



Human Brotherhood is the Key to World Peace, MWL Chief Tells Global Conference

Zagreb, Croatia: Promoting the values of human brotherhood is the most important pillar for achieving world peace, the international conference titled 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Security' heard. Organized by the Muslim World League (MWL) in the Croatian capital of Zagreb, the conference was held under the patronage of Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic.

The conference called for the enactment of legislation to criminalize all methods and practices of hatred, racism, marginalization and exclusion as a crime against humanity. It also called for the establishment of a global centre for civilized communication based in Zagreb to be a bridge for dialogue, understanding and cooperation among humans and to be an incubator for initiatives related to promoting human and societal values and bridging religious, cultural and ethnic gaps.

The Croatian president launched the activities of the international conference in cooperation with others, including the Catholic diocese of Croatia and an official representation from the Vatican State represented in the Pontifical



(Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa (center), secretary general of the Muslim World League, with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (left) during the Human Fraternity for World Peace and Security conference in the Croatian capital)

“The conference called for the enactment of legislation to criminalize all methods and practices of hatred, racism, marginalization and exclusion as a crime against humanity.”

Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. The conference was attended by Croatia's prime minister, the speaker of parliament, a number of Croatian

ministers and parliamentarians and a wide range of political, religious and intellectual leaders from all over the world.

“This initiative is an important opportunity for all of us to build a world of love based on brotherhood,” said Kitarovic, adding that “God created us diversified in our cultures, religions, races and others, so that we can cooperate in the service of humanity, and based on this human unity that the Creator wanted, the suffering of every

human being is really the suffering of all humanity.”

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, the secretary general of the Muslim World League, called for “a real adoption of the values of the human fraternity” that remove negative barriers and close their gaps, build bridges and facilitate dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

He stressed that humanity has enough common values for making peace and harmony in the world today. He also noted that the shared love, coexistence and tolerance become closer, stronger and more responsible when they are common national values.

(Based on a report on arabnews.com)

Women Can Offer Prayers at Mosques: Muslim Personal Law Board

Entry of women into mosques to offer prayers, as per Islamic texts, is permitted, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) said in an affidavit submitted before the Supreme Court. It also said any fatwa barring the entry of women “may be ignored”. The submission was made in response to a plea filed by a Pune-based couple seeking the apex court directions to allow women to enter a mosque and offer prayers.

Women are not prohibited from entering mosques under Islamic tenets, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board told the Supreme Court. “Islam permits the entry of women into mosques. However, unlike men,



it is not mandatory for them to offer Friday prayers or attend congregational prayers,” the Muslim body said in an affidavit filed in response to a petition seeking that women be allowed to “worship at all mosques”.

There is no bar on women and men praying together either, it added.

“(We have) taken a stand as per Islamic texts that the entry of woman into mosques for namaz be permitted. Any other ‘fatwa’ to this effect may be ignored,” news agency IANS quoted the Muslim body as saying in its affidavit.

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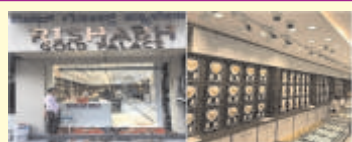
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Asia Bibi Breaks Silence in New Book

Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman who spent years on death row after being convicted of blasphemy, has published a book about her experiences and her new life. Ms Bibi released a memoir, *Enfin Libre*, or 'Finally Free', written with French journalist Anne-Isabelle Tollet.

She was sentenced to death on blasphemy charges by a Pakistani court in 2010 but acquitted in 2018. She currently lives in an undisclosed location in Canada. Ms. Bibi, 47, has always maintained her innocence in a highly sensitive case that polarised Pakistan and was closely followed around the world. The Pakistan Supreme Court's quashing of her sentence in October 2018 led to violent protests by religious hardliners who support strong blasphemy laws, while more liberal sections of society urged her release.

In the new book, Ms. Bibi recounts her arrest, the conditions of her prison detention and her eventual release. She also discusses the challenges of adjusting to her new life in Canada. In an excerpt released by the publishing house, she writes: "How could I ever imagine in 50 years that I would become a global symbol of the fight against religious extremism when I am but a simple, illiterate peasant?"

"From my small windowless cell, I often wondered why Pakistan was targeting me." She describes the conditions of her detention, where her neck was "encased in an iron collar that the guard can tighten with a huge nut", according to excerpts published by the AFP news agency. She writes that few of the other prisoners showed her sympathy.

The book was published by Éditions du Rocher in French with an English version due out later this year. Ms Bibi collaborated on the book with Ms Tollet, who spent years working in Pakistan. The journalist has long championed her case and published two books on the subject.

Ms Bibi went on trial after an argument she had with a group of women in June 2009. She was later beaten up at her home and her attackers claimed she confessed to blasphemy. She was arrested after a police investigation. Acquitting her, the Supreme Court said that the case was based on unreliable evidence.

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Several US Jewish Groups Critique Trump's 'Peace' Plan

Many Jewish organizations in the U.S. have critiqued the Trump administration's proposed peace plan to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unveiled by President Donald Trump at the White House, the so-called peace plan offered everything the far-right Israelis have been demanding, giving Palestinians nothing concrete but vague economic promises and the tiniest glimmer of hope for statehood.

The Jewish Democratic Council of America said the plan "is a green light for Israeli annexation of the West Bank, an intentional undermining of a viable two-state solution and another example of Trump using Israel to further his domestic political agenda." Progressive Middle East advocacy group J Street called it "the logical culmination of repeated bad-faith steps" Trump has taken to "validate the agenda of the Israeli right, prevent the achievement of a viable, negotiated two-state solution and ensure that Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory in the West Bank becomes

permanent."

Daniel Sokatch, CEO of the New Israel Fund, said the proposal "threatens to make the occupation permanent" and "is not the vision of Israel's founders." Emily Mayer, co-founder of American Jewish progressive activist group IfNotNow, also blasted the plan as "totally and utterly bankrupt," adding it "reveals the shameful way that our government has catered to the Israeli right at the cost of Palestinian freedom for our entire lives."

Rabbi Alissa Wise, acting co-executive director of Jewish Voice for Peace, a not-for-profit NGO, called it "an apartheid plan." Wise added that it is "a distraction ploy by two warmongers who are prioritizing their personal election campaigns over any semblance of statecraft."

The UN in a statement said it remains committed to a two-state solution in accordance with UN resolutions on the basis of pre-1967 borders.

(Extracted from aa.com.tr)

90% of Boko Haram Victims are Muslims, Says Buhari

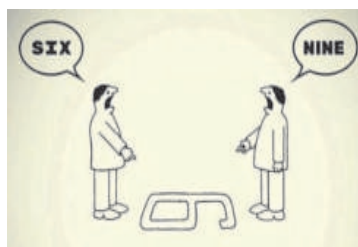
Nigeria President Muhammadu Buhari has said that 90 per cent of all Boko Haram's victims in the past years have been Muslims. The insurgents began their heinous activities in 2009 after the killing of the leader Mohammed Yusuf. Global Terrorism Index indicates that the group since 2009, has killed tens of thousands and displaced 2.3 million. President Buhari in an article published in Speaking Out, a guest opinion column for "Christianity Today", said that the perception that members of the sect were always targeting Christians in Nigeria is not true. According to him, the terrorists have targeted vulnerable Nigerians without discrimination. "It is the reality that some 90 per cent of all Boko Haram's victims have been Muslims," Buhari said. "They include a copycat abduction of over 100 Muslim schoolgirls, along with their single Christian classmate, shootings inside mosques; and the murder of two prominent imams." "It is a simple fact that these now-

failing terrorists have targeted the vulnerable, the religious, the non-religious, the young, and the old without discrimination," the President stressed.

Buhari warned individuals, organisations and groups seeking to divide the country through religion to have a rethink. "There is no place in Nigeria for those who seek to divide us by religion, who compel others to change their faith forcibly or try to convince others that by so doing, they are doing good," Buhari said.

President Buhari stated that the terrorists today only attempt to build invisible walls between the adherents of the two major religions in Nigeria. "They have failed in their territorial ambitions, so now instead they seek to divide our state of mind, by prying us from one from another to set one religion seemingly implacably against the other," Buhari said.

(Extracted from <https://guardian.ng>)



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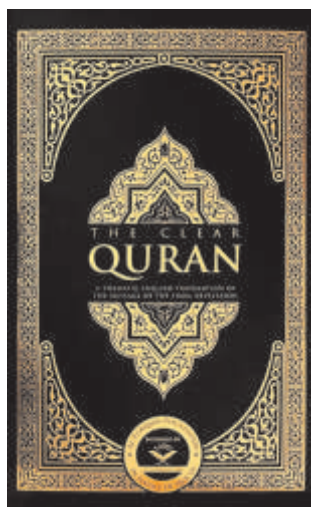
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Muslim World League's Historic Visit to Auschwitz

Of the more than 6 million Jews and millions of other victims killed during the Holocaust, in total 1.1 million lost their lives at Auschwitz during the Second World War.

On the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the former Nazi German death camp in Poland, a high-level interfaith delegation visited the place, led Dr. Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL). The delegation comprised 62 Muslims, including 25 prominent religious leaders, from some 28 countries.

The interfaith visit also included the CEO of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), David Harris. "Our 21st century challenge at AJC is to write a new chapter between the Muslim and Jewish peoples," said Harris. "There are those who want to keep us divided. We will not let them win. It's about nothing less than defining the future of the world in which we want to live." The AJC delegation included members of the organization, among them some children of Holocaust survivors.

The visit by the interfaith Jewish and Muslim delegation from the MWL and the AJC was agreed to in April 2019. In total, a year and a half of negotiations were needed behind the scenes before the visit was secured. The visit took place as part of events commemorating 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, the World War II death camp where the Nazis killed more than 1.1 million people, most of them Jews. Over six million Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust.



(The interfaith delegation at Auschwitz)

"The delegation affirms the messages of the Muslim World League against violence, hatred, and extremism," the group said in a statement. Speaking to *Al Arabiya* during the visit, Sheikh Al-Issa said, "We are advocates for peace. We believe in peace. This high-level delegation of Muslim scholars from different countries and from different sects has come to say that our religion is one of peace, one of mercy and one which fights evil."

Of the more than 6 million Jews and millions of other victims killed during the Holocaust, in total 1.1 million lost their lives at Auschwitz during the Second World War. The death camp was built and operated by the Nazis during the German occupation of Poland. Since it was liberated by the allies in 1945 the death camp, where the vast majority of those killed were European Jews, has been hallowed ground. Recently, during events across the globe for the 75th anniversary of that liberation, it was also a place of prayer for Muslims mourning the carnage of the Nazi genocide. This most senior delegation of Muslim leaders ever to visit Auschwitz held prayers at the concentration camp. Before he led the prayers, Sheikh Al-Issa said that his group, which

included both Sunni and Shia clerics, stood vehemently against the crimes perpetrated at Auschwitz. "We came to say that the Islamic religion deplores these crimes," he said. "This visit is important, it expresses the Islamic feeling towards these crimes, these racial, genocidal crimes". "Islam doesn't have double standard, as it stands with justice against any crime that violates the sanctity of humankind," he said. "This high-level delegation of Muslim scholars has come to say that our religion is one of peace, one of mercy, and one which fights evil," Sheikh Al-Issa, who served as Saudi Arabia's Minister of Justice until 2015, said during the visit.

The day following the visit to Auschwitz, a Friday, which is holy to both Muslims and Jews, the

interfaith delegation celebrated the life of their respective religious cultures in Poland. Jews and Muslims prayed together at Jumma prayers at the Tatarska Street Mosque by the Tartar cemetery in the north west of Warsaw. The sermon there called for understanding between neighbours. The Muslim community in Poland is centuries old. The grave stones to Tartar officers in the cemetery, written in Cyrillic and Arabic, date back to the 19th century.

After Muslim prayers the delegation went to Warsaw's only remaining pre-war synagogue, the Nozyk Synagogue in the centre of the Polish capital, before a Friday Shabbat service. The Jewish temple stood in what was the Warsaw Ghetto, where nearly half a million Jews were imprisoned during World War Two. Most held there were sent to the gas chambers, killed during the ghetto uprising or died of starvation.

The day concluded with a Shabbat dinner, held at Warsaw's Royal Palace. The Speaker of the Polish Senate, Poland's Minister of

Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz, and members of the Polish Catholic clergy were in attendance.

Following his visit to the extermination camps, Sheikh Al-Issa said, Sheikh al-Issa said "We condemn the horrific acts that took place at Auschwitz against the Jews. It is a stain on humanity". "The evidence we saw yesterday shook us all. It was so painful for me looking at human hair, at children's shoes, at so much more evidence of the atrocity."

Sheikh Al-Issa, who became the most senior Muslim leader in history to visit Auschwitz, said "Islamic values" prompted him to make the trip and that he "would oppose anyone who denies" the Holocaust. Emphasizing that Muslims and Jews have much in common, he added, "Even if we could act on 10 percent of the commonality, it would help bring peace to the world." "The meetings today and yesterday should send a strong message about our cooperation against those who twist the word of G-d to generate hate towards others, towards humanity," Sheikh Al-Issa said.

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By SinemCengiz

More women have taken up national leadership roles or key positions within decision-making bodies linked to governments around the world than ever in recent years. It is hard to deny the presence and influence of women, as they are and have always been the key to any country's political landscape.

This year has started with the appointments of women to some important positions both in Europe and the Arab world.

Amid the mass protests shaking the country, Lebanon has appointed a female member of parliament as its defense minister, with ZeinaAkar becoming the first female to take up such a role in the Arab world. Akar, a descendant of a Christian Orthodox family, was appointed despite her non-military or defense background.

Although Lebanon is considered to be liberal within the regional context, with women occupying a significant place in public life, patriarchal norms are still dominant in the country, as its politics continues to revolve around men. This is partly related both to the complex political power-sharing system in Lebanon, which is based on religious and sectarian sensitivities, and also women's status in general in the Arab world. However, last year, the country did name its first female interior minister, who hailed her appointment as a "point of pride for all women."

Following the resignation of Saad Hariri, new Prime Minister Hassan Diab leads a government that includes six female ministers. The new Lebanese government has a busy agenda to deal with in order to get things on track in the country. Among the challenges faced by this Cabinet is to gain the trust of the public, build confidence and peace among several factions in the multi-ethnic society, improve the economic situation, and effectively respond to the demands of the

Women Breaking the Glass Ceiling all Over the World



(Lebanese government ministers, left to right; Minister of Labor Lamia Yammine, Justice Minister Marie-Claude Najem, Defense Minister Zeina Akar, Minister of Youth and Sports Vartie Ohanian, Minister of Information Manal Abdul-Samad and Minister of Displaced Ghada Shreim)

protesters. Thus, both challenges and opportunities await the female ministers of the new Cabinet. The defense and interior ministers have already broken the stereotype that women are ill-suited to handling situations related to a country's national security.

Other important appointment news came from Greece, which has a historically low number of women in senior political positions. Greece's lawmakers [...] elected their country's first female president 62-year-old high court judge and human rights advocate Katerina Sakellariopoulou by an overwhelming majority. The unprecedented step of proposing a progressive female judge to assume the role of head of state caught many by surprise, but Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said: "The time has come for Greece to open up to the future," adding that change in Greek society "starts from the top ... with Greek women receiving the position they deserve."

“New Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab leads a government that includes six female ministers.”

It is significant that a nation used to the divisiveness of bipartisan politics will soon have a non-partisan president, who will enjoy broad support from across the political spectrum. Sakellariopoulou was nominated by the ruling conservative New Democracy party, but also managed to secure the backing of the main opposition party Syriza and the center-left Movement for Change. However, it is not new for this veteran judge to break the glass ceiling of the patriarchy, as she was also the first woman to serve as president of the Council of State, the country's top administrative court.

Ahead of becoming the figurehead of a country that is trying to get out of a decade-long financial and political crisis, the president-elect

noted the "difficult conditions and challenges of the 21st century, including the financial crisis, climate change, the mass movement of populations and the consequent humanitarian crisis, the erosion of the rule of law, and all manner of inequalities and exclusions."

Last October, Belgium's king appointed Sophie Wilmes as the country's prime minister, making her the first woman to hold the office in the country's near-200-year history. She is another of the many examples to have appeared recently that signal the improvement in the presence of women in significant positions.

Needless to say, having more women ministers will encourage others to join politics. There is an old stereotype that says "if women

ran the world, there would be no wars." This is both right and wrong. We cannot totally agree with this statement due to some historical facts. Turkey's first and so far only female Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and India's Indira Gandhi, among others, could be listed as examples in this case. This may be because, in societies where the patriarchy has more supporters, female leaders are considered "weak" due to their gender and this perception encourages some women leaders to adopt more aggressive policies. However, male-dominated leaderships have not brought peace either. Therefore, although the above statement might not be strictly true, we might agree that having more women in senior leadership positions would make a significant change, which would be more likely to be positive than adverse.

SinemCengiz is a Turkish political analyst who specializes in Turkey's relations with the Middle East

Source: arabnews.jp

Malaysia: Woman in Leading Post

A bioterrorism expert recently became Malaysia's first female counterterrorism chief, taking the helm of the Muslim-majority nation's agency in charge of fighting threats from violent extremist groups. Police Inspector-General Abdul Hamid Bador confirmed Normah Ishak's appointment as the police branch's new chief. He described Normah as "a highly qualified, very experienced, [and] tough professional of high integrity, and an excellent commander." "She is a gutsy officer and there is no doubt she will carry out the task given to her to the best of her ability," the national police chief said.

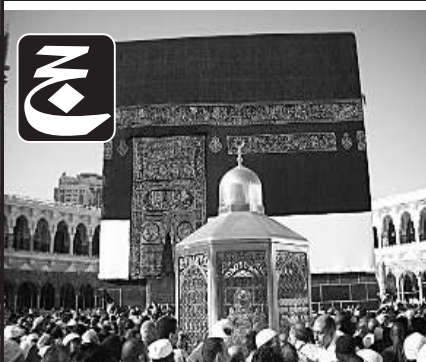
A source at federal police headquarters in Kuala Lumpur



said she was the right person to lead the counterterrorism unit. "She is a woman, but gender has nothing to do with how one executes the task given. She is capable of carrying out the task as counterterrorism chief. She is very strict but humble," the source told BenarNews.

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33
Years of
Service

Yazidi Girls Seek to Find Healing

When Rainas Elias was 14, 'Islamic State' militants overran her Yazidi homeland in northern Iraq, kidnapped her and sold her to a fighter who repeatedly raped and tortured her before selling her to an even more brutal monster. Two years after her escape, Elias was visiting Britain recently with a choir created by young survivors of atrocities of 'Islamic State' terrorists.

The girls, aged 15 to 22, say the choir provides them with friendship, healing and an escape from the traumatic memories that haunt them. The choir has sung at Westminster Abbey and will perform at the Houses of Parliament and in front of Prince Charles, a longtime patron of AMAR, a charity helping with the girls' rehabilitation in Iraq.

The estimated 400,000-strong Yazidi community in Iraq is a Kurdish minority whose faith combines elements of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam. 'Islamic State' terrorists killed and abducted thousands of Yazidis after unleashing a 2014 assault on their Mount Sinjar heartland in what the United Nations says was genocide. Although the militants were driven out three years ago, most Yazidis still live in camps, too afraid to return.

On a boat ride down the River Thames in Britain recently, the girls gathered on the deck to take in the

sights and snap selfies. In their sunglasses and high street fashions, they could have been any group of excited teenagers on their first trip abroad until they brought out a large tambourine-like daf drum and broke into song. Music is central to Yazidi religion and culture, but it has never been written down or recorded. British virtuoso violinist Michael Bochmann has been working with Yazidi musicians and AMAR to record the ancient music. Bochmann and the choir handed over the archive to Oxford University's Bodleian Library. The project also aims to protect Yazidi music by teaching it to hundreds of young people in the camps. Although traditionally performed by men, nearly half those learning are girls and women, which Bochmann is delighted by. He said the choir was having a transformative effect. "It's extraordinary how they've grown in confidence," Bochmann told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "The great thing about music is that it makes you live in the here and now. More than any other art form, it can make you happy in the present moment."

For their performance, the girls donned long white and lilac dresses tied with orange sashes, and black headdresses adorned with gold. As they danced with sequined scarves or ululated during a folksong it was hard to imagine the horrors they had

endured so recently. About half the 14 choir members were enslaved. Most did not want to tell their stories, but Elias was keen to speak out. "I'm not sure whether I'll (ever) recover from what I've experienced," said the teenager who spent three years in captivity. Elias was sold three times to different men after her abductors took her to Syria. The second man, a Saudi national, died while she was pregnant. She was sold with her child to a Moroccan who raped her "like a monster," sometimes six times a day. She became pregnant twice but lost both babies, attributing the first miscarriage partly to torture. Elias's family secured her release in 2017 for \$12,000. Her sister and two brothers are among thousands of Yazidis who are still missing.

Some choir members were even younger when abducted. One girl was sold five times to ISIS rapists after being kidnapped when she was 11. Another was nine when she was taken as a domestic slave. Her tiny frame suggests how little she was given to eat.

Elias, now 19, said the international community must help rescue remaining captives and ensure the Yazidis are never persecuted again. It is a message the choir was taking to politicians and religious leaders during their trip to Britain.

(Extracted from nationalpost.com)

Indonesian Islamic Women's Group Help Transgender School

In line with its inclusive policy and moderate approach, the Yogyakarta branch of Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the women's wing of the Indonesian Islamic movement Nahdlatul Ulama (one of the largest Islamic movements in the world), has expressed willingness to provide female preachers to Al Fatah transgender Islamic boarding school. "We don't have a different view of transgenders," the branch's chairwoman, Khotimatul Husna.

The group signed a memorandum of understanding on the plan with the boarding school's head, Shintar Ratri. Witnessing the signing were students of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University's School of Ushulludin, researchers and members of local transgender groups, including Yogyakarta Transgender Association (Iwayo) chair Kusuma Ayu.

Khotimatul said Fatayat NU Yogyakarta had a moderate view and aimed to make friends with anybody, including transgender people. The more friends it had, the more goodness it could generate

for all mankind, she said. "We can learn together. This is a good start," she said, adding that with Fatayat, the transgender community could learn about gender issues and get access to counselling services on violence against women and children. They could also avail of security aid from Garda Fatayat, which is a women- and child-friendly group that promotes peace and tolerance and condemns violence.

Separately, Shinta Ratri said Al-Fatah hosted a preaching programme every Sunday that included activities like social gatherings, Quran reading, Maghrib prayers and a preaching forum. The boarding school was established in 2006 and is a place for transgender people to learn more about religion, as well as participate in culture activities and transgender empowerment discussions, among other things. "We really hope that once a month a preacher from Fatayat NU will visit us and preach here," said Shinta, who last year was a recipient of a Front Line Defenders Award from a human rights organization in

Dublin, Ireland. Shinta also expressed hope that the preacher would also participate in discussions and social activities organized by the boarding school.

Forty-two transwomen currently attend the boarding school, located in Kotagede, Yogyakarta. The boarding school's supervisor, Masthuriyah Sa'da, said the cooperation would run for a year and could be extended. A preacher from Fatayat NU, she said, would preach on the most basic of Islamic teachings. "The preacher for sure must be sensitive to gender issues and be nonjudgmental," she said.

Runi, one of the boarding school's transgender students, said everyone should be able to interact with the marginalized transgender community, which would open the way to mutual understanding. "If there is interaction, there will be no reason to hate one another," she said. Al Falah is said to be the only Islamic boarding school in the world for transwomen.

(Extracted from the jakartapost.com)

Muslim Board has Little to Offer Muslim Women Demanding Right to Pray in Mosques

IMSD Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy
Equality Justice Compassion Peace



While welcoming the submission of the All India Muslim Personal Board (AIMPLB) in the Supreme Court that Islam permits Muslim women to pray inside a mosque, Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy (IMSD) questions the "howevers" with which its counter-affidavit is laced.

Though it is true that participation in congregational prayers at mosques is not obligatory for women, it is an undisputed fact that during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, women were part of mixed gender prayers in Islam's two holiest mosques: in Mecca and Madina. The practice has since continued through most of the Arab world. Millions of Muslim men and women from across the globe pray together during the annual Haj pilgrimage.

Contrary to this, the doors of over 95% mosques in India [...] remain shut for Muslim women. This is the context in which a Muslim couple has petitioned the Supreme Court for women's right to pray in mosques and in which the AIMPLB seems to be speaking up for women but only apparently so.

To begin with, the AIMPLB contends that issues of faith should be left "to be resolved through the processes of social transformation within the religious faith itself instead of the court seeking resolution through judicial process". IMSD strongly disagrees. It believes that as custodian-in-chief of the Constitution, the apex court is obliged to uphold women's right to gender equality and non-discrimination guaranteed under

it in all spheres of life.

Next, the Board states: "A Muslim woman is free to enter a masjid for prayers. It is her choice to exercise her right to avail of such facilities as available". But what if a woman enters a mosque only to be told by the *mutawalli* (manager) that in his mosque there is no facility available for woman? To this the AIMPLB says that mosques are managed by *mutawallis* (administrators) and neither it nor the court "can enter into the arena of detailed arrangements of a religious place".

What if the *mutawalli* claims that in his understanding of Islam only men are meant to pray in mosques? To this the counter-affidavit states: "AIMPLB does not want to comment on any contrary religious opinion on this issue". To women who thus will be kept away from mosques across India on one pretext the Board has this consolation to offer: A woman praying at home earns the same *sawaab* (religious reward) as her praying in a mosque.

In short, the AIMPLB has nothing except a mere opinion to offer to Muslim women demanding equal access to mosques. And it wants the Supreme Court to stay far away from this matter of faith.

For further details, please contact:

Javed Anand
Feroze Mithiborwala

Convener Co-convener
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(Source: sabrangindia.in)

When God pushes you to the edge, trust Him
Because only one of two things can happen:
Either He will catch you when you fall,
Or He will teach you how to fly!

46% Women Among 17,000 Saudis Registered to Become Conciliators

The Saudi Ministry of Justice recently announced that as many as 17,000 people had applied to register as conciliators at the Reconciliation Center under the ministry. Around 7,800 of those registered at the time were women, accounting for 46 percent of the total applicants. This comes after the Ministry of Justice, represented by the Conciliation Center, has allowed men and women to register as conciliators. It allowed individuals of both genders or from the profit and non-profit sectors to register as conciliators. They can practise conciliation out of courts or within the courtrooms. The conciliation minutes they issue will become executive documents once electronic approval was accorded by the Conciliation Center at the ministry.

Recently, Saudi women have taken up leading positions of late in public as well as private sectors. There has been a tremendous

response from young Saudi women to take up jobs at the Ministry of Justice. There are 220 women working at the ministry after they were allowed to work in this vital sector in 2018 and creation of a separate department for women at the ministry last October. As many as 57 women got license to undertake attestation services, issuance and cancellation of power of attorney and other notary services. There has been a 240 percent increase in the number of licensed women lawyers. There are 418 female lawyers, in addition to 3,140 trainee lawyers.

Recently, Saudi minister of justice and president of the Supreme Judicial Council, Walid bin Mohammed Al-Samaani, ordered the appointment of a woman, Shorooq bint Mohammed Al-Jadaan as deputy director-general for alimony affairs. She is the first woman to assume a leading position at the alimony fund. The

fund aims to ensure alimony is paid to beneficiaries as quickly as possible, and help achieve a financial balance for families.

The Saudi Ministry of Justice has implemented a number of initiatives in the past few years to increase the number of female employees and improve their representation in promoted positions. In late 2017, it started to provide special sections for women in courts around the country and appoint female notaries. Previously it was rare for women to work in courts. Women can now work as social researchers and administrative assistants. More women are also working in the ministry's digital transformation project, and in related fields such as computer science, software engineering and information systems. In addition, there has been a huge increase in the number of registered female lawyers, from only 10 in 2013 to 487 by November last year.

Egypt: Outcry Against Female Genital Mutilation

After the death of a young girl in upper Egypt during a botched circumcision, women and doctors in Cairo launched a number of protests in recent days to decry the practice, which has been officially outlawed since 2008. A crowd of mostly women took to the streets of Cairo to protest the enduring but now illegal practice of female circumcision. Egypt has the largest percentage of circumcised women of any country in the world.

The protests began after 12-year-old Nada Hassan Abdel Maqsood died from a botched circumcision in the Upper Egypt town of

Assyout. Both the girl's father and uncle were arrested and held for questioning for four days, along with the retired doctor who performed the procedure.

Since 2003, at least six Egyptian young women have died as a result of being circumcised.

Writer and sociologist Nawal Sadawi decried the practice at a recent women's forum. She said that circumcising women is ghastly, both medically, socially and psychologically. It is deceitful, she said, to cut off a part of a girl's body on the pretext of morality.

Dr. George Nashed, who heads the good practices committee of the

Egyptian Doctors' Syndicate, told Egyptian media that female circumcision continues, despite having been outlawed in 2008. He said that Egyptian law now bans the procedure, but it remains a customary practice, even if it is not based in religion. He said the practice is less common in Cairo, but widespread in the provinces and villages.

More than 87% of Egyptian women from ages 15 to 49 are circumcised. The figure is almost as high in Sudan. By contrast, only 18.5% of Yemeni women and just 7.4% of Iraqi women are circumcised.

Rana Ayyub Gets McGill Medal 2020 For Journalist Courage

Global Opinions Writer at Washington Post and an author Rana Ayyub recently won the 2020 McGill Medal for journalistic courage. Ayyub, after winning the award, said it was a huge honour for her. 'I accept this award on behalf of all journalists who are fighting an unpopular battle to speak the truth,' she tweeted.

The Mumbai-based journalist Ayyub will collect the award at The Grady College Of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia on 22 April. Ayyub was previously an editor with the investigative magazine *Tehelka*. She also authored a book titled of



"Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover-Up".

The McGill program is named for Ralph McGill, the late editor and publisher of the Atlanta Constitution. McGill was regarded by many as "the conscience of the South" for his editorials

challenging racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s.

Woman Ensures Dignity in Death for Unclaimed Bodies

Women are not usually allowed into burial grounds. But in NR Pura of Chikkamagaluru district in Karnataka, a Muslim woman has broken the barrier and won the hearts of locals. Jubeda Akbar Ali, a 45-year-old Muslim widow, is member of the local town panchayat performs the last rites of unidentified bodies. This mother of two girls also works as an ambulance driver. She graduated from Koppa First Grade College.

On Saturday, she transported the body of an unidentified person in his fifties in her ambulance and arranged the burial. "He had been ill for many days. After his death, the body was kept in the mortuary for many days. As no one came forward to claim it, we decided to bury it as per rules. As no relative was present, I offered prayers and did the burial," she said.

She said her father wanted her to be involved in social service. She said: "I did my first burial in 2003. A woman's body was being transported in a tractor used to



Jubeda Akbar Ali

dump garbage. That made me take up this service and provide dignified last rites. Now, if I come across an unidentified body, I organise the funeral and so far, I've buried 10 persons. I learnt driving when I was young and started driving the ambulance two years ago. Some persons donated an ambulance and I ferry patients, the destitute, among others, in it." For locals, she is a familiar face. "What makes her special is her decision to take up a challenging task like organising a burial for unclaimed bodies," said Raju, a local resident.

(For details, see timesofindia.indiatimes.com)

Qatar's First Female Minister Passes Away

Sheikha Al Mahmoud, the first female minister of education and higher education of Qatar, passed away recently. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in Arabic language, she started work in 1970 as a teacher and then a school director. She worked as undersecretary at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. H E Sheikha Al Mahmoud became the Minister of Education and Higher Education in 2003, the first female minister in Qatar. She also chaired many committees, including employees affairs, general supervisory on school development project. Sheikha Al Mahmoud received many honours, as she was honoured - as a pioneer figure - at the level of the Arab World on Arab Women's Day in 2002.



Qatar University also chose Sheikha Al Mahmoud to be the personality of the year for social responsibility for the year 2018 in recognition of her services throughout her career in inspiring generations, through many achievements and initiatives, especially in her decades-long educational career.

Saudi Woman Appointed Arab World Goodwill Ambassador

A woman from Saudi Arabia, Lamia bint Majed, secretary-general and a member of the board of trustees of Alwaleed Philanthropies, has been appointed as the first regional goodwill ambassador for the Arab world by the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-

Habitat). She will advocate for sustainable urbanization, helping UN-Habitat to address urban challenges in Arab states and advance sustainable urbanization as a driver of development and peace. She has a bachelor's degree in public relations, marketing and advertising from Misr



International University in Cairo, Egypt. In 2003, she founded Sada Al-Arab, a publishing company operating from Cairo, Beirut and Dubai.

An Explanation of Human Suffering

Name of the Book: *Why Bad Things Can't Happen to Good People!:*
Because APPLES Can't Grow on MANGO Trees

Author: Atman in Ravi (AiR)

Published by: AiR Institute of Realization, Bangalore (air.ind.in)

Year: 2019

Pages: 122

Price: Rs. 125 (paperback)/ Rs. 175 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Qalamdar

Almost every human being seeks happiness and, conversely, tries to avoid pain. Yet, why is it that all of us experience painful situations every now and then? Why is there so much suffering in the world, including in our own life? Most of us must have reflected on this question at least some time or the other.

Another, related, issue is the question of what many of us might regard as unwarranted pain in the world. Why is it, we may ask ourselves, that people who we think are very good and kind sometimes face excruciatingly

painful situations in life? Surely, we may tell ourselves, they didn't deserve it. We might be able to accept something 'bad' happening to someone who has done a grievous wrong to somebody else as a just punishment for his action, but we might find it impossible to understand why a person we think is noble might sometimes face the

same sort of predicament. On a larger scale, the enormous amount of pain that millions of people are subjected to in large parts of the world as a result of war, poverty, displacement in the name of 'development' and so on may make us lose hope in the possibility of goodness and justice in this world. We may be led to complete despair.

“ This book seeks to provide an explanation of human suffering ”

For some people who believe in God, the Creator and Controller of the universe, this what some may regard as unwarranted suffering may pose major theological questions concerning the power, goodness and justice of God. If God is, as many religions say, All-Powerful, All-Just and All-Good, why does God allow what we



might think is undeserved suffering and pain in this world, and on such a massive scale? If God is as believers say God is, why doesn't God put an immediate end to all misery in the world? Atheists often raise these sorts of questions in their critique of the concept of God.

This book by Bangalore-based author AiR seeks to provide an explanation of human suffering even why 'bad' things happen even to supposedly 'good' people from a theistic perspective that is based principally on two tenets: firstly, the Law of Action and Reaction, and, secondly, belief in rebirth. Even though some may have different opinions on some of the issues raised in the book, the book offers some interesting and useful insights.

Turning Weaknesses into Strengths!

This was the first time I was reading a self-help book that directly draws inspiration from Islam.

Title: The Secret Of Success

Author: Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Publisher: Goodword Books (www.goodwordbooks.com)

Year: 2020

Pages: 336

Price: Rs. 150

By Haris F. Farooqui

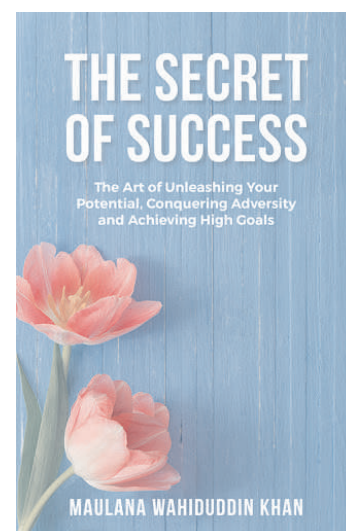
The Secret of Success is an English translation of the Urdu book *Raaz-e-Hayat*, written by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, an international scholar of repute. The 95-year-old author is a well-known personality in the international community and is a recipient of many awards. He has authored several books and promotes peace and spirituality through interfaith efforts.

The Secret of Success is organized into more than 200 short chapters. Each chapter explains a concept by way of an example drawn from either nature or from experiences of different people. The writer seeks to encourage individuals to turn their weaknesses into strengths by transforming their views.

Having read many self-help books by different authors, I thought this might just another one of the sort. But it actually turned out to be something quite different. This was the first time I was reading a self-help book that directly draws inspiration from Islam, and it contains many instances which I can directly relate to in my daily life.

The book is well organized, with each chapter giving new insight into one's life. When I completed the first chapter, interest and curiosity led me to the second chapter and to the third and so on. With each chapter, I could relate to situations and circumstances in my own life.

The overall theme of the book can be summed up as learning the art of managing the way we respond to situations rather than confronting them. Non-confrontational methods are the best way to succeed in life. Confrontation only yields more negativity and is bound to produce negative results while also upsetting others. The book emphasizes how we can handle



“ The simplicity and clarity with which the author presents key concepts made me wonder how complicated we have made our lives by trying to implement complicated advice! ”

everyday challenging situations in the most positive manner. Such situations can become for us a great means to grow as persons. The book also has advice for business owners and employees and for people keen to move ahead in their career. The simplicity and clarity with which the author presents key concepts made me wonder how complicated we have made our lives by trying to implement complicated advice!

Although detailed, the chapters are short and concise and hence easy to read and comprehend. On the completion of each chapter, you will only be more curious and fresh to begin a new one. This is a book that will never tire you. I recommend this book to anybody who is interested in learning the 'how' of managing their lives and the 'how' of avoiding confrontations.

GUIDANCE

Discovery Of God

The Source of True Bliss

One who has found God has found everything. After the discovery of God, no further discovery remains to be made. Thus, when a man has discovered God, his entire attention is focussed upon Him. God, for him, becomes a treasure which he cherishes, and it is to Him then that he has recourse for all his worldly and eternal needs. God's world is a collection of atoms. In its elemental form, it all consists of one and the same type of inert matter; but God has moulded this matter into countless diverse forms: light, heat, greenery, flowing water. He has also invested lifeless matter with the properties of colour, taste and smell; and everywhere, He has set things in motion, having carefully controlled this motion by gravity. Discovering God who has made such a world is much more than just acquiring a dry creed. It means filling one's

heart and soul with the radiant glow of divine light and opening one's mind to incredible beauty and delicacy.

When we eat delicious fruits, this gives us a great sense of enjoyment. When we hear beautiful music we are quite entranced by it. When a handsome child is born to a couple, their joy knows no bounds. Then what of our experience of God, who is the source of all beauty, joy and virtue? On discovering Him, can one remain unmoved? This is something which is hardly imaginable, for such a sublime experience like coming close to a source of dazzling radiance must surely leave its mark on one.

Having endowed things with their unique qualities, God Himself must have qualities that His discoverers may savour. To discover Him, therefore, is to experience Him like a fragrance in the nostrils, a taste which

excites the palate; a texture which is a joy to caress; a melody which touches the heart. To come close to Him is to live in an everlasting garden of brilliant colours and delicate fragrances. It is to hear such music that one might wish its enchantment to last forever.

The Creator of all light, God Himself is the most resplendent of all beings. He is the light of the heavens and of the earth, shedding His radiance on the personalities of all who discover Him. His is the greatest treasure-house of all true wisdom. He is the greatest repository of all true strength. His discoverers are so fortified by His strength and so enlightened by His wisdom that no flood or hurricane can carry them away. They cannot, once having known Him, do other than evolve into superior human beings. (Taken from spiritofislam.co.in)

Four Things Which Harm The Body

- 1) Anxiety (about the future)
- 2) Sorrow (for what happened in the past)
- 3) Staying hungry
- 4) Staying up late

(Ibn al-Qayyim, in *Zaad al-Ma'ad*)

Dialogue only Way Forward for Social Harmony: Cardinal Gracias

Bengaluru: Cardinal Oswald Gracias, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, says consistent dialogue with all sections of people is important and necessary to maintain unity and harmony in society. "Dialogue is the tapestry of different cultures, languages and ethnic diversity and the Church has always stood for service of society," the cardinal, who is also the Archbishop of Bombay, told a press conference on February 12, the eve of the bishops' conference's 34th biennial plenary session. The February 13-19 meet at the St John's Academy of Medical Sciences chose the theme "Dialogue: The Path to Truth and Charity."

Cardinal Gracias called for a variety of dialogues, particularly cultural dialogue for the whole country. As a new decade begins, the Catholic Church in India will move forward to dialogue with all groups in society. This could include civic bodies, government and non-governmental organizations so as to create a peaceful and a harmonious environment for all to live as true citizens of the rich land, India, the cardinal said.

The cardinal, one of the six



Cardinal Gracias addressing a press conference

consultants of Pope Francis, assured all Indian citizens that the Church in India would continue to live the gospel values of peace, joy and harmony and always work for the whole humanity.

Cardinal Gracias also reiterated his stand that the federal government should hold dialogue with those opposing the controversial Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) and come to an arrangement on finding a way forward with justice, equity and fairness.

"There is no harm in backtracking and changing the course if it is necessary for the good of the country and our people," he said and recalled that he had expressed the same views on CAA and dialogue soon after Christmas.

Answering a wide range of questions along with Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios, CBCI Vice President and Interim Secretary General, he said the Catholic Church in India was committed to the idea of dialogue and believes that dialogue with diverse groups in society, different religions, ethic and cultural entities including all civic bodies, governmental and non-governmental organizations was necessary for creating a peaceful and harmonious environment for all to live as true citizens. Cardinal Gracias said dialogue was the only way to resolve the present impasse on CAA in national interest.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

South Asians Celebrate Passage of Resolution Opposing CAA and NRC by Seattle City Council

Seattle City Council became the first legislative body in the United States to take a stance on India's CAA and NRC, which have created turmoil in India since the CAA passed in December 2019.

The resolution was passed on February 3rd causing celebrations amongst the hundreds of South Asians settled in Seattle who rallied and attended a midday City Council voteto express their support. . The resolution, introduced by Council member Kshama Sawant, opposes India's National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), affirm

Seattle as a welcoming city, and express City Council's solidarity with Seattle z's South Asian community regardless of religion and caste.

Individuals and organisations from the South Asia community such as API Chaya, Tasveer, IAMC Seattle, Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Washington, Seattle South Asians Building Accountability & Healing (SABAH), Khalsa Gurmat Center Federal Way, Gurudwara of Renton, Gurudwara of Auburn, Gurudwara of Kent, Gurudwara of Bothell and the Seattle LGBTQ Commission joined national

organizations Equality Labs, Amnesty International USA, and the Ambedkar King Study Circle have spoken up against the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) and NRC (National Register of Citizens).

Veena Roy of SABAH said in the press release, "As South Asians in Seattle, SABAH confirms that the CAA is not an internal issue to India, and that Seattle must take a stand against it. There are thousands here in Seattle who are intimately connected to the minority experience in India, some have needed to migrate here after similar violence in the past, and many who have family in India who directly experience the violence that the Indian government clamors to keep hidden. We know that Kshama Sawant's resolution is much more than a symbolic gesture. It has created ripples in the Greater Seattle Area, even in India. As a community of Seattle, a sanctuary city that fights for equality and safety for the undocumented, we applaud the passing of this resolution."

(Extracted from twocircles.net)

CAA is "Divisive, Discriminatory", Revoke "Immediately": Goa Archbishop

Panaji: Archbishop of Goa and Daman, Rev Filipe Neri Ferrao, has urged the central government to "immediately and unconditionally revoke the Citizenship Amendment Act" and stop quashing the "right to dissent". He also appealed to the government not to implement the proposed countrywide National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR).

Diocesan Centre for Social Communications Media, a wing of the Goa Church, in a statement said, "The Archbishop and the Catholic community of Goa would like to appeal to the government to listen to the voice of millions in India, to stop quashing the right to dissent and, above all, to immediately and unconditionally revoke the CAA and desist from implementing the NRC and the NPR."

The CAA, NRC and NPR are "divisive and discriminatory" and will certainly have a "negative and damaging effect" on a multi-cultural democracy like ours, the church said. There is serious concern that NRC and NPR will result in "direct victimisation of the underprivileged classes, particularly Dalits, adivasis, migrant labourers, nomadic communities and the countless undocumented people who, after having been recognised as worthy citizens and voters for more than 70 years, will suddenly run the risk of becoming stateless and candidates for detention camps," it said. There has been widespread discontent and open protests

throughout the country and even abroad against the CAA, NRC and NPR, which are "forecasting a systematic erosion of values, principles and rights" that have been guaranteed to all citizens in the Constitution, the release said.

Eminent citizens, including top intellectuals and legal luminaries, have taken a studied and unequivocal stand against the CAA, NRC and NPR, it noted.

Goa also witnessed several protests, which transcended the confines of religious and caste affiliation and brought people from all walks of life together on one united platform, said the statement.

It said Christians in India have always been a peace-loving community and deeply committed to the ideals of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, enshrined in the Constitution.

"We have always taken great pride that our beloved country is a secular, sovereign, socialist, pluralistic and democratic republic," the church said.

The very fact that CAA uses religion goes against the secular fabric of the country, it said. "It goes against the spirit and heritage of our land which, since times immemorial, has been a welcoming home to all, founded on the belief that the whole world is one big family," the church said.

"We pray for our beloved country, that good sense, justice and peace prevail in the hearts and minds of all," it added.

(Extracted from ndtv.com)

MANUU Discusses Sufi Connection Between India & Iran

Hyderabad: 'Islamic Mysticism or Sufism is a significant part of intellectual heritage. This school of thought is very important and effective in countering extremist ideologies. Dr. Mohammed Ali Rabbani, Cultural Counselor, Iran Culture House (ICH), New Delhi expressed these views at a seminar, "Significance of Mysticism in Historical Perspective of India and Iran".



MANUU organised the seminar in collaboration with ICH. An Islamic calligraphy exhibition by Iranian scholar Dr. Masoud Rabbani was also inaugurated on the occasion.

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Bonding Together Beyond Differences: Reasons to Live

Muslim youngsters need to develop the qualities of attentive listening, acknowledging, and sharing. They must recognise the importance of positive efforts to promote interfaith and inter-community dialogue.

By Haris F. Farooqui

A dispassionate discussion about religious beliefs between people of different faith backgrounds is the need of the hour today. People of different faiths must come together to discuss their beliefs, practices and the values that they follow, or claim to follow. They need to engage in dialogue rather than confrontation and learn the art of living amicably together even though they may have differences in matters of faith.

Positive interactions between people from diverse religious backgrounds is really essential today. Members of different faith communities should try to see the brighter side of each other's religions, for which establishing friendly interpersonal relations between people from different religious communities is very important. While such relations are vital for learning about others, they are also necessary for effectively explaining or sharing one's own worldview with others. Peaceful dialogue is what is needed, not one-sided speeches, which is often perceived as moralizing, biased and even boring. People like to be heard more than being talked to.

In this context, Muslim youngsters need to develop the qualities of attentive listening, acknowledging, and sharing. They must recognise the

“Participants from a particular religious background shared their religious beliefs and the others appreciated them. One participant opined that if you remove the religious label, what you have is ancient knowledge that has passed down through generations.”

importance of positive efforts to promote interfaith and inter-community dialogue.

Recently, I happened to attend a workshop organised by a group known as the 'Inter-Religious Harmony Movement' (IRHM). It was held at Ashirvad, a Catholic-run centre off St. Marks Road in Bengaluru. The workshop provided a very useful occasion for people from different religious and community backgrounds to spend quality time together, sharing with, and learning from, each other.

The IRHM is an interfaith group that was formed in 1973 by a Jesuit (Catholic) priest, the late Father Ronnie Prabhu. The group is still very active. They hold interfaith events around twice a month. I was surprised that despite living in Bengaluru, I had not been aware of such a group before.

The theme of the workshop was 'Reasons To Live'. Different speakers, from different religious

backgrounds, spoke on the issue, providing participants rich food for thought. I particularly enjoyed the group activities where people of different faith backgrounds individually discussed their values, and one person from the group presented the points to the rest of the participants.

Participants from a particular religious background shared their religious beliefs and the others appreciated them. One participant opined that if you remove the religious label, what you have is ancient knowledge that has passed down through generations. This resonated well with my understanding about the value of much knowledge that is sometimes dismissed as 'old-fashioned' simply because it is rooted in religion.

The atmosphere in the workshop was very relaxed and participants were eager to share their beliefs and learn from fellow-participants from different faith backgrounds. I did not find anybody to be preachy. Nor was anybody shying away from sharing what they believed in or practised.

I hope that more people join interfaith groups, make friends with people from different faith backgrounds, become more tolerant of different beliefs, accept religious differences and resolve belief-related conflicts by way of peaceful dialogue.

Man Who Worked for Bhopal Gas Tragedy Victims Gets Padma Shri

Abdul Jabbar of Bhopal, who fought a long battle for the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984, has been awarded the Padma Shri. He is receiving this honour posthumously. Abdul Jabbar, who died on November 14 last year left behind a wife and three children.

Abdul Jabbar's wife SairaBanu said that her husband never thought about his own family. He made the gas victims his family. "He always kept thinking about the gas victims, and at the last moment he had told me not to let the gas victims fight end here but to take this fight further", she added.

Abdul Jabbar's eldest son Sahil



said that he had learned to serve the poor from his father. Sahil said that his father used to stay at home very rarely he used to go out in the morning to help the gas victims and sometimes when there was no money in his pocket, he would borrow and help the gas victims. "I learned the same from my father", he says.

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ORGANIZERS: Al-Mussaddiqati women's welfare organization,

FOR REGISTRATION CONTACT:

Madiha- 9967975396 | Asma - 9769721755

Nazneen - 9967365330 | Shabnam - 9870464416

EMAIL: mussaddiqat@gmail.com

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Catholic Religious Support Shaheen Bagh's Women Protesters

New Delhi, Feb 4, 2020: A group of Catholic religious has expressed solidarity with the women protesters of ShaheenBagh in the national capital. Around 25 Catholic priests and nuns from Delhi led by Presentation Sister Anastasia Gill on February 2 spent a day with the women who are protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). "The Christian community rejects CAA as this piece of legislation that is against the spirit of the Constitution of India," said Sister Gill while addressing thousands of women gathered at the south Delhi suburb. The nun, who is the Christian member of the Delhi Minorities Commission, said as "citizens of this great nation, Christians are in solidarity with the protesters as they defend the

idea of India cherished by the father of our Nation Mahatma Gandhiji and BabasahebAmbedkar."

The Catholic religious sang with the protesters 'Abide with me,' a favorite hymn of Mahatma Gandhi, and the popular hymn "Hum hongekaamiyaab" (we will succeed), an anthem of many civil rights movements.

Sister Gill later told 'Matters India' that ShaheenBagh has become a remarkable symbol of the widespread, spontaneous and a profound mass upsurge of people across India against what they say



Sr Gill (right) and Sr Shalini Mulackal (left) with a woman protester

are anti-people laws.

This sit-in protest has attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the country who came to express their solidarity. Earlier visitors included Father Susai Sebastian, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Delhi.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

Hyderabad: Arshad Pirzada's successful career in Saudi Arabia has enabled him not only to help his family but also serve the community through education initiatives. Whether it was learning skills from various General Motors representatives at Al-Jomaih Automotive Company or learning from the Indian expatriates, Pirzada's hard work has paid off. "Okay, I had gone to the Kingdom to alleviate the economic woes of my own family. But should one stop there? Shouldn't he think about the people he has left behind in his city who were in the midst of an economic crisis for a long time?" Pirzada asks looking back at his stay in Saudi Arabia.

NRI Promotes Education in Hyderabad



Speaking about how began his journey to educate a miniscule part of the community, he says, "My children are well settled. My wife, on the other hand, is a teacher of Quranic Arabic, author of a book and an entrepreneur in her own right. She designs and sells mostly

Bridal ware. This where my active association with Mount Mercy School comes in," he informed.

Established in June 1999, the school in its early days has gone through the pangs of growth. There was always a galore of challenges. Initially only 56 students enrolled.

Yet, through better infrastructure developed and word of mouth, there are now 850 students.

Pirzada mentions, "Not many among us realise how bad the

literacy levels are among the Muslims. For example, around 30 to 40 percent of the kids in MMS are first-generation learners who come from families with limited financial resources. Also, whatever money we make is pumped back into the development of facilities at the school." He says, "In today's competitive, globalized market, soft skills are just as important as the hard skills. We also polish the kids and prepare them for interviews for different competitions, contests and tournaments as well."

(Extracted from an article hosted on siasat.com)

"The Elders" Call on the World to Wake Up!

'The Elders' have called on the world to wake up to the threats of nuclear war and climate disaster as they unveiled the 2020 Doomsday Clock. The Elders are an independent group of global leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights.

Mary Robinson, Chair of The Elders and former President of Ireland, and Ban Ki-moon, Deputy Chair of The Elders and former United Nations Secretary-General, recently joined experts from the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists for the unveiling of the Doomsday Clock in Washington DC, an annual assessment of the existential risks faced by humanity. The Clock's hands were moved forward to 100 seconds to midnight - the closest to midnight they have been since they were first set in 1947. The decision takes into account the precarious state of nuclear arms controls, the growing threat of climate disaster, and how these can be compounded by disruptive new technologies.

"Our planet faces two concurrent existential threats: the climate crisis and nuclear weapons. We are faced by a gathering storm of extinction-level consequences, and time is running out," Mary Robinson said.

The Elders specifically called on President Trump to respond to Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer to open negotiations on New START, which will expire in February 2021 unless the agreement between Washington and Moscow is extended. Following the termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in July 2019, the end of New START would mean there was no remaining arms control treaty in force between the United States and Russia, raising the prospect of a new nuclear arms race. The Elders



(Mary Robinson and Ban Ki-moon and Jerry Brown [left] at the unveiling of the 2020 Doomsday Clock)

reiterated their proposals for a "nuclear minimisation" agenda as the best way of making progress towards complete disarmament by the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council and all other nuclear powers.

Ban Ki-moon warned that the threat of catastrophe is being exacerbated by attacks on, and disregard for, the multilateral rules-based system:

"The existential risks of nuclear conflagration and climate change are increasing just as the decision-making frameworks to address them are unravelling. From the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal to deadlock on nuclear disarmament talks and division at the UN Security

Council, our mechanisms for collaboration are being undermined when we need them most."

On the climate emergency, Mary Robinson called for a change of mindset if the world is to tackle the threat effectively:

"The science of the climate crisis makes it imperative that we take urgent action in 2020. We need a change of mindset in politics, finance, business and civil society, one that enables us to keep temperature rises at or below 1.5°C, whilst protecting the rights, dignity and livelihoods of those affected by the shift to a carbon neutral economy. Not to do so will be a death sentence for humanity."

(Extracted from theelders.org)

Exhibition Showcases Kashmir's Islamic Architecture

With an aim to highlight the marvelous and uniquely synthetic aspects of Kashmir's Islamic Architecture to the world, INTACH-Kashmir Chapter under the Department of Tourism of Jammu and Kashmir and the India International Centre (IIC) jointly mounted an exhibition at the IIC, in New Delhi. A panel discussion was also held before the exhibition's inauguration and it brought spotlight on the genesis and synthesis of Islamic Architecture in medieval Kashmir. Initiating the discussion, noted architecture expert and convener of the INTACH J&K chapter, Saleem Baig, noted that the Islamic architecture of Kashmir was a continuation of spiritual traditions of the past, represented through religious architecture. He also highlighted

the central feature of Kashmir's history that it has been the melting pot of cultural practices of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Echoing his observations, Dr. Sameer Hamadani shed light on the integrated architectural practices among Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists vis-à-vis the sacred architecture in Kashmir. DrHamadani is attached with INTACH's Kashmir Chapter. Another panelist, Professor Narayani Gupta, who teaches history, maintained that art and architecture are the expression of human creativity and it cannot be classified into divisions like Hindu architecture/Rajput architecture/Muslim architecture and so on. She stressed that in creative human enterprise, such types of classifications did not exist.

Akal Takht Supports Muslims Protesting Against CAA-NRC

The highest temporal seat of the Sikh religion, the Akal Takht, has extended support to protesting Muslim groups against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Akal Takht head GianiHarpreet Singh met a delegation led by Delhi Minority Commission chief

Zafarul Islam Khan in Amritsar and assured his support to them, a senior functionary told IANS. There is a sentiment of fear and insecurity among the minorities and the Sikhs are bound to stand by the oppressed, GianiHarpreet Singh was quoted as saying to the visiting Muslim delegation.

(Extracted from siasat.com)

Salih ad-Dimashqi [may God have mercy on him] said to his son:

"O my beloved son, if a day and night passes in which your religion, body [i.e. health], wealth and family are all safe then increase in your praises and thanks to God, Exalted be He. For how many people during that same day will have lost their religion, been afflicted with disease, become bankrupt and lost their family members whilst you are in a state of safety and well-being [from God]."

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Importance of Sincerity

Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due? (Holy Quran 39:3)

Sincerity in Islam means to worship God out of true faith in Him. It means to do good deeds for God's pleasure. Sincerity is about what is in your heart. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines sincerity as: "honesty of mind: freedom from hypocrisy."

Here are some quotes from the Quran and Sunnah about sincerity:

1. God specifically uses the term 'the sincere' (mukhlaseen) to describe His servants who will be rewarded:

But the sincere servants of Allah for them is a sustenance determined. (37:40-41)

Then see what was the end of those who were warned, except for the sincere servants of Allah. (37: 73-74)

2. God relates sincerity to prayers and charity:

And they have been commanded no more than this: To worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith); to establish regular prayer; and to practice regular charity; and that is the Religion, right and straight. (98:5)

We are feeding you for the sake of Allah. We do not expect from you any compensation or thanks. (76:9)

3. God warns us about insincerity:

So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers those who want to be seen (of men), but refuse (to supply) neighborly needs. (107:4-7)

O Believers! Do not make your charity worthless by reminders of your generosity or by injury, like him who spends his wealth to be seen of men and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day... (2:264)

By Sheima Salam Sumer

4. The purpose of life's hardships is to test our sincerity:

Do the people think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe," and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false. (29:2-3)

5. God judges us based on sincerity:

Allah will not call you to account for thoughtlessness in your oaths, but for the intention in your hearts, and He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Forbearing. (2:225) There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the Cause), if they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger: No ground (of complaint) can there be against such as do right: and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (9:91)

6. Religion is sincerity:

The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Islam is to be sincere." The companions asked, "To whom?" He replied, "To Allah, His Book, His prophet, the ones in authority over you and the general public." (Source: Muslim, Tirmidhi)

7. Our inner reality is more important than our outer reality:

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "O God! Make my inside better than my outside, and make my outside (also) righteous." (Source: Tirmidhi)

and,

"Allah does not look at your bodies nor does he look at your faces, but He looks at your hearts." (Source: Bukhari, Muslim)

8. One proof of sincerity:

The proof of a Muslim's sincerity is that he pays no heed to that which is not his business. (Source: Tirmidhi)

Thoughts and Advice

In order to be more sincere people, we should remind ourselves about God's attributes. Some people feel distant from God due to a lack of knowledge. God is the One who is nearer to us than our jugular vein. He sees and hears everything we do. He knows our deepest secrets. He is Generous, Merciful, and Forgiving. Making dua to God is a great way to increase our sincerity to Him. Another way to increase sincerity is to make a clear intention for everything we do. The Prophet (pbuh) taught:

"Actions are only (judged) by intentions. Each person shall be rewarded only for that which he intended." (Source: Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi)

(This is a modified version of an article that first appeared on the Quran Academy blog, www.Quranacademy.io)

Sheima Salam Sumer is author of *How to be a Happy Muslim Insha'Allah and The Basic Values of Islam*. She can be contacted on howtobeahappymuslim@outlook.com See her website www.howtobeahappymuslim.com

Divine Connection

By Amin Valliani

In a tiny drop of water are found all the secrets of the ocean. A small bit of rice gives us the taste of the whole cauldron, and a few grains indicate the quality of a large sack of wheat. Similarly, human beings created from a single soul are the vicegerents of Allah on earth, equipped with the highest potentialities. All divine attributes are realisable at the human level. For example, the

Nature and all living creatures need our compassion.

Holy Prophet (pbuh) reportedly said: "Adorn yourself with the attributes of Allah." But many of us are oblivious of this fact.

A teacher once asked his students which of them had seen God. Everybody was taken aback at the question; the whole class was silent looking at each other, and no response came forth. At last, a student raised his hand to answer the question. He said, "I have seen God." Upon this, the teacher asked, where? He said, "Everywhere." Allah says in the Holy Quran: "...And He is with you, wherever you may be..." (57:4).

We are with God. He reveals Himself to discerning eyes and thoughtful minds. Numerous signs around us indicate His presence, such as the birth of a newborn, the evolution of the human foetus, the activities of human blood, the automatic working of internal organs like the heart, the ability to repair internal and external injuries etc. All these functions bear testimony to His greatness.

Our connection with the Divine can be compared to an electric light bulb connected with the main powerhouse. The bulb illuminates our homes every night because it is connected through concealed and uncoiled wires to the electric pole and then on to the main powerhouse. If the bulb has 100-watt capacity, it illuminates with more brightness while the low-wattage bulb illuminates dimly.

It consists of transparent or translucent glass containing a wire filament that emits light when connected. If the bulb's glass is dusty, it affects the brightness while a clean bulb's glass would have more brightness. A fused or broken bulb does not emit light; it fuses when an inner wire is broken or if there's a tiny hole on its surface. The glittering shades and other decorative items placed around the bulb enhance its brightness. Similarly, the socket through which the bulb is connected, if loosened, also affects power supply to the bulb.

This example can aptly be related to individual human beings whose body is made of flesh but is spiritually connected to Allah. If one realises the strength of this divine connection, one can illuminate the path for others. A person needs to be

pure inside out so that he or she can strengthen the divine connection.

All religions persuade humanity to realise the divine origin of its existence and the inherent spiritual link with the Creator. For Allah says "...And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (50:16).

While narrating the story of Prophet Adam, the Holy Quran says that Allah made him His vicegerent (khalifa) on earth. This means mankind is the custodian of God's other creations, charged with a responsibility to supervise and protect earthly resources. This includes minerals, plants and animals and other environmental factors which support life.

Thus, every human has a three-fold responsibility: i.e. keeping a close connection with God spiritually, with society and with the world's physical environment. He is called upon to strengthen all these links by fulfilling the responsibilities towards God, his fellow beings and to take care of his material world for which he has been made trustee.

Throughout history, mystics and intellectuals have emphasised the realisation of this three-fold responsibility to the extent that they regard it as a core of faith. With realisation, a person not only understands his/her origin but performs astounding feats by unfolding his physical and spiritual capabilities. He develops a sense of compassion towards other creatures. He makes himself/herself accountable in case of any mishaps. Besides, he develops sympathy, empathy and a soft corner towards society and shares his time, knowledge and other material resources to uplift society. He puts values into practice and raises his voice whenever the values are violated.

Presently, we are confronted with numerous challenges. For example, there is rampant pollution and environmental degradation all around us, while endangered animals are caught, smuggled or killed. Islam strictly condemns the hunting of defenceless creatures. In fact, Islam enjoins us to be kind towards all life forms on the planet.

We have been made the 'crown of creation'; our role and responsibilities as humans encompass the safety and security of the entire world and its beauty. All living creatures and nature need our compassion. This message needs to be part of our school curriculum, and the media should remind us of it.

(The writer is an educationist with an interest in religion. He can be contacted on onvalianiamin@gmail.com)



Mosque On Wheels To Help Muslims Pray At Tokyo Olympic Games

For the thousands of Muslim athletes, officials and supporters who may arrive in Tokyo for the Olympic Games later this year, it may be an issue for them to find an appropriate place to pray. The answer might just be found roaming the streets of Tokyo on the back of a truck! By the time the Games start in July, there will be prayer rooms available at the currently under construction athlete's village. However, some venues may not have a designated space. There is also a dearth of prayer spaces in hotels and public areas across the Japanese capital. This is where the Mobile Mosque, a fully-equipped 48-square-metre prayer room that opens up on the back of a parked truck, comes in.



The back of the modified truck can be widened in seconds and the vehicle also includes Arabic signage and outdoor water taps for pre-worship cleaning.

The Yasu Project has come up with a Mobile Mosque for the thousands of Muslim athletes, officials and supporters arriving in Tokyo for the Olympic Games later this year. Yasu Project, the organisation behind the enterprise, plan on pitching up

outside venues during the Olympics, which run from July 24 – Aug. 9. The organisation's CEO Yasuharu Inoue hopes athletes and supporters alike will use the truck. "I want athletes to compete with their utmost motivation and for the audience to cheer on with their utmost motivation as well. That is why I made this," said Inoue, pointing to the truck. "I hope it brings awareness that there are many different people in this world and to promote a non-discriminatory, peaceful Olympics and Paralympics." According to an investigation by Waseda University, there were 105 mosques in Japan at the end of 2018.

Nights are Sleepless? Days are Restless? Come, The DISCOVER YOURSELF Workshop will Heal You!

The Discover Yourself Workshop was held in Karkala, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Surat in January and February 2020. Some of the participants share their experiences after the Workshop:



KARKALA



HYDERABAD DYS PHOTO 2

MUMBAI



IPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, HYDERABAD

MUMBAI

• Life-changing, I wish I had known about this workshop earlier. Before, I was not responsible and conscious of myself. I was in denial of living through challenges.

• Nights are sleepless? Days are restless? Come, this workshop will heal you!

• I was irritated in my life, now it is more peaceful. I did not take any medicine in these three days related to depression or pressure and I did not have any distress. This workshop should be made compulsory for parents.

• It was well structured and impactful. After the workshop, I learned to be a human being and use the power of the heart to treat every other person as a human being.

• Soul-stirring! I am overwhelmed by the change in the pattern of my communication.

• Your way of explanation and your way of making us concentrate on every topic is brilliant. Superb talent, may Allah bless you, sir.

• I don't have words to express my gratitude to Khan Sir. He inspired me to be honest with myself and understand my worth.

• I found the purpose of my existence. It helped me a lot in learning my past and creating my future while being in the present.

• It allowed me to become a good human being and to concentrate on my actions rather than on other people's actions.

• The best thing I ever did in my life is to attend this workshop.

• The workshop is a perfect blend of Islam and practical life.

KELLY: An eye-opening and heart touching workshop. My life before the workshop was extremely complicated and unhappy. I did always look for reasons to fight. Now it is peaceful, lovely and calm. It has helped me get hold of myself and to think before I speak. I am willing to give up my ego and the stubbornness of being right. I will try to change myself in the best ways, in order to please God always wherever I can.

KINJAL: Earlier it was nearly impossible for me to forget and forgive people for all the wrong they did to me. But what I learned is that their words, actions, and behavior towards me was their choice, opinions and not my reality. Only my God knows my reality and that is all that matters. I feel happier, calm, light headed at heart and will live for the rest of my life in this state. I am giving up my short temper and reaction to others.

SARIFA: I am a shy person,

afraid to share in front of so many strange people. Before attending your 3 days' workshop, I was in the assumption that it will be boring, and I judged you before knowing you. My husband was forcing me to attend this workshop from the past four years, but now after attending your workshop, I want to thank my husband from the bottom of my heart. I also want to thank you for such a wonderful workshop. I am free today.

SAFA: Previously I used to fight with my husband because I feared my past. I used to trouble my husband to a great extent. After attending this workshop, I feel I can provide comfort to him rather than becoming a challenge to him. I want him and me to live in peace. He has noted a big difference in my attitude in these two days. My family is happy now because my husband is happy, and now, I see him as a human being and equal. Thank you, Sir, May Allah bless you. This workshop is a must for

every human being irrespective of caste or religion

JAFFAR: My life is completely transformed. I pray to Allah that it remains like it is now till my entire life. The way I used to see others, the way I used to talk to others, the way I was not living in the present, the way I have been a spectator and not the player, everything changed with the new perspective. Every aspect of our life can change if one can realize that the most important is to seek Allah's love and to avoid Satan's trap. I am giving up my world made by my opinions about other humans. Allah created every person a human being and I will see and treat everyone as a human being.

KULSUM: When I came here, I was suffering from depression and I was not ready to listen to anyone because that person's voice irritated me. But after listening to the coach I forgave everyone in my life, and I started to talk with everyone and live happily. Alhamdulillah it changed my life.

SALMA: I used to easily cry about everything, I was short-tempered and reacting to each and everything, I was weak inside, I sometimes get frustrated or angry and when I cannot get out of my anger on someone else, I end up beating or crying myself. But from the day I attended this workshop, I have changed, but not completely. I am not reacting; I am able to stop myself from crying and control myself. Now, I have left all my past enemies by forgiving them. Everyone must attend this workshop once in their lifetime.

FARHEEN: Before the workshop, I was lost, but after the workshop I found myself. I learned how to control my mind and listen to my heart. Life-changing workshop. Today, I was able to concentrate on salah like never before. Being an Islamic teacher, I will try to implement the methods taught by you.

AMAL: My life was good before the workshop, but it became better after the workshop, Alhamdulillah! I realized that my mind is not actually my reality, but it is the heart. My family expressed their feelings about me, I was not in denial and didn't affect me (their judgments). I somehow understood that each member has his/her point of view and we need

to accept that.

ASTHMA: Before I was not self-confident, but now I am Self-confident. I learned the importance of humanity. I will say 'Alhamdulillah' at every moment whether I achieve what I want or not. I will be a human being and see others as human beings. If I am *Insaan* then I will create *Insaaniyath*.

Sadia Farheen

Assalam Alaikum sir

I had attended your workshop in 2005 as a student of Ghousia polytechnic Bangalore. I was inspired by your speech. Alhamdulillah trying to stand by your words from that day till now. Your words really motivated me. Personally I met you and I took your autograph in an A4 sheet stating "Be True To Yourself." Till date, I have kept it safely and whenever I see, it will remind me about your workshop and while giving autograph you had said to me... why do you need it, you will keep it safe for a month or for a year, later you will throw it, but sir I have kept it till now and trying to lead my life as you said from the heart. Alhamdulillah.... Thank you so much sir for motivating many people.

Blessed that I had met you once in my life.

Sadathullah Khan Replies: Jazakallah khair. You have made my day! It is so encouraging when the participant takes all the trouble to share how impactful our workshop was and what difference it made to your life. Many doubt that all that you do, lasts only for a few days and months. But you have proven them wrong and given me the courage to continue the work to make a difference to one soul at a time. I am proud of you.

Sarah Fathima

My life-transformational journey started in 2004, when I first attended your workshop in Mysore as final year B.sc student. I thank my father for not listening to my reasons to escape the workshop. I had a genuine reason for not attending the workshop as my final exams were a week ahead and I had not studied the entire year. I was academically very poor and had failed in 2nd PUC and carried 2-years' backlog to the final year of my B.SC course... But miracles started after attending the workshop... Guess what??

1. In the final year, I passed all papers, with good marks and the 2-years' backlog as well.

2. I took charge of my life. I decided to do an MBA, and excelled in it. I worked in an MNC for more than a decade and am now an entrepreneur.

3. I am someone who is from a small town. I was fearful to even cross a road alone. But now I can independently handle complex situations of life (tending to my bedridden grandmother, taking my father to hospital in the middle of the night he had a massive heart attack dealing with a financial crisis, dealing with major health issues of the family, taking the decision to marry, and now dealing with an ADHD child).

4. Someone who hardly entered the kitchen or cleaned the house proved to be an expert within a week of marriage.

All this is only due to DYS teachings, as this workshop empowers us to live in the present and in submission mode.

DYS is oxygen for my life. I am empowered to live fearless and move on in life, in good, bad and worst times, only by applying the universal laws that you have shared with us.

I pray everyone goes through this miraculous journey through the DYS workshop. Thanks Sir for changing my life and that of so many other people. I am short of words to express my gratitude for the workshop.

Would you walk fifty miles to convey the message of Islam to people in another city?

This is what Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) did in the tenth year of the revelation. It is known as the Year of Grief. His wife Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib had just passed away.

Left without protection in Makkah, he walked to Ta'if to invite its people to Islam.

It was a difficult journey, as the city of Ta'if is an area of high mountains. It is a lush area of green palm trees, fruits, and vegetables about 50 miles southeast of Makkah. Its temperatures are lower than Makkah but getting there was not easy.

The Prophet travelled with his companion, Zaydibn Harithah. Upon arrival, the first thing he did was meet the city's local leaders. He presented his message to the chiefs of the Thakif tribe, who were three brothers. Then, he invited them to Islam.

All three of them rejected the invitation and responded in the most sarcastic way. Although saddened by what they said, the Prophet did not give up or lose hope. Some reports suggest that he spent almost a week in Ta'if after this meeting calling its people to Islam.

Traumatic Attack and Beautiful Supplication

Nobody in Ta'if accepted his call.

However, towards the end of his stay, some people seemed ready to accept his invitation. The leaders of Ta'if were infuriated by this news. They sent a mob of young people to attack the Prophet and pelt him with stones.

Unfortunately, the attack succeeded. The mob forced Prophet Muhammad and Zayd out of the town. Both men were wounded by the stones thrown at them, and their feet were covered in blood.

They walked for around 8 kms in a state of trauma from what had happened. Outside Ta'if, they reached a garden with trees where they sat to rest and recover from the shock. It was there that Prophet Muhammad said his famous supplication to Allah:

O Allah! To You alone I make complaint of my helplessness, the paucity of my resources and my insignificance before mankind. You are the most Merciful of the merciful. You are the Lord of the helpless and the weak, O Lord of mine! Into whose hands would You abandon me: into the hands of an unsympathetic distant

Prophet's Patience

Prophet Muhammad Goes to Ta'if: Most Difficult Day of His Life

“ The Prophet accepted the gift. Before eating the grapes, he said out loud, “Bismillah” (In the Name of Allah). These words attracted the attention of Addas, who said that people here didn't use these words. ”

relative who would sullenly frown at me, or to the enemy who has been given control over my affairs? But if Your wrath does not fall on me, there is nothing for me to worry about. I seek protection in the light of Your Countenance, which illuminates the heavens and dispels darkness, and which controls all affairs in this world as well as in the Hereafter. May it never be that I should incur Your wrath, or that You should be wrathful to me. And there is no power nor resource, but Yours alone.

This powerful and beautiful supplication is a reminder that *dua* is the weapon of a believer. Allah immediately responded to the Prophet's supplication and two things happened.

A Gift of Grapes

Two wealthy men from Makkah saw the Prophet resting in the shade of the tree. They had witnessed what happened in Ta'if and felt sorry for him, so they sent him some grapes with their servant. He was a young man, Addas, who was a Nazirite (a believer in Jesus as a prophet from God).

The Prophet accepted the gift. Before eating the grapes, he said out loud, “Bismillah” (In the Name of Allah). These words attracted the attention of Addas, who said that people here didn't use these words. Prophet Muhammad asked him where he was from. Addas answered that he was from Nineveh (a city in Iraq).

The Prophet asked:

You belong to the city of the righteous man Jonah, son of Matthew (YunusibnMatta)?

Addas said, “Yes.” He was astonished by the question, as the Arabs did not know of Jonah.

Thereupon Prophet Muhammad said:

He is my brother. He was a prophet and so am I.

Addasthen returned to his masters.

Angels Descend

Following this incident and this beautiful supplication, Prophet Muhammad and Zayd continued their journey back home. Angel Gabriel came to him at a place before Makkah called Qarn Al-Manazil and said:

“Allah has heard what your people say to you and how they reject you. He has ordered the angels of the mountains to obey whatever you tell them to do.”

The angel of the mountains greeted him and said:

“Send me to do what you wish. If you wish, I will crush them between the two mountains of Makkah.”

The Prophet said:

Rather, I hope that Allah will bring forth from their loins those who will worship Allah alone and not associate anything with Him. (Al-Bukhari)

The Prophet could have asked that those children who pelted him with stones be finished off. He could have asked the same for their intolerant parents. But he didn't! He never took revenge for himself. Rather, he was a mercy to the world and only wanted the guidance and what was best for his people.

(aboutislam.net)

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This verse establishes certain rules to apply within an Islamic society, protecting the integrity and freedom of individuals, while at the same time teaching people how to cleanse their feelings and consciences, using a highly effective mode of expression.

Following the pattern of the Surah, it begins with the endearing address, "Believers!" It follows that by issuing an order to avoid most suspicion, so that they do not leave themselves to any thoughts of doubt about others, justifying this order by the fact that some suspicion is sinful. Since the prohibition applies to most suspicion and the rule is that some of it is sinful, then the verse implies that all negative suspicion should be avoided, because a person does not know which part of his or her doubts are sinful. Thus the Qur'an purges a Muslim's inner conscience so that it may not be contaminated with evil suspicion and incur sin. It leaves it clean, free of doubt, entertaining only friendly and affectionate thoughts toward one's brethren. In this way, it keeps suspicion away from society in order to enable the community to enjoy a feeling of reassurance unmarred by worry

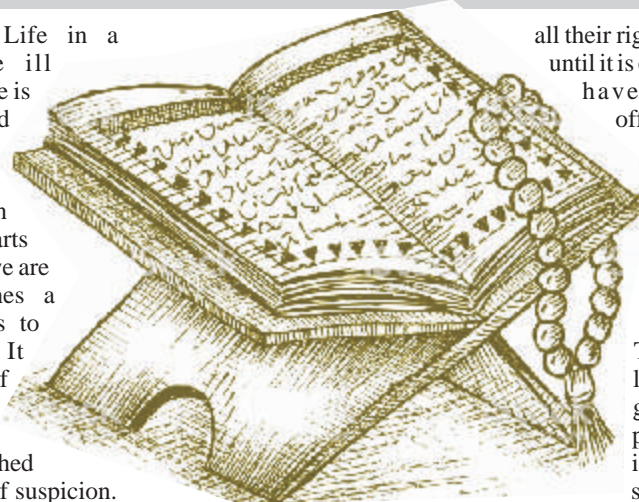
Avoid Wrongly Suspecting Others

"Believers! Avoid suspicion as much as possible, for, some such suspicion is a sin. And do not spy on one another, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would loathe it. And remain God-fearing. God is certainly the One who accepts repentance, and He is merciful."

Surah Hujurat (49: 12)

and apprehension. Life in a community where ill thoughts have no place is both serene and comfortable.

But Islam does not stop at this point in educating people's hearts and souls. The verse we are looking at establishes a principle that applies to people's dealings. It protects the rights of those who live in its pure society so that they may not be punished or tried on the basis of suspicion. Such suspicion is no basis for filing charges against people and putting them to trial. Indeed suspicion does not form a proper basis for interrogating people or investigating their affairs.



The Prophet is quoted as saying: "If you have doubts, do not investigate." (Related by Al-Tabarani). What this means is that people remain innocent, enjoying

all their rights, freedom and status until it is evidently clear that they have committed some offense. It is not sufficient that they are suspected of having committed something in order to pursue them with the aim of establishing whether they are guilty.

This verse shows us the limit to which Islam goes in protecting people's freedom, integrity, rights and status. How does this compare with what even the best democratic countries

This verse shows us the limit to which Islam goes in protecting people's freedom, integrity, rights and status.

boast of with regard to protecting human rights? This standard, which the Qur'an sets for the believers, is far superior indeed. Moreover, Islam achieves this in real life, after it establishes it in people's hearts and consciences.

It clearly shows that one must not pursue suspicion, and that it is infinitely better that should there be some indications of a person's guilt, one should try to find a good explanation for them, away from suspicion. This applies to a colleague, a friend or spouse. We should act only on clear evidence. In the absence of such evidence, we dismiss suspicion and think the better of our people. This is more conducive to strengthening relationships and making an Islamic society well-knit.

HADITH ILLUMINATES THE HEART

It is not a Weakness to Remain Silent!

A man insulted Ab Bakr (RA) in the presence of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). The Prophet remained seated. He looked pleased and smiled. The man continued with his insults until Ab Bakr responded to some of what he said, upon which the Prophet became angry and stood up.

Ab Bakr followed after the Prophet and said: "Messenger of Allah! He insulted me and you just sat there. Then when I responded to some of what he said, you became angry and got up."

The Prophet said: "There was an angel with you who was responding to his insults on your

behalf."

Then the Prophet said: "Ab Bakr, [keep in mind] three things which are always true, one of which is that whenever a person is subjected to an injustice but leaves the matter to Allah, then Allah will come to his aid..." [Musnad Ahmad]

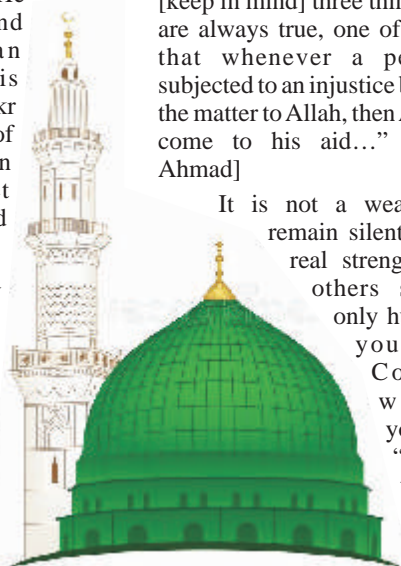
It is not a weakness to remain silent. It takes real strength. What others say will only hurt you if you let it. Construct within yourself a "refuse treatment plant" and try to turn other people's insults into something constructive and positive that you

can use for your own betterment and the betterment of others.

There are a lot of well-known stories about people who kept quiet in the face of accusations and insults. Some people do not feel the need to defend themselves and clear their names.

When someone criticizes you, insults you, or calls you names, do not respond. Do not try to defend yourself. Allow yourself to appear at a loss. See the positive effect that this has on you. As Allah said to Mariam when she gave birth to Eesa "And if you see any person, say: Lo! I have vowed a fast unto the Beneficent, and I may not speak this day to any mortal." [Surah Mariam: 26]

For a few moments, let yourself feel that your stature has diminished. Then you will feel as if something mighty inside you has woken up and you will know that you have not diminished in the least.



Discipline we learn from Salah should also be applied to our lives outside the Masjid



We have surely set forth in this Quran every kind of lesson for people, but humankind is the most argumentative of all beings.

Surah Al-Kahf, Ayah 54

REFLECTIONS

Tribute

Abdur Rahman, A Smiling Lad

By Nigar

It was sometime in 2014 that I first met Abdur Rahman. He was then a patient at a kidney dialysis unit of a hospital. He looked weak and somewhat disillusioned about life. He must have been less than 25 years old then. Those days, I would visit the dialysis unit often. I had to complete some 200 hours in the unit as part of a course I was pursuing. One thing that struck me then about Abdur Rahman was his excellent command of English. He told me that he used to work at a call centre and that his good communication skills could help him get a good sales job in a company. Listening to him, I knew he could have sold ice cubes to an Eskimo! Abdur Rahman did not complain that he had developed a kidney problem and needed to be on dialysis. He always seemed to sport a smile.

A few months later, when I dropped in at the dialysis unit, I was pleasantly surprised to see Abdur Rahman at the front office reception, greeting patients and making them feel comfortable. I was delighted that the hospital had put him on their employee rolls. Now he looked very confident and happy. As my project ended, I now visited the hospital only very occasionally. On some occasions I spotted Abdur Rahman busy at work at the reception. He would say *Alhamdulillah* whenever I asked him how he was doing.

Just the other day a friend informed me that Abdur Rahman had passed away. It seems he was at a mosque for prayers and fell down and was brought to the hospital, where he was declared dead. What touched me immensely was that according to this friend who informed me about his demise, Abdur Rahman, in his desire to perform Umrah with his own hard-earned income, had left the job and with the Provident Fund money that he received, had performed his Umrah just a few months ago. I was also told that he strongly stood by his faith. Obstacles arrived in his way, but he did not waver from his faith in God. I kept thinking what a graceful death it had been for him. After having to go through dialysis for some years, he collapsed in a mosque and then he went back to God.

Abdur Rahman was just 29 years when he left the world. In the short life that he lived, he left behind memories of his firm faith in God. Way back in 2014, he had said to that he would make a good salesman as he was good at communication and interpersonal skills. Now that he has returned to the Almighty, he must be having great conversations with God. We may not remember Abdur Rahman as a good salesman, because this he did not become. But we will remember him as someone who did not sell his *iman*, his faith, or his soul for acquiring the things of this world. May his soul rest in peace!

Interfaith Actions Stressed For AIDS Advocacy in Asia

Chiang Mai (Thailand): The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) recently organized a regional consultation to intensify interfaith HIV and AIDS advocacy collaborations in Asia. Held at the CCA headquarters from January 27–31, twenty-five participants representing different faith-based organizations and religions from Asia as well as networks of People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) attended the consultation. In his opening address, CCA general secretary Reverend Mathews George Chunakara stated that the interfaith consultation was part of the Action Together in Combatting HIV and AIDS in Asia programme. It is a significant move to revitalize the wider coalition of interfaith advocacy networks, especially for stimulating the activities of the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS, he explained.

Venerable Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai, a prominent Buddhist monk who is committed to promoting interfaith collaborative actions to combat HIV and AIDS, said, "Most people prefer not to engage in conversations around HIV and AIDS because of the discomfort and stigma surrounding



The participants of the CCA consultation on AIDS

it. An interfaith consultation such as this sets a positive precedent and invites other Asian faith communities and networks to work in this space". Elucidating the Buddhist perspective, Venerable Boonchuay spoke of *mahakaruna*, or 'great compassion'. "Whoever desires to serve the Buddha should first desire to serve sick persons," he explained. He provided numerous examples of the work of Buddhist monks in responding to HIV and AIDS in Thailand. He reported that their work had led to a reduction in infection rates, stigma and discrimination.

An Islamic perspective was shared by Siti Sugunai, a young woman representing the Komisi Penanggulangan AIDS in Indonesia. "[...] Muslim communities are called upon theologically to serve the underserved".

Ronald Lalthanmawia, coordinator of ATCHAA, spoke on the

Christian perspective. He called for developing an inclusive theology that was grounded in compassion, care, and support.

Khawn Taung, the General Secretary of the Myanmar Interfaith Network on AIDS (MINA) shared the journey of MINA and spoke of how different faith communities had put aside their differences and collaboratively worked on issues.

Wangda Dorji, from the Bhutan Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (BNP+), which is the only civil society organisation operating to address HIV and AIDS in Bhutan, delivered a moving presentation. He shared his journey as a person living with the virus and the struggles he faced when publicly disclosing the same. He also spelt out the possibilities of reaching out to faith leaders in Bhutan who could use their respective organisations and networks to influence society and reduce stigma and discrimination.

Developing an action plan, the participants resolved to strengthen and revive national interfaith networks on AIDS, and also initiate networks in countries where they do not currently exist.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

Forum for Justice and Peace Convention

An advocacy group for progressive Catholic religious nuns, brothers and priests in India has asked top Church bodies to oppose openly laws that try to divide citizens in the country. "The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR) are divisive, discriminatory and draconian," the Forum for Justice and Peace, known as Forum, stated February 24 at the end of their 14th national convention in Varanasi.

Around 50 members of the 500-strong group of priests and nuns working among grassroots groups met February 22–24 at VishwaJyotiGurukul to address the theme, 'Prophetic Response to the Signs of the Times.' The group describes the citizenship laws as unconstitutional and "obviously part of a larger strategy" to establish a fascist state based on the 'Hindutva' ideology. It says the controversial laws have caused discontent forcing hundreds of thousands of women, men and youth to protest all over the country. The CAA, the group says, uses religion that goes against the 'secular fabric' of the country. The forum has resolved to collaborate



with other groups to get the CAA revoked and ensure the non-implementation of NPR and NRC. The group wants the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the Conference of Religious India, the national body of major

superiors of the Catholic congregations, to issue public statements asking the federal government to immediately revoke CAA and stop the implementation of NRC and NPR.

For the full text of the statement, see <http://mattersindia.com/2020/02/forum-asks-bishops-superiors-to-oppose-divisive-citizenship-laws/> (Extracted from mattersindia.com)

Muslim Teen Wins Bhagwad Gita Quiz

Jaipur: A 16-year-old Muslim teenage boy has won the Bhagwad Gita quiz competition organised here by Hare Krishna Mission in association with AkshayPatra Foundation. The two-round quiz show lasted for over six months, that saw participation by over 5,000 students.

Abdul Kagzi, a class 9 student left the judges surprised with his apt knowledge on the subject and enormous knowledge on Sanskrit hymns and verses. This year, the theme was "Knowing Shri

Krishna." Kagzi said that his liking for Krishna developed while watching a cartoon series, "Little Krishna".

Kagzi's father, AbdurKaleem, runs a grocery shop in his three storey house at Sanganer. "My father allows me to follow my heart and has never shown any restriction towards any faith and practice. I have been using his mobile to study diverse facets of spiritualism", the winner said.

(Extracted from muslimmirror.com)

Interfaith Leaders Confront World Problems at United Nations Event



Pervasive violence. Devastating climate change. Religious and racial intolerance. Deadly epidemics. These themes threatening our world today were taken on by a panel of faith leaders, experts and high-level officials at a commemoration of an event during World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrated annually in early February at the United Nations. Entitled "The State of the World Today from a Religious and Spiritual Perspective," and held at a UN headquarters conference room, the event focused on faith leaders' solutions to the real life issues affecting peoples worldwide.

Two themes emerged: calling for putting words into action, and for oneness. These were presented in speeches and song.

An appropriate tone was set in his welcome by Gordon Tapper, President of the United African Congress, when introducing the main sponsorship of the Mission of the Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations. Tapper acknowledging that the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed Ali, for successful efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation in resolving the decades-long border conflict with neighboring Eritrea. The event annually features

presentations by faith leaders from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as well as from spiritual and indigenous groups, and cultural performances. Past themes include "The Diaspora - A Force for Positive Change," "Tolerance, Reconciliation and Forgiveness" in honor of the late Nelson Mandela, "Interfaith Prayer, Healing, and Community Services in the Cause of Peace" and "The Path to a Culture of Peace - Our Common Humanity," all under the umbrella of the theme of "Building Bridges across Boundaries."

Conceived to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence, the World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) was first proposed in 2010 at the United Nations by King Abdullah II of Jordan. United Nations General Assembly resolution (A/RES/65/5) declared the first week of February each year as World Interfaith Harmony Week, calling on governments, institutions and civil society to observe that week with various programs and initiatives to promote the aim of the WIHW objectives.

Abu Dhabi Marks Interfaith Effort

Interfaith leaders gathered recently at Abu Dhabi to mark one year since Pope Francis's historic trip to the Arabian Peninsula, a visit that saw leading Muslim clerics gather alongside the Pope of the Catholic Church to promote co-existence. The United Arab Emirates has worked to promote itself over the past year as a beacon of religious tolerance, despite its hard limits on political speech. The majority of the country's population are not Emirati Muslim citizens, but foreigners, millions of whom are other than Muslims.

Abu Dhabi hosted the meeting to showcase its continued efforts in promoting interfaith dialogue as it prepares to break ground this year on a compound that will house a mosque, church and synagogue side by side. The Abrahamic House of Fraternity project is due to be completed in 2022. In the neighbouring emirate of Dubai, an unmarked villa has already been turned into a synagogue.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf states, have been expanding their outreach to Christian groups, like evangelicals, and Jewish organisations. A US rabbi, a representative of the Catholic church and a trained sheikh from Egypt's Al-Azhar attended the briefing, where they discussed ongoing interfaith efforts. Senior Rabbi at the Washington Hebrew Congregation, Bruce Lustig, insisted his participation on this visit was "apolitical". "We are here as a forum for peace for the whole human family," he said. "I am delighted when there's opportunities to bring justice and peace to so many people who have so many injustices in the world."



The Quran is a Guide of Ethical Principles

False allegations, often based on vested interests, have created uncontrolled vigilantism in societies, especially where the laws of the country are implemented poorly.

Muslims throughout the world profess their faith through verbal declaration of the unity of God and the Prophethood of Hazrat Muhammad (Pbuh). The message brought by the latter has become the living Quran, a book covering all aspects of human life that can prepare one for the Day of Judgement.

As much as the Quran is a guide of ethical principles, it has been questionably interpreted by some to be a book of laws. Only 80 of the 6,666 verses in the Quran are directly concerned with legal matters, and even these are addressed through an ethical lens.

The Quran is mainly concerned with truth, kindness and justice: "Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. ..." (16:90). Justice can only be established through a careful search for truth and the doing of good and being kind must be ensured by mercy and compassion. Truth must be relentlessly pursued and demands made for proof. God further enjoins Muslims to always speak "the right" (33:70); and avoid falsehoods and allegations against others.

If one does need to cast blame, it should be against oneself. Saying bad things about someone behind their back is backbiting and is akin to eating the flesh of one's brother; saying false things is an allegation and deserves the most severe punishment.

Vigilantism is a Crime In Islam

The world at large is facing the scourge of falsehoods, so often repeated and shared and so convincingly communicated that it dons the guise of truth. As a consequence, at the global level, wars are fought, millions are killed, countries face humanitarian crises and nations seethe with hatred for each other. At an individual level, homes are destroyed, relationships falter and suspicions abound.

A particularly cancerous form of the spread of falsehoods is accusing someone of a sin or crime without clear proof. Accusing others at a personal level is forbidden: "O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards



By Nikhat Sattar

The main problem with some Muslim societies is that we have closed our minds to rationality and fairness and to questioning our presuppositions and centuries-old beliefs. We have become hostage to anger and rage.

become full of repentance for what ye have done" (49:6).

False allegations, often based on vested interests, have created uncontrolled vigilantism in societies, especially where the laws of the country are implemented poorly. God has decreed the worst punishment for all who accuse falsely. The Prophet is reported to have said: "He who, in order to find fault, says something about a person that was not there, Allah will throw such a person in hell till he tastes fully what he had fabricated" (Tibrani).

False allegations are often made on religious grounds. The perpetrators are aware that these will most likely give rise to angry sentiments of a by and large uneducated and unthinking populace and exploit this for their nefarious purposes. Unfortunately, such allegations are also readily believed by mobs and give rise to unbridled violence. [...]

Most countries have laws against libellous statements about

religion and religious personalities. Except for four countries, all others use punishments such as fines and imprisonment after carefully conducted trials with clear proofs and evidence of the negative impacts.

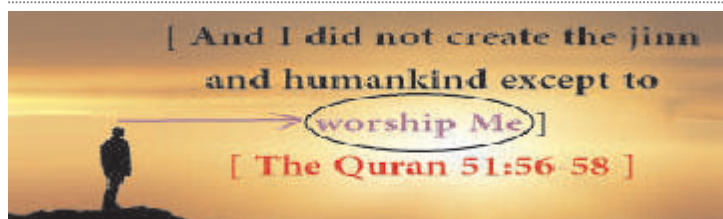
Vigilantism is a crime in Islam. The Prophet forbade a man who asked what he should do if he witnessed adultery by his wife and wished to deliver punishment. His sense of 'honour' was no justification for such vigilantism (Sahih Muslim, 1498). Civilians meting out punishment for a perceived crime are themselves criminals in the eyes of Islam. In fact, not only must a stringent process be followed to establish evidence, judges must exercise restraint to keep their personal biases from creeping into their judgements and temper their decisions with due consideration to mitigating circumstances. As the Prophet said: "It is better for the 'man to err on the side of compassion than on the side of punishment'" (SunanAltirmidhi, Kitab al Hudood, Vol4, p 25)

The Quran is explicit in calling for mercy in all cases of crimes and states that the death sentence can only be given in cases of deliberate and wilful murder and when a state of anarchy (Fasad) is being created.

The main problem with some Muslim societies is that we have closed our minds to rationality and fairness and to questioning our presuppositions and centuries-old beliefs. We have become hostage to anger and rage, ready to cast aspersions on others and assign moral and religious codes based on our narrow views. We are more concerned with how others behave than with our own attitudes. Our concepts of justice and truth have turned into caricatures as we occupy ourselves with ideas of how the world should change, rather than making an effort to introspect and change our own selves.

(Nikhat Sattar is a freelance contributor).

(Extracted from an article hosted on newageislam.com)



OPEN SPACE

Higher Education..... at Whose Cost?

Is it right for young adults who can earn to expect their parents to pay hefty sums for their higher studies?

By Rela

Many young adults today are pursuing higher education at costly institutions, in the country and abroad too. I know of parents who are spending a huge amount of money on the higher education of their grown-up children. For instance, there is this modestly-middle class family who have spent over 70 lakhs for their daughter for the MBBS course that she recently completed. Then, there is this family who have spent I don't know how many lakhs on a boy whom they sent abroad to study, added to which are the expenses they incur for him to come back to the country every now and then on holiday.

When I think of this, I wonder...Is it right for parents to spoil their grown-up children like this? Aren't there more reasonable alternatives available to such expensive forms of 'education'? Don't these youngsters feel guilty about their parents slogging away to earn all that money that's spent on their fancy 'education'? Are these children taking their parents for granted?

At least till Class 12 or the Bachelor's degree level, it's fine, I think, that parents fund their children's education. But beyond this, I feel youngsters should try to find alternate means to support their education, if not fully, then at least partly. I don't think this is difficult at all: I speak from personal experience here.

After I completed Class 12, I travelled to another city, where I enrolled in a college for my BA. I was a good student. With God's grace, when I later enrolled for an MA, I got a scholarship from an organisation to pursue higher studies. Instinctively, I did not want to take any money from my parents. Maybe I did not want to burden them. Perhaps I somehow felt that they would not be able to cover my higher education expenses. It could be that some childhood experiences reinforced my decision that depending on my parents financially at this stage wasn't a good thing.

With the scholarship I received, if I remember correctly (this was some 30 years ago!), I was an extremely cautious and careful spender. I learnt the value of money. Once, somebody borrowed one rupee from me and did not return it. I made it a point to remind him about it (Back then, one rupee or even 50 paise was quite a big thing).

I tried to supplement my scholarship money by freelancing for newspapers etc.. That was another



Don't these youngsters feel guilty about their parents slogging away to earn all that money that's spent on their fancy 'education'? Are these children taking their parents for granted?

way I was able to fund my education at this stage. I was a good writer, and I loved reading too. I did not have many friends and I wanted to communicate so many things to the world. I felt I was not a very good speaker, but rather than this being a handicap, it may have turned out to be a blessing because my urge to communicate began to express itself in the form of writing. I got in touch with some newspapers and also a features agency and began writing for them. I can't remember now, but perhaps back then I would pen my articles by hand and take a bus all the way to the newspaper's office to hand it over! I didn't have a computer back then (few people did!), and sometimes I would get the article typed with the help of a typist maybe for two rupees a page.

From my freelance writing work I earned a fairly decent sum. This helped me to cover at least a substantial portion of my studies when I was doing my Master's degree. As I was also getting a scholarship, if I remember correctly I managed to cover all my education expenses and was even able to save some money and was no longer taking any money from my parents. I am very glad that I was not financially dependent on my parents for my higher education after a certain stage. So, today, when I hear of young adults whose parents are spending whopping sums on their higher studies, I think perhaps it isn't a good thing at all. Today, young adults pursuing higher education probably have many more opportunities than I did when I was their age to earn while they also study. With this income, they can fund their higher education at least partly, rather than expecting their parents to pay for the whole thing. Another point is that while aspirations to go in for higher studies may be good, students should think about the pros and cons of getting into courses that are so expensive that their parents have to tire themselves out to earn for their fees.

By Anguba

God, our Maker, has created each one of us, just as He has created the rest of the vast universe. Surely, He must have had some reason to do so it couldn't have been just in jest. There must be some definite purpose for which God brought us into being and sent us to Earth, to spend a bit of time here before we are called back.

So, then, what is this purpose?

Do we have any clue at all?

If you really think about it, you might be led to realise that there is hardly any question that is more important than this one for us to ask and to seek to find the answer to. But despite this, how many of us actually do ever ask ourselves (or others) this question, leave alone seeking to find the answer to it? If I recall rightly, for several decades (I am now in my 50s) I gave this really important question no serious thought at all. My case might hardly be exceptional. It may be almost the universal norm actually.

I was born in a supposedly 'well-educated' and 'very cosmopolitan' family. Growing up as a child, not once did my parents ever raise the issue of the purpose of human life in general, or of our own lives in particular. The issue wasn't once broached in conversations with relatives either. Nor was it with classmates and teachers at school, or, later, in the college and in the universities where I studied. Later on, I worked for a living in different places, but not once, if my memory serves me right, did I hear a single person talk about life's purpose. All through those many decades, in my

What On Earth Are We On Earth For?

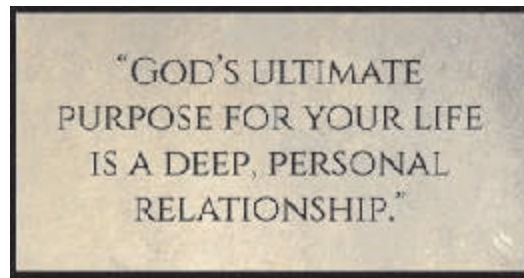
One of the most basic questions about human existence that we could ask ourselves is: What is the purpose of life? Or, to put it differently, What on Earth are we on Earth for?

conversations with other people, we talked about all sorts of things, but possibly on not even one occasion did we ever refer to the purpose of life.

Now, isn't that really strange?

The conspiracy of silence on this most important question about life is actually really eerie.

Although the purpose of life was hardly, if ever, referred to in my interactions with others, there was, right through and all along, a certain implicit understanding of this purpose that possibly most of us shared. It wasn't ever stated explicitly, and maybe for that reason it was particularly seductive and pervasive. Possibly, it had come to be so widely accepted as obvious, as in the very nature of things, that it did need to be articulated in words. At home, in the various educational institutions I studied at, and later, in the places where I worked, there was probably a broadly-shared consensus about the purpose of life being centred on the notion that life was meant for maximizing the pleasure that one could derive from the five senses. This is what (supposedly) gave



meaning and purpose to life. Pampering the never-ceasing demands of the ego was what a meaningful and purposeful life was essentially about, although this could be sometimes tempere. 'Have as much fun as you can while the game lasts', or 'Shop till you drop' could be other ways in which this idea could be described. This understanding of the purpose of life was also endlessly purveyed by the mass media, advertising companies and the 'entertainment' industry till it was converted into plain 'commonsense' for probably hundreds of millions of people. Hedonism, a worldview that is based on the notion that the purpose of life is the pursuit of pleasure, had become the *de facto* creed for vast numbers of people, including myself and probably a great many of those I knew, including several who described themselves as ardent believers in this or that religion. Hedonism had, for all practical purposes, become the religion

that we were passionately devoted to, even if we did not ourselves consciously recognise the fact.

Now in my 50s, and having gained some insight (including through some 'bitter' experiences) into the hollowness of the hedonistic worldview, my understanding of the purpose of life is or so I hope not quite the same now. I'm learning about diverse theistic spiritual traditions of the world that have a very different understanding of life's purpose. While these traditions might differ on some issues among themselves, there are certain points they agree on.

One of these commonalities is that human beings (and all other life-

forms) have been created by a transcendent God, and for a certain purpose.

A second common teaching is that death is not the end of us. Death is the dying of the physical body but not of the real 'I' the soul. We continue to live (in some or the other form and in some or the other realm) even after the death of our body. Our state or fate in the life after death will depend on how we had lived our short life while on Earth.

Coming to recognise two basic facts the fact of God, the Creator, and the fact of life after death can completely transform one's understanding of the purpose of life. Seen in the light of these two facts, the ideology of Hedonism can be recognised as not just totally bankrupt but dangerously self-damaging and delusional as well. Along with this, *the true purpose of life can now come to be seen as in having a deep and loving personal relationship with God and seeking to do His will for us, moment by moment.*

Church council condemns Delhi violence, pledges support for victims

The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) on February 26 condemned the "dastardly attack on the vulnerable and the weak" in different parts of the national capital. The council also appeals to various Christian denominations to facilitate each other, and all others of different faith traditions and ideological persuasions in their

neighborhoods, to rise from the ashes. "We will not be cowed down. We will rise," the statement asserts. Besides condemning violence, the Christian body regretted "the explicit or implicit complicity and tacit approval of those in power and authority, and the blame game to cover inaction and poor response to early

warnings." It appealed to Churches and their organization to in the riot-affected areas to respond appropriately to those in need. The 106-year-old council also prayed for the deceased and wounded and for their families.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

Sri Lanka's Muslims Offer Prayers For Virus Victims

Sri Lanka's Muslim community recently offered Friday prayers in solidarity with victims of the global coronavirus outbreak that has already killed nearly 1,400 people, mainly in China. More than 2,000 worshippers gathered at the 19th-century Dewatagaha Mosque near Colombo's Town Hall for prayers that were also attended by Muslim parliamentarian S. M. Marikar,

Colombo Deputy Mayor Mohamed Iqbal and Chinese diplomats. Speaking on behalf of Ambassador Cheng Xueyuan, the Chinese mission's Cultural Counselor Liu Dong expressed gratitude for the move and offered an assurance that business activity between the two countries will resume soon. "China is overwhelmed by the moral support given by the Muslims of Sri

Lanka during this crisis. We will soon overcome this problem and business will be restored as usual," Liu said, referring to a recent slump in trade due to the virus outbreak.

Marikar, who coordinated the prayer meeting, said that "China has lost lives, while Sri Lanka is largely affected due to the absence of Chinese tourists, who topped the list of foreign visitors to the island."

Rohingya Muslims:

'The Hague Court Verdict Means So Much to Us'

The UN's top court has ordered Myanmar to do all it can to prevent genocide against the country's ethnic Muslim Rohingya minority. A 17-judge panel at the Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) said its order for so-called provisional measures meant to protect the Rohingya was binding "and creates international legal obligations" on Myanmar. Yasmin Ullah, a Rohingya activist who was in the court on Jan. 23, described the ruling, which warns that genocidal actions could recur, as historic. "Today, having the judges unanimously agree on the protection of Rohingya means so much to us because we're now allowed to exist and it's legally

binding," she said, adding that she did not think Myanmar would comply with the order.

Yasmin Ullah was born in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state, and her family fled the country after the massacres of Rohingya Muslims in the 1990s. After arriving in Thailand in 1995, her family lived there without any legal protection and basic rights for 16 years. She is now based in Canada where she is pursuing a degree in political science. In addition, she serves as the President of the Rohingya Human Rights Network (RHRN) and works as a coordinator at the Free Rohingya Coalition.

(Extracted from arabnews.com)

Beseech not Humans

The Prophet, blessings and peace be upon him, had sought a **special oath from some of his selected Companions that they would not beseech anyone for anything.** The result was that even if they were to drop their whip while riding, they would stoop to receive it themselves and not request anyone to pick it up for them. [Abu Dawud, "Kitab al-Zakah"]

The way to achieve this is to simply delink all your expectations from whatever other human beings may possess or whatever may be in their power; and give up hopes regarding whatever might be in the hands of human beings!

"O Allah! Instil in my heart all hopes with Thee; cut off all hopes with ought other than Thee."

[Ibn Majah, "Kitab al-Zuhd"]

Most of the evils in human relationships, and most of the sorrows we encounter, are the result of broken expectations. **By severing your hopes from human beings, not only will these relationships be freed from being hurt but you will also be able to rid yourselves of your grief and sorrow.**

Compiled From:

"Dying and Living for Allah" - Khurram Murad, pp. 32-33

Q: While for many people the purpose of life may not be explicitly talked about at home, the school or the workplace, many of us are constantly faced with the implicit message that the purpose of life is to become materially rich. So, the purpose of life comes to be seen as getting a 'good' job, a big house or whatever. This is something that is pervasive in society in the education system and the media and even in our homes. Through this subtle but pervasive propaganda, people come to define the purpose of life in essentially materialistic terms. How do you see this?

A: It is true, as you have observed, that the prevalent view in the society in terms of the implicit lived message is that the purpose of life is securing a materially well-off situation in terms of wealth, health, job, position,

power, etc. But although these are good values, they are not the ultimate values. We can help ourselves and others by reminding ourselves and them that all material things are perishable and that our own death will make an end to our possession of all these good things. We should not be then at the loser's side when death takes away all what we have amassed. To survive and overcome this loss at the hands of

death we need something that transcends death itself. The assurance that God has prepared

His will shall not make us desperate in the face of the sure death. We have to store up

"treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Bible: Mt 6:20).

Q: God has bestowed each of us with a particular calling in life, and following that calling may be

said to be the means for us to fulfil the purpose of our life. How do you think we might be able to discern this calling?

A: It should not be absolutely impossible to discern the calling of God, for it makes no sense that God calls us and yet would give us no clue to this calling! The providential turnings in our life, as

long as we are on a sincere search for our individual vocation, will tell us about what God wants from us. This includes the voice of our conscience, inspirations from reading Holy Scriptures and the lives of holy persons and the messages of our life experiences and encounters with certain persons and events. Listening to the voice of God in the spirit of prayer and meditation is very helpful in this regard.

Q: It is said that we should seek to do God's will, not our will. This could be said to be the way to fulfil our life's purpose. How do you think we can discern God's will for us?

A: Discerning God's will for us has certain norms. Our God-given talents and skills can give us a general idea of the way we are expected to glorify God in this world. In order to be clearer about this we need the help of a spiritual guide, who can help us open our spiritual eyes. The discerning should take place in the spirit of prayer and openness to God.

(Fr. Sebastian Athappilly can be contacted on athappillys@gmail.com)

Each One Has a Calling in Life

Fr. Sebastian Athappilly (Interviewed by Roshan)



Fr. Sebastian Athappilly (b. 1949) is an Indian Catholic priest and theologian. He is a member of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), a Catholic religious congregation. Presently, he is hospital chaplain at the University Clinic, Graz, Austria, and visiting professor at the DVK. He is the author of several books and articles.

an indestructible state of affairs for those who live according to

MUSINGS

Explaining the Muslims Decline in Science

By Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz



attitude towards knowledge and learning?

The answer is that as Muslims began to move away from the Quran, their understanding of knowledge and learning also began to change.

The understanding of knowledge (*ilm*) in the Quran is a holistic one. Numerous verses of the Quran exhort people to reflect on various phenomenon of nature. For instance, the Quran (3:190) says: "There are signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day for people of understanding". Verses such as

this one encourage us to develop knowledge of God's creation. This knowledge is a means to grow in our understanding of God. Inspired by this Quranic understanding of knowledge, many early Muslims made impressive contributions in various fields of knowledge, including what are called the 'Sciences' today.

In later centuries, however, as Muslims began to depart from the teachings of the Quran, this holistic understanding of knowledge was soon eclipsed. Knowledge came to be artificially and arbitrarily divided into two distinct categories 'religious' (*dini*) and 'worldly' (*duniyavi*). There is no such distinction made in the Quran, though. Whereas God had given human beings the capacity to gain knowledge in all fields, some Muslims declared that only the former sort of knowledge was to be pursued while they forbade or frowned upon the latter. That is how the Muslims fell from their position of torchbearers of knowledge in various sciences.

(The author has written extensively on issues related to Islam and Science. He can be contacted on maparvaiz@gmail.com)

“ In later centuries, however, as Muslims began to depart from the teachings of the Quran, this holistic understanding of knowledge was soon eclipsed. Knowledge came to be artificially and arbitrarily divided into two distinct categories 'religious' (dini) and 'worldly' (duniyavi). ”

There is a simple yet convincing explanation for this. And it is this: the decline of Muslims, including in the field of science and learning, happened because Muslims increasingly began to move away from the Quran and its teachings.

Now, how did this effect Muslims'



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Welcome Children in The Mosque

By Firdos Tarannum

It was during the month of Ramzan. My younger brother and his friends were praying in the mosque, and a man who was late for the prayers started forcefully budge into the line of kids. He wanted to get to the front. But these kids didn't move because the prayer had already begun. The man began to yell at them and guess what? he ultimately beat them! Can you imagine! My brother had tears in his eyes. He declared: "I will not go back to the masjid". But praise be to God, this problem



was resolved by the elders. When children enter a mosque, we ought not to look at them as if they have entered a prohibited area. Just because they may not be well dressed or they may make noise we shouldn't be harsh with them

or rude to them. When children enter a mosque, they should be welcomed with a smile so that they feel at home and enjoy coming there again and again. We ought not to chase them away from goodness. When someone comes into the mosque, give space for them. Perhaps God will make space for you in Jannah for that good deed

(Firdos Tarannum is pursuing her degree course at SKDS College, Sindhanur, and also teaches at Holy Family School, Sindhanur).

London Muslim Leader Forgives Attacker

Raafat Maglad, who is in his 70s, checked himself out of hospital and returned to London Central Mosque in Regent's Park for afternoon prayers, less than 24 hours after being stabbed there. A 29-year-old man is in custody after he was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder after he was tackled by worshippers. With a dressing still on the "very deep cut" on his neck and his right arm in a sling, Mr Maglad told reporters: "I forgive him. I feel

very sorry for him." Mr Maglad, who is originally from Sudan, said he thought he had seen the attacker previously worshipping at the mosque. Describing how the attack unfolded, he said: "We were praying and I just felt somebody hit me from behind. He didn't say anything. "I just felt blood flowing from my neck and that's it, they rushed me to the hospital. Everything happened all of a sudden." Mr Maglad, who has



been the muezzin for 30 years, said as a Muslim he does not hold any hatred in his heart and that it was "very important" for him to attend Friday prayers. "If I miss it, I just miss something very important. It is very important for us as Muslims," he added.

(Extracted from: independent.co.uk)

Lesson for Living

One day, a school teacher wrote on the board the following:

9×1=5
9×2=18
9×3=27
9×4=36
9×5=45
9×6=54
9×7=63
9×8=72
9×9=81
9×10=90



When she was done, the teacher looked at the students and found that they were all laughing at her! This was because of the first equation, which was, obviously, wrong.

Then, addressing the students, the teacher said:

"I wrote that first equation wrong on purpose, because I wanted you to learn something important about life. I wanted you to know how some people in the world might sometimes treat you. You

can see that I wrote the equation right nine times, but none of you congratulated me for it. But all of you laughed and criticized me because of the one wrong thing I did!

"So, this is the lesson: Some people may never appreciate the good you do, even if you do good a million times. But they will criticize one little wrong thing you may do. But don't get discouraged. Continue doing good. Always rise above all the laughter and criticism. Stay strong!"

How the students appreciated their teacher and the lesson she had taught them that day!

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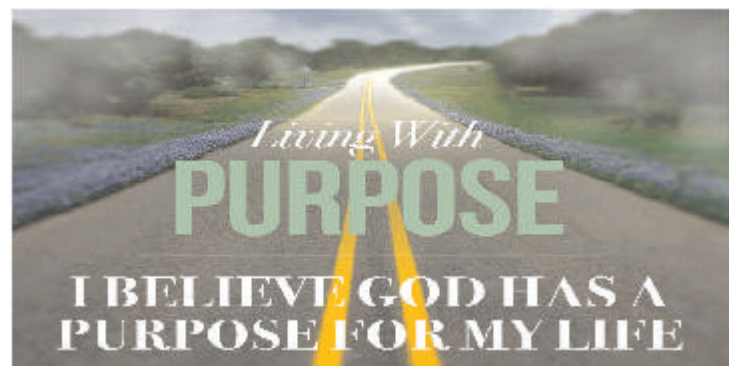
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By Qalamdar

Many of us love to travel. We'd probably travel even more if we had less responsibilities and more money. At one time, I was what you could call a travel-addict. Over the years, I managed to travel in more than 30 countries!

These days, I don't travel very much. It perhaps isn't just because I'm in my 50s now and my energy-levels are different from what they were back in my 'wild' days. It's also probably because my understanding of the purpose of travelling has changed.

There are two ways of looking at travel. One can view it from a secular perspective or from a spiritual one. The purpose of travel in the two cases can be very different. From a secular perspective, one could travel for several purposes, such as:

- Relaxation, enjoyment, adventure having a 'fun' time or 'chilling out', as they say.
- Wanting a 'change'; escaping the boredom and tedium of routine life.
- Seeing new places, meeting new people and having new experiences.
- Increasing one's knowledge of other cultures, ways of life etc.

For many years, these were among the major purposes for my almost obsessive travelling. Those days, I had essentially what you could call a materialistic understanding of travel. That is, if I visited a place, my major focus was on seeing material things (museums, palaces, forts and historic buildings, or zoos, forests, beaches, mountains etc.) and indulging in various forms of sensual stimulation (eg. eating 'good' food, attending a musical concert or a dance performance). 'Sightseeing', that gives sensual pleasure which is temporary, was really what much of my travelling

Travelling Can Help Us Grow Spiritually

You can become a spiritually-reflective traveller if you bring in God into your holiday picture!

was for. This was an understanding of travel that I probably shared with many others. In fact, this was also probably how 'Tourism' was envisaged and marketed by many travel companies the world over. Then wedded to the 'religion' of Hedonism, travel was for me yet another means for obtaining pleasure through sense-stimulation. In those days, even if I visited a place of worship, it may have been just to admire it as an interesting work of craftsmanship, a beautiful physical structure, like the other monuments that my travel guidebook recommended tourists really ought to see.

From a spiritual point of view, the purpose of travel is very different. In diverse spiritual traditions one learns of spiritual aspirants or masters who travelled a great deal. The purpose of such travel often included the following:

- Searching for a spiritual guide.
- Searching for spiritual knowledge.
- Seeking out and being in the company of fellow spiritual seekers.
- Pilgrimage.
- Communicating God's message to others.
- Communing with God while on travel, sometimes in remote places like mountain caves, forests etc.

From the materialistic or secular point of view, travel can undoubtedly have its benefits. It can help us open our mind, expanding it to embrace new ways of living, new cultures and new ways of doing things. Travel can enable us to meet people from



diverse cultures, religions, ethnicities and nationalities. This can help one become more universal in one's thinking, learning to discern the oneness that binds all people together. Facing challenges while travelling can help us become stronger and more resilient.

All that is well and good. But from the spiritual point of view, the purpose and benefits of travel go beyond that. From the spiritual perspective, the purpose of travel should be to help us grow in our connection with God and to do God's will. If you study the lives of saints, you will find that, centuries ago, many of them did a great deal of travelling including on foot or on horseback or sailing in ships. They sojourned to distant lands, taking the message of God to people there. In those days, when the means of travel were limited and journeys often entailed many great dangers, these people travelled keeping God as their destination. For them, travel wasn't for a 'summer break' or to have 'fun' or to holiday in some 'exotic' locale. Their purpose was entirely different: to do the work that God had set for them. Along

with their physical travelling from place to place, these master journeyers engaged in a profound inner journey, going deep within to seek to understand who they truly were.

From a spiritual point of view, travel can afford us many opportunities to grow in our connection with God and in relating to God's creatures while also having an enjoyable time. For example, if suppose you travel to a place by the sea for a holiday, you

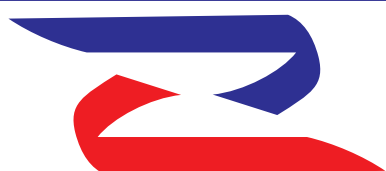
can definitely have fun swimming in the sea or making sandcastles. At the same time, you can be awestruck at the immensity of the sea or admire the beauty of the shells scattered on the beach and use these to reflect on the beauty, power and majesty of their creator, God. If you spot a party of seagulls flying overhead, you can reflect on how God guides them across vast stretches of water and provides them food to eat. And at the end of your holiday, when you return, you can thank God for the good time that you had and for bringing you home safely. In these and other ways, you can become a spiritually-reflective traveller if you bring in God into your holiday picture!

England Muslim Educationist Wants to Help White Kids

The head of three Muslim schools that are ranked top in England in terms of pupil progression says he wants to help working-class white children too. Government data released recently revealed that the best three schools for pupil improvement are Muslim, based in inner cities and run by a not-for-profit trust called Star Academies. Hamid Patel, its chief executive, is responsible for more than 25 other schools across the UK, many of which are aimed at Muslim students.

Following his success in inner-city locations such as London and Birmingham, he is turning his attention to schools in deprived coastal areas where, unlike many of his schools, most of the pupils are white. Star Academies has already begun working to help these schools and their students.

In 2016, it took over Highfield Leadership Academy in the town of Blackpool and Bay Leadership Academy in the town of Morecambe, when both were performing exceptionally badly. Patel said he is distraught by the lack of progress for white working-class boys in coastal areas compared with more diverse inner-city areas, particularly given the existing inequalities in the UK. "There is no doubt a white child has advantages. You only have to look at the statistics on employment, average pay, the prison system and even life expectancy," he said. "This underlines how severe our issues are with white working-class boys that despite the inherent advantages, they do so badly," he added. "Only one in seven white working-class boys will pass their GCSE in English and maths."



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