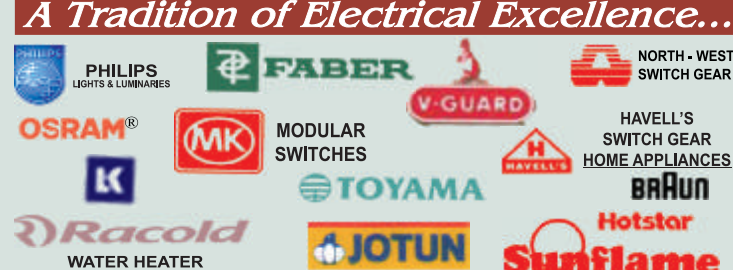
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