

al-talib
THE MUSLIM NEWSMAGAZINE AT UCLA
الطالب
'the student'

Jumada al-Thani 1418 • October 1997



Masjids

using lessons from the past
to implement solutions for the future



editor

Ahmed Shama

managing editor

Amina El-Mahdy

business manager

Arif Shaikh

staff editors

Rima Assaf
Mansur Khan
Shafia Mir
Tamseel Mir
Talha Rizvi
Ben Wang

design manager

Omar Hamoui

copy editors

Sawssan Ahmed
Arshad Ali
Tahira Hoke
Jamil Jaffer
Omar Mahmood
Shahab Razfar
Nicholle Safavi
Jihad Saleh
Ali Shaikley
Tarek Shawky

graphics

Amy El-Akabawi
Lynn Salahi

public relations manager

Lynn Salahi

distribution

Ayaz Khan
Masood Khan
Omar Mahmood
Talha Rizvi

writers

Suleman Ahmer
Arshad Ali
Ather Ali
Salam Al-Maryati
Zahra bint al-Qalam
Aquil Baseer
Muhammad Elamin
Mansur Khan
Maher Hathout
Mikal
Shahab Razfar
Imran Razi
Talha Rizvi
Abdul Khaliq Siddiq

special thanks

Chris Bates
Meri-Louise Harrison
Ernest Lee
Edina Lekovic
Munira Lekovic
Jaime Maldonado
Misty Patrick
Arvli Ward

The *masjid*, known more commonly in English as the mosque, is defined literally as a place for *sujud* (prostration). When trying to define a masjid to a non-Muslim, it is often easy to say, "the Islamic equivalent of a church." However, this definition is inaccurate due to the role that the masjid plays in Islamic society, culture, and history. Whereas churches, synagogues and other temples often serve the weekly or yearly spiritual needs of the people, the masjid's role is to serve as the daily center of the community. Not only has it served the Muslims spiritually throughout history, but it also served the *Ummah* (community) politically, educationally, socially and culturally.

During the time of the Prophet (pbuh), the center of virtually all activity took place at *Masjid al-Nabawi* (the Prophet's mosque). It served Muslims spiritually by offering all five daily prayers in a group, and the masjid was open all night for anyone seeking to perform worship in *qiyam al-layl* (night vigilance). It served politically, as matters of state and war were decided by the Prophet (pbuh) in the masjid with his companions. Lessons of the Qur'an and the Prophet (pbuh) were often taught there, serving educational needs. It served socially in that it housed the homeless in their time of need. Finally, it served culturally in that festivities such as spear-throwing took place during the 'Id holiday.

Although Masjid al-Nabawi served as the community's center, the role of the masjid has declined over the course of Islamic history. After the death of the Prophet (pbuh) and *al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun* (the Rightly-Guided Caliphs), the masjid was

stripped of many of its honorable cloaks. It quickly became a tool of the dynasties in power to their political advantage. While many masjids still served some of the roles that Masjid al-Nabawi served, only a few could follow its towering example.

So, what is the current situation? Unfortunately, masjids seem to be failing in all of their roles.

Spiritually, sometimes we find 10 to 15 brothers praying *Maghrib* (sunset) in our largest masjids. Some masjids are not even open except on Friday and/or Sunday. Our Ummah is at least 1,000 times larger than it was during the days of Masjid al-Nabawi, but we can only fill the masjids today during *Jum'ah* (Friday prayer) or 'Id prayers.

Politically, we have abandoned the doors of Allah's House in favor of seeking entrance through the doors of the White House. Whereas the masjid used to house the affairs of the Islamic State, it now houses the affairs of Congressional lobbies.

Educationally, we have broken the links to Islamic scholarship in pursuit of the public school system. Some of our youth even go to Catholic schools, in search of "better education." This can be considered perhaps one of our largest casualties as an Ummah: we are failing to pass Islamic knowledge and spirit on to our youth. We are losing them step by step to an American system that teaches youth how to accept blindly, not how to think.

Socially, we kick homeless people out of the masjid, so as not to disturb the mayor's speech inside. Because we fear tarnishing the "image" of our institutions.

Culturally, we have split into eth-

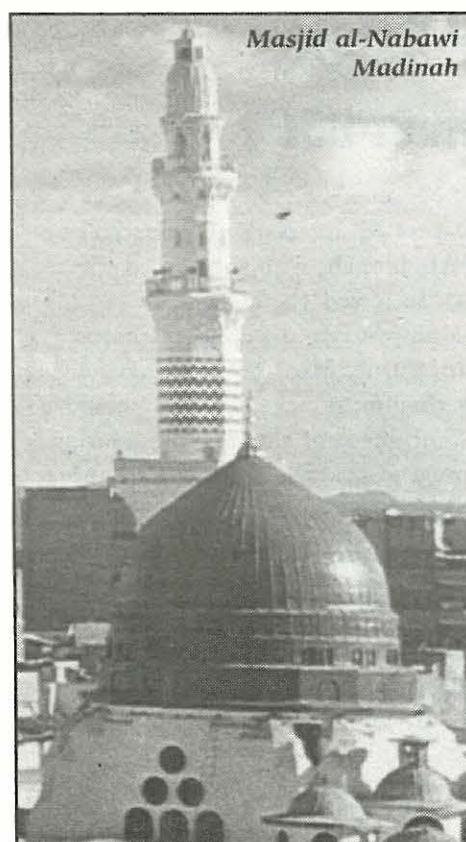
nic factions, too timid to visit the other side and too inhospitable to greet them at our own masjid. Furthermore, we have replaced Islam with *our* cultural version of "Islam," to the point that we can no longer differentiate between what is Islam and what is Arab, Persian, Indo-Pakistani, etc.

How do we solve these problems? Often times, we become blinded by the glamour of technology, and we feel that improvement of the masjid lies in more complex bureaucracy and state-of-the-art equipment. However, all the roles of the masjid are lost by our blind push to move "forward" into the next century, although we are clearly falling backwards.

Ironically, the solution for the future lies in the example of the past. Real progress will be made by returning to the simplicity of Masjid al-Nabawi. The focus then was to build the center of brotherhood and sisterhood in the community, not to build video-conferencing rooms.

We need to use the masjid for what it was intended: our home for prayers, our center of politics, our school, our homeless shelter and our cultural melting pot. If we do this, we can establish the spirit of Masjid al-Nabawi in every masjid, insha' Allah. •

Jazakum Allahu khayran.
-The Al-Talib staff



**118 Kerckhoff Hall • 308 Westwood Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90024
Phone (310)206-7877 • Fax (310)206-3165
altalib@media.ucla.edu
http://www.altalib.media.ucla.edu**

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

Unsigned editorial represents a majority opinion of the *Al-Talib* Editorial Board. All other columns, cartoons, and letters represent the opinion of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the *Al-Talib* Editorial Board. The ASUCLA Communications Board has a media grievance procedure for resolving grievances against any of its publications. For a copy of the complete procedure, contact the Publications Office at 118 Kerckhoff Hall.