



LIGHTHOUSE

The Magazine for Muslim Youth

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(in school)

And much more

To pray or not to pray (in school)

In the cafeteria in Hopewell Middle School ...

Kaitlin (opens sandwich and makes a face): Peanut butter again ... My mom is so stupid!

Maryam (unwrapping her own sandwich): What's wrong with peanut butter?

Kaitlin: I don't like it, that's what's wrong, I've told her that so many times, but she just doesn't listen!

Maryam: Just make your own lunch!

Kaitlin: Seriously? I don't have time for that. I wish my mom would just buy me something cool for lunch, but she's so lazy! It's insane.

Maryam: I think what's insane is how you talk about your mom. Moms do a lot for us. The least we can do is be nice, you know? Give them some respect.

Kaitlin: Honestly, Maryam, don't be so boring. Looks like someone's been spending a little too much time around their mom lately.

Ali (walking up and sitting down): Hey Maryam, Yusuf and Saliha have asked Mr. Vara if they can pray Zuhr in his room during lunch or advisory. You know where his room is, right?

Maryam: That's a great idea. Do I need a note or anything?

Ali: Nope, just tell your teacher where you're going and ...

Kaitlin: What's this about Mr. Vara's room? And *praying*?

Ali: Yeah. What's the problem?

Kaitlin: But I thought you're not allowed to pray in school.

Ali: Says who?

Kaitlin: Says *everyone*. I don't see anyone else pray in school. Praying is for losers.

Maryam: You think *everything's* for losers, Kaitlyn! What's not allowed in school is someone leading a prayer for everyone, since we all have different religions. But we can pray on our own if we want to. There's freedom of religion after all.

Kaitlin: Obviously, but who would want to pray in school? Just go to church on Sunday. Although, even that's a waste of time.

Ali: Muslims don't go to church on Sunday. We pray 5 times every day, but it can be in a mosque or in our home, or wherever we are.

Kaitlin: Oh, so you're going to open a mosque in school? Wow, I have to tell everyone about this. They're *not* gonna believe it.

Ali: No, we aren't opening a mosque. We just asked the principal for a place to pray, and he said we could go to any classroom that was free and had a teacher there. We checked with Mr. Vara, and he said it was fine with him. He's awesome.

Maryam: Yeah, Mr. Vara is pretty cool.

Kaitlin: So you guys are gonna miss lunch or advisory, and for what? To go *pray*. Why? What are you praying for? Are you guys in trouble or something and you want to get out of it?

Maryam: Praying isn't just for when you're in trouble. It's a way to slow down, to meditate and connect with God.

Kaitlin: Meditating? I've seen some Muslims praying on TV. They had their hands on their knees and were all bent down, and now you guys are gonna do that here in school.

Ali: Yes, we are! Hey, aren't you in yoga club?

Kaitlin: Um, yeah. What does that have to do with anything?

Ali: Yoga is meditation too. It's a way to be mindful, just like our prayer. Oh, I forgot. It's *so* not weird to wear a tank top, sit on a mat and contort yourself.

Kaitlin: Excuse me? Yoga is an ancient practice.

Maryam: Prayer is pretty ancient too. Muslims have been praying like this for over fourteen centuries, and even before, people have always been praying in one way or another. We should respect that.

Kaitlin: Still, do you *really* have to do it in school?

Ali: Kaitlyn, prayer's a part of normal life, just like eating or drinking. If it's not weird to feed your body

at lunchtime, why is it weird to feed your soul at prayer time?

Maryam (glancing up at the clock): Ali, we should get going before the bell rings. Come watch us, Kaitlyn, it's not that strange. Seriously!

Kaitlin: Okay... but only if you guys

come check out yoga club tomorrow morning.

Ali: Sure, I've tried yoga and it was pretty fun, although I couldn't do half the poses.

Maryam: Let's get going then.

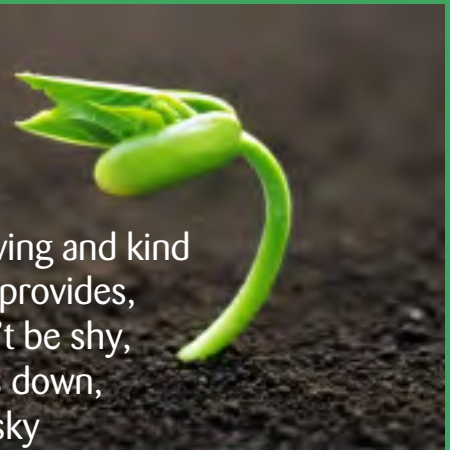
Classroom with a few kids praying. One says Iqama, boys stand in front, one says Allahuakbar and starts recitation of Surah Fatihah.

Kaitlyn bows her head respectfully and closes her eyes.

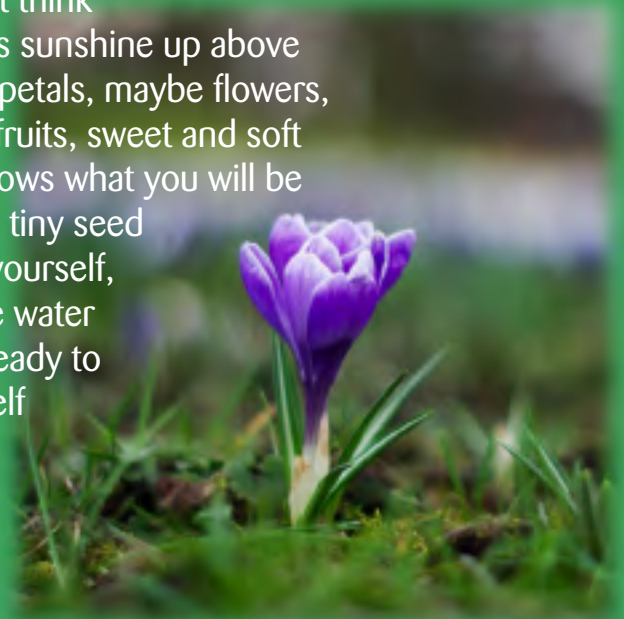
— The End —

Plant a Seed

Dig the earth
Put it there,
Say a prayer,
Tiny seed,
May you grow,
This earth is loving and kind
It nurtures and provides,
Little seed, don't be shy,
Send your roots down,
Arms up to the sky



It seems hard
To open up,
Reach out,
In the dark, scary earth
But just think
There is sunshine up above
Maybe petals, maybe flowers,
Maybe fruits, sweet and soft
Who knows what you will be
But first, tiny seed
Stretch yourself,
Drink the water
And be ready to
Be yourself



Ramadan Awakenings

4am

I don't remember which stair is creaky, the last or the one before it, so I tiptoe over them both and head to the kitchen. Eating at this hour without waking anyone is going to be a challenge. I turn on the exhaust in the kitchen to muffle the noise, and decide that oatmeal will be a better choice than crunchy cereal. Besides, I need something that will stick in my tummy, as Zahid would say, though I doubt anything will stick for 15 hours ...

Two bowls of oatmeal, one peach, one cookie and a glass of milk later, I check my watch and pray Fajr, food and water sloshing around inside me. I think of all the people around the world who are fasting today, feeling a little stronger, a little less lonely. I yawn and head back upstairs, this time leaping over those last two creaky stairs.

9am

Breakfast time in the Khan household is busy, really busy. I can hear the noise before I can smell the food. My stomach grumbles as if to remind me that I usually eat around this time. I pat it as if to remind it, that I just ate a couple hours ago at suhoor.

"Raafe, pancakes for you, dear, or a fried egg?"

"Nothing, thank you. Not hungry."

Mama stops beating the eggs and comes over to me, feeling my forehead. She looks at me over her glasses.



“Not hungry? You’re always hungry. Are you feeling ok?”

“Yes, hmmm ... I’m fine, Mama. Are you home today?”

“No dear, I have to go, Nina will be here soon, so be good and watch out for your brothers until she comes.”

My mother is a realtor, and I have twin brothers. Nina is our babysitter.

Watching my brothers can be exhausting, and Mom knows I won’t do it, but she always asks me anyway.

I sit there and stare at the glass of orange juice, deep in thought. What does a fasting person do the entire day? Well, Zahid said I had to conserve my energy, so I won’t head to the pool. I should probably read some Quran and find my library books. I hope Rayyan can come over for some chess.

Ugh. Something wet and gooey bounces off my forehead. I look up and see Tahir giggle and Zahir wave at me. I hope Nina gets here soon. I can already tell that this is going to be a *long* day.

1:30pm

I have read two books, played two rounds of “Raider Tom”, and lost three games of chess. My head feels sore and my stomach is begging for food.

“Lunch time, Raafe,” Nina calls out.

“I’m taking a nap,” I yell back, putting a pillow over my head. A little sleep will help pass the time, and then I’ll pray Zuhr.

4pm

I wake up in a daze, not sure if it’s



morning or evening. Oh no, I’m late for Zuhr, as in *really* late. It sure isn’t easy, praying five times a day! You really have to watch the clock. I stumble over to the bathroom and make wudzu. Right after I finish praying, I’m so tired that I fall asleep again, almost instantly.

6pm

“Dad’s home”, yell Zahir and Tahir together, jolting me out of my peaceful nap.

By now, I feel limp and really lonely, wishing I had a regular family like Zahid’s. I remember him telling me how everyone ate together at sahoor, and during the day, the kitchen was deserted. Then, before iftar, everyone helped make something to break the fast with, and it was always Zahid’s job to peel the potatoes. His mom said that it was the least tempting thing, because he can hardly pop a raw potato in his mouth.

I wonder how two people can be so different. My uncle, who lives in Pakistan, is very religious. His family prays at home together and often discuss verses of the Quran. All of them seem to know a lot about Islam. Dad isn’t like his

brother, even though they grew up together. My mom isn’t Muslim, though, so maybe that’s why there isn’t much religion in our house.

I never realized how much I missed that until I went to stay with Uncle Akram and my cousin Zahid for a month last year. At first, I didn’t want to go, thinking that Zahid would be a spoilt only child, but it was great. Staying there was like being in a different world, one that makes a lot more sense to me.

There are parts of my family that just seem nonsensical. They tell me not to eat pork without really saying why. We don’t celebrate either Christmas or Eid properly, but we get presents without knowing why those days are special. I always wish my parents would talk about religion to me, explaining things and answering all of my questions. My life seems shallow without knowing why I do the things I do.

The smell of roasted chicken wafting up the stairs jolts me from my reverie. My stomach gives a loud gurgle, and I lick my dry lips.

“Raafe, come for dinner!”

I slouch down to the table, feeling like an oddball. *How pathetic*, I

think, *a misfit in my own family.*

Mama passes me a plate of chicken with potatoes and broccoli. Right now, even the broccoli looks good. My stomach gives another loud gurgle and I wonder if everyone can hear it.

“Start eating, son!” Dad claps me on the back and spoons a huge bite of chicken into his mouth.

Suddenly the sight of everyone eating as if it were a regular day is more than I can bear. I think Zahid mentioned something about this ... hunger makes us irritable. I decide I can't go the whole month fasting in secret. I want some answers, and I want them now.



“Dad ... isn't it Ramadan ... aren't you supposed to be fasting?”

Dad chokes on his broccoli. Mama reaches over and thumps him on the back. Dad removes his glasses

and wipes his eyes, all the while coughing hard.

“Dad ... you ok?” I say, feeling like laughing for some strange reason.

“Hrmpf ... yes, yes, I am fine. What did you say, Raafe?”

“I said that it's Ramadan. The month of *fasting*, remember! Why isn't anyone fasting?”

My parents look at each other. It's one of those looks that means, *how are you going to handle this one?*

Dad clears his throat. “Well, Raafe... I kind of forgot that it was Ramadan, already... I remember I used to do that back when I was

your age ... actually a bit older. Akram was always the one who woke me up and we would play many long games of chess to get through the day.”

“So then what happened? Why did

you stop fasting and praying, and all that religious stuff. We are Muslim, right?”

Dad stares into his plate as if words of wisdom might appear in it at any moment. He seems to be going back in time and I'm pretty sure he hasn't heard my question. I feel an arm on my shoulder.

“I think I can answer that one,” Mom says. “What happened was that your Dad married me, and then when we had you, we couldn't decide which religion to teach. As a result, we ended up teaching you guys ... nothing much about religion. We tried to teach you good values, but not more than that. I can see you are curious about Islam, Raafe. I was too, once.”

“Then what happened? Didn't you like what you learned?”

“The problem is that I didn't get a chance to learn very much in the first place. We both got so busy in our lives that I forgot how important religion is. I always felt I was missing something, but then the twins came along and life got even busier than before. But that's no excuse.”

While Mom had been talking, Zahir was mixing stuff vigorously in his glass of water. He picks out something with his hand and stuffs it in his mouth. “Yummy,” he declares, and wipes his hand on his hair.

Dad clears his throat and speaks a little hoarsely, “Actually the fault is mine. I thought I would share my religion with you and show you how beautiful it is. Then other things got in the way, and I forgot the most important part of life. How did I let that happen?”



“It’s okay, Dad.” It’s hard for me to see my cheerful father with such a sad expression. “Uncle Akram said it was never too late to start. He said Allah always gives us one chance after the other. I can help you learn. He and Zahid taught me how to pray, and to read a little of Quran ... I remember Gramps taught me a little of the Quran when I was younger ... “

Dad bows his head and covers his face with both hands.

“Are you okay, Dad?” I ask worriedly.

“My dear Baba,” says Dad in a very low voice, “he always worried about me and my family. He kept saying he was afraid we would get lost in this world, be too busy to remember Allah, and he was right.”

“It’s okay, Dad”, says Zahir, and Tahir launches some flying kisses into the air.

Mama moves over towards Dad and puts an arm around his shoulders.

“I think it’s beautiful that God sent us guidance through our own son. There is always time to fix our mistakes, but let’s eat first, alright? We can start fasting tomorrow.”

“Actually, Mom, I’m fasting today. You go ahead.”

“Fasting!!” both my parents stare at me, wide-eyed.

“Super Raafe,” yells Tahir, offering me a carrot stick out of his mouth, dripping with drool.

“Tahir, I’m fasting. Remember what I said a second ago?”

“Oh,” says my younger brother. “Well, me going fast too!”

“That’s the spirit,” Mom says. “Let’s all wait for Maghrib time to eat.”

And so we wait. And we talk. And when we finally do eat all together, the feeling of joy inside me is incomparable.

Thank you, Allah, I think.



A Prayer for Tough Times

By Sarah Ahmad

You may have heard this well-known dua from the Holy Quran; some of you may even remember it by heart. But how many of you know its meaning and understand how it can help us in our lives today?

This beautiful prayer is related in the Holy Quran within the story of Prophet Moses. After he was granted Prophethood, Allah wanted him to go to Pharaoh's court and invite him to the worship of one God. Moses was nervous about his ability to convince the mighty Pharaoh, so he sought Allah's help in these words. As a result, he emerged as the clear victor in his encounter with the Pharaoh.

You can use this dua when you are faced with a tough task, like preparing for a math test, or making an important speech to a crowd of people. When you ask Allah to expand your chest and ease your concern,

Inshallah, you will find your task to be easier. Finding it hard to make your parents understand your point of view about something? Surprise your friends and family with your eloquence when you have beseeched Allah to loosen the knot in your tongue and to make them understand your word!

No kidding, give it a try! Before you freak out next time, remember to ask help from the Almighty and see how your troubles fade away. Just entreat Him from the core of your heart ... *rabbi shrahli sadri, wa yassirli amri ... my lord, expand my chest for me and ease my work for me ... wahlul uqdata mil lisaani, wafqahu qauli ...* and loosen the knot from my tongue and make them understand my word.

Aameeen!

'My Lord, expand my chest for me
And ease my work for me,
And loose the knot from my tongue,
(That) they may understand my word'

20:25

Public or Islamic Schools?

A Discussion between Youth and Parents

Teen:

My mom has recently been trying to convince me to go to an Islamic school. I know bad influences are rampant at many high schools, but *mine isn't like that*. At my school, all we do is study and do homework because we want to get good grades. The bad influences exist there too, but they're not my friends and aren't in my classes, since I'm in advanced courses. Maybe I spend too much time on homework and not enough on Quran. But I'm trying to fix that. Is sending me to an Islamic school really the solution? I honestly don't think so.

Firstly, I will be forced to wear an abaya and hijab, even though I'm pretty sure I already dress modestly. A *black* abaya! That's incredibly heat absorbent, and in the South, there's plenty of heat to absorb. Also, I don't think it's fair to force the girls wear hijabs because each person is ready for it at a different age.

Secondly, I will have to say goodbye to all of my friends, those "bad influences" who spend all their time doing homework or complaining about it. I've known them for 4 years now and I would really miss them if I have to leave. Yes, maybe an Islamic school has a more family-like environment, but

those students have known each other for a really long time. There are only a handful of people in each grade, so there aren't many options for friendship. It would be pretty awkward if there was a close group of friends and then I had to tag along with them and get left out.

Also, Islamic schools are often chosen by parents of troubled children in the hopes that the schools will have a miraculous effect on them, meaning that bad influences exist there too, and I don't want to have to be friends with them just because we're in the same grade.

My school already has an amazing and challenging academic program. I love being in hard classes



and making friends with people there. Islamic schools also *claim* to have very high standards, but when I go to websites and look at test scores, they are nowhere near as good as in highly ranked public schools. I think we should strive for a high level of achievement rather than accepting a lower level with a "better" environment.

Fifth, some may say that Islamic schools have a "positive environment". That's definitely a generalization. Some of the girls I know who go to Islamic school seem no better than the other girls in my school in the way they talk and act. I'm sure they teach character and morals and all that, but if there are such positive influences there, then what am I going to do when I'm in college, out of the shelter of Islamic school, and having to deal with bad influences? For those who've always gone to Islamic schools, it'll be hard to deal with the real world. In my case, even if I transferred to an Islamic school, I don't think a few years of a "positive environment" would leave me too sheltered from the real world.

Mother:

Okay, I don't think that Islamic schools are a one stop solution to every problem under the sun, but when I go and visit these schools or learn about the activities they have,

e.g. Quran competitions, girls basketball with modest clothes, community service projects, I feel as if my kids are missing out on this good environment where they can participate in *all* the activities that the school has to offer. In public schools, Muslim kids are often the odd ones out, since in middle and high school most activities seem to be centered around dances and proms and all that stuff. I think the kids themselves take it more in stride, knowing they shouldn't do this or that activity, but it bothers me and makes me worry that Muslims kids might not feel as if they really belong.



I am not in favor of forced abayas and hijabs, but when the other options are microscopic shorts and strappy, tight tops, I don't need to wonder what is better. I am sure Muslim kids are now relatively immune to seeing half dressed people around them, and that is what I am worried about. It should not seem normal. Do you even remember to avert your eyes? Is it the end of the world to have to wear an abaya? I don't think so, especially if there is air conditioning, and many abayas are thin and airy, much like a judge's robe. It may actually be nice to not have to worry about wearing the cool brands, coordinating your outfit, and worrying about how your hair looks.

I agree that since Islamic schools are relatively new and less established, other schools may have a better standard of education. However, we are supposed to balance our religious and worldly development. How many Muslims kids get lost in the public school system and loose or feel ashamed of their Islamic identity? I think you can also go to a good college from an Islamic school if you work hard and obtain extra credit.

I also agree that one does need to be exposed to the real world. Kids from Islamic schools still get exposed to the popular culture in their neighborhoods, TV, internet etc. It is not as if they are living in a bubble, but I feel they may benefit from having been taught a more Islamic perspective during most of the day. They get to pray on time, and attend juma prayers. The exposure to culture is balanced out by Islamic activities.

Adjusting to a new environment is hard, and it may be harder if the class sizes are small and there are not many people to choose from. I think that if we take a leap of faith, things work out, and if they do not, there are always other options.

One point seems to have been overlooked: the influence of a positive home environment. If a child is being taught Islam at school, they can thrive in a public school and safeguard their faith. If the child does not have a stable home environment, even an Islamic school might not be enough to keep them strong in faith, and a public school would be very hard for them to thrive in.

Conclusion:

Islamic schools can be a good option if they have a high standard of education and are inclusive and modern in their approach. They offer Muslim youth an environment where there is less conflict in the choices they have to make to stay true to Islam. Public schools with high standards offer more opportunities for academic excellence to students, and the Islamic education aspect can be managed at home with regular Quran studies and discussion with parents. Most of all it is important for parents and kids to have open and honest communication, so that if the child faces a problem in public school, they know how to ask for help. Parents should not only ask kids how good their grades are, but also how strong their faith is, and what obstacles they face in school.

Arabic anyone?

The mosque resonates with the beautiful recitation of the Imam. People around you raise their hands in prayer. You raise yours too, after glancing furtively at the people next to you. *Rabbana la tuzir qulubana* ... says the Imam in a most heartfelt manner. You scan your brain to give meanings to these words. Rabbana seems familiar enough ... Something to do with Rabb, which is Allah, ok and what's next? You don't have a clue. For people who are entirely unfamiliar with Arabic, scenes like this are very familiar: The Imam is reciting prayers after the juma khutba. People around you are uttering heartfelt Aameens. The person on one side of you wipes away a tear. The person on the next side has eyes closed and face scrunched in concentration. You feel bored, annoyed and ... kind of ashamed. Bored, because you have no clue what the Imam is ac-

tually saying, annoyed because it all sounds rather familiar and should make more sense, and ashamed because this is your religion and your life and you are missing out!

There is a simple solution to this problem. No, you don't have to pack your bags and head to Al-Azhar University in Egypt for two years. You don't have to take complicated Arabic classes and learn now to say "where is the bathroom," and "how much is the pumpkin?" in Arabic?

Of course, there's nothing wrong with learning Arabic as a language; however, we can get by with becoming familiar with the meanings of some of the basic and common words used in the Quran, as well as some very basic Arabic. This can be very painless, even enjoyable, and the next time you listen to the Quran being recited during

of after prayer, and realize, hey, I can actually understand some of it ... the feeling is incredible.

Understandquran.com. This website has a series of small lessons that focus on the meaning of the words we recite in salat, as well as some really basic grammar. There is a free trial, and subscription is really worth the reasonable price.

80percentwords.com. You can test your Quranic vocabulary on this site. If you subscribe, a new word from the Quran with its meaning is sent to your email every day

Make your own system. All you need is some index cards (or recycled paper cut into small pieces) and a pen or marker. Every day, when you read the Quran, note the meaning of just one word and write it on your card. Stick that card on the fridge, the wall, or stick it into your notebook. If you manage to keep this up every day, (and it's not that hard; takes less than 5 minutes a day) you can learn 365 new words in one year. That is a lot of words, and since most of the words in the Quran are repeated, it will really boost your understanding. You will not feel alienated because you do not understand a dua or recitation anymore.

Insha Allah by following some simple steps, by next Ramadan, your Arabic vocabulary will have increased amazingly.

خ	ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ا
kha	haa	jiim	thaa	taa	baa	alif
ص	ش	س	ز	ر	ذ	د
saad	shiin	siin	zaay	raa	thaal	daal
ق	ف	غ	ع	ظ	ط	ض
qaaf	faa	ghayn	ayn	thaa	taa	daad
ي	و	ه	ن	م	ل	ك
yaa	waaw	ha	nuun	miim	laam	kaaf

CASE STUDY: BOKO HARAM OF NIGERIA

By Roshnara Musthafa

Is it legitimate to call Boko Haram “Islamic”? Does the terrorist group exist because of Islam?

Recently, the world was sent into a state of shock and shame when 276 girls were abducted from the Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok, in Borno State of Nigeria. Three months later, more than 200 girls are still missing, and the few who were reunited with their families did so after fleeing from the abductors at their own accord.

The government and the military have so far failed to rescue any of the girls, creating despair among the parents.

The terrorist group responsible for the kidnapping is called “Boko Haram” even though the official name of the group is “Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati WalJihad” or “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and jihad.” This group was established in 2003 by an Islamist cleric Mohammed Yusuf, who had attracted a lot of poor youth to his religious ideas, which were at first only a call to withdraw from the secular state.

Later, however, due to harsh treatment from government and police, they radicalized and turned to violent insurgency against the government,

calling for the formation of an Islamic State. In 2009, Mohammed Yusuf was killed by the army in a televised execution and about 800 people died in extra judicial killings. This led to further radicalization as well as the splintering of this group into many factions without any strong leaders.

The group is now known for its terrorist-like activities, including sui-

cide bombings, attacks on educational institutions, and the killing and abduction of students as well as a rash of other haphazard criminal activities.

It is thought that the group is now connected to a faction of Al Qaeda, but the group lacks any unified leadership. It has also begun activities in nearby states of Niger and Cameroon.



The name of the sect implies that they are a group of people committed to the way of Prophet Muhammad and jihad, making necessary for us as Muslims to analyze the group and find out if they are justified in using the name of the blessed prophet as they commit violent crimes against innocent people.

We need to analyze the situations that give rise to extremist groups and terrorism. Is Islam the problem? If not, then what is? Can terrorism be eliminated by killing the terrorists and attacking their ideologies? Or does it require tackling other problems that give rise to terrorism?

Jihad Is to Strive

Jihad is a term that is widely misinterpreted by Muslims as well as non-Muslims today. The word, as we are increasingly beginning to realize, stands for all striving in the

way of Allah. We are asked by Allah in many verses of the Quran to strive with our wealth, bodies and minds in the way of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad's life is a guiding light to Muslims to understand the various forms jihad can take. He suffered at the hands of his own tribe in Makkah for 10 years of his mission, without as much as raising a hand at the people that oppressed him and his mostly poor, underprivileged followers.

But things changed when he migrated to Madina and was accepted by the people of Madina as their leader. That gave him the legitimacy to respond to battles that he was forced to fight in order to defend his people from aggressive forces.

This phase of the Prophet's life is often used by extremist groups to justify their armed revolts, as they

fight the established rulers or governments who are oppressive. But they don't realize that Prophet Muhammad was the head of a state when he waged wars, and never did he use war as a means to obtain legitimacy and statehood.

Therefore, groups like Boko Haram cannot call their insurgency Islamic or claim that it is in accordance with the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet. In fact, aggression is condemned by Allah in the Quran. He says in the Quran: "You may fight in the cause of God against those who attack you, but do not aggress. God does not love the aggressors" (2:190)

When Allah specifically mentions fighting (the word used to refer to fighting in the Quran is "qital"), he reminds Muslims to fight only when they are under attack themselves. Islam permits fighting only for self-defense. He condemns all excesses in the name of fighting. Allah says that he does not love those who commit excesses.

Quran also states that anybody who kills an innocent person has committed a crime equivalent to killing all of humanity, whereas saving one person has the same reward of saving all of humanity.

But we find that groups like Boko Haram are excessive in their fighting, and they commit crimes against innocent people who are helpless against them. Most of Boko Haram's victims are poor people who are trying to survive in the poverty-stricken regions of Nigeria.

Boko Haram?

The word "Boko Haram", from the Hausa language of Northern Nigeria,



is conveniently translated as “Western education is sinful”. However, Dr. Paul Newman, professor emeritus at Indiana University, a linguistic expert on the Hausa language, explains that the word “boko” stands for anything that is deceptive.

When British colonialists tried to impose secular education on the natives and tried to force them to write Hausa in Roman script rather than the Arabic script that they used, the word “boko” became associated with Western education because the natives felt that the colonialists were trying to control their minds and eradicate Islam.

This distrust of secular education still exists in the minds of some Muslim clerics there, and it is this that leads to the attack on schools and students by Boko Haram. But is such mistrust justified in the name of Islam? What does the Quran say about seeking knowledge? Is secular education at odds with Islam?

Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation in the word “recite”. Knowledge was transmitted orally in those times when writing was not very popular. And yet, the verses that follow this first commandment refer to Allah as the one who created man from a blood clot, taught him how to use the pen, and also taught him all the things he didn’t know. Thus, we see the emphasis on knowledge at the very beginning of the Quran.

Further, in a large number of verses in the Quran, we find Allah urging human beings to think and understand how everything in nature, within us and outside of us, is related to the existence of God and His Laws. The lesson in the Quran is to inquire and to find a connec-

tion to Allah, but never once does He asks us to limit our knowledge in any way. In fact, Prophet Muhammad asked his followers to gain knowledge, even if they had to go to China for it. China was then the very end of their known world.

This is exactly what Muslims did as their territories expanded and empires grew. All the ancients’ books of philosophy, mathematics, and science were translated by Arabs from Greek into Arabic.

Thus, the books of Aristotle and the theories of Pythagoras found their way to a new world, where the Muslim scholars added to these works with their own original thoughts, ideas and discoveries. Muslims used their knowledge to improve upon navigation, medicine, architecture and all other fields of human life.

In Spain, a thriving civilization under Muslim that was built on an enlightened way of living unknown to the rest of Europe, and there, Christians, Jews and Muslims lived in peace for 700 years. It was this knowledge, available then, only in Spain that was sought by Europeans at the dawn of the Renaissance. So, what we call western education is essentially built on what was found in the Islamic world.

“And He it is Who created the heavens and the earth with truth,” says the Quran (6:73).

Scientific enquiry is basically just an enquiry into this truth of creation. Modern secular education focuses on the nature of the physical world and the relationships of its various elements. This enquiry has enabled man to improve life

for human beings. It has also helped human beings understand their own nature better, and to understand the important factors that lead to peaceful human existence on earth.

But in the absence of an understanding of the Higher Power who has made the laws of creation, and who has also placed in human beings a desire to transcend, to rise above his earthly condition, human beings can misuse the knowledge they get from scientific enquiry for selfish needs and give in to lower instincts of arrogance and greed.

Today, we see a world that has been pushed to extreme imbalances. We find that in spite of all the technological advances, wealth inequality is high, poverty and warfare are increasing, and peace and tolerance is lacking. Environmental concerns are threatening our survival. Human beings have jeopardized ecosystems, and put many species on the brink of extinction. This is not a flaw inherent in scientific enquiry, but a flaw that arises from the fact that religion broke away from science. Islam has never been at odds with science, unlike some Christian doctrines.

If Muslims seek modern education sincerely, their knowledge of an All-Encompassing God who is earnest about the wellbeing of all His creation and has the final word in all our affairs will bring more justice to the world and help us work towards peaceful coexistence.

Turning away from education as such creates more problems for Muslims by taking away their ability to participate creatively in the modern world and hindering the communication of their problems to the non-Muslim world.



Status of Girls in Islam

Prophet Muhammad raised the status of girls in Arabia. Before he started his mission, women were among the most neglected members of the society. Female infanticide was high, and women were denied the right to inheritance. There was no limit to the number of wives a man could keep and easily divorce.

Islam changed all this and uplifted a woman's life. In the community that Prophet Muhammad built, women actively participated in all matters and were not limited to housework. They were active in education, business, and even warfare. Learning was never pre-

sented as a pursuit for men alone.

The most illustrious example of this is the wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Aisha (RA) who was known in her time and the generations that followed as a woman of great knowledge who people approached to clarify their questions on Quran, Sunnah, Fiqh, Arabic and grammar. She was known for her critical thinking and interpretations of the Quran. Her house was like a school where many of the future scholars of Islam were nurtured.

The Islamic world has seen many more women educators and scholars after Aisha (RA). Sadly, we see that often women are not allowed

to develop their intellect and interests in a natural manner and are insulated from modernity in the name of upholding traditions and family honor.

The Quran is not a book that addresses itself to men only. When Allah asks the reader to think, understand and strive, it is a command aimed as much to a woman as to a man. Allah never refers to Himself as the Lord of Muslims, or the Lord of Men, or the Lord of Arabs; rather, He addresses

Himself as the Lord of All the Worlds. He tells us that His Mercy and His Reward extends to all believers who do righteous deeds. Hence, Muslims are required to ex-

tend the bounties of the world to all people, regardless of gender, class, creed or any other part of one's identity.

Does Boko Haram exist because of Islam?

Boko Haram exists in a country where poverty is rampant. The statistical figures show us that it is a country that is divided into the very rich and the very poor. Inequality is sharp in the absence of a substantial middle class. It is the home to the 4 richest billionaires in Africa, while at the same time, 67% of the population lives on a dollar a day. The country is rich in oil and is the second richest country in Africa, but most people are subsistence farmers (growing crops for themselves). The government has failed to meet the needs of these poor farmers, and failed to spend on infrastructure and social services. Hence, there aren't even proper roads to access many of the rural areas, and health services are inadequate.

Corruption and extrajudicial killings also plague the poor people. Poverty is more intense in the north, which is home to the major-

ity of the Muslims. We find that the problems that created the insurgent group under Muhammad Yusuf had nothing to do with Islam. They were the result of a failed government. Muslims living in countries with such failed governments often resort to armed struggle against the state to change their own condition. Allah teaches us that He does not change the condition of a people until they change themselves. Therefore, Muslims are asked to participate in social change by beginning with their own selves.

This is how Prophet Muhammad changed the condition of people in Arabia. When he began his mission, he was only the leader of a poor and unprivileged section of the society. However, Islam changed them and gave them the wisdom to tackle their problems in the best manner. We have to find guidance from the life of the Prophet and understand that the condition of Muslims in the world will improve only by reforming ourselves, not by trying to grab power in order to impose a certain type of society on others. Such coercion has no place in Islam.

What to do?

The government of Nigeria has been advised by other governments and organizations to better the condition of people in rural areas by improving agricultural practices, providing education and health services, tackling corruption and improving security in order to end the menace of Boko Haram. It is difficult for a government that is not functional to fight a terrorist group that can draw frustrated youth into its influence easily.

Without addressing the underlying problems, a solution to terrorism seems bleak. As Muslims, we have the responsibility to understand our religion better. Our problems and our suffering are all tests to help us become better people. We cannot withdraw from active participation in the society because our faith is targeted, but we need to apply the wisdom we get from our faith to our problems. Let us also pray that people everywhere are guided to truth and submission. May Allah lessen the suffering of people everywhere and make our suffering the means to reformation and salvation.

'Lighthouse'

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