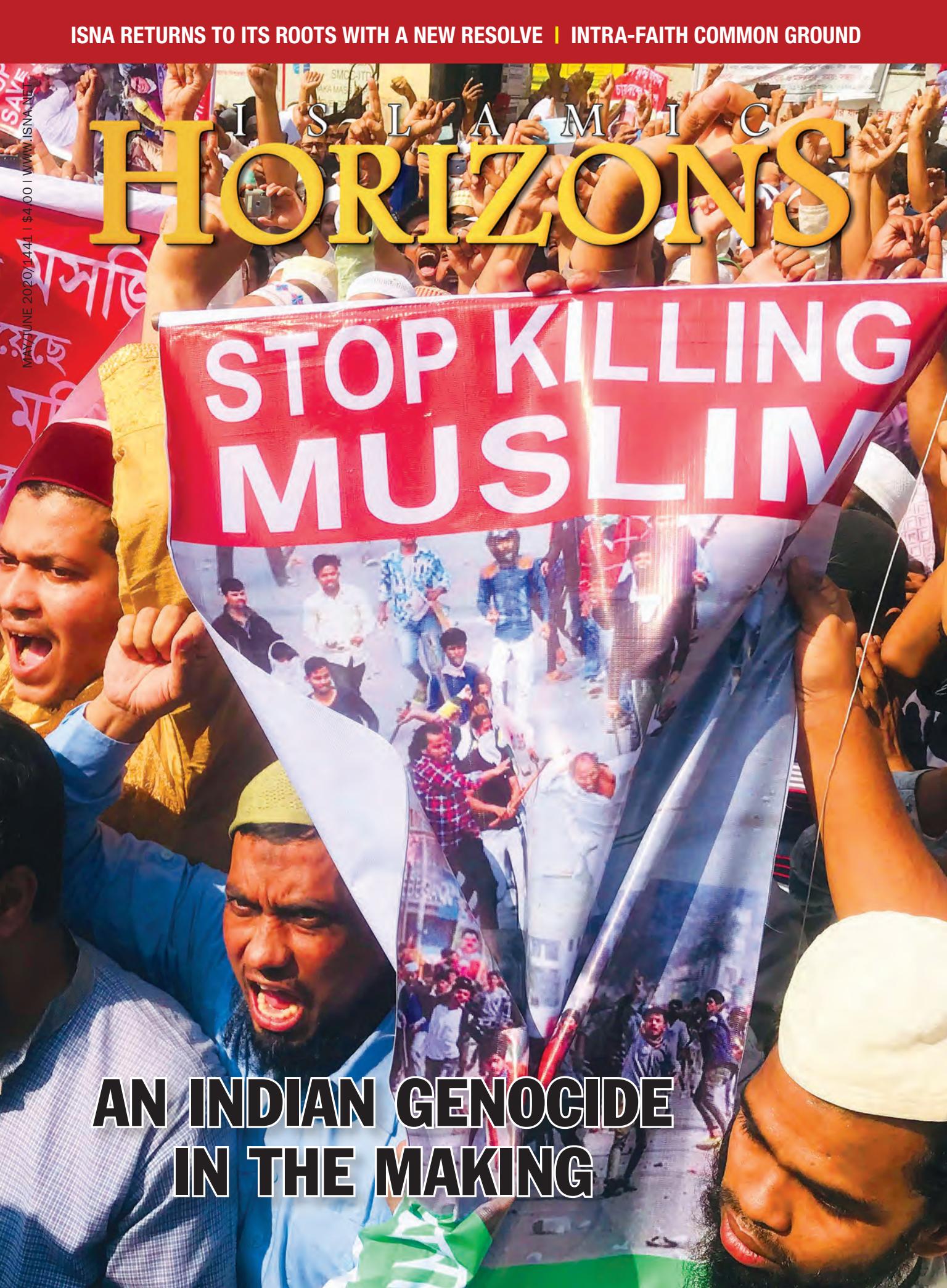


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# Have We Paused to [Re]Think?

**L**ATE LAST YEAR, THE WORLD'S PEOPLE heard of the death and misery coming out of China and, after a quick "Oh my," moved on to their own chores, interests and problems.

The calamity spread, and the usual commentators began focusing on its strategic and financial implications. When it landed with full force on all of us, we sat up and started thinking and acting in self-defense. The result? Vast swathes of the world are now in lockdown.

The global economy is contracting painfully. COVID-19 and its side effects can spawn poverty and hunger especially in developing countries. Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan, while making this very point, has suggested that lender countries consider forgiving the loans — much of which ended up in the lenders' own financial and real estate sectors, courtesy of unscrupulous public officials. He also requested giving even temporary respite to sanctions against [his neighbor] Iran.

UN Secretary General António Guterres made a similar, yet more profound, call on March 23: "Our world faces a common enemy: COVID-19. The virus does not care about nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly. Meanwhile, armed conflict rages on around the world. The most vulnerable — women and children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced — pay the highest price. They are also at the highest risk of suffering devastating losses from COVID-19."

"Let's not forget that in war-ravaged countries, health systems have collapsed. Health professionals, already few in number, have often been targeted. Refugees and others displaced by violent conflict are doubly vulnerable. The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war. That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives."

But has anyone listened?

President Trump has refused to lift the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran, where COVID-19 is extracting a

huge toll. And this despite Iran's status as a regional hub for this virus that, like all others, doesn't respect borders.

In Occupied Palestine, which continues to endure long-standing harsh sanctions, Tel Aviv is denying the needed resources. In Indian-occupied Kashmir, the fascist New Delhi regime refuses to stop subjecting the hapless population to sufferings, when it is already undergoing immense sufferings.

The imperial hubris of nations has crumbled. Dare we hope that the powerful might actually begin to see all people as fellow human beings instead of abstractions?

In this issue, we focus on India's continued slide into fascism.

The most recent action started on Aug. 5, 2019, when New Delhi unilaterally abrogated Kashmir's constitutionally guaranteed special status. Since then more than 12 million Kashmiris have endured a lockdown and communication shutdown. Now we have some idea of their lives — minus the fully armed and omnipresent Indian army, of course.

Then came the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, designed to evict as many of its 201 million Muslims — 11 percent of the population — as possible regardless of their centuries-long existence there.

In our continuing quest to inform Muslim Americans about those working with underserved Muslims, we focus on Rasha Abulohom, whose Exceptional Individuals with Dreams (Special E.I.D.; <https://www.specialeid.org>) organization envisages a world where every Muslim child with disabilities — plus their parents, siblings and other loved ones — can enjoy the Eid celebration's spiritual benefits and prayer.

As we go press, ISNA's headquarters staff are working from their homes and the Chicago ISNA Education Forum and the MYNA Spring Camp have been cancelled.

Along with many other organizations, ISNA, which pioneered Islamic work in North America more than 57 years ago, is under great financial stress. We need your *sadaqa jariya* (continuing charity) to keep serving you and your future generations.

May God bless you all. 

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

# ISLAMIC HORIZONS

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# ISNA Returns to Its Roots with a New Resolve

BY BASHARAT SALEEM

**O**N FEBRUARY 18, THE LEADERSHIP of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) reinitiated me into the family to which I have belonged since 1999, when I joined its first “Fellowship Program in Philanthropy & Non-Profit Management” initiative hosted by the Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).

I am humbled and honored to join ISNA as its new executive director. I am grateful to the ISNA leadership for entrusting me with this enormous responsibility.

In May 2018, I took a different path by joining the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) as their conferences director. Two years later I returned to my familiar roots because I fully and passionately believe in this organization’s mission and understand its current needs.

Like me, ISNA has nurtured more than a few workers. My internship was an amazing learning experience that introduced me to the nonprofit world and philanthropy. After completing this program, I went on to finish a master’s degree in business administration at the University of Indianapolis and joined ISNA as its conventions and conferences director.

My tenure at SPJ, albeit short, gave me an opportunity to work with journalists and professionals in the news and broadcast industry.

Having worked with ISNA leaders for nearly two decades, I understand the culture, challenges and strengths, as well as the many opportunities ahead of us. We are excited to open a new chapter of ISNA’s long-standing mission, and therefore want to be in full communication with you. We believe that with the membership and the community’s support and involvement, we will continue to strengthen ISNA and make it great.

Today, as we embark on a new journey with a renewed commitment, I draw strength from the fact that we have a committed group of selfless board members, staff and volunteers, and important stakeholders and supporters like you.

Although the challenges are many, I am excited and inspired by the great possibilities of growth and development waiting for us. I



**I AM PERSONALLY COMMITTED TO NURTURING A CULTURE THAT ENABLES GREATNESS, ENCOURAGES OPENNESS, CREATES INNOVATION AND HELPS US TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO OUR MEMBERS AND THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE.**

am confident that with the help of God and with your own help and support, we can achieve great things, *insha’ Allah*.

I am personally committed to nurturing a culture that enables greatness, encourages openness, creates innovation and helps us to provide services to our members and the community at large. In addition to our continued programs like the annual convention, regional and professional conferences, youth programs, interfaith alliances and more, we

must also enhance our work by building diversity, women and youth empowerment, inclusiveness and reaching out to our brothers and sisters, who are not affiliated with any mosque.

We must also provide services and a platform to professional organizations like the Association of Muslim Scientists, Engineers, & Technology Professionals (AMSET), the Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA), the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS) and other organizations.

My mission is to ensure that ISNA continues to explore new frontiers in providing capacity building and organizational development support to its constituents.

While we thank you for your continued support, we also want you to become more involved. There are many ways to do this — renew your membership, become a new member, support ISNA financially, volunteer, host a webinar, attend our events, host an ISNA day in your community, give us your ideas and feedback, share your expertise with others through ISNA and work with us in other ways.

As the Quran tells us, “God does not change a people’s lot unless they change what is in their hearts” (13:11). We have to strive together for what we are seeking. We have to help and reinforce each other as one community. We have to choose hope over uncertainty and fear. And, we have to deliver a beautiful gift to our future generations.

As we move ahead as a unified entity, we will continue to provide quality services and programs designed to better the Muslim community and society at large. As we face new and evolving challenges, I want to assure you that with your help we will continue to make ISNA relevant and operationally efficient.

Like all of us, no one was expecting the reality with which the coronavirus pandemic has confronted us — a challenge that surpasses all confines. We will need to tread the stricken path, supporting each other as we strive for a better tomorrow. **ih**

Basharat Saleem, M.B.A, M.S., CMP, is executive director of ISNA.

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# MYNA Convention 35: The Muslim Survival Kit

Muslim youth come together for fellowship and self-improvement

BY AMANI HAGMAGID



THE MUSLIM YOUTH OF NORTH America (MYNA) will host its 35th annual convention in Chicago over Labor Day weekend, concurrently with the ISNA Convention.

This year's program theme, "The Muslim Survival Kit," will provide youth with the necessary tools to navigate through their lives and ultimately attain God's pleasure. These tools will be taught through the stories and lessons of the past, which will enable the attendees to build their pride and hope through the struggles of today and to prepare for what's to come in the afterlife. The program is deliberately youth-centered and devoted to discussing their issues and answering their questions.

MYNA seeks to accomplish this goal by bringing qualified speakers from across the nation. As well as a stellar program, platforms will be provided for youth to express themselves via sessions that will allow them to speak their mind on certain topics and showcase their talents in an open mic and talent show.

**MYNA WORKS  
IN CONJUNCTION  
WITH ISNA'S YOUTH  
DEPARTMENT TO HOST  
CAMPS, HALAQAS,  
SPORTS TOURNAMENTS  
AND DINNERS  
NATIONWIDE, ALL WITH  
THE INTENTION OF  
EMPOWERING YOUTH  
TO ACHIEVE AWAKENED  
MINDS AND INSPIRED  
HEARTS SO THAT  
THEY MAY ENGAGE IN  
ENLIGHTENED ACTIONS.**

MYNA works in conjunction with ISNA's Youth Department to host camps, *halaqas*, sports tournaments and dinners nationwide, all with the intention of empowering youth to achieve awakened minds and inspired hearts so that they may engage in enlightened actions. It also creates an environment for self-expression, promoting Islamic principles rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunna, and establishing a greater Muslim youth community across the U.S.

Far from being just a regular youth group, MYNA is run by the youth for the youth. Every event, camp and convention is put together by these hard workers, an approach that ensures that everything is specifically targeted to the youth. The annual convention is no different.

The MYNA Convention Committee comprises nine inspired youth working at every step to put together a successful event and create a welcoming atmosphere. In short, it bears full responsibility for putting together all of the various parts, among them the bazaar booths, the youth lounge, the sports tournament and each program session.

Another unique experience is the Youth Lounge Area. Mohannad Shoair, a 2019 MYNA Convention attendee, commented on its atmosphere, stating "The energy in the MYNA Youth Lounge Area was captivating, involving and welcoming to all kinds of youth." This area lounge features couches and board games so that attendees can sit down, unwind and meet new people.

The nightly Quran sessions, which feature youths who have memorized the Quran, will be open to the public. The Ping Pong Tournament, held every year, will again allow the participants' to display their talents. As always, MYNA will be selling its merchandise.

But what makes the convention truly exceptional is that you meet people and see old friends from across the country. Every year, this convention grows larger and brings more Muslims together. This event is a time for the entire MYNA family to reconnect and catch up with each other, all while being in the presence of exceptional speakers and attending life-changing events.

You can register for the convention at <http://www.isna.net>. 

Amani Hagmaged is MYNA vice president.

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## Louisiana State University Retires Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's Jersey

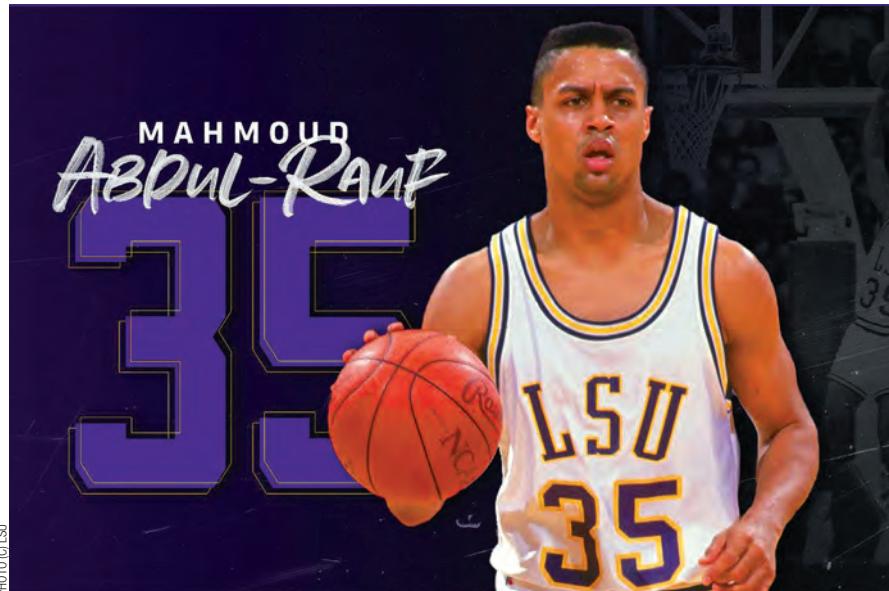


PHOTO © LSU

ON FEB. 29, LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY (LSU) honored one of its outstanding alums, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, by retiring his No. 35 jersey. The university now has a starting five of great names on display in its Pete Maravich Assembly Center, among them Shaquille O'Neal. The players' banners are arranged chronologically in the order that they played at LSU, reported The Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.; March 1). Abdul-Rauf is the 14th athlete or coach to have his/her jersey retired.

In his video message, O'Neal, who played with Abdul-Rauf during the 1989-90 season, called his former All-American teammate LSU's best player ever. In 2019, the university invited Abdul-Rauf to give the Black History Month speech.

Abdul-Rauf, 50, who played under his given name Chris Jackson at LSU from 1988-90, received a standing ovation as he was honored at midcourt, surrounded by four of his five children, LSU teammates and former LSU coach Dale Brown.

Brown, who had recruited the talented but troubled youth from Gulfport, Miss., said, "Mahmoud is one of the greatest players in college basketball history, and he is one of the nicest young men I have coached in my 44-year career. He won accolades throughout the country while being inflicted with Tourette Syndrome, a truly remarkable accomplishment."

"Never could I have written this story

for myself, to be in this position 30 years later and have my jersey retired," Abdul-Rauf said. LSU athletics director Scott Woodward said, "He's [Abdul-Rauf] one of the greatest of all time at LSU and incredibly deserving of this honor."

Also attending the game was former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who, like Abdul-Rauf in his NBA days, has been a lightning rod for bringing attention to social justice causes. As Avery Wang of Sports Illustrated reminds sports fans in the Feb. 26 issue, "Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf didn't stand for the national anthem, and—like Tommie Smith and John Carlos before him and Colin Kaepernick after him—was punished in the process." Kaepernick remained in the stands during the halftime ceremony.

Abdul-Rauf set the NCAA freshman scoring record in 1989 by averaging 30.2 points per game — a mark that still stands. A two-time All-American and two-time consensus Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Player of the Year, he was the third overall pick in the 1990 NBA Draft by the Denver Nuggets. He played in the league for nine seasons with the Nuggets, the Sacramento Kings and the Vancouver Grizzlies. He twice led the NBA in free throw percentage and was voted the league's Most Improved Player in 1993.

This remarkable athlete still plays in the Big 3 basketball league. *ih*

## App for Islamophobia Reports

THE ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES CENTER (ISC; <https://iphobiacenter.org>) at Berkeley University has initiated the Islamophobia Reporting App. Now available on App Store and Google Play (<http://reportislamophobia.org/report.html>), it enables victims of legal, social, religious, gender and political discrimination, or those on the receiving end of an anti-Muslim prejudiced incident or hate crime, to document it and create a comprehensive statistical picture of such events.



If you experience or have experienced Islamophobia, report it because doing so will impact policy. Also, remember that if you don't report the incident, it didn't happen. This is the core element of this particular discourse, and now Muslims can use it to challenge Islamophobia. But if you or someone on whose behalf you are reporting is in danger, please exit this app and contact 911 emergency services.

The app, which is not affiliated with any attorneys or law enforcement agencies or personnel, is strictly an academically based data collection app designed to approach Islamophobia through statistics that can impact policy. All of the data and contact information collected is kept confidential and used only for this initiative.

This ISC initiative focuses on applying a systematic and empirical approach to the study of Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim communities. Funding for the app's construction was provided by the Islamophobia Studies Center. *ih*

## Website Gives Muslim Americans Faith-based Estate Planning Tools

ON MARCH 19 ABED AWAD, A NEW Jersey-based attorney and international expert on Islamic law, launched Shariawiz.com, a faith-based estate planning website designed to make such planning easy, customizable and affordable for Muslim Americans.

Shariawiz.com guides its users through a series of questions customized for their specific needs and offers religious insights and practical solutions along the way. Awad notes that these features will help Muslims who want to create such an estate plan overcome their initial hesitations due to expensive attorney fees, misunderstandings about religious requirements, procrastination and other reasons.

Awad says that his team of lawyers, Sharia experts and software engineers spent nearly three years researching, testing and developing Shariawiz.com. Along with attorney-created Sharia-compliant legal forms, a scholar-approved proprietary inheritance calculator and bank-level security encryption, the site also offers transparency with every transaction — buyers may review each document before purchase. As these documents will be available in their Dashboard, they will be permitted to make changes to them for free for 12 months from date of purchase and for a small fee later on. [ih](#)



## Faith Leaders Join Together for an Accurate 2020 Census Count

THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU CONVENED A nationwide range of diverse faith-based leaders in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 18 for the 2020 Census Interfaith Summit. Its purpose was to discuss the importance of encouraging their community's members to respond to this once-a-decade census.

Census Bureau Director Dr. Steven Dillingham stressed, "Faith leaders play an integral role in the community. They are the trusted voices, and in some cases, in the hardest to reach communities, they are the most trusted voice."

Summit participants included leaders from ADAM's Center, the Catholic Health Association Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the National Latino Evangelical Coalition.

ADAMS Center's Hurunnessa Fariad stated, "American Muslims are a part of the American family. And for this very reason, it's important for us to be counted. We appreciate the Census Bureau's sensitivity in approaching the American Muslim community through its most trusted voices — it's

faith leaders and faith institutions. It's these trusted voices that will make all the difference in ensuring our community is represented alongside others in American democracy."

The participants stressed the importance of being counted. Faith leaders outlined how the constitutionally mandated once-a-decade count of every person in the U.S. determines funding for key public services such as education programs and schools, hospitals and healthcare, roads and bridges, and emergency and disaster response. It also determines the number of each state's congressional seats.

The faith leaders committed to a Census Weekend of Action on March 27-29 — just before Census Day on April 1, the reference day people should use when responding to the 2020 Census. This event was a coordinated chance for faith leaders to focus their outreach and support of the census and urge their communities to respond.

The 2020 Census is the first to allow all households to respond online at <https://my2020census.gov>. One can also respond by phone or by mail. [ih](#)



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## Intra-Faith Initiative in the Capital Region



THE SHIA-SUNNI ALLIANCE FORUM (SSAF), a continuation of the path formed by the Washington Declaration ([www.washingtondeclaration.us](http://www.washingtondeclaration.us)), held its first scholars' retreat at ADAMS Center on Feb. 9. The forum's ultimate purpose is to lay the foundation for an everlasting synergy between this county's various Muslim schools of thought.

Attendees heard and exchanged views with Shia and Sunni scholars from across the country, hearing about their journey toward unity and how the community can work toward its success.

This active forum seeks to meet regularly in order to address general Muslim concerns, such as community building, family and social issues, bullying and Islamophobia, thereby normalizing such interactions.

The forum creation process was initiated with several retreats for Shia and Sunni religious scholars.

SSAF paired groups of them from several cities, thereby enabling them to spend three days together in Northern Virginia building a deep relationship so that they can begin initiating joint community events and projects back home. The pair would also duplicate such retreats locally, imparting what they have learned to the other local congregations.

Joint events and projects will be planned and implemented by "twinning" Islamic centers. These undertakings will include joint efforts such as Eid celebrations, community services and volunteer drives, umra and ziyaras, speakers at Islamic events, and lunar eclipse prayers. *ih*

Paul Amoroso said, "[Elmedina] approached the board last summer. She made a very compelling case ... it was well-researched and very thoughtful."

Several New Jersey school districts, including Jersey City, Paterson and Wayne, have already changed their calendars to include Islamic holidays. Students in Edison have the day off for Diwali due to the township's large Hindu population.



DR. TIMOTHY J. GIANOTTI JOINED THE American Islamic College (AIC; <https://aicusa.edu>) as its interim vice president of academic affairs on Jan. 24.

He earlier served (2013-15) as its inaugural director of Islamic studies and associate professor of Arabic and Islamic studies. During that time, he designed and taught a range of undergraduate and graduate courses, established and ran the faculty council, helped redesign AIC's existing bachelor's and master's curricula, designed its Master of Divinity in Islamic Studies and was an active participant in the college's institutional and interfaith outreach.

Gianotti, a scholar of classical Islamic theology, philosophy and spirituality, also has strong interests in Islamic psychology, ethics, moral theology, education, political thought and comparative mysticism. In addition to being a theologian, he is a committed interfaith advocate with hands-on experience in promoting interfaith engagement worldwide.

His career of 20+ years of university-level teaching experience in North America includes working as an associate professor at Canada's University of Waterloo, the York-Noor Chair of Islamic Studies at York University as well as an assistant professor of Arabic & Islamic thought at the University of Virginia, the University



PATERSON, N.J. APPROVED AN ORDINANCE on Feb. 25 by a vote of 7-0 (two members abstained), to allow the *adhan* to be broadcast over loudspeakers every day from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Under the new measure, which still has to go through two public hearings before being implemented, the *adhan* will be exempt from the city's noise control ordinance. This will prevent mosques from receiving a noise summons.

"We applaud Paterson officials for taking this admirable step toward inclusion, and

encourage them to pass the proposed ordinance," said Salaedin Maksut, executive director of the CAIR-New Jersey chapter.

Paterson has approximately 30,000 Muslim residents, along with more than 15 mosques scattered across the area.

Hamtramck, Mich., passed a similar ordinance in 2004.

ELMEDINA VELIU, 16, A MORRIS COUNTY'S Pompton Lakes High School (N.J.) junior, successfully petitioned her school district to give students the day off on Eid.

After securing 280 signatures from fellow classmates on her petition, she argued her case at four separate board of education meetings that Muslim students were being discriminated against. Her request was approved on Jan. 17, 2020. Thus, there will be no school on May 13, 2021.

In his statement, School Superintendent



PHOTO COURTESY CITY OF BELLEVUE

▲ City officials and community members attended the groundbreaking.

THE ISLAMIC CENTER OF EASTSIDE, ALONGSIDE BELLEVUE (WASH.) OFFICIALS and residents, participated in a celebratory groundbreaking ceremony for its new \$3.3 million mosque on Jan. 25. Completion is expected between March and April 2021.

During the last three years, the original center was twice damaged by arson — in Jan. 2017 and March 2018. This new building replaces the original one.

Farida Hakim, a founding member and board member of the Eastside Inter-faith Social Concerns Council (EISCC), expressed particular appreciation for the support from council members, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and city officials, among them Councilmember John Stokes, former mayor John Chelminiak, City Manager Brad Miyake, and Project Manager Faheem Darab during the transitional period.

The two-story 4,800 square feet building includes 23 on-site parking places.

Hakim, who is also an advisory council member for the Muslim Community Resource Center, said EISCC board members — which includes delegates from Mercer Island, Bellevue, Redmond and other cities — have been contributing and supporting The Islamic Center of Eastside since 2017.

Hakim spoke of the importance of the rebuild and said she's looking forward to getting to know neighbors and inviting them to the new, rebuilt mosque. *ih*

of Oregon and Penn State University. He is presently serving as the founder and principal teacher of Toronto's Islamic Institute for Spiritual Formation (<https://instituteforspiritualformation.wordpress.com/about>).

He is the author of "Al-Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul" (2001) and "In the Light of a Blessed Tree: Illuminations of Islamic Belief, Practice, and History" (2011) and has published numerous scholarly articles, book chapters and theological essays on contemporary issues and traditional topics, such as the inner (psycho-spiritual) processes of moral beautification (*ihsan*) and character formation within an Islamic framework.

MIDDLETOWN'S (CONN) OMAR ISLAMIC Center held its first Friday prayer on Jan. 24, reported The Middletown Press. Mayor Ben Florsheim, State Sen. Matt Lesser (D) and Cromwell Town Councilor James Demetriades attended the inaugural event. The mayor said, "[The mosque] is a testament to the city, to Connecticut and to our region that we have three different religions sharing space with one another. It's very exciting."

Middletown's new mosque is a former auto body shop that was donated rent-free by service-station owner Khalid Mahmud and then repurposed. It is located just steps away from the Congregation Adath Israel synagogue and around the corner from the World Mission Society Church of God.

Mahmud, a Mystic Oil Co. franchisee, donated \$2,000 to the mosque for its children's religious instruction program.

THE CITY COUNCIL OF ST. CLOUD, MINN., approved (4:2) a new mosque that is being shaped out of the building's basement. In January, the council had approved allowing a grocery store to open in the building's upstairs level.

The maximum occupancy is 323 people, and the site will have around 200 parking spaces — more than required. As this property has been zoned C2 (available for places of worship, offices and retail were allowed by right) for decades, the city council couldn't deny the request.



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN U.S. POLITICAL history, on Feb. 4 five Des Moines mosques served as satellite sites for the Democratic Party's caucus gatherings, reported Al Jazeera News.

"It's historical," said state Representative Ako Abdul-Samad (D), the state's only Muslim state legislator and longest-serving African American legislator.

For Iowa's Muslims, this meant "having a safe place that is inclusive and is not going to give them any friction in the process," said Rummi Khan, co-chair of the Muslim Caucus of America. Ghazala Salam, president and founder of the Muslim Caucus (<http://www.muslimcaucus.org>), a civic advocacy group that promotes voter engagement within Iowa's Muslims, called these designations unprecedented and predicted that this inclusion would soon "lay the ground for the rest of the country ... To me, it shows we're being included in the political process and that our voice and vote matters."

The mosques joined more than 80 other locations to act as a "satellite sites," which were established this year to be more accessible and inclusive of all Iowans. The Pew Research Center states that Muslims make up about 1 percent of the state's 3.1 million residents.

## ► COMMUNITY MATTERS



G. ABDULLAH MITCHELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of The Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC; <https://www.ciofc.org>), welcomed Imam Charles Muhammad to its board this February.

A dedicated Islamic worker, Muhammad has often found himself in leadership roles: student council president of his high school, co-founder of the African Cultural Center in Knoxville (Tenn.), president of Whitney Young Magnet High School's Local School Council (he established its Muslim Students Association) and a member of the Oak Park-River Forest Community of Congregations executive board, to name just a few.

During the civil rights movement, he was involved with the Black Panther Party for Self Defense and the Congress of African Peoples. A keen interest in philosophy and religion led him to study world religions. After helping his Muslim college-mates establish a mosque on the African Cultural Center's second floor, Muhammad became interested in helping reconcile the differences between the Lost Found Nation of Islam and mainstream understandings of Islam.

Upon graduation and moving back to Chicago, his dream came true. Imam Wallace Mohammed succeeded his father and eventually disbanded the NOI to form and lead the World Community of Al-Islam in the West. As the imam's director of propagation in Chicago, one of Muhammad's many achievements was to donate 100 Qurans to the Chicago Public Library for all of its branches.

Charles Muhammad's professional career includes working as a civil engineer and science teacher. He and his wife Maria are parents of two sons and two daughters. They have nine grandchildren.



▲ *Capt. Ouza Maysaa, chief of legal assistance at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., and the first U.S. Army JAG Corps officer to wear hijab*

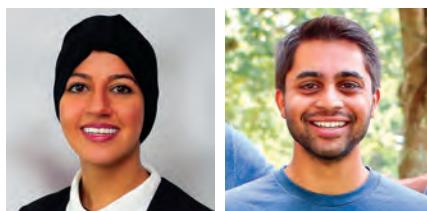
THE U.S. AIR FORCE UPDATED ITS REGULATIONS ON FEB. 7 TO FORMALLY allow requests for religion-based waivers for wearing turbans, hijabs and other religious apparel, as well as beards, as long as they are "neat and conservative" and present a professional and well-groomed appearance.

Those seeking waivers must submit a request, which can be denied only if the policy "furthers a compelling government interest" and is the least restrictive way of furthering that interest.

In recent years, USAF personnel have been granted these accommodations. In 2017, the Army became the first service to allow Muslim and Sikh soldiers to wear head coverings and beards.

In 2014, CAIR similarly welcomed an updated Pentagon policy on religious accommodation for military personnel.

In his statement, CAIR National Communications Director Ibrahim Hooper said, "We support these new guidelines as a step toward religious accommodation and inclusion for military personnel of all faiths. Thousands of American Muslims and members of other minority faiths serve in our nation's military and should be able to practice their faith while serving." *ih*



**FORBES 30 UNDER 30 IN LAW & POLICY** for 2020 includes Tasnim Motala, 29, who currently supervises Howard University's Civil and Human Rights Clinic. She has directed several projects, among them a report on prison censorship nationwide, petitions to international human rights bodies on behalf of the families of victims of police brutality and a white paper on the mental health effects of police brutality on the black community. Armed with a bachelor's degree (Yale), a master's (Uni-

versity of Cape Town) and a law degree (Yale Law School), this Alexandria (Va.) resident has represented men imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay.

In the Education sector, FORBES 30 Under 30 includes Samyr Qureshi, 26, co-founder and CEO of Knack, a website that enables college students to connect with others on campus for tutoring and mentoring sessions at a 20 percent discount. After three years, it is now available at 50 schools nationwide and has 5,000 tutors. Both founders are graduates of the University of Florida.

Qureshi, who moved from the UAE to the U.S. with his family when he was seven years old, follows in the footsteps of his mother, who was a teacher. While in college, he was elected president of the student body.

Despite formal education as a pre-law student, Samyr, who Inc.com named "Top 30 Entrepreneur to Watch," learned to become CEO of a successful technology startup.

MINNEAPOLIS' (MINN.) MASJID AN-NUR IS set to become the Twin Cities' first "ecomoque." Plagued with flooding issues, it is getting a much-needed makeover thanks to grant money from the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization and Hennepin County, reported 5 ABC Eyewitness News, on Jan. 24.



Imam Makram El-Amin said, "It's a growing community, [a] very diverse community." **ib**



▲ Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson presenting Outstanding Business awards

AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON JAN. 26, THE DALLAS FORT WORTH MUSLIM AMERICAN Chamber of Commerce ([www.dfwmcc.org](http://www.dfwmcc.org)), presented Outstanding Business awards to local business owners who have established successful businesses in the Muslim community. These include Syed Waji Bilal (Jimmy's Burger and Grill), Khawar Abbas (Texas King, Irving) Kareem Valliani (Agha Juice), John Hammond (Five Star Banquets & Park Plaza Tower) and Saleem Ali (Sign Express).

Ghulam Jangda, a veteran leader, community organizer and Radio Sada-e Islam host on Radio Azad, led the celebration. In addition to being the founder and president of DFW Muslim American Chamber of Commerce, Aboobaker Ebrahim, a lifetime ISNA member who has served on many area boards, reported that Jangda is also the founder and president of Makkah Masjid Garland,

Guests included Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas), State Rep. Ana Maria Ramos, Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot, Dallas County Commissioner-District 1 Dr. Theresa Daniel, public officials, entrepreneurs and community leaders. Rep. Johnson, who presented the awards, highlighted the aspect of "America, the land of opportunity." Dallas County District Clerk Felicia Pire was the keynote speaker.

The Chamber of Commerce also awarded scholarships sponsored by the law offices of Khalid Y. Hamideh, who has a 30+ year record of assisting the community with various projects and volunteer work and who serves as board member of various nonprofit organizations. Richardson mayor Paul Voelker presented the four scholarships awarded to high school seniors Subhana Memon, Mian Bilal, Sheheryar Gaziani and Marwa Abdel Karim.

Gena Slaughter, presiding judge in the 191st civil district court, instituted the scholarship awards in January 2007 that were presented to Samira Marfani and Muhammad Ashar.

It was stressed that the Chamber has established relations with public officials from the federal to the city levels and that the nation's Muslim communities should replicate this example specifically during this presidential election cycle. **ib**

## ACHIEVERS



▲ Nida (center) with parents Abdul I. and Iffat Allam and sisters Arsheen (left) and Afreen Allam (right)

NIDA ALLAM MADE HISTORY ON MARCH 3 when she became the first Muslimah to be elected to a public office in North Carolina.

Allam, who ran as a Democratic candidate for Durham County Commission, received 39,523 votes. Because no Republican candidate(s) ran for the seat, she will be elected to her first term in November.

In 2017 Allam, who has a BS in sustainable materials & technology (North Carolina State University), was elected third

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## ► COMMUNITY MATTERS

vice-chair of the North Carolina Democratic Party — the first Muslim elected to the party's executive council.

Allam, who served as a political director for Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign, was appointed to the Durham Mayor's Council for Women in 2018 and then unanimously elected as its chair.

Her best friend was Yusor Abu-Salha, who, along with her husband Deah Barakat and her sister Razan Abu-Salha — all of them college students at that time — were murdered at their Chapel Hill home by their neighbor on Feb. 10, 2015. Allam has declared, "I'm fighting for a better Durham so that others don't have to suffer the pain my community did."

[IH Jan./Feb. 2020 issue, p. 32, featured Nida's technology entrepreneur sisters Afreen (CEO of SiNON Therapeutics) and Arsheen Allam (CEO of GOLeafe)].



ADNAN BOKHARI STARTED MARCH 2 AS the National Immigration Law Center's (NILC; <https://www.nilc.org>) chief operating officer. As a member of its executive leadership team, he plays a key role implementing such NILC strategic priorities as advancing racial equity through organizational systems and policies. He also leads the center's finance, human resources, information technology, administration and development teams.

"We are excited to have Adnan take the helm of our operations at this critical time in NILC's history, as the organization experiences unprecedented growth and executes multiple transformational initiatives to advance our vision for immigration in this country," stated NILC executive director Marielena Hincapié.

"I am thrilled to be joining the leading immigrant rights organization at this important time for the movement and our

nation. I migrated to the United States at the age of 15 and experienced first-hand the arduous path that millions of low-income immigrants traverse in pursuit of a better future. Being a part of NILC's amazingly talented team offers a distinguished opportunity to advance its mission by utilizing my personal and professional background," stated Bokhari.

Bokhari, a CPA, brings 20 years of nonprofit sector finance and operations experience. He most recently served as CFO and COO for a national Washington, D.C.-based anti-poverty organization. Bokhari, who has gained expertise in leading change and garnered a reputation for building resilient organizations, is also the first Pakistani-American to be elected as chairman, board of directors of the Golden Key International Honor Society, the world's largest collegiate honor society. He also serves on the Virginia Community Colleges System's board, appointed by the state's governor, and is chair of the board's personnel committee.



ACTIVIST, EDUCATOR AND FORMER IMAM Abdullah Jaber, 29, assumed his latest office as executive director of the CAIR-Georgia chapter on March 1. He succeeds Edward Ahmed Mitchell, who was appointed the organization's national deputy director in Washington, D.C. Mitchell, an attorney, had held the position since 2016.

"Over the past four years, I have come to know Abdullah Jaber as a scholar-activist who puts his faith into action by standing up for causes of justice across our state," Mitchell said in a release. He further stated that "Jaber's experiences as an interfaith activist, a prolific fundraiser and the founder of a non-profit organization make him the ideal person to strengthen and advance CAIR-Georgia in 2020, a critical moment for American Muslims."

Jaber previously served as resident scholar and imam at Masjid Omar, one of Georgia's largest Islamic centers. In addition, he is a former member of the CAIR-Los Angeles advisory committee, co-founder of Muslim Youth of Los Angeles and founder and director of the nonprofit educational organization Tibyaan (<http://www.tibyaan.org>).

In 2017 he delivered the opening prayer at the Democratic National Committee's national winter conference.



ZAINEB A. HUSSEIN STARTED AS MICHIGAN Department of State deputy chief of staff on Feb. 10, upon being appointed by Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.

Hussein, previously the deputy director of external affairs for Wayne County, served more than 1.7 million people in the 43 communities that make up Michigan's most populous — and the nation's 19th most populous — county. In this capacity, she directed diversity, inclusion and equity work; led planning efforts for the 2020 Census; and oversaw strategy and activities to support immigrants, refugees and minority communities.

Her previous experience includes working in the Michigan Department of Human Services, State Senate District 5 and the City of Dearborn Heights. She currently serves on the Michigan Health Endowment Fund and eMgage boards, and previously on the board of the League of Women Voters. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer appointed her to the 2020 Census statewide Complete Count Committee.

Hussein holds a bachelor's degree in history and political science (University of Michigan) and a master's degree in counseling (Spring Arbor University).



SAMIA NASEEM, A MEMBER OF THE NEW YORK BAR ASSOCIATION WHO TOOK HER OATH as immigration judge in Dec. 2019, is now a Chicago immigration court judge.

Naseem (BA, Simmons College, 2001), obtained her juris doctor from the George Washington University Law School ('04), where she was a Thurgood Marshall Scholar.

Naseem also studied international human rights and refugee law at Oxford University (2002). Based on her academic performance, she was inducted into Phi Delta Phi, the international legal co-ed honors fraternity, and later elected its president. During her term, Naseem had the privilege of inducting Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, also a member of the fraternity, as an honorary member of the George Washington University chapter.

Naseem has a very impressive professional record: assistant chief counsel for the Office of the Chief Counsel, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, in New York City and Chicago (2010-19); a trial attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. (2007-10); an attorney at the law offices of Khalid Naseem in Boylston, Mass. (2005-07); and a law clerk for Judge Judith N. Macaluso in Washington, D.C. (2004-05).

Her parents Khalid and Homaira Naseem, who have lived in Massachusetts since 1985, came from India as graduate students in 1978. Khalid practices law. Homaira, a plastics engineer who has been involved in several nonprofit organizations, is a member of the Boylston, Mass., planning board and was a national delegate for Sen. Sanders in 2016. *ih*



WALEED KHAN, A SENIOR IN THE MODESTO (Calif.) High International Baccalaureate program, scored a perfect 2400 on the SAT test, the first time counselors can recall anyone doing so in Modesto.

Waleed, who plans to follow his parents' career path in medicine, wedged in study time between Mock Trial practice, Key Club community service projects, volunteering at a local hospital, speech and debate meets, Project Hope fundraising to build a school in Africa, PHAST (Protecting Health and Slamming Tobacco) anti-tobacco projects and cross country and track runs.

The November 2019 test was his third stab at the SAT, besting a previous score of 2240 — an impressive achievement in its own right. The SAT benchmark score for showing college readiness is 1550. With his heart set on Stanford, where he found that 25 percent of its students scored 2400, Waleed pursued his goal with total dedication. *ih*



▲ Nasir Saleem, center, gets his badges

NASIR SALEEM, WHO HAS VOLUNTEERED with the New York Police Department since 1991, was appointed deputy chief its 5,000-strong volunteer force — the first Muslim to be installed as a potential head, reported Newsweek Pakistan on Jan. 30.

In a Twitter posting, Chief Fausto Pichardo said: "Our NYPD Auxiliary officers serve this city day in and day out, in all types of weather, and in every community—and it's all volunteer work! Congrats to Nasir Saleem on his promotion as the first Muslim Auxiliary Deputy Chief. His 28 years and 14k hours does not go unnoticed."

Auxiliary police officers, who are trained to observe and report conditions requiring police intervention, help out in non-enforcement and non-hazardous duties and with uniformed patrols by providing traffic and crowd control, as well as other services, during major events. New York has the nation's largest auxiliary police program.

Saleem was inducted into his new assignment at a simple ceremony attended by senior police officials. Fellow Muslim American police officers Capt. Adeel Rana and Lt. Zaigham Abbas pinned the badges on his uniform. *ih*

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# AN INDIAN GENOCIDE IN THE MAKING

**Can India still be considered a secular democracy?**

BY ASLAM ABDULLAH

**A** DAY BEFORE PRESIDENT TRUMP's 36-hour visit to India in February, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) members belonging to the Hindu paramilitary organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; founded in 1925) attacked Muslim businesses and houses in northeastern New Delhi. By Feb. 26 they had killed some 38 people, mostly Muslims, burnt houses and a mosque.

This number would increase, as the seriously injured aren't receiving adequate treatment in hospitals often staffed by pro-RSS doctors. This is the worst attack on Muslims seen in New Delhi since independence (1947) and the second deadliest since 2002, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi, known to many as the "Butcher-in-Chief," was chief minister of Gujarat state.

In 2002 he and Amit Shah (now federal home [interior] minister) teamed up to supervise the killing of 2,000 Muslims—some say more than that. Consequently Modi, now a favored buyer of our “beautiful weapons,” was barred from visiting the U.S.

The world has reacted with shock and horror to this latest wave of killings. Democratic presidential aspirants Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-N.H.) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) condemned it, and Sanders questioned Trump’s wisdom of praising Modi, a hatemonger, while in India.

Hailing Modi as a champion of “religious freedom,” Trump refused to condemn the law introduced by his host’s government that sparked the protests and opens the door to second-class citizenship for India’s 200 million Muslims. “I don’t want to discuss that,” he told a reporter. “I want to leave that to India, and hopefully they’re going to make the right decision for the people.”

In fact, Trump declared that India is the U.S.’s “premier defense partner” [read buyer of his “beautiful weapons”] and that the two countries are “firmly united” in their “iron clad resolve” to defend their citizens against terrorism (<https://time.com/5790831>).

The U.S. State Department has raised concerns over India’s deteriorating law and order situation and advised American citizens on March 8 to avoid visiting areas where Muslims are being killed. Michelle Bachelet, UN high commissioner for human rights, also voiced “great concern” over India’s amended citizenship law and reports of “police inaction” (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific>) in the face of communal attacks in New Delhi.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation — usually aloof to Muslim issues—in its Feb. 27 statement urged India to stop anti-Muslim violence and “condemns the recent and alarming violence against Muslims in India, resulting in the death and injury of innocent people and the arson and vandalism of mosques and Muslim-owned properties” (<https://www.oic-oci.org/home/?lan=en>).

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan hit out against the massacres on Feb. 27, saying that “India right now has become a country where massacres are widespread. What massacres? Massacres of Muslims. By who? Hindus.” He accused anti-Muslim mobs of hurting children studying in private



▲ The aftermath of anti-Muslim rioting in New Delhi

## THIS VIOLENCE IS ROOTED IN THE FASCIST HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY THAT BELIEVES IN A HINDU-ONLY INDIA — A GOAL IT WANTS TO ACHIEVE BY 2025. THE RSS PROMOTES THIS IDEA AND SAYS THAT ANY MUSLIMS ALLOWED TO REMAIN CAN ONLY BE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS.

tuition centers with “metal sticks as if to kill” them, adding, “How will these people make global peace possible? It is impossible. When making speeches — since they have a large population — they say ‘we are strong’ but that is not strength” (<https://www.ndtv.com>).

India’s external affairs ministry routinely rejects such proclamations as irresponsible and “interference” in the country’s internal affairs, as well as the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s Feb. 26 statement that “the ongoing violence we are witnessing in Delhi and the reported attacks against Muslims, their homes and shops, and their houses of worship are greatly disturbing. One of the essential duties of any responsible government is to provide protection and physical security for its citizens, regardless of faith” (<https://www.uscirf.gov>).

Ironically, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) itself interferes in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan because India accuses them — without any evidence — of “persecuting” Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians and grants them the right to resettle in India.

Among the riot victims was a police officer. Violent mobs carrying Hindu religious flags, chanting *Jai Shri Ram* (Glory to Ram) and hailing Modi went to Muslim areas to violently remove women protesting the CAA. Women of all faiths have been protesting at hundreds of sites since its Dec. 15, 2019, promulgation. The police are either spectators or supporters; several videos show them throwing rocks or shouting Hindu religious slogans.

On Feb. 25 the RSS-directed mob torched a mosque in New Delhi’s Ashok Nagar neighborhood after raising the Hindu flag on its minaret. Is this an individual incident of violence, as Trump claimed, the beginning of a civil war or a resumption of the Partition’s horrendous anti-Muslim violence?

Violence against Muslims peaked in 2002 when Muslimahs were burned alive and children were thrown into the fires. The answer may not come quickly, for the violence could take different forms. Moreover, not only do the police seem to be pro-BJP, especially in BJP-governed states, but the bureaucracy has an overwhelming majority of RSS members and the judiciary is slowly becoming a government mouthpiece.

People living in a democracy have the constitutional right to protest. The women’s peaceful anti-CAA protest, which began last December in Shaheen Bagh, a neighborhood in New Delhi’s southernmost Okhla area, soon spread further afield.

The RSS and BJP have resorted to calling protestors “anti-national” and “traitors” and even suggest that they “do not belong to India.” Ajit Shah equates them with “anti-national elements.” Modi calls them as “people recognizable by their dress” and other cabinet ministers refer to them “Pakistani agents.”

Kapil Mishra, the BJP New Delhi leader who lost his assembly seat in the 2019 elections, has invented a new slogan — “shoot the traitors.” His party has officially endorsed it. Chanting it has led some of his party workers to attack protesters in heavily



▲ The Economist said it all

Muslim-populated localities. A day before the current wave of violence, he warned that party members would forcibly remove those protesters who didn't abandon their homes after Trump's visit. However, they began carrying out their threat while the Trumps were enjoying their visit to the Taj Mahal — an ivory-white marble mausoleum commissioned in 1632 by the Muslim Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to house the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal, his favorite wife.

This violence is rooted in the fascist Hindutva ideology that believes in a Hindu-only India — a goal it wants to achieve by 2025. The RSS promotes this idea and says that any Muslims allowed to remain can only be second-class citizens. Its millions of members make it the world's largest paramilitary organization, and its political wing, the BJP, now controls the federal government and 14 of India's 28 states.

Many believe that this latest wave of violence is part of a pogrom. The BJP first tested this plan in 2002 when Modi, who the Seattle City Council called the "Butcher of Gujarat" (<https://sikhsiyasat.net>), was ruling the state. Under his supervision, terrorists killed thousands of Muslims and destroyed property worth millions of dollars. During 2017, party hooligans uprooted thousands of Muslims living in Uttar Pradesh.

People fear that a nationwide anti-Muslim campaign may be in the works. *ih*

Dr. Aslam Abdullah, a resident scholar at Islamicity.org, is a Muslim American activist who visited India early this year and witnessed violence against the people. He has served as director of several Islamic centers and as editor-in-chief of the erstwhile Minaret magazine.

## The Women of Shaheen Bagh Challenge Hindu Fascism

**T**HE WOMAN-LED MOVEMENT launched in Shaheen Bagh to protect India's constitutionally guaranteed secular and plural structure is unique in Muslim — maybe even in the world's — history.

No one would have thought that those living on their community's margins could ever transform millions of usually passive spectators into activists worldwide.

This movement is feminism at its best — resistance at its peak, a revolution with far-reaching consequences for Muslims everywhere. It is no exaggeration to foresee a future where every women-led movement will feel its impact.

Starting off as a protest against the notorious CAA passed by the BJP government last December, the longest-running protests soon became a movement to protect the constitution and then a revolution with which every law-abiding, secular and democratic Indian wants to identify. It has drawn crowds in the millions nationwide and led several state assemblies to pass resolutions against the CAA. It has brought secularists and democrats onto one platform and exposed the fascists who envision a *Hindutva Rashtra*.

RSS founder Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), who was deeply influenced by Hitler, propounded Hindutva's three essentials: a common nation (*rashtra*), a common race (*jati*) and a common culture or civilization (*sanskriti*). This echoes the Nazi slogan of *Ein Volk - Ein Reich - Ein Führer* (One People - One Country - One Leader).

Most of the Shaheen Bagh women are average Muslimahs from various middle-income strata who have no ties to any political party, religious sect or institution. Most of them grew up in a very restrictive environment. Not always allowed to enter mosques and Islamic centers, they had little chance to listen to sermons. Even if they were allowed, the speakers might have told them that their place is at home, or that they must serve their husbands or could not speak in front of men.

And so they learned about their world

through the Internet, joining WhatsApp groups of sisters or through various news sources. Despite this encompassing male suppression and marginalization, they unleashed their anger upon seeing their children beaten mercilessly by the New Delhi police on Dec. 15, 2019, at the Jamia Millia Islamia. Their outrage, which caused them to

launch protests against such brutality, gradually evolved into a movement to protect the constitution as many women — not all of them Muslim — began to respond by following their example.

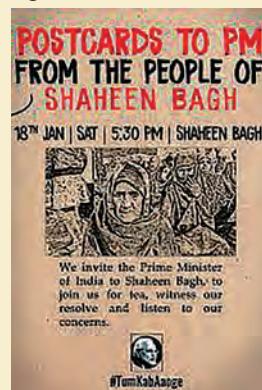
Today, women have taken to the streets in hundreds of cities, braving harsh winter weather and vulgar attacks on their integrity and character. Fascist BJP leaders are calling them "Pakistani agents," "terrorists" and "traitors" — even "whores." And yet, these hijab- or niqab-wearing women have retained their dignity. Even after 70 days (as of the writing of this article), they continue to stand their ground and maintain their initial enthusiasm.

India's male-dominated Supreme Court has failed to capture the movement's essence and thus is trying to reduce its importance by declaring it a "dispute over a road closure." The 1,000 sq. ft. space they have occupied in Shaheen Bagh — not the constitution — has become its priority.

These women don't trust the BJP government, which, they assert, consists of fascists and liars. They believe that the ruling party is using its majority to change India's ethos, that religion doesn't determine citizenship and that people have a right to live with dignity in their homeland.

These women have shown the world that despite obstacles and impediments, people can rise and peacefully engender change. Their discipline, responsibility and dedication have created a role model for the world's women. Hopefully they will inspire all Muslimahs to defend human dignity and pluralism so that no one will feel excluded.

On March 23, police using bulldozers broke up the protest, citing a ban on public gatherings because of the coronavirus pandemic. *ih*



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# Hindutva: Coming Soon to a Neighbourhood Near You

Do countries fawning over India because of its market size realize that its rising Hindu fascism endangers peace and stability outside its own region?

BY MOHAMED NAWAB BIN MOHAMED OSMAN



▲ An armed Hindu mob hits a Muslim

**T**HE RECENT SPATE OF VIOLENCE against India's Muslims has captured the world's attention. Following months of peaceful protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), riots in New Delhi killed more than 53 people — most of them Muslim (Economic Times, March 5, 2020). The government's refusal to quell the rampage caused these deaths. Authorities have generally stood by and even participated in such events. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home [Interior] Minister Amit Shah have yet to visit the riot-hit areas.

## THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE HATE

Since attaining power in 2014, the Modi regime has enacted a series of policies targeting Muslims. While serving as chief minister of his home state of Gujarat (2001-2014), he quietly sanctioned a months-long period of anti-Muslim violence that resulted in 2,000+ fatalities, the overwhelming majority of

whom were Muslims (Rana Ayyub, "Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up" ([2016]). As a result of his complicity, Modi was banned from the U.S. [on the recommendation of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which Obama abrogated in May 2014] and Britain for nearly a decade.

Devoid of any serious policies and having presided over some of the worst economic policies in recent times, the Modi government used the politics of hate to mobilize support in the 2019 Indian elections, which he won by an even larger margin (Washington Post, Oct. 26, 2019). Since then, Modi has pursued a number of anti-Muslim policies, from revoking Jammu and Kashmir's constitutionally enshrined autonomy to the controversial CAA that will render over 200 million — primarily Muslim — people, stateless. For many, the CAA has been regarded as a step too far, a sinister act designed to strip Muslims of their citizenship. This amendment has led to the current protests.

Modi and many members of his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; <https://www.facebook.com/BJP4India>) are members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; <http://rss.org>). Formed in 1925 and patterned after the Nazis, the movement has sought to establish Hindutva (Hindu nation) (Walter Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, "Messengers of Hindu Nationalism," 2019). They entered politics while inaugurating a series of socialization processes, among them establishing schools, operating children's camps and running anti-Muslim campaigns. An example of the latter is its anti-“Love Jihad” campaign to defeat the alleged practice of Muslim men “seducing” Hindu girls in order to convert them. For the RSS and Hindu nationalists, Hindutva can exist in its pure form only if a new set of laws are augmented, which makes Muslims second-class citizens and deprives them of certain Hindu-only privileges.

## HINDUTVA COMES TO AMERICA

I saw Hindu nationalists at work here while attending a teach-in session on citizenship and population in India on March 1, 2020, which discussed India's Citizenship Amendment bill in Austin, Texas. The event featured two historians, a sociologist, a lawyer and other academics from the University of Texas-Austin. These four scholars explained the CAA from historical, political, legal and sociological perspectives. Unfortunately, a group of Hindu nationalists repeatedly disrupted this intellectual discourse. An earlier event that had been held in January 2020 was transformed into a shouting match.

In anticipation, the organizers of the event that I attended had called in the police. If not for the police officer's presence, there would have been complete mayhem. But the Hindu nationalists nevertheless interrupted and heckled the speakers.

Many such people work for big technology companies. Yet not only do they espouse hate and justify these killings, they also contest the number of Muslims killed in the New Delhi pogrom. One of them claimed that Muslims had killed, raped and looted Hindus for centuries. Perhaps even more disturbing was that one of them had brought his 11-year son to hear the protestors' message of hate.

After the event, the boy spoke to one of the speakers and openly chastised her for being anti-Hindu.

I have spent the last two years researching the rise of Hindu extremism in India. My fieldwork in that country has consisted of interviewing members of the RSS, the BJP and other nationalist groups collectively known as the Sangh Parivar (<http://sangh-parivar.org>). I have been struck by their attempt to justify their hatred by a range of dubious claims, such as the Muslims' plan to make India an Islamic state — Ghazwa-e-Hind — through an alleged prophecy of an end times battle between the two groups.

While the message of hate is more overt in India, especially after BJP's second electoral victory in 2019, Hindu nationalists work in a more sophisticated manner outside of India.

In the U.S., their activities are fronted by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS; <https://www.hssus.org>), which was founded by Hindu nationalists in Kenya during the 1940s. It now has chapters in more than 40 countries; its largest one is in the U.S. (Christophe Jaffrelot and Ingrid Therwath, "The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West," *International Political Sociology*, vol 1, no. 3 [Sept. 2007]).

A similar organization, known as the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP; [www.ofbjp.org](http://www.ofbjp.org)), strives to improve the BJP's image in the U.S., lobbies popular negative opinions of Indian Muslims and seeks closer ties between the U.S. and the BJP government. The extent of Hindu nationalism's influence is reflected in the fact that presidential candidate Joe Biden's Muslim outreach coordinator is Amit Jani — a Hindu nationalist whose late father, Suresh, was a OFBJP co-founder and had hosted Modi at their New Jersey home in 1993.

#### **"HINDUOPHOBIA" IN NORTH AMERICA**

Jasmin Zine, a leading scholar on Islamophobia in North America, has highlighted the "liberal washing" of White



## **IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE WORLD UNDERSTANDS AND REALIZES THAT THE RISE OF HINDU NATIONALISM IN INDIA AND THE RABID ANTI-MUSLIM HATE PROMOTED BY THE BJP GOVERNMENT HAS SPREAD BEYOND INDIA. ITS TENTACLES, WHICH PROMOTE THE SAME KIND OF HATE, ARE NOW ACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA.**

nationalism, which disguises politically camouflaged xenophobic, Islamophobic and racist notions under the veneer of liberal discourse, such as "protecting democracy," "freedom" and the "rule of law," from what are regarded as illiberal, anti-modern and anti-democratic minorities (<http://theconversation.com>, April 2, 2019).

In this regard, the Hindu nationalist narrative doesn't differ very much from the anti-Muslim one: Islamists are "infiltrating" society, seek to "impose" sharia law in India and thus destroy its secular nature. Any criticism against the Modi government's policies is dubbed "Hinduophobia," a term increasingly employed by Hindu nationalists outside of India.

#### **THE FRONTIER OF HINDUTVA EXPANDS**

In my own region of Southeast Asia, Hindu nationalists can be found within Indian expatriate communities. In Malaysia and

Indonesia they have formed organizations, such as the OFBJP, which organize cultural activities and largely avoid politics. Interviews conducted with members of these groups, however, reveal that many of them agree with their Islamophobic compatriots in India. In countries like Thailand, members of the Friends of BJP openly espouse anti-Muslim sentiments on their social media platforms.

One worrying trend in Southeast Asia is the massive reach of Indian television channels. Mainstream Indian media are pursuing an agenda that presents Muslims as backward, uneducated and anti-national or disloyal to India. Zee News, a news outlet known for pushing the BJP agenda, hosts "Fatah ka Fatwa," a weekly debate show featuring Tarek Fatah, the Canadian self-acclaimed expert on Islam — one of the most virulent voices promoting Islamophobia in Canada (<https://scroll.in>, Jan. 2, 2017).

Considering that region's sizable Indian population, the potential impact of this highly poisonous anti-Muslim discourse can negatively alter the social fabric of multi-religious societies that have existed in peace and harmony.

It's important that the world understands and realizes that the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the rabid anti-Muslim hate promoted by the BJP government has spread beyond India. Its tentacles, which promote the same kind of hate, are now active in North America and Southeast Asia. Clearly, those who believe in religious harmony and coexistence must counter its messengers.

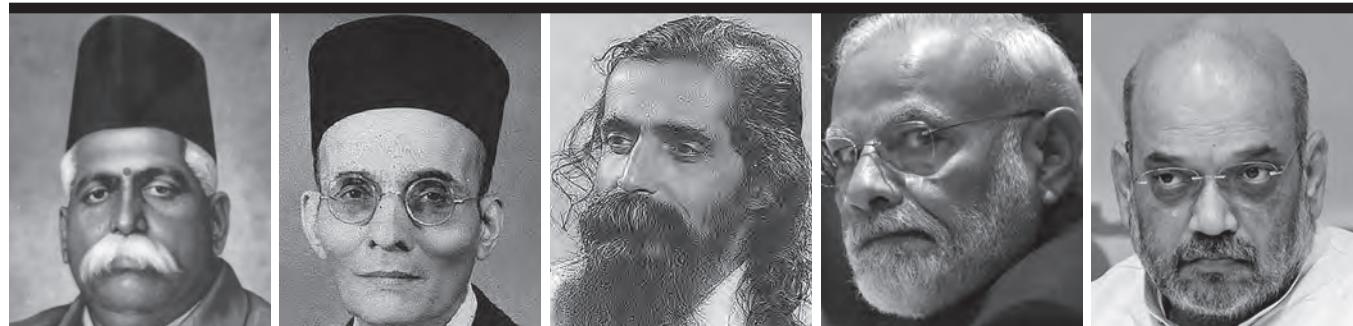
Gideon Rachman, writing in *The Financial Times* on Nov. 11, 2019, aptly warns, "The West's fear of China means that it is likely to continue to give Modi's India a free pass for some time. But a failure to talk openly about the failings of the Modi model is not cost-free. The danger is that the West is embracing a comforting illusion — that democratic India will act as an ideological bulwark against authoritarian China. The reality is that India's slide into illiberalism may actually be strengthening the global trend towards authoritarianism." *ih*

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# The Logic Behind the Kashmir Lockdown

## Another step toward Hindutva's longed-for Hindu-only India

BY ANUBHAV SINGH



▲ K. B. Hegdekar

▲ V. D. Savarkar

▲ M. S. Golwalkar

▲ Narendra Modi

▲ Amit Shah

**T**HE ERASURE OF KASHMIR'S STATEHOOD AND THE UNPRECEDENTED information lockdown effected on Aug. 5, 2019 [which continues as this magazine goes to print], the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA), the denial of citizenship rights to almost 2 million people in Assam based on the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and the Indian Supreme Court's Nov. 9, 2019 Babri Masjid verdict are only few of an alarming sequence of events that signify democracy's dimming future in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's India, currently ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

More than 50 primarily Muslim individuals died in the March 2020 riots in northeastern New Delhi sparked by BJP leaders Kapil Mishra, Deputy Finance Minister Anurag Thakur, BJP parliamentary member Parvesh Verma and State Assembly member Abhay Verma's incendiary speeches.

The riots are another link in the chain of events signalling India's relentless descent into an ethnic state where, theoretically, Muslim Indians continue to enjoy constitutional and legal rights similar to the Hindu majority, but in a state whose structures are ethnically dominated by majorly upper caste (*savarna*) Hindus with a very specific Hindu worldview.

To many outside observers, the erosion of India's democratic and constitutional values seems surprising. Due to its long-standing status as "the world's largest democracy," the country has been considered a beacon of secular and democratic values in a region tormented by communal and sectarian violence. However, almost 70 years after independence, Muslim Indians, having been assured of a "secular" state by its founders, now find themselves fighting a battle for survival in which no political party, whether "secular" or "communal," has sought to draw them into the national political, social and economic mainstream.

Muslims and Dalits ("untouchables") still exist at the margins of India's democratic institutions, and upper caste Hindus dominate the administration, police and military cadres. After the Hindu vote was consolidated in 2014, Muslims began vanishing from the Lok Sabha (the Upper House) and state assemblies. While the

Indian state's character has been majoritarian for almost its entire existence, the current regime is now facing a crisis of legitimacy as it actively seeks to socially, politically and economically marginalize its most disempowered citizens.

To understand why this is the case, we must understand the driving ideology and the organization behind them — Hindutva and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP's ideological parents.

K. B. Hegdekar founded the RSS in 1925 to "organize the entire Hindu society from Kanyakumari [southernmost tip] to the Himalayas [northernmost tip]." He developed the *shakha* (local branches) model, where uniformed volunteers would be given physical and ideological training. The RSS's immediate inspiration were Mussolini's Brown Shirts, and its ideology came from V. D. Savarkar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin who devised the idea of Hindutva (pure Hinduism).

Savarkar's seminal "Hindutva: Who's a Hindu" [originally "Essentials of Hindutva," 1923], identified Muslims, *not* the British colonial rulers, as the Hindus' main enemy. He viewed Muslims as a close-knit community having a pan-Islamic, instead of a nationalist vision, and thus a danger to what he conceived as the real nation — a *Hindu Rashtra*.

This particular concept was derived from the European Westphalian nation-state system and defined mainly along ethnic lines. For Savarkar, Hinduism was just one attribute of "Hinduness," where "Hindu" was essentially a national identity comprising territorial, racial, geographical and cultural attributes. According to him, Hindus were the descendants of the Aryans who had settled between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean at the dawn of history.

This was his *Hindustan* — an all-Hindu land defined by a common culture, rituals, social rules, mores and language. Viewing Sanskrit as "a language par excellence" and a reference point for all Indian languages, he demanded that either it or Hindi, its close cousin, be proclaimed the "national language."

Hindustan's minorities, namely, Muslims and Christians, were the threatening "Others," for Hindustan was their *Pritubhumi*

(Fatherland) but not their *Punyabhumi* (Holy Land). They were parts of the Hindu race who had been forcibly converted into non-Hindus and could only be reintegrated into the Hindu fold by paying allegiance to Hindu culture and recognizing Hindustan as their Holy Land. These Hindutva tenets were made more rigid by M. S. Golwalkar, who went on to label all non-Hindus and those who didn't subscribe to the "social laws of the Hindu religion and culture" as Dalits (*mlecchas*: an ancient Sanskrit term for foreigners or barbarians [i.e., non-Aryans]). Such people have always existed on the caste system's fringes.

## **THE RSS HAS CONSISTENTLY OPPOSED THE AUTONOMY GRANTED TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR BY ARTICLE 370 OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION AS A CONDITION OF ITS "ACCESSION" TO INDIA, WHEN IT INVADED AND OCCUPIED THE PRINCELY STATE IN 1947.**

Taking inspiration from Hitler, Golwalkar further emphasized the primacy of race as the driving factor behind nationhood and labelled Muslims "foreign bodies" lodged in Hindu society. He proclaimed, "To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic Races — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for use in Hindusthan to learn and profit by" ("Our Nationhood Defined", Bharat Publications, Nagpur India, 1939, p.35).

The Hindu nation's other enemies, as envisioned by Golwalkar, were Christians and communists. Dr. Gyanendra Pandey (Arts and Sciences Distinguished professor; director, Interdisciplinary Workshop on Colonial and Postcolonial Studies at Emory University) characterizes the idea of a Hindu nation as "upper caste racism" ("A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States," 2015).

Modi and current Home Minister Amit Shah, both lifelong RSS members, belong to this school of thought.

The process of constructing this upper caste hegemony in the name of the envisaged Hindu Rashtra is being achieved through legalism and vigilantism by active state participation. The country has become a de jure Hindu Rashtra via legal and constitutional means to imprint the state's majoritarian character on the Muslim mind, despite being officially secular in nature. Thus, Kashmir's statehood has been erased on the pretext of securing India's borders from external enemies (Pakistan) while cracking down on Kashmiri Muslims, who are accused of harboring pro-Pakistan secessionist tendencies.

Savarkar envisioned such a territorial integration of the Hindu Rashtra. The RSS has consistently opposed the autonomy granted to Jammu and Kashmir by article 370 of the Indian constitution as a

condition of its "accession" to India, when it invaded and occupied the princely state in 1947.

The passage of the CAA, which together with the planned NRC threatens to deprive Indian Muslims of their citizenship, is just an extension of Hindutva's racial attribute of citizenship, which does not recognize Muslims, Christians and Dalits as citizens.

Despite recognizing that the Dec. 6, 1992 demolition of the 660-year old Babri Masjid (by the RSS mobilized Hindu militants) as an illegal act, the Supreme Court nevertheless awarded the land to a specifically government-created trust to build the Ram Mandir in its place.

The second means to relegate these two minorities to the fringes of India's society has been the activation of *Sangh Parivar*, non-state militias. Part of the RSS "family," these militias violently enforce such social "norms" as preventing marriages between Hindu women and Muslim men (dubbed "the Love Jihad"), inter-caste marriages between Dalit men and upper caste Hindu women, segregation in urban spaces to stop "Muslim occupation" of the land (dubbed "the Land Jihad") and preventing the slaughter of cows (cow protection), a movement that has led to the lynching of Muslims and Dalits across the country.

The last element is rather ironic, considering that Binay Singh's March 15, 2019, article in The Times of India (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>) quotes Seer Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati as stating: "This is the same Modi, who as a chief minister of Gujarat used to say painfully that his heart is burning to see cow slaughter in the country, but after becoming Prime Minister he made the India the biggest exporter of beef."

These militias' violent operations often enjoy state patronage and protection, for the police have remained rather unconcerned when mob attack such people.

# Relief Efforts in Kashmir and New Delhi



▲ IMRC executive director Manzoor Ghori (second right) supervised relief operations in Indian-occupied Kashmir

**M**USLIMS IN INDIA AND [INDIAN-OCCUPIED] Kashmir face an existential crisis under the Narendra Modi's Hindutva supremacist regime. The anti-Muslim pogrom in New Delhi afflicted an estimated \$34.65 billion loss to businesses and rendered hundreds of families who are now living in makeshift camps, homeless.

To help ease to their sufferings, the U.S.-based Indian Muslim Relief and Charities

(IMRC) sent its Emergency Response Teams to [Indian-occupied] Kashmir and New Delhi to assess the situation and subsequently provided immediate relief.

Since November 2019, IMRC has provided food packages and *pherans* (traditional Kashmiri jackets worn in winter) to nearly 3,000 families in Kashmir. Other relief projects suggested by local Kashmiri volunteers are underway.

In New Delhi, IMRC volunteers have distributed relief packages to more than 1,000 riot-affected families. The packages include rice, flour, a variety of lentils, spices, cooking oil, baby milk formula, salt, oats, sugar, tea, cookies, sanitary and personal hygiene supplies, and flip-flops.

IMRC is currently conducting a survey in the affected areas to rehabilitate the victimized families. *ih*

The construction of the Hindu Rashtra — institutionalizing upper caste hegemony in the state structures and enforcing Brahmanical Hinduism's social "norms" is indeed underway in India as the interests of the BJP government and its ideological parent, the RSS, converge and India moves rapidly away from its constitution's secular and democratic ideals.

Over the years, the RSS has grown into a Janus-faced organization with enough power to enforce its version of the law either through grassroots organization and social work or through violent means. Since 2014, the ostensibly democratic and secular Indian state has facilitated this transformation so that one wonders if the country still deserves its title as "the world's largest democracy."

Noting that it was Obama who had dignified ties with Modi, but that Trump has been taking them to colossal heights, Mumbai, India-based journalist Akanksha Singh, who covers politics and social justice and has written for the BBC and other international publications, aptly warned, "We in India are still in the early phases

of this terrifying regime, but if the world doesn't stand up and take notice soon, it will only get worse. India is very concerned about her image globally right now — it's the reason a wall was built to hide slums before Trump's visit."

She implored: "It's important for the president of the world's top superpower, as well as the candidates seeking to replace him, to condemn the ongoing hate crimes against Muslims as they unfold within the borders of an important ally and trading partner as it gains attention on the world stage" ("Democracy is dying in India, and Trump shouldn't be on Modi's side", CNN, March 22, 2020).

Although it is rather late in the day, it's time for those countries of the world that still value democracy to wake up and seek to end this new violent apartheid state being created in the name of democracy. *ih*

Anubhav Singh is a graduate student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston, Mass.

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# Toward a Muslim-free India

A majoritarian democratic setup has dismantled the citizenship rights of Muslim Indians

BY KAMAL QALAMKAR



▲ Aman Wadud

**A**PANEL OF EXPERTS CONVENED ON March 4 by the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF; <https://www.uscirf.gov>), stated that India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) could disenfranchise the country's 200 million Muslims. This panel, which advises the State Department, Congress and the White House, met to help Washington develop policy recommendations in response to the issues this new law is spawning.

The CAA, passed by the Lok Sabha (Peoples Assembly, India's Lower House) in December 2019, offers citizenship to non-Muslim minorities, who India alleges are being "persecuted" in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Its enactment has led to nationwide protests over fears that both it and a planned nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR) may marginalize Muslims.

The Indian government, which terms

CAA an "internal matter," says it seeks to "protect" the "oppressed" minorities [Hindus] in neighboring countries. The NRC — a register containing the details of Indian citizens living inside and outside India — requires them to prove that they came to Assam by March 24, 1971, the day before neighboring East Pakistan declared "independence" from Pakistan [finally becoming Bangladesh after India's invasion and Pakistan's surrender on Dec. 16, 1971].

## FACTSHEET INDIA

USCIRF's Legislation Factsheet on India (Feb. 2020; <https://www.uscirf.gov/countries/india>) noted, "There are serious concerns that the CAA serves as a protective measure for non-Muslims in case of exclusion from a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC) — a proposed list of all Indian citizens. This purpose is evident from BJP politicians' rhetoric. With the CAA in place, Muslims would primarily bear the punitive consequences of exclusion from

the NRC which could include 'statelessness, deportation, or prolonged detention,' according to three United Nations Special Rapporteurs."

The Factsheet also highlighted: "The CAA and NRC must also be understood in the context of the growing prominence of the BJP's Hindutva ideology. This ideological frame views India as a Hindu state (with its definition of Hinduism inclusive of Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs) and Islam as a foreign and invading religion. Hindutva political rhetoric questions the legitimacy of Muslims' Indian citizenship and perpetuates the further marginalization of this faith community. The BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP) Yogi Adityanath, for example, promised in 2005 to cleanse India of other religions, calling this the 'century of Hindutva.' A BJP member of the UP Legislative Assembly further argued in January 2018 that India will become a purely Hindu nation by 2024 and all Muslims who do not assimilate to Hindu culture will need to leave the country. This perspective renders Indian Muslims particularly vulnerable to exclusion from a nationwide NRC, regardless of their citizenship status."

## USCIRF HEARING

USCIRF chair Tony Perkins, president of the [conservative Christian] Family Research Council (FRC; <https://www.frc.org/about-frc>), noting that the right to a nationality is a fundamental human right that serves as a bedrock for accompanying political and civil rights, said that denying individuals this fundamental recognition not only strips them of accompanying rights, but also denies them the ability to participate in the political process and use legal pathways to seek redress for discrimination and persecution.

USCIRF Commissioner Anurima Bhargava, a civil rights lawyer who has served as chief of the Educational Opportunities Section of the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice, stated, "There are fears, however, that this law [CAA] in conjunction with a planned National Population Register and a potential nationwide National Register of Citizens, or NRC, could result in the wide-scale disenfranchisement of Indian Muslims."

"This would leave them vulnerable to prolonged detention, deportation, and violence. We are already seeing this process being conducted in the northeastern state

of Assam ... The NRC is a mechanism for identifying illegal migrants in the region."

She continued, "... it is with great dismay that we have seen a deadly crackdown by government authorities against the protesters and recent violence in Delhi [March 7] that have targeted Muslim communities."

USCIRF vice-chair Gayle Manchin, West Virginia's former secretary of education and the arts, cited examples from Vietnam, Bahrain, Kenya and other countries to stress that many governments are stripping people of their citizenship, in clear violation of international human rights standards, simply because of their faith.

Ashutosh Varshney (Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences, Brown University; director, Center for Contemporary South Asia) stressed that the CAA and NRC could render large numbers of Muslims stateless, even those who were born in India and, along with their ancestors, have lived there ever since. He said, "The fear is that if the existing Muslim citizens of India are unable to produce documents of Indian ancestry, which simply can't be ruled out until we know what documents are required, the NRC, using [the] CAA, can easily call them infiltrators."

This would, consequently, make them objects of internment or expulsion and/or deprive them of the right to vote. However, Hindus with a similar documentary deficit would not be interned, expelled or disenfranchised — they can simply claim they are welcome only in a Hindu homeland and persecuted elsewhere in South Asia, which opens the door for citizenship for them.

Azeem Ibrahim (director, Displacement and Migration Program, Center for Global Policy; former strategic policy advisor to Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan), who cautioned that Muslims' rights as Indian citizens are now under direct threat, reiterated Khan's talking points on both the CAA and the NRC. He added that these laws are not just an attack on the rights of refugees, but also a deliberate attempt to remove citizenship from those already living in India by misusing a revised census.

Aman Wadud, a human rights lawyer from Assam, told USCIRF that the NRC and CAA are not in India's interest because "The procedures followed are arbitrary and unfair, and will, as the Assam experience shows, result in the harassment, disenfranchisement and detention of the poor and the helpless." One-third of Assam's 32 million residents



▲ (l-r) Gary Bauer, Nadine Maenza, Tony Perkins, Gayle Manchin, Anurima Bhargava

## THE CAA AND NRC MUST ALSO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GROWING PROMINENCE OF THE BJP'S HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY. THIS IDEOLOGICAL FRAME VIEWS INDIA AS A HINDU STATE (WITH ITS DEFINITION OF HINDUISM INCLUSIVE OF BUDDHISTS, JAINS, AND SIKHS) AND ISLAM AS A FOREIGN AND INVADING RELIGION. HINDUTVA POLITICAL RHETORIC QUESTIONS THE LEGITIMACY OF MUSLIMS' INDIAN CITIZENSHIP AND PERPETUATES THE FURTHER MARGINALIZATION OF THIS FAITH COMMUNITY." — USCIRF LEGISLATION FACTSHEET ON INDIA

are Muslim, the second-highest number after Indian-occupied Muslim-majority Kashmir.

Amnesty International, which termed the NRC process in Assam "shoddy and lackadaisical," noted that more than 1.9 million people had been left out of its final list, which

was published on Aug. 31, 2019 ("Uncertain Destiny for Millions in Assam Post NRC," Aug. 31, 2019).

Registering its protest, Amnesty International India expressed "its deep concerns about the functioning of the 100 or more Foreigners Tribunals, which will decide whether those excluded from the NRC list are Indian citizens or not. Amnesty International India strongly urges the Assam Government to ensure that the Foreigners Tribunals function with utmost transparency and are in line with the fair trial standards guaranteed under national and international law."

USCIRF noted that many impoverished families found it difficult to present the necessary documents due to poor record keeping or illiteracy. And many individuals who had documents were excluded for minor inconsistencies, such as differences in a name's spelling. Those omitted from the list included Indian army veterans; individuals, especially women and children, whose relatives were included in the NRC using the same legacy documents; the nephew of former Indian president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed; and even the former Chief Minister of Assam Syeda Anwara Taimur. Excluded individuals were originally given until December 31, 2019, to appeal their citizenship status to one of the hundreds of Foreigners Tribunals, after which they face placement in detention camps and potential statelessness. These quasi-judicial bodies lack adequate oversight, transparency or an appeal process to challenge the decisions rendered.

The BBC stated that journalist Rohini Mohan analyzed more than 500 of these court judgments in one district and found that 82 percent of the people on trial had been declared foreigners, that more Muslims had been declared foreigners and that 78 percent of the orders were delivered without the accused even being heard. The police said they were "absconding," but Mohan found many of them still living in their villages and unaware that they had been declared foreigners ("Assam NRC: What next for 1.9 million 'stateless' Indians?" Aug. 31, 2019).

The laws' intent is transparent. After all, according to NDTV (<https://www.ndtv.com>, Sept. 12, 2019), Prime Minister Modi's government has built an exclusive detention center that can hold 3,000 detainees in Assam alone. *ih*

Kamal Qalamkar is a freelance writer.

# Exceptional Individuals with Dreams

## A decade of EID organizing festivities for children with disabilities

BY SARA SWETZOFF

**V**IRGINIA RESIDENT, RASHA Abulohom who has an MA in Special Education, wants a world where every Muslim child with disabilities — plus their parents, siblings, and other loved ones — can enjoy the spiritual benefits of the Eid celebration and prayer tailored to meet their special needs. After hearing glowing reviews of her annual event from friends in the Washington, D.C. area, I called Rasha on behalf of Islamic Horizons to learn more about her organization: Exceptional Individuals with Dreams (Special E.I.D.; <https://www.specialeid.org>).

**IH:** What was your original inspiration for the Eid event?

**RA:** My younger brother, who has autism, is my inspiration. Eleven years ago, while attending a large Eid celebration held at a park, I wanted my brother, who we always take everywhere, to experience a moon bounce for the first time. I knew standing in a long line would give him anxiety. Being familiar with accessibility and access, as well as a special educator, I asked the volunteer monitor if we could have easy access to go in briefly.

Many individuals with autism may not look like they have a disability to someone unfamiliar with autism. Some of the families, who hadn't heard what I'd said, started objecting. It hurt to have to explain myself that this kind of accommodation is part of my brother's disability rights. I remember telling the volunteer, "You know I can go to Six Flags and Kings Dominion, and he's accommodated because he has a disability, and it hurts that I'm in a Muslim space and I am made to feel guilty for asking."

To their credit, some of the families heard me and encouraged us to come back. But at that point I was emotionally discouraged. I convinced myself that he probably wouldn't have enjoyed it. But that was the point: I wanted him to have the experience. So that's where the idea for a special Eid came from; an event exclusively for children with special needs.

Individuals with special needs have the right to be included in everything. But not everything is accessible or accommodating to their needs. What would I want if I were to do my own event to meet the needs of the families and their children? I already knew many families would benefit — I work for Fairfax County, which has a lot of Muslims. So where are they, and where do they celebrate Eid? I wanted to reach them and bring them together.

**IH:** Since disabilities are diverse and society does not educate us



▲ *Rasha Abulohom and her brother Mohammed, who is autistic*

*about disability, can you explain more about the kids we are talking about?*

**RA:** The target audience — and I put this on the flyer every year — is kids with intellectual disabilities, autism, Down syndrome, physical disabilities, visually impaired and cerebral palsy. Of course it's not limited to these disabilities, but these are the ones that I mention by name to encourage families. To serve families better, on the registration form I ask about any behavioral needs that the caretaker might be concerned about and how we can support them.

**IH:** What were your first steps in planning the event and getting the support you needed to make it a success?

**RA:** I contacted the Muslim American Society (MAS; <https://www.muslim-americansociety.org>). At that time I was one of their community service volunteers; later on I became a youth director. The president of the Washington, D.C., chapter said, "You can have the whole center. We can give you the space, so go

from there." Knowing that I had the larger community's support and the venue encouraged me the most.

As I didn't want the event to be affiliated with just one place, I reached out to other mosques and Muslim organizations, such as Islamic Relief, who were excited to support the initiative. I wanted families to feel like their mosque was a stakeholder and endorsed its importance. After the first couple of events, more mosques offered support.

**IH:** So what is the turnout for the annual Eid celebration event?

**RA:** I limit it to 50 children, because making it too big defeats the purpose. Some kids and families have been coming for some years. Sometimes new ones show up.

The first event was designed to test the waters, so I sought to avoid overcrowding by not allowing [typically-abled] siblings to attend. I did include them the next year, however, because I wanted them to be aware of this celebration, to know that there are events for their siblings and that they can have fun too. I wanted them to know there are advantages to having a child or sibling with special needs, whether other people see it or not, that it's nothing to be ashamed of and that there are other families like theirs.

**IH:** How does your experience as a special educator shape the event and its activities?

**RA:** Working with my younger brother and as an education professional helps me know what works for most families. First, I

see what he likes and is interested in. Second, because I'm a teacher, I think of my students and their needs.

The event has both indoors and outdoors components. Inside the building are different activities such as arts and crafts, a sensory room, a calming area and each year I have a special activity such as making little cardboard Kaaba replicas, or sheep using cotton balls. Outside, in addition to the moonbounce there is a petting zoo, pony rides, a sandbox and water table for a sensory experience.

I also offer a photo booth and a resource table. I contact organizations and ask for their support. They either send materials or bring someone to talk about what they do, with their own table and pamphlets. Special dental clinics, therapeutic recreation centers, and so on — anything that benefits the parents.

## ...KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS KIDS WITHOUT DISABILITIES, BUT NOT ONLY FOR ACCESSIBILITY PURPOSES ..."

**IH:** Can you describe the spiritual component of the event?

**RA:** The reason why it's an Eid event is because we do the Eid prayer during the last part of the day. Families gather in the prayer room, we talk about Eid and its importance and then the imam talks about prayer. At that point I explain — from my perspective — the importance of teaching disabled kids about their religion. Not because they'll be held accountable for it, because, *subhan Allah* (Praise be to God), how can they be held accountable if they don't have the mindset to know the consequences, but because it's their right to know their religion to which religious community they belong.

So the point of the prayer is to tell parents that just because their kids aren't saying anything don't mean that they don't understand. I bring up my brother and we do a little prayer together. I demonstrate how to physically prompt children, how to show them the steps and their willingness to join with the group.

Then the imam announces that we're going to do two rakats. He explains that one can teach this to others by saying everything out loud during *dhikr* and *sujood*. So we have everyone line up and he does that. Volunteers stay, as needed, with the kids to make it easy for the parents by helping to prompt them through the steps.

We follow that with a mock hajj where we have a mini replica of the Kaaba, and the kids go around it with the imam. It's just for the sake of practice. Many families enjoy these activities.

**IH:** I appreciate your point that people with all kinds of disabilities deserve and enjoy spiritual lives.

**RA:** That's what I believe. My brother loves to listen to certain suras. And *subhan Allah*, I remember listening to those suras a lot when he was little. He was so young plus having special needs, so I didn't realize he was paying attention. But eventually I noticed that when I turned on recitation he would always request to listen to Surah al-Mu'minun (Chap. 23) in particular. After showing him the number, he remembered it. Now he opens the Quran app on his iPad, finds his favorite reciter by choosing the Sheikh's photo and then scrolls down to listen.

When he was younger, he loved the *adhan*. I never paid attention to its last phrases. But he would always say, right before its ends, "Allahu Akbar" and ask me to rewind it. So he's aware of when it begins and ends and, *subhan Allah*, he brought certain details to my attention.

The other aspect [of these kids' spiritual life] is community. Even if they don't realize it or understand it, they do belong to a community and should know that "these are my people." Thus the prayer is one of the most important things we do at the Eid event. We have had several non-Muslims attend the event, and *subhan Allah*, one non-Muslim family has been coming for about ten years so her son can participate, because she understands the value of feeling like you are part of a spiritual community.

**IH:** That's really beautiful that your event brings people from other faiths closer to Islam. Do you have any other thoughts on the values of accommodation and inclusion from an Islamic perspective?

**RA:** I'm not a scholar, so what I know is basically common knowledge. We are all God's creation. We all have a right to learn and to be given the opportunity to learn. It may seem challenging, but it is possible to provide accommodations to those who need them. As a teacher, I continue to learn about new accommodations that are available. Kids with special needs have the same rights as kids without disabilities. Accessible bathrooms, rails, visuals, reading materials ... all these things are important. You need to allocate the money for that, because then you are welcoming everyone.

**IH:** Is it true that this event is the only Eid celebration for disabled kids in the U.S.? I read that in a 2014 article.

**RA:** From my research, I think it is. Some people drive over two hours for the event. I have had other people from other states asked me to expand to their communities. One day I hope to have the opportunity and funding to expand to other states nationwide.

**IH:** Before we wrap up, is there anything else you want to add?

**RA:** Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "He who does not thank people, does not thank God" ("Sahih Muslim," hadith no. 1955). I truly thank MAS (<https://www.muslim-americansociety.org>) and Islamic Relief (<http://irusa.org>). They have been supporting this event from day one. Their support of Eid, the venue and other assistance has helped make this an annual success.

I also want to thank all the families that come and the volunteers who dedicate their time to help on the day of the event to ensure that Special E.I.D. is a day that the children with special needs feel like the VIPs they deserve to be.

Thanks to all their support, I was able to eventually launch an independent organization (Special E.I.D.) — an organization that is associated with bringing joy to those with special needs and able to provide parents with the resources to assist them, *insha' Allah*. I encourage other Islamic organizations to provide similar support to disability justice initiatives.

Please go to [https://4agc.com/donation\\_pages/44100c08-5149-48f0-8220-79ac80f0a84e](https://4agc.com/donation_pages/44100c08-5149-48f0-8220-79ac80f0a84e) and make a tax-deductible donation to Special E.I.D. 

Sara Swetzoff is a doctoral researcher at Howard University and mother to a DeafBlind child. Her family uses tactile sign language and large-print digital texts to meet their daughter's accessibility needs.

# Healing the World Through Spoken Word Performances

Using passionate poetry to vent one's frustrations and dreams

BY NOSHIN BOKTH

**A**MIDST THE INCESSANT STRIFE of life and war, we often turn to one another for respite. If we look closely, we can hear the soft cadence of compassion from sisters Kashmir Maryam and Aishah Alam, founders of the nonprofit The Strangers Poets Organization (<https://www.facebook.com/Thestrangersorg>).

Their illustrious spoken word performances have suffused our world with poetic justice.

The sisters, originally British Muslims, stand resolutely as pillars for social justice and community responsibility. Through this inimitable platform of spoken word poetry, they are working indefatigably to clear misconceptions about Islam, uphold human rights and empower Muslims worldwide.

Established in 2014, the organization's mission is "to make Muslims less strange in a world that is plagued with misconceptions about the religion of Islam." They strive to educate not only through poetry, but also through a myriad of creative aptitudes. As founder Aishah ruminated, the platform is centered around a profound and powerful discourse. Its essence comprises the urgent notions of peace and love, as opposed to confrontation, in a deeply Islamophobic atmosphere.

## MEET THE SISTERS

Aishah shared the concept for The Strangers with her sister after attending a CAIR event hosted by Cyrus McGoldrick, a lyrical artist of Iranian and Irish descent, on how Islamophobia is impacting Muslims. Inspired to employ her talents for a more noble cause, she came to realize that everyone has a role to play in battling Islamophobia. The beauty of humanity is reflected through our nuanced abilities and passions. Kashmir, who enthusiastically received her sister's idea, reminisces,



▲ Aishah Alam

"I was over the moon. It was the perfect way for us to funnel our passion for spoken word poetry while providing a platform for young Muslim writers."

Although both sisters celebrate the art of poetry and are spoken word performers, Aishah views herself as the organizer and Kashmir as the poet. While focusing on The Strangers and a myriad of other campaigns, Aishah took a hiatus to explore her next path. Now the mother of a baby girl, she remains an active founder of The Strangers Organization while pursuing her BSW in social work.

Kashmir, who is not only a mother and a spoken word artist, but also an active co-founder, works alongside her sister in hosting and organizing poetry slams. She also consults with Aishah on prospective projects and opportunities.

Her first book, "Nafsi: Jihad Upon My Self" (2016), is a collection of fervid Islamic poetry. She says that her second book, the self-help "A Muslim Woman's Manifesto"

(2020), is about "achieving phenomenal success in both worlds. It focuses on the meaning of success through the Islamic lens, and it discusses how we can achieve success in both worlds. It tackles many aspects of a Muslim woman's life."

Her extensive history with poetry began in high school, where teachers recognized her talent and encouraged her to perform at workshops and local slam competitions. Soon thereafter, she found opportunities on the international stage.

## GROWTH AND SUCCESS

Of course, launching such an innovative project comes with a few initial impediments. Some expressed qualms about their efforts. But despite working in an atmosphere where people refused to listen, The Strangers has earned its spurs. Over the years, they have hosted numerous events nationwide. One of their more distinguished events is their hosting of the ICNA convention's annual poetry slam, which invites the youth attendees to create and perform their theme-related poetry.

The Strangers is essentially an emblematic microphone for Muslim youth to amplify the voices of the oppressed through its various campaigns. For example, the organization sought to send an open letter to the Chinese embassy about the Muslim Uyghurs by encouraging the youth to submit all forms of creative expression to advocate for this persecuted minority. Through the years, they have collaborated with esteemed organizations like Burma TaskForce, Islamic Relief USA, Janaza project, and more recently, [saveuyghur.org](http://saveuyghur.org) and Justice for All (<https://www.jfaweb.org>).

Their creative flame has become a force for profound altruism and truth. And yet it doesn't end there, for The Strangers Organization, aside from being a society

of poets, includes two other branches. The first one focuses on spreading the message of Islam and imparting knowledge through diverse artistic initiatives, and the second one is the Mercy for Humanity charity.

Their projects are international in scope. Currently, they have sent resources to Venezuela for their on-the-ground people to distribute among the hard-pressed population. It seems as though a charitable disposition is a thread that binds this family, as their mother, Rukhsana Muneer, is the CEO of Mercy for Humanity (<https://www.facebook.com/Mercystrangers>).

### MAINTAINING FAITH AND MOTIVATION

As performers and founders of an organization whose essence is composed of Islamic values, spiritual discord is bound to arise. With inspiring candor, the sisters recounted how they cope with their inner tumult. They understand that being public performers



▲ Kashmir Maryam

alone. She is driven less by material gain and more by serving her community and Creator.

Essentially, the work of The Strangers is a work of activism. Communal responsibility was a critical part of both sisters' lives even before they established this nonprofit.

emphatically asserts that her voice is her God-given right. She says, "We believe that Muslim women must be heard, not because they are oppressed, but because we are empowered by Islam already. Therefore, it is an obligation upon us to shed light on our experiences because many Muslim male speakers/performers (even though they are well-intended) cannot truly explore our experiences in the same way that a Muslim woman can."

On stage and off stage, Aishah frequently muses about how she presents herself as a Muslim woman. From the volume of her words to the audacity of her attire, Muslim women are too often probed and discussed. Despite resistance and unsolicited advice, her journey on the stage has propelled her to engage in constant self-inquiry. What is the role of modesty in her life as a Muslim woman, and what message does she seek to impart with her poetry? This line of queries led her to one truth: "It is not liberating looking a certain way. It is liberating to do something for God and with a purpose."

### POETRY, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

Poetry has been a timeless reservoir of solace for restless hearts. An iambic way of uttering the harsh truths of life, it is effortlessly melodic without the aid of instruments — a "halal art," as Kashmir puts it. For her, the power of the spoken word is immeasurable. She says, "The most empowering thing is to be able to use only the voice as an instrument of change. There are no instruments needed. This is one of the most powerful things about spoken word to me."

But for both sisters, poetry is only the means because it is meant to stir your hearts so vigorously that your limbs feel agitated without action. In their chosen roles as poets, they are seeking to fulfill their divine duty of serving humanity and establishing justice. Through them, we are reminded that as an ummah, we must do more for one another. Without community, the Islamic ideals of peace will wither away. Instead of harmonious fellowship, we will hear obstreperous unrest. When asked what she envisions for the future of The Strangers, Kashmir gracefully answered, "A community of active Muslims who are empowered by their Muslim identity and who use it to revive the true Islamic spirit. To create torchbearers of Islam." *ih*

Noshin Bokth is a freelance writer, content editor and the North American regional editor at The Muslim Vibe.

**WE BELIEVE THAT MUSLIM WOMEN MUST BE HEARD, NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE OPPRESSED, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE EMPOWERED BY ISLAM ALREADY. THEREFORE, IT IS AN OBLIGATION UPON US TO SHED LIGHT ON OUR EXPERIENCES BECAUSE MANY MUSLIM MALE SPEAKERS/PERFORMERS (EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE WELL-INTENDED) CANNOT TRULY EXPLORE OUR EXPERIENCES IN THE SAME WAY THAT A MUSLIM WOMAN CAN."**

entails a deep responsibility, for if they are to be paragons of faith, then sincerity must permeate everything that they do.

Aishah describes the constant inward trepidation of sinking into the trap of stage life. As a performer, losing oneself in the spiral of accolades is all too easy. Thus she seeks to sustain a life of ceaseless introspection and to ground herself in the reality of her ephemeral existence. She says that reminding oneself of what is important, namely, one's relationship with God and of one's humanness, is vital. She is driven by the notion that our kinship with the creation is an echo of our connection with our Creator.

Kashmir is passionate about questioning the arrogance that pervades those in the public eye. To counteract this in her own life, her poetry urges her readers to call back to God, first as a reminder for herself and then for her audience. Praise is reserved for God

However, this platform gave them the means to funnel their passion into something greater. Kashmir declares, "Our activism is less about making our 'mark' and more about inviting non-Muslims and Muslims back to Islam. We use spoken word as a creative and engaging way of doing that."

### THE MUSLIM WOMAN'S VOICE

One of The Strangers' mission is to dispel misinterpretations about Islam. The mere existence of two Muslim women spoken word performers is enough to transmit tremors into the realms of bigots. Reticence and deference are the preferred outlooks for Muslim women. Yet Kashmir and Aishah are vociferous with their words, seizing the stage and cordially sharing it.

Although most people offered their support, some were cynical about their roles as women on stage. However, Kashmir



# Participation is Power

**Being counted helps our communities receive a fair portion of federal funds**

BY IMAM TALIB SHAREEF

**W**E ARE LIVING AT A CRITICAL moment, and the stakes for many in our community have never been higher. In many ways, 2020 will determine where this country is headed for the foreseeable future. Each of us has the power and the responsibility to make an impact. Starting with the census, 2020 will be an important year for our increased civic participation.

In March, all households in the U.S. received a mailed invitation to respond to the 2020 Census either online, by phone or by mail. Many people may have disregarded it as yet another piece of spam mail. Don't do this, because not only is it stated on the envelope that "Your response is required by law," but filling it out and returning it is both relevant and essential to ensuring that you are included.

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts a constitutionally mandated count of every person living in the country. Regardless of where they are from, why they are here and their immigration status, including temporary workers, international students and workers on assignment from overseas, everyone is counted. Again, I repeat, the census is a count of *people*, not

a count of *citizens*, and no citizenship question will be asked.

What many people may not realize is that their participation translates into our communities receiving the resources and representation they need and deserve. An estimated \$675 billion a year in federal funding for the next 10 years is on the line.

**WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THE CENSUS IS IN THE CONSTITUTION BECAUSE THIS COUNTRY BELONGS TO US, THE PEOPLE, AND NOT TO WHOEVER IS IN POWER AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT OR TO SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS.**

The census determines how this money will be allocated to states and communities for housing, roads, food assistance, health care and other vital social services annually, as well as for such critical public services as schools and healthcare facilities, police, fire and emergency services.

In addition, the 2020 Census will determine congressional seats and state legislative redistricting, local school district boundaries, school board members and every level of political power. States that grow rapidly can gain congressional seats, while those that fail to keep pace can lose seats. Businesses will also use this demographic data to plan new investments and create jobs across the county.

As you can see, money and political power are at stake.

The data also helps us understand and research our own communities better. If we have accurate data, we can calculate what percentage of them may be impacted by certain diseases or health issues. In short, we need a denominator, a number by which we can divide. This information will empower us to apply for federal funding to help address the challenges that all communities face.

As the census rolls out over the next few months, you will continue to see community leaders, advocacy organizations, nonprofits and religious leaders like myself encourage all of their members to participate. Since there is a concern that adequate funds have not been allocated to reach the hardest-to-count populations, such as people living in rural communities, children, people of color, immigrants and so on, it is even more critical for community leaders and organizations to educate their members about the census and encourage them to participate.

Ultimately, this is because we believe that participation is power. The numbers matter. Participating gives us a true picture of the country, our voices are heard and those in authority pay attention to our interests.

We need to remember that the census is in the constitution because this country belongs to us, the people, and not to whoever is in power at any given moment or to special interest groups. This is the time for all of us to stake a claim: This is our country!

This is the time to stand up and take part — together. Participation is power. *ih*

Imam Talib Shareef, president and imam of the historic Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque in Washington, D.C., is chairman of the Interfaith Conference.

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# Raising Boys

## What I learned from the Turkish television serial, Ertugrul

BY NOOR SAADEH

**L**IKE MANY MUSLIMS THE WORLD over, I am hopelessly addicted to the Turkish TV series, *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (English: "Resurrection: Ertuğrul"), based loosely on the life of Ertugrul (d. c. 1280), son of Suleiman Shah and father of Osman, founder of the Ottoman Empire. It's an account of a time when men truly were men.

Despite the gruesome sword fights and endless parade of villains and traitors and drama, this television series is often soundly Islamic and inspiring. Gender roles are clearly delineated. Both internal and martial striving (*jihad*) are constant with seldom a moment's peace. Young men, whether *alps* (warriors) or artisans and farmers, are taught that men lead the community and their families and with honor, integrity, reflection and mercy.

Boys are raised to be steadfast in battle and, when the situation demands, merciful and forgiving. Young boys are beloved by all generations and their community; imbued with respect for leaders, scholars, teachers and parents. In addition, honoring women is paramount. These youth adhere to time-honored traditions and a firm, unshakeable belief in God, His Prophet (*salla Allah 'alayhi wa sallam*) and the continuation and propagation of His *deen*.

From an early age, boys and young men are raised with purpose and tested. Praise for their valor and character is balanced by the administration of strong admonitions when they're out of line. The role modeling of an unwavering father figure and the tribe/community's other male members help lead a young man firmly from childhood into manhood.

One didn't need to watch Ertugrul to mourn the loss of this time-honored passage. "O humanity, what has distracted you from your Lord Most Generous?" (82:19) reverberates in my head more every passing day. Muslims suffer from the same plagues as all societies — young people left without direction, industrialization, "civilization,"

divorce, gender confusion, the empowerment of girls and the neglect of boys.

Unlike in "Ertugrul," the vast majority of boys can no longer expect to be inducted into their forefathers' ways. Instead, we now promise girls that the sky's the limit. The obvious physical and celebrated physiological passage has been replaced by the fairly recent — in historical terms — concept of "teenager." Children now remain very dependent creatures well into their twenties, and boys who have reached the age of puberty are no longer sent to endure survival, training with arms or apprenticing with their father or other local men to mark the beginning of manhood.

### ABSENT FATHERS, MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF MEN AND GENDER CONFUSION

Unlike past societies, today's boys remain at home through puberty, high school, university and, as is often the case with Muslim families, until marriage. Fathers disappear into an office/work, leaving boys at home surrounded by women. At best, fathers might be available on weekends or evenings; however, the family is rarely their first concern. In fact, some of the more observant Muslim men are more preoccupied with establishing Islam and paving the way for future generations that their sons sometimes seem to be mere afterthoughts.

If the father is absent, how can he prepare his sons to become breadwinners, caretakers and protectors of the family? Other problems are the result of male beliefs, such as the typical idea that parenting is "women's work." Other contributors are the rising divorce rates, which result in non-traditional families, and the widespread nature of abuse — verbal, emotional, physical and/or sexual — toward one's spouse and/or children.

Today's cartoons and sitcoms reduce fathers to buffoons like Homer Simpson. No longer do we have sitcoms like "Father Knows Best" that depict a wise family man



and his common-sense wife. Mothers are now presented as logical, level-headed leaders as compared to comedic father-failures whose children possess far better insight and sense. Dad is now an idiot, and mom and the kids know best.

Gender confusion is the new norm. Where people once believed that God prescribed the laws of nature, citizens now turn to legislation for their cue. No longer do we follow the Basis of Creation: male and female pairs. Women everywhere vie for the positions of men, while men take less of a role as breadwinner and share leadership with their wives. The traditional lines between female and male have become blurred. Both parents work, both are absent from the home and both share the same responsibilities. Who, then, is raising and role modeling for our children?



Each new day we see ever more promotion of gender *choices* — totally disregarding the very *fitra* of our creation (49:13). For all things, God created a counterpart that is different; each is the opposite or complement of the other.

Possibly the recent rise of overt homosexuality, bisexuality, gender experimentation and choice may be attributed to boys raised without significant male role modeling. A great deal of research is being done in these areas, as a search of the relevant online literature will show.

#### TODAY'S PASSAGES INTO MANHOOD

Today our boys sit at home, challenged only in the realm of academic performance. They *sit* — either in the classroom or glued to devices — which is in opposition to their

*fitra*: activity and physical contact with other males. The sole challenge is to be first in class so that they can participate in higher education and thereby secure prestigious occupations and a comfortable future.

Not all young men are created or equipped to succeed academically. Thus they look for that all-important passage into manhood by exploring and experimenting with cigarettes, hookah, drugs, alcohol, gaming, sexual encounters and gender, pornography, thrill-seeking, vulgar language, internet celebrity status and chalking up “likes” on social media.

In my travels to the Middle East, I see

they need air. How many of them are immediately classified as ADHD and prescribed various pills, or perhaps expelled, for that very reason? As a deterrent for high spirits, the first thing we do as educators is to use confinement or deny recess privileges, exacerbating the very issue we seek to rectify.

Muslims need to remember that as much as we desire offspring like Abu Bakr (*'alayhi rahmat*) — studious, memorizers of the Quran, wise and calm — the early Muslims prayed that their ranks be strengthened with warriors like 'Umar (*'alayhi rahmat*). Where would Islam be today without the courage and bravery of 'Umar and Khalid ibn Walid?

#### IN FACT, SOME OF THE MORE OBSERVANT MUSLIM MEN ARE MORE PREOCCUPIED WITH ESTABLISHING ISLAM AND PAVING THE WAY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS THAT THEIR SONS SOMETIMES SEEM TO BE MERE AFTERTHOUGHTS.

boys and young men overflowing hookah joints and cafes and/or wandering the streets and malls aimlessly, meaning without goals, directions or leadership. Possessed of energy, talent, and the *fitra* to pursue higher goals, without sufficient direction they become easy targets for extremists. In non-Muslim majority lands, young men are at great risk, for they often find themselves walking a tightrope between their parents' cultural origin(s) and their birth nation's nationalism, which refuses to recognize them as full citizens.

Desperate to find a place in which they will be acknowledged, accepted and actually seen, some of them find what they are looking for in extremist groups. The strong, charismatic leader, nearly hero-like in his passionate rhetoric for justice and jihad, becomes the missing male role model — an individual who is courageous, inspiring and often father-like in compassion and leadership, one who provides outlets for their physical energy, goals and a noble cause. He offers them self-esteem and self-worth and perhaps the highest reward of all — martyrdom.

Extremists always need more fodder for their agendas, and a male's *fitra* begs for action and physical combat. Boys are rambunctious in school, for they need roughhousing and physical activity as much as

#### WESTERN GOALS IN CONFLICT WITH ISLAM

The goal of seeking comfort and ease has replaced the endless struggles faced by Ertugrul's tribe. When tests take believers to the breaking point, the timely appearance of a wise scholar (based loosely on Ibn al-Arabi's character) reminds us that God created humanity to struggle, not, as is the Western goal, of seeking ease, comfort and financial abundance. Muslims have lost this readiness to accept and face hardship, knowing that with it, eventually, comes ease (94:6).

Muslim parents and leaders are obliged to better guide our youth. Without a sound understanding and practical application of the Quran, we will be at the mercy of every latest whim and trend as opposed to remaining true to our values, resisting external pressures and leading humanity back to its moral foundations. Let's take a lesson from "Ertugrul," namely, that the goal of this life is not comfort, ease, and peace but struggle. We must take this to heart and teach our boys accordingly.

Absent rituals, I think manhood in my family must be a code of values transmitted mostly by example by a *father who is present*. *iH*

Noor Saadeh is production manager at Noorart, Inc.

# “Israeli” Cuisine

A labeling with a potential for humanizing the dehumanized

BY LINA SAUD

**W**E ARE WHAT WE EAT. AMONG THE most significant markers of culture is the food that a given people make. Different cultures value different spice pallets, ingredients, food-making processes and so forth. This aspect of culture travels easily. In countries like the U.S. with large immigrant populations, people's original cultures live on for generations notably through inherited recipes and etiquettes surrounding food. The intricate processes of preparing food, and the creativity infused in cultural recipes, are among the hallmarks of the human experience. If we imagine culture as a manifestation of what differentiates human beings from animals, as social scientists have argued, the foods fostered in different cultures are, too, a demonstration of a people's humanity. The late chef and travel documentarian Anthony Bourdain, encouraged people to eat others' foods as a window of understanding who they are: “walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food.” In his acceptance speech when the Muslim Public Affairs Council honored him for hit show, *Parts Unknown* for its episode on Israel and Palestine, he said, “The world has visited many terrible things on the Palestinian people, none more shameful than robbing them of their basic humanity.”

It is difficult to imagine this humanizing experience of sharing others' food occurring alongside the ongoing *dehumanization* of those very people. However, consider the case of Israelis and Palestinians. Since 1948, the Israeli state has gradually grown in its hegemony over Palestinian people. Palestinians living within the boundaries of Israel-proper live as second-class citizens, a reality that propelled them to politically mobilize in the latest Israeli election cycle. Palestinians living in the West Bank live under a military occupation that squelches any attempt at developing a viable economy and annexes land for illegal settlement building. Palestinians in Gaza, the brutally stricken subjects of an ongoing

Israeli blockade, live in unlivable conditions and experience onslaughts from the Israeli military frequently. In its actions, the Israeli government and military demonstrate that Palestinians are undeserving of human rights. Israel's unwillingness to respect the basic human dignity of Palestinians is further encapsulated in the dehumanizing language used by some Israeli politicians when describing Palestinians. For example, in 2014 right-wing Knesset member Ayelet Shaked posted an article on Facebook describing Palestinian children as “little snakes.” Israel's



**THE NEW YORK TIMES  
STYLE MAGAZINE ARTICLE  
TITLED “THE RISE OF  
PALESTINIAN FOOD”  
DESCRIBES THE GROWING  
EFFORT BY PALESTINIANS  
TO DOCUMENT THEIR  
RECIPES AND COOKING  
METHODS, PERHAPS AS  
A RESPONSE TO ISRAELI  
ATTEMPTS TO ERASE THE  
PALESTINIAN SIGNATURE  
ON NOT JUST THEIR LAND,  
BUT THEIR FOOD AS WELL.**

hegemonic power allows Israeli dehumanization of Palestinians to manifest itself in every lived moment of those Palestinians who continue to survive under its rule.

Despite the Israeli state's dehumanization of Palestinians, Israelis have adopted Palestinian food into their diet, alongside a mix of other cultural foods. Prized Palestinian dishes like *maklouba* (a meal made with meat or chicken, rice and vegetables) are described as Israeli *maklouba* by Israelis who have found access to Palestinian recipes. A recent piece in The New York Times Style Magazine titled “The Rise of Palestinian Food” describes the growing effort by Palestinians to document their recipes and cooking methods, perhaps as a response to Israelis attempts to erase Palestinians' signature on not just their land, but their food as well. To be clear, a number of Israelis protest their government's subjugation of Palestinians and do not endorse this erasure of Palestinian culture. The question that remains in this state of affairs, however,

is how Israelis who *do* endorse the dehumanization of Palestinians sit comfortably eating a product of Palestinians' very humanity, their cherished cuisine, and call it their own? The situation should arouse what psychologists refer to as cognitive dissonance, the aversive experience when one's actions do not align with one's beliefs.

In fact, a series of narratives seem to ameliorate this dissonance. For example, Palestinian dishes are treated as naturally “Israeli” because all aspects of the land, including the foods derived from the land, are thought to rightfully belong to Israelis. This idea exists in harmony with the historical Zionist narrative that Palestine was “a land without a people for a people without a land” — interestingly a phrase coined and propagated by nineteenth-century Christian writers and used by people like Israel Zangwill, a British author, playwright and poet. These lies deflect a serious opportunity to change facts on the ground. Imagine the impact of recognizing that the foods Israelis are eating are the product of generations of sharing, refining and preserving recipes that nourished bodies of Palestinians for centuries. As Anthony Bourdain wisely described, such an experience would humanize the bearers of the cuisine, a phenomenon capable of reversing the dehumanization of Palestinians that prevails today in Israel. *ih*

Lina Saud is a graduate student in social psychology at Rutgers University.

# We Are Proud Muslim Americans

We are proud Americans who settled in this land and have been part of it from the very beginning. Muslims fought in the independence war against British colonialism. The Sultanate of Morocco officially recognized the U.S. as an independent nation one decade after its declaration of independence. Muslims helped build this country's skyscrapers. A Muslim American owns football teams. Muslim men and women serve in the United States Congress and in every sphere of American life.

Every day we contribute to the beautiful and diverse tapestry of this land and make contributions in every field. We are law-abiding citizens who pay our taxes and enroll our children in public schools. We take pride in our faith and in our American identity. We have made many contributions to this land, from Congresspersons to neurosurgeons, from artists to rappers and more.

So let it be known that we are part of this society and share its identity, and that we work every day to benefit both it and humanity at large.

I therefore call upon my fellow Muslim Americans to:

- 1 Join and support other national organizations that are fighting for just causes and providing social services, such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and many others.
- 2 Continue to broaden our knowledge and understanding of Islam.
- 3 Contribute to and strengthen our national Islamic organizations, like the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA; [www.isna.net](http://www.isna.net)), so they can better serve us and represent the community at this country's highest social, economic, academic and political levels.
- 4 Support and strengthen our Muslim media by subscribing to the award-winning Islamic Horizons magazine. We can also donate gift subscriptions to our local school, university and institutional libraries.
- 5 Muslims should join and support Unity Productions Foundation (UPF), which is pleased to offer complimentary PBS films that bring greater awareness to the broad subject of Islam and Muslims through the media.
- 6 Muslims should also support PBS, which has telecast Islamic documentaries such as "Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet" and "The Sultan and The Saint" on its 400 television stations, which were viewed and admired by millions of Americans.
- 7 Muslims should also give the most gracious of *sadaqaat*, like blood and organ donations as 5:32 proclaims: "if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all humanity."

# Birthing in Challenging Times

A midwife can provide safe care for expectant Muslim mothers

BY ROMY SHARIEFF

**T**HE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IS leading some expectant mothers and their families to consider midwifery care for an out-of-hospital birth, which would help reduce exposure to COVID-19 and other pathogens that can adversely affect the mother and the newborn's health.

Considering the limited availability of data on the potential complications on fetal development if a healthy mother contracts the virus during pregnancy, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (RCOG), has strongly advised expectant mothers to practice social distancing to minimize potential risk (<https://www.rcog.org.uk>).

In the U.S., telehealth is quickly being adopted as an alternative to face-to-face routine care. Yet, a vulnerability exists when health care facilities provide labor and also deliver services simultaneously with care of the sick.

Even before the onset of the current pandemic, the U.S. had the worst maternal death rate of any developed nation, where non-Caucasian women are represented disproportionately among the fatality figures (<https://www.npr.org>, May 12, 2017). One study found that "40 percent of deaths from pregnancy-related complications were potentially preventable, mainly through improved quality of medical care" (<https://www.americashealthrankings.org>). That is an alarming conclusion.

The World Health Organization (WHO), which designated 2020 as the "Year of the Nurse and Midwife," is pushing for increased access to midwives as the first line of defense to improve birth outcomes (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr-007-508.pdf>). The ability of certified nurse-midwives (CNM) and certified professional midwives (CPM) to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality around the world has finally come

into focus. According to the WHO, "83% of all maternal deaths, stillbirths and newborn deaths could be averted with the full package of midwifery care" (<https://www.who.int>).

Even in the current health crisis, midwifery care is still poised to deliver on that statement.

**THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO), WHICH DESIGNATED 2020 AS THE "YEAR OF THE NURSE AND MIDWIFE," IS PUSHING FOR INCREASED ACCESS TO MIDWIVES AS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE TO IMPROVE BIRTH OUTCOMES.**

The WHO defines midwifery as "skilled, knowledgeable and compassionate care for childbearing women, newborn infants and families across the continuum throughout pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, birth, postpartum and the early weeks of life." A midwife is trained to handle low-risk pregnancies and various complications that may occur during birth. In a comprehensive study published in 2014, the safety of a planned home birth and freestanding birth centers of a low risk pregnancy with a midwife was indisputably documented (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jmwh.12172>). We also need obstetricians who are trained to handle high-risk pregnancies. However, in areas such as Scandinavia, where midwives are the primary birth attendants, phenomenal



outcomes have been noted when compared to those in the U.S. As more American states continue to recognize midwives, more consumers can legally access the benefits that they provide.

Midwifery care also strives to provide holistic care and create an environment that empowers clients. Although there is science in childbirth, there is an even stronger element of trusting intuition, instinct and tradition, for this is perhaps one of the most life altering events a woman experiences as she transitions into motherhood. Islam recognizes and honors that journey so much so that the Arabic word for "womb" — *rahm* — comes from the same root as al-Rahman, one of God's attributes.

Anecdotal accounts state that a midwife named Shifa'a bint Amr ('alayha alrahma) attended the Prophet's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) birth and that midwives also attended his children's births.

But, what does it mean to contemporary



PHOTO © ROMY SHARIEFF

Muslims to have access to an out-of-hospital birth with a midwife during these uncertain times? What makes midwifery care attractive, other than minimizing risk to potentially harmful infections?

**Equity.** We live in a time of widespread Islamophobia. There are documented cases of discrimination against Muslims, specifically women wearing hijab. Unfortunately, health care workers are not exempt from mistreating patients. Generally, the midwifery model of care values building relationships based on mutual respect, compassion and non-maleficence.

**Modesty.** Preserving modesty with midwifery care may be more effortless than in a hospital. Although patients have the right to request a different attendant, such as a female obstetrician, fulfilling such a request may be difficult due to staffing constraints. In a home birth practice, families typically know who will attend the birth because they have already developed a relationship with

the provider and assistants during the course of prenatal care.

**Honoring a Birth Plan.** A midwife can offer each client an environment that better individualizes care. Midwives practicing out of hospital can usually incorporate religious values, traditions and personal preferences more easily than hospital providers. For example, some Muslims wait to announce the baby's name until the *'aqeeqa*. However, hospital protocols may require the child's name before discharge. Depending upon locality, midwives may have more flexibility in filing birth certificate papers.

**Respecting Religious Values.** Various hadiths support particular childbirth practices such as reciting the *adhan* in the newborn's ear and the *iqama* in the left ear ("Sunan Abu Dawud," vol. 5, p. 518); eating, drinking and mobility while in labor (19:23-26: Mary's [*'alayha as salam*] birthing of Prophet Jesus [*'alayhi as salam*]). Inherently, out-of-hospital midwifery care

is more flexible so integrating most special requests can happen easily.

**Support.** As a precaution to minimize the spread of COVID-19, some hospitals are limiting or denying women labor support during birth. While some home birth midwives are implementing similar policies, some are using discretion by limiting those who had possible exposure or are actively showing symptoms. Why is that important? A Cochrane review in 2017 noted that women who had labor and emotional support provided by *doulas* — a person, typically without formal obstetric training, who is employed to provide guidance and support to a pregnant woman during labor — appeared to have shorter labors, more spontaneous vaginal births and a decreased rate of interventions such as caesarean, instrumental births or use of analgesia (<https://www.marchofdimes.org>).

**Autonomy.** The term "informed choice" is used to denote an individual's right to make his/her own health care decisions using evidence-based information on the details, risks and benefits of the options given considering his/her own situation. However, sometimes relevant information may be withheld — for instance, Cervidil, a common prostaglandin used in hospital induction, is porcine derived. Whether or not it is halal for medicinal use is important, but the larger issue is whether Muslims are informed about this fact and would they accept it if they knew? Informed choice and shared decision-making are at the core of midwifery care. Acquiring knowledge and making well-informed decisions is also a cornerstone of Islam.

As COVID-19 continues to unfold, it will take time to fully understand its implication on birth outcomes. But, the WHO contends that midwifery care is ready to make a positive difference in maternal health care, even during a crisis. For Muslims and those seeking a safe alternative to hospital care, midwives integrate skill with holistic care. Hindsight can be 20/20, but there is an opportunity now, in the present moment, to leverage midwives to simultaneously support Islamic values and improve birth outcomes. *ih*

Romy Sharieff, a licensed midwife and ambassador for Midwives for Haiti, has a master's degree in engineering. She is the founding contributor of the Bryan J. Westfield Scholarship and can be reached at [prenatalyoga@midwivesforhaiti.org](mailto:prenatalyoga@midwivesforhaiti.org).



# Intra-faith Common Ground

The first Shia-Sunni Alliance Forum retreat gathers Muslim scholars for solidarity

BY RASHEED RABBI

**S**HIA AND SUNNI SCHOLARS FROM NINE STATES SPENT THE weekend of Feb. 7-9 in Northern Virginia to seek understanding, share their perspectives and examine divisive intra-Muslims viewpoints. This ambitious anti-sectarian endeavor convened as the first Shia-Sunni Alliance Forum's (SSAF) retreat initiated by the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS; <https://www.adamscenter.org>) and the Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya (IMAM; <https://imam-us.org>).

These differences, which originally erupted over who would be the Prophet's political heir, gradually coalesced into the Shia and Sunni branches. The Sunni branch favored one of his closest Companions, whereas the Shia branch contended that the Prophet had been presumably divinely inspired to appoint his cousin and son-in-law Ali (*radi Allahu 'anh*).

## EMPHASIZING DISTINCTION, NOT DIFFERENCE

In theological terms all Muslims form one community, for the diverse schools of thought were simply sources of intellectual enrichment instead of separation, ostracism and desecration of their sanctities. Thus, these influential Muslim leaders' spontaneous participation and subsequent consent to empower the greater Muslim American community by uniting it accords with the Washington Declaration's ([www.washingtondeclaration.us](http://www.washingtondeclaration.us)) ongoing efforts to build a foundation for everlasting synergy between these schools of thought.

This retreat elaborated what this country's communities have in common to foster mutual dialogue and harmony via shared methods, lessons and aspirations. The ensuing scholarly discussions, implications for everyday lives, the five congregational daily prayers and socialization empirically sketched the initial version of a shared space. Participants covered numerous controversial subjects within Islamic history, theology and jurisprudence to facilitate a niche of unity for this country's Muslim communities.

Unlike traditional conferences, this event sought to overcome the existing hurdles and misconceptions. As a strategy, every imam paired up with another resident imam to complete a minimum of three projects in their states within the next year. For example, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Kashimiri (IMAM religious director and vice chair, Washington, D.C.) paired up with Imam Magid (imam, ADAMS) and Shaykh Naghavi Nia (researcher, IMAM; president, Mufid Academic Seminary) to accomplish three projects.

## DIVINE REMINDER OF UNITY

The retreat culminated in a community dinner at the ADAMS Center with two keynote speakers, Imam Khalid Latif (executive director and chaplain, New York University) and Shaykh Faiyaz Jaffer (research scholar and chaplain, NYU). Introduced by ADAMS' board chair Rizwan Jaka, the event started with Qari Ali Azbouri's recitation of "and hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided" — a perfect reminder of what this coming together hoped to achieve.

## HARVESTING THE LOVE OF AHL-AL-BAYT

Imam Magid reiterated the true "representation of Islam where people would not find hatred or bigotry in attending mosques of other communities. Such Muslim unity in America would represent the narrative for next generations." He also shared the story of how an unofficial meeting at the IMAM Los Angeles office during February 2019 led to a collaborative spiritual trip to Iraq and let their shared love for the Ahl-al-Bayt bring them together.

Quoting 21:92, Sayyid Kashmiri stressed that both Shia and Sunni hold that "We [Muslims] have one God, one Prophet, one scripture (Quran), and one *qibla* to face God during prayer." So any division is merely superficial, and the SSAF strives to restore the greater commonality of Muslim American communities

without stressing the outer diversity. Divine guidance, he reminded attendees, can be accrued only by engaging the entire community through welcoming each other and overlooking their diverse conjectures.

**HAJJ MUSTAFA (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IMAM) STATED THAT THE LEAST SIGN IN THIS REGARD IS A WELCOMING MOSQUE, WHERE ANY MUSLIM CAN WALK IN AND PERFORM PRAYER WITHOUT ANY TROUBLE.**

#### CALL FOR GREATER PARTICIPATION

Hajj Mustafa (executive director, IMAM) stated that the least sign in this regard is a welcoming mosque, where any Muslim can walk in and perform prayer without any trouble. He also hinted at two of SSAF's immediate goals: a much larger national retreat and regional retreats with local scholars.

#### AWARENESS OF ELDERS TO INSPIRE YOUTH

Sanober Yaqoob (principal, ADAMS Taleem ul-Quran program), said that ADAMS embodies solidarity and tolerance and named a few of the center's founding pioneers. Sarah Silmi (Rising Islamic Social Expression) expanded on the role of interaction between elders with youth.

#### REEXAMINING HISTORY WITH INNOVATIVE LENSES

Dr. Aziza Al-Hibri (founder and chair, Karamah; <http://karamah.org>) shared her long legacy toward unity and explained how Karbala can be seen as a constitutional lesson.

#### URGENCY OF UNITY AND INDIVIDUAL POTENTIALITY

Jaffer noted how our focus on superficial differences weakens Muslims and helps the negative agendas of anti-Muslims. Latif stressed developing individual influence as a vicegerent of God to embrace the differences and complement the community's combined efforts.

Overall, this conference was a summons to carry forward the truth that while Shias and Sunnis may follow different roads toward the goal of human fulfillment in God, their goal is one and their roads have many meeting points. ■

Rasheed Rabbi, an IT professional who earned an MA in religious studies (2016) and a graduate certificate in Islamic chaplaincy from Hartford Seminary, is also founder of e-Dawah ([www.edawah.net](http://www.edawah.net)); serves as a *khateeb* and leads the Friday prayers at ADAMS Center; and works as a chaplain at iNova Fairfax, iNova Loudoun, and Virginia's Alexandria and Loudoun Adult Detention Centers.



## Time Capsules of Islamic Heritage: Beyond Andalusia

Millions of vanished Muslim descendants are living in Latin America

BY WENDY DÍAZ

M Y ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S fifth-grade class sought to pass down some of our traditions by burying a time capsule deep in the ground and labeling the place carefully so that future fifth graders could unearth it years later and learn about us. But sometimes time capsules are lost or forgotten, as is the case when our ancestors' knowledge isn't passed on via storytelling and keeping their culture and family traditions. When that happens, we gradually forget ourselves, as is the case with those Latin Americans who have Muslim blood coursing through their veins and yet know nothing of Islam.

I remember meeting Musa during an intensive 12-hour WhyIslam Dawah Summit in Princeton, N.J., on a brisk fall day with about 60-70 ICNA and WhyIslam employees and volunteers from all over the nation. As I walked in and out of the conference room, I noticed two contractors placing blue tape on the hallway's baseboards. One was a stocky, fair-skinned older man with salt-and-pepper hair and a moustache; the other one was a younger man who sported a black moustache, darker skin and black, curly hair under a baseball cap. Working diligently and quickly, they avoided eye contact with guests. In an adjacent room, sheets had been laid over the dark blue carpet for attendees

to pray. At *zuhr*, the congregation formed. The two men continued working.

As there were only three other women, we decided to pray together separately in the conference room. Standing close to the doorway, I overheard the contractors speaking to each other in Spanish. They must have thought I was Arab or South Asian, so I stood silently waiting, half smiling. "*Mira como los hombres rezan solos y ellas separadas*" (Look how the men pray alone and keep them [the women] separated), the older gentleman remarked. The younger man shrugged and continued to work. "*Las dejaron aquí!*" (They just left them here!), he continued, his tone implying that we were being excluded. I decided to interrupt.

"*No. No nos separan. Nosotros preferimos estar aquí*" (No. They didn't separate us. We prefer to be here), I explained, smiling. Startled, he exclaimed, "Oh, you speak Spanish!" That's the typical response I get in these situations. "Of course, I do. I'm Latina," I said. "Oh! I thought you were..." he fumbled for words. His friend continued working, without looking up. "Arab?" "Yes, I get that a lot." I asked them where they were from. The older gentleman replied "Honduras," and the younger one said he was Puerto Rican. Saying that I was also Puerto Rican, I began

## ► ISLAM IN AMERICA

talking with them and explained why we prayed separately. They listened intently, but after a few minutes, the younger man returned to his work.

The older man, however, seemed very interested in Islam and so I decided I would try to get him some Islamic literature in Spanish. Then he shared something unexpected: "My grandfather was Palestinian." That wasn't so surprising, for there is a huge Arab — both Christian and Muslim — immigrant population in Latin America, especially Palestinians,

Muslims and their descendants now live in that region.

We often hear about the glory of Andalusia but ignore the fact that its legacy lives on in contemporary Spanish and Latino cultures. Musa desperately wanted to read the Quran and rediscover his past, but he never knew how. Until we met, he had never mustered the courage to ask a Muslim or connected with a Spanish-speaking Muslim. Introducing some of the other summit attendees to Musa, I related his story and why we must understand the deep connec-

The Muslims who were trying to advise him meant well, but they obviously lacked the cultural context to realize that they were mistaken. I also informed José that changing his name wasn't a requirement. In fact, if he were to pick up a Spanish translation of the Quran's meaning, he could flip to the twelfth chapter and see his name there. We ended the call on a good note, and I directed him to some Latino Muslims in his area. I pray that he is still practicing and will be a time capsule of knowledge for his offspring.

These two stories aren't isolated incidents, for I've encountered many similar situations. Recently, while standing in line to pay for a purchase at a bookstore, the woman in front of me overheard me speaking in Spanish. She turned to me and asked where I was from. I told her I was from Puerto Rico and asked her origin. She responded, "Honduras." We began talking, and I lightheartedly told her, "Most people don't think I look Hispanic because of my veil." She responded, "No, I had a feeling you were Latina because of your facial features. My father was also Muslim."

Immediately remembering Musa, I asked her last name. She responded "Abdu" and said that her first name was Gloria. Her story was similar to Musa's — her father had migrated from Jordan and eventually settled in Honduras and opened a business. That is where he met her future mother. Since much of the population in Honduras is Roman Catholic, Gloria's father failed to pass down his religion to his children. However, they are aware of their ties to Islam and their Middle Eastern roots.

So many other Latinos or Hispanics in the Americas are bound to Islam in some way, shape or form, just waiting for someone to help them unearth and embrace their past. What are we doing to reach them? Every single day is a missed opportunity if we are not taking advantage of our gift and passing it to others. Regardless of whether we know Spanish or not, we can always smile at our neighbors, co-workers or classmates and, with that universal gesture, let them feel that we are here for them if they have any questions. Additionally, we can easily obtain literature in Spanish and offer it to those who are interested. There are many time capsules waiting to be discovered, and we can provide the map. *ih*

Wendy Díaz, co-founder and director of Hablamos Islam, is a writer and translator for the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA).

### SO MANY OTHER LATINOS OR HISPANICS IN THE AMERICAS ARE BOUND TO ISLAM IN SOME WAY, SHAPE OR FORM, JUST WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO HELP THEM UNEARTH AND EMBRACE THEIR PAST

Jordanians and Lebanese. Many Latinos have Arab ancestry, among them, entertainers Shakira, Emilio Estefan, Jaime Camil and Salma Hayek.

"My name is Moisés," he remarked, "but my grandfather called me Musa and so does my mother. Everyone on his side of the family calls me Musa." I asked him, "Was your grandfather Muslim?" He replied "Yes," but when I asked if he knew anything about Islam, he said "No." He hadn't had a chance to unearth his legacy.

After Musa's grandfather moved to Honduras, he gradually abandoned the religion's external practices but still self-identified as Muslim. As the family mixed with the locals, after three generations their faith disappeared. The time capsule had been lost forever.

This story is reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition, when newly conquered Andalusia's Muslims were either forced to convert or expelled. Some converts pretended to be Christian, but it proved to be too difficult and even dangerous to pass on their faith and traditions. Likewise, there were West African Muslims who were brought to the Americas as slaves, some of whom held on to their religious and cultural practices and passed them down to their children; however, their efforts were largely suppressed by Church edicts and cruel slave masters. During and after the Ottoman Empire's dismantlement, massive numbers of Muslims migrated to Latin America — a trend that continues to this day. Millions of

tion between Islam and Latin America. We promised to get him some Spanish-language literature, and he was grateful.

This incident made me recall something that occurred some years ago when I was taking calls on WhyIslam's Islamic information hotline. Typical phone calls are from non-Muslims asking questions about Islam, ordering free literature or a copy of the English translation of the Quran. This caller, who was calling on the Spanish line, was different — a recent convert who was hoping to connect with someone who spoke his language. I will never forget his name, because it's the same as my brother's: José.

José's family was originally from Mexico, but he lived in Chicago. When he called, he was sad and confused and searching for a Spanish-speaking mentor, preferably another Latino Muslim. There was no language barrier, for he spoke fluent English. But there was another type of barrier — his feeling that the mostly immigrant Muslims he had met didn't understand his culture. He had even started questioning his decision to convert.

He told me about attending a mosque and being questioned about everything from his tattoos to why he hadn't changed his name. They claimed his name was not Islamic and that he should choose a new name to go with his new Muslim identity. I reassured him, "Your name is José. In Arabic that's Yusuf, like Prophet Yusuf (*'alayhi as salam*), so your name is even in the Quran. There's a chapter named after you!"

# There Is Much More in a Name

A lot of beauty, culture, meaning and identity, actually

BY HABEEBA HUSAIN



▲ Hasan Minhaj



▲ Wajahat Ali

**I**N AN APPEARANCE ON THE ELLEN DeGeneres Show last April, Muslim American comic Hasan Minhaj used much of his airtime to focus on the correct pronunciation of his name.

DeGeneres said, “It’s Hasan Minhaj (ha-SAAN mi-NAAJ),” to which Minhaj quickly responded, “No.” The “Patriot Act” star then went on to lightheartedly explain how people always mispronounce Hasan, even though they can correctly and effortlessly articulate the unique names of White celebrities like actors Ansel Elgort and Timothée Chalamet.

He walks DeGeneres through a mini lesson on how to correctly say his name, making sure that she gets every syllable right. He recalls his early public appearances: “So, for like two months I’d go to open mics and I was Sean. I kept trying to negotiate. I was like, ‘All right, Hasan — people can pronounce Hasan.’ And it just got weirder and weirder ... but I’d always have that open mic host in my head: ‘You’ve got to do it to make it.’”

Muslims in the U.S. can definitely relate to this experience. Their names are butchered, shortened or replaced with what is easier for the tongues of their peers, coworkers and classmates. The change is oftentimes not of their own accord.

New Jersey resident Zaheer Hussain is simply known as Z at his office. Born Mohammed Zaheeruddin Hussain, he ran into many issues in his first few years in the U.S. He and his brothers, father, and nephews all share the same first and last names. Only their middle names differentiate them on paper.

Hussain’s older brother worked in the same organization as he did, and on one occasion his workplace sent him the wrong paycheck. Hussain even mistakenly received his brother’s ten-year service award, even though he had only been there for two years, despite a difference in the spelling of their last name.

His coworkers were confused as to why he and his brother had the same name. Hussain tried to emphasize that his middle initial was different: Z vs. his brother’s Q. His Italian coworker, who had to change his original last name Blanco to White to suit the English speaker, understood and jokingly called him Z from across the small office.

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DEGENERES.**

“Initially, it was weird, but it started in a funny way. I just let it go since we were all Mohammed Hussain,” he says. “Z was a little different.” Hussain accepted the moniker because for him, it was a lot better than always being confused with his brother at work.

While he shared his workplace with one brother, he shared his home address and phone number with three other brothers. When people called the house asking to speak with Mohammed Hussain, the phone often ended up in the wrong brother’s hands — ultimately resulting in an unintentionally canceled job interview and a tardy work clock-in. Bank letters and tax refunds didn’t include the middle initial on the addressee’s name either, making it hard to keep track of which document belonged to which brother.

“It was so frustrating for me initially in my first five years in the United States,” Hussain says. “I was desperate to change my name.”

When given the opportunity to do so upon attaining citizenship, he quickly opted in and legally became Zaheer Hussain to avoid further confusion. But by then, Z had already caught on at his workplace. He has been called Z ever since.

Journalist Wajahat Ali writes in The New York Times, “By fifth grade, the scimitar forged by and for mainstream simplicity chopped off two syllables, leaving me as only “Waj” — the friendly neighborhood token American Muslim kid of Pakistani descent with lentil stains on his OshKosh B’Gosh shirt and husky pants” (Oct. 3, 2015).

If not shortened, names have been changed altogether, and it isn’t always a welcome one: Rayyan to Ryan, Soofia to Sophia, Tahira to Terry, Imran to Ron, Mariya to Maria, and the list goes on.

Some people feel compelled to correct, while others just let it pass. Still others adopt a mispronounced version because it’s easier (and less draining) than walking someone through the correct pronunciation, the way Minhaj did for DeGeneres.

“I remember in college we had to share

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three interesting facts about ourselves," says New Jersey native Erum Farooqui, reminiscing about her freshman year at a school with a majority White student population. "I said, 'People can't say my name, so I have to teach them a mispronounced version,' and they were so confused." Usually, the 28-year-old lets "eh-ROOM" slide, but she will correct those who say "EYE-ram" and the baristas who write "Erin" on her drink.

Her sister Sobhana also has encountered many incorrect versions of her name throughout her life. When she transferred from Islamic school to public school, rollcall was a whole new ball game. "It'd be like John, Jill, Martha...then they'd get to my name. Then you'd hear a pause," she says. "They'd look at my first name, look at my last name, look at my first name."

Finally, she would say her name out loud for the teacher or substitute. Sometimes, they would repeat after her semi-correctly and other times not. When she encountered people who really wanted to learn how to pronounce her name correctly, like her Brazilian co-worker, Sobhana dedicated the proper time to sit down and teach it.

When she was younger, however, she says most people didn't seem to care and opted for an "easier" nickname. Her sister Erum adds, "[People] try when they care ... they don't see much value in [saying our names correctly]."

That sentiment is very unfortunate. A name is your identity. It's how people know you. When someone forgets your name, that's often considered an insult.

Parents carefully ponder for months about what to name their child — it's a big responsibility. They want to pick something honorable, but also something manageable — a name that will neither hinder a child's opportunities in their future endeavors nor lead to mockery in their youth.

"We recently found an old VHS tape of my mom going into the hospital to give birth to me," Sobhana says. "You hear my mom and my dad debating baby names, and a heavy part of the debate was: 'Is it easy to spell, easy to pronounce, easy to handle?'"

The video cuts out, and Sobhana assumes that's when she was born. When it picks up again, you hear everyone congratulating her parents on baby Sobhana — a name her grandmother wanted for her, though she jokingly says it's arguable whether it met her parents' conditions of "easy."

"The video made me realize being people of a different culture, of a different language, of

a different heritage — when you're in a nation that's not your own, you have to think about these things when you give a name," Sobhana says. "The general society will say it wrong."

But just like many other things in life, practice makes perfect, right? Muslims shouldn't have to settle for their names being mispronounced if they don't want to. Just like a Kathleen may be insistent on not being called Kate or Kathy, as Hussain says of one of his coworkers, we too can insist on being called by our proper names.

Names are our identifiers. They represent our uniqueness, our family, our culture, our religion and our language. To butcher the syllables and try to squeeze them into positions comfortable for an English speaker's tongue is unnecessary and, quite frankly, a disservice to their beautiful meanings and to those after whom we were named.

The more we advocate for our names to be pronounced properly, the easier it will become for our greater societies to finally say them correctly.

Minhaj tells his Patriot Act audience that his father felt he blew his seven minutes with DeGeneres on his name, but he makes a powerful case for his actions, "I think that's the big difference between our generation and our parents' generation. They're always trying to survive ... so [they'll say,] 'Just go by whatever she calls you,'" he said. "And that's cool. When Dad came in '82, he survived for us. But I'm trying to live."

It is time to live. It is time to be known and called upon by our proper names. In the process, the sacrifices of Muslims past, who may have had their Hussains mangled to Seins by Ellis Island immigration inspectors of old shall not be forgotten or overlooked. Instead they will be appreciated for the survival tactics and foundation building they honorably took on so our generation and those of the future can fully thrive, Muslim names and all.

It would be apt to quote Shakespeare:

"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord, Is the immediate jewel of their souls: Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing; 'twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands; But he that filches from me my good name Robs me of that which not enriches him, And makes me poor indeed." — Othello, Act 3. *ih*

Habeeba Husain is a freelance journalist based in New York. She blogs for Why-Islam and helps manage social media for WuduGear. Her work has also appeared in SLAM Magazine, Narrative.ly and MuslimGirl.com, among other online and print publications.



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# Do Imams Measure up to Their Office?

**Needed: An exact job description for imams in the West**

BY JAMAL TAYH



▲ *The Muslim Community of the Quad Cities, Bettendorf, Iowa*

**D**OES A MOSQUE REALLY NEED PAID imam to lead the daily prayers and a *hafiz* to lead the *taraweeh* prayer so that the entire Quran is recited during Ramadan? What is the Prophet's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) *sunna* in this regard? Did the early Muslim generations recite the entire Quran during their *taraweeh* prayer?

The imam's position has been an integral part of the Islamic state since the Prophet established it in Madina. The Prophet and his Companions erected the Quba Masjid, the first purpose-built mosque. He laid its first stones as soon as he arrived, served as its first imam and leader, spent 14 days there praying *qasr* (the shortened prayers) while waiting for Ali (*Radi Allahu 'anh*) to arrive, and led the first Friday prayers held in it. Shortly thereafter he built the main mosque, now known as al-Masjid al-Nabawi. Other mosques were gradually built in nearby locations and further afield. The local imams chose imams for these mosques to lead the prayers and maintain the facility.

In his "Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din," Abu Hamid

**AND YET MANY IMAMS AND HUFFAZ ARE DISRESPECTED, FOR MANY FUTURE IMAMS WERE ENROLLED IN MADRASAS BECAUSE THEY WERE BELOW-AVERAGE PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS. THIS IS ONE REASON WHY MANY WORKING PROFESSIONALS HAVE A NEGATIVE VIEW OF THEM.**

al-Ghazzali states that the imam should lead the prayer "with sincerity," be trusted in his spiritual purity and fulfill the prayer's requirements. Here, "sincerity" means not taking any salary, because the Prophet ordered Uthman bin Abi al-Thaqafi to assign a person who asks no recompense to call the *adhan*. As this is less important than the prayer itself, paying someone to lead the prayer is more prohibited. Such an arrangement isn't *haram*, but it is certainly disliked (*makruh*). Paying someone to lead the obligatory prayers is even more disliked than paying someone to lead the *taraweeh* prayer. An imam should be paid only for coming to masjid regularly and taking care of its needs and general maintenance.

Sheikh Saeed Saabiq, in his "Fiqh-Us-Sunnah," defines an imam as "the one who is the most versed in the Qur'an. If two or more are equal in this, then it is the one who has the most knowledge of the *sunnah*. If they are equal in that, then it is the one who performed the migration first. If they are equal in that, then it should be the eldest. Abu Sa'id narrates that the Prophet said: 'If you are three in number, then one of you should be the imam. And the one who has the most right to it is the one who is the most versed in the Qur'an' (Ahmad, Muslim, and an-Nasa'i). The meaning of 'most versed in the Qur'an' is the one who has more of the Qur'an memorized. This interpretation is based on the hadith from Amr ibn Salalah, which says: 'Your imam should be the one who is most versed in the Qur'an'" (<http://mappingsharia.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Saabiq-Fiqh-us-Sunnah.pdf>).

Only a few Companions had memorized the entire Quran. Al-Bukhari (hadith no. 3599) and Muslim (hadith no. 2465) narrated that Qatada asked Anas Bin Malik: "Which Companions had collected/memorized the entire Quran during the Prophet's time?" He replied: "Only four..." Some scholars argue that Anas was referring to four members of a specific group of Companions, as opposed to all of them. Regardless of the actual meaning, however, it indicates that only a few of them had memorized all of it. Historically, most imams were volunteers chosen by locals, except for the government-appointed imams assigned to major mosques for political purposes.

During the *taraweeh* prayer, the regular imam — in most cases a non-*hafiz* — led the prayer with whatever *surahs* he had memorized. This was the case in most

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Muslim-majority countries until the 1970s, when the “Islamic Awakening” encouraged Muslims to memorize the Quran. Since then, mosques have been having *huffaz*. And yet many imams and *huffaz* are disrespected, for many future imams were enrolled in madrasas because they were below-average public school students. This is one reason why many working professionals have a negative view of them.

Based upon my active membership in community organizations in Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and North Carolina since 1986, I know that an imam in the U.S. faces many issues. In smaller Muslim communities, members pool funds to build or acquire a mosque or rely upon a handful of local wealthy Muslims to do so. Then they hire an imam of their own liking. I believe that this reality has led to a shortage of imams and obliged many mosques to hire those who aren’t academically qualified.

Sometimes these “imams” skip leading some of the daily prayers without a valid excuse, don’t help maintain the mosque because “I was hired just to lead the prayers and give the Friday *khutba*,” or request overtime pay for participating in community services and activities not stated in their contracts. In recent years, many communities have struggled to find an imam to lead *taraweeh* due to unreasonably high salary expectations.

In 2017, Sally Jacobs of Politico magazine noted: “As America’s Muslim population has grown from 2.3 million a decade ago to a current high of 3.3, according to the Pew Research Center, the number of imams in the country has struggled to keep pace. In 2013, about 43 percent of U.S. mosques employed a full-time paid imam, while about one third made do with a volunteer imam, according to a study commissioned by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the North American Islamic Trust.”

Part of the reason for the shortage, says Ihsan Bagby, the study’s author and a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Kentucky, is that there aren’t enough American imams to go around. Increasingly, America’s Muslims, many of whom were born in the United States, want imams trained in U.S. ways and culture, rather than those versed in the more formal ways practiced overseas and who sometimes do not speak English. But there are very few schools in the U.S. that can provide the necessary training. While efforts are under way in a dozen U.S. cities to develop seminaries to prepare homegrown American imams and chaplains, Bagby thinks the Trump era is likely to slow progress. ‘The big challenge on everyone’s mind now,’ he says, ‘is that the imam’s position is just not a particularly desirable one’ (<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/11/26/america-running-out-imams-215867>).

My local mosque, The Muslim Community of the Quad Cities, was founded in 2000 in Bettendorf, Iowa, and never needed an imam. A few Muslim families just got together and converted an old house into a mosque. Ever since, the community has organized groups of dedicated volunteers to run and maintain it. Visitors are amazed by the kinds of activities our volunteers offer in such a small community. But now that our community has tripled in size, last year we hired a full-time imam. Yet this had always been an option, never a necessity.

Muslim leaders in the West need to address this issue. Educating the public about the imam’s true role is the first step to real change. **ih**

Jamal Tayh is professor of chemistry at Wayne Community College, Goldsboro, N.C.



## The Virtual Mosque Never Closes

The dawn of the digital umma rises to fight the COVID-19 catastrophe in North America

BY RASHEED RABBI

**T**HE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS A WAR — NOT A CONVENTIONAL one, but one against notoriously infectious germs. It’s threatening not only the human immune system, but also our innate nature. It’s restricting us from staying together as an extended family or a community, particularly when we want to surrender our fears to the higher power. Precautionary measures have prompted mosques around the world to close down indefinitely, even the Masjid al-Haram, the Ka‘bah and the Prophet’s Mosque. Just when we need to seek solace collectively in the House of God, this very virus is preventing us from doing so.

Despite the challenges it presents, Madonna contends that coronavirus can be viewed as “the great equalizer” (CNN, March 23, 2020). Or, as Rumi would say, it allows us to reclaim our withheld communities “in a different form.” While the planet throbs with uncertainty, mosques refused to disappear behind closed doors with deadbolts; rather, they have increased their ardor through a diverse set of digital outreaches. Long criticized for being slow to adapt to technology’s pervasive presence (IH March-April 2020, pg. 28-30), this reality was resolved overnight when the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a burst of cyber outreach in the U.S. and made the digital community’s value obvious to Muslim Americans.

The abundantly available cyber solutions have enabled us to change the mode of invoking God and engaging congregants. For example, the Muslim Association of Virginia (Manassas) is broadcasting the *adhan* on Facebook. *Salat al-Jumu‘a* has

been suspended, but the *khutbas* are being broadcasted via live streaming, such as the East Plano Islamic Center's Facebook page.

People are in isolation, but thousands of Muslims celebrated the anniversary of the Prophet's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) Night Journey and Ascension (*al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*) on Zoom (Celebrate Mercy, March 21, 2020). Including an English translation could be good for non-Muslim and even Muslim readers like in seminaries. Patients are quarantined, but imams are sending antidotes of Quranic verses through WhatsApp and Viber. Although no mosques are open, their services are electronically omnipresent and thereby heralding the dawn of the "digital umma" or the "virtual umma."

"Umma," which is repeated over 63 times in the Quran, means "faithful Muslim community." Scholars have been describing the "digital umma" or "virtual umma" for over a decade, among them Mohammed El-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis, "Islam Dot Com" (2009) and Gary R. Bunt's "IMuslims" (2009), which deals with "CIE" (the Cyber Islamic Environment), and "Islam in the Digital Age" (2003). But the obscurity of the concepts, the

These tools, websites and Facebook pages, among others, serve as examples for newer communities that haven't expanded their digital outreach yet.

This very sudden shift has prevented the formation of practical guidelines for novices. While bigger mosques are "bathing into the bits" of the ocean of cyber tools, smaller mosques may be struggling to do so. Exploring the recent surge of digital outreach activities launched by many mosques will be a big asset for them.

For easy reference, think of this process as EPIC, which includes four simultaneous supports for congregants: Emergency support, Personal piety, Information flow, and Compassion.

**Emergency Support.** Although mosques are closed, their emergency support systems are still available for situations like quarantine support, *janazas*, assisting domestic violence victims and helping out during food and financial emergencies. These tangible services give hope to congregants and protect the virtual umma's possible diffusion into the obscurity of cyberspace.

**Personal Piety.** The entire curriculum of spiritual enrichment programs — lectures, seminars, communal supplications and Quran studies — is gradually becoming available online. In addition, the periodic justifications and *fatwas* for mosque closures are being posted for those who want to understand the religious edicts behind these shutdowns. These spiritual amenities preserve the sacrosanctity of each community as part of the digital umma.

**Information Flow.** American mosques are also providing local coronavirus hotline numbers, what symptoms to look out for, drive-through diagnosis center locations and other essential information online to ensure seamless connection with their locked-down congregants. During this period of fear and despair, accurate and timely information spares members from the conflicting messages coming out of the government. Sharing such cautions harbors twin hopes: (1) dismissing the complaints that mosques are out of touch with reality and (2) increasing their credibility within the wider community.

**Compassion.** Each of the above services can be subscribed to digitally from many vendors; however, they don't ensure the needed compassion that the physical community can offer. Each mosque is trying to provide its members with maximum personalized services to evoke the appropriate hope and needed courage to deal with this temporary crisis.

Implementing the EPIC approach will complement the ongoing development of a new cyber frontier for Muslim Americans. This new platform, which is hampered by hundreds of hurdles, is designed to carry on the incessant divine mercy previously outpoured by the pre-virus physical community. Therefore, leaders and members must work together to ensure this new dawn offers an enduring digital sanctuary, one in which souls can savor the inherent independence to rest, be inspired and soar despite the disaster. 

## THE ABUNDANT AVAILABLE CYBER SOLUTIONS HAVE ENABLED US TO CHANGE THE MODE OF INVOKING GOD AND ENGAGING CONGREGANTS.

unprecedented surge of technology, and the elective nature of participation made these concepts too elusive to fully embrace and implement (Mirela Märct, "The Socioeconomic Evolution of the European Union," 2016, p. 100).

However, the threat of the current pandemic has reinforced the cyber platform as the only viable option and obliged believers and congregants to carry out their spiritual endeavors digitally as the de facto standard. Millions of Muslim Americans' avid and collective participation amidst the ongoing COVID-19 adversity have made this long-discussed concept a reality.

This emergent virtual culture has redefined the believers' routine lives and completely changed how they express their religiosity. In the absence of physical mosques, Yasir Qadi's invitation to transform each ordinary household into an exemplary House of God has rekindled the inner calls of hundreds of believers in solitude and despair (Yasir Qadhi, Facebook page, March 17, 2020). Imams Omar Sulayman and Shuaib Webb's nightly reflections on social media now function as bedtime stories to lower adults' cortisol levels so that they can better concentrate on this sweeping epidemic.

The trend of migrating the entire mosque curriculum, unlike sporadic spiritual balms, to cyberspace makes this current transition distinct. Mosques are live-streaming weekly *halaqas* (study circles) for youth, men, women and all congregants over Zoom, Webinar, Facebook Live or YouTube Live; Quran memorization classes are active on Skype and WhatsApp; and "emergency support" activities are being coordinated through varied video-conferencing tools like GoToMeeting, join.me, or Teamviewers.

Rasheed Rabbi, a full-time IT professional who earned an MA in religious studies (2016) and a graduate certificate in Islamic chaplaincy from Hartford Seminary, is also founder of e-Dawah ([www.edawah.net](http://www.edawah.net)); secretary of the Association of Muslim Scientists, Engineers & Technology Professionals; serves as a *khateeb* and leads the Friday prayers at ADAMSCenter; and works as a chaplain at iNova Fairfax, iNovaLoudoun and Virginia's Alexandria and Loudoun Adult Detention Centers.

# Myanmar Faces Genocide Action

What are the implications of the International Court of Justice's ruling on the Rohingya?

BY AZEEM IBRAHIM



**T**HE ROHINGYA WILL MARK JAN. 23 as a significant day, for that was the day on which the International Court of Justice (ICJ; <https://www.icj-cij.org/en>) unanimously ruled that Myanmar must undertake a set of Provisional Measures to prevent the genocide of its roughly 600,000 remaining Rohingya in the wake of the “clearing operations” executed by the Myanmar military against them during the past couple of years.

This legal development sets up a confrontation in the UN Security Council between the self-described pro-human rights West and the anti-human rights China and Russia, one that may greatly diminish the role of international law in global geopolitics in the coming years.

China, or perhaps even Russia, may choose to exploit the situation to fatally undermine the entire UN regime and its underpinning legal and humanitarian presumptions. The West may yet have to give unilateral force to the letter of international law if those two countries choose to sabotage the Security Council’s duty and mandate to enforce ICJ rulings.

## THE RULING

The ICJ demanded that Myanmar must (1) actively seek to prevent genocide against the

Rohingya, under all definitions of genocide; (2) prevent the military and paramilitary groups from carrying out, conspiring to carry out or inciting genocide; (3) preserve all evidence related to the allegations of human rights abuses in the affected region; and (4) report on the situation every six months through the proceedings of the ICJ.

## JURISDICTION

The ruling’s first important aspect is establishing the precedent that the ICJ and, by extension, the UN enforcement apparatus via the Security Council, have jurisdiction in this case. This was established not merely by legal fiat in the Court, but politically, when Myanmar’s civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi unexpectedly volunteered to represent her country before the court. Notably, she did so with the blessing of the military establishment, the principal party accused of genocide.

While Suu Kyi confessed that *war crimes* had been committed in the conflict between Myanmar’s army and the Rohingya, she denied that its actions amounted to *genocide*.

The Court will likely take years to adjudicate the respective claims of The Gambia, which brought the legal action, and of Myanmar. But by her appearance, Suu Kyi recognized the Court’s standing to

pass judgment on that question. It subsequently took the Court only two months to conclude that there is an ongoing acute risk of genocide being committed in Myanmar’s northwestern Rakhine state against the Rohingya before getting to the question of whether what has happened so far amounts to genocide.

It is quite difficult to ascertain what calculation Suu Kyi had made before deciding to appear before the ICJ. It is even quite plausible that she genuinely believes that her country has acted properly and will be exonerated. The military leadership is likely stalling for time to mollify the international response, while also letting the civilian government’s leader take the fall. Whatever the case may be, her decision to appear before the Court has backfired spectacularly.

On the plus side, this could have come with a huge upside for global human rights. At first blush, the mere fact that this precedent on jurisdiction has now been set might be taken to signal a strengthening of the moral force of international law and the global standing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## ENFORCEMENT

The major question, however, is that of enforcement. The responsibility for enforcing the ICJ order on the Provisional Measures falls upon the Security Council, as a matter of law and of the UN Charter.

As expected, Myanmar’s first response to the order was to assert that it is already meeting these requirements. The first real test of this claim will only come when the country is due to deliver its first report on the developing situation, in accordance with measure 4 above. For now, the Security Council has decided to take no further action on the order at this point — mainly as a result of the veto by China, which is backing Myanmar. This was also expected.

At this point, and until Myanmar is found to be in flagrant breach of the order, the situation is just about tenable, as China is just about within its rights to call on the Security Council to allow Myanmar time to comply with the order. The question is what happens if and when Myanmar falls foul of the requirements of the Court order in the coming months.

If the Security Council’s history is any guide, nothing will happen. The Permanent Members, in this case China and also possibly Russia, will likely continue to wield their

vetoes in much the same way the U.S. and other members do when it comes to protecting their respective client states.

However, the situation this time around will be different from a legal point of view. Unlike in the past, this will not be merely a question of the Security Council's political will or whether its members can agree on anything. This time, it will be a question of whether the Security Council will meet *its legal obligations* under the international laws and charters that are its reason or being: to enforce a ICJ-issued court order.

In other words, if either China or Russia choose to wield their veto on the question of enforcing ICJ *orders*, they would be undermining the ICJ itself. Yes, but they would also be challenging the legal foundation underpinning the UN and the Security Council's existence, as well as their own lofty standing and right to cast a veto in the Security Council.

**THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP IS LIKELY STALLING FOR TIME TO MOLLIFY THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE, WHILE ALSO LETTING THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT'S LEADER [SUU KYI] TAKE THE FALL. WHATEVER THE CASE MAY BE, HER DECISION TO APPEAR BEFORE THE COURT HAS BACKFIRED SPECTACULARLY.**

#### THE FALLOUT

This case puts the very concept of international law in a precarious position. In all likelihood, sooner or later Myanmar will violate the ICJ order. And when it does, at least China will likely prevent the Security Council from meeting its legal obligation to enforce an ICJ order.

If both of these eventualities come to pass, we will suddenly find ourselves in a very different geopolitical arena — one in which even the pretense of there being an international law at all will have been dispelled. We now live in a world where most states, with the notable exceptions of the U.S., China and Russia, have to at least pretend that there is such a thing as an “international law” and, as a matter of prudence, they must mediate their interactions with other states and their own citizens through the mores espoused by that law.

If this illusion of legal order is fundamentally challenged by, in this case, the Security Council's refusal to enforce an actual ICJ Order despite being obliged by the law to do, then everyone else will also be unleashed.

Such a scenario could go in a number of different directions, and it would be virtually impossible to anticipate exactly how things will unfold. But regardless of what happens next, a fundamental shift will occur in how international relations work. And when that shift occurs, the global order as it stands will likely experience considerable upheaval. This would occur at a time when a number of other geopolitical trends are already challenging the U.S.-dominated world order — and is likely to accelerate that order's decline. 

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim is the director of the Displacement and Migration Program at the Center for Global Policy in Washington D.C. and author of “Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Genocide” (Hurst: 2016).

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# NONPROFIT



## Reduce Muslim Nonprofit Corruption by Demanding Real Accountability

Caring donors can help nonprofits and their leaders stay out of trouble and obtain an essential decision-making tool

BY AHMED SHAIKH

**F**ORMER PENNSYLVANIA STATE REP. Movita Johnson-Harrell (D) has a compelling story of perseverance after being affected by gun violence, triumph and helping others. But after pleading guilty to various crimes — stealing more than \$500,000 from her own nonprofit and spending it on family vacations, designer clothing, furs and personal bills — she resigned her office (<https://www.inquirer.com/news/movita-johnson-harrell-criminal-charges-pa-state-rep-20191204.html>).

What she did is common to both Muslim and non-Muslim nonprofits. Indeed, President Trump has done egregious things with his “charity” in New York, all of which were undetected by law enforcement until the news media started asking questions; however, he faces no criminal charges.

We often donate because of “social proof.” Someone invites you to donate online or a

friend invites us to a fundraiser. We hear a good speech or testimonial and often give not really caring about accountability — a serious mistake.

### THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

It matters where a nonprofit is located, for state attorneys general have regulatory authority over them. Charities have tax benefits because of the social good they theoretically provide. If an environmental charity’s CEO pilfers funds, you cannot reasonably expect a family of ducks to sue. Ideally, he/she is there for ducks and trees, beaches and artwork, the homeless and the addicted, the mentally ill and the patients who are not yet poor or sick, as well as everyone/thing else that a charity should benefit.

Given that such abuse is an actual violation of the public trust, state attorneys

general sometimes file lawsuits and criminal prosecutions alleging corruption on the part of nonprofit leaders. A high-profile state representative like Johnson-Harrell is an obvious target. But these lawsuits and occasional criminal prosecutions are rare compared to the rampant corruption in nonprofits. Attorneys general typically don’t put adequate resources into regulating the more than trillion-dollar nonprofit sector.

For example, California’s religious corporations are exempt by statute from oversight for things like breaches of fiduciary duty. This lack of accountability is remarkable, for U.S. history shows that religious charities can be extremely corrupt. Such exposures have long been fodder for documentaries and movies, and certain televangelists are known to abuse their so-called churches’ nonprofit status and flaunt their extreme wealth without suffering any negative consequences.

Although the religious nonprofits’ executive directors and board members can be criminally prosecuted, one usually doesn’t expect it. Various taxing authorities also have authority over charities. But the IRS, despite being the primary regulator for charities nationally, usually leaves nonprofits, even obviously bad ones, alone. Thus, it’s largely up to the donors to learn how to distinguish the “good” ones from the “bad” ones, and to deal with their hard-sell data-driven marketing tactics derived from social psychology.

As we know, the stories of nonprofits and their leaders can be compelling. But such narratives can also be used to manipulate

and distract. The raw charisma of a speaker quoting the Quran and Hadith can make donors think that they're doing good work in the path of God when they may, in fact, be enabling criminality. After all, both charisma and convincing stories can convince us to contribute to just about any cause.

This article focuses on perhaps the most obvious red flag — an executive acting as a board member, as was the case with both Johnson-Harrell and California's scandal-plagued Ta'leef Collective. State law does not typically forbid a CEO or other employee (like an imam) from being a board member, despite the glaring conflict of interest. Having employees oversee themselves has never been part of a nonprofit's best practices. In fact, the only possible real justification for this is when a nonprofit is new and small.

Larger nonprofits can have employees, as well as others, with personal, family or business interests with the charity (like a vendor) on the board. To avoid such unexpected conflicts, nonprofits need to formulate a "conflict of interest" policy. And yet such a policy is not a solution to self-created problems the organization never would have had otherwise.

### BADLY GOVERNED RESPECTED INSTITUTIONS

Pop-up Muslim charities run as vehicles for individual leaders usually come and go and should never be regarded as the local community's foundation.

In reality, the more serious long-term threat is when those institutions with actual staying power take the route of slipshod, accountability-free governance that lets an executive oversee himself or herself. When institutions present plain-as-day opportunities for abuse, everything can collapse.

One of the more spectacular instances of such a collapse is the California-based Crystal Cathedral, which once had a massive global TV viewership for its "Hour of Power." It fell into bankruptcy because its functionally nonexistent "oversight" board was little more than structural corruption. Unfortunately, such a situation is widespread among *all* nonprofits, for the absence of a serious framework to hold their officials accountable makes them seem almost custom-built for corruption.

Although we might respect these nonprofits for doing good work, we need to start demanding accountability from those

Muslim leaders to whom we entrust our donations. And the result of doing so will probably be rather disconcerting — the reasonable expectation that we will see more such criminal charges brought against nonprofits in the future.

### OVERCOMING THIS PROBLEM

Self-interested board members may point out that "independent" board members are responsible for keeping insiders in check. But this misdirection doesn't justify an executive's presence as a board member. Of course we cannot stereotype boards; however, there

## IN REALITY, THE MORE SERIOUS LONG-TERM THREAT IS WHEN THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH ACTUAL STAYING POWER TAKE THE ROUTE OF SLIPSHOD, ACCOUNTABILITY-FREE GOVERNANCE THAT LETS AN EXECUTIVE OVERSEE HIMSELF OR HERSELF.

are institutions whose board members are given no visibility into the organization's operations, budget or anything important; never attend board meetings; were never even informed they were board members; and helped start the organization as Ph.D. students, in exchange for which they received a lifetime board membership. And yet they might no longer be living in the U.S.

Management often prefers straw board members who can be "handled." A well-known example of this is Theranos, the Silicon Valley "unicorn" startup with a fake blood-testing product. Many supposedly sophisticated investors were reassured when the company stacked its board with famous seat-warmers and never thought to ask if the business was a fraud.

Some Muslim leaders will no doubt feel insulted by a call for accountability. And yet how else can the nonprofit be made sustainable if such calls are never made? Although most of us may not know Johnson-Harrell, no Muslim can honestly claim to be better than she was in her commitment to the

community. In short, the lack of accountability magnifies the fallibility of decent people.

Qur'an 43:28 advises our leadership to handle their communities' affairs through *shura* (mutual consultation). A nonexistent or insincere *shura* is a sign of trouble. While freedom without accountability can be intoxicating, good people can make serious errors in judgment. Abu Bakr (*radi Allahu anh*) preferred not to determine his salary and welcomed accountability. If even this revered figure had such an attitude toward accountability, Muslim leaders should also welcome it.

If you are responsible for overseeing a charity, online educational resources can help you become more effective in this role. For instance, check out the suggestions and use the tools featured at [https://www.charitiesnys.com/helpful\\_websites\\_new.html](https://www.charitiesnys.com/helpful_websites_new.html) to help your board. You should also remove board members with conflicts of interest.

In addition, prepare for and be present at meetings. Hold the organization and other board members accountable. Don't sit on the board to win anyone's favor, least of all that of the CEO or the imam. Realize that you have an *amana* (a trust) to ensure that the charity is operating above board and according to best practices. Ask difficult questions. Read all of the financial statements and reports. Make sure that no executive can "handle" you. If you cannot do these things, then resign your membership.

The common denominator in virtually all nonprofit corruption cases is executive domination. Don't enable it. Instead, encourage charities that you support to strengthen their governance procedures so that your donations will mean something in the long term. Understand that your money can actually enable corruption. Sometimes your best contribution is to seek governance reform, and even a small donor can play an important role in this regard.

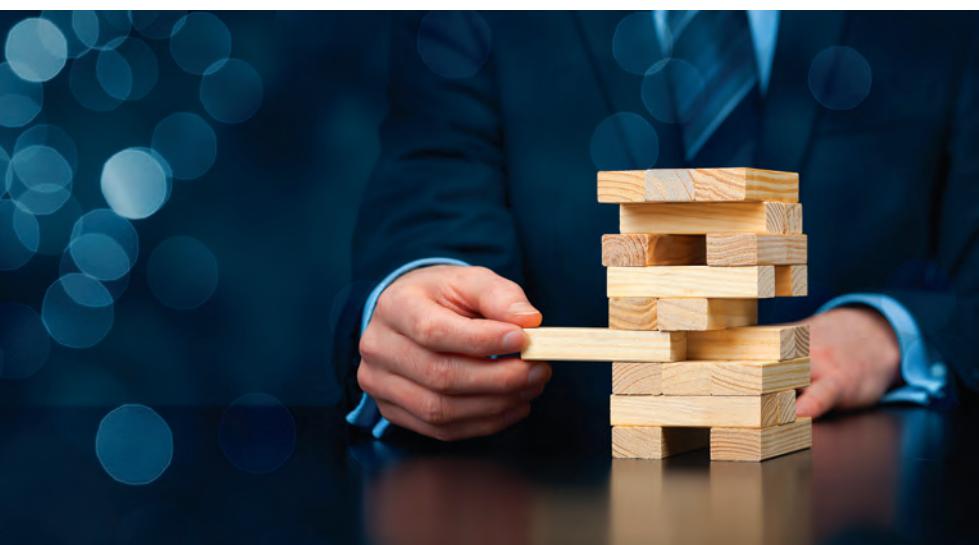
You may not know much about the organization's finances or how good or bad its operations are. However, a board member who is also an executive is a good sign that the organization is not big on accountability. There are plenty of good charities worth supporting. And so if the one you support remains stubborn, move on. *ih*

Ahmed Shaikh, attorney at law, is a certified specialist in estate planning, trust and probate law by the State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization and the co-author of Estate Planning for the Muslim Client (ABA Publishing, 2019). He is a former member of ISNA's executive council. A version of this article first appeared at [Muslimmatters.org](http://Muslimmatters.org).

# Giving Back Means More Than Running a Business

A call to action to Muslim entrepreneurs: Start where you are

BY NAAZISH YARKHAN



**W**ITH CONSUMERS INCREASINGLY aware of the footprint that their favorite brands leave behind, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives make good business sense. Over the last two decades, Western companies have steadily adopted ways to give back to their local communities — caring for the environment, involving themselves in local affairs and events, working to support fair-trade practices and fair wages, and similar initiatives.

“Given the sheer power of their collective purchasing power, Muslims can shape corporate social responsibility practices, both as consumers and as business-owners. Start where you are,” says Javed Younis, who heads the Bridgeview, Illinois-based Maya Cosmetics.

## THE MUSLIM DOLLAR: A HIDDEN GIANT

Muslim entrepreneurs have made inroads into just about every field, from mom and pop grocery stores to diagnostic clinics, and from motels and gas stations to franchises.

And just how powerful is the Muslim consumer globally? According to Dinar

Standard’s State of the Global Islamic Economy 2019/20 report, “Muslim spend on cosmetics is estimated at \$64 billion in 2018, versus \$61 billion in 2017... The sector is forecast to reach \$95 billion by 2024. ... Muslims spent \$92 billion in 2018 on pharmaceuticals, from \$87 billion the previous year ... With Muslim awareness of the need for halal pharmaceuticals on the rise, the industry is projected to grow to \$134 billion by 2024.”

Younis points to the research paper, “What Do Muslims Say About Corporate Social Responsibility?” that states, “since human beings have been created with an exalted and noble nature, they must utilize their potential by shouldering the responsibility of maintaining and developing the universe” (Z. Parvez, Building a New Society, 2000). This understanding of humanity’s responsibilities should drive the “Islamic economic vision and business philosophy, as it implies that human welfare cannot be satisfied by just concentrating on material needs alone.”

## START WHERE YOU ARE

Maya Cosmetics, the nation’s leading halal cosmetics company, has distribution outlets

in 43 countries. Not only does it produce halal nail polishes and beard care products, but it also regards giving back to the communities in which it operates as a cornerstone of its business practice. “These efforts weren’t originally part of our corporate mission, but rather just our Islamic upbringing. My late father was one of the most selfless people [I know,] and always taught me that if I was able to help someone in need, I should just do it,” says Younis.

When the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA; <https://ifanca.org/Pages/Index.aspx>) first certified Maya Cosmetics as halal in 2016, the company’s concerns were limited to ingredients and manufacturing. But Maya Cosmetics didn’t stop at that, for as Younis states, “The other very important part of running a halal business is conduct. Being clear and concise on our product offering, including its advantages and limitations. Being honest and fair in all business transactions, providing healthy, safe products that give value to the consumer. As Muslims, these are all matters we have to answer to [God] about. At Maya Cosmetics, we do our best to incorporate these values into our day-to-day business dealings. It is not about distinguishing ourselves from the competition, but rather just being a responsible organization that gives back to the community. It’s about being human.”

Besides donating to Islamic Relief, CAIR and similar organizations, as well as sponsoring *iftars* for several hundred people each Ramadan, Maya Cosmetics makes a conscious effort to source ingredients from fair-trade suppliers around the world. Approximately 20 percent of the ingredients used in its nail polish remover, as well as 40 percent used in its beard grooming products, are sourced under fair-trade. For instance, the company purchases its almond oil from Palestinian farmers at fair-trade prices, thereby giving suppliers and independent farmers a sustainable livelihood.

Maya Cosmetics also created custom-made products at wholesale prices for fundraising efforts for organizations like the Dearborn-based KBK Relief Foundation (<https://www.kbkrelief.com>), which is named after one of history's most notable Muslim women, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (*radi Allahu 'anh*) – first woman to enter into Islam and the first wife of Prophet

## ACCORDING TO THE 2019 AMERICAN MUSLIM PHILANTHROPY REPORT, “MUSLIMS ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE MOTIVATED TO CONTRIBUTE TO CHARITABLE CAUSES BY THEIR SENSE OF RELIGIOUS DUTY (17 PERCENT VS 10 PERCENT OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC) AND THE FEELING THAT THOSE WITH MORE SHOULD HELP THOSE WITH LESS (20 PERCENT VS 12 PERCENT OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC).” FURTHER, “AMERICAN MUSLIMS ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING DOMESTIC POVERTY OUTSIDE THEIR FAITH COMMUNITIES (81 PERCENT).”

Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alyhi wa sallam*), and supports indigent women around the world. From the sales proceeds of particular products sold in particular countries, it has donated to Susan B. Komen and the HugABaby Campaign in South Africa. “These were [the] requests our customers brought to us,” says Younis. “Corporate social responsibility, business ethics and philanthropy will remain crucial in running Maya Cosmetics as a halal business.”

This year, Maya Cosmetics has donated personal care products to homeless women via ICNA Relief Chicago’s “Women’s Essentials” campaign.

The company reflects its target market's values and practices by letting religious values drive its charitable giving. According to the 2019 American Muslim Philanthropy Report, “Muslims are most likely to be motivated to contribute to charitable causes by their sense of religious duty (17 percent vs 10 percent of the general public) and the feeling that those with more should help those with less (20 percent vs 12 percent of the general public).” Further, “American Muslims are the most likely to contribute to organizations addressing domestic poverty outside their faith communities (81 percent).”

### FRANCHISE OWNERS DO THEIR SHARE

Like Maya Cosmetics, faith fuels the CSR practices at the Glendale Heights, Illinois-based auto-repair shop, Merlin 200,000 Miles Shop. For 17-years, the owner has participated in Merlin's Snug Hugs for Kids Coat Drive, and has even asked other small businesses to help. “The response is overwhelming. Of course we offer zakat during

also established the Sabeel Center (<https://www.facebook.com/SabeelCenter>) and the Abrahamic Center for Cultural Education (ACCE; <https://www.abrahamiccenter.org>).

The Sabeel Center's programs and activities bring together diverse communities to enhance both an understanding of Islam and of each other. Open to all, its activities range from documentary screenings and discussions to interactive exhibits on diverse Muslim cultures such as the “America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far” developed by the Children’s Museum of Manhattan.

“Our monthly Family Movie & Discussion Nights attract different segments of our communities. In fact, anywhere from one-fifth to one-fourth of our audience is non-Muslim, and that's a point of pride to me. At the same time, these events provide a venue for young adults to engage in meaningful discussions with older guests. For example, I once noticed a 17-year-old having an intense, but polite, discussion with a 70-year old guest,” says director Rizwan Kadir. “The events are free, and our attendance-to-RSVP ratio has been over 60 percent for the last three years, exceeding the national average for free events by nonprofits.”

IFANCA, through its Abrahamic Center for Cultural Education (ACCE), focuses on a different audience. “We started with a gallery of the timeline of the Prophets, peace be upon them. Then we commissioned specific pieces of art displaying more information about the common themes among the Abrahamic faiths; things like justice, cooperation, togetherness and standing up for what is right,” says Roger Othman, managing editor of IFANCA’s Halal Consumer magazine. The organization has even connected with local universities and colleges, providing Introduction to Islam and Muslims, and Islamic Tessellation classes to Chicago public schools. With budget cuts for the arts, these have been especially well received, he says.

As CSR efforts should be, these activities are well researched and well planned. Both these entrepreneurs and IFANCA develop goals, consider budgets, market their efforts and track and analyze results. “We feel this disciplined approach enhances the experience of our visitors, and many have said so,” concludes Othman. *ih*

Naazish Yar Khan, an international writer and educator ([www.writersstudio.us](http://writersstudio.us)), coaches students nationally and has written for, among others, NPR, PRI, and the Chicago Tribune.

### NONPROFITS CAN GO ABOVE AND BEYOND

IFANCA, a nonprofit halal certification organization, has a food pantry, cohosts the Annual Muslim Turkey Drive and has

# Utilizing the Human Development Approach and Values to Advancing Education in Muslim Societies

The public schooling model, which separates values from the academic curriculum, is inherently problematical for schooling in most Muslim societies

BY ILHAM NASSER AND AHMED ALWANI



ONE YEAR AGO WE SHARED THE GOALS of the Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) initiative, part of the International Institute of Islamic Thought's (IIIT) contribution to the evidence-based research agenda in Muslim societies. In this article, we delve deeper into the main component of the empirical research and, more specifically, the "Mapping the Terrain" study. This empirical study, an expansion of IIITs ongoing theoretical and theological work of integrating knowledge and universal Quranic values, examines the existing views of these values and their significance for the human development trajectory of youth and stakeholders in Muslim societies.

The AEMS initiative, as we define it, is unique in its emphasis on education utilizing a human development lens for its appeal to the individual and groups in ecological contexts. In addition to the wider view of education as part of growth, we chose this lens because of its attention to academic as well as non-academic education.

This approach also allows the emphasis and inclusion of a values-based approach to reform beyond the schooling systems. According to S. F. Yap, attempts in some Muslim countries to follow the public schooling model, which separates values from the academic curriculum and keeps them in the private sector, haven't been showing results in either academic and non-academic gains (<http://www.iier.org.au/iier24/yap.html>).

Adopting a human development approach infused with values that are both Islamic and universal brings a new and situated approach to education reform, one that is as intentional and long term as it is developmental. After all, as C. Vincent argues, the literature contains evidence that values increase social cohesion and reduce extremism (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1477878518774128?journalCode=tred>).

In our research framework, we distinguish values-based education from moral

education, character and ethics education. These latter types of education were prominent during the 1980s, when the major goals of education were to promote moral reasoning and moral behavior via character education.

Although it is difficult to distinguish among these types because they are often used interchangeably, the main difference, in our view, is in the role(s) that values play in the developmental trajectory and how they influence decision making, meaning making and peaceful living. For example, the Oxford English dictionary defines ethics as the philosophical study of moral values of human conduct and judgment, whereas morals are more concerned with human behaviors and ways to determine right from wrong.

According to R. Thornberg and E. Oguz (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0742051X16300026>), a value is "an overarching concept that includes areas such as moral education, character education, ethics education, civic education, and citizenship education" (p. 110). And, as T. Lickona writes, it is also a drive to help humans live together and in community with others (<http://www.hi-ho.ne.jp/taku77/refer/lickona.htm>). For us, (universal Islamic) values are principles that guide a person or a group on how to expand beyond themselves in order to meet others who have other faiths and beliefs for the common good.

Recently, values education has reemerged as a prime focus in the curriculum of schools and higher education institutions (Acar, Turkmen, & Roychoudhury, 2010) (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09500690902991805?journalCode=tsed20>) and as a way to develop "ethical reasoning" and decision making as 21st-century educational outcomes. Yap contends that including Islam's universal values as an alternative framework provides another avenue for exploring the more prominent moral and ethical

aspects of educational decision making. Recent calls among Islamic education specialists to bring values back into the classroom because of their universal relevance and Islamic grounding have intensified. In addition, Vincent posits that universal values are also seen as a way to prevent and counter extremism. The AEMS' initiative argues that values are critical for the human developmental trajectory and, as a result, should be part

us to customize this specific model to AEMS' vision and mission, for *tawhid* also includes all of Islam's operational values, such as peace, justice and tranquility. This model is unique in that the individual may move among the states (or stages) as he or she is impacted by life's conditions such as poverty, wars and other dramatic situations (<https://iiit.org/en/home>). This also means that intervention and motivation may support one's transformation on the trajectory.

(ethnocentric) to "all of us" (worldly) — a good example of the unfolding waves of consciousness (p. 34).

Our model takes this a step further by emphasizing the "beyond us" state as a higher goal in the developmental trajectory. A person's understanding of *tawhid* and the depth of its manifestation may, in fact, go through a developmental process from the lowest state of consciousness (the tribal and egocentric) to the highest one in the model (the holistic) and beyond to incorporate a universal consciousness in which the only distinction with clear boundaries is that between the Creator and the creation.

The values, as well as the constructs that may be operationalized into competencies, examined in our empirical study have educational implications for interventions in curriculum and pedagogy, as well as in policies that utilize education as a way to capitalize on a person's development potential to reach higher states, such as the holistic (defined in the Spiral Dynamics model as the state of transpersonal living where common goals and systems are synergized) and *tawhid*. In this process, educational programs that infuse the values included in the study, such as empathy and forgiveness, and a values-based approach into education could make a difference for the next generation of Muslim youth.

The results of our study show a high correlation between the values and the various states of the human development model that we adapted. The hope is that over the coming few years, we will accumulate enough knowledge about the values and how they are expressed in the countries participating in the study and share that (including the data sets publicly on our website and other repositories). Our unique contribution is providing accurate, high quality and authentic knowledge grounded in universal Islamic values as infused in the next generation's growth and development.

Finally, the accumulated wisdom gathered from AEMS' various projects and studies can be an asset for interventions and larger global initiatives, such as the United Nations Global Citizenship agenda (<https://unchronicle.un.org/issue/global-citizenship>), by demonstrating how a value system grounded in the developmental approach can inform and enrich the various programs based on this UN initiative and others. 

Ilham Nasser is director of Mapping the Terrain research at IIIT. Ahmed Alwani is vice president of IIIT.

## THE AEMS' INITIATIVE ARGUES THAT VALUES ARE CRITICAL FOR THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY AND, AS A RESULT, SHOULD BE PART OF ANY REFORM EFFORT, ESPECIALLY WHEN 84 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION CLAIMS A RELIGION AND/ OR A SPIRITUAL BELIEF SYSTEM ([HTTPS://WWW.PEWFORUM.ORG/2012/12/18/GLOBAL-RELIGIOUS-LANDSCAPE-EXEC](https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec)).

of any reform effort, especially when 84 percent of the world's population claims a religion and/or a spiritual belief system. (<https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec>).

To reflect the above approach, we adopted the Spiral Dynamics model (Beck & Cowan, 2006) (<https://journal.fi/ar/article/view/67574/27870>) of human development as a basis for infusing values such as empathy, gratitude and forgiveness in education. To the original model, which contains eight states of consciousness, we added a ninth one — one that highlights *tawhid* (God's oneness) as the highest state of being.

The developmental trajectory begins with the most basic form of existence, which places survival needs and belonging to the immediate group (the clan and the tribe) at the center of growth. This egocentric state continues in an increasing order of magnitude until it reaches the *worldly* state, defined as one's arrival at an inclusive state of existence. In other words, bonding and human-to-human empathy are at the center of being.

For us, *worldly* was inappropriate because *tawhid* is the central premise of any Muslim's being and belief systems (Aslan, 2011) (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/5837>). In addition, doing so permitted

In our study, we define *tawhid* as the state of consciousness in which Oneness with God and others is achieved. This working definition forms part of the model, and any theological interpretation of it is beyond the scope of our research. We take this approach because a simple view of the concept may be taken in the wrong direction. For example, some of those who believe in *tawhid* are confident that their beliefs are superior to others, even though a more in-depth view reveals a more complex revelation of God's Oneness that applies to monotheism in general and to the unity of all of God's creations.

Our view is based on those of previous Islamic philosophers and scholars who elaborated on *tawhid* to not only describe God as the Creator, but also as the universal power that enables humans and creatures to live in harmony with self, others and their surroundings. In our approach, the *tawhid* state may be the ultimate one for devout Muslims. But it is not exclusive to them, for it is also relevant for individuals from other religions and convictions as well. This model is aligned with Wilber's articulation (2007) (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/190452/the-integral-vision-by-ken-wilber>) that moral development tends to move from "me" (egocentric) to "us"

# NEW RELEASES

## Lessons from Surah al-Kahf

Yasir Qadhi

2020. Pp. 148. HB \$33.31, PB. \$15.95, Kindle \$8.49  
Kube Publishing Ltd., Leicestershire, U.K.

**W**HEN THE MEANINGS OF THE QURAN'S MANY PARABLES are unwrapped and understood, they offer wisdom and guidance.

Muslims are advised to read Surah Kahf at least once a week. Qadhi explains why and what readers gain from this particularly thought-provoking chapter by analyzing the lines, stories and symbols associated with the People of the Cave, Prophet Musa's ('alayhi as salam) encounter with Khidr, the two men and their gardens, and Gog and Magog.

Qadhi strives to help readers obtain a glimpse of the Quran's profound meaning. The chapter concludes with, "Say: 'If the sea were to become ink to record the words of my Lord, indeed the sea would all be used up before the words of my Lord are exhausted..." (Q. 18:109).



## Estate Planning for the Muslim Client

By Yaser Ali and Ahmed Shaikh

2019. Pp. 324. PB. Members \$79.95, Non-members \$89.95, Section member \$69.95  
American Bar Association, Chicago, Ill.

**I**SLAMIC LAW PROVIDES A NON-DISCRETIONARY SYSTEM OF rules that governs the distribution of a Muslim's estate. Designing such an estate plan presents unique challenges and opportunities.

*This book* provides insights, information and practical planning solutions for Muslims who wish to be Sharia-compliant while recognizing the practicalities of daily American life. The authors highlight various planning strategies and identify the most common issues: meeting Muslim clients and understanding Islam's pillars, ethical, legal and public policy issues; estate planning while still alive; planning for incapacity and death; disposition of property after death; drafting estate-planning documents (sample forms included); planning for individuals and assets abroad, and more.

## Islamic Finance: Principles and Practice (3rd ed.)

Hans Visser

2020. Pp. 269. HB \$135.00

Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham, Glos., U.K.



**I**N HIS THIRD — AND EXTENSIVELY UPDATED — EDITION, Visser investigates the ideas and concepts that drive and shape Islamic finance. He correctly informs readers that this system cannot be understood without a basic knowledge of Islamic ethical and legal thought.

Visser reviews the products, institutions and markets offered by Islamic finance; critically discusses the "ethical superiority" arguments made by its advocates; and offers ways to adapt fiscal and monetary policy to Islamic financial institutions.

This book should be a welcome addition for economics and finance students seeking alternatives to conventional finance; students of Islamic finance and Islamic studies; and bankers, journalists and politicians who want to learn about Islamic finance and financial institutions.



## Healing Politics: A Doctor's Journey into the Heart of Our Political Epidemic

Abdul El-Sayed

2020. Pp. 352. HB. \$27.00, Kindle \$9.99, AudioCD \$19.88

Abrams Press, New York, N.Y.

**A** CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS, EL-SAYED GREW UP FEELING A responsibility to help others. He rose through securing a Rhodes Scholarship, earning two advanced degrees and landing a tenure-track position at Columbia University. At 30, he became the nation's youngest city health official, tasked with rebuilding Detroit's health department after years of austerity policies.

But he found himself disillusioned: He could heal the sick and build healthier and safer communities, but neither of those addressed the social and economic conditions causing the various illnesses in the first place. So he left health for politics, in which he has a solid academic background — he won the William Jennings Bryan Prize for Political Science — running for governor of Michigan (unsuccessfully) and earning the support of progressive champions like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.).

While relating his life as a young idealist, the author offers personal stories and fascinating forays into history and science. Combining his unique perspective with epidemiology, El-Sayed diagnoses an underlying epidemic that afflicts the country — an epidemic of insecurity. And to heal the rifts that this epidemic has created, he presents a new direction for the progressive movement.

## Defending Muhammad in Modernity

SherAli Tareen

2019. Pp. 506. HB. \$125.00, PB. \$35.00, Kindle \$16.99

University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind.

**T**AREEN OFFERS A COMPREHENSIVE AND THEORETICALLY engaged study of the Barelvi-Deobandi polemic. These two normative orientations/reform movements, which began in British-occupied South Asia almost two centuries ago, still haunt the religious sensibilities of postcolonial South Asian Muslims and the region's diaspora communities.

The author argues that this polemic was animated by "competing political theologies" that articulated contrasting visions of the normative relationship among divine sovereignty, prophetic charisma and everyday life.

Based on his reading of previously unexplored Arabic, Persian and Urdu print and manuscript sources spanning the late-18th and the whole 19th century, this book intervenes in and integrates the often-disparate fields of religious studies, Islamic studies, South Asian studies, critical secularism studies and political theology.



## Demystifying Shariah: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It's Not Taking Over Our Country

Sumbul Ali-Karamali

2020. Pp. 240. HB \$22.95, Kindle \$13.99  
Beacon Press, Boston, Mass.

**M**USLIM AMERICAN LEGAL EXPERT ALI-KARAMALI'S DIRECT counterpoint to the fear mongering about Shariah analyzes the reality while eliminating the common stereotypes and assumptions.

She argues that propagandists use scare tactics and deliberate misinformation to depict Shariah as a draconian and oppressive Islamic law that all Muslims must obey. Al-Karamali points out that this would be almost funny if it weren't so terrifyingly wrong — as puzzling as if Americans suddenly began protesting the Martians' occupation of Earth.

She explains that Shariah is not one set of punitive rules or even law as we perceive it — rigid and enforceable — but religious rules and recommendations that provide guidance via its accessible, engaging narrative style, its various meanings, how it developed and how Shariah-based legal systems have operated for over 1,400 years.

By describing the key lies and misunderstandings associated with it, she seeks to explain why they are nonsensical; to introduce readers on its basic principles, goals and general development; and to answer many questions.

She presents her book as a defense against stereotypes and provides a relatable discussion of Sharia.

## Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis

Fazlun Khalid

2019. Pp. 256. HB \$30.78, PB \$18.95, Kindle \$15.95  
Kube Publishing Ltd., Leicestershire, U.K.

**K**HALID OFFERS A MAJOR STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTALISM and Islam in practice and theory, along with an historical overview that sets out future challenges, including reformulating the Islamic legal tradition to take the ecological dimension seriously.

He argues that the world's more than one billion Muslims have the potential to reinvigorate the desire for environmental change in a community that is ignored at the planet's peril. In arguing that modernity, consumerism and industrialization need to be rethought, along with his appeal to reconnect humanity with creation in the divine order, this book could transform a generation.

Khalid seeks action from those whose primary orientation is toward Islam.

## Ibn Battuta: The Journey of a Medieval Muslim

Edoardo Albert

2019. Pp. 80+illus. PB. \$9.95  
Kube Publishing Ltd., Leicestershire, U.K.

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Professor Dr. Mohammad Hashim Kamali is Founding CEO of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia. He was Professor of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence at the International Islamic University Malaysia (1985-2004), and also Dean of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) from 2004 to 2006. Professor Kamali serves on the advisory boards of 13 local and international academic journals.

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