



Link

SPRING/SUMMER 2009

A PUBLICATION OF MSA NATIONAL

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A TRADITION OF CHANGE: **Grasping & Transforming Today**

INSIDE
**A LETTER TO
PRESIDENT
BARACK OBAMA**

PLUS
FROM AROUND THE ZONES
SUICIDE AMONGST AMERICAN MUSLIMS
STUDY OF HIJAB AND GENDER RELATIONS

FEATURED SCHOLAR
Shaykh Faraz Rabbani

**QUICK GUIDE
TO MUSLIM
CHAPLAINS
ON CAMPUS**



"On a Wing and a Prayer" is, if nothing else, a congenial exercise in cultural bridge building.
The New York Times



HOST A SCREENING AND DIALOGUE ON YOUR CAMPUS ON A WING AND A PRAYER

An American Muslim Learns to Fly

A production of Unity Productions Foundation in association with Handcrank Films

His wife thinks he might be crazy...
The FBI thinks he might be a danger...

Monem thinks they might be right.



www.20000dialogues.org/owapmsa

On a Wing and a Prayer follows one Muslim-American man on his quest to obtain a pilot's license. But will the "land of opportunity" deny Monem his dream in the aftermath of 9/11 and in the face of heightened domestic security? The cinema verite-style documentary reveals a funny, loveable, altogether human Muslim-American as he pursues the American dream against tides of negative public perception.

20,000 Dialogues, a nationwide dialogue project of Unity Productions Foundation has partnered with Peaceful Communications to offer **On a Wing and a Prayer** free on DVD when your MSA agrees to host a screening and discussion. This program is great for outreach events and Islamic Awareness activities. The main character of the film, Monem Salam is available to speak at your MSA, please contact Daniel Tutt at Daniel@upf.tv or (202) 298-8088 to learn more.

To sign up for a complimentary DVD and to get discussion material, go to www.20000dialogues.org/owapmsa. Questions please call Daniel Tutt at (202) 298-8088, Daniel@upf.tv



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Unity Productions Foundation
www.upf.tv

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The views expressed in the MSA Link do not necessarily reflect those of the MSA National executive committee.

The Muslim Students Association (MSA) National, headquartered near Washington D.C., has been serving Muslim students on colleges and university campuses across the United States and Canada since 1963. There are over 500 MSA chapters on university and college campuses throughout the United States and Canada.

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T HIS ACADEMIC YEAR MARKS THE 46th Anniversary of the Muslim Students Association National organization. While reflecting over the previous 46 years, we must also shed light on where we are today, both as an organization and as individuals.

Since its inception, MSA National has continuously set the standard with regards to North American Islamic achievements. After successfully launching our very first continental conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1963, we moved on to pioneer the establishment of North America's first Islamic printing press, with publications such as the English translation

The Prophet, (peace and blessings of God be upon him) once said, "There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) Health and free time for doing good" (Sahih Bukhari) How do we leave an impact such as that of our past leaders while taking advantage of this fleeting time that we have by grasping and transforming today? This life, this squeezed time in which we are tested, is limited and we must take full advantage. We can start by remembering to incorporate the most basic principles of Islam into our daily routines. Calling our parents, inviting a neighbour over for dinner, and taking a bowl of soup to a sick friend are but a few examples of changing our today. Caring for our communities at the grassroots level serves as a

There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) Health and free time for doing good. Prophet Muhammad

of The Life of Muhammad by Muhammad Husayn Haykal being amongst the first scholarly printings in 1976. It is through MSA that fine scholars such as Imam Zaid Shakir and Dr. Umar Farooq Abd-Allah received inspiration in their youth and how political leaders like Congressman Keith Ellison were first enlightened by Islam. It was by the support of MSA National that organizations such as ISNA and ICNA came to be and in more current times, through the extensive MSA network, projects such as Islam Awareness Week, Ramadan Fast-A-Thon, Project Downtown, Peace...Not Prejudice, and the Get Out The Vote coalition flourish across our campuses. These are the firm bricks that previous generations have laid out for us. Now we ask ourselves, how will we continue the great work of those who came before us?

stepping stone to eventually leading them.

This summer edition of the Link themed "A Tradition of Change: Grasping and Transforming Today" reflects on our previous accomplishments as well as the tools we have to transform the present. This edition is a collaboration of the sincere and assiduous efforts of talented students throughout North America. Above all, it is by the countless blessings and opportunities bestowed upon us from God that we have the opportunity to serve one another today. We ask God to guide us amongst those whom He has guided and to bless us with the knowledge and dedication to transform our lives.

Monika Nagpal
Editor in Chief

MSA National Political Action Task Force 2008-2009 Update



BY ASMA REHMAN

MSA National's Political Action Task Force (PATF) has had a busy year. Among other projects and initiatives, excitement over the presidential elections has been a focal point of many students' hard work and energy this past year. In what became an unprecedented election, millions of Americans, many of whom had never voted before, registered to express their right to vote. Muslim Americans played a large role in that drive. MSA National's first ever Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign was an astounding success. With over 20 MSAs in 13 states participating, MSAers helped bring out the Muslim vote in key states including Virginia and Ohio. The dedicated coalition members participated in monthly conference calls, voter registration drives, phone banking, and facebook and text message reminders.

Another important project several MSAs across the nation participated in this year was MSA National's 'Peace...Not Prejudice' (PnP) Campaign. The PnP Campaign is a proactive and positive effort to further facilitate understanding about Islam and Muslims in our local university and college communities. By engaging students of diverse racial and religious backgrounds, MSA National hopes to eliminate stereotypes and racism among campus communities.

MSA National's Political Action Task Force also led a "Call to Action" over attacks on Gaza in January of this year. Many MSA members and students across the continent joined the Call to Action by:

1. Taking part in the MSA co-sponsored 'Let Gaza Live' National March in Washington D.C. outside the White House on January 10th, 2009. MSA National requested students to meet under large MSA National banners with slogans such as "Fund Education, Not Occupation" and "Books Not Bombs", and led the Muslim student contingent in the march across the nation's capital.

2. Participating in the National Day of Fast in Solidarity with the People of Gaza. In an act of solidarity and sense of unity, MSAs and their respective campuses and local communities fasted on Thursday, January 15th, 2009, and



MSA National president, Asma Mirza (left) and Political Action task Force Chair, Asma Rehman (right) meet with Amy Goodman of Democracy Now at the Media and Human Rights Conference sponsored by AMT.

also donated the money they would have normally spent on lunch to a relief organization of their choice that provides aid to the victims of Gaza. At the time of breaking fast, students made a special prayer for the safety and well being of the people of Gaza. As stated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings

By engaging students of diverse racial and religious backgrounds, MSA National hopes to eliminate stereotypes and racism among campus communities.

of God be upon him), the prayer of the faster upon breaking fast is always answered. In addition, several MSAs organized viewings of video presentations and/or documentaries in conjunction with the National Day of Fast.

3. Joining MSA National's mass writing and calling campaign. Using MSA National's suggested talking points, hundreds of MSAers contacted their elected officials and asked them to adopt an even-handed Middle East policy that

is in our nation's interest. Earlier this semester, PATF Chair, Sr. Asma Rehman traveled to the United Kingdom and met with British Muslim political activists involved in organizations such as the Quilliam Foundation, City Circle, and The Active Change Foundation to discuss initiatives, share ideas and participate in discourse about Western Muslim organizations' best-practices.

Most recently, Sr. Asma Rehman, along with other national Muslim leaders, met with the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu to discuss challenges faced by Muslims both in the U.S. and Turkey, as well as opportunities to collaborate and strengthen our relationship by working together for the prosperity of young Muslims both domestically and abroad.

MSA National President, Sr. Asma Mirza, and Sr. Asma Rehman also met with White House officials in early June to discuss issues of concern to MSA National and Muslim student across North America. Additionally, they explored ways to work more closely with the White House and our new administration. Stay tuned for important and exciting new initiatives coming from MSA National's Political Action Task Force. If you are interested in getting involved, please email Sr. Asma Rehman at patfchair@msanational.org. ☪

Thinking Anew:

Muslim Chaplains on Campus Bridging the Gap

BY FARAZ KHAN
Graduate Student,
Thomas Edison State College



“Chaplains are practitioners – bridge builders engaged in an active dialogue while remaining true to their faith”

The Muslim Students Association

and the mosque are two of the oldest Islamic institutions that have inspired many foundation-building projects in the United States. Muslim chaplaincy on campus is a phenomenon that has developed in cooperation with MSA work over the last few years. Although a precise number of college chaplains remain in flux, there are about thirty dedicated individuals who have been on the forefront of campus chaplaincy. These chaplains are pioneers - a conglomerate of a very diverse and unique representation of American Islam. As a former Muslim chaplain at Rutgers University, I want to bring my readers up to par with the idea of Muslim chaplaincy on campuses across America.

CHAPLAINCY

Campus chaplaincy, as I understand it, is competency in pastoral care, ministering, and counseling. A chaplain is a person who

formulates a unique role as a religious leader, social worker, and counselor; this individual is a staff or affiliate member of the university and is able to act as a liaison between the administration and the students. A chaplain may or may not be a religious authority (such as a “shaykh”) but he or she is knowledgeable on practical, everyday, religious issues. Ultimately, a chaplain’s purpose is to serve his or her constituents on a campus setting.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

It is a known fact that many Muslim youth find a communication gap with immigrant imams and scholars. Chaplains, however, are able to fill that void due to their cultural competency. It has been my experience that these folks are highly knowledgeable of the culture of their respective institutions. Interestingly, not only do they understand their fellow Muslims but they can also associate with people of other

faiths and are a source of solace to everyone. They are practitioners – bridge builders engaged in an active dialogue while remaining true to their faith. Chaplains give many talks on Islam but they are all-ears when it comes to student issues. The diverse background and skills of some of these chaplains prove that each individual is a gem and an asset to the community in their own right.

LOOKING AHEAD

I believe that as the Muslim community learns more about chaplaincy, better communication between local mosques and campuses will be established. The Muslim community needs to prioritize a commitment to college chaplaincy to establish a better representation of Islam in America. Needless to say, I am very optimistic about the future of chaplaincy. In a short time, Muslim chaplains have bolstered another institutional dimension to Islam in America. ◀

Who's Who?

For more information about chaplains or chaplaincy programs at your school, contact:
Faraz Khan
burraaq@gmail.com
<http://liberalartsforum.blogspot.com>

A brief list of some chaplains who serve on the front lines of advocating for the Islamic faith on campus.

Chaplain Taha Abdul-Basser	Harvard	He has spent more than ten years in Islamic education, is an expert in Islamic Finance and Arabic language, and is a Harvard alumnus.
Chaplain Tahera Ahmad	Mount Holyoke	She is a bona fide Quran reciter and has used innovative role-playing programs at Mount Holyoke.
Chaplain Najiba Akbar	Wellesley	She is passionate about counseling and social work with deep roots as an alumna and chaplain at Wellesley.
Chaplain Marwa Aly	Trinity and Wesleyan	She is a first-rate speechwriter and excels in personal development programs for her students.
Chaplain Abdullah Antepi	Duke	He is known for his charming, "Turkish delight" personality and ability to engage students and faculty on many issues pertaining to Islam.
Chaplain Omer Bajwa	Yale	He is known for his openness and prolific intellectual writings.
Chaplain Naila Baloch	Tufts	She is experienced in cross-culture work in Pakistan and the US.
Chaplain David Coolidge	Dartmouth	He is known for his openness and prolific intellectual writings.
Chaplain David Fricke	Rutgers	He is well-experienced and has been committed to chaplaincy for a decade.
Chaplain Mary Lahaj	Simmons	She plays an active role in her community and does not shy away from dialogue.
Chaplain Suheil Laher	MIT	He is well-experienced and has been committed to chaplaincy for a decade.
Chaplain Khalid Latif	New York University	He is a community builder with a \$20 million dollar endowment vision, and is an NYU alumnus.
Chaplain Salahuddin Muhammad	Bard	He maintains a focus on religion as actually practiced, rather than a superficial gesture of good will.
Chaplain Sohaib Sultan	Princeton	He is committed to building a comprehensive Muslim life program at Princeton.

Muslim Students Stand for Peace in Palestine

BY ASMA REHMAN

Catastrophe brings us together, and the massacre in Gaza has illustrated this most bittersweet motif. Around the globe, communities from every background organized a multitude of events this past January to express their distaste for the politics involved and their deep sadness for the lives lost. MSA National joined the call for action with a diverse set of events covering the span of human emotions involved in such tragic times.

Often, the first emotion drawn from a person during a crisis, such as that in Gaza, is commonly anger and frustration. Rarely are sensations such as these capable of contributing to constructive causes, but when expressed in a manner that can bring attention to such calamitous conditions they can breed hope and concern. That was the essence of the rally and march hosted by the ANSWER group and co-sponsored by MSA National as well as other organizations on Saturday, January 10th, 2009 in Washington DC. Thousands of caring and conscious citizens both Muslim and people of other faiths marched down the streets of Washington DC braving freezing temperatures to show solidarity and support for their fellow brothers and sisters in Palestine.

MSA National's Political Action Task Force (PATF) member, Irfan Shuttari and PATF Chair, Asma Rehman, addressed the audience calling an end to the occupation and bringing awareness to the unlawful targeting of schools and places of learning by the Israeli army. Hundreds of students marched side by side, as part of the student contingent at the rally, under banners made by the students themselves, in solidarity with the people of Gaza.

Aside from the vivid image and impact caused by masses of people standing for a cause, MSA students across the US and Canada participated in an MSA Call to Action to contact their Senators, Representatives and Members of Parliament to demand action be taken to end the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. MSA National



MSA National co-sponsored 'Let Gaza Live Rally. 50,000 participants marched side by side calling an end to the occupation.

officers also met with members of the US Department of State to express their concerns and work towards a solution to bring peace and end the humanitarian crisis.

As Gandhi did for the British occupation of India, we did this for the occupation of Palestine.

When reality sets in and the victims of the tragedy begin to weigh heavily on the mind, the next emotion drawn is sadness. At the MSA National co-sponsored candle light vigil, the lights of the candles illuminating the dark D.C. night served as a solemn reminder of the men, women, and children that died in the bombings and assaults. Silent remembrance and reflection is perhaps the greatest provocation for personal inspiration. Hundreds of citizens turned out on a bitterly cold New Years Eve to show their support.

But what use are these expressions of human emotions if only heard by men? The greatest

gift granted to Muslims is the use of prayer, and MSA National arranged a way where we can amplify this power. To complete the expanses of human emotion, MSA National called for a National Day of Fast for the casualties in Gaza, the prospect of peace, and hope for humanity on Thursday, January 15th. MSAs and Islamic Centers from around the country participated in this most spiritual solidarity, and perhaps the history of abstaining from food for peace was on our side. As Gandhi did for the British occupation of India, we did this for the occupation of Palestine.

Human emotions are a natural reminder that we are in fact, human. When uncontrolled, we may have the tendency to be blinded and enraged, but when channeled and focused, they can be the greatest tools in any arsenal to change the world we live in. God willing we used and will continue to use this tool wisely: to catalyze peace, to pray for the victims, and to leave a lasting awareness that we are an Ummah united, and one death unjust is the death of humanity - and this becomes and ideal felt, not only spoken. ◀



Making banners for 'Let Gaza Live' rally. From left: Asma Mirza (President), Asma Rehman (PATF Chair), Danish Adil (Treasurer), Tauqeer Zaidi (East Zone U.S. Representative).



MSA National's Political Action Task Force (PATF) member, Irfan Shuttari and PATF Chair, Asma Rehman, addressed the audience calling an end to the occupation and bringing awareness to the unlawful targeting of schools and places of learning by the Israeli army.



MSA National members and officers: Iman Barzinji, Yasmin Hussein, and Asma Rehman participate in the 50,000 strong MSA National co-sponsored 'Let Gaza Live' rally on January 10th, 2009



letter from the president

As I clean out the "My Documents" folders, I look back on my terms as MSA National President with both pride and regret. Two years ago, the Executive Committee humbly accepted their positions with a vision: to strategically improve the organization to better serve our fellow Muslim students and the community at large. While a quick look at the website alone demonstrates the progress we've made, I sincerely pray the incoming officers take this organization to new heights.

My role as steward began with an onslaught of Islamophobic events on campus. We saw unprecedented attacks on Muslim students and our faith. Yet on our shoestring budget we united our campuses around peace, not prejudice. Since that time, your MSA National officers have worked extremely hard to build relationships across faiths and with government agencies to breakthrough stereotypes and raise our collective voice.

There were two moments that to me encapsulate our success. The first was last year, when MSA National was invited to be among a handful of faith leaders to meet with the Pope during his historic visit to the US. The second was last week, when I was invited to meet with the White House on the heels of President Obama's speech to the Muslim World. These two institutions recognize the value and positive contributions of Muslim students across the US and Canada; contributions of amazing Muslim students like you.

We've revamped the website, the MSA Link, created the Eletter, expanded training through COMPASS, supported hundreds of MSAs when facing Islamophobia, raised the voice of Muslim students to government agencies from the DHS, FBI, Department of State and the White House, networked students through conferences, and much more. Yet there is so much more to accomplish.

As Muslim students, we need to expand our network. On campuses there are many Muslim students who are not a part of our MSAs, MSUs and Islamic clubs. I've seen Muslims and peoples of other faiths transformed by their MSAs, therefore we should embody our role as Ambassadors of Islam on Campus. We should invite this silent majority to become part of an atmosphere where no matter what your ideological or organizational affiliation, you belong. This broadest platform was the founding principle of Muslim student groups – and it is a concept that is vital to the future of the Muslim community in North America. Finally, the MSA network is powerful. As we move forward, we must leverage these networks and become further united to have a meaningful impact on our world and serve The Creator. This is the mission of MSA National and all of its officers.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve you these past two years as MSA National President. Anything good has come from God and anything negative flows from our own faults. I ask for your forgiveness for any of my shortcomings. This time as a student, as a youth, is sacred; it is almost shocking to realize that for me it is over. It has been a life changing experience and I thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Asma Y. Mirza

Asma Mirza
President
MSA National

2009-2010 MSA NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

By Monika Nagpal

Last month, MSA members across North America elected the new executive committee for MSA National. Your new officers look forward to serving you this coming year.

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Celebrating 45 Years of MSA National

BY SYED FAKHRI
Graduate Student, Penn State University



Penn State University 45th anniversary banquet



MSA Legends dinner during continental conference

The **ACADEMIC YEAR OF 2008-2009** ends on a significant milestone for MSA National and one of its constituents, MSA of Penn State University. It was in 1963, forty-five years prior, that marked the nascence of MSA National. The founders of the time recognized the necessity of having an umbrella organization that would encompass the several MSAs that were establishing themselves on campuses around the US & Canada, and to help in their development.

Asma Mirza, as the incumbent MSA National president, feels that the organization has grown tremendously over the years. She opines that several of the problems Muslim students face on any campus, are generally similar, irrespective of location. It is here that MSA National comes in and helps students use case studies to apply accordingly on their respective campuses. As president, she is glad to have had the opportunity to work with several amazing Muslim students who continue to contribute positively to the society.

This 45th Anniversary was celebrated in September 2008, at the "MSA National Continental Conference", held parallel to the annual ISNA Convention. The event comprised of a banquet followed by a history session. The former was attended by over 200 past and present officers of MSA National, and the history session was attended by close to 10,000 people. Original documents from the 1960's and 1970's were exhibited at the event. Several of the eminent speakers included Imam Zaid Shakir, Dr. Altaf Husain and Dr. Abdullah Idris Ali.

Later on in the academic year, the MSA at Penn State University (PSU) celebrated their own 45th year anniversary, on the 28th of February, 2009. The event had close to 200 attendees, several of whom were alumni that had come from throughout the region. Their guest

speaker, Dr. Farouk Fawzi, was the founder and first president of the PSU MSA back in 1964. Currently he is the director of the International Center for Quality and Management Sciences in Rotterdam, Netherlands and is a consultant for the UN Industrial Development Organization. Dr Fawzi, during his talk, recollected several anecdotes from his experiences as a Muslim student at the time. He recalled that the MSA then consisted of a mere 7 to 8 members and was amazed that its current membership exceeded 500 students. He reminisced of a time when

He reminisced of a time when MSA did not have a prayer room on campus or a mosque in the vicinity as it does currently

MSA did not have a prayer room on campus or a mosque in the vicinity as it does currently, compelling his fellow Muslims and himself to utilize a chapel for the Friday prayer. The anniversary event listed all the former presidents and showcased several photos elaborating the evolvement of Penn State's MSA over the years.

As we enter a new academic year, these events make us realize the dynamic nature of MSA National and its chapters. We are reminded of how the efforts of a few can potentially have a significant positive influence, years and decades down the line. MSA National strives to further improve on the efficaciousness by helping to form a network of all MSA chapters across the continent. By doing so, MSA National can facilitate the crucial exchange of ideas between its member associations and concurrently instill a sense of cohesiveness among Muslim students across the continent, merely by virtue of them being part of their campus MSA. ☪



Imam Zaid Shakir



(From left to right) Asma Mirza, Dr. Tarik Elgowhary, Dr. Altaf Husein, Mohamed Sheibani



(From left to right) Dr. Jamal Barzinji, Dr. Sheikh Abdalla Idris Ali, Dr. Iqbal Unus, Dr. Yaqoob Mirza



FROM AROUND THE ZONES

BY RANDA KUZIEZ
Vice President, MSA National



Assalamu Alaikum (Peace be upon you) everyone! Thank you for tuning in and keeping up with MSA National. We have had a solid zonal team this year who has been working hard organizing and participating in some very exciting activities this past year. With the MSA Guiding Principals in mind (see www.msanational.org), the Zonal Representatives are out discussing MSA National and attempting to be the shared network and glue between local MSAs and the national organization. As you may know, the five zones are divided into East Zone USA, East Zone Canada, Central Zone, West Zone USA, and West Zone Canada.

This year, the East Zone Representative, Tauqeer Zaidi, has helped spread various MSA National projects throughout the east zone such as Islam Awareness week, Get Out the Vote Campaign, Peace not Prejudice campaign, and the establishment of many new MSAs. He has also implemented numerous COMPASS PATH programs in the East Zone in states such as Florida. In addition, the East Zone Representative and the Zonal Committee worked with the Philadelphia Conference Committee in the organization and publicity of the East Zonal conference 2009, which took place in mid-April.

The Central Zone has been engaged in many different activities with local MSAs and MSA National initiatives. There have been consultations with new and growing MSAs

and assistance with the Get Out the Vote Coalition work. In addition, this summer the Central Zone Representative, Nura Sedique, and the COMPASS team joined the Lone Star Council in hosting the MSA Track conference that was a part of the ISNA South Central Conference in Houston, Texas. MSAers from throughout Texas joined in as well as those from other states as far as Ohio and Louisiana. The Central Zone was also proud to host and join the MSA conference as part of ISNA Midwest. This year, we also hosted a Path Program in Toledo, Ohio as part of an initiative with the Great Lakes Council. The Chicago MSAs gathered for an exciting MSA Summit held in conjunction with the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC) to help better organize the MSAs. The Texas Showdown took place at Texas A&M University in March.

The West Zone of the United States has been active and engaged within its local communities. This year, the West Zone has been working to outreach and expand its knowledge base through programs like the PATH training presented by COMPASS for MSA National. Through an alliance with MSA West, MSA National helped bring the first ever PATH training program for MSA organizational excellence to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The UCLA MSA, the MSA West delegates, and the MSA National West Zone Representative, Yasmin El-Hady, helped organize this training event for MSA leaders from across

the Southern California region. Thankfully, the strong attendance at the event helped create new connections and contacts with different MSA organizers from around the zone. The West Zone Representative has also been active in representing the national organization at the joint Tony Blair Faith Foundation & Malaria No More event in Los Angeles, and the Department of Homeland Security's National Youth Round Table.

East and West Zone Canada have also been busy with various projects, including a PATH program in the East Zone at the Southern Ontario MSA. Students were given an interactive presentation by the COMPASS team on effective management and building a Fortune 500 MSA. Over 6 different MSAs attended this event. Future programs planned in the East Zone of Canada include collaboration with the ISNA conference. The West Zone Canada region, represented by Samir Hassan, is currently planning a PATH program as well as a retreat for students to get refocused and receive effective training on a selected topic from the PATH program.

As Zonal Representative director, I am quite thankful to be working with such an outstanding team. Have you ever thought of getting involved? MSA National is always looking for more people to participate. Don't hesitate to visit www.msanational.org and contact your Zonal Representative today. ☪

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The Fountain is a bi-monthly magazine that covers a wide range of topics including Islam and the Muslim world, science, technology, arts, culture and society. It promotes a holistic approach to universe and human nature combining scientific and spiritual thought in the same quest for truth.

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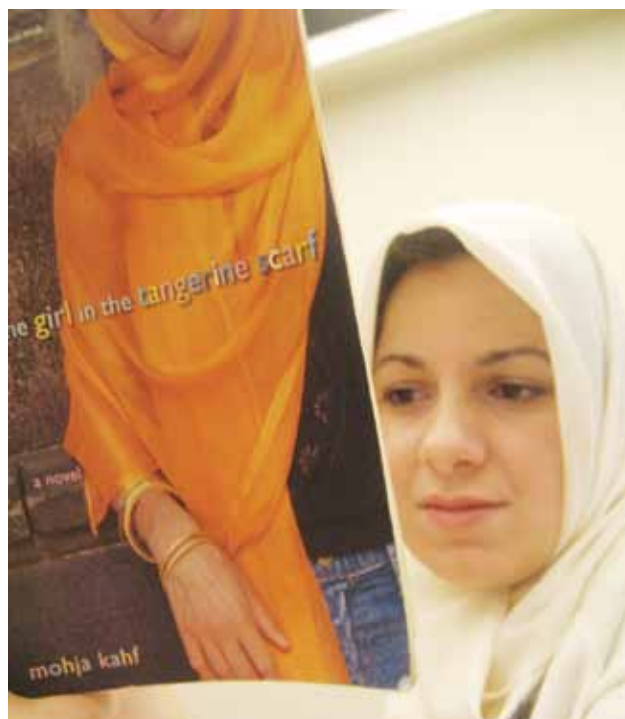
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Dr. Mohja Kahf using a scarf to add to the colorful imagery of her poems. Dr. Kahf spoke on 'Ihram and the Feminine Beautitudes of Hajj' as part of this year's Peace not Prejudice Week at Georgetown University in Washington D.C.



Khadijeh Zarafshar takes a moment to read her favorite excerpt from "Girl with the Tangerine Scarf", a novel by Mohja Kahf who gave a presentation at Georgetown University's Peace not Prejudice Week in November 2008.



Georgetown University Students and MSA National officers meet with Mohja Kahf, famous author and poet, as part of their annual Peace not Prejudice Campaign. From left: Khadijeh Zarafshar, Asma Rehman, Ibrahim Al-Talib, Hadia Mubarak, Mariam Abu-Ali, Farah El-Sherif, Front: Dr. Mohja Kahf

SPOTLIGHT ON MUSLIM STUDENTS

BY ASMA HUSSAIN

He IS ONE OF PAKISTAN'S FORMER professional tennis players, model, personal trainer, financial advisor and salesman; a current businessman, director, banker, and president. He is Hassan Akmal, MPH and is perfectly named, for Akmal means "to be the most complete" in Arabic. What is remarkable about Akmal is that he has found unparalleled ways to combine all of his professions, interests, ambitions, and passions and has successfully channeled them into an unprecedented paradigm.

Hassan Akmal is the Director and Founder of Invitation to Peace, Invitation to the Truth... Unity through Charity, Understanding, and Moral Leadership, a da'wah organization which promotes peace, education, and tolerance among different faiths and communities. Under the umbrella of "Invitation" he has also created a partner organization which focuses on public health issues titled Invitation Relief: A Non-Profit for Forced Migration and Health-Lead by Example. Invitation Relief is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt not-for-profit corporation. Akmal's reason to create two organizations was to demonstrate that humanitarian efforts should not take place without providing da'wah to its recipient communities. Most Islamic charity and relief organizations do not provide information about Islam or Muslims, as they operate as humanitarian agencies and therefore, must remain apolitical and irreligious. Akmal believes

God will ask me how I earned my money, how I spent it, in addition to how I used my youth as well as my health.

both aims can coexist in order to provide holistic approaches to various public health issues to ensure sustainability, cultural sensitivity, understanding, growth and development.

This is certainly no easy task Akmal admits. "I built the organization by the Grace of God from scratch. There is a vision in my mind. Each accomplishment, big or small, illuminates the pixels which will eventually form the picture we will one day, God willing, live to admire. We are currently applying for Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council." This status allows non-governmental organizations to network and collaborate with the UN.

Akmal, 33, is a Pakistani-American originally from Lahore and currently resides in California. He received his Masters in Public

To Be the MOST COMPLETE



Hassan Akmal, inside a tsunami shelter in India.

Health in Forced Migration and Health with a Concentration in Epidemiology in 2004 from Columbia University. He also did a double major in biochemistry and history, with a minor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles and graduated in 2001.

Akmal is currently a Business Development Manager and Private Banker for Bank of Whittier. He would like to combine his knowledge and

Da'wah, or invitation, remains an integral approach to Akmal's ventures. In July of 2006, Akmal traveled to India to work at the Andaman and Nicobar Multiple Rehabilitation Center for Handicapped Children, which provides care to over 100 deaf, blind, and disabled children. This shelter houses children who were orphaned after the tsunami of 2004. Akmal was there for a three-week intervention during which, by the Grace of God, he taught eight deaf children about Islam, each of whom later took their shahadah.

Akmal is living up to his name as he works to build his vision of empowerment, health,

and economic prosperity for disadvantaged populations while providing da'wah about Islam and attempting to fund this entire enterprise through Islamic finance. He says, "My work will hopefully help me answer some of the first few questions I am asked after my death. God will ask me how I earned my money, how I spent it, in addition to how I used my youth as well as my health. None is perfect except God, but one must first know his Creator. Call it a moral revolution—reflection towards perfection. I am trying to please my Lord by leaving behind knowledge and charity that will continue after I am gone." ☞

For more information, please email Akmal or visit hassan.akmal@gmail.com www.invitationtothetruth.com

MSA moments

“

As a new member of MSA at my university, I immediately realized that the Muslim Students' Association was grander than just any college organization. It was a group dedicated and united towards achieving one common goal: to strengthen the Muslim ummah - to enhance and fuse the larger community of Muslims around the world. The MSA environment gave me a sense of belonging and a feeling of home that I felt I had lost when initially making that transition from high school to college. When I was not able to spend Eid with my family, I was with the sisters celebrating the holy day with prayer, spectacular feasts and unforgettable company. MSA is unique in that its members come from various walks of life from all over the world while at the same time, each and every member is an integral and essential part of the community. My MSA friends come from diverse cultures, speak different languages and possess distinct perspectives, and they continue to retain their individuality while striving to come together under the global and local MSA umbrella. Every single friend I've made through the MSA has enriched my life and made a memorable imprint; they are my community. MSA has become part of my culture and identity.

Tasleema Khan, Penn State University

“

The MSA essentially defines my spiritual life. When I began my freshman year, Ramadan had just begun, and I was a brand-new convert. I had never fasted the entire month before, and I didn't even know how to pray. Alhamdulillah, it was my sisters in the MSA that taught me how to live life as a Muslim and supported me through some very rough patches. If it was not for the open, accepting atmosphere of the Wellesley MSA, I am certain that I would not be as secure in my new identity as I am now.

Anonymous Sister



“

Growing up is all about discovering one's identity, and one of the most significant periods where this occurs is during the college experience. The young naive student finds himself in a strange and often unforgiving environment, forced to deal with difficult classes, homesickness, and peer pressure on a level even more severe than that in high school. Amidst this uncertainty, the Muslim community -- as crystallized in the form of our MSAs -- exists to provide a reminder that regardless of his ethnicity, his hometown, or his major, at the end of the day, he is a Muslim. There is no application procedure nor is there a recruitment process; walking into his first MSA meeting or campus jumu'ah, he is immediately

accepted and he knows he has walked into a gathering of his own.

The average college campus presents a countless array of tests and challenges for the Muslim; but surrounded by his brothers and sisters, he need not fear for his faith, for theirs is now a common struggle -- a struggle against the weaknesses of the nafs (self), against ignorance and intolerance in society, a struggle to be ambassadors and representatives of the beautiful spirit of Islam in the 21st century. The Arabs have a saying: 'Man by himself is weak, but how strong is he when with his brothers.' May our MSAs continue to further this noble spirit.

Hamdan A. Yousuf, University of Michigan



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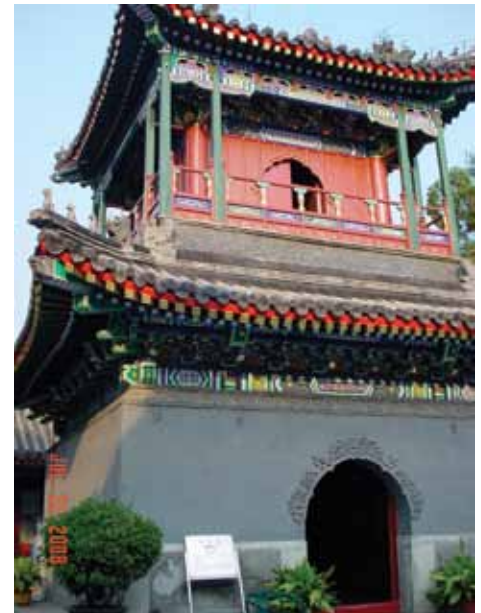
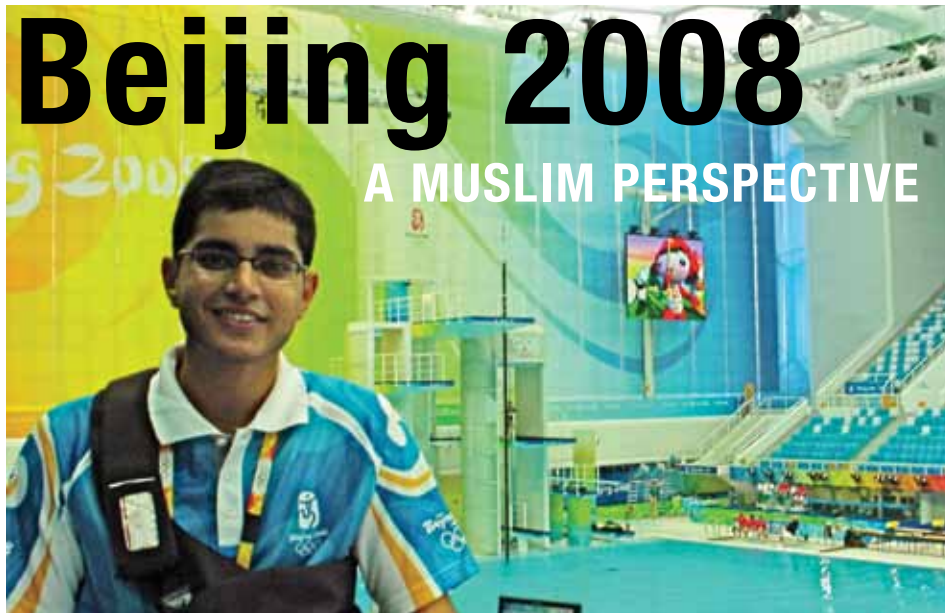
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BY FURQAAN SADIQ
University of Missouri, Alumnus

Last summer, I had the opportunity to work for the Olympic News Service at the Beijing Olympic Games. Arriving a month before the opening ceremony, I witnessed the capital transforming itself in preparation for what the Western media called “China’s Coming Out Party” - much to every Chinese citizen’s disdain. Indeed, the air pollution was bad, but for a Pakistani, it was no Karachi, if you know what I mean. There was no end to the number of construction cranes that dotted the skyline,

made charades-like hand gestures to mimic what I wanted. Yes, I even flocked my arms in restaurants to order chicken. For the first week in Beijing, I had no contact with a fellow Muslim, nor was I successful in locating a mosque for Jumah. I was really desperate to find at least one mosque and had employed a few Chinese students traveling with our group to find out where the Muslim community was hiding in Beijing.

A few weeks later, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) was treating our intern group to a nice lunch in one of the city’s newer hotels. As we were being

Unfortunately, this word stuck during the trip, and my close friend from that point onwards called me by that name. “Hey, Xing-Xing, you hungry? Let’s go with that group, Xing-Xing.”

After a long week of training at my venue, I utilized my free day to actually venture out to this famous mosque. I wasn’t sure if I was more excited about the mosque itself or the possibility of seeing a group of Muslims.

As I stepped off the bus, I approached the gates of the mosque and was greeted by an elderly Chinese man dressed in what looked like a shalwar. He had a strong resemblance to those

The mosque, including the minaret, is structured in traditional Chinese architecture with vibrant colors of red and blue

making the capital look a lot like Dubai before the world’s housing market tanked. Commuters covered every visible part of concrete, bustling around the city by either walking/biking on the streets or traveling on newly constructed subway lines. One had to push and poke, perhaps even nudge an elbow sideways, to be a true Beijinger on Beijing’s public transit.

While most of my fellow interns from the University of Missouri spent their free time strolling in the botanical gardens or bargaining for cheap clothes in the city’s shopping districts, I was on a very specific mission: discover the Muslim heritage in China’s capital. Although I had no language skills, communicating with the locals became its own adventure when I

ushered into the lobby, I suddenly spotted a hijab out of the corner of my eye. Now, I know the rules of lowering one’s gaze, but I beg of you to not judge a Muslim brother who spots, for the first time in a long time, a fellow Muslim in a foreign land. I immediately broke with my group and practically verbally accosted the sister (who was actually an auntie) with a boisterous “Asslaam-Alaikum!” I learned she and her husband were visiting from Malaysia, and her husband, who spoke fluent Mandarin, was able to write down the address of Beijing’s oldest mosque, Niuje Mosque. Most importantly, they taught me how to say “Muslim” in Mandarin. It’s pronounced “Xing-Xing” (I am told that the word is derived from the fact that most of China’s Muslim reside in the Xinjiang province.)

older uncles sitting against the walls after Isha at my own masjid back home in St. Louis. He briskly pushed me into his empty office where there was only an old cot and a steel desk. Resting on the desk’s dusty top was a standard, classroom size globe. He pointed his wrinkly finger at the globe, spinning it gently, and I realized he wanted me to point to where I was from. I wasn’t sure why I did what I did, but I squinted at South Asia and pointed to Pakistan. He smiled at me and pushed me out the door before I could say anything. As I walked away, I noticed a sign at the gate that read, “Non-Muslims: 5 Yuan, Muslims: Free.” I guess I had passed his “Muslim test.”

The narrow walkway of Niuje’s entrance opens



into a beautiful courtyard; every part of the mosque, including the minaret, is structured in traditional Chinese architecture with vibrant colors of red and blue, contrasting sharply with the stone path's ashy look. The actual prayer hall is an airy room with numerous pillars, and it truly reverberated with a deeply spiritual aura. Through my rudimentary Arabic, I was able to understand the khutbah given by the Imam, and communicate with the other men there. I made it just in time for Asr, and I was lucky to spend a quiet evening until Maghrib relaxing and contemplating about the many Muslims who have probably walked the very same corridors of this mosque, built over a millennia ago.

Outside the mosque's gate, I was immediately struck by the enormity of what I later learned was literally the Muslim "neighborhood" of Beijing. Niuji Street is essentially a more grandiose version of Chicago's Devon Street. (Sorry, I haven't been to Dearborn.) Building after building, sign after sign, all of them had a mixed insignia of Arabic and Chinese. Walking with my eyes and mouth wide open, I was absolutely marveled at the diversity of not only the people but also of the businesses. There was something for everyone, from Muslim barber shops to restaurants, from video stores to giant grocery stores that were three stories high. I finally found where all my Muslims were hiding. Even in the densely populated Muslim districts of the city, the government had invested heavily to reconstruct homes and revitalize older structures. To say that it was only done because of the Olympics would be unfair, but the upcoming Games was indeed a big catalyst for much of the city's remodeling.



China will leave a lasting impression on any American Muslim. In the process of synthesizing current events, we all too often make generalizations of people and nations based on meaningless impressions, in turn, robbing ourselves of a true understanding of the beauty in what we call an Ummah. After traveling in and around Beijing, I have obtained a deep respect for this remarkable aspect of Islam's unifying message, and I highly recommend to those of us in the West to reach out and re-establish the sense of Ummah with our Eastern Muslim brothers and sisters. ﴿

The Troubling Rise of Suicide in the American Muslim Community

BY SHYAM K. SRIRAM
Georgia Perimeter College, Professor



LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT ZAFIRAH*. She is a 17-year old Palestinian-American girl in Bradenton, FL*. She is a junior in high school. She wears hijab and likes to spend her free time shopping, reading, and watching TV. But, unlike other teenagers, Zafirah is also extremely suicidal. She has attempted to kill herself more than once; has recently lost a friend to suicide; has bipolar disorder; and also cuts her thighs as a coping mechanism.

The real tragedy in all of this is that Zafirah is not the exception. As generation after generation of Muslims are born and raised in America, these

violence, suicide, rape, pedophilia, incest, etc. Personally, I have lost three friends to suicide in the last eight years – one to overdose, one to hanging, and one to a gunshot wound to the head. My experiences are a stark reminder to Muslims, particularly the older generation, that we cannot let hubris or pride get in the way of our need to help those around us.

So, what can we, as Muslims, do to help our brothers and sisters who are experiencing severe depression and/or suicidal tendencies (also known as suicide ideation)? The first step is to admit that this is a problem. Only when the

almost three years I have been Muslim, I have only heard one khutbah (sermon) on the issue of suicide and it was delivered by Imam Siraj Wahhaj in Atlanta. Besides this alim (scholar), the only other scholars who I know have addressed depression and suicide are Shaykh Husain Abdul Sattar and Imam Zaid Shakir. We have to ask our ulema (scholars) to become more involved in this issue by being available to talk to depressed young Muslims and not judge them. We also need to ask our scholars to publicly address this issue more and erase the stigma that surrounds it.

[suicide] is the second highest leading cause of death for all American college students

young people are also imbibing the cultural and social norms and customs of the people around them. This has led to a devastating situation in the American Muslim community today where suicide and suicidal tendencies are on the rise among young Muslim men and women.

Suicide is an American epidemic. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org), an American commits suicide every 16 minutes and 30 times that number attempt to do so. It is the second highest leading cause of death for all American college students and is the third leading cause of death among all youth, ages 10 to 24.

Almost every week, I hear about a young American Muslim who is going through an experience that most people would not associate with our community – child abuse, domestic

Muslim community as a whole - and not just progressive pockets – can openly admit that we have certain issues that need our immediate attention can we move forward.

Secondly, we need to ask God to protect all of us from our nafs (desires) and from the evil influence of Satan. We need to remember that in times of trouble and despair, our first line of defense is God and we should turn to Him before we turn to what I have labeled the “Three F’s” – Family, Friends and Facebook. In the very last ayah (286) of Surah Al-Baqarah, God says that He will not test you more than you can bear. We need to always remember that every test is a challenge from God and how we respond to the challenge is our key to Jannah.

Third, we need to have community accountability on the issues of suicide and depression. In the

Suicide is a sin. It is also something that can be prevented. In the Glorious Quran, God revealed, “And on that Day, you will be judged for what you did and for what you left undone”

(Surah Al-Qiyamah, Verse 13). The only way that the American Muslim community can move forward in tackling social evils like suicide is for us to remember that it is wajib (obligatory) on us to serve those around us because in serving them, we are serving Our Creator. Perhaps once we have such a collective mindset, we can really make strides in ameliorating the mental health crisis in our communities. Ameen. ☪

*[Names and places have been changed to protect identities.]

Shyam K. Sriram teaches political science at Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta. He took shahadah in July 2006 and has been actively involved in Muslim social issues since that time. He is the founder of the Muslim Suicide Survivors Association (MuSSA) and the coordinator for Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence (MMADV) in Atlanta. You can email him at ssriram@gpc.edu



The Study of Hijab and Gender Relations in the American Muslim Landscape

BY HEATHER LAIRD
Eastern Michigan University, Alumna

IN THE UNITED STATES there seems to be a continuing disenchantment with hijab. Muslim women have suffered in their daily lives over injuries and insults to their persons and livelihoods because of hijab. In addition, the Muslim community, diverse in its own views, has many different understandings on the significance of hijab, how to support Muslim children in a society that does not support hijab and how gender relations should ensue in a highly sexualized society.

In a September 12th world, issues of hijab and gender relations have been scrutinized in the media. It has highlighted the need for more progress and understanding both within the Muslim community in America and to be translated for the rest of the American community. This survey research attempts to get under some of these issues by allowing thoughts of American Muslims to be expressed through anonymity.

This research focused on questions surrounding six main themes: the meaning of hijab, the social aspects of hijab, how hijab correlates with

identity, self-perception in hijab, the broader community and its relationship with hijab, and the outspoken words of those who either wear or do not wear hijab. Through these different insights to the perspective of Muslims on hijab, there is an opening to more comprehension around this controversial issue.

the Muslim community, diverse in its own views, has many different understandings on the significance of hijab

This survey consisted of 50 questions and was conducted for a period of two months. There were over one-thousand participants, all of whom were considered American raised Muslims, and all data was provided anonymously. This was the first survey of its kind conducted at this magnitude. Some of the findings showed that,

unlike what has continuously been reported in the media, the majority of Muslim women who wore hijab prior to September 11th continued to wear it afterwards. When participants were asked if they had any additional comments about hijab, many women who currently wear hijab wanted it to be known that they do not feel oppressed wearing hijab while women who do not wear hijab wanted it to be known though they do not wear hijab, they are still practicing Muslim women. Participants hailed from various Islamic backgrounds including Sunnis, Shias, and Sufis, amongst many others. Overall, there was generally no difference in responses between convert Muslims and those who were born Muslim. ☪

Heather Laird received her B.A. in Political Science and Arabic from Indiana University in Bloomington and her Masters in Public Administration and Non-Profit Management from Eastern Michigan University. She is currently working to publish her essay and expand her thesis (on "Islamic non-profits and how 9/11 affected their ability to fundraise") for publication.

The Journey Has Begun

A Letter to President Barack Obama



BY SAMI ELMANSOURY



Dear Mr. President,

Salam! Greetings of peace, and congratulations to you and to your family! I want to take a moment to specifically congratulate you and your team on a tremendous win this past November. It is a wonder to imagine how much our nation has evolved over the past four decades, and more specifically over the past two years, for the cause of an inclusive democracy powered by its everyday citizenry. Indeed, you faced some of the most challenging roadblocks in campaign history. But you fought back with respect and you distinctly rose to the occasion time and again with visible character and humility. You earned my vote, as well as that of so many Americans across this nation. I am and have been thoroughly grateful for your emergence on the national stage. You have shattered and then pieced together the timeless definition of what it means to be the American President. So today, I would like to take the time to share my thoughts with you on behalf of an exemplary group of people who have so frequently been spoken and echoed for, but who have yet to speak, uninterrupted, for themselves. We may not yet be influential donors, but we are young. We may not yet count in major

statistics, but we are growing. Our dress and our prayers may not always be acceptable to the conventional definition of "American culture", but we know that our country's mindset is always changing and we are patient. We are America's Muslim youth. And we are taking the reins of our community's future.

Mr. President, we are activists. During your campaign, so many of us stood by your side. I had the personal privilege to attend and to volunteer at a closed event at the Apollo Theater in New York City. There, I had the opportunity to meet you and to speak with you. I acclaimed many of the promises that you had made and I asked that you persevere and follow through no matter what the political costs might be. Despite the number of individuals around me who hoped to meet you, you accepted this point graciously and with due concern. It was because of this concern that I went on to volunteer at phone-banking offices, to canvass, to use my network to heavily promote you as my candidate (so much so that I had been jokingly referred to among friends as "Barack Obama's nephew") and to donate what I could to your campaign. I have been politically

active for some time, but I have never witnessed a campaign develop so well into a true family of all faiths and creeds.

Mr. President, we are perceptive. I volunteered and met you once again in West Philadelphia toward the end of your campaign. Standing in the front, I distinctly recall your concern for two young children who had been pushed up against a barrier. It was not simply a politician who was speaking that day, but a man with honor enough to leave a conversation with the Governor of Pennsylvania so as to reprimand the offenders. You did not wait for the Secret Service to take charge. You did not wait for Philadelphia's law enforcement to step in. You acted Presidential. And you acted upon your words.

Mr. President, we are visionaries. As with many of America's Muslim youth, I spent Inauguration Day toward the front of the National Mall in Washington, and I walked away knowing that something had truly changed. But I realized then, that it was not our politics that had evolved, but the very core vision of our nation. The past was now in the past. A new chapter

had opened. So it is with great confidence that I know that you shall follow through with your distinct calls for mutual respect, and for the honoring of both our American heritage as well as our common values. We applaud your proposed closing of Guantanamo Bay. We applaud your efforts to carefully end our current military conflict abroad, to bring our troops safely home to yearning families, and to stop the growing loss of life. But we also applaud your concern for education. We applaud your activism on the economy. And we share the common fear that Social Security and a strong financial market may not be left behind for our children. But above all, we applaud your belief in the empowerment of America's people to solve these afflictions.

Mr. President, we are leaders. Just like so many of my peers, I am a young American Muslim who has been involved in a significant number of leadership experiences - ranging from advocacy and direct interfaith work, to diplomacy and politics, to youth support, to economic encouragement and societal change.

America's Muslim youth, are tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, politicians, diplomats and entrepreneurs. We have a drive to be honorable and we want to succeed. It is fueled by our patriotism and ultimately, by our faith.

Every experience that I have had thus far has brought me new insight and has strengthened my perspectives on the respect for law and justice, as well as on the important meanings of life, human rights and peaceful coexistence. In this regard, I have always held definition and determination to reach whatever positive goal it is that I have sought. We, America's Muslim youth, are tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, politicians, diplomats and entrepreneurs. We come from every ethnicity, race, and background. We uphold the values that our beloved country stands for. We have a drive to be honorable and we want to succeed. This drive comes from a desire to witness the best for our country. It is fueled by our patriotism and ultimately, by our faith.

Mr. President, we are patriots. As the son and grandson of Arab-American immigrants to the United States, I have always held a deep appreciation for my American upbringing as have many who have walked similar paths. Several members of my family came to this country with its sheer sense of justice in the forefront of their minds. They had lost everything in Sinai. Their hope was in America. In his first year on American soil, my grandfather proudly served as a Senior Engineer for the Apollo 11

mission that sent Neil Armstrong to the moon. My mother was a young girl as she watched the rocket take off from Cape Canaveral, FL. In her striking eyes, she saw the transcendence of ineffectual global conflict. She saw hope. My grandparents' immigration story has inspired me to desire so much more for a world ravaged by generations of disparity and the destruction of the most basic human rights around the world. I believe in change and I know that it will not begin solely in our politics, or through endless warfare. It must begin at the doorway to diplomacy, honor and the respect for differences - but even more so the dynamic respect for the common values that can in fact bring our world together. This is our generation's trust, this is our chapter and this is our day. We simply cannot forego it.

Mr. President, we are willing. We recognize that your Administration is one that can seek to improve the foresight of Muslims both here at home and around the world - as well as the prospect for a true and lasting global peace. I know that this foresight can and will expand

with time, but I have hope that some of the most profound players, some of whom can be found here in America's youth and in specific in her American Muslim youth, shall not be left out of the equation. So much of our Obama for America movement was based upon youth mobilization. Will you now, Mr. President, respond to our own calls for the betterment of our country? Will you establish teams of America's youth leaders, and advisory councils that not only include General Colin Powell and Warren Buffett, but America's next generation as well? The key to an end to the current military conflict, for example, and to the hearts of a new generation of Muslims around the world, as well as others, may in fact be buried within unheard voices found in the backyards of both Paterson, NJ and Dearborn, MI. Millions of America's Muslims poured their hearts into your efforts, hoping that they too might share in the hope emanating from your podium. Our hopes, yearnings and dreams are not unlike those of our fellow Americans. We are a team with many diverse faces. Our newest captain is Barack Obama. And our field ranges from the mountains of Colorado, to the streets of the Bronx. But this time, we are all on the same team. We cannot afford to be otherwise, as change can only come about if we all work together. We are ready to lead this challenge.

Mr. President, we are the future. So we would be honored and humbled to share our perspectives on moving forward for a lasting global peace, and to become a true, significant part of this ever-strengthening grassroots movement that you have so proudly begun. America is a nation - one nation that includes African-Americans, White-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Christian-Americans, Muslim-Americans, Buddhist-Americans, Hindu-Americans and Atheist-Americans of all walks of life. But its youth are more than the key to the future - we are the future. We are its hope. And hope is strictly defined by its ability to see forward. One cannot have hope in the past, as it has come and gone. So as America's Muslim youth, we are calling on our President to hear our voices of hope. Not all of us will make it to Washington one day to share these words. So we ask you to come to us. We ask you to listen.

Mr. President, we are hopeful. It was Henry David Thoreau who once stated that "whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe, and enthusiastically act upon, must

inevitably come to pass." I have hope that my grandparents' journey to our country was not in vain. I have hope that America will continue to rise and serve as a beacon that so many look toward to lead the way forward. And I have hope that hope itself will never be stifled. I am sincerely optimistic for our nation's future.

Mr. President, we are ready. America's Muslim youth look forward to knowing the man who was sworn in to justly serve our nation earlier this year. Let us help you find the keys to hope. Let us work alongside your vision and at your side, toward a brighter future that can finally come to pass.

Many, many congratulations to you, to Mrs. Obama, and to America. Greetings of Peace.

Salam & Best Regards,

Sami H. Elmansoury
Rutgers University, Class of 2006
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The Tremendous Character of the Prophet

PEACE AND BLESSINGS
OF GOD BE UPON HIM



BY SHAYKH FARAZ
RABBANI

WHY IS THE PROPHET'S CHARACTER DESCRIBED AS BEING TREMENDOUS?

In the Quran, the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) is addressed directly, "Truly, you are of tremendous character." [Quran, 68.4] This Quranic verse intrigued Muslim scholars, early and late, especially the Quranic exegetes and the masters of the spiritual path, especially as the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) himself emphasized that, "I was only sent to perfect noble character," [Ahmad] and said, "The believers most perfect in faith are those best in character." [Tirmidhi]

WHAT IS GOOD CHARACTER?

Good character, Ghazali explains in his *Ihya'*, is an inward disposition that causes one to incline towards praiseworthy inward traits and praiseworthy outward actions.

HOW IS GOOD CHARACTER MANIFEST?

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali and others relate that the sum of Prophetic teachings is that good character is manifest in five matters:

1. Fulfilling the rights of others
2. Avoiding hurting or harming others
3. Being cheerful and positive in one's dealing with others
4. Recognizing the good of others and reciprocating
5. Responding to the wrong of others with nothing but the good

These five manifestations of good character don't only summarize the Prophetic teachings on good character, but they also summarize the Prophet Muhammad's (peace and blessings of God be upon him) own character and conduct.

FIRST

As for fulfilling the rights of others, the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) emphasized to, "Give everyone who has a right their due right," [Bukhari] and he warned against non-fulfillment of others' rights, "Injustice shall become manifold darkness on the Day of Judgment." [Bukhari]

SECOND

Avoiding hurting or harming others is a corollary of fulfilling the rights of others. However, sometimes one can fulfill others' rights in ways that hurt them; or we follow the fulfillment of rights with hurtful reminders; or strive to fulfill rights without considering how others feel or may consider our efforts.

THIRD

Being cheerful and positive in one's dealings with others. The Prophet is described as always having been full of concern, yet he was always cheerful.

FOURTH

Recognizing the good of others entails not only thanking and reciprocating those who do obvious acts of good to one, but to reflect, consider, and appreciate the less-obvious (but significant) good that countless people do for one another--both directly and indirectly. We owe our very lives to our parents. When did we last thank them? Our teachers, whether at school or university, have taught us so much. When did we last thank them? The Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) cautioned that, "Whoever is not thankful to people is not thankful to God." [Ahmad, Tirmidhi, and Abu Dawud]

FIFTH

The greatest test of character is responding to the wrong of others with nothing but the good. This tests one's character because one's personal urge would customarily be to reciprocate; and one's negative urge would be to affirm oneself. However, the way of Prophets is to respond with nothing but the good.

UPON ENTERING MECCA, VICTORIOUS

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) entered Makkah as a victor, people expected that he would seek revenge two decades of opposition, wrong, and injustice from his people. The Makkans were fearful, and some hastened to declare that, "Today is a day of slaughter." The Prophet responded that, instead, "Today is a day of righteousness and loyalty," and he forgave them in a public address, saying, "I say to you today as Joseph said to his brothers, 'There is no blame on you today. May God forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.' [Quran, 12.92] Go! For you are free." [Salihi, Subul al-Huda wa'l Rashad]

A bedouin once came to the Prophet, seeking some money. Without introduction or greetings, he said, "Muhammad! Give me, for you're not giving me from your money or your father's money."

Despite the man's rudeness, the Prophet gave him, and asked, "Have I pleased you?" The bedouin replied, "No, and you haven't done me good."

The Muslims who were standing around them were angered and surrounded the bedouin. The

The Prophet is described as always having been full of concern, yet he was always cheerful.

Prophet signaled for them to restrain, and he entered his house.

He asked for the bedouin to be invited in. When he entered, the Prophet gave him some money, and asked, "Are you pleased?" He replied, "No." The Prophet gave him more, and asked, "Are you pleased?" The bedouin responded, "Yes, we are pleased."

The Prophet told him, "You came to us and asked us. We gave you, and then you said what you said. As a result, there is something in the hearts of the Muslims regarding that. If you were to say in front of them what you said to me, that might remove those feelings from their hearts." The man agreed, and mentioned the Prophet with praise and thanked him in front of the Prophet's Companions. [Salihi, Subul al-Huda wa'l Rashad]

The Prophet was unaffected by the man's words. His concern was for the good of the man himself and the feelings of his Companions. Why? This returns to the understanding why the Prophet character was described as being "tremendous" in the Quran.

Imam Junayd al-Baghdadi, one of the foremost authorities of Islamic spirituality (tasawwuf) and others have explained that, "The Prophet's character was termed tremendous because his concern was for God alone." [Qurtubi, Jami Ahkam al-Quran] What moved the Prophet was the pursuit of His Lord's pleasure, both in acting and in responding.

This was manifest in small matters, too. Once a woman brought a baby for the Prophet to bless him. The Prophet placed him on his chest, and the child urinated. The mother reached out for the child, anxious. The Prophet signaled to let the child finish first. After that, the Prophet

(peace and blessings of God be upon him) calmly rinsed the area lightly. He didn't want to alarm the child, nor make the mother feel bad.

It is also related that though he was the busiest of people, young girls in Medina would take the Prophet's hand and would take him wherever they went--and he wouldn't let go of their hand until they let go of his. [Bukhari, Sahih]

LESSONS IN MERCY

We see from this that the Prophetic example is nothing but a manifestation of mercy. And any understanding of religion lacking in mercy is lacking in true understanding. After all, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) having been, "sent only as a mercy to all creation." [Quran, 21.107] The Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) himself emphasized that, "I was only sent as a gift of Mercy." [Bazzar and Tabarani]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) explained, too, that, "The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Be merciful to those on earth and the Lord of the Heavens will be merciful to you." [Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud, from Abd God ibn Amr; rigorously authentic] It is a sign of the way of traditional Islamic scholarship that this is the first hadith (Prophetic teaching) traditionally conveyed by a scholar to their students.

This mercy, manifest in good character in one's dealings with people, is the test and barometer of faith. After all, "The believers most perfect in faith are those best in character," as the Prophet affirmed. [Tirmidhi]

It once happened that some non-Muslims greeted the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) with an insult. His wife, A'isha, insulted them back. But the Prophet (peace and

blessings of God be upon him) did not. Rather, he simply replied, "And upon you," which is the standard reply to the greeting of, "Peace be upon you." Then, he said to his dear wife, "A'isha! God is gentle and loves gentleness in all matters." [Bukhari, from A'isha] And he also taught that, "Gentleness is not found in anything except that it makes it beautiful; and gentleness is not taken out of anything except that it makes it ugly." [Muslim and others, also from A'isha]

THE KEY TO ALL RELATIONS

The Prophet made clear that the key to all relationships is upholding good character and maintaining it, even when tested. He said, "Deal with people on the basis of good character," [Tirmidhi] and affirmed that, "Forbearance is the very best of character."

Forbearance is for one not to be moved by anger or negative emotion--but to make one's response based on reason and (for a believer) Revelation. Forbearance is, ultimately, intelligence, as it is the capacity to respond in the best of ways to each situation.

This restraint and concern for excellence and the greater good that underlie excellence of character--and that made the Prophet Muhammad's character "tremendous"--are virtues each of us would do well to strive for in our own lives and relationships, both as individuals and communities. ☪

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In early 2000, MSA National adopted 9 Guiding Principles, derived from the Quran and Sunnah, as a broad framework to guide our work. Since that time, other groups, including the student government at Virginia Commonwealth University, have adopted these Guiding Principles.

Guiding Principles

SINCERITY IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR EXISTENCE.

KNOWLEDGE PRECEDES OUR ACTIONS.

HUMILITY GUIDES OUR CONDUCT.

TRUTHFULNESS IS THE MARK OF OUR SPEECH.

MODERATION IS THE COMPASS OF OUR JOURNEY.

TOLERANCE IS THE BANNER OF OUR OUTREACH.

FORGIVENESS PRECEDES OUR RECONCILIATORY EFFORTS.

PATIENCE IS THE HALLMARK OF OUR PLANNING.

GRATITUDE BINDS OUR HEARTS TOGETHER.



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