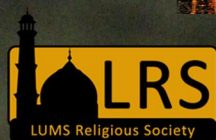
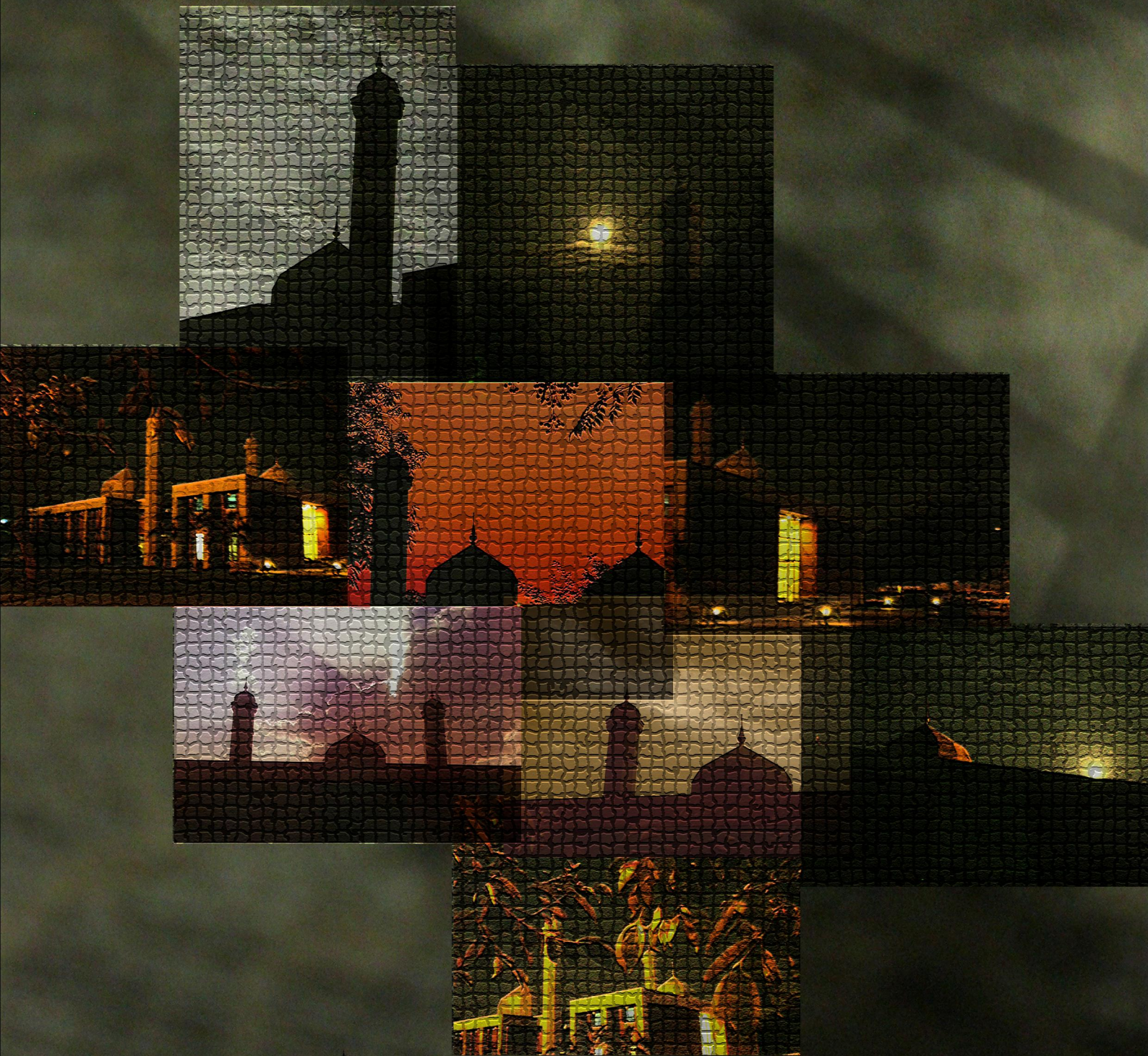


# the Call

*Spring Issue 09*



LUMS Religious Society

# The Call

## Spring Issue 09

**Y**ou have in your hands a copy of the annual publication of the LUMS Religious Society. This is an invitation to reflect further on the reflections of our contributing writers, who pour their own drink into their own vessels—and thereby gift this LRS magazine a refreshing new taste and outlook. We hope you enjoy the concoction that you will find within.

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### Contact Us!

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### Disclaimer

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# Nineteen and Counting

*Sobia Asrar*

God, this is it. The beginning of my last year of teenage life. One year from now, I'll be turning twenty. Do I feel like it? No. Do I want to feel like it? No way. Yep, here's where that phrase comes in: it seems just like yesterday... It really

on growing older than either. I always got those I-can't-believe-you stares from others when I would own up that feeling. Everyone else around me couldn't wait to be a teenager. Of course, when I would later ask them if being thirteen felt any

complicated something in between. Give it a rest, huh? These are supposed to be our years of living freedom, forget the consequences. Call me sentimental, but I just can't accept that for some reason. I'm turning 19 and I already have so many

*We live each day, some of us living for the moment, others preferring long-term goals. In the midst of it all, though, we seem to forget the big scope of things.*

regrets. I don't know how I see myself 10 years from now, but going back the same time, I see myself

does. I thought being 18 was being old, but now, a whole year's gone as well.

They say you change as you grow older, you mature. But, you know what? I don't see what has changed in me since I started being a teenager. I remember those days. I must admit I wasn't exactly too keen

better, there'd be that unconvincing yes, but nothing to really back it up.

I know some of you are probably thinking I'm that timid little girl who can't face reality. Grow up, duh. Hey, maybe you're right. Maybe I am. But, here's the deal: I guess I'd be okay with each passing birthday if I felt like I actually ac-

making mistakes which I probably would not do if given a second chance. But, there is no second take, is there? That's the story of life. Not just mine, but even yours.

We live each day, some of us living for the moment, others preferring long-term goals. In the midst of it all, though, we seem to forget

the big scope of things. This is just a journey. This isn't our real home. We belong somewhere else, where we'll go on short, if any, notice. The way we do things, we yearn to feel that this world will last and go out of our way to convince ourselves that it's true. It's like we're the untouchables for the Angel of Death.

"Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your (full) compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained (his desire). And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion." (3:185)

But, you see, when we come to this world, there's already a Help guide for us that tells us how to pass this life to get to the next. Follow the rules and you will face obstacles, but you'll make it. Those who don't have the Qur'an don't have that. So, they think, blow away your teenage years, get muddled up in your twenties, try stabilizing in your thirties, work away for your kids in your forties, half-expect to be diagnosed with life-threatening diseases in your fifties, get thrown by your kids in old-age homes in your sixties and then, take one day at a time. That's not how it should be. Each and every day, even when we're small, is a blessing. It shapes who we are and where we'll go. Every action of ours has weight. Snapping at your dad, not getting the chores done as mom requested, badmouth-

ing that brother who gets on your nerves, ridiculing your sister for her different style, not touching the Qur'an till Ramadan comes and even then, reading it half with eyes on the clock and half counting the pages left, praying like exercising in full speed - everything counts. It's all written down somewhere and we'll get to see it on the Day of Judgment, when it'll look like a really bad

***... blow away your teenage years, get muddled up in your twenties ... get thrown by your kids in old-age homes in your sixties and then, take one day at a time.***

movie script. We would feel compelled to wonder: what was I thinking? How could I have done that? Why? But, there'll be no answers; and even if there were, it wouldn't make an ounce of a difference.

"And the record (of deeds) will be placed (open), and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it, and they will say, 'Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?' And they will find what they did present (before them). And your Lord does injustice to no one." (18:49)

Earth calling! Some people think thinking about those things is like being stuck in the afterlife. They're confident they'll handle it as it comes. But, no matter how many management workshops you go to, there's no trainer in there who will equip you with everything you need for the Hereafter.

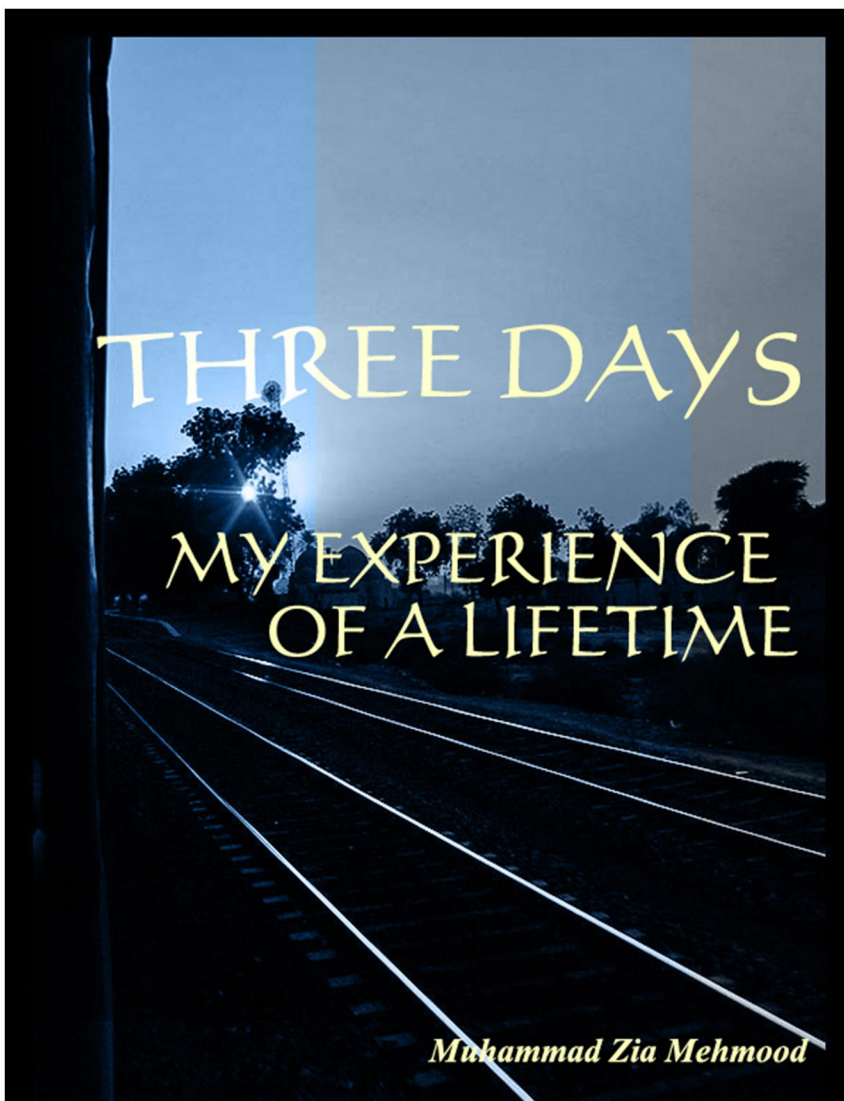
You need to go back to that

Book. Open the Qur'an, read it. Forget that sitcom for a moment and try reading books of Sunnah. You're not too young for it. For that matter, you're not too old either.

Yes, I do have remorse over many things I've done in my past. We all have slipped up at one point or the other. We wouldn't be human if we didn't. Those mistakes I know I've made and Allah knows it much

better than I. I also know that I want to do differently. I've lived 19 years in this world and I think I've learned enough for me to realize that growing older isn't really in my hands, but making the most of those years is. Wouldn't it be so wonderful if it didn't take that long to figure it out? Ah-ha. Another regret. Guess some habits are hard to break.

*This article was originally published in Al-Jum'ah, an Islamic magazine to which Sobia Asrar often contributes. She sent us this piece for The Call on the request of Bilal Lakhani.*



“But I’m leaving for Lahore tomorrow....”

“Only one day...and think of everything you’ll get in return!”

I thought about it for a few minutes and then agreed.

“You’ve got to take permission from your grandmother first...”

“Yes, of course...”

I was led to another room where my grandmother and aunt were present. Before I could even utter a single word, my grandmother cried out: “You have my permission, Zia, and you can stay as long as you want.”

I knew she would never

have said no. But somehow it was only after her encouragement that I really started planning what to do next.

“I will need a mattress, a quilt, a pillow, clothes, a pair of slippers, my toothbrush and toothpaste, a bar of soap and.....ah yes...a *tasbih*”

“Hmmm...I guess we’ll have to get all your stuff from your uncle’s place first. In fact, I’ll provide you with whatever is necessary so let’s leave now.”

This took me by surprise...

“Errr...sure.”

“Great!”

I wished my grandmother goodbye and strode towards the car.

During the long drive to Bansara Gali, a place close to Murree, I recalled the day’s proceedings.

After spending a whole month at my uncle’s place in Islamabad, I was planning to go back to Lahore the following day since the summer vacations after my first year of A levels were drawing towards a close. My grandmother had to pay a visit to Colonel Iftikhar, a great family friend whom I had often heard of but had never really seen. With nothing left to do in the house, I decided to accompany my grandmother to his place.

Hardly twenty minutes had gone by since our introduction that Colonel Iftikhar convinced me to join him for one day in what he called a ‘Jamaat.’ This strange offer jolted me back to my senses that had been dozing off until now. When he talked about the religious significance of *dawah* and *tableegh*, I agreed to accompany him. Without any preparation, without readiness and without previous experience, I found myself attracted to the idea of going off to some place I had never heard of before. I was prepared to go but I had neither any idea about what I was required to do during this new and strange journey and nor any clue as to what good this experience would offer me.

No doubt I did have a rough idea of the purpose of the journey. A group of people called a ‘Jamaat’ (in my case, fifteen) journey to a far off

place, stay in a masjid for three days and undertake the role of persuading the local people to fulfill their religious obligations—especially the offering of *salat*, five times a day, in the masjid.

During the journey, thanks to my over-inquisitive nature, I found out that Bansara Gali was just a temporary stop. Our real destination was some place further. We stayed for a night in a masjid in Bansara Gali which, I later came to know was actually the *markaz*—a place where different Jamaats gather and then head off to different locations allotted to them.

The Jamaat that I belonged to was allotted a place called Kotli Sathiaan. We took off in cars in the

Reaching our destination, we quickly found the masjid which would be our abode for the following days. I have been to a variety of places that boast of great scenic beauty, but I had never found any place so enjoyable. Of course, it was not the breathtaking scenery that took me in nor was it the beautiful weather. It was an unfamiliar sense of satisfaction and completeness I had never felt before. I felt like a traveler who suddenly feels he has found the right path.

The entire day passed by swiftly only to bring me closer to the time that would take me back to Lahore since I had intended to spend only one day with the Jamaat. However, God had a different plan in

bothered me much. Even though the ‘toilets’ seemed to have been rewarded with a misnomer and actually had no semblance to actual toilets, nobody seemed to have any problem with it. The meals were simple yet so tasty and fulfilling that it seemed as if there was nothing better in the world.

Every day, two different members were appointed for *khidmat* which involved cooking the meals and washing the dishes afterwards. Anyone would be amazed to see people of such high ranks cooking food, washing dishes and living in such tough conditions. But during my stay there, such an activity did not qualify as an anomaly and seemed such an obvious behaviour that the thought never crossed my mind.

What I valued most during my stay was not only the regularity with which one tends to pray in congregation but also the time and strength one is bestowed with to offer *nafl* prayers like *tahajjud*, *ishraq* and *chasht*. What more could a Muslim want?

Every time I offered a prayer, I felt calmer and slightly satisfied. Every time I stood up after listening to a *bayan* (sermon), it seemed as if my mind had expanded its horizons, increasing my thirst of knowledge.

An exciting part of the routine was *gusht*—a process in which members of the Jamaat go to the native people’s homes and meet them in the streets in twos and

***Of course, it was not the breathtaking scenery that took me in nor was it the beautiful weather. It was an unfamiliar sense of satisfaction and completeness I had never felt before. I felt like a traveler who suddenly feels he has found the right path.***

morning but Colonel Iftikhar had to go back. So I was left alone with complete strangers.

Slowly, I got to know the names of my companions. Many people believe that people who are involved in such activities don’t play an active role in other activities in life and so are constrained by their ‘Jamaat career.’ They refer to them as mere *molvis*—a title much abused by society these days. But the time I spent with the fourteen people traveling with me completely cleared these misconceptions.

store for me. My uncle came to visit us—which was something, as I later came to know, known as *nusrat*. Initially intended to take me back to Lahore, this visit could not draw me away from the Jamaat’s activities. I just couldn’t leave, so I said no and stayed for three complete days, thus completing my first ever *sehroza*.

The conditions of our abode weren’t exactly comfortable; the water was freezing no matter what time of the day it was and so numbed our body whenever we performed ablution. Yet it never really

threes, persuading them to spend more time in the masjid. When a person tries to convince others to devoutly follow the straight path not only does he reach out to people but comes closer to religion himself. No human is perfect so one doesn't have to be an ideal Muslim to tell others to fulfill all religious obligations. Of course, one should also keep a check on himself, but if someone decides to first perfect his own life and *then* invite other people

to Islam, his whole life would be spent on his own self, as perfection cannot be achieved in this world. But if he

executes both actions together, Allah makes his life much closer to perfection nonetheless.

A lot of people have this misconception that the *bayans* delivered by such *molivs* target sects, or may even be anti-Islamic, and listening to them might even cause a person to 'go astray.' During my stay, I didn't hear a single sentence which would offend a person of any sect, or even any religion. Everything they said was the standard material I had already read and heard before, but listening to it repeatedly, and then reiterating it in front of others left a strong impact on me, enabling me to truly understand a lot of concepts. Apart from that, it increased the need for knowledge and, believe me, this was the best thing that ever happened to me.

All the sermons they de-

liver are based on six basic rules.

There are some principles in Islam which, if learnt and acted upon, make it really easy for a person to spend his life according to religion. The first and the foremost is the first *kalimah* that once recited, destines a person to eventually enter paradise no matter how sinful he is. The second is the offering of *salat*, the foremost duty of a person after accepting Islam. The third involves

***Everything they said was the standard material I had already read and heard before, but listening to it repeatedly, and then reiterating it in front of others left a strong impact on me, enabling me to truly understand a lot of concepts.***

the acquiring of knowledge and the remembrance of Allah. The fourth refers to the fulfillment of one's obligations towards other people—in other words, respecting other people's rights. The fifth principle deals with the purity of one's intentions while performing a righteous act; if the intention is just to show off, then the act has no value in front of Allah, no matter how virtuous it seems. The sixth and the last is inviting other people to Islam and guiding the present ones to stick to their religion. The best of *bayans* are those in which all these points are covered along with their significance, the corresponding rewards and powerful references from the Quran and Sunnah.

I don't think any of this would be offensive to a person of any sect. And, believe me, this is

mostly what they say—nothing more and nothing less.

The three days passed by quickly and suddenly it was time to go back. I had learnt a lot, even though I had known everything all along. It is when you're in the company of such people and in such an atmosphere that you really begin to contemplate on the meaning of life.

Now that I'm back, I would strongly advise everyone out there

who hasn't been to it ever, to try it. It's just like a foreign dish; anyone can sit back and comment on how it *might* taste like, considering its presentation. But no one can really know, without actually taking a spoonful at least. So taste it. Give it a chance... and maybe you might even end up eating the whole plate!



There is a road that goes down from library to the masjid. If you sit by its side, around *asr* time, you can see the sun, still well above the horizon, spraying its warming rays upon the earth. Walking that road, on a beautiful winter afternoon, I began to wonder about the Sun. I thought about King Nimrod and Prophet Ibrahim and Moses and the Pharaoh and those who walk in their various footsteps. I wondered about whether the Sun would be back again in the East, first thing tomorrow morning. Despite the proverb, I thought, there really was no guarantee. David Hume would tell you, much as the Quran told us well before him, that expecting the Sun to get back every morning is no more than a habit of the mind. The Quran goes further and

tells us that not only is this perfectly possible, but that one day the Sun will cease to rise again.

I thought about dear old Sun and about how we must all part one day and a tinge of sadness arose in my heart...

***David Hume would tell you, much as the Quran told us well before him, that expecting the Sun to get back every morning is no more than a habit of the mind.***

A memory welled up in my mind. Some day, young but adamant Ibrahim must have stood before the king of his times, Nimrod, in some really old-fashioned clay-colored court in Mesopotamia and asked him: "Surely, God causes the sun to rise from the East. Make it rise yourself from the West (2: 258)." Nimrod, the self-proclaimed giver of life and death, couldn't stake a claim to

that. And Ibrahim knew then that the man before him could not have been the Creator of life or death. In my heart, I felt a sudden admiration for the role that the Sun has played in the making of history. "Dear old Sun, what wonders you have been

doing trumping Nimrod's egoism! You must be very proud of it."

I couldn't resist confiding in the Sun. I told him that we were brothers in being created by the same hand. That moment, I thought of the Prophet saying to the moon: "*Rabbi wa rabbukallah* (My Lord and your Lord is Allah)." The Sun must have blushed at being reminded of its proud history and of



our shared lofty origins but I couldn't see it. By then, I was already inside the mosque.

In there, it was quiet and empty and a little cold. There was still some time before the jama'at would gather, so I went ahead and picked up a very nicely-bound scarlet copy of the Quran. For a while I kept thinking about that self-proclaimed giver of life and death and someone else, in our own days, nearer to the end of time, who thinks that he is giver of freedoms and that he can take them away at leisure.

By now, the whole masjid, its marble tiles and solid columns, its niches and the domes were reverberating with the deep sonorous voice of the best student muezzin in LUMS. I wondered about the angels who attend to the gatherings of those who remember God and if they would be tapping to this tune. I was very happy to be right there where a mosque was singing in unison with a gifted muezzin and I too tried to match the notes. But as many an amateur comes to realize, matching notes with a fine muezzin is no joke.

In my hands was still that nicely bound scarlet book and I began to read. It was very exciting—like talking to a long parted friend. Certain engagements had kept the two of us away for too long. Now, the Quran was telling me stories. In particular, the story of *ashab ul ukhdood*, or the 'people of the ditch' who executed believers for no more

than standing fast to their belief in Allah, the Great and Oft-praised. *Qutila ashahul ukhdood... Annari zatil waqood...*

*Woe to the makers of the pit (of fire). Fire supplied (abundantly) with fuel. Behold! They sat over against the (fire), they witnessed (all) that they were doing against the Believers. And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, Exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise!- Him to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth! And Allah is Witness*

***“Dear old Sun, what wonders you have been doing trumping Nimrod’s egoism! You must be very proud of it.”***

*to all things.” (85: 4-9)*

Talk of that infernal fire full of fuel reminded me of another one. A defiant young man whizzing through the air, on his way to a blazing fire, is asked: “O Ibrahim, do you wish for anything?” None other than Archangel Gabriel is making the offer. The reply is instant: “Nothing from you.” With nothing beneath his feet but thin air, and nothing in sight but a blazing fire, it must have taken a lot to say that—nothing less than complete immersion of the heart and soul in the contemplation of God. What he may not have seen was someone almost as brave further up in the sky.

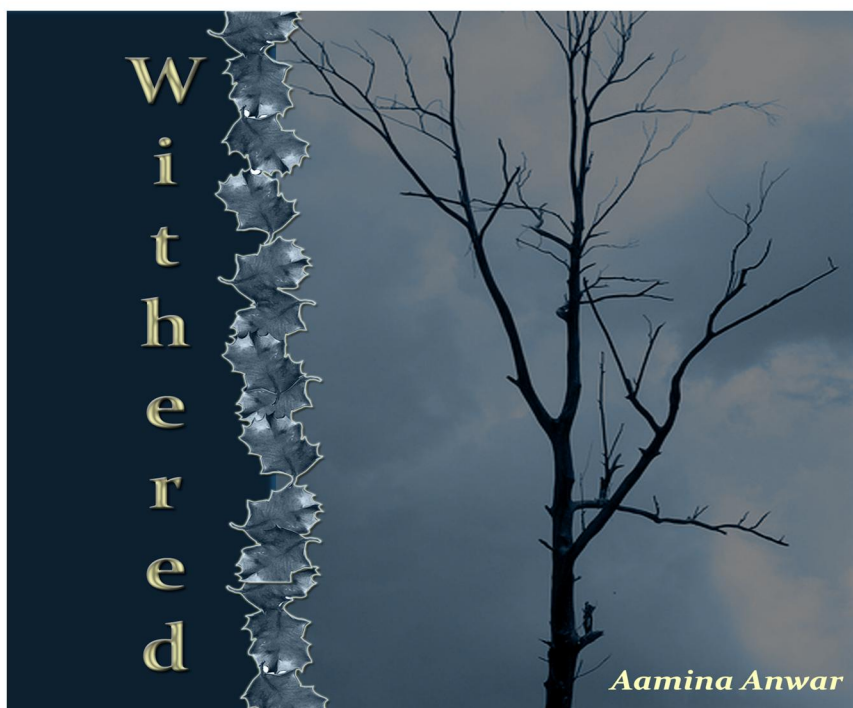
Up in the sky, a hudhud was flying, at a blazing speed, carrying in its little beak but one drop of water. “What are you doing silly little one? One drop shall not avail

him.”

“I do nothing but my duty. On the Day when He inquires, I will tell Him that I did all I could.” It couldn't quench the fire nor could it melt Nimrod's heart. But time has chosen to preserve the memory of little hudhud's sacrifice. The avian pilgrim's perilous journey continues to inspire generations of those who resist evil, as it spreads unchecked in God's world.

Resistance to tyranny reminded me of Noman ibn Sabit who is known to many of us today as the

Great Imam Abu Hanifa. I thought of his story too but I will share it with you another day. That moment, however, I felt inspired to follow in the footsteps of cute little hudhud and the resilient Imam Abu Hanifa. I felt that in my own little capacity, I had to resist what I am convinced is evil—be it in politics, economy or society or anywhere else in the world of ideas. Evil demands resistance. Resistance demands courage. Courage demands faith. I thought about faith which required effort—effort that we must all put in. By that time, I was out of the masjid, the air was fresh and had a tinge of chill in it, and the sun was close to setting.



I've always wandered into the most moving experiences of my life by accident.

It was Saturday, I'd gotten up late and I was hungry. I had nothing to do over the weekend, surprisingly enough. No papers, no readings, no assignments. I looked forward to a day of profound nothingness. On my way to PDC, I met a friend. She was shopping for some food items in bulk. I casually inquired why. They were for the elderly. She was going to the Old People's Home and wanted to know if I'd like to come. It seemed rude to refuse. I was curious and bored, so I assented.

What I witnessed was moving, disturbing, and deeply sad. Sure, I'd always believed that the elderly deserved respect and honor and I condemned those cruel enough to leave their relatives in some forsaken home to live the last few years of their life in utter loneliness with

only the memories of their past to haunt them. But I had never imagined how alone these people were, and what they suffered in the silence and dignity of age.

One lady I met told me of her daughter who had committed suicide by burning herself. Her mentally retarded son had passed away shortly thereafter. She had sold her house on the insistence of her brother who invited her to come live with his family in their native village. Instead, the brother took her money and dropped her off at the home. Here, she had roommate problems. Her roommate could only sleep in pitch darkness; she was afraid of the dark. Too old to contrive some nightlight contraption, she spent most of the night worshipping or sitting outside, staring at the sky.

It seemed strange that someone at this age should have the same problems as college students.

Wasn't this the age where you are treated like royalty, your every whim catered to and voices lowered when you speak? But then again, I've been told by a lot of people that I live in an overly idealistic world.

Her roommate, a former teacher, was an enigma. Her bitterness seeped through—she once beat up another woman with a stick. She yelled and argued with the others. The others asked me whether she thought she was some princess or something. As a typical angst-ridden teenager, I used to write about lonely characters that lived difficult lives and where in the end, no one ever came to their funeral. I realized that for these people, my fiction was their reality. I also used to imagine once in a while what it would feel like to live off of other people's charity—demeaning, humbling, or just sharp mortification? For these people, my imaginative ramblings were their destiny.

Yesterday I was angry at my roommate for smashing a ketchup bottle on the floor which left a sticky stain in the corner. I was even annoyed at having nothing constructive to do. Today, the ketchup stain cannot compare with the wrinkled face and sagging eyes that tell the story of a battling and battered soul. My life has been put in perspective, to simply phrase it. I may complain over the petty, and get angry over the inconsequential—I'm only human—but at least I now know what really matters in life and for how long.



It's Sunday night and you tap your foot impatiently on the floor, dialing your friend's number for what seems like the thousandth time. You get angrier with each unanswered bell. How dare he forget that the paper is due tomorrow, you think. Am I expected to research and write every darned letter? He's that sort of a person—the kind who takes no responsibility, leaves everything to everyone else and still expects to breeze through life.

How many times have we caught ourselves in such a situation, thinking like this? Assuming the worst of people is something so normal and seemingly inherent that we have no scruples in writing off people for one reason or the other. We form opinions based on who a person talks to down to what they dress like. It doesn't matter if we're wrong; we continue in our judgmental state of mind anyway. We harbour suspicions and continue to hold them; doubt and continue doubting; and suspect, and continue suspecting.

*Husn-ul-zann*, or thinking

the best of people, is a glorified and praised practice in Islam. It's an encouraged habit to foster better relationships and community building—the habit of avoiding suspicion and doubt against our fellow Muslims.

“Thinking good of someone is beautiful worship.” (Musnad Ahmad)

It sounds wonderful in theory but when it comes to the actual execution of this worship, we are unable to control ourselves and indeed start assuming the worst by default. It seems as though we have been wired for the worst.

Fortunately, there's a solution. Well, seventy of them, to be exact.

This is from the words of Hamdun al-Qassar, one of the great early Muslims, as narrated by Imam Bayhaqi in his *Shu'ab al-Iman*.

He said (Allah have mercy on him): “If a friend among your friends errs, make seventy excuses for them. If your hearts are unable to do this, then know that the shortcoming is in your own selves...”

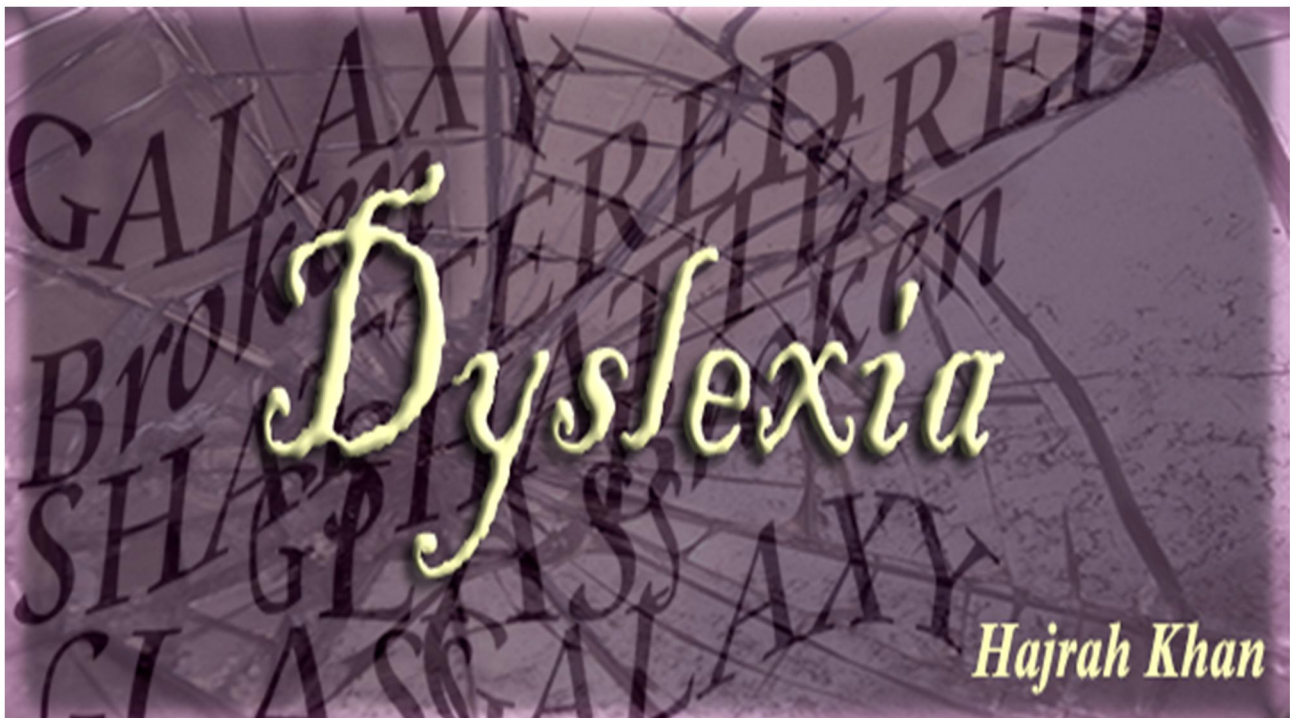
This practical advice, of

course, may seem too ridiculous to be taken literally but its implicit meaning speaks volumes. There can be no excuse for harbouring suspicion, doubt and ill-feeling in Islam. Indeed, doing so would be antithetical to this religion's emphasis on brotherhood. We are told to make excuses for our fellow Muslims, give them the benefit of the doubt, and above all, to never judge them.

It's your right as a Muslim to be thought well of and thus your responsibility to return the honour. There are no high horses in Islam which one can get on to look down on people and nor is ill-feeling towards one another allowed in our ranks.

Next time, make excuses. Perhaps your friend forgot? Or maybe he's on his way right now.

As it turns out, he was lying in a hospital bed that Sunday night, sweating down a fever. But wait, you'd thought of that excuse! It was number 56.



*Bring forth men-children only!*" [Macbeth, I.vii]

Speech stammers now.  
 A galaxy rips into pieces of constellations,  
 Stars straying about, perforating the floor with  
 A delirium of fireworks;  
 Splinters of broken mirrors  
 Pierce my eyes, peeling off strange patterns.

I see nothing – This is not what I heard –  
 Did it speak to me, before, this White sky  
 Collapsed onto a murky plain.  
 Pages and pages were laid before me.  
 Crystals that I should have clasped  
 Safe, are now lost.

It is too dark for me to Read, again.  
 This ink stares hard at me.  
 I can feel it, grinning now, as if I  
 Misunderstood the joke.  
 I am embarrassed now.  
 Let me shroud my face with blood.

These slivers prick my fingers –  
 So much mess on the floor.  
 Gather it all – let me arrange these fumbling  
 Phrases into some order.  
 These shadows clot into darkness.  
 And my hands smell of stale blood.

27 January, 2008



**The Turmoil Within: “Madness Without a Method”**

To Silence!

The Banshee a mute, the song gone,  
Yet maybe still, unheard, unnoticed, the mad one raves on.  
Alas! Lulled and numbed exists this tomb in its unrealized abject misery.

The thunder, the screams, the madness... all gone?  
The madness unheard, the madness hence gone?

Oh Lord! Today let the Banshee once again scream  
And let the caged bird sing its song.  
Let them howl, let them scream, let them burn this haunting, hounding, halting calm.  
Return just the sound of silence, for even silence speaks no more.

To Silence!

This tomb of dirt ahead of me holds within its dark recesses my very soul.  
A soul pinning away for the fulfillment of an oath,  
That promise, that oath, that covenant, that bond:  
*“Yes I testify that you are my Lord”*  
Wither then do you drift, oh soul?  
Why then do your eyes rove?  
Woe to this silence!  
Why this silence now?

And maybe still the mad one raves on,  
No Banshee trying to silence it,  
No caged bird trying to escape it,  
The oath of old no more trying to defy it.

Oh Merciful power, restrain in me this madness that is raving on.  
 Now that conscience is silent,  
 Halt the unnoticed raving on.  
 Now that existence is numbed to its wiles,  
 Let the mad one rave no more.

Shivering, crawling, fumbling,  
 Twisting, turning, tumbling,  
 Dying, withering, crumbling...  
 Over memories past and present  
 Wracked with pains of doubt and guilt,  
 Lying burnt, forgotten, fallen forever.

This hazy swirling madness in blue,  
 This sickness in my heart that has casqued my soul,  
 Once again the flames anon!  
 Let the banshee scream,  
 Let the caged bird once again sing its song.

I the silent, I the sigher,  
 I the sinner, I the crier!  
 I the banshee- wailing, I the bird- yearning,  
 I the tomb- crumbling...  
 Yet I the mad one- forever raving, forever rumbling.

**Interlude:**

*“These sinful vestiges rise like black smoke to the mirror of the heart, continually accumulating there, time and time again, until the heart is blackened, obscured and completely veiled from God Most High...” (Abu Hamid Al- Ghazali, Ihyā □, vol.3, book 21, p.12.)*

Do I wait then in the now-silence of my shack?  
 Do I wait while the grains of this lonely sand bathed in my silence  
 Like mountains weigh heavy on the tomb of my existence?  
 Do I wait so that the madness that maybe still echoes  
 Unheard, unnoticed, indifferent, so persistent,  
 Dissolves this tomb of dust grain by grain  
 And calls out like Hell: ‘Is there anymore?’

Or do I resurrect my conscience,  
 So that it wails once again like a banshee making its deafening call?  
 So that the old, old wings of this battered soul beat no more red on these cruel bars?

Speak then, oh blaming soul, and warn this tomb before it crumbles,  
 Speak for this spirit yearning to escape beats its wings on the bars of this tomb,  
 Speak for the soul commanding evil is forever raving on.

Throw-off these green spectacles that hinder sight,  
 Smash all these goblets of wine,  
 Choose then milk over wine,  
 Become then, oh soul, the soul at peace!

*“Soul at peace, return to your Lord, both pleased and pleasing [me]; enter among my servants, and enter paradise!” (89:27-30)*



And so we feel that we, yet again, have patiently won another battle. Amidst a fresh bloodbath, we have been triumphant in reestablishing order and peace. Although security forces have been put on high alert, hostages have been delivered to safety, and rebels have been killed, a latent threat remains. All of us are perhaps questioning whether

venient) amnesia. And the media has generously and quite unabashedly provided us with recommendations about who and what we are, what to become, how, and how much. We are, or have become, our own audience.

But then it makes one wonder what prompted the loosing of this blood-dimmed tide? A few

lam of the Prophet (saw) was something else. Today brings a new dawn. New rules, new recommendations. But let us keep Islam on the rack, just in case. Or better yet, let us have it stretched out, as an etherized patient, ready for autopsy.

Regretfully, we as enlightened and moderate Muslims are still insecure. We keep the Quran and Sunnah as tokens of a bleak collective memory. Instead, we have foreign magazines and news channels that tell us who we are, or rather what we

***And the media has generously and quite unabashedly provided us with recommendations about who and what we are, what to become, how, and how much. We are, or have become, our own audience.***

we are on the road to Kandahar or Guantánamo. Or both. Surely, most of us would not want to go on either. Yet, surely, as W. B. Yeats contemplates, some revelation is at hand.

Today is not a time for us to be exclusivist. We live as a global community – global warming, terrorism, Talibanization, modernity, enlightenment, human rights et al are issues that bind us all as a happy global family. But this globalization has come at a cost. It requires us to have a degree of collective (and con-

bearded militants and their cloaked allies just came, saw and dared to conquer? The global audience was watching, and today, G-6 was center stage soliloquizing about the Shari'ah and its enforcement in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The media was the unbiased arbiter. Islam, now, in a global context has to be reinterpreted. The media has equipped us with its vocabulary to decipher what we do not understand. Jihad is obsolete. The Shari'ah has to take an honorable leave. The Is-

ought to be. And a country whose alleged *raison d'être* was Islam (almost each one of us remembers that jingle riddle: *Pakistan ka matlab kya? La illaha illallah*), now yearns to become secularized. As Muslims whose faith and fundamentals are being moderated by the media, we are to understand Islam as nothing more than a secularized humanitarian project. Since the past six days (after an elongated six-month trial), every local channel is informing us that Islam is a religion of peace.

Surely it is. But what color of Islam are we referring to? One that is a convenient compromise between modernity and tradition? One in which it is fine to have a *madrasah* in Waziristan bombed? One that is rooted in opportunism in which a former military dictator offered patronage to *madrasah*-trained militants and used them as cannon fodder? And now, incidentally (or accidentally?) the same militants that were given arsenal then have to be obliterated because they demand that enlightened moderation is no good for us and we want the Shari'ah in our (Islamic) state. At least some of

pervising the autopsy.

Perhaps, we are still under the effects of an Orientalist hangover. The Western media and its puppeteers in defining Islam actually created it anew. And now, Lal-Masjid and Jamia-Hafsa will become fresh metaphors in this topical discourse for them to understand what Islam is, and then, teach us about it. The institution of the *madrasah* is already generalized as a terrorist laboratory. The West didactically reminds us about what Islam ought to be. Muslims today are told to believe that the Islam of the Prophet (saw) was a puerile project. We for-

Messenger of Allah, two of those I cannot do. The first is Zakah. I only have ten camels. They constitute my entire wealth. The second is Jihad; I heard that whoever runs away from the battlefield has incurred the wrath of Allah. I am afraid if fighting faces me I might fear death and my spirit would fail me." The Prophet (saw) grabbed his hand, waved it and said, "No *sadaqah* and no Jihad! How can you then enter into Jannah?" Abu al-Khasasyah then said, "The Messenger of Allah took my pledge on every term he mentioned" (qtd. in al-Hakim's collection, "Al-Mustadrak", volume 2/80). Should Islam, then, be

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us Muslims felt the need to have Islamic Law. Or maybe that was just a narrow assumption. The rest of us now take the middle path. Surely, the Islamic solution is too extreme for us moderates. As an aside, it would be a telling intellectual exercise to examine what Yeats meant when he said: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." The Islam that we are taught to understand is tempered and tailored to meet the requirements of the ever-watchful West whose eye is fixed on us, su-

get that the Prophet (saw) declined the offer of an eager believer to become a complete Muslim because he rejected the tenet of Jihad. A *Sahih Hadeeth* of the Prophet (saw) reveals that Abu al-Khasasyah offered allegiance to him. The Prophet (saw) took the pledge from him "to testify that there is none worthy of worship other than Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to pray the five prayers, to fast in Ramadan, to pay Zakah, to make Hajj, and to fight for the sake of Allah." Abu al-Khasasyah said, "O

selectively understood? Conceptually speaking, if Islam is a religion of mercy, how is mercy to be understood without wrath? How is peace to be understood without violence? Is Islam just to be an alarmist misadventure for Muslims? But perhaps that was for then. Now, when Muslims are in need of defending their religion from the anxiety of external influence, it is wiser for them to become gall-less. Jihad should not be part of the Islamic curriculum. Chapters from the Quran such as Al-Anfal and At-Taubah that clearly lay down tenets of Jihad (8:74 and 9:38; 9:43) have to be neatly edited out from syllabi. It is too endangering.

We have to understand how much the Lal-Masjid-Jamia Hafsa affair can be indicted for what happened and how it happened. On reli-



gious grounds, these insurgents were not rebelling without a cause. At least they themselves were convinced that they were doing the right thing. Their premise of having the Shari'ah in a state that claims to be an Islamic Republic sounded fair, but perhaps only to them. They failed to tabulate the practical considerations of this premise. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is not ready to become an Islamic State. J.N.D. Anderson, professor of Oriental Laws and Director of the Institute

of Advanced Legal Studies in the University of London, has observed in his article, "Law as a Social Force in Islamic Culture and History," that Pakistan is factionalized into three mindsets: "one that wants to jettison the Shari'ah practically and keep it as a vague cultural heritage, the second that feels to give the Shari'ah a place that is honoured yet not supreme and the third (and the smallest group) that wants to transform the Shari'ah in such a way as to reestablish its pre-eminence." Theoretically and conscientiously, we all might want to identify with the last consideration. But this too has been interrogated by Anderson, and perhaps by the Lal-Masjid-Jamia Hafsa fellowship. Will not transformation be essentially a denial of the basic ideology of Islam as an historic religion, a total way of life, known and learnt from Divine Disclosure and attainable in political, social and

economic existence, by human beings on earth? Or is this just something that we want to intellectually and theologically believe but not internalize? Or maybe, submit to?

***We need to revise our ideals about Islam which are now skewed in favor of the stereotypes that our secularized mindsets have conditioned us to stubbornly cling to. If insurgents are brainwashing vulnerable minds, then, from the other side, we need to examine how the media is indoctrinating us with its generalizations about Islam.***

That Pakistan is an apologetic compromise between pseudo-secularist and half-baked traditionalist ideals is a reality that needs to be confessed and confronted. The premise that the State was to be a Muslim State rather than an Islamic one has created further ambivalence. The claim itself is being contested. According to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the first of the basic principles is the "supremacy of the will of people." Ignoring its character as sacred law, should the Shari'ah, then, be subordinate to the legislature? Can a reconciliatory equation be established between the two? Or, as Anderson questions, should legislation, which is contrary to the Shari'ah, be regarded as *ultra vires*? To squeeze the issue into one overwhelming question: how ready is Pakistan is to become a Muslim State in its entity and entirety? How willing are we to

exorcise the myths that we are holding on to? We need to revise our ideals about Islam which are now skewed in favor of the stereotypes that our secularized mindsets have

conditioned us to stubbornly cling to. If insurgents are brainwashing vulnerable minds, then, from the other side, we need to examine how the media is indoctrinating us with its generalizations about Islam. Perhaps, a deeply honest willful suspension of disbelief is needed to facilitate this interrogation. And that might be our only guide through this time when things have truly fallen apart and the center cannot hold.

Lahore, Pakistan.  
Friday, 13 July, 2007.



# Reflections on Education

*Sumika Farooqui*

*In a society where education and religion are no longer two sides to the same coin, it is more difficult to practice religion than it is to ignore its values. A disheartened IBA grad narrates the story.*

A child is born in this country. Among the first few things he is taught is the first *kalimah*—he bears testimony to the existence of Allah and Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as His last messenger. As part of his childhood education, a ‘*Maulvi Sahib*’ is hired to teach him how to read the Holy Quran.

Beyond this point, parents begin to feel liberated of their responsibilities and it isn’t uncommon to hear them saying: “He’s going to a good school, and *masha-Allah*, is reading the Quran too—will finish it in another year.”

Once the child has finished reading the Quran and—with his elementary schooling—his teaching in Islamiat, it is believed that his essential religious education is com-

plete. After all, he knows the six *kalimas* and has learnt some of the *surahs* of the Holy Quran by heart.

It’s surprising how we can’t see the issue with this way of doing things. The meaning of that treasure-

***Today, as I stand at the doorstep of ‘practical life’, I look back and realize that my schooling has given me the confidence that I need to succeed. Yet the whole process feels hollow.***

trove of knowledge that we seemingly acquire in Arabic does not even register until we actually make the effort to understand it.

We may wonder then: what about the ‘Islamiat’ we studied until the tenth grade? How about the fact that we pray five times a day? That certainly cannot be the sole criteria by which to measure the extent to

which we are living a balanced life. The daily ritual of prayer is merely the first step towards embracing a religion which is a complete way of life and that holds within it the power to revolutionize our thinking,

our actions—our entire lives.

Throughout my childhood, basic schooling and religious practice were always perceived as two independent facets of life. School was about real life. Religion, meanwhile, was merely about praying five times a day and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Today, as I stand at the doorstep of ‘practical

life', I look back and realize that my schooling has given me the confidence that I need to succeed. Yet the whole process feels hollow.

I realize I am simply going through the motions of life—competing with my colleagues for the best jobs, eating out at expensive restaurants and spending my evenings blowing away at a *sheesha* watching all meaning and sense of purpose drifting away with the wisps of smoke. School never taught me why I'm here in the first place.

As we grow, a pattern emerges in our lives. The cloud of secularism grows and looms over our heads while that of religion simply drifts away. When a typical student of MBA drives

his car on the roads, he looks around at the billboards and notices the plethora of corporate advertisements around him. He identifies the numerous opportunities that lie in store for him. Why? His exposure to marketing education in the form of courses, seminars and networking with reputable personalities in the field during the past six years has molded his thinking so that now he can walk, talk, eat, sleep and breathe marketing. 'Progress' entails focusing primarily on what the world has made most pressing. In the case of the above mentioned student, it is the attainment of a degree in marketing followed by the job people dream about.

Let's pause and think about

what we started our lives with—the sound of the *adhaan* in our ears, the *kalimah* that was the crux of our education in Islam, and the *surahs* that we diligently memorized. Do we ever take the time to repeat that testimony of our faith in God and His Messenger as we rush through the motions of our lives at breakneck speed?

So wherein lies the flaw? Who's at fault? Each one of us and yet no one. This has become our established way of living. Breaking

***I realize I am simply going through the motions of life—competing with my colleagues for the best jobs, eating out at expensive restaurants and spending my evenings blowing away at a sheesha, watching all meaning and sense of purpose drifting away with the wisps of smoke.***

away from this tradition is a frightening thought. Religious and practical education are on two completely different tangents; it seems impossible to attain both. Some concepts seem so deeply entrenched in our belief system that others appear inherently flawed. The stereotypical image of religious education lies in the *madrasah*, with long-bearded scholars and children going through the motions of learning the Quran by heart.

When anyone expresses their wish to acquire religious education, they are generally faced with the comment: "So do you plan on restarting your normal education?" This and similar disillusioning ideas are so strongly embedded in our

thinking that we don't even stop to consider any other possibilities.

We've made religion alien territory. We're scared to come close to it and sometimes even to talk about it. It is essential that we break through this barrier. Abandoning everything in pursuit of religious education is not necessary. Islam does not propagate essential seclusion from the world. You do not *have* to sit on a floor and then acquire religious education, nor do you *have* to grow a long beard to do so.

These misconceptions have just strengthened over time and metamorphosed into beliefs.

But beliefs are changeable. And change begins with will.

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*Sundus Khalid*

**171 in 2008 Alone: ... and I still believe in God, His Prophets, His Angels, His Books and the Day of Judgment**

(The following dialogue is an adaptation of: *Niazi, Sheraz Khan. "Faith's Lament." Nucleus: Phoenix. UCL, Topical Lahore. 1998-99*)

"He was only five years old. How do you explain this, Ezekiel? Why does He let them die like this?" intoned the old stranger wrapped in his grey cloak. He may have worn a look of sadness: sadness so intense that heaven and earth could explode with grief. Yet his sadness seemed completely detached from and transcending anything in his immediate surrounding.

"He created them and calls them unto Him when He chooses,"

sighed Ezekiel.

"Ah! His precious creation! They claim to believe in the same Master and yet proceed to destroy each other in this manner, some even in His name!"

"They are lost. They do not know," was the cool reply.

"Truly, there seems to be no question in that. These, they kill without conscience. Look at all the destruction around you. See the fire and ruin. Smell the burning flesh. It's not even whole crimsoned corpses any more, Ezekiel. Now it is hardly even "organs." See the legs, the arms, the heads; the lumps of flesh... see that still palpitating heart! The butchery! See the dead innocents. How many more martyrs will there be in His cause? They

console their own deceitful conscience by declaring that it has been done in God's name. The murder of innocents in His name! Nay, they do not even know anymore why they slaughter. The murderers know not why they kill; those murdered do not know why they are killed! Which one of them does all this, they know not. Have they forgotten He who created them? Have they forgotten what His Messengers taught them? And they—'they' are supposed to be better than us!"

"All of humanity cannot be judged by the actions of a few lost souls," intoned the Angel softly. "For all such sinners, there will be a saint to maintain the balance of good and evil. An Abel will always be there for every Cain."

“But they are dead!” was the incredulous reply.

“They go to a better place. They return to finally meet the One who created them, who owns them.”

“They did not choose to die this way. What did they do to deserve this fate? Why them, Ezekiel?”

“The choice is not theirs to make. Life and Death are among those things that have been preordained for humanity. Mankind has no control over them. Between the time they are born and the day they die, the choices are theirs to make. They are given the Gift of Life by God Himself, what they choose to make of it is entirely up to them. They will be judged according to the lives that they lead and the deeds that they commit. However, their death is already decided and they have no control over it. They can still influence their death by choosing to die as those with whom their Lord is pleased or as those destined to eternal damnation. Some proceed to heaven while others to hell.”

“But do you think it is right to be so?”

“There is no right or wrong. It just is.”

“They kill each other without conscience. What of that? What of their loved ones?” the grim questioner’s voice was filled with mock horror at the injustice.

“Those who perpetuate injustice will be punished for their sins. And those who face tests and trials then walk on the surface of the earth without a single sin upon them.

Above all, this life is passing and death puts an end to all pain, but what of the pain that knows no end? Those who are left behind to live another day should think of the pain that no death can ever overtake and not doubt the most Just of the just and the most Merciful of the merciful.”

“Ah, ‘Merciful’. You always say that no sin is unforgivable. Would God forgive the murderers of these innocents their sins? I think not.” The stranger’s voice now oozed with contempt and disdain.

“The greater the descent into the pit, the greater will be the triumph once one crawls out of it. The only way to do so is to seek forgiveness. It is up to their Lord to forgive or to punish. If He chooses to forgive them, they are His creation. And if He chooses to punish them, they are still His creation.”

Then something seemed to disrupt the angelic calm and serenity. For once the angel’s expression seemed to be that of disappointment and concern...

“If only you of all the creatures understood this... the most industrious and dedicated of spirits that inhabited the earth, the one being renowned for his learning and insight, the sole master of *sama ad-dunya*, as well as of the earth and all the spirits found therein, the being without a peer... the Azazel I knew.

Was there a place where you had not bowed? Alas that power, that majesty, that unique position of yours gave birth to your

pride, your first refusal, your first disobedience. No wonder you appear ignorant of the sweetness of repentance. Oh ‘Iblis,’ did you doubt your Lord most kind? Why did you not then repent?” And as the angel uttered his reply he seemed pained as if out of grief over the loss of someone dear.

All this while, the devil was brimming up with anger and fury, sadness turned into defiance and he shot back: “What would you know of belief and what could *you* ever know of the sorrow of separation! Was there ever a worshipper, a believer as me? ‘I prick God’s heart like thorn Ezekiel, but you only Allah Hu, Allah Hu, Allah Hu!’”

“By His Truth! I doubt not my Lord, I only hate His creation. The wretched humans made of earth, hollow on the inside; it is not I who disbelieve, it is them!”

“These creatures do not believe in Heaven anymore, Ezekiel. There are no more miracles on this Earth. They do not want to repent. And they could not worry less about eternal damnation. Instead of doing His work they now do mine for me. I have brought Hell to earth. He built one Iblis from fire, I have made 200 000 Iblis from clay!” the tall, grim, gray devil stared at his companion with fire blazing in his eyes.

“They proclaim Him to be dead. And you know what, Ezekiel? They are right! They really have killed Him with their murderous ways, their lying minds, their insolent disobedience, and their diseased

hearts. They follow me in my footstep; these gullible ones give in so easy. I really have succeeded!' With every word the devil, true to his fiery essence, seemed to ignite with maddening pleasure.

"Do you not see, Ezekiel—people who are hopeless sinners are the ones who get to succeed in this world while the ones who remain true and pure are the ones who die in poverty, in obscurity, lamented by none. People who commit putrid acts like this one blazing before you are the ones who succeed and live to see the morrow, while today's innocents die a violent and painful death. Was I not right in proclaiming that I was better than Adam? Why else do you think they do all this? Ha! What sort of a God lets this happen? Ever ponder over why they obey me and yet..."

"And yet there are people in this very world who worship and believe in Him. Did you never ask yourself that, Iblis? Did you never wonder why there are still people whom you flee in despair? You still ask what sort of a God lets this happen? Well, clearly you seem to remember that, Iblis, or have you truly forgotten your "B-e-l-o-v-e-d"? Doubt you still that your Lord knew better when He proclaimed in front of us that He knew what we knew not?" the angel replied placidly, his very voice the balm of woe.

"You have failed, Iblis. Your purpose was to turn humanity away from God. Despite your best efforts, people still believe in the

God that loves them. No matter what wrong people might commit they still cling to the last vestiges of their faith and in doing so defy you. They may have diseased hearts, but that only proves that they still have hearts."

"You ask me why there are people who obey you, why they continue to wreak the sort of destruction that surrounds us? Well, only God knows why, Iblis. I just work here."

"The best of humans too continue to simply do their particular job. As for you, had you also only done your work your worries would not plague you as they do now. Your form too would not have been changed."

"God decides the right from the wrong Iblis; we only live out our part gracefully. We accept as true and false what He deems to be such and all in humble obedience to what He specifically desires from each one of us: angel, animal, human or jinn. After all, if one believes in a Lord as Majestic and Great as ours then one cannot possibly doubt Divine Wisdom, Divine Justice, Divine Grace or be unwary of Divine wrath. One neither questions Divine Will nor disobeys Divine Command, and is ever hopeful of the Lord most kind and the great things to come. You may be fooling the whole of humanity Iblis, but even you know that you cannot fool yourself," and the angel smiled.

The angel's simple yet deep comments seemed to have devastated the devil. He stared at the se-

renely smiling angel in impotent wrath and in a thunderclap of helpless fury, was gone.

Ezekiel stared at the destruction around.

Watched as the paramedics and emergency teams came looking for survivors.

Watched as the living carried away the dead.

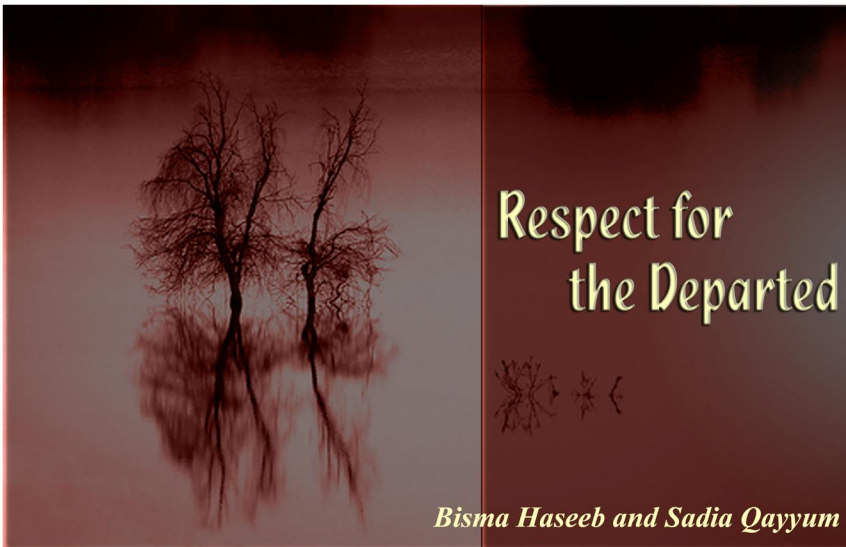
Watched as the camera men and news reporters frantically tried to capture the destruction.

Watched as the security forces cordoned off the area.

Heard how a lot of lives could have been saved had the rescuers arrived on time, heard how the explosion had been a suicide attack, heard how the intensity of the explosion rocked the entire city... heard all that there was to hear and wondered.

Ezekiel watched as from each body its ethereal soul rose until the entire devastated area was filled with the immortal souls of the dead, watched as the five-year-old's soul went to his mothers and silently watched as they rejoiced at the reunion. There were no tears for they were off to a better place.

Ezekiel saw all that others around him could not see... could not even relate to anymore. And then unnoticed, soared towards the heavens with the army of souls. Once again to return when time for more was due and once again to ascend back to His Lord unnoticed and unfelt by the living.



Mass murder and genocide seem to be a common phenomenon in today's world. The moral dilemma with this is not simply the actual act of taking human life but the amount of disrespect shown to those killed not only by the murderers but by people in general, as seen through how images of these mutilated bodies are shown by the media without any moral regard. Keeping this in mind, we interviewed three faculty members from three different fields to understand the different perspectives on respecting the departed.

**Philosophical Perspective** (Dr. Anne Christine Habbard)

Talking about the relevance of death, Dr. Habbard explained how death is an inevitable reality; it's a terrifying concept but life itself is terrifying. Therefore, we have to live life to the fullest as Kierkegaard has said—that instead of avoiding death with immortality of the soul, one should face the possibility of death and make life worth living.

When asked about the specificity of the burying ritual, Dr. Habbard said that this ritual does not pertain just to the dead person per se but also to his relatives as they have an attachment to that person which in turn imposes a moral obligation on them.

Furthermore, on the issue of mutilated bodies being shown on the media these days, Dr. Habbard said that it is a question of honouring the memory of the dead as those close to him would not want to remember the person as a mutilated body. The highest form of love is the love for the dead as they cannot reciprocate this love.

**Anthropological Perspective** (Dr. Steve Gardiner)

In the anthropological perspective, according to Dr. Steve Gardiner, death is a major event in a person's life. It's an inevitable fact which is interpreted by different cultures in different ways. Anthropologists view it as a rite of passage having three stages: separation (the physical death and the burial/burning

etc of the body), transition (the mourning period which is the purification period for the mourners so that they can resume their normal social life) and the incorporation period (when the mourners have fulfilled their ritual duties and have been cleansed).

Furthermore, Dr. Steve Gardiner explained how this rite of passage serves different functions in different cultures. Some cultures use it to accommodate dramatic change while others use it to convince people that the person has actually died. Others view it as a reaffirmation for the society that it can perpetuate without the dead person. For some people, it serves the function of bringing the community together to bury the dead. It is also a collective expression of grief as it provides a forum to the people to express their grief.

**Islamic Perspective** (Abdul-Rahman Mustafa)

In Islam, the significance of death is that it distinguishes man from God. It is an unavoidable phenomenon where we move from this life to the next. In the afterlife, one will be judged based on what one does in this life; hence, instead of getting attached to this life, one should see it as preparation for the next life.

When asked about why Muslims bury the dead, Abdul-Rahman Mustafa replied that it is the practice of our Prophet and it is in the Quran that when the son of Adam killed his brother, God sent

two birds, one of which was killed and buried—implying that we do the same with our dead.

He emphasized that burial should not be an elaborate affair as it is the perfect expression of what an individual takes with him to the next world which is only his actions—showing the futility of accumulating

wealth.

Regarding the reckless display of mutilated images in the media, Abdul-Rahman Mustafa pointed out that the dead have rights, one of them being protection of their bodies which is ensured under Islamic law.

These three perspectives shed light on how people deal with

the inevitable event of death. In contrast to the views expressed in these three viewpoints on respecting and honouring the dead, respect for the dead accorded by our media has greatly diminished as is evident from the images of mutilated bodies being flashed on our television screens these days.



## The World— Upside Down

Tayyab Noor Ghandi



Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions

By Martin Lings

Available from any leading bookstore and LUMS Library

Price: approximately Rs 200

I somehow got my hands on this book and decided to give it a read over a long weekend. Though it is not a recent release, the book's subject and content are such that its relevance to the modern world cannot be underscored. Added to that, the fact that it's authored by Martin Lings makes it a must-read for all.

Martin Lings was born in

1909 in Lancashire, Britain. After reading English at Oxford University, he lectured overseas in Lithuania and Egypt before returning to the UK to take a degree in Arabic. After accepting Islam, he adopted the name Abu Bakr Sirajuddin. Inspired by René Guénon, Lings contributed much to the critique of modernity and advocated a return to spirituality and tradition. This book is but one glimpse into his profound outlook. Some of his other must-read works are *Muhammad: His Life based on Earliest Sources* and *The Eleventh Hour*. He died on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

The title of the book can be

misleading and readers may expect Lings to discuss certain ancient beliefs and practices which are now regarded as superstitions in the modern world. Far from it, the book describes misconceptions held by man today about ancient values. By explicitly stating them, the writer intends to bring into focus the distorted image held by modern man of the world he lives in.

Lings talks about how modern man links the nomadic and hunter lifestyle to barbarism and settlement to civilization. He mentions how tall buildings and dense populations have become character-



istics of the modern city, which has become a symbol of prosperity and progress, but which history has proven to be a place of corruption in reality. Hence, far from being a symbol of prosperity, the modern city is home to backwardness in every sense of morality.

In the middle of the book, Lings turns the tables and rather than judging the past when viewed from the present, he does the reverse. He claims that just as the planets move around the sun, man's beliefs and actions are peripheral to his heart. The sun is the centre of the outward or the 'lower' plane (the domain of materialism) while the heart is the centre of the 'higher' plane (the domain of spirituality). Until the time of Copernicus, man believed that the sun moved around the earth; likewise, the heart was held to be the centre of man's actions. Hence, the heart received its due attention. As man learnt that it was actually the

earth which moved around the sun (this fact has been used as a proxy to represent man's increase in knowledge of the material world in general), he seems to have forgotten about the centrality of the heart. This has resulted in a shift in focus from the spiritual to the material—a fact which modern man is in denial of.

Towards the end of the book, Lings highlights a superstition under which the majority of the West lives: the superstition of freedom. He sets the stage for his argument by making an implicit assumption that the powerful, in any society, have the greatest (but not an exclusive) chance of influencing the masses and so attaining power would be the goal of the majority. Thus, the level of power attainable by an individual in a society can be an appropriate gauge of the level of freedom existent in the society. The time when the Church was the centre of power in Europe often comes

under attack by historians. Now, of course, the Church has been separated from the State. Lings proposes, however, that these medieval times exhibited a greater level of freedom than the modern age since to ascend to a position of power; one had to become a member of the clergy, which was an option available to all, regardless of financial and social status. On the other hand, power today has almost become a private property of the rich and famous, who pass it down to their generations. Unfortunately, modern man lives under the misconception of being free when he really has restricted access to power.

In this short, 70-page text, Martin Lings explores these and many other modern-day 'superstitions.' The book is an eye-opener, especially for those who hold the ultimate superstition that today's day and age is the best mankind has ever seen.

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checking or clearing the options. Truly unique and useful, and therefore an excellent facility for research purposes. Interestingly, there is a LUMS connection with this website; Dr Shahab Baqai from our Computer Science Department worked on it in its initial stages during his time at USC.

### [www.quranexplorer.com](http://www.quranexplorer.com)

Quranexplorer.com is another Quran searching facility. This website is solely concerned with this feature and therefore offers a lot more than other similar websites. Choose a chapter from the Quran, chose which translation you want, the script you want to read the Arabic in, and above all, which *qari's* recitation you want to listen to. From Sheikh Ghamdi's to Sheikh Sudays's (Imam of Masjid Haram), quranexplorer is delightfully pleasing and useful. Even though this site does not offer a keyword search facility, it makes up for this by a convenient, no nonsense, and user-friendly design.

### USC Website ([www.usc.edu/dept/MSA](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA))

Sponsored by the Muslim Student Association of the University of Southern California, the site offers articles briefly introducing Islam, its pillars, and has an excellent article on common misconceptions about Islam. Although such articles are plastered on almost any Islamic website, what distinguishes this page is undoubtedly the Quran and Hadith search facility. Type in key words in the Quran search facility and you'll be given a list of chapter and verse numbers which you can then click on to read the English translation. Although the search facility does not support very complex queries, it is however, extremely fast. The hadith search facility offers a compendium of ahadith from Malik's Muwatta, Bukhari, Muslim and Sunan Abu Dawud. You can choose which databases you want to search the key words by just

### [www.halaltube.com](http://www.halaltube.com)

This website, as the name suggests, works on similar grounds as the popular YouTube. The difference is obviously in the content. Halaltube offers a plethora of Islamic audio and video lectures by various well known scholars. Updated by the users themselves, it is conveniently organized and therefore easy to navigate. Just click on the name of a speaker and it'll take you to a list of lectures by that person. An RSS feed is available for users to get regular updates on discussions, etc. The site is relatively new, just a few years on and still not extremely well-known amongst its target Muslim audience. Hence, many lectures are still not available. However, the site is growing and improving everyday and is a must-see for those looking for excellent Islamic lectures by competent Muslim scholars. As the lectures are found and uploaded by users, one finds the name of scholars of varied persuasions and not just the names of those holding a specific viewpoint or abiding by a specific school of thought.

### [www.islamictube.net](http://www.islamictube.net)

Islamictube.net is another similar website yet its content varies considerably. Whereas Halaltube offers only lectures, Islamictube contains everything from lectures to cute 4-year-olds reciting the Quran. Anything with an Islamic or Muslim undertone goes. However, it is a lot more like YouTube with channels, groups, and featured videos. Kudos to the website admin for excellent channel organization, considering the diverse videos that are uploaded by users.

Great news for knowledge seekers

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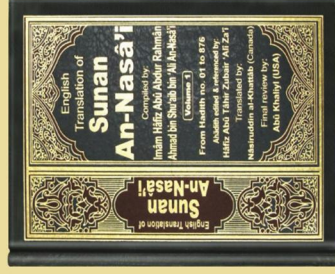
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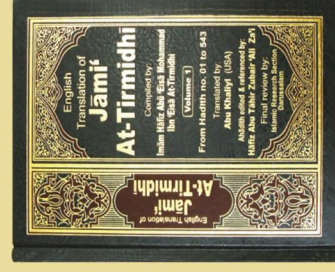
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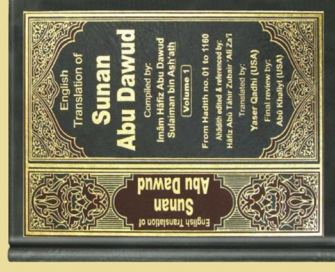
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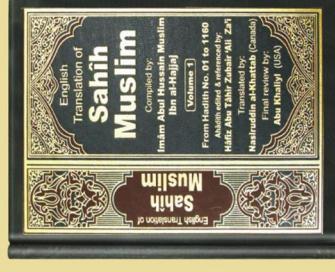
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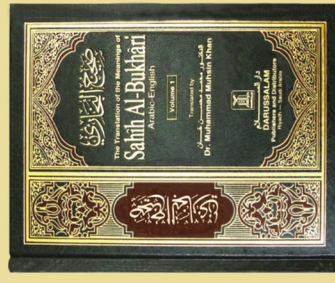
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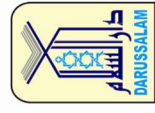
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