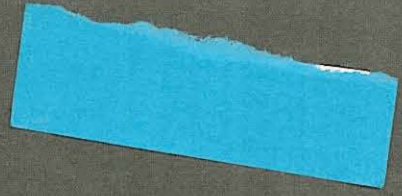


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THE MUSLIM NEWSMAGAZINE AT UCLA

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Believers in Captivity

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The Struggles of Incarcerated Muslims

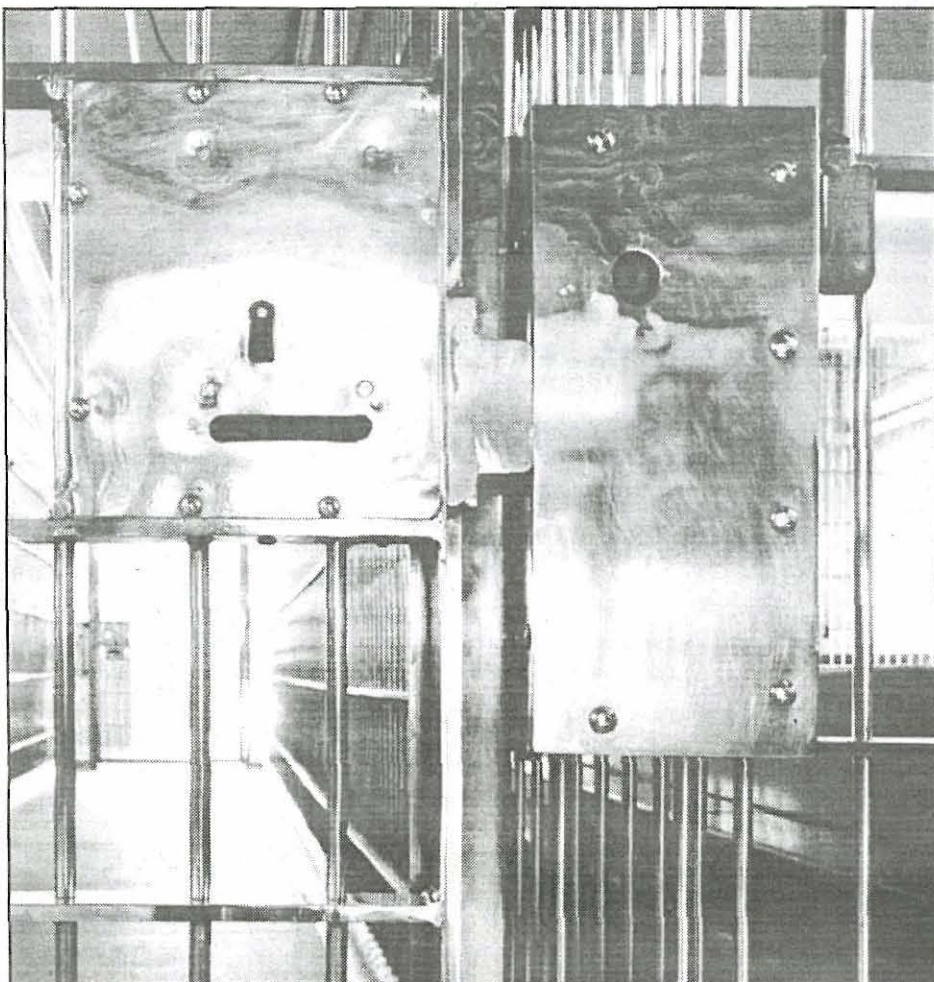
Consider the purpose of the prison system. Some might argue that it is a manifestation of justice in the American society. Proponents of the prison system might tell us that this method deters people from committing crimes, while simultaneously removing dangerous criminals from the community and giving other criminals an opportunity for reform.

However, a closer look at some prisons in the United States shows us that these environments are anything but conducive to some of these goals. Islam teaches us that a major part of justice is compassion. The absence of this important component in some American prisons leaves in its place a savage disregard for the basic rights that all humans are entitled to. Dignity is met by abuse; respect is exchanged for callousness and perversion.

Many people discover and accept Islam while they are incarcerated. As these people follow the perfect way of life prescribed by Allah, they turn from a life of crime and become important contributors to their respective societies. The prison system, however, is deterring Muslims from making this transformation. The most basic rights are stripped away from our brothers and sisters in a way that seriously impedes the establishment of some of the fundamentals of Islam. As many of us complete the activities that constitute an ordinary day, we exercise rights that are so innate in human nature that they almost transcend the classification, 'rights.' Privacy is one of these.

Many of us never find our right to basic privacy challenged. In some prisons, however, this is precisely what happens. As some of our Muslim sisters attempt to guard their modesty as commanded by Allah, they are subjected to almost unimaginable disrespect, as their dignity is carelessly disregarded. The women in some prisons must shower in view of men who stare at their uncovered bodies. Some are issued revealing nightgowns that do not adequately cover their bodies. They are pat frisked by male officers. Other Muslims are opposed as they try to establish the Jum'ah prayer, grow a beard, or wear the hijab.

We should feel outrage that servants of Allah are being blocked from His path. Their distress is ours. As they are humiliated we should feel embarrassed. The unfairness of a system that works against reformation and redemption, a system that ignores the humanity of the participants, should cause our sense of justice to scream out. Our love for Allah, our resultant love for other Muslims should manifest itself in our refusal to accept the merciless, inhumane treatment received by those who struggle



behind bars.

Although the prison system itself lacks in its structure and its effectiveness, some Muslims in prisons are blessed with support from brothers and sisters in the community who genuinely care for their well-being. When faced with constant oppression and denial of rights, support from within the Muslim community is a breath of fresh air for Muslim prisoners.

Muslim chaplains do their part to make sure that Muslim prisoners have a sufficient number of Islamic books, newspapers, and tapes. Also, Muslim chaplains ensure that there are periodic visits by Imams and scholars to teach the believers their din and increase them in their love for Allah.

Support from the Muslim community is essential in any situation, incarcerated or not. When a Muslim has left prison and entered the community, however, that is when the community's sincerity is truly put to test. It is a tough transition for Muslims when they leave the prisons and attempt to become part of the existing Muslim community. Often, after they have left prison, Muslims are not given the support they need to make this difficult transition.

Every masjid should have specific programs to help and work with formerly incarcerated Muslims. This is important for a

variety of reasons. First of all, formerly incarcerated Muslims can share their firsthand knowledge of the horrific conditions they face in prison. Working cooperatively, community members can insha'Allah come up with solutions to fight for Muslim prisoners rights to practice their din. Also, upon leaving prison, Muslims often don't have any place to go. The communities they used to be in before they entered prison may not be conducive to their Islamic way of life. It is important that we establish a temporary-housing arrangement as well as job placement for our brothers and sisters. Alhamdulillah, Muslims have the financial resources to do these things, and there is no reason for them not happen.

If nothing else, it is important to raise awareness amongst each other as to the conditions of Muslims in prisons. We need keep these brothers and sisters in our prayers the same way we keep our family in our prayers. We need to encourage Muslim chaplaincy programs and tutorial projects. And, we need to establish community support and outreach for when they insha'Allah leave the prisons.

Jazakum Allahu khayran.
-The Al-Talib Staff

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**This magazine contains
the name of Allah.
Please treat it with respect.
Jazakum Allahu khayran.**

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Al-Talib exists to serve the needs of the UCLA Muslim community, the general Muslim community, and the general non-Muslim community. It is an independent forum for a diverse spectrum of views and concerns. Al-Talib serves to educate about Islam and Muslim cultures. Al-Talib corrects the mainstream media's misinformation about Islam and Muslim people. Al-Talib is the first publication of its kind in the United States - a newsmagazine run by volunteer students dedicated to Muslim issues.

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