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Muslims need to focus particularly on their educational and economic progress.

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The way Muslim brothers and sisters celebrate the month of Ramzan helps me grow in God-consciousness as a Christian.

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We have turned our Islam into rituals – our prayers, fasts, Haj, Umrah, Zakat and sadaqahs have become lifeless rituals.

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## Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania's New President



Samia Suluhu Hassan is a soft-spoken, veteran politician unexpectedly thrust from the role of vice president to become Tanzania's first female President after John Magufuli's sudden death. Under the constitution, Hassan will serve the remainder of Magufuli's second five-year term, which does not expire until 2025.

A former office clerk and devel-

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## Aligarh Muslim University to set up centre of Sufism and Islamic Philosophy

The Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) has proposed to set up a Centre of Sufism and Islamic Philosophy with the aim to provide a platform for inter-religious studies and dialogues at national and international levels. The centre will re-examine the core issues of Islamic Philosophy in its historic-cultural context.

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# Commemorating A Great Man Bhagat Singh

90 years have passed since Bhagat Singh left the world. May his concern for social justice and communal harmony and his universal vision and humane approach continue to inspire people who dream of a better, happier, more just and humane world.



Sameer Ahmed Siddiqui

The life of great men and women have a lasting message for generations that follow after them. On some issues our thinking may be different from theirs—that is obvious, because each person is unique and has their own way of looking at, and thinking about, the world. At the same time, though, we can appreciate and benefit from



the goodness in their life's message. One such great person was Bhagat Singh, who played a key role in India's movement for independence from British rule. In order to make the new generation aware of this great man, I would like to pay him tribute on his 90th death anniversary. Bhagat Singh went to the gallows, along with two of his comrades, Sukhdev and Rajguru, on March 23, 1931. He was hanged by the British colonial regime when he was not even 24.

In this essay, I would like to highlight

certain aspects of Bhagat Singh's life that are of continuing relevance in today's world. I would like to commemorate, in particular, his concern for the socially and economically marginalized, his advocacy of rational and humanist thinking and his commitment to communal harmony. These are issues that remain of particular concern across the globe today.

Born in Punjab, in 1907, Bhagat Singh belonged to a family of freedom fighters. His father Kishan Singh was involved with the freedom struggle at different levels all his life. Bhagat Singh was born and brought up in a family that stood for rational and humanitarian values.

This indicates the importance of good parenting for nurturing a child who can grow up to contribute and be of value to the wider society.

Bhagat Singh was a widely-read person, and deeply concerned about the conditions of society, especially the plight of the poor, being a firm advocate of social justice. Thus, intellectual maturity and social concern were among his prominent

features. This is something really precious that young people today can learn from—they need to develop intellectually and at the same time grow in terms of empathy for others. Our intellectual or academic pursuits should not be for our sake alone, for promoting our career prospects, as indeed often happens. Our intellectual development should help us become more oriented towards helping and serving others too. It should help us move forward, from 'me' to 'we', to a universal vision.

Bhagat Singh was barely 17 when he published his first article, in 1924, in Matwala, a magazine from Calcutta. The subject was 'Universal Brotherhood'. He imagined a world where "all of us being one and none is the other. It will really be a comforting time when the world will have no strangers."

To think such advanced thoughts at such a young age was truly remarkable! This one instance can be a great inspiration for young people today—to think of, and work for, the greater social good, to aspire to contribute to making the world a better, more just, peaceful and harmonious place. Of course that change must start with oneself. Inner transformation is a must.

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**Arun Kumar Jain**

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opment worker, Hassan began her political career in 2000 in her native Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous archipelago, before being elected to the national assembly on mainland Tanzania and assigned a senior ministry. She rose through the ranks of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) until being picked by Magufuli as his running mate in his first presidential election campaign in 2015. The CCM comfortably won and Hassan made history when she was sworn in as the country's first ever female vice president.

Hassan was born on January 27, 1960 in Zanzibar. Her father was a school teacher and her mother, a housewife. Hassan graduated from high school but has said publicly that her finishing results were poor, and she took a clerkship in a government office at 17. By 1988, after undertaking further study, Hassan had risen through the ranks to become a development officer in the Zanzibar government. She was employed as a project manager for the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and later in the 1990s was made executive director of an umbrella body governing non-governmental organisations in Zanzibar. In 2000, she was nominated by the CCM to a special seat in Zanzibar's House of Representatives. She then served as a local government minister – first for youth employment, women and children and then for tourism and trade investment.

She holds university qualifications from Tanzania, Britain and the United States. The mother of four has spoken publicly to encourage Tanzanian women and girls to pursue their dreams. ■

(Extracted from aljazeera.com)

### Christians in Muslim-Majority Malaysia Can Use The Word 'Allah' In Publications

A Malaysian court recently ruled that Christians in Muslim-majority Malaysia can use the word "Allah" in publications, overturning a decades-old ban after a lengthy legal battle that fuelled religious tensions. The Arabic word for God has long been divisive in Malaysia, with Christians complaining attempts to stop them using it. The case began 13 years ago when officials seized religious materials in the local Malay language from a Christian woman at Kuala Lumpur airport that contained the word "Allah". Jill Ireland Lawrence Bill, a member of an indigenous group then launched a legal challenge against a 1986 ban on Christians using the term in publications. After repeated delays, the Kuala Lumpur High Court finally sided with her, ruling she had the right not to face discrimination on the grounds of her faith.

According to the judge's lawyer, Annou Xavier, the ban on Christians using "Allah" was "unlawful and unconstitutional". Malaysia's constitution guarantees freedom of religion. ■

(Extracted from wionews.com)

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We as individuals need to be transformed into more kind, compassionate and socially-concerned people, reaching out to serve all needy people, irrespective of caste and creed. Only if we are ourselves transformed within can we possibly become a means to help bring about social transformation in a positive direction.

Today, in large parts of the world, identity politics in the name of religion and the politicization of religion are playing havoc with the lives of people. Religious identity is being employed to divide people and foment hate and conflict. What is called 'communalism' is truly a major challenge to religiously plural societies. In this context, the question arises of how people from different religious backgrounds can live together amicably in a plural society. Also, what can be done to prevent the politicization of religion and identity politics in the name of religion? These are issues of global concern today. Here, too, Bhagat Singh has some important things to teach us.

Bhagat Singh was acutely conscious of the divisiveness of mixing religion with politics. In 1928, he wrote, "If religion is separated from politics, then all of us can jointly initiate political activities, even though in matters of religion we might have many differences with each other. We feel that the true well-wishers of India



Bhagat Singh was acutely conscious of the divisiveness of mixing religion with politics.



Grand Parents of Bhagath Singh

would follow these principles [...]" But not many cared to listen to this voice of sanity then. And even now, many people continue to peddle religion to promote what they conceive of as their political prospects, with devastating consequences.

Bhagat Singh had some important things to say about religion. He was an atheist, but even those who do believe in God and religion can benefit from some of his views on the subject. For those who are pained at the ways in which religion has been used to promote dehumanization, superstition and exploitation, some of Bhagat Singh's insights on the issue are very insightful. For instance, he observed: "Our retrogressive thinking is destroying us. We keep ourselves entangled in futile discussions about God and heaven, and remain

busy in talking about the soul and God. We are quick to dub Europe as capitalist and don't think about their great ideas or pay any attention to them. We love divinity and remain aloof from the world."

Bhagat Singh made a strong critique of untouchability and communalism. The decade of the 1920s saw a rise in communal politics in large parts of India. However, Bhagat Singh steadfastly remained committed to the idea of a plural and inclusive India. The manifesto of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha that he founded said, "Religious superstitions and bigotry are a great hindrance in our progress. They have proved an obstacle in our way and we must do away with them."

Bhagat Singh was acutely conscious of the divisiveness of mixing reli-

gion with politics. Being fully and consciously secular, he understood, more clearly than many of his contemporaries, the danger that communalism posed to the country and the movement for independence. He often told his audience that communalism was as big an enemy as colonialism. Significantly, two of the six rules of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, drafted by Bhagat Singh, were: 'To have nothing to do with communal bodies or other parties which disseminate communal ideas' and 'to create the spirit of general toleration among the public considering religion as a matter of personal belief of man and to act upon the same fully.' 90 years have passed since Bhagat Singh left the world, at a very young age. Today, many of the things that he stood for remain as relevant as they were in his time. May his concern for social justice and communal harmony and his universal vision and humane approach continue to inspire people who dream of a better, happier, more just and humane world. ■

### Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee launches 'India's biggest' dialysis facility

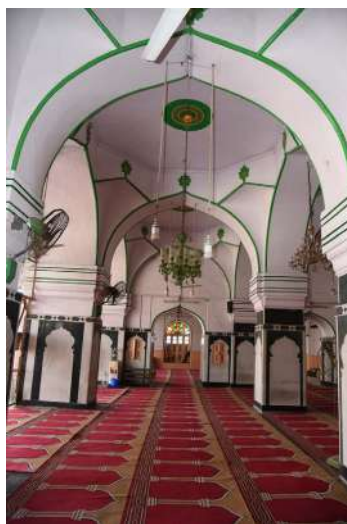


The Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) recently launched "India's biggest" kidney dialysis facility at the Gurudwara Bangla Sahib complex. The Guru Harkishan Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Kidney Dialysis Hospital will offer dialysis facility to 101 patients simultaneously and it can cater to 500 patients daily, the DSGMC said in a statement. The hospital will offer its services to patients completely free of cost. "All services are being provided totally free in this most technically advanced hospital. There is no billing or payment counter. The DSGMC will take services from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) from corporate houses and from those who are willing to contribute for such initiatives and various government schemes," DSGMC president Manjinder Singh Sirsa said. The capacity will soon be increased to 1,000 beds from the current 101 beds, he added. ■

## Hyderabad: Mosques offer free education, skill development amid school closure

Hyderabad: In a bid to ensure academic continuity with schools being closed since March 2020 due to COVID-induced lockdown, 12 selected mosques in the city are now providing regular education and skill development, along with religious teachings for boys. A group of intellectuals and educators in Hyderabad—including Siasat managing editor Zaheeruddin Ali Khan, MS educational society director Mohammed Moazzam Hussain, educationalist Zakir Hussain, president of mosque committee Munawar Hussain and secretary Syed Shaikh—are among the few who came forward for this initiative.

At Masjid-e-Chowk and twenty other mosques in Hyderabad, the initiative is set to start by connecting the students and youngsters to the mosque where specialized coaching in English, Science and Mathematics and other courses will be provided.



Masjid-e-chowk, situated in the heart of the city, has a huge library for youth to spend time reading where internet access is provided. This initiative is being appreciated as the students from economically weaker sections and slum areas cannot afford the high tuition fees. Mr. Mohammed Moazzam Hussain said that its aim is not only to re-

ligious teachings but also to make students aware of the modern teachings as well. The experienced faculty is selected among the people who come to the mosque or the graduates who reside nearby so that they can responsibly teach the students and bring out the best and enhance new skills among them.

In February 2020, a similar initiative has already been started at Masjid-e-Alamgir, Shantinagar, which opened its doors for hundreds of students, and helped them prepare for various competitive exams including national eligibility cum entrance test (NEET) for medical courses, and civil services.

Alamgir Masjid is a three-story building. Earlier, it had full occupancy during one prayer out of 35 prayers in a week. Now all the floors are fully occupied for the coaching. Later, 11 more Masjids took up this initiative. ■

(Extracted from siasat.com)

Pope Francis, the 84-year-old head of the Catholic Church, recently made history with a four-day visit to strife-torn Iraq (5th to 8th March, 2021). The visit was an immensely significant and very appreciable step in promoting interfaith dialogue and inter-community harmony and highlighted the Pope's deep commitment to peace between religious communities.

The Pope's long-awaited trip sought to comfort one of the world's oldest Christian communities, while also deepening his dialogue with Muslims. His historic tour of Iraq took him to six cities and sites, during which he met Muslim and Christian leaders and preached peace and coexistence.

The Pope began his Iraqi visit landing in Baghdad. In the first important meeting of the day, he pointed to Iraq's authorities, civil society groups and diplomats the path toward a genuine recovery of the country following years of conflict and terrorism. The problems facing the country can be overcome by building a society based on fraternity, solidarity, tolerance, and coexistence, through concrete acts of care and service, especially for the vulnerable and those most in need. The Pope said he was among them "as a pilgrim of peace in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace." "May the clash of arms be silenced" in Iraq and everywhere, he urged. "May no one be considered a second-class citizen," he said. Later that day, he met bishops, clergy and religious in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad, underscoring the importance of sowing seeds of reconciliation and fraternal coexistence that can lead to a rebirth of

## Pope Francis Makes History with Iraq Visit

### Major Step for Interfaith Harmony



(Pope Francis gives a speech at the Presidential Palace in Baghdad)

hope for everyone. At the cathedral, he prayed and honoured the victims of one of the worst massacres of Christians, the 2010 attack on the cathedral that left 58 people dead. Speaking to congregants, he urged Christians to persevere in Iraq to ensure that its Catholic community, "though small like a mustard seed, continues to enrich the life of society as a whole" — using an image found in both the Bible and Quran. Among the places in Iraq that Pope Francis visited was Najaf, where he had a historic meeting with the country's top Shia Muslim religious

leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and delivered a message of peaceful coexistence.

The meeting took place at the humble home Ayatollah Sistani has rented for decades. The Vatican said the Pope thanked Ayatollah Sistani for having "raised his voice in defence of the weakest and most persecuted" during some of the most violent times in Iraq's recent history. The visit was carried live on Iraqi television, and residents cheered the meeting of two respected faith leaders. In a statement, Ayatollah Sistani said, "Religious and spiritual lead-

ership must play a big role to put a stop to tragedy ... and urge sides, especially great powers, to make wisdom and sense prevail and erase the language of war". He affirmed his concern that Christian citizens should live like all Iraqis in peace and security, and with their full constitutional rights.

The Vatican said Pope Francis thanked al-Sistani and the Shia people for having "raised his voice in defence of the weakest and most persecuted" during some of the most violent times in Iraq's recent history. The Pope said that Aya-

“Charity, love and fraternity are the way forward: This was said by the Pope in conversation with journalists on the flight from Baghdad back to Rome, after his historic Iraq trip. Truly remarkable and inspiring words these, from a truly remarkable and inspiring spiritual leader.”

ayollah Sistani's message of peace affirmed "the sacredness of human life and the importance of the unity of the Iraqi people". According to a statement from the Vatican's Press Office, during the courtesy visit, which lasted about forty-five minutes, the Pope "stressed the importance of cooperation and friendship between religious communities for contributing — through the cultivation of mutual respect and dialogue — to the good of Iraq, the region and the entire human family." In taking leave of the Ayatollah, the Pope stated that he continued to pray that God, the Creator of all, would grant a future of peace and fraternity for the beloved land of Iraq, for the Middle East and for the whole world. ■

## Pope Francis' Prayer For The Children Of Abraham



Pope Francis is pictured with religious leaders during an interreligious meeting on the plain of Ur near Nasiriyah, Iraq, March 6, 2021.

Standing alongside Muslims, Jews, representatives of different Christian Churches and other Iraqi religious minorities in the Iraqi city of Ur (where the Prophet Abraham, revered by Jews, Muslims and Christians, is said to have been born) on March 6, Pope Francis offered a prayer for reconciliation and peace for Iraq:

Almighty God, our Creator, you love our human family and every work of your hands: As children of Abraham, Jews, Christians and Muslims, together with other believers and all persons of good will,

we thank you for having given us Abraham, a distinguished son of this noble and beloved country, to be our common father in faith. We thank you for his example as a man of faith, who obeyed you completely, left behind his family, his

tribe and his native land, and set out for a land that he knew not.

We thank you too, for the example of courage, resilience, strength of spirit, generosity and hospitality set for us by our common father in faith.

We thank you in a special way for his heroic faith, shown by his readiness even to sacrifice his son in obedience to your command. We know that this was an extreme test, yet one from which he emerged victorious, since he trusted unreservedly in you, who are merciful and always offer the possibility of beginning anew.

We thank you because, in blessing our father Abraham, you made him a blessing for all peoples. We ask you, the God of our father Abraham and our God, to grant us a strong faith, a faith that abounds in good works, a faith that opens our hearts to you and to all our brothers and sisters; and a boundless hope capable of discerning in every situation your fidelity to your promises. Make each of us a witness of your

loving care for all, particularly refugees and the displaced, widows and orphans, the poor and the infirm.

Open our hearts to mutual forgiveness and in this way make us instruments of reconciliation, builders of a more just and fraternal society.

Welcome into your abode of peace and light all those who have died, particularly the victims of violence and war.

Assist the authorities in the effort to seek and find the victims of kidnapping and in a special way to protect women and children.

Help us to care for the earth, our common home, which in your goodness and generosity you have given to all of us.

Guide our hands in the work of rebuilding this country, and grant us the strength needed to help those forced to leave behind their homes and lands, enabling them to return in security and dignity, and to embark upon a new, serene and prosperous life. Amen.

(Extracted from [www.americamagazine.org](http://www.americamagazine.org)) ■

## Prophetic Medicine Council launched to organize its practitioners



With an aim to promote Prophetic medicine (Al-Tibb al-nabawi) in the country, the Kerala-based Traditional Prophetic Medicine Association Trust (TPMAT) has launched a tibb council. The Council will provide a platform to Prophetic Medicine physicians and doctors and it will also provide training for those doctors who are interested in practicing Prophetic Medicine.

Prophetic medicine is the advice given by the prophet Muhammad with regards to sickness, treatment and hygiene as found in the hadith, and the writings undertaken primarily by non-physician scholars to collect and explicate these traditions. ■

# In 150 Days as District Magistrate, Young IAS Faiz Ahmed Opens 100 Public Libraries in Jharkhand



Mumtaz Alam

This is rare and so seems unbelievable, but it is True. This young IAS officer from 2013 batch is doing wonders in one of the backward districts of the country. In the last five months, Faiz Aquil Ahmed Mumtaz, District Magistrate of Jamtara, 250 kms from Jharkhand's capital Ranchi, has renovated and refurbished 118 dilapidated and deserted government buildings in as many panchayats and turned them into public libraries. He has already inaugurated 99 of them and will open the rest in the next 10 days.

Talking to this reporter on phone from Jamtara, the DM said these libraries are going to leave huge impact on the areas and they will bring big changes.

He assumed office of Jamtara District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner in July 2020 and from October he started working on his mission library. By 28th February, he has inaugurated 99 libraries and dedicated them to people. He is hopeful of big changes these libraries will bring in the villages.

"Definitely, the impact and changes will be huge. They are very nice, well-made and good libraries with nice slogans written on the walls. They have good competitive books for engineering, medical and banking examinations. We are also motivating the students," said the Jamtara DM.

Government officials also visit the libraries once a week and guide the aspirants, he informed.

"Now the students don't need to go to Patna or Delhi to prepare for competitive exams. They can remain in the villages and do that. People from lower class and lower

middle class cannot afford coaching and so they give up hope. Now these libraries will help them a lot. I am sure literacy should also improve. Results will be visible in a year or two," said IAS Faiz Ahmed who had secured 17th rank among 1122 successful candidates in the Civil Services Examinations 2013. After training, he was posted as Sub Divisional Magistrate, Deputy District Commissioner, and transport commissioner. In July last year, he was appointed District Magistrate. After assuming office of the DM, he had planned to open 30 libraries in the current financial year in the district but in view of the huge positive response and demands from the local students, he decided to open one library in each of 118 panchayats of the district.

"The response of the people has been great. First, we had planned 30 libraries only in the current financial year but students from villages started coming to meet me in groups and asking for library in their villages. Then we planned to open libraries in all 118 panchayats of the district. All the libraries are ready. We have already inaugurated 99. In the next 10 days, we will inaugurate the rest," said the DM.

Chief Minister Hemant Soren has lauded the DM's efforts and he is getting full support from the state government.

These are basically old and dilapidated buildings which were left and had become abode of snakes and insects. The IAS officer renovated those buildings and turned them into libraries.

When asked about the role libraries played in his own successful jour-

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**“We have provided competitive books for engineering, medical, banking exams etc. Now students from villages will not need to go to Patna or Delhi for coaching” — Faiz Ahmed, District Magistrate, Jamtara**

“

ney, IAS Faiz Ahmed said libraries play very big role in success.

“Teachers can only guide you. You have to work very hard yourself. For this, you have to sit somewhere and spend 5-6 hours on books. This is what libraries can help you do,” he said.

In villages, houses are small and families are big. It does not help in creating ambience for study. At libraries one can dedicate himself to study.

IAS Faiz Ahmed, who hails from Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, got education in Darjeeling district of West Bengal before moving to Delhi for preparation for Civil Services Exam. He got enrolled at Jamia Millia Islamia's Residential Coaching Academy and cleared the country's one of the toughest exams with 17th rank in June 2014.

(Source: <https://www.inclusiveindia.net/education/in-150-days-as-district-magistrate-young-ias-faiz-ahmed-opens-100-public-libraries-in-jharkhand/>)

## Egypt becomes first MENA country to launch Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator

Egypt has launched the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator, the first institutional cooperation between Cairo and the World Economic Forum, which will advance women's economic empowerment efforts. In a statement, Minister of International

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It will also revisit the classical Islamic tests to provide a deeper understanding of Islamic thought, culture and civilisation.

“We aim to bring a clear picture of Islam and its relevance in all times. AMU is perhaps the only seat of learning that has three disciplines of Philosophy, namely Indian, Islamic and Western Philosophy,” Prof. Latif Shah Hussain Kazmi, Chairman, Department of Philosophy, said. The objective is to propagate secular, humanist, pluralist and liberal ethos of Islam, added Kazmi.

The proposal to set up the Centre of Sufism and Islamic Philosophy has been passed unanimously at the Ordinary Meeting of the Academic Council. “We hope for a better mutual understanding among all religions, a sense of brotherhood with the teaching of the saints,” Kazmi added.

The proposed centre also has plans



to conduct research in the fields of Sufism, comparative study of Sufism and mystic traditions in other religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism, etc. “We will encourage research on the various dimensions of Sufism and Islamic Philosophy and the ways of enhancing religious understanding in our country,” he said.

The centre also plans to organise inter-faith dialogues, seminars, conferences and extension lectures on Sufism, mysticism and bhakti movement etc.

The concept note of the centre envisages that Islamic Philosophy has remained for long spells of time under a shadow of doubt, criticism and uncertainty. Some thinkers,

mostly orientalist, denied its very existence. Those philosophers who tended to deny the very existence of an Islamic Philosophy in view of their social and religious prejudices, misunderstood the very vision and mission of Islam. They consequently maintained that the teachings of Islam are opposed to all free discussion and rational investigation. The only fruits that Islam, according to these philosophers, has borne for its followers have been intellectual despotism, irrationalism and dogmatism, the concept note states.

“The centre would serve as the platform for advanced learning and research investigating the philosophical doctrines of the great Islamic philosophers such as Ab Bakr al Razi, Suhrawardi, al Farabi etc. Their philosophical contributions in Islamic framework need to be revisited, explored and re-examined in the light of contemporary philosophical discourse,” Prof. Kazmi said.

“Throughout centuries, Sufis trav-

elled across Asia, Africa and Europe. They lived with or co-existed with Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Christians and Pagans. They were at peace with all of them. These men of God mingled with all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, gender, colour, race and culture,” he said.

According to the plan, the centre “will focus on classical, medieval and modern framework that needs to be synthesised into a horizontal framework with science and modern social scientific studies”. The centre will offer diploma as well as Bachelors, Masters and Ph.D. degree in Sufism and Islamic philosophy. ■

(Extracted from indianexpress.com)

Cooperation Rania Al-Mashat said that the partnership enables Egypt to use the forum's global presence to tell development stories, promote the empowerment of women, and exchange ideas with international partners. She said that Egypt is the first country in Africa and the MENA region to launch the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator. The initiative will focus on achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concerned with gen-

der equality to enhance women's economic empowerment. It will reduce the gender gap in the labor market and change stereotypes surrounding women. The ministry has dedicated \$82 million for about 13 projects to achieve the SDGs associated with the empowerment of women. The dedicated SDGs fund will also spend \$3.3 billion implementing 34 projects to close the gender gap in various sectors such as education and health. ■

# Time To Rethink And Go Forward



K. Rahman Khan

**Muslims need to focus particularly on their educational and economic progress.**

Muslims today face numerous issues. The most pressing problems are issues within the Muslim community itself. Muslims must introspect and see where they have gone wrong.

Deficiency in investment for education and economic advancement is a major cause of the overall backwardness of Muslims. Muslims have failed to invest their resources in building infrastructure for the overall development of the community. Muslim leaders—both religious leaders and political leaders—have failed to guide Muslims to invest in economic and educational progress and stand on their own feet. They have made them

think that this progress is the responsibility only of the government or political parties. They have ignored the basic fact that Muslims are responsible for their own progress. A sense of minoritarianism is deep rooted among the Indian Muslims. This sense is responsible for many Muslims thinking that they must depend on the government for their own development. They should know that this is unreasonable. The state must treat all citizens equally. Ever since Independence, the Indian Muslims' leadership has not provided the community with the guidance that they needed. It has not facilitated them to participate equally with other communities in the economic and education fields. It is true that the Muslims have had to face many challenges, including the issue of communal polarisation. Another issue was the emphasis given by the religious leadership on madrasas, while modern education was not given the attention that it was due. The entire country was on the path of development, and other social groups were participating in the developmental process and reaping its benefits, but Muslims did not

participate much in the process. Instead, they wasted all the energies on irrelevant issues or non-issues. Various political parties exploited these non-issues and kept the Muslim leaders engaged in them. The Muslim community is divided religiously, on the basis of sects. These sectarian divisions with-

in the Muslims are another major cause of their backwardness. Muslims need to reflect on this. Today, Muslims should start seeing things from a different perspective. They need to focus particularly on their educational and economic progress. Economically rich Muslims should not sit apart and isolate themselves from the larger Muslim society, content just with doing some charity work. They have a major responsibility to share their wealth for the development of the community and invest in the educational sector. They should realise that the wealth they have is not their own. They are only trustees of wealth that is given by God. God has given wealth to them, and they must share it with others. If they do not do this, they



will have to face tragic consequences when they depart from this world, leaving their wealth to their children to become a liability to the society, rather than becoming an asset. Our religious leaders should realise that promoting modern education and the economic progress of the Muslim masses as well as overcoming sectarian divisions ought to be among their major priorities. Economically wealthy Muslims and Muslim religious leaders should come together and enable the community to address these issues on their own strength. They should not hope or expect that anyone else will do this work for them.

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## A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF KNOWLEDGE



M. Aslam Parvaiz

**It is our mandatory duty to explore Nature through knowledge,**

The Jamiat ul-Ulema-I Hind (JUH), which is possibly among the largest Muslim organisations in the country, has a strong base among imams, muezzins and other functionaries of mosques and madrasas. Many of its members are graduates of the Dar u-Uloom (Deoband, U.P.), which is stated to be one of the largest madrasas in South Asia. The JUH thus exercises a major influence on a vast number of Muslims. It is in this context that the decision by executive body of the JUH to introduce contemporary education in madrasas is expected to be a significant step, possibly heralding an important paradigm shift, which, if implemented successfully, might make madrasas more socially meaningful and useful.

Knowledge and capacity to discover, explore and invent was central to the creation of Homo sapiens. The Quran (2:31) says: 'He taught Adam the names of all things'. When God says that He 'taught' Adam the names of all things, it means that Adam (Humanity) has been given the potential and ability to discover the characteristics of all things that he comes across in the Universe. We have this potential and ability in our genes. This particular Quranic verse is

extremely inclusive with reference to knowledge. God bestowed the potential to gain knowledge of all things in the Universe to Adam and

ly signs for those mindful of Him.' At another place, the Quran (6:97) says: 'And He is the One Who has made the stars as your guide

**“The Quran exhorts us to observe creations and explore Nature for our own benefit and spiritual growth.”**

gave him the gift of senses and intelligence, to discover the creations of God for the benefit of all beings. The Quran (16:78) says: 'And God brought you out of the wombs of your mothers while you knew nothing, and gave you hearing, sight,

through the darkness of land and sea. We have already made the signs clear for people who know.'

The Quran exhorts us to observe creations and explore Nature for our own benefit and spiritual growth.

By understanding God's creations, we discover the creative power and ingenuity of God, and through this we are able to get an idea of God's greatness. By understanding God's creations, we also able to harness the natural resources that are waiting to be discovered, for the benefit of human beings, and other creatures.

This process of discovery of the signs of God in the universe cannot be initiated without equipping ourselves

with knowledge of contemporary disciplines. It will be pertinent to mention here that the Arabic word ilm means science. Those people or nations who have mastery over various sciences are engaging in discoveries and inventing all sorts of machines and gadgets, facilitating various domains of human activity. But by giving up sciences and declaring them 'worldly' knowledge, many Muslims have done an injustice and disservice.

and intellect so perhaps you would be thankful.'

All the creations, living or non-living, which we see around us are aayaat (signs) of God, but only for those who are God-conscious (muttaqi), i.e., who follow Divine commandments, including the binding order of exploring Nature and discovering its secrets. The Quran (10:6) says: 'Surely in the alternation of the day and the night, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are tr-



### APPEAL

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**Muslim youth have to understand that the competition requires them to achieve excellence in the field they choose.**

# Redefining The Muslim Agenda



Moin Qazi

**M**uslim Indians constitute over 14% of the country's population or roughly 172 million people. Muslims have considered India as their home for more than a millennium and they have become so seamlessly integrated into its social mainstream that their culture and tradition has got subsumed into the national fabric. But the tragedy is that Muslims are so marginalised that their presence in important public spheres is almost invisible. Most of them are poor, semiliterate and driven into ghettos. On almost every measure of success they lag far behind.

The mood among India's Muslims is despondent and they see their position being undermined steadily in their own country. So, what should be the agenda for Muslims? There have been multiple approaches on multiple fronts—economic, social and educational—but the success has not been noteworthy. This is not to undermine the significance of political instruments which have an important role to play. But, as experience suggests, the political route has many limitations. While political leaders may continue to work for Muslim rights, Muslim institutions need to focus on certain fundamental issues that can bring speedier and

more reliable gains on the economic front. This is a more stable route to the larger empowerment of Muslims.

The burgeoning private sector, that is a fruit of globalisation, is built on a system of meritocracy where discrimination is largely absent and talent is respected. While the vast majority of Muslims who don't have access to quality education may continue to be deprived of this new prosperity, others who are both talented and fortunate to get good education have a fairly assured route to achieve their life goals.

Most Muslims will continue to draw their sustenance from the informal sector. The huge numbers of informal workers have still no formal training opportunities. Traditional craftsmanship is losing value and the market offers poor compensation to artisans for their skills and artistry. The gap between skill training and employment has widened, leading to a situation where many youth are unable to find the employment that they are aspiring for and many employers are unable to find workers who are appropriately trained for the job.

The feedback from corporate India average respondent answered fewer than half correctly. The survey identified several factors that were correlated with higher knowledge of various religions. Americans with more education tended to score higher. Another important factor was personal interaction with people of other faiths; the survey found that Americans who personally

**We need to assume responsibility for both our worldly and other worldly lives.**

shows that 65-75 per cent of the 15 million Indian youth who enter the workforce each year are not job-ready or suitably employable. The vocational training system in the Muslim community needs to be realigned to the emerging reality. Imparting more relevant skill sets makes families self-sustaining.

It is also important to ensure that specific skills are not scaled across multiple areas in the same region as this saturates the market with limited opportunities for those who are trained. This is specifically true of dense Muslim localities where competition, rather than collaboration, is ruining the community economically. If everyone is trained in becoming an auto-mechanic, there will be too many auto-mechanics and not enough jobs.

There are several ways in which the backwardness of the community can be addressed. Political and social scientists will have to document facts and figures to advance this agenda. Since the Constitution

know people from several different religious backgrounds tended to know much more about a range of religions. One important finding is that greater knowledge of religions other than one's own has a strong tendency to lead to more positive perceptions of other religions.

Americans' knowledge and perceptions of different religions have

and the courts have ruled out religion as a criterion for assessing backwardness, minority groups may find it difficult to get the benefits of affirmative action. Experts do argue that social backwardness is a fluid and evolving category with caste as just one of the markers of discrimination. Gender, culture, economic conditions, educational backwardness and official policies among other factors can influence social conditions and become the cause of deprivation and social backwardness. We are seeing this transformation at a much more exponential pace than our Constitution makers may have visualised. This understanding and legislative recognition alone can enable newer groups to get the benefits of affirmative action through social reengineering. Muslims can become eligible for at least some forms of reservation among new "backward" groups.

It is thus clear that while collective efforts will have to continue, Muslim youth have to understand

implications for society and foreign policy. The Pew survey, combined with other studies on the connections between public religious views and foreign policy, suggest that education on world religions and programs designed to offer person-to-person interactions, such as interfaith programmes, would improve Americans' understanding

that the competition requires them to achieve excellence in the field they choose. Sadly, both political and religious leaders have appropriated the responsibility for collective moral and economic salvation, freeing individuals of personal accountability. We need to abandon this trend of seeking salvation in herds and assume responsibility for both our worldly and otherworldly lives; this is the distilled essence of not just our collective economic and political wisdom but also of our scriptures.

(Moin Qazi holds PhDs in Development Economics and English. He has a rare blend of strong grassroots as well as institutional level experiences in the development and finance sectors spanning four decades.

He served as Member of National Committee on Financial Inclusion at NITI Aayog. He was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Manchester.

He received UNESCO World Politics Essay Gold Medal, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Gold Medal from Dalit Sahitya Academy and Rotary International's Vocational Excellence Award. He writes regularly for mainstream publications and has authored several books.

His father Justice M M Qazi was a senior judge of Bombay High Court and his grandfather Kazi Syed Karimuddin was member of the Constituent Assembly of India.)

Moin Qazi can be contacted on moinqazi123@gmail.com

## Religious Education Could Improve US Foreign Relations

The Pew Research Center recently published the results of a December survey looking at Americans' knowledge of various religions. When given 32 basic questions about a variety of religions, the

of a variety of religions z. Such efforts could facilitate improved relations with other countries, both by producing a larger cadre of foreign policy professionals with knowledge of religions and a voting public with better informed — and likely more positive — views of other religions.

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Zafarul-Islam Khan

No Muslim living today will deny that contemporary Muslims are hated, despised, and considered backward. Exceptions apart, this is the case of Muslims whether living as a majority or minority across the globe. It is not that we are poor or uneducated or because we lack political power. There are 58 countries which claim to be "Islamic" and thus qualify for membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. Yet they are unable to face a tiny country, Israel, to thwart one aggression after another against Muslim countries, or to force countries like Myanmar and China not to persecute their Muslim minorities.

The fact is that wealth at the disposal of millions of Muslim individuals, corporates and states today far exceeds what Muslims ever owned during the past fifteen cen-

turies. There is an army of graduate, post-graduate and doctorate-holder Muslims. Yet, as people and communities, Muslims are not respected.

The only reason I can think of is that we have turned our Islam into rituals – our prayers, our fasts, our Haj, our 'Umrah, our Zakat and sadaqahs have become lifeless rituals. Once outside mosques or on return from Makkah and Madinah, no difference is discerned in our character. Such visits hardly enthuse us to live Islam in our real lives in our homes, offices, workplaces, factories and on the street. We live carefree as if Islam poses no duties and obligations on us and as if there will be no Day of Judgment ever. Our lives hardly differ from those who do not believe in Islam, if not worse.

Turning a vibrant and revolutionary

Islam into lifeless rituals is the direct result of our shunning the Qur'an. Today we read the Qur'an or listen to it for thawab (reward in the Hereafter), not as a source of guidance and inspiration, not as a guide in our daily individual or community lives. Even those who know Arabic prefer to listen to famous reciters of the Qur'an in order to enjoy the recital, not as a guide and source of inspiration and admonition. This is why our noble Prophet will complain to Allah on the Day of Judgement: "O my Lord! Truly my people deserted this Qur'an" (25:30). What a severe indictment of our character – we have deserted the Book which taught us and made us how to be Muslims – a community which submits to Allah.

It is the book which lifted the barefoot illiterate Arabs into guides and masters of the world within decades of its first revelation in 610 CE.

Today, we have in our midst, in this country, such wretched people who tell us not to read the Qur'an translation because, they claim, you will get misguided because without certain "sciences" ('ulum) you cannot understand the Qur'an! How strange! These "sciences" did not exist in the time of the Prophet or the Companions or even during the time of those who succeeded them for the next few centuries. Ordinary Companions of the Prophet understood the Qur'an instantly without these so-called "sciences". They lived it,

**We have turned our Islam into rituals – our prayers, fasts, Haj, Umrah, Zakat and sadaqahs have become lifeless rituals.**

**Once outside mosques or on return from Makkah and Madinah, no difference is discerned in our character.**

propagated it and conquered most of the known world at the time fired by their faith and understanding of this divine message. Any part of "Islam" which was not known to the Prophet, his Companions and the immediately following generations (tabi'un, taba' tabi'in) is not Islam of Muhammad. Muslims in the Subcontinent are told today to read and are forced to listen to man-made books which are read out in mosques instead of the Qur'an.

» Page 14



## MAYMAR CHARITABLE TRUST (REGD.) Est. 1993

### APPEAL

Dear Brothers and Sisters

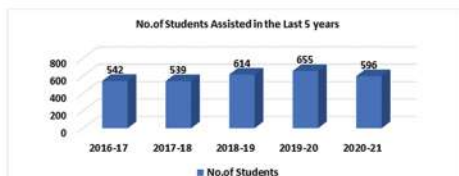
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On behalf of Maymar Charitable Trust (MCT), we would like to convey our heartiest greetings for the Blessed month of Ramazan to our entire brotherhood. May this blessed month of Ramazan bring you and your loved one's good health, happiness, and prosperity. **The auspicious month of Ramazan highlights the significance of giving Sadaqa and Zakat, which will multiply in seventy folds and much more.**

With your continuous help and support, MCT serves the poor and less privileged sections of the community at our operational areas/centers across Bengaluru: DJ Halli, Avalahalli, Padarayanapura, Nayandanahalli and Bada Makaan (Off: Siddaiah Road) for the last 28 years by providing the following services:

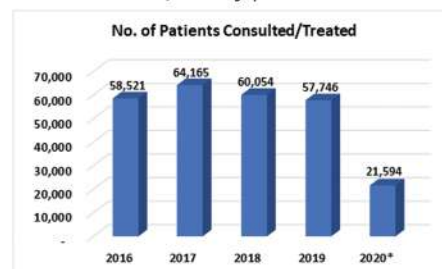
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NOTE: \*2020: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Clinics were closed from March 15 to Oct 31, 2020

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- **Providing Computer Training:** Currently operating at our DJ Halli and Avalahalli centers, with plans to expand to other areas. We provide basic MS Office and Tally courses. So far around 200 students have graduated and are able to find jobs.

- **Providing Tailoring Training:** Currently operating at our DJ Halli, Avalahalli and Nayandanahalli centers, with plans of expanding to other areas. So far, over 1,300 women have graduated after successfully completing 3-months hand-on comprehensive tailoring training. This training ensures that they become independent entrepreneurs and can earn their livelihood.

- **Working towards upliftment of Downtrodden areas** (as listed above)

**MCT services are just a drop of water in the ocean. Sadly, the community needs much more assistance and services in each aspect of their day to day life!**

In this regard, we sincerely thank and appreciate your generous contributions by way of donation, support, and participation in this noble task. **We humbly request your continuous help, support, and assistance to bring a "smile" on the faces of the needy families in this blessed month of Ramazan.**

Once again, our sincere prayers and duwas to you all; may Allah SWT bless and reward you abundantly and give AJR-E-AZEEM to you and your loved ones in this world and in the hereafter. Ameen, Summa Ameen.

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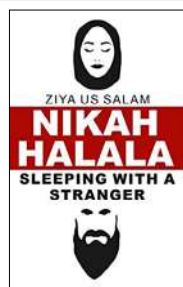


# Investigative Study of a Reprehensible Practice

The title of the book “NIKAH HALALA- SLEEPING WITH A STRANGER” succeeds in drawing your attention to the book, which probably is one of the reasons for the book ruling the charts on Amazon, apart from the fact that the book deals with a subject which has always been kept under wraps. Ziya Us Salam has to be complimented for writing a book on a subject which has always been discussed in hushed tones. The title reminds you of Nancy Price’s novel “Sleeping with the enemy” (1987), later a Hollywood thriller film (1991), telling the story of an abusive husband. But the comparison ends here.

Ziya’s book handles a very serious and controversial subject—a practice that is prevalent among some Muslims of South Asia. The Halala practice stems from another controversial practice, of Triple Talaq. An errant and abusive husband in a fit of anger pronounces Talaq three times to his wife and she is considered a stranger to him henceforth. Later, when the husband regrets his hasty decision and when his ex-wife also wants to get back to him, she cannot do so unless she performs Halala. That means she has to temporarily marry another person, who has to consummate the marriage and then divorce her. This one night stand may get extended by a few more days or weeks as the Halala husband, many a times, refuses to divorce his temporary wife immediately in order to satisfy his lust. After the Halala husband gives the divorce, the wife becomes eligible to remarry the estranged husband.

The author succeeds in clearly bringing out the fact that Halala as practised in South Asia has no sanction from the Qur’an. The Qur’an allows a man to divorce his wife for a maximum of two times revocably, on both occasions separated by at least one menstrual cycle. The author points out that instant triple Talaq is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur’an. After the first and second separation, the couple are allowed to cancel the divorce and re-marry without any third party intervention. If the husband takes back his wife but again divorces her for the third time, he is not allowed to marry her again because divorce is not a plaything in the hands of a whimsical husband. After the third divorce, the wife becomes an independent woman. She may choose to stay single or marry another man. If her second husband dies or if her marriage with the second husband



Title of the Book: NIKAH HALALA: SLEEPING WITH A STRANGER  
Author: Ziya Us Salam  
Publisher: BLOOMSBURY  
Price: Rs. 492  
Published: 2020  
Reviewed by Syed Tahsin Ahmed

**It is high time that the Muslim community breaks the shackles and comes out with strong measures to eliminate this reprehensible practice once and for all.**

does not work out despite all efforts at reconciliation, she can be separated from him with a repetition of the earlier procedure. Once again, she becomes an independent woman who is free to stay single or marry another man or marry even her first husband.

The author clearly explains how this elaborate Quranic procedure is circumvented by following the concocted Halala system, where a woman is required to perform Nikah with a temporary husband, consummate the marriage and thereafter the Halala husband will divorce her after spending one night with her so as to enable her to get back to her original husband and marry him. This distorted practice has been widely condemned by some of the most respected Islamic scholars. In fact the former husband who arranges for this sham marriage and the temporary husband were both denounced strongly by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

The author, who is a journalist by profession, investigates and ex-

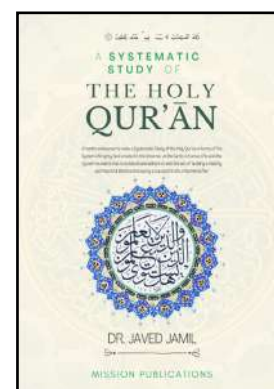
pertly culls out details about plenty of such Halala marriages with a pre-decided divorce date. The indiscreet and illegal action of the husband in pronouncing Triple Talaq in one go in a fit of anger and his subsequent repentance makes him approach some maulanas or clerics who, with their half-baked knowledge, declare that the marriage is annulled and that his wife has to perform Halala. The cleric either facilitates the services of a temporary husband or, in some cases, offers his own candidature for the job since he is perceived as being more reliable as compared with others. For the mistakes of her husband and to satisfy the lust of a stranger under the garb of helping the couple to reunite, it is the woman who suffers for no fault of hers and has to undergo all the trauma.

When the author, after extensive investigation, writes about one case after another, some astonishing facts emerge, like how many of the Halala husbands even charge for their services or how they refuse to divorce the woman after spending one night with her and seek extension as if the woman is just a commodity. In most cases, the woman agrees for this embarrassing, awkward and painful arrangement for the sake of her children, who will get back their father if she remarries the original husband. The author goes to the extent of calling this a legalised form of prostitution under the garb of faith by men who exploit the situation. He also talks of the women who dared not to succumb to pressures and who approached the judiciary to get back the rights denied to them.

The book makes absorbing reading and it becomes difficult to put it down as the author makes use of undercover investigation to get details about all the murky happenings and in the process discovers some shocking secrets of lust, greed, moral degradation and illegalities which society has kept under wraps since the subject has always been considered taboo.

But pretending that the problem does not exist or that it exists only in a few rare cases allows the evil practice to continue and for gullible men and women to continue to pay a price with their honour, dignity and self-respect. Here, the book NIKAH HALALA: SLEEPING WITH A STRANGER is found wanting by not making efforts to find solutions for eliminating this obnoxious practice. There is only a brief reference to this when the

author rightly says that mere legal measures will not be enough to end this menace and that there must also be greater social awareness. The author, being a journalist, displays a journalistic approach to the entire issue. His contribution would have been still more valuable and substantial if his journalistic approach were to be combined with a scholarly approach by exploring ways and means to combat the problem by working on the nitty gritty of bringing about a change. Unless some well thought out and strong measures are undertaken, the indiscretion by husbands will continue and the misinterpretation of scriptures by certain elements to satisfy their baser instincts of enjoying a woman’s body without any responsibility and without any fetters attached will continue. Women will continue to suffer, and a repentant husband has to face the mortification of sending his wife to the bed of a stranger. It is high time that the Muslim community breaks the shackles and comes out with strong measures to eliminate this reprehensible practice once and for all. ■



Authored by  
Dr. Javed Jamil  
(Chair in Islamic Studies  
& Research, Yenepoya  
(Deemed to be) University, Mangalore)

## A SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

### Some Excerpts and Contents

What attracts attention at the very outset was the caption on the cover of the book. The book describes Qur’ān as “a humble endeavour to make a Systematic Study of the Holy Qur’ān in terms of the Systems Almighty God created in the Universe, on the Earth, in Human Life, and the System He wants man to establish and adhere to with the aim of building a Healthy and Peaceful World and ensuring a Successful Life in the Hereafter”. This is a categorical confirmation of the fact that, in Qur’ān there are a very large number of verses, which describe the Creation and Functioning of the Universe as a whole and the Functioning of the Earth, including its flora and fauna. There is absolutely no doubt that, if human beings must establish on earth the kind of harmonious functioning existing in the universe, they have no option but to follow God’s injunctions in full.

Qur’ān deals with numerous subjects including the Laws and Structure of the Universe, creation of the Earth and its flora and fauna, the beginning and the end of the Universe, the history of mankind especially related to its rejection or acceptance of the Divine Guidance, the philosophical foundations of the Divine Universal System, and the theological, legal, social, political, economic, moral, and spiritual guidelines for the establishment of Final Phase of Islam. The stories of some of the Prophets and Ambassadors of God and the fate of some of the villains of humanity make it not only absorbing but also more comprehensive. Further, Quran beautifully captures the swings of the on-going revolution, with all its struggles and successes, which started with the communication of the first set of the wondrous verses to Muhammad (SAW), and continued till the communication of the last verses. By that time, the first example of the truly Islamic System was set in order, leaving the continuation and expansion in the hands of the Followers of Islam. Those who are interested in having the book can contact What’s App Number 91-8130340339 or doctorforu123@yahoo.com. ■

Maulana Alam Mustafa Yaqubia  
(General Secretary, Islamic Centre, Firozabad, U.P.).

(Interview conducted by Syed Ilham Jafri)



**Q: Could you please share something about yourself?**

A: My name is Alam Mustafa Yaqubia, and I am 45 years old. Presently, I am General Secretary of Islamic Centre, Firozabad. I graduated as an Islamic scholar (alim) from Mazahir ul-Uloom, Saharanpur, in 1999. Then, I did High School and Intermediate. Considering the requirements of the contemporary times, I stepped into the professional field and did computer courses and a journalism course. An Islamic scholar should be keep up with changing times, and this is what made me study modern subjects even after my formal Islamic studies.

**Q: How and when did you get the idea to engage in social and humanitarian projects?**

A: After completing professional studies, I opened some computer institutes in Lucknow. But this thought was in my mind: Where am I using the understanding of religion, which I have received? In order to serve the poor and needy, I made up my mind to start a centre, which came into being in 2013, here in Firozabad. Among its primary purposes is to provide religious knowledge and offer professional and language and computer courses to young people and to infuse in

them the significance of service of humankind, which is a very important teaching of Islam. With this Islamic centre, we started our journey towards social service. Some of the efforts of the centre are blood donation camps, plantation projects, medical awareness camps, visits to leprosy patients and distribution of ration kits.

**Q: What future plans do you have regarding your centre, and what message do you have for the community as well as the humanity?**

A: The best person among all is the one who benefits others. There are many things that we would like to do in the near future, such as having a platform where people from different religions and communities can come together and work for the good of all. We would also like to work with young people, to help them with their professional and academic lives, start a career counseling centre, and so on. I would say that a human becomes truly human when he desires to work for humanity. Our centre is open for all. Our message for our youth is to balance their lives with spirituality and science and to inculcate in themselves love for humanity, and through this, help the dream of a united and developed India come true. ■

## Interview with Young Achievers

By: Akhlaque

Munib Chougale, Mohammad Umar Khan and Farhan Khan of Anjuman-i Islam Kalsekar Technical College, New Panvel (Maharashtra) secured the first prize in Aerovaccine held during the 2020-21 IIT BOMBAY Techfest. They proposed a conceptual solution of a vertical takeoff and landing aerial vehicle to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to rural areas of India. Akhlaque Sk. provides a brief interview with them.

**Q: Munib, could you please give us a short introduction of yourself?**

Munib: I am a final year student of Mechanical Engineering. Due to the lockdown, colleges were closed, online studies were going on, and we were tired and bored and wanted to do something new. Suddenly, I came to know about the Techfest. I immediately shared the information with my friends. We registered our name for the competition. We decided to develop a design in the category called "Aerovaccine". It was a challenging task for us. But Alhamdulillah we did so and stood first in the category.



**Q: Mohammad Umar, could you please introduce yourself?**

Mohammad Umar: I was a student of Saboo Siddik college, from where I completed my Diploma. I am now a final year student of Kalsekar Engineering College.

**Q: Farhan Khan, could you please share some of your experiences of participating in the tech fest and any message you may have for youngsters?**

Farhan Khan: I passed my 10th with 82% marks. Later, I took admission in Tilak Jr College, New Mumbai, and completed my HSC Sci with

79%. I am a final year student of Mech Engg at Kalsekar Campus.

Our project was a dream project for me. It was great experience for me. The three of us worked hard on the conceptual design.

Every year, IIT Mumbai hosts Asia's largest Techno Festival for Engineering students. The tech fest is a very popular competition, in which renowned colleges take part. This year, the team from our college performed outstandingly in the competition. With God's grace, our campus team did very well. We were awarded a certificate and a cash prize of 25000 rupees. ■

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## ISLAMIC VOICE

ISLAMIC VOICE  
IS HERE AGAIN!

The summer of 2020 will remain unforgettable globally, when much of the world went into a 'lockdown' due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected the smooth functioning of Islamic Voice, too. The magazine, that had shone like a star in the media skies for 34 long years, starting in 1987, came to a temporary halt. After the April 2020 issue of the magazine was out, the doors had to be shut down. The lockdown had a serious impact on the magazine financially, emotionally and in other ways. The monsoon of 2020 brought some coolness into the hearts and minds of our readers. They began missing the familiar folded magazine landing in their letter-boxes every month. By the winter of 2020, we began receiving letters of encouragement, such as you see in this issue of the magazine. Slowly, the foggy air of despair began to clear.

While we thought of resuming Islamic Voice as an online publication, some of our wise old readers still preferred a printed magazine reaching their hands. They felt a big vacuum without the magazine, which had provided them intellectual, social, and spiritual insights. While we are not blowing our own trumpet, it is a fact that some of our readers had grown up reading Islamic Voice, and generations following them followed their practice. So, for them, the magazine had become a sort of 'family member'!

Now, in the summer of April 2021, with many of our readers encouraging us to restart Islamic Voice (both, the printed and the online editions), we have decided to revive the magazine, starting with this issue which is in your hands.

We hope to have articles from many different writers, who can bring diverse perspectives on a broad variety of issues, focusing especially on God-oriented spiritual living. We hope that Islamic

Voice will help all those who read it gain hope and grow in positivity. We wish to stay out of sectarianism, party politics, the victimhood syndrome, controversial issues, and negative thinking. We do not want to serve stale food for thought to our readers, be it news reports that are a month old or social media forwards. We would like to be more of a view's magazine, providing insights and guidance that can help shape people's minds and lives in a positive direction. We hope to specially focus on universal spiritual values, positive thinking and practical guidance for people. Our magazine should focus on issues of general concern and the common social good. We hope to highlight perspectives that will be found to be of value for all people. True spirituality is universal. The One God is the Creator and Sustainer of all beings. Accordingly, we need to care about the wellbeing of all beings—and this, we hope, will be reflected in the pages of Islamic Voice.

We thank all those who have lent us their moral and intellectual support that has helped revive Islamic Voice. We would like to remember these words from the Holy Quran (65:2-3): And whoever is mindful of God, He will make a way out for them, and provide for them from sources they could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in God, then He alone is sufficient for them. Certainly, God achieves His Will. God has already set a destiny for everything.

The following excerpt from a poem by Robert Frost beautifully describes the journey of Islamic Voice from its inception, in 1987, till today:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference!

Come, do please join us on this journey!

## WHY WE NEED ISLAMIC VOICE.?

I was following IV for more than 25 years. I don't know about others, but, IV along with Young Muslim Digest, has made a great impact on my life. Whenever I met youngsters, I advised them to follow IV and YMD for the development of their personality as a true Muslim and good human being. May Allah revive IV, which was guiding the community at a time when differences are order of the day.

Zamiruddin

We have grown up reading Islamic Voice and loved reading it. I remember sending articles and getting them published and enjoyed sharing with my friends with my printed name there. Alhamdulillah, I always enjoyed reading the magazine and many of my have admired your commitment and the content. Reading a book or a magazine in our hand has its own joy when compared to digital content. I feel continuing the print edition will carry forward the legacy of the magazine for long years. I personally feel you should continue despite knowing that you may have logistical and other issues. I am sure with so many sympathizers around, you can certainly continue.

-Ziyaullah Khan, Nagpur

I think every effort should be made to revive the print edition of Islamic Voice. A corpus of funds should be raised to put it back

on sound financial track with a strong and wider subscriber base and powerful bulwark of continual advertisement support from Muslim business and corporate houses, industries, and entrepreneurs. Knowledgeable friends should come forward to share their ideas.

Syed Sajjad Ahmed, Mysore

Islamic Voice was a very compact and well edited monthly airing Muslim issues, particularly those concerning their socio, economic and educational issues. Islamic Voice also used to carry news about global issues and concerns. It is not easy to sustain and continue to publish a magazine consistently for years. But this monthly was doing the job admirably. The entire Muslim community needs to support its re-launch. We need to strengthen the hands of Sadathulla Khan. With the population in crores, can we not support and run a monthly? Definitely, we need Islamic Voice print edition. It has become a part of our life. We are missing it.

An annual membership drive could be undertaken and Muslim intellectuals, Muslim organizations and Muslim NGOs. Muslim institutions and social workers should promote it throughout the country to get paid subscribers. Big business houses and philanthropists should donate sizeable amounts to a corpus fund. A campaign can be started in social media, which has a tremendous reach and impact. InshaAllah, we will be successful.

- Tahsin Ahmed, Bengaluru

I have been a subscriber of ISLAMIC VOICE magazine ever since it started publication. For giving news and views on Muslim issues, there is no other English journal. I used to wait impatiently every month for it to reach my house and read it. I have also contributed many articles to this journal.

Professor Nishath, Ex Principal, Abbas Khan College for Women, Bengaluru

The fact that Islamic Voice has been there for 34 years in itself, a sufficient reason. Efforts and dedications that have kept it going thus far deserve acknowledgment. Of course, content and quality require upgradation. Print media is definitely an asset to the community. Please continue. Best wishes.

Kamal, Bengaluru

Why do we need Islamic Voice? We need Islamic Voice because it brings likeminded people together on a common platform and it aligns with the goals of the Discover Yourself workshop.

Shabana Anwar, Kolkata

Print issue of IV is needed for those who do cannot read soft copies. Islamic voice is needed because it is a voice of Indian Muslims

Mushtaq Sikander, Srinagar

We need topics that will support the shift in mindset. Experiential writing and connectivity to topics is especially important.

Saadia Tonse, Bengaluru

We recognize Islamic Voice's contribution in the past. Also, the contribution of the Discover Yourself movement.

Buhari, Chennai

My view is as it was started years ago, please continue it. There should be an Endowment fund for this paper so that it runs smoothly without hiccups. There should be an advertisement drive, to get advertisements from big business groups.

Rafiq Bhai, Hyderabad

## APPEAL FOR AASRA

"AASRA-Women and Children Welfare Trust" develops self-confidence in demoralized women and children confronting problems in everyday life, be it in their marriages or in facing the challenges ahead. It helps them to face life's challenges with courage and resoluteness.

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**A Sincere Appeal: As the month of Ramzan is approaching we sincerely look forward to your generous contribution (zakat or sadaqah) towards the organization, which will translate into a smile for many deserving children and helpless sisters.**

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# Fraternal Conversation Among Muslim and Christian Co-Pilgrims

**I belong to a vast family of God, where all human beings, without any distinctions, are brothers and sisters.**



Dr. Fr. Victor Edwin SJ

The Islamic Studies Association (ISA) is an organisation of Catholics in India who are engaged in promoting interfaith understanding and inter-community harmony between Christians and Muslims. Recently, the Bishop of Jammu and Kashmir, Bishop Ivan Pereira, invited the Islamic Studies Association to conduct a programme, titled 'Interfaith Sharing', at Jammu. The programme was held on February 27, 2021, at the Ismailpur Pastoral Centre.

A three-member team from the Islamic Studies Association, consisting of Sister Sneha, Father Arun Mozhi SJ and myself, went to Jammu for the programme. Sister Sneha and Fr. Arun are both deeply committed to promoting interfaith relations and the welfare of the poor and marginalised. And I, as a student and a teacher of Christian-Muslim relations, accompanied them for the

programme.

The programme had three components. The first component, which was conducted by myself, focussed on interfaith relations, with special emphasis on Christian-Muslim relations. The second component focussed on the context in which we reflect on interfaith relations and share with each other our views and thoughts about the issue. The context for us is a pluralistic India, home to many religions, cultures and ways of life, and the Constitution of India and issues such as Constitutional values and human rights. The third component was about listening to Muslims. We had invited 10 Muslim brothers and sisters from Rajouri. They are members of an organisation called Centre for Peace and Spirituality, which is based in New Delhi. In this session, they spoke about their faith—Islam—and about how the Holy Qur'an and the life of the Prophet of Islam had helped them to be better persons, better Muslims.

I do not want to give a report on the programme here. What I would like

to do is to reflect on some of my experiences during the programme.

## What is Interfaith Dialogue?

In my sharing with the participants in the programme at Jammu, I reflected on these experiences of mine, from the things I had learnt from interacting with Muslim brothers and sisters. Then, we talked about interfaith dialogue.

Often, people think that interfaith dialogue is something only 'experts' do or can do. I had to challenge that notion. Interfaith dialogue is simply the dialogue of life. The respect and esteem that we show to others is the starting point for dialogue—respecting them as fellow human beings, respecting their religious convictions, respecting their ways of life, respecting their thirst for peace and justice, their thirst for harmony, their thirst for God in their life.

We began with that. We talked about dialogue as conversation, conversation between people holding significantly different views on some things. I emphasised that the differences are significant. I also spoke about how we look at other through our own lenses and interpret them accordingly—and so, we need to practice caution.

Another point that I emphasised

was that interfaith dialogue is not polemics or debate or apologetics. I drew from examples from the history of Christian-Muslim relations to show how polemics generate heat but not light, how debates end without any mutual learning, how apologetics is a one-way journey, where there is no co-pilgrim.

I also shared about how interfaith dialogue is a certain way of thinking, seeing and reflecting on reality. I reflected on how important it is for us to try to put ourselves in other people's shoes, as it were. I stressed that dialogue needs open-mindedness to appreciate differences and plurality—not simply tolerating differences, which is not a virtue at all. Going beyond mere tolerance, we need to appreciate religious differences and religious plurality.

I also emphasised that we must shed exclusiveness and feelings of superiority. Sometimes, we behave like triumphalists, as if we have a monopoly over truth. We need to shed that attitude.

God is a mystery. For Christians, Jesus is very important for us in our hope for God-experience. Similarly, other faith communities have their own understanding of God-experience. We need to see how we can mutually enrich one another and continue to go towards God, towards God as a mystery. We cannot comprehend God, but we can have experiences of God. When people from different religious backgrounds share our experiences of

**I had requested our Muslim brothers to give more of a faith-sharing—not about the rules and regulations or theoretical part of their faith, but, rather, more about how their life is shaped by the Holy Qur'an and the life of the Prophet of Islam.**

God with one another, we feel and experience that God is at the heart of human life. So, there is no exclusivism, no supremacism, no triumphalism—all of which should be shed.

I spoke about how the primary purpose of interfaith dialogue is to learn and experience mutual enrichment. I also shared about how by learning about other religions and their followers we can grow in wisdom and faith. By opening up to Muslims, a Christian can become a better follower of Christ. In other words, one can grow in one's own faith by interacting with people of other faiths. Our faith is not compromised through this interaction. Rather, it is deepened and becomes more open. I said that we take roots and we also take wings!

» Page 19



# ISLAMIC CENTRE VELLORE

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### Please remember us in your Ramzan Zakath

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرْجُونَ تِجَارَةً لَّن تَبُورَ

لِيُؤْفِقَهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ

Indeed those who read the Book of Allah, and keep the prayer established, and spend from what We have bestowed upon them in secret and publicly, are hopeful of a trade in which there is never a loss. In order that He may reward them with goodness in full, and further increase it with His munificence; indeed He is Oft Forgiving, Most Appreciative. (35:29-30)

## ISLAMIC CENTRE VELLORE - AN APPEAL

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## Sobia Mushtaq, a self-taught calligrapher from Kashmir

Kashmir, which is often referred to as a land of Sufi saints, has always been famous for its rich culture and heritage. The values brought in by the scholars and saints hold great importance in the lives of the Kashmiri people.

"The roots of Arabic calligraphy are strongly embedded in Kashmir. They connect us to our spiritual being," says Sobia Mushtaq, a 23-year-old young calligrapher from the Bandipora district of North Kashmir. "Arabic Calligraphy is a way of connecting to God," she adds.

Sobia started doing calligraphy when she was in 7th standard but had to leave it as studies took most of her time. Sobia says she was always passionate about the art of calligraphy. She completed her post-graduation in English last year and is currently preparing for competitive exams. After completing her PG, she decided to take up the art and started posting her calligraphy works on social media. Soon people began to like her calligraphy and she started getting orders. She happily says, "People like my work and my family has always encouraged me to carry on with this artwork". Whatever little money Sobia makes from her work, she buys pens, paint, ink and papers.

Sobia mainly does Arabic calligraphy. She used to make sketches but calligraphy is her main passion.



"Calligraphy enriches faith, connects me to the Quran. It helps me to strengthen my faith

and draws me closer to Allah," she says.

Sobia, being a self-taught calligrapher says that she learns by practice and by seeing videos online but she is against plagiarism of artwork. "One should come up with something new. I have imitated and used the traditional techniques to convert them into modern calligraphy," she said.

Arabic script and Kashmiri script are similar. "I write Arabic and with a slight change I write Kashmiri," Sobia says while sharing her aspiration to do wall calligraphy in future. She wants to do calligraphy on the walls, tombs and shrines in Kashmir.

Sobia says she does dual calligraphy combining modern backgrounds with Islamic calligraphy. Sobia wants the younger generation of Kashmiris to learn this art. "It tells us about our faith. Whenever I write down any verse, I search for the meaning and try to understand it before writing. This is how it enhances my faith," she says.

Sobia wants to open a calligraphy store one day. "It is important to get orders. This enhances confidence and also helps to get resources," she says. ■  
(Extracted from twocircles.net)

## 1 in 3 women experience violence globally: WHO

One in three women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner in their lifetime, says a World Health Organisation (WHO) report. According to the report, this violence starts early — one in four young women (aged between 15-24 years) who have been in a relationship will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-twenties. Intimate partner violence is by far the most prevalent form of violence against women globally, affecting around 641 million. Given the high levels of stigma and under-reporting of sexual abuse, the true figure is likely to be significantly higher.

"To address violence against women, there's an urgent need to reduce stigma around this issue, train health professionals to interview survivors with compassion, and dismantle the foundations of gender inequality," Claudia Garcia-Moreno from WHO, said in a statement.

As per the report, violence disproportionately affects women living in low and lower-middle income countries. An estimated 37 per cent of women living in the poorest countries have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life, with some of these countries having a prevalence as high as one in two. The regions of Oceania, Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest prevalence rates of intimate partner violence among women aged between 15-49, ranging from 33-51 per cent. The lowest rates are found in Europe (16-23 per cent), Central Asia (18 per cent), Eastern Asia (20 per cent) and South-Eastern Asia (21 per cent).

This report presents data from the largest ever study of the prevalence of violence against women, conducted by WHO on behalf of a special working group of the UN. Based on data from 2000 to 2018, it updates previous estimates released in 2013. ■

her parents and sister behind, she came to Bangladesh to serve humanity. She is not a nun with all vows but people regard her as a nun. She leads an ordinary life, did not get married and wears a simple sari and footwear.

The Bangladesh government recognized her 60 years of service by giving her a Bangladeshi identification card on International Women's Day on March 8. "I'm not a nun but I wanted to be a nun. Becoming a nun is very time-consuming, so I developed myself as nun and I think I achieved my goal. I was with the Oxford Mission when it started in Bangladesh," Holt told UCA News. Born in St. Helens in northern England on Dec. 16, 1930, she started work as a schoolteacher and women's development worker with the Oxford Mission in Barishal city in southern Bangladesh. She worked as a nurse during Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971. She helped the Catholic-run Fatima Hospital in Jessore when it was short of medical staff to treat the injured in the war against Pakistan.

Reverend Philip Biswas, a senior pastor, said what Lucy Holt has achieved does not seem to be possible even for a regular missionary nun. "She has been in Bangladesh since the Oxford Mission started. A foreigner has played a leading role in the advancement of medical services, teaching and women's advancement and has been working with teaching and women since retirement," he said.

Barishal deputy commissioner Jashimuddin Haider told UCA News that "Sister Lucy" will get everything she wants from the Bangladeshi government. "She has shown how much she loves Bangladesh and shown her generosity to Bangladeshi people. We will never forget her. Bangladesh will remember her with respect," he said. ■  
(Extracted from ucanews.com)

## British social worker honored by Bangladesh

A British-Bangladeshi citizen has received the national identity card of Bangladesh as recognition for her social work. Lucy Helen Frances Holt, 90, came to Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, in 1960 when she was 30 years old. Leaving



## Saudi women reach for the skies, inspire fellow dreamers



Saudi women reach for the skies, inspire fellow dreamers

Not long ago, working in aviation was somewhere near the bottom on the list of careers for Saudi women, until the country launched a number of reforms including female empowerment programmes. Now, they have broken into many professions which, for decades, remained domi-

nated by men, including in aviation.

The number of Saudi female pilots has risen steadily, with three names standing out: Hanadi Zakaria Al-Hindi, the first female pilot to fly with a Saudi commercial pilot license; Rawia Al-Rifi, the first to fly the Airbus A320 internationally as a civil aircraft from the UAE; and co-pilot Yasmin Al-Maimani, who was the first woman to co-pilot a commercial plane in Saudi Arabia. Such names were a source of inspiration to many young women pursuing a career in aviation. Ghadir Mohammed, 23, a flight dispatcher with a diploma in aviation, told Arab News that she is keen on completing her studies to obtain a pilot license.

"I want to be a source of inspiration for those of my age. I have always been dreaming of achieving something special among my community and family, and I want to make them both proud," she added.

Raghad Mohdher, 26, has been dreaming of working in aviation since she was only 10, when she was inspired by her father, who used to tell her all about airplanes during their trips to the airport where he used to work.

She is now a flight dispatcher. "Since that day, I felt like this is my place and where I want to work," she said. Taking responsibility to plan flights and make decisions with pilots to ensure passengers arrive safely was something Mohdher was passionate about. "I am managing the daily decision-making process according to

data about the airplane, the airport, and the weather."

Laila Ibrahim, an 18-year-old student, finds herself fascinated by aviation as it combines physics and engineering, two fields she is interested in the most.

She told Arab News that she is eyeing the Sports Pilot Certificate from the Oxford Saudi Academy and hopes "to participate in aviation competitions" in future.

Inside the corridors of Flyadeal airline, everything looks vibrant.

The company's 56 Saudi female employees have succeeded in establishing and launching the latest low-cost airline in the country, by providing an ideal air travel service under the slogan "travel daily at the lowest prices." Women have

successfully managed to reach all departments of Flyadeal, onboard and on the ground, including in air operations, ground operations, human resources, marketing, finance, information technology, and others. Over the past two years, the company has also doubled down on its initiatives towards empowering women, offering many employment opportunities, in addition to organizing many intensive training courses.

Maha Adnan, the company's marketing director, said that she worked three years in the field of education, four years in information systems, and three years in graphic design before moving to the field of communications and marketing about 11 years ago. ■

# Do not use the Quran, but live it

Discover Yourself workshop conducted by Islamic Voice editor Sadathullah Khan on 16,17 & 18 January at Sea Sand Resort, Mandarmoni Beach, West Bengal.

## Some of The Participants Share Their Experiences:

- The workshop was ecstatic. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Sir's energy is contagious. After this pandemic, this workshop was a real need at this hour.
- I learned how to protect myself from the urgings of the lower self.
- The workshop is a way to transform oneself.
- Alhamdulillah, I was blessed and lucky to attend this workshop,
- This workshop was extremely useful, and it helped me to control anger.
- It was a wonderful way to connect to God and to discover myself.
- I learnt many things from DYS, but the main thing I got is that we must first be human beings and then Muslims.
- What I got is to focus on one's inner transformation.
- What I liked best is the understanding that if we start implementing and living Quran in our own life there would be no disputes. 'Do not use the Quran, but live it'
- The workshop was a turning point for me. It has given me a lot of power to deal with my depression.
- This workshop made me realize the inner bitterness regarding my life and my family and I have learnt the strategy to come out of it.

**SIDDIKA:** It is very much needed to become a true human being. Attending with the family helped me to practice many of the distinctions of the workshop. The whole family is happy and in a peaceful state, Alhamdulillah, after attending this workshop.

**TASNIM:** It is exceptionally good; my life is better than in the past. So many things have changed in my life. Now, I can adjust and accept myself very easily. I would have missed something valuable had I not attended the workshop, and it is really good to change my life.

**NAJMUL:** Before the workshop, I was confused and my life was a puzzle. Right now, I am free and enjoying my life. Before, I could not distinguish between haq and batil. I was living in batil (false world) and now I am in the world of haq (Reality).

**SHAH ALAM:** The workshop helped me understand who I was

and where I am. Before this workshop, I was against any type of workshop. I did not find workshops to be beneficial because I did not find people implementing even a single thing after attending any workshop—their character remained the same. But if this type of workshop is held often, it will help us to change, slowly and steadily.

**NAFISA:** The three days of the workshop will remain memorable. I would have missed something valuable had I not attended it. Many things have changed in my life after attending it. I became more patient, less angry and more able to balance difficulties and adjust very easily to situations. The entire family enjoyed the workshop and tried to change their unhealthy habits into good habits.

**SHAGUFTA:** I attended the workshop for the first time. Alhamdulillah, this workshop helped me change my perspective towards myself and life. Sadath sir very beautifully explained the dual nature of a human. May God put barakah in everyone's life who were involved with this workshop. Ameen.

**HAMEEDA:** This workshop is greatly beneficial to those who are on the journey of discovering oneself. I really want to thank Sadath sir from the bottom of my heart for being a mirror to show us our own reality. ■



## AN APPEAL

### DARUL ULOOM SAYEEDIYAH & SAYEEDIYA YATHEEM KHANA

Alhamdulillah, The **Darul Uloom Sayeediyah Trust**, established in the year 1988, is maintaining a Madrasa, a Masjid and an Orphanage – '**Sayeediya Yatheem Khana**' – (for boys). The Orphanage was established with the aim of providing free care and education to the deserving orphan students of our community. Hundreds of orphans are deprived of the privilege to study and it is our responsibility to take care of such children and provide them education. According to Ahadith one who takes care of an orphan is rewarded with heaven by Almighty Allah. **Darul Uloom Sayeediyah** requests assistance from all welfare minded persons by way of sponsorship contributions or donations. They can help deserving Orphan students with sponsorship contributions - of Rs.18000/- per year @ Rs.1500/- per student per month from their Zakath / Sadaqaat or for 'Eisal-e-Sawab' of their deceased relatives. All the students are being provided free education with boarding and hostel facilities. The source of income for the institution is donations from welfare minded persons of our community.

All are requested to encourage the Management with their assistance **specially during the holy month of Ramazan which is a month of Charity**. It is hoped that your assistance to these deprived children will protect them from getting their lives destroyed and will, Insha Allah, make them educated responsible citizens of the Society.

**SAHRI and IFTAR :** Since there is no holiday in the institution during Ramazan students stay at the institution and observe fasts throughout the holy month of Ramazan. **SAHRI and IFTAR** arrangements are made for the students and staff at the institution. Donors are requested to contribute for this arrangement or provide food grains etc. for this purpose.

May Allah grant acceptance to the noble acts of our donors who help the needy with the intention of obeying His commands and earning His pleasure and reward them highly. Aameen.

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# Filling the Chasm Between Islamic Teachings and Psychology

Arshi Parvez Dokadia

It was just a few decades ago that leading psychiatrists claimed religion to be a mental illness. Particularly, the argued upon father of Psychology, Sigmund Freud and his mentor, Jean Charcot, linked religion with neurosis. We have come a long way from the 1950s, and mental health practitioners today recognize the importance of spirituality in not only maintaining a healthy mind but also in preventing mental illnesses. There is a stark shortage of Muslim mental health practitioners that can cater to the need of Muslim clients. We need practitioners who can not only acknowledge the faith of their client but who are also be able to work in tandem with the spiritual needs of the Muslim population. In the 2010s the movement of Islam and Psychology gained momentum, and there have been attempts

to make a framework for Islamic Psychology particularly based on the works of Imam al-Ghazali of the 12th century. The number of Islamic mental health practitioners has been increasing, and we need to add to the movement. However, this is not the only area we need to focus upon. It is important to note that Psychology goes beyond the arena of mental health and illness. The fields of positive psychology and applied psychology particularly focus on the everyday application of the theoretical elements to better the quality of living.

This is the area we need to focus upon, taking the elements of Islamic Psychology and making it a part of our life, because, at the end of the day, Islam is meant to be a way of life and, truly, we cannot find contentment and also reach our optimal potential unless we apply the teachings of our Creator to our life. Elements of Islamic Psychology Nafs

It is not uncommon to hear that

Islamic Psychology is the study of nafs. Many people use the term "self" or "ego" to draw parallels with the modern psychological concepts. al-Ghazali's The Revival of Religious Sciences refers to nafs to describe an integral soul, which can be at different stages during our lifetime. According to Islam, our nafs or our own selves are under constant struggle, indicating the test of this lifetime. On one end of this struggle is Akhirah or awareness of Allah and at the other end of the spectrum lies Dunya or all the distractions from Shaytaan.

Theorists, based on the ayahs of the Qur'an, classify nafs into three categories:

1. Nafs al ammarah - the soul that inclines to evil - a state in which there is no struggle or effort to control our soul. The person does what they wish to, out of sheer selfishness rather than awareness of God. This state is also called ghafila which is forgetfulness of God.

2. Nafs al lawamma - the self-reproaching soul - a soul that is struggling to shift from dunya to ruh and akhirah. It is the stage where lies the most struggle and where most of us find ourselves in.

3. Nafs al mutmainah - the soul at peace - it is the goal that we strive for. Many clerics claim that it is a stage that cannot be reached by most. However, there is an element of positivity in Islamic Psychology, the fitrah.

Fitrah

Fitrah is the nature of the soul. It is our natural disposition and Islam believes that everyone is born of fitrah. This natural inclination makes it completely possible to achieve the state of mutmainah (contentment) as long as our psyche and our mind are in sync with our natural disposition. Dunya acts as a distraction that takes us away from the natural way of our self. This causes the jihad an-nafs (struggle of the soul), where the struggle is between our desires and wants and our basic inclination. This is where the importance of our aql (intellect) comes in.

## Aql and Qalb

Aql is our intellectual centre. Our intelligence is developed through our knowledge and experiences. It could be one of the reasons why knowledge is so important in Islam. We need to have aql not only to have reasonings to come back to our fitrah but also to have our qalb (heart) in the right place.

Qalb is our spiritual centre and often referred to as the heart. The literary meaning of the Arabic term qalb is something that keeps on changing. The dynamic nature is seen in our hearts, too. Our desires, our spirituality, keeps on shifting and if not reigned in with the knowledge, we might keep on shifting our hearts to the wind of the desire.

## Achieving Mutmainah (Peace)

The main goal of therapy, life coaching or even seeking spiritual guidance boils down the element of contentment. There is the desire to be at peace while knowing that change is inevitable and accepting that struggle is constant. The question rises is how do we achieve this

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Nigar Ataulla

# God Cares for Cats As Well!

God created the cats and He provides for them

There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on God: He knows the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: All is in a clear Record. (The Qur'an 11:6)



I feel very consoled, secure and at peace whenever I read this verse. Often, when I recall the many 'stray' cats who would come over to the place where I lived, eat the food that was laid out for them and then, after some weeks or months, disappear, I would feel very sad. I would worry and feel anxious about their whereabouts. I would feel helpless as I could not go out searching for them because they were 'wild' and 'stray'. But God knew where they had gone. At times like these, the above verse would give me meaning as I reflected that it is God who created the cats and He would take

If we look around and observe nature carefully, we can see that all creatures—birds, plants, animals and so on—depend on God for their sustenance.

care of their food.

In the above verse, 'moving creature' applies to all creatures, including cats. If God wanted the cats to live in a certain place and get their sustenance there, so be it. Regarding 'temporary deposit' referred to in the above verse: It is God who provides all that they need to the cats, as well as all other creatures, for the temporary period that He has willed they should be here, on Earth, for. So, if a certain cat had stayed at a certain place for a few days and then scampered off elsewhere, that was God's will, and God will take care of the creature. If we look around and observe nature carefully, we can see that all creatures—birds, plants, animals and so on—depend on God for their sustenance. Imagine you are sitting on a bench in a garden, munching a biscuit and a few crumbs fall down. In a matter of just a few minutes, or perhaps even less, a big line of ants might start heading towards the crumbs! They might start feasting on them there and then, or else pick up tiny bits and head off to their home, in a very orderly manner! Now, how did the ants know about

the biscuit crumbs that God had placed as sustenance for them? It was God's will!

'All is in a clear Record': By this I understand that what each one of us gets as sustenance—food, money, shelter and so on—all is already written in God's 'record book'—for all creatures, human beings and others.

It may have happened to you as it does to me at times: I might have planned that by a certain time I would begin preparing for cooking a meal. But then, lo and behold, half an hour or so before that, a kind neighbour comes over with a gift of food! That is God's will! He sends sustenance in the ways He wants to, sometimes in unexpected ways.

So, the next time the cats wander off elsewhere, I should not feel sad. I should have the firm faith that God is providing them the sustenance they need elsewhere—it could be, in the words of the verse cited above, their 'temporary deposit' or their 'definite abode'—God knows best!

## The Prophet used to remember God on each occasion By making it a point of reference for God's remembrance.

Q&A With Maulana Wahidudin Khan On Zikrullah, or Remembrance of God

Q: When it is said that one should remember God at every moment, how exactly does one do it? Suppose one is busy doing something: say, eating one's meal or going for a walk or driving a vehicle. If one's mind is on God at every moment during this process, will it not distract one from the task one is doing? So, in this context, how can one be engaged in zikr of God all the time?

A: Remembering God at all times does not mean remembering Him every moment—it means most of the moments. There will be some moments in which you are engaged in other things, but those even this may also lead, in an indirect manner, to the remembrance of God.

Q: Please explain, with the help of one or two examples—say, of going for a stroll or washing one's clothes—how one can both focus on the work one is doing and at the same time engage in God's zikr or remember God at every moment while being engaged in the particular activity one is engaged in.

A: It is very simple to remember God, and also quite natural. For instance, when you are walking, you are doing so entirely because of the



blessings of God. God is providing you sunlight, He is supplying you with oxygen and air. Also, it is He who has caused the gravitational attraction of the earth to enable you to walk, and so on. Without these Divine blessings, you cannot walk on earth. If you realize these Divine bounties and connect them with God, then you are remembering God. Similarly, when you are washing your clothes, it is due to Divine blessings that you are able to do so. The water that you use is supplied by God, the cotton that makes up your clothes, the soap through which you clean, etc., all have been provided by God. If you reflect on these bounties of God and connect them

with God, then you are remembering God.

Remembering God is not alien to your being. It is interwoven in your being, like energy is. You and energy are apparently separate, but in fact both are one and the same. So, every moment there are bounties of God present around you. If you awaken in yourself this consciousness and connect what you see or experience with God, then you are remembering God.

Q: Please explain the Prophet's way of zikr of God. Was he engaged in this zikr every moment of his life as a prophet? If so, then please explain how he did this continuous remem-

brance of God even while busy in so many tasks—e.g. dawah, teaching his Companions, spending time with his family, etc.

A: The Prophet's wife Ayesha reports about the Prophet: Kana an-nabiyu yazkurullah ala kulli ahyanihi. (Source: Bukhari) It shows that the Prophet used to remember God on each occasion by making it a point of reference for God's remembrance. So, for the Prophet, zikrullah and other tasks were not two separate activities. Rather, both were intermingled.

Q: When it is said that we should make every occasion an occasion for remembering God, does that mean we must focus on the present—the present occasion—and then use that as a means to reflect on and thank and praise God?

A: Zikr means living with divine consciousness. When you have attained this state of consciousness, every moment you will be in a state of zikr, even though you may not be uttering any specific words.

Q: Suppose I am going for a stroll. I try and keep my mind in the present, not allowing it to stray off into the past or the future. So, I focus on, say, my feet, thanking and praising

God for my feet. I focus on the trees I see, praising God for them. I see the birds and I praise God for having created such beautiful beings. Is this also a means of making the occasions we face an opportunity to remember God? Is this a good method of zikr?

Yes, this is a right way of zikrullah.

Q: Often, I find myself thinking of the past (mainly negative feelings, thoughts) and sometimes, the future, too. My mind is dragged away from the present. What are the teachings of Islam about this?

If I have had some negative experience in the past, when I recall it today, I convert it into an item of shukr, or thankfulness to God, because, God didn't let me stay on in that negative moment and made me reach a better situation today.

Q: When one's mind is not engaged in any task and one is free, do you suggest any specific words or phrases that we should repeat in order to do zikr of God?

A: When your feelings are moulded in the form of words, that is what constitutes zikr. When your own divine feelings take expression in words, that is zikr. These words could be in your own mother tongue or in the Arabic language.

# A Ramzan Letter to My Muslim Sisters & Brothers

The way Muslim brothers and sisters celebrate the month of Ramzan helps me grow in God-consciousness as a Christian.



Dr. Fr. Victor Edwin SJ

Dear Muslim sisters and brothers,  
Assalam Aleikum!

In the month of April this year we will celebrate the advent of the month of Ramzan. I consciously use the word 'celebrate', because I have personally experienced and seen Muslim friends—sisters and brothers—really looking forward to the fasting month of Ramzan.

Let me begin with an anecdote from my days in Aligarh. On the day before the advent of the month of Ramzan in the year 2003, a Muslim journalist friend of mine, Shafi, and I went for an evening stroll. There was a lot of expectation in the air. There were people in the streets and on rooftops trying to spot the crescent moon, waiting for the announcement of the commencement of the month of Ramzan. The thought came to my mind how intently these people were looking forward to seeing a sign of God—the crescent moon. It was really beautiful! I felt very happy for that great awareness—looking for a sign of God in Nature.

God is the Creator of all things, and, using the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit poet, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God". God's signs are everywhere. One needs to pay attention to them to realise their significance.

I heard an announcement saying that the crescent moon had been sighted. Shafi and I looked in the direction of the moon. An elderly gentleman was before us. Two little children—a boy and a girl—were holding his hands. They were perhaps his grandchildren. The gentleman raised his hands in prayer. He said something, facing the crescent moon. I was moved to see the two little children also raise their hands in prayer. How wonderful it was that this grandfather was teaching, through his own example, these two little children to recognise a sign of God! Even these little children were aware of God! I felt very happy for that.

Dear friends, the Holy Quran says that fasting is prescribed for you. It is a means for developing God-consciousness. This is something very attractive for me. The month of Ramzan is about focussing on God-consciousness. To experience a deep experience of God-consciousness, fasting, prayer and charity are a means. They help us in awareness of the presence of God in the world. So, God-consciousness is something that the Muslim tradition teaches me, including through the significance of the month of



Ramzan in the lives of Muslims. The way Muslim brothers and sisters celebrate the month of Ramzan helps me grow in God-consciousness as a Christian.

Dear sisters and brothers, as a student of Christian-Muslim relations I have asked a number of Muslim sisters and brothers, 'Why do you fast?' Many of you have said that fasting is for purification, fasting is to please God, fasting is an act of obedience to God. Everything that you have said I know you are saying it from your own experience, because I know my Muslim friends and their deep faith in God and their commitment to God. For me, this is a very beautiful experience. What you have said is from the heart of your experience. It inspires me to become God-oriented in my own life. It is an invitation to lead a life that is based on God-consciousness. As a Christian, something else strikes me very much. The Bible says, in the Gospel of Matthew (6:17-18):

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Dear friends, many years ago, I was a student at the Department of Islamic Studies at the Aligarh Muslim University. There was a professor in the Department who was a wonderful teacher and a very pious person. During the month of Ramzan, I would notice that he would be extra careful to look fresh, with oiled and neatly-combed hair and well-ironed clothes. In the other months, he would sit and teach, while in the month of Ramzan he would teach while standing. He would not show

any signs of tiredness on account of fasting. He would be fully ready to spend enough time especially with me to explain things. And he would never make any reference to his tiredness or about the time the fast would end. On some occasions I would say to him, 'You must be tired, Sir', but he would reply, 'Victor, it is important that I should explain things to you.'

How beautiful is the message of the Gospel (referred to above) in a way it comes to me through the life of a Muslim! I was able to see the meaning and depth of those Bible verses through my Muslim professor. This was something really amazing, a beautiful experience for me.

While I was a teacher at St. Joseph's School in Baramulla, there would be young Muslim boys telling me, 'Father, this year I am going to start fasting!'. They would say this with great joy. We think fasting must be something very tiring, very difficult. But never in my experience did I find my Muslim friends say that fasting in the month of Ramzan is difficult. They have always looked forward to the month with joy. This joy is on account of fasting being ordained by God in the Quran.

At the same time, I also want to share with you some anxiety that I have experienced on occasion. A few friends have a slightly narrow way of seeing religion. For instance, in some Muslim-majority countries, there may be some unreasonable restrictions on people of other faiths during the month of Ramzan. And so on. But I feel such things have nothing to do with Islam, for the Quran (2:256) says, 'There shall be no compulsion in religion'. In line with this, one could say that pressuring others is not in the spirit of Islam.



I pray with you as a Christian brother that this month of Ramzan be a blessing for all of us who desire to grow in God-consciousness, all of us who thirst for God in their lives.



Dear sisters and brothers, I pray with you as a Christian brother that this month of Ramzan be a blessing for all of us who desire to grow in God-consciousness, all of us who thirst for God in their lives. May all of us put our heart and soul, hands and feet, together and worship the One God according to our faith traditions. And together as brothers and sisters may we all spread peace, joy and harmony.  
Ameen! Amen!  
May God bless us all.  
Khuda Hafiz,  
Your brother,  
Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

(Joseph Victor Edwin is a Catholic [Jesuit] priest who teaches Christian-Muslim Relations at Vidya-jyoti, a Catholic centre for higher theological learning in Delhi. He is deeply engaged in seeking to promote understanding and goodwill between Christians and Muslims. He has a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and has written widely on issues related to interfaith relations. He can be contacted on victoredwinsj@gmail.com)

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seemingly paradoxical state where the world changes, we struggle and yet we are at peace and content with what we have?

In Islam, the answer comes in the form of Purification of Soul.

## Tazkiyat an-Nafs

Tazkiyyah is cleaning, purification. Many Islamic courses have modules, if not courses specifically dedicated to this. The purification comes in with the struggle of the soul. It refers to working on the soul at any level. You could be mutmain but still tempted with something and denying this temptation could be referred to as the struggle of the soul.

Purification of soul has mainly two elements:

1. Self-reflection: This is awareness or mindfulness (muraqabah). The first step is to be aware where you are and where you wish to be. This is similar to most modern approaches to psychology. The first step is always being aware, in the present. This state can lead to guilt, blame and insecurities.
2. Character Refinement: Akhlaq or mannerisms (character) have a great importance in Islam. Just being aware is not enough—you need to take actions to fill the gap between your current self and ideal self. While self-reflection ensures that our intentions are for the sake of Allah, tadhīb al-akhlaq or refinement of character ensures that our actions follow moral principles. Just changing the way we think is not enough, we need to change our behaviour, too. This redirects the negativity and guilt to working for positive and praiseworthy characteristics. Psychologists agree that the insatiable desires humans possess can lead to moral and mental problems. Reforming our manners helps shift that beacon of desire to doing the right thing.

These concepts are still under study, and research is being done to form an ideal framework on how to bring these elements under everyday practices that we can apply. Psychologists know that our belief system can make or break our mental wellness. It is important that we study these elements regardless of our profession and interest because awareness is the first step to making a change. The current generation struggles with loneliness, depression, anxiety and avoidance that can come off as laziness. All of this has a basis in our psychology. Bringing awareness of the core errors in thinking can become the key to the change we wish for ourselves and the world around us.

# The Journey to Self-Discovery Begins Early



Shabana Anwar

The present social environment presents teachers with a daunting challenge: how to ensure a positive school experience for their students. Many students carry the burden of adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, poverty, divorce, authoritarian parents, academic pressure, favoritism, negligence and numerous other social, emotional and academic issues. Schools, unfortunately, focus only on the intellectual development of children, training the brain to fulfil tasks in subjects like Mathematics, Science and English, in order to have an edge in career competitions. It is worthwhile to note that the current school curriculum has its basis in the times of Industrial Revolution, where technologically advanced and market-ready individuals were required and schools performed the role of manufacturing products for the society—and hence, the culture of making humans work like machines. The need to change the system may not have been felt, for many people led what they regarded as ‘successful’ lives, amassing material wealth and equating it with happiness. But a recent spurt in seeking out help for depression, anxiety, anger, envy, pride, arro-



gance and other kinds of emotional imbalance has led us to question: When will our schools include social-emotional development in the existing curriculum? Is it not important for children to identify emotions and separate themselves from the intensity of the emotion? Is it possible to teach children how to manage anger, anxiety, jealousy, hate, feelings of superiority or inferiority, and so on? Why don't we consider teaching about emotions and feelings as important as teaching Sciences and Humanities?

Marilee Sprenger in her book Social Emotional Learning writes that Social Emotional Learning (SEL) should become foundational in our

education system. She asserts that when students walk into the classroom, backpacks and textbooks are not the only baggage they bring with them. Each student enters the room in a different mental, emotional and physical state, which affects their readiness and willingness to learn. The experiences children bring with them and how they feel about those experiences play a central role in shaping a child's personality. A child who has been made to feel 'no-good' will have limiting beliefs about him/herself. It is frustrating for the teacher and the child to be unable to identify how the child is actually 'feeling'. Children in this situation may fear humilia-

tion, and almost any social situation is difficult for them. Conversely, a child who enters the classroom with a feeling of "I am as good as others" will have a different approach to academics as well as socializing with classmates.

Most times students who show behavioral issues in the classroom are doing so because of a 'feeling' they have. We need to help them name that feeling or emotion. Emotions guide behaviour. Therefore, it is important to build self-awareness in children from preschool years. Self-Awareness is the ability to recognize our emotions in various situations and put a name to them. For example, it is common among children and adults to say they are stressed because of feelings of anxiety, fear, pressure, worry, frustration, hostility, apprehensiveness or a combination of emotions. The more specific the language of identifying the easier it will be to help children in dealing with emotions and feelings. The goal is to help the child know that emotions are different from their being.

Research highlights five competencies to build self-awareness:

- Be able to identify emotions: Self-awareness begins with identifying and labelling their emotions. (I am feeling angry because.....)
- Have an accurate self-perception: This competency requires children to have a realistic perspective on who they are.

- Recognize strengths: Each student is unique, with their own strengths and weaknesses. Realizing these and working towards building or getting rid of them, as the case might be, is important to students's sense of self.

- Self-confidence: When students recognize themselves, their self-confidence grows which is vital to a strong sense of who they are.

- Demonstrate self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is the students' belief in their ability to achieve a goal. Doing so requires a growth mindset. Teachers must keep in mind that every student will have a different level of emotional self-awareness. ■

(Shabana Anwar started her career with teaching preschool children in California and slowly grew as a professional to become a teacher educator. She has taught children at the pre-primary and primary levels in USA and India and has been working towards bringing innovative pedagogies in the classroom. Currently, she is a faculty in the Modern Academy of Continuing Education and a guest faculty in Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy. She is an Early Literacy Specialist and believes in lifelong learning.)

## BAZM - E - NISWAN CHARITABLE TRUST An Appeal

Bazm-e-Niswan wishes you all a very happy Ramazan - Mubarak. This is the month in which Allah's bounty, Mercy Grace & Forgiveness showers abundantly on the Ummah. Let us pray to ALLAH Swt to bestow us the will, the heart, the health and the means to fulfill our obligations of Salath, Fastings, Zakath & performing good deeds during this month. Allah's rewards are multiplied many times on these good deeds in Ramazan as per several hadiths.

Your generous donations, encouragement and support have given us the strength and motivation to accomplish all these programmes. We request your continued support, valuable guidance in all our endeavour. The main source of funds for our services is from Zakath, Sadaqath & Donations from large philanthropists like you.

Bazm is doing your work to wipe a tear, to reduce the pain, to care for the destitute, to educate a girl, to feed a mouth, to help a poor bride and to serve humanity in general. Therefore, we appeal to you to extend your whole hearted support and contributions. Our volunteers may come to meet you. You can also contact us or send a cheque or DD in favour of BAZM-E-NISWAN CHARITABLE TRUST to our address. All donations to us are exempted from Income Tax under section 80G.

### A brief overview of BAZM - E - NISWAN 's activities

Bazm-e-Niswan has been actively engaged in aiding & empowering several thousand women of all ages, especially those from the weaker sections of society for the last 47 years. With a firm belief that everyone deserves a helping hand and the right to live in dignity. Bazm has launched many initiatives, all designed to make women self sufficient by boosting their self confidence and providing them opportunities to be socially relevant. Some of these projects are :

\*Bazm's signature project, the scholarship grant programme, since it's inception in 1974, more than over 61,000 girl students have been benefitted from this scheme. They have qualified as Doctors, Engineers and Graduates in different fields. Some of these qualified doctors and engineers are working abroad.

\*Care for the elderly is a major program of Bazm. Nearly 250 Men and Women are given a monthly allowance of Rs. 150/- in cash and food grains worth Rs. 450/- In addition, they are provided with four sets of clothing, Blankets, Bedsheets, Shawls and Sweaters besides Medicines, Spectacles and Medical Treatment.

\*Assistance for the marriage of poor girls. This scheme provides essential bridals items for the marriage of poor girls to reduce their burden. Yearly around 300 girls will be benefitted. So far more than 10000 girls have been benefitted. From 1992, Medical Aid is offered by providing financial assistance to patients undergoing treatment for serious diseases.

\*The Sahara self help program is another initiative of Bazm aimed at empowering women for economic self-reliance thro' self help program & vocational training.

\*Among other schemes being implemented by Bazm are to adopt Govt schools to improve the standard, infrastructure and academic excellence. \*Bazm support students in specialized coaching for PUC and CET aspirants.

\*IQRA - A play home for kidswith a difference. IQRA offers a beautiful and creative headstart for your child aiming to provide quality education. We also encourage children to learn the foundation of Islam and Islamic knowledge, which includes Islamic rhymes, Kalimas and Duas.

\*DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION OF ISLAM - Bazm also conducts meetings. Daras programs & Lectures on Islam to educate its members on the right perspective of Islam and to help them live a life which harmoniously blend spirituality with world life. To further encourage this, Ijtema is being conducted at Dar-us-Salam, Queens Road, Bangalore on every first Wednesday of each month.

**This year BAZM-E-NISWAN has distributed its Annual Scholarship of Rs. 1.20 Crores for around 3200 deserving under-privileged girl students from PUC to Master Degree courses. Scholarship has been paid through online due to the pandemic crisis.**

**Husna Ziaulla Sheriff, President.**

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# Empowering Muslim youth With moral values



Javid Hasan

In his famous quote Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." Elsewhere, he observed: "As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world...as in being able to remake ourselves."

It is an apt message, since with 356 million Indians aged 10-24 year-old, India has the world's largest youth population, observes the UN in its report issued in 2014 under the title, "The Power of 1.8 billion", referring to the global youth population.

Yet, India stood at 131 out of 189 member countries of the UNDP in the latest international ranking of Human Development Index (HDI) in 2019, down from the 130th slot in 2015. The evaluation is based on parameters like life expectancy at birth, mean years and expected years of schooling, besides gross national income per capita. It falls in the medium development category.

"Developing countries with large youth populations could see their economies soar, provided they invest heavily in young people's ed-

ucation and health and protect their rights," it points out. According to the HDI Report, 28% of India's population falls in the 10-24 year age group, while its youth population has been growing at the fastest rate among the poorest countries.

Accordingly, the Indian branch of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) stresses the importance of educational reforms whereby graduates from technical schools and institutes become employable in the national industry. Its report cites the National Manufacturing Policy (NMP), which envisages a growth rate for the manufacturing sector from around 15% at present to 25% of India's GDP over a decade. BCG blames poor labour productivity for its sluggish industrial growth rate hamstrung by strikes and demonstrations.

Labour productivity and the global GDP share are inter-related. According to the report, though India has a young and booming demography, its labour productivity is lower

than those of the developed countries.

It stands at \$3,000 per employee a year compared to the industrialised or even other BRICS nations. Labour productivity in the US is \$1, 55,000 per employee annually, while in Japan it is \$1, 04,000. Against this backdrop, the government and the private sector should give priority to training and other productivity-related issues.

"Raising the manufacturing sector share of the GDP from 15% to 25% will only happen with an increase in labour productivity. Low labour cost alone will not do. The labour cost in China has in-

creased by 10-15% in the last 10 years. But the productivity has also increased by over 15%," observes Arvind Pandey, director of the Boston Consulting Group, India.

Other socioeconomic challenges retarding growth and development are smoking, drinking, drug addiction, eve teasing and some bad habits among the youth. These issues are not dealt with properly in schools, where the focus of education is on science, technology, and related subjects.

As a result, modern educated youth, including Muslims, tend to misuse their technical skills for hacking bank accounts or stealing data landing their victims in serious trouble. Due to lack of Islamic knowledge, they are unaware of the fact that their own body parts will bear witness against them under divine inspiration as mentioned in Quran surah 36, verse.65:

"That Day (the Day of Judgement) shall We set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness, to all that they did," according to Surah.41, verse.21, which says in part: "...their hearing, their sight, and their skins will bear witness against them, as to (all) their deeds."

This is where project-based interactive essay writing offers a solution. It is like education therapy for

students participating in a group essay writing session contributing two or three sentences each on a given topic. The target audience should be secondary level students with English as one of the subjects in the school curriculum.

These are the students who have fairly good oral communication skills in English but need to develop writing skill to make them employable in the market.

The subjects to be covered under this project will include the importance of technical and general education, work ethic, healthcare, agriculture, environmental preservation, tourism, and any other topic deemed fit. It could be an online project of 'Islamic Voice' with a journalist acting as a media partner cum-mentor to suggest topics within an agreed framework.

The essay writing will be based on a set of questions designed to test the students' aptitude for any profession. When he/she answers them properly, we will know the student's mind set on a given topic.

This will explain why he prefers a short cut to success through cheating or offering bribes to invigilators widely reported in the Indian press. Interactive essay writing offers him course correction during his formative years before it is too late. It fills in the gap on matters that are outside the purview of science and technology. ■

(\*Journalist and author)



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## Sharing and Witnessing

After lunch, the next session began—the third component. I had requested our Muslim brothers to give more of a faith-sharing—not about the rules and regulations or theoretical part of their faith, but, rather, more about how their life is shaped by the Holy Qur'an and the life of the Prophet of Islam. A young lady also spoke, very well, with confidence, on women in Islam. Senior members of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality beautifully shared about how they had changed in their life journey, and how the words of the Holy Qur'an and the life of the

Prophet had helped them to live in peace. In this way, the CPS members gave witness to their faith. When people from different faiths give witness to their respective faiths together, we can grow in our recognition of our common brotherhood and sisterhood. This one-day programme provided some precious opportunities for that. Personally, it was another transformative experience for me of understanding God's call for all of us to know one another, appreciate one another, and love one another, for God loves each one of us. ■

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Ramadan is a time of behavioral modification! It is the time when we must control our whims and desires (nafs) as well as our tongues. It was narrated by Abu Huraira (r) that the Prophet (S) said: "Verily, fasting is not only from eating and drinking. Rather, fasting is from vanity and obscenity. If someone abuses you or acts foolishly against you, then say: Indeed, I am fasting." (Ibn Hibban) Abu Huraira (r) also narrated that the Prophet (S) said: "Whoever does not give up false speech and evil deeds while fasting, then Allah is not in need of his/her leaving food and drink." (Bukhari) Jabir (r) said: "When you fast, then let your hearing, seeing, and tongue fast as well from falsehood and sins, and avoid harming your servants. Rather, you must have dignity and tranquility on the day of your fasting. Do not make days you do not fast and days you fast as if they were the same."

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## CHILDREN CORNER

## Bushra and the Rice Tree



Shahin Ashraf Ali

Dadi had been observing that Bushra was growing up to be a very short-tempered young woman. Moreover, she would take out her anger on someone else, who was not at fault!

One day, while coming home from school, a student raced before Bushra into the school bus and took her favorite window seat. That made her very angry. On reaching home, Bushra grumbled at Mummy for cooking vegetables that were not her favorite!

"Bushra! Stop grumbling! I am not going to make potatoes everyday! You have to eat other vegetables to be healthy." Mummy told her sternly.

That made Bushra angrier. She just glared at the cabbage and peas on her plate.

Hope you are not like Bushra! Dadi was very pious. She passionately believed in the Quran. So, she was very worried about Bushra's short temper. After all, in the Quran, God has told us to control our anger.

While Dadi was praying for ways to help Bushra learn to manage her anger, coronavirus attacked the whole world! There was a lockdown! It was (and perhaps still is for many people) a difficult time. During the lockdown, Bushra had lot of time on hand. She started spending more and more time with Dadi.

One day, Dadi told Bushra a rice fable:

"Long long ago, the rice used to be quite different from what it is today.

Each grain of rice would be as big as a sweet potato and grow on trees! Naturally, then, three or four grains of rice were enough to make a meal for a person. Moreover, farmers did not have to work hard at the time of harvest. When the rice was ripe, it would fall off the branch and the farmers gathered them in sacks.

"One year, a farmer had quarreled with his wife and was sitting under a rice tree. At that very time, the rice was ripe in the tree and began to fall off the branches. As the huge grains fell on the farmer's head, he lost control of his temper. He yelled and shouted at the grains! The grains were hurt. Each grain split into many small grains. And the farmers across the globe heard the vow of the rice: 'From this day onwards, we will not grow on trees. You will have to sow us, remove our stalks, replant us and then when we are ripe, you will have to thresh us out! You will have to do a lot of hard work.' And the rice has kept its vow to this day."

Dadi ended the story and asked, "What do you think is the moral of the story, Bushra?" Bushra kept quiet for a while. Then she said, "The moral of the story is: Control your temper." Dadi smiled. She kissed her granddaughter's head, knowing that henceforth she would try to keep her anger in check. And Bushra began to just that. As a result, what a different, and much more pleasant, girl she became!

Shahin Ashraf Ali is an author of children's books and freelance journalist.



## QURAN AND SCIENCE

## From Imam Ghazali

## To The Theory Of Quantum Mechanics



S. Anwar

'Occasionalism' deals with the concept of causation. Simply put, the relationship between a cause and its effect. It determines the dependency of cause and effect on each other. If my hand moves a chair, is it the strength of my hand causing the movement? Is the firing of the neurons stimulating the muscle activity, or is the thought process behind it? Or is it the molecules and atoms rearranging themselves to make this possible?

Occasionalism has far reaching implications in the philosophical and theological world. From Aristotle to Imam Ghazali, Gottfried Leibniz and Rene Descartes—this topic has perplexed the greatest minds.

Our article will explore some of the philosophy and the science behind occasionalism.

Imam Ghazali, Ashari Theology and Occasionalism.

Abuu Hamid Muhammad Ghazali (1058-1111) is regarded as one of the most influential theologians, philosophers and polymath of his times. Over 400 books are attributed to his name. Great Muslim philosophers preceding Ghazali debated the Aristotelian and neo-platonic concept of origin of the universe and the role of God. Philosophical giants like Abu Nasr Al Farabi (872 AD -950 AD) and Abu Ali Ibn Sina (980-1037) discussed the essence and attributes of God. Al Farabi's emanation theory and Ibn Sina's contingency hypothesis confirmed God as the prime mover, the original source of all being. However, the role of God in the day-to-day events of this world is disputed by

these philosophers. Their dictums dictated that God is too exalted to deal in the particulars of this world. God, according to them, could not bother himself with the trivial and mundane day to day affairs of the universe. According to the philosophers objects effect causality by their internal physical nature and attributes.

In his book the "Incoherence of the philosophers", Ghazali criticises this logic. He accused the philosophers of the "begging the question" fallacy. How could the philosophers know that God does not contribute to the particulars of the universe and life on earth? He approached the issue of causality with the opening premise of the role of God in all and everyday events. According to Ghazali, God plays a central role in daily occurrences. Things exist and exert effect because of God's continuous creation. His argument states that a presumed cause and a presumed effect are in fact two separate and unconnected events. Ghazali clearly states the agency of God as the ultimate cause of everything, including the perceived cause and effect relationship.

Ghazali held that everything that God created (matter, time, space and motion) consisted of two basic elements, namely atoms and energy. Atoms were accepted as indivisible. As a result of atomizing matter, space, time and motion Ashari philosophers like Ghazali saw the universe as consisting of separate and independent entities. Things in the world do not have any permanent nature. Fire, for example, does not have an inherent permanent power or quality of burning. When a sub-

stance like cotton touches fire, it is only God who creates burning in the cotton, not fire.

This was the basis of the Ashari deterministic philosophy which states that atomism makes everything in the universe discontinuous and fragmented, including space-time, substance and movement. Accordingly, the universe had a first moment of creation, then continuous re-creations at every subsequent moment in time. In this way, the universe's existence is like the blinking of a light—it exists successively for the duration of only a moment.

## Quantum Mechanics

In 1925-1926, quantum mechanics was invented as a mathematical concept. It posits that probability and discontinuity are fundamental in the physical world. Al-Ghazali's views on cause and effect are quite similar to quantum physics' approach to movement. Quantum physics' understanding of movement makes it easier to understand why Islamic theologians called movement as a coming into existence from nothing (al-kawn). Both Ghazali and the Quantum theory deny the independent existence of objects, stating that objects are created anew and in relation to its position with the observer. For some this comparison may be a farfetched idea. However, for the Muslim philosophers, metaphysics is as close as it gets to science in their days. Peering into history from the lens of metaphysics will help establish this link for the reader. (The author is a consultant surgeon with the NHS in the UK)

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It is a duty of every Muslim to read and understand the Qur'an in Arabic and if he does not know Arabic, he must read the Qur'an's translation which is available in most languages of the world today. If you receive a letter from a government official, will you start doing its tilawat (reciting) again and again and assume that you have complied with its instructions? If you don't know the letter's language, you will rush to someone who knows it. But a majority of Muslims today are exactly doing this: making tilawat of the Quran, without knowing what it says. Muslims are misguided that merely saying the Kalimah or saying a few prayers or reading certain chapters of the Qur'an will suffice for their Salvation in the Hereafter. If we actually read the Qur'an, we will never make such claims. The Qur'an on every

page exhorts us to believe in Allah and do righteous deeds. The two, belief and continuously doing righteous deeds, go hand-in-hand. Many think that without doing any righteous deed they will enter Paradise while Allah says in the Qur'an that mere saying good words is meaningless unless accompanied by good deeds (35:10).

The Qur'an says that Prayer (salat) "restrains from obscenity and abominable deeds" (29:45) but our prayer today fails to make any real impact on our lives or character. The Qur'an says that you should spend "Whatever is in excess of your needs" (2:219) while our majority does not pay even the meagre amounts of Zakat, yet millions of Muslims around the world spend lavishly on social occasions, buy costliest gadgets and compete to make 'Umrah visits, one after the other, while their fellow Muslims

starve in so many parts of the world. We are doing everything to earn Allah's wrath and yet blame others! The only way for our salvation is to read the Qur'an, in translation if we do not know Arabic, and meticulously follow Allah's commands in every part of our lives.

According to the Qur'an, this community is the best community raised for mankind. It enjoins good & forbids evil (3:110). This community has not been raised for itself. It has been entrusted with a mission to bear witness to the Truth before humanity. In order to carry out this mission, Muslim individuals and societies must first return to the straight path in their thought and conduct. It is only by living true Islam that they can bear testimony before the world.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD



Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

يَلِّغُوا عَنِّي وَلَوْ آيَةً

"Convey my teachings to the people even if it were a single sentence."

Ab DUKHARI: 3401

(Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah) Abu Darda (r) narrated that the Prophet (S) said: "Nothing is heavier on the scale of the believer on the Day of Resurrection than good character. Verily, Allah hates the vulgar, obscene person." (Tirmizi)

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Nikhat Sattar

# Intellect and Islam

**Muslims are floundering because they have mostly disregarded this important pillar of Islam — intellect**

Given the lack of analytical thought, deep reflection and serious scholarship in many Muslim societies today, the fact that intellect was cited by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as the most critical aspect of a Muslim's life might come as a surprise.

Dr Khaled Abu al-Fadl mentions that the Prophet is said to have stated: "To everything there is a foundation, and the foundation of a believer is the intellect. And to every person, there has to be an objective. And the objective of the true believer has to be the intellect. And to every home, there are people that are responsible and accountable and in the homes of true believers, it is the intellect that holds every one to account ... and for every journey, there is a purpose and the true purpose of the journey of a true believer is the intellect."

The Prophet is also said to have stated that the best person and worship-

per is one who possesses intellect, has developed it and invested in it. Intellect and ethics are also linked in Islam because only a person with intellect can assess the goodness and eternity of ethical values and can abide by ethical standards.

With the Quran instructing Muslims to deliberate and think deeply, it is ironic that many Muslim societies, scholars, rulers and laypersons are unable or unwilling to apply their intellect and rationality to their beliefs and actions. Blind following of religious leaders without critically applying one's own intellect; assuming that interpretations of the Quran by earlier scholars are fixed and newer interpretations are no longer possible; believing in all hadith without testing them for authenticity are common practices.

So many of us are led by emotions that are easily stirred by whatever we hear or are taught in madrasahs or whatever is published in the

increasingly large numbers of religious magazines and books. We seldom engage with this information at an intellectual level, question their validity, sort them through, look for evidence, search other sources for proof or subject them to a critical evaluation before placing our belief in them.

Many Muslims resist alternative interpretations of the Quran that differ from traditional tafsirs, to the extent of sticking the labels of 'kufr' and 'fitna' on anyone who dares to do so. This is the reason why many reputable scholars leave their countries to live in places where they can think, debate and write with greater freedom, for the practice of intellect and debate and expression must necessarily go hand in hand.

Intellect causes desire in humans to seek knowledge: the Arabic word 'ilm' has been used in the Quran hundreds of times in various connotations. Intellect enables humans to

ther understand the Quran properly nor practice it fully. For centuries, a few Divine orders have been passed on to us, generation after generation, and our understanding of Islam is confined to these commands of 'prayers' only. If one truly understands the Quran and believes that it is a book of guidance and it must be followed, one would never Divide knowledge into 'religious' and 'worldly', and one would never shun science, which is actually the study of God's creations.

It is actually mandatory for us to explore, discover and harness the ayaat or signs of God with our knowledge, otherwise we will be answerable to God on the Day of Judgment. The Quran (27:83-84) says:

And the day we will gather from every community, troops of those who denied Our signs, they will be formed into ordered ranks, until when they come, He will say 'Did you deny My signs and not comprehend them in (your) knowledge, or what was it that you did? Can we ask ourselves what we did, or what we are doing?'

**Al Ghazali, the famous Muslim thinker, said that if a Muslim refuses the role of intellect in religion, this is a contradiction because a true believer's piety is based on intellect.**

comprehend signs of God and establishes the link between knowledge, faith, and practice. This knowledge differs from information, because it is only the intellect that can sort out false and biased information from true knowledge and separate fact from fiction.

Al Ghazali, the famous Muslim thinker, stresses upon the need to understand and assess knowledge so that one can act upon it. He said that if a Muslim refuses the role of intellect in religion, this is a contradiction because a true believer's piety is based on intellect.

The Quran and hadith are often memorized, both in their original form as well as their translations. This is considered the height of religious knowledge. Even when the meaning of these texts is discussed, the usual format is of a religious teacher expanding upon his own interpretation of Quranic verses. Humans are gifted with varying degrees of intellect. It is up to them to hone it, develop it and enhance it. Intellect increases with use and becomes dormant and rusty if left unutilized.

Intellect demands that compassion should be paramount in dispens-

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ing justice; changes in social and economic realities should be considered in applying religious instructions that responded primarily to social conditions of the times of revelation. [...]

Muslims are floundering because they have mostly disregarded this important pillar of Islam — intellect.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1610788/intellect-islam>

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Another damaging attitude which came along with this exclusion of scientific knowledge was the inculcation of an unscientific outlook and loss of objectivity. The Quran asks us to use our senses and intellect but many of us prefer to blindly follow past precedent.

The Quran (8:22) says: 'Verily, the worst of all creatures in the sight of God are those deaf, those dumb ones who do not use their reason.' In this verse, naas, the Arabic word for humans, is not used. Instead, the word dawwab is used, which means 'creatures'. The most important factor which distinguishes human beings from animals is their intelli-

gence (aql). A person who does not use his intelligence or reason is not intellectually a human being, hence the Quran does not use the word 'naas' but calls them creatures, not humans.

Ironically, while it is our mandatory duty to explore Nature through knowledge, Muslims, by and large, have kept themselves away from this commandment, because, like many other such commandments, it was not preached as a religious or deeni obligation, and because they had 'shelved' the Quran, which otherwise, could have been a beacon of light and their primary source of guidance. Many Muslims nei-



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