

LIGHTHOUSE

The Magazine for Muslim Youth

EDITORS: AAFIA & ZAINIB AHMAD

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Love Allah like a Baby

By Zainib Ahmad

I just returned from a visit to Pakistan where I spent two weeks with my parents, my brother, and my sister. My youngest niece, Zuhaa, is an extremely adorable toddler of 13 months. As I watched her interact with her surroundings, I could not help but marvel at the beauty of the human soul. I realized that a parallel could be drawn between the relationship of a mother and child and that of us with Allah.

At the risk of sounding like the host of *Animal Planet*, I made some observations about Zuhaa's very interesting behavior with regards to her mother. She instinctively knows that she is dependent upon her mother for everything in her life: food, care, safety, affection, and personal development. As a result, she is extremely vigilant about her mother, constantly keeping track of her whereabouts. Of course for children so young, if a person is out of sight, they are gone, even if they have only taken a trek to the bathroom. Zuhaa may be playing happily with her older brother, yet every few minutes, she will remember to make sure her mother is within reach, and that the connection between the two has not been disrupted. This means she will wander through the entire home on her tiny, wobbly legs, looking around and calling loudly for her mother. If her errant mother is not promptly located, Zuhaa will send out loud signals of distress and alarm – in the form of piercing shrieks – to make sure

that her mom comes back to her so that all is well once more.

I wish we could use that sense of strong connection to Allah, innate to our souls, in the same way, keeping our attention focused on Him, never forgetting about Him, never being unmindful of our need and love for Him, and always searching and yearning whenever the connection is weakened.

In order to let my sister use the bathroom in peace, I tried to make up a game with Zuhaa. Each time she would start looking for her mother, I would offer to help her and carry her around the house, looking behind doors and under tables, among other places, and saying "Is Mama here? No, she isn't, but we will find her." Zuhaa

humored me in this game, but she was very cautious about it. She would look at me each time I pretended to search somewhere her mother could not have been to begin with, an interesting expression on her face, as if to say, "Hmmm ... my aunt is trying to distract me, and yet she always takes me to Mama in the end. And this game she plays is kind of fun, but she better take me to Mama soon, because I am not fooled by her drama. I want Mama. and I want her fast!"

This reminds me of the distractions in life that muddle our connection with Allah. Unless we see through these diversions, we will end up wasting away a lifetime on trivialities and have nothing of



worth to show for it. Like Zuhaa, we must keep our eyes on the goal, and not settle for anything less.

Zuhaa is also very vigilant about anything and everything that belongs to her mother. As though a special agent in training, she is always scanning her environment for her mother's misplaced possessions. She will drag her mother's gigantic purse behind her

to give it back, and then she will make sure her mother carries it around with her. She recognizes her mother's cell phone, watch, hijab, sandals and makes sure no one else takes these things.

This brought to mind our concept of Tauheed, or Oneness of Allah. We need to make sure we are giving all our love, allegiance, sincerity and dedication to Allah and no-one else, for they truly belong

to Allah. He is the only One who really deserves them. It would serve us well to be as vigilant as a small child in these matters. As we grow, and develop life skills, in the same way we stop relying on our mothers for many things, we also stop relying on Allah. We think we can manage by ourselves, and while it is a blessing that we learn so much, we are still entirely dependent on Allah and need to remember that.

Beauty, Redefined

By Zainib and Aafia Ahmad

Not all princesses are blue-eyed, flaxen-haired, and perfectly proportioned, and Jasmine exemplified that truth. On the night of her birth, a tempestuous storm raged above the castle, sending most of its occupants into turmoil. But the royal couple paid no notice, because Allah had finally blessed them with a child after 15 long years of waiting. As the lightning outside crackled with sheer power and nearly struck one of the castle's turrets, the happy couple marveled over their daughter, in all her long-nosed, hair-free glory.

"Oh, isn't she lovely?" sighed Queen Rania, whose glasses had fallen off in the excitement over her newborn daughter.

"Oh yes, we will have princes fighting over her in no time." said King Bobo, who was so excited he needed to lie down before he collapsed. "Let us name her Kiki."

"Are you kidding? Your family

doesn't exactly have the best track record with naming children. Her name will be Jasmine, after the fragrant flower," chided Queen Rania.

As Bobo processed what Rania had just said, he began spluttering in indignation, but no one was looking at him, because everyone continued to gaze at the child in wonderment. The maids and servants reassured themselves that most newborns looked rather lumpy, and the princess would grow out of it.

She did not.

Jasmine grew into a curious-looking toddler with a large red nose and just a few mousy hairs on the top of her head that resisted any effort to make them lie flat. Her complexion was blotchy, and her nose seemed to grow larger each year. She was the apple of her parents' eyes, and despite her looks, she was a sunny child who giggled and gurgled at everyone.

Queen Rania often thought that

her daughter did not look anything like her, and concluded that she took after King Bobo's family. King Bobo's family suspected that Jasmine had been switched at birth with the real princess, but they loved her all the same. Meanwhile, everyone told Jasmine stories of beautiful princesses and their handsome princes, hoping she would get the hint. She would rather read about rocks, stars and animals, but was too young to say so.

Life went on, and the princess continued to grow. She loved being out in nature, reading books and taking care of wild birds. She hated dressing up for fancy parties. Her name was a hidden curse, because she was allergic to jasmine, frightening everyone with huge thundering sneezes whenever presented with the flower by an aristocratic visitor from another kingdom who thought her namesake flower would be an appropriately sycophantic gesture.

In Beautopia, it was customary for princesses, on their 18th birthday, to be “presented” to neighboring royalty – a thinly veiled way of saying it was time for her to find a husband. The royal household hoped that dressing her up would speed the process, but it was in vain.

Jasmine knew she was not beautiful, or at least in the traditional way that beauty is viewed. She was comfortable with the way she looked, and did not mind her mousy hair and large nose. She would not have liked to mess for hours with long, thick hair, and she felt her large nose was an asset. It helped her smell extraordinarily well, and she loved all the smells of nature, except for jasmine, of course.

She did not understand all the fuss about beauty. Her mother, Queen Rania, was supposedly very beautiful, yet what was the use of that? She still got huffy over small things, and never got messy with Jasmine in the garden for fear of getting freckles. In her mind, beauty in nature was to be admired and loved, but beauty in people seemed like a disease one had to be careful about because it led to arrogance. She wanted no part of it. As she was soon to find out, handsome princes thought otherwise.

At the ball, Prince Miles (known in his kingdom as “Muscles”) and Prince Samuel (who forced everyone to call him “Swagger”) had been told by their parents to be especially nice to Princess Jasmine. Because her kingdom was full of natural resources, it was highly regarded by neighboring kingdoms. Prince Muscles thought Jasmine’s

brown gown and flower-laden hair were quite peculiar. Prince Swagger was too busy cutting eyes at a number of fair maidens to pay attention to the Princess, despite several vicious jabs to the ribs by his mother.

To be fair, Jasmine had tried to fit into the pink, shiny dress. She had been nervously nibbling on chocolate truffles for a month in anticipation of the ball, so when the dress had finally been wrangled onto her, at the first exhale, a seam had burst, causing an unsightly rip to appear. The blue shimmering dress was forced onto her next, and she had just become used to all the frills and flouncy layers when her pet parakeet, Tweety, had an accident on her skirt (For the record, Tweety had been potty-trained for ages, but he had been snacking on truffles along with Jasmine, which was not good for his digestion.) By that point, her ladies-in-waiting had begun to clutch at their hair in desperation, making it stand on end. To make matters worse, the princess was allergic to all cosmetics, and looked blotchier than ever after its application.

After that ordeal, Jasmine had locked herself in her room and announced through the keyhole that she would only go to the ball if she could dress as she wished. While everyone had been mortally afraid she would come in her natural state, they acquiesced, since the ball couldn’t exactly go on with the princess locked inside her room. In a way, they had been right. She had marched out of her room with her head held high. She had donned an elegant brown gown with tiny brown sequins that shimmered when the light hit them, and in which she felt entirely at ease.

She had decorated her hair with small flower wreaths of daisies and chamomile, preferring to be more natural instead of having a thousand hairpins stuck into her scalp.

She decided to smile at the princes – since they were her guests – and because so far, all she disliked about them were their nicknames. She wanted to give them a chance. She offered to take them to the gardens to see her horses or tour her butterfly gardens. However, both princes were decked out in fancy gear, and resembled Christmas trees more than they did people, so it was not convenient for them to traipse about in the gardens. Jasmine breathed a sigh of relief and spent the rest of the evening sampling from the extensive buffet.

“The ball was almost fun, Mama dear,” she declared later to the Queen, who was reading the 5th edition of *How to Get Your Princess Married in 30 Days*.

“I’m pleased,” the Queen said, smiling thinly. Then she sighed. “Jasmine, you need to make more of an effort with your appearance.”

“My appearance? Is there something wrong with it?” questioned Jasmine, rubbing her nose bemusedly, making it shine all the more.

“Nothing *wrong*, love, but you could do some things for your nose and your hair. We need to find you a handsome prince, right?”

Jasmine snorted with laughter (another negative for a princess) “Handsome prince! Mama, how did you get that idea into your head? Handsome guys are not at all my type. I prefer all-natural people. I don’t want to be pretending



to be someone else my entire life. Doesn't being a princess mean I get to choose?"

"You have the most peculiar ideas, child," sighed the Queen, but then she made an effort at a smile. "Yes, you get to choose, and you can choose any handsome prince you like."

"What if I don't like any princes, handsome or not? They rarely have anything interesting to say."

"Then who are you planning to marry? The head gardener's nephew?"

Jasmine's eyes shone with naive joy. She jumped up and clapped her hands. "Yes, what a splendid idea, Mama! I really like Christopher. He's smart and funny, though his chin kind of looks like a turnip. But who cares about chins? We would make a happy couple... that is, if he likes me too."

The Queen tossed her book aside in alarm as if stung by a bee. "Jasmine, I was joking! Princesses do not marry the nephews of head gardeners. You must marry a prince! Any prince will do, but he can't live out of a huge truck and grow organic vegetables for a living."

"Mama, imagine this ... Beautopia will be even more wonderful than it already is, with the best vegetables and fruits in the region. We already have the best flowers thanks to me. Our subjects will be healthy and happy, and with great food, we can focus on improving education. Mama, didn't you once tell me that beauty comes from within?"

"I meant, dear, that beauty is within makeup and jewelry!" replied the Queen irritably.

"Beauty is within *nature*, Mama, and we can be beautiful too, if we

understand nature and grow its beauty all around us. My big nose hardly seems big when I am among my flowers, does it? Yet it sticks out a mile in a ballroom. We don't all have to be like everyone else. You could be the first Queen to let her daughter choose a nice, normal person to marry. Why, you could even write a book about it."

Queen Rania allowed herself to imagine the moment of glory for a minute. There she was, autographing copies of *How to Marry Your Princess to a Normal Person (and be Glad About it)*, while cameras flashed, and newspaper reporters waited eagerly for interviews. She remembered that before she had met King Bobo, she had always wanted to be a writer, but once she married him, she ended up doing what everyone expected a Queen to do – be a beautiful social butterfly.

She snapped back to reality and

looked at Jasmine's hopeful face. But what would people say? And, oh, how her friends would gossip. Esmeralda's pretty daughter had married the Prince of Stardom, Meredith's lovely daughter had married a *Crown Prince*... and her daughter?

Suddenly a footman ushered Christopher into the room. "Excuse me, your majesty, but I urgently need the assistance of the Princess. Prince Swagger has the deadly princely croup and he needs the extract of mountain marigold to get better. Could Princess Jasmine be spared to help me find it?"

He looked expectantly at mother and daughter by turns, his eyes tick-tocking as if watching a tennis match. The Queen looked at him with new eyes. He was tall and strong, but a plain fellow, with impossibly unruly hair and the biggest chin imaginable. Jasmine interrupted her thoughts. "Mama, may I go?"

"Why yes, of course" said the Queen regally, inclining her head as Jasmine galloped in a most unregal manner out the room. Her thoughts swirled. If Prince Swagger was cured with Jasmine's flowers, surely he would be inclined to marry her? There was hope after all. Christopher could be assigned to border patrol and sent far, far away ...

Three hours later, a tired and bedraggled Christopher and Jasmine dragged themselves tiredly into Prince Swagger's quarters at the castle, holding a small pot of freshly made ointment. Queen Rania was already there, planning a royal engagement in her mind. The Prince had been wheezing and

coughing like a steam engine, but as soon as he received the tincture, his breathing calmed, and the color of his cheeks began changing from blue to pink. He opened his eyes and looked straight at Jasmine, who had what seemed like a bird's nest in her hair, the result of scrounging under bushes for the rare mountain marigold. At that moment, in his I-can-breathe-again happy daze, he thought her the most beautiful girl ever. The Queen noticed the look, and frantically signalled Jasmine with her eyebrows to *hold his hand!*

While eyebrow signalling had been used successfully for generations, Jasmine managed to miss the point, and instead clutched Christopher's hand, saying most unromantically, "Oh, thank God you're alright! Christopher here was a great help." Not being particularly adept socially, she trailed off awkwardly. "Well... I think we should get going now. I really need a bath."

Before she could leave, though, the Queen grabbed her elbow and shoved her closer to Prince Swagger.

"Jasmine can stay here for a while with you. Christopher, you can get going. A most soothing girl, isn't she? She practically saved your life, and she would be ideal for..."

Prince Swagger completed her sentence, looking intently at Jasmine. "A wife ... Princess Jasmine, I apologize for the circumstances, but ... will you marry me?"

Jasmine gasped loudly and gaped most unattractively at the Prince. Christopher turned very pale, while the Queen practically glowed with glee.

"I, um, well – you don't mean that, surely – that is to say, I am sorry but, um ... I have already made up my mind to marry someone else," stammered Jasmine, the proposal as unexpected as an exploding rose bush.

"WHO?" shouted the Queen and Prince Swagger in perfect unison.

Jasmine looked shyly at Christopher, who was staring at her in shock. "Christopher, I-I apologize for the circumstances," she stammered out, as Prince Swagger winced at the untimely reuse of his own words, "but ... will you marry me?"

While Prince Swagger was secretly relieved after looking at Jasmine without the lens of near-death euphoria, the Queen looked at Christopher with dread. He fiddled with his chin, twiddled his thumbs, while Jasmine muttered under her breath, "Say yes, just say yes."

"Yes, it would be my honor, Princess Jasmine. I have always admired you. You spread beauty wherever you go."

Beauty ... thought the Queen. Suddenly her heart felt warm and big. Who better could her precious daughter marry than someone who thought she spread beauty around her? Her eyes overflowed with happy tears, leaving trails of mascara down her cheeks.

"We would be honored to welcome you into the royal family," she said tenderly.

And Prince Swagger looked with wonder at the happy couple whose faces were radiant with joy. He sniffled and reached for a tissue. "Allergies," he mumbled.

Children's Rights in Islam

By Alishba Sahukhan

Islam has done much to protect the rights of children. Children are not the property of parents who can do with them as they like, but rather they belong to Allah (swt) and parents must take care of them as a duty to Allah. The most important thing Allah (swt) has done is to place strong love in the hearts of parents for their children, so they will make all sacrifices to see their children happy and cared for.

Islam gives parents the duty to give the following rights to their children.

1. Parents show their children how to love Allah (swt) through salat. Allah (swt) states in the Holy Quran that salat protects one from bad behavior: "Indeed prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs."
2. Parents must give their children healthy and halal food like meat, fruits, vegetables, and milk.
3. Parents must give their children decent clothes to wear.
4. Parents must educate their children and send them to school so they can learn about the world and about Islam.

5. Parents should show respect towards their children. Prophet Muhammad (s) told parents: "Respect your children and talk to them with good manners and in a likeable way."

6. Parents must treat all their children fairly and equally. Since parents give many rights to their children, their children must respect and obey parents in return and take care of them when they become old. In this way, Islam produces a family in which all family members love and respect one another.



A model illustrating these concepts

(CR)ISIS

ISIS, honestly,
what are you
but
a CRISIS
for everyone?

as if there is any shortage
of those giving a bad name to Islam
this is not what the ummah needs
caliphate by force?
no thank you

we need teaching with love
sharing of Islam with others
with the kindness and compassion
that forms the essence of Islam

so please, can you change your name
at the very least?

(it'd be better if you changed everything,
but a name change is a good place to begin)

there are many choices
in names and in life

do us all a favor
make some right ones
and end the madness

Ask Ayesha...

and she will answer all your weird, wild and wacky questions

Dear Ayesha,

Why does Allah say in the Quran that he guides whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases. I find it somewhat difficult to understand.

*Sincerely,
Confused*

Dear Confused,

Indeed, the words of the Quran can be quite hard to decipher at first glance. That's why we have good commentaries from enlightened scholars like Maulana Muhammad Ali to help us! Your question is a good one. One important thing to realize is that when Allah says He will or can do something, He doesn't say *how* He will do that thing. So it doesn't mean that it'll happen without regard for the laws of science and the universe. For example, when Allah says, "Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! And when He decrees an affair, He says to it only, Be, and it is" (2:117)

Maulana Muhammad Ali's excellent explanation of the verse is as follows: "Be, and it is' is the oft-recurring phrase in which Allah's act of the creation and annihilation of things is spoken of in the Holy Quran. It is not meant by this that there is no gradual process in the creation of things; evolution in cre-

ation is in fact plainly spoken of in the very first words of the Quran, where God is spoken of as Rabb (Evolver) of words, the Fosterer of a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion (R). It is, in fact, an answer to those who think that the creation of things by God is dependent on the previous existence of matter and soul and the adaptability of their attributes. The argument given here in the word 'badee', or 'originator', is that man, who stands in need of matter to make things, also stands in need of a pattern after which to make them, but God stands in need of neither. The verse seems particularly to refer here, however, to the revolution that was to be brought about by the Prophet. It seemed an impossibility to men, but Allāh had decreed it. And, in fact, the revolution brought about in Arabia by the Prophet was so wonderful that the old heaven and earth of the peninsula may be said to have been changed into new ones."

Similarly, when Allah says He punishes whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases, it does not mean that it happens without the rules of cause and effect. Usually, when we seek guidance from Allah through prayer, studying the Quran, and other good deeds,

Allah will give us guidance in accordance with the rules of deeds and consequences He has set up for us. On the other hand, if we commit sins and forget about Allah, He will cause us to forget our souls – that means that the consequence of bad deeds is that we will be far from peace, goodness, and the happiness that comes from being close to Allah. This is our punishment.

So Allah is doing as He pleases as a result of the law of action and consequences he determined for us and told us about in the Quran. He wouldn't just do things capriciously without rules or telling us the rules because that wouldn't be fair – and one of Allah's names is Al-Adl, the Just. So the consequences are actually the result of our own actions – as Allah has told us in our rulebook, the Quran.

Some of the verses that talk about Allah guiding whom He pleases are good to ponder upon because they give us clues about why Allah has said that "Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people concerning that in which they differed. And none but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear argu-

ments had come to them, envying one another. So Allah has guided by His will those who believe to the truth about which they differed. And Allah guides whom He pleases to the right path.” (2:213)

In this verse, before Allah talks about guiding whom He pleases, He mentions that He gave all the different people in the world books of guidance to help them know the right things to do and what bad things to stay away from. Isn't that interesting? He talks about the rules of guidance before He mentions that He will guide whom He pleases. This fact helps us see that His guidance is based on Him providing us with the rules of guidance.

The verse below is laid out similarly: “We have indeed revealed clear messages. And Allah guides

whom He pleases to the right way.” (24:46)

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا آيَاتٍ مُبِينَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي
مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

Allah mentions this in another verse: “Their guidance is not your duty, but Allah guides whom He pleases. And whatever good thing you spend, it is to your good. And you spend not but to seek Allah's pleasure. And whatever good thing you spend, it will be paid back to you in full, and you will not be wronged.” (2:272)

Here, the context is that the Prophet Muhammad would cry and pray for his people to be guided rightly. He was always very sad when he saw people doing bad things. Sometimes he would cry so much that it affected his health. So

Allah reassures him that the guidance of people is ultimately in Allah's hands and is based on the actions they take and their decision to follow or not follow the rules of guidance. It is not the Prophet's job to worry so much.

Another verse meant to reassure the messenger of Allah is as follows: “Surely thou canst not guide those whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases; and He knows best those who walk aright.” (28:56)

According to these verses, ‘as Allah pleases’ can also translate as ‘As Allah wills, or intends, or as Allah sees fit according to His rules’.

Hope this helps,

Ayesha



Thirty Years as an Educator — an Interview

Yasmin Nighat was born in Peshawar in 1946. She was married to the late Bashir Ahmad and has three children and three grandchildren. She is now enjoying retired life after being a committed academic for over 30 years.

Lighthouse Magazine: *When did you decide to become a teacher, and how long did you have to study for it?*

Yasmin Nighat: In 1968, I completed my Master's degree in Geography. I wanted to study further and earn a doctoral degree in the same subject, but there was no such opportunity in my hometown of Peshawar (a city in Northern Pakistan) in those days. It was not possible for my parents to send me out of the city – at that time it was not typical for young females to study abroad. It was said in Pak-

istan that if a person, wanting to be a professional, is unable to attend university to become a doctor or an engineer, she becomes a teacher! It was true at that time, because there were limited occupations for females. I am glad that now there are so many opportunities in Pakistan too, and my granddaughters can choose any profession.

As a second choice – which I later developed an appreciation for – I decided to take admission at The College of Education in Peshawar, and completed my Bachelor of Education there in 1969. This set me on the path of teaching for which I am grateful to Allah.

LM: *What qualities do you think a good teacher should possess or cultivate?*

YN: A teacher should have a good command of her subject and the ability to increase her knowledge. A teacher, in addition to being professionally obligated to covering the prescribed subject material, has a moral duty to build the character of their students. If a teacher is a good listener, students will not hesitate to share their problems with her. In this sense, the teacher plays many other roles, including being a 'counselor' and confidant.

LM: *Do you think all students have an equal chance at being successful?*

YN: Though not all students can be exceptionally intelligent, I believe that by working hard and being committed to their studies, all students are capable of academic success.

'Lighthouse'

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LM: How has your Islamic faith helped you in your career as a Principal?

YN: When I was the Principal of a middle school (for students from kindergarten to eighth grade), after the daily assembly in which a few verses from the Holy Quran were recited, and the National Anthem was sung, I encouraged students to recite some daily prayers with me. This daily practice formed a bond between the students and me and helped us realize our common purpose of learning for the sake of knowledge and self-improvement, according to Allah's command.

LM: What is your favorite memory from your career?

YN: In my 30 years of teaching, there are so many pleasant memories, but the best one was when I was the admissions director at the Elementary Teachers Training College. The selection for admission was according to candidates' academic record. Sadly, many times a student selected refused to take admission because she could not pay the admission fee. It was very hard for me to let go of a capable student, so I came up with a plan to help needy students by fundraising among my fellow colleagues, friends and relatives. Most students who were helped by such efforts went on to become good teachers and citizens. It pleases me that I could play a small role in helping students achieve their goals.

LM: What advice can you give our readers on how to attain success in life?

YN: From my academic and teaching experiences, I believe that for students, and people in general, to be successful – within oneself and within society – they must be honest, disciplined and committed. Whenever these three virtues come together, success is sure to follow. Islam teaches us the same thing by advising us to pray regularly and fast for self-discipline. I hope that all young people will avoid too many distractions and stay committed to their goals in life.



Codename Zero

by Chris Rylander — a Review

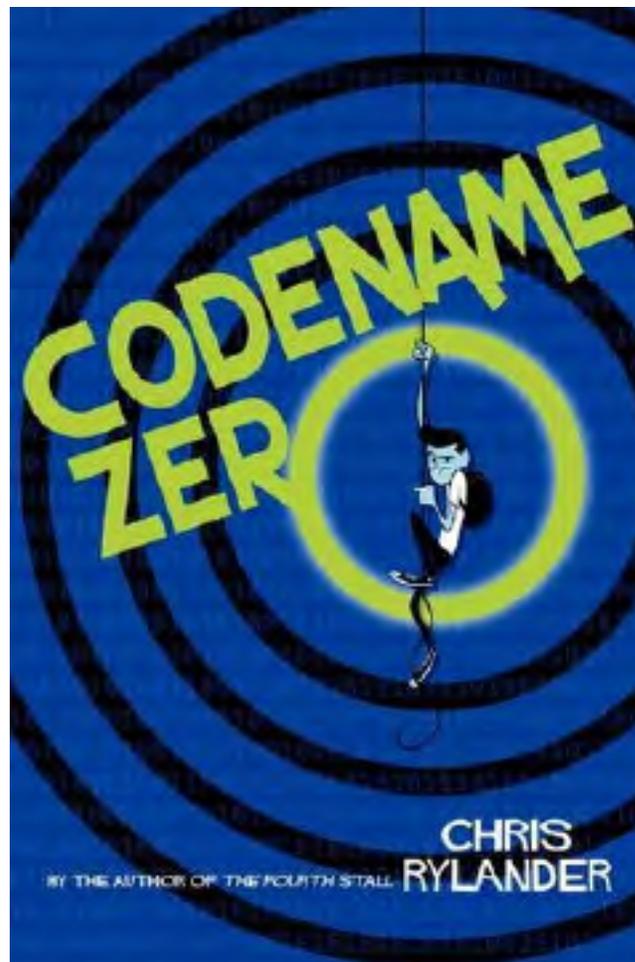
By Aafia Ahmad

Summary: Seventh-grader Carson Fender, our protagonist, is an avid prankster who wants to liven up his boring North Dakotan existence. In the middle of an epic prank involving fainting goats and glue, he receives a self-destructing device and a set of cryptic instructions, and suddenly finds himself pulled into a world of danger and intrigue. When he is thrown into a high-stakes mission by a mysterious secret agency, life becomes far more exciting than Carson could ever have dreamed.

Overview: Codename Zero is a thrilling, hilarious book that I couldn't help but race through. Rylander keeps the tension high throughout, but the humor really stands out, and is essential in keeping the book light and preventing it from just dragging the reader through a series of near-impossible situations which the narrator will inevitably survive. While it is targeted towards middle-school-aged children, as a high school student, I still thoroughly enjoyed it. Aside from the violence that

permeates the book, Codename Zero is appropriate for most younger children.

Characters: Carson is very likable and has an upbeat sense of humor, reminiscent of a younger



Percy Jackson, that prevents him from despairing too much even in the most dire situations. His friend Dillon's crazy conspiracy theories also keep the mood light, but many end up being surprisingly ac-

curate. Well, not the one about how "Icelandic spies [were] determined to take down the US so they could use our land to bury millions of cubes of Mako shark meat and then dig it up months later to eat."

Dillon's twin sister Danielle is more pragmatic and dependable, but still gets involved with pranking. New student Olek is hilarious with his mangling of English phrases like "early bird gets many intestine worms in gut," but he also jokes around intentionally, like when he describes his favorite activities, saying "I like eating strawberry jam with spoon, hypnotizing elderly turtles, collecting old horse hooves to build for with, um, oh yes, I also really like standing in middle of park pretending to be tree that suffers from serious tree disease, Comandra blister rust." However, his involvement in the plot is much more serious. The camaraderie between these four characters is a highlight of the book. Describing any other characters would spoil the book as their identities are revealed through the plot.

The Greek Debt Crisis Explained in the Light of the Holy Quran

By Dr. Hamid Rahman

There is much talk these days in the news media about the Greek debt crisis. There are many technical issues involved, but the situation can easily be understood in the light of the great wisdom that Allah has given us in the Quran. In Surah Al-Furqan, Allah says: “The servants of the Beneficent are... they, who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just mean is ever between these.” The wisdom that this verse is imparting to us is simply that we should live within our means. We should neither be misers nor spendthrifts.

What is true of individuals is also true of nations. A nation that does not live within its means has to borrow from others. The Greek government was spending far too much money as compared to its

resources, and it made up the deficit by borrowing heavily from whoever was willing to lend to them. Now, the limit of the lenders has been reached, and they would like to have their money back, but the Greeks do not have the money to pay them. In fact, they are asking for even more money from the other European countries to keep themselves afloat.

Many sovereign nations spend more than what they take in through taxes, fees and other means. They do not have to worry too much because they can print money in their printing presses and pay their creditors. However, in the case of Greece, this is not possible because the countries in the Eurozone have handed over the function of printing money to the European Central Bank. In the absence of this ability to print

money, the Greek government has had to borrow huge amounts to maintain its social welfare programs. The accumulation of this debt over time now requires large sums of money to be paid in interest. Much of the money that Greek government was borrowing in recent times was being used to service its debt, i.e. make interest payments, so little was left for meeting other needs. This situation reminds us of the evil of usury and why Islam prohibits usury.

The Quran and the teachings of the blessed Prophet Muhammad stress the importance of hard work as a means of progress in worldly affairs. The three golden rules of living within one’s means, working hard and honestly, and avoiding dealing in interest are principles which any nation or individual can use to avoid financial trouble and escape potential crises.



Memories of my Mother

By Rifat Ahmad

My mother, Iqbal Begum, was a remarkable woman who always inspired me with her simple honesty and piety. She was very loving towards children and would spend time with them and talk to them, telling them stories. She was never harsh with them, and when little toddlers played a lot, she would massage their legs before they went to sleep, saying that they got tired walking around on their little legs. She would cook excellent meals for us, and I especially remember the delicious vegetable curries she would prepare and the sweet treats like rice pudding.

My mother never would waste anything. She was careful how she used water, which she would conserve scrupulously, along with food. She taught all her children how to value Allah's blessings so that nothing was wasted. This is a virtue which seems lost in today's world.

I remember my beloved mother as a very simple and modest lady, though she came from an affluent background. She faced many, many hardships in her life with great courage and resourcefulness. She completed her basic education and was fond of reading the newspaper and other books. My mother was a very good student, and her headmistress was so sad when she was removed from school after the fifth grade that she visited her parents at home to urge them to let her continue her edu-

cation. It was not the custom in those days in the Indian subcontinent to educate girls beyond a certain grade level.

Even so, when I was in my twenties and was very keen on mountaineering, she let me join a mountaineering expedition headed for the northern areas of Pakistan. It was very unusual for girls to go on trips like that in those days, yet my mother trusted me, and memories of the adventures I had at that time are some of my most cherished. Now I can look back and see what a big step it was for her, which speaks to her courage and trust in Allah.

My mother was not very talkative, but would enjoy the jokes of others and laugh heartily over them. She had only one sister, who passed away very early from tuberculosis, and at that time she took over care of the three daughters of her deceased sister. This was at a time when daughters were considered to be a burden rather than an asset. When people would visit and comment on how she would manage to secure marriages for her own three daughters as well as three nieces, she would reply calmly that "Allah will take care of them, He has created them and is even more concerned about them than I am." Indeed, her simple faith and reliance on Allah was not unfounded. All her children were successful and happily married. She had a total of seven children, two of whom died in infancy.

My mother did not have abundant means, but would always give charity in whatever way she could. I remember a humble street vendor who would regularly come around, and she was sure to offer him a meal when he came selling things. My mother loved and appreciated nature greatly. She grew plants in her home and knew how to propagate them. Her favorite plant was the sweet smelling jasmine. She shared this love of plants with all her children, and now, even her grandchildren and great grandchildren have inherited her love of the natural world.

I often think back fondly to a beautiful scene from my childhood. My mother would regularly feed the birds every morning and evening. As a result, birds would line up on the clothesline in our backyard in anticipation of the regular treats they were going to receive. Seeing birds lined up always reminds me of her kind nature and simple acts of goodness and charity.

How to Make a Beautiful Banner for Ramadan / Eid

By Ayesha Sahukhan



Materials

Blue cardboard

Glitter foam

Glue, ribbon

Craft pins or tape

Instructions

Trace triangles onto the cardboard depending on how large you want them to be. Cut out the triangles. You will need one triangle for each letter on the banner.

Trace letters onto the glitter foam sheet and cut using a sharp blade. Keep adult help or supervision nearby.

Glue the glitter foam letters onto the cardboard triangles.

Measure the area where you want to hang your banner, and cut the ribbon according to that measurement.

Place the triangles on the ribbon and attach them with pins or with tape.

Use the beautiful banner to remind you of the happy occasion Allah has blessed you with.