



# LIGHTHOUSE

The Magazine for Muslim Youth

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# “And When the Books are Spread”

We often think that people from a thousand years ago were living in the “Dark Ages”. But in Muslim civilization from the 7th century onward, there were amazing advances and inventions that still influence our everyday lives. These inventions are beautifully presented in the book **“1001 Inventions and Awesome Facts from Muslim Civilization”**, published by the National Geographic Society in partnership with the Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilization. This awesome book is filled with eye-catching illustrations and facts,

informing us about Muslim contributions to medicine, surgery, music, astronomy, architecture and much more. You really have to read this book to understand how profoundly the world has been influenced by Muslim inventions. It makes a great gift as well as a handy book to have on a coffee table. It can also be used for classroom presentations, or to show friends and neighbors how richly Islam has contributed to modern civilization. We have no reason to feel apologetic about the events that are associated with Islam in modern times. We have

thousands of reasons to feel proud that Islam has always been a force to change the world for the better.

Islam came as the best operating system for humans, and its teachings changed the lives of those who followed it, who would in turn change the world for the better. This beautiful book provides us with enough evidence of that. As for those who use Islam as an excuse to behave in a primitive or barbaric way, sadly they have not understood what Islam is really about.

## Changing the World? Warning! Deep thinking required!!

If you could do two things to change the world, what would they be? Sorry, endless chocolate fountains and no homework don't count! Imagine if it was in your power to really influence the problems of the world and make a change.

Deep thinking is definitely required. Don't just think about your life, or that of your family, but about this precious planet we have and all the people on it. What can you do for the greater good? Please send us your ideas and the best ones will be chosen for publication in the next issue of Lighthouse Magazine.



# How I nourish my soul

By Malaika Sahukhan

Every night when I'm asleep my soul takes me,  
To an ultimate universe – Jannah,  
When I'm there, it doesn't feel like a dream  
anymore,

It feels almost realistic.

Early in the morning my soul wakes me up to pray,  
And asks me to nourish it.

The Shaitan pulls me away from the prayer rug.  
That's when my soul reminds me of my dream,  
And I pull the covers off of my lap,  
Jump out of my bed,  
And leave the Shaitan moaning behind me.

I put on my hijab and pray,

After the first rakah all my laziness has disappeared,  
It feels as if an angel is carrying me.

Sometimes, when I get mad my fists clench,  
My knuckles turn white,  
And I seem to lose control of my soul.

To make sure I don't hurt anyone,  
I sit on my bed.

My soul got lost in thoughts,  
And I had a vision of me in the future.

I was standing before Allah [SWT],  
It looked like the Day of Judgement.  
Behind Allah (SWT) was a bright light,

It shone so bright I couldn't physically see my Rabb as well  
as I wished to,

But then and there my vision stopped.

I noticed that not only was I trying to nourish my soul,  
But my soul was trying to nourish me.

# The Art of Conversation:

Being Meaningful without being Offensive



Sometimes a conversation can seem like brain surgery. You have to be so careful about what you say and how you say it, especially with certain people, that it can be downright painful. But imagine this: people of different faiths and the same faith sitting together and peacefully discussing their thoughts on various topics, some of them sensitive subjects, in a friendly yet meaningful setting. Introducing The Red Bench: an interfaith conversation that matters. This is the brainchild of the United Methodist Church in downtown Austin, Texas. The original idea came from Professor Betty Sue Flowers of the University of Texas at Austin. It has been widely popular, with the Interfaith Action of Central Texas, or iACT, hosting Red Bench events in various faith congregations around

the Austin area, giving people a chance to visit different houses of worship and actually seeing what they are like, instead of relying on what they heard.

Recently discussed topics were: religion vs. spirituality, education, perfection, mortality, tolerance and inclusion. The discussions are led by table hosts, who are given a set of simple “host scripts”, or instructions, to follow so as to lead the conversation.

I think the best part is that we get to share a little of our religion with people we would not be talking to ordinarily, yet there is nothing preachy or pushy about it. We are also listening to what the other person has to say and not trying to ‘fix’ one another or prove a point. There is almost no chance of arguments!

Ever wanted to have an interfaith conversation that matters? Check out the iACT website for inspiration and start your own. Change usually starts small, but good ideas do spread and it is these good ideas that lead to the kind of change that we really want to see in our world. Even if it is a couple of friends meeting at your home, what better way to really have a meaningful dialogue, instead of just grumbling about teachers or homework, or discussing the latest scandals of movie stars?

## ‘Lighthouse’

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# Don't bite that back

Luna Writewell at your service! Investigative reporter of the self proclaimed kind. Do I write about politicians? Nope, boring ... they always do the same old, same old rotten things. Do I research about building new roads, and school funding? No, plenty of other people do that. I like to write about ordinary people: human behavior and the why's and how's of it. This time my focus is backbiting. It was my sister Hasina who gave me the idea. We always read a verse of the Quran together before we go to bed, and it was her turn to read.



The verse was: **“O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion, indeed some suspicions are sins. And don't spy or backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah, surely, Allah is The One Who accepts repentance, Most Merciful.”** (49: 12)

It was a scary verse ... we both

looked at each other for a minute with the image in our minds, eating the flesh of a dead person. Ewww ... gross. I am sure Allah made it vivid and dramatic so we could stay away from it. I put backbiting on my mental radar immediately. It was surely something to be on the lookout for.

It so happened my good friend Millicent was running for student council. Now, she is a smart cookie if you ever saw one, the kind of kid every mother is always praising ... her politeness, her table manners, her kindness, till you are ready to scream. But honestly, she is adorable. She was doing well in her campaign, even though she is not the popular kind of kid, she's too “kind” for that ... great pun? Well, I helped Millicent make some posters to put up around the school and we talked to the kids we knew, asking them to vote for her.

Things were going well, till Queenie, the other candidate, asked her to withdraw her nomination. We could hardly believe it! Queenie said she just knew she would win and did not want Millicent to have her feelings hurt, better for her to withdraw now. Imagine that, the sass that girl has! Millicent was polite as ever, saying she didn't mind losing, but wanted to try and had the right to.

You would think that would settle things, but no ma'am. Queenie did not like people standing up for themselves, and we would find that out the hard way. Strange rumors began to circulate about Millicent, that she had stolen from the principal, which is why she had been expelled from her last school (not true, she moved because her Dad got a new job!), and that she was bribing people with popsicles to get their votes. Also, that she got into a fight on her first day at this school. Now, that was true, but only because she stood up for another kid who was being bullied and things got ugly. It was just extremely mean and of course Millicent lost the election. She has been really quiet ever since and I have been thinking about the whole thing. What does one call such behavior?

I talked it over with Hasina and we both agreed that the worst part



was that people did not speak up and ask Millicent if she had done those things or not. They just talked about it behind her back, not giving her a chance to defend herself! The truth is, it is a very common behavior, and we had been guilty of it ourselves many times. I decided to do some investigating.

The next day in school I had my ears perked up for conversations of all kinds. I didn't have to wait long. I heard someone say: "Maddie is wearing that t-shirt again. I swear I think it's the same one my aunt donated to some charity. Do you think that's where she gets her clothes?" It was Lexie, her eyes wide as buttons and she ran her fingers through her hair.

I whipped out my notebook and parked myself in front of her.

Excuse me, Lexie ... why did you say that?"

Huh, where did you come from? Say what?"

"About Maddie? where she got her shirt? Do you know if that's true? Why are you interested anyway?"

And why is that any of your business?"

I am doing some research ... about backbiting. I'm trying to see why it's so common."

Well! I was not backbiting ... I was just ... saying something, it was an innocent comment, ok."

Well, Lexie, that is what backbiting is ... something we say behind someone's back that is mean, or hurts their reputation, and it may be true or not even that."

Look, Luna, mind your own business. I am just talking to my buddies ... we talk about clothes, ok! We like fashion and style, unlike some people."

Hey, did she mean me? I glanced down at my same old jeans and scruffy sneakers ... well at least she was saying it to my face. But, honestly, "front biting" does not feel good either. When I looked up, Lexie was gone in a huff of righteous indignation leaving me to note this observation:

Many times we are backbiting without noticing it. We think we are "just talking casually" but what we say is unkind and qualifies as backbiting! Watch those words!

My second chance came at recess. Hana had promised that we would all play kickball today, but it turned out she was planning a party and just wanted to talk to her special friends about it. That left only three people behind, not enough to make teams! I opened my mouth to rant to Maiya about how unfair it was, how probably we were not even invited to the party and it was horrible to be left out. Then I closed my mouth firmly and manage to get out a neutral statement through gritted teeth ...

"I hate being left out and hate it when people break their promises. I wish this world were more fair." I also made up my mind to tell Hana how I felt, when I had the chance. I wrote in my notebook:

Often we backbite because we feel we have a grievance, but we do not talk to the right person to solve it! It helps to try to communicate the problem, nicely, to the right person, instead of complaining to others who cannot do much about it.

While walking home after school, I was caught behind two mothers who took up the sidewalk and were so busy talking they did not notice little old me, trying to get past them. I overheard them say: *No kidding ... you should have seen the cheap decorations, I mean you only get married once, right?*

I pondered that philosophical question while waiting for a break in the conversation, so I could say "excuse me" and get past them. Then I heard:

*It was a bargain wedding, I tell you. I am surprised they did not pick out plastic plates from the dollar store. The bride's dress looked tacky too, though she was pretty and smiling as if she were princess Kate!*



I sighed and edged past them, as they paused for breath. Backbiting was not a rare thing for sure. In just one day I had heard enough. There was enough of this bad mouthing going around, and no one seemed aware of it, and what could we do to stop it? I felt defeated.

When I got home, Mom's friend, Auntie Hella was visiting. I said salam before I collapsed on the couch.

"Well looks who's tired out from all that learning?" she said.

"Not really", I replied, trying to revive myself, "It wasn't learning, but backbiting that made me weary."

"Backbiting! Are they teaching you backbiting in school! You mean it's a subject?"

"No ma'am." I replied, sitting up to explain properly. "But it could be, there is enough of it going around. It's hard to talk nice all the time, I suppose."

"Right you are, little Luna, and so wise too. Our tongues wag too much. It's just easy to talk, we open our mouths and the words flow out. If we don't watch it, all sorts of words come out ... and we use this tongue like a weapon instead the blessing that it is."

"Maybe we should not talk so much," I mused.

"That sure helps, plus friends help too."

"Friends? Seems to me they just help us backbite."

"Well then you have to change that. We made a pact in our small group of friends. If anyone has a problem, she talks to the person involved directly ... no stories going around."

"That's a good idea. A friend reminded me of that today."

"There's more friends can do. They can remind each other not to backbite, tell each other to stop when someone starts. Change the topic, tell a joke, discuss an idea, just don't talk about people all the time."

"And do your friends do that?" I asked

"We try our best, honey. We're not perfect of course, but we do try. After all, what are friends for if we don't help each other become better people?"

"Friends are NOT for backbiting. They are to help you stop! Thanks, auntie Hella, I need to write this down in my diary!"



Mom came in with a plate of samosa's. I gave her a huge hug, grabbed a samosa and ran to my room. I had an idea brewing ... How about a campaign with posters and buttons and yard signs, to raise awareness that backbiting is terrible thing. Maybe the student council could sponsor it and even Queenie and her followers could help. Millicent could help me plan it. I had work to do.

"Hasina, my dear sis, come give me a hand."

I grabbed a notepad and scribbled down my slogans:

*"Fly a kite, don't backbite!"*

*"Give your tongue a rest  
Save it for the best"*

*"Backbiting is gross  
Better ride a horse"  
(that was by Hasina)*

*"STAB: Students, Teachers against  
Backbiting – Don't Blab, join Stab"*

*"Say it to my face  
And make sure you're kind  
Don't say it behind my back  
That way I won't mind."*

# Halloween Rant

By Aafia Ahmad

One of the most peculiar traditions in our culturally capricious nation is Halloween. On one day of the year, it suddenly becomes acceptable to take candy from strangers, disturb people by ringing their doorbells at night, and parade around the streets dressed up as anything from the devil (I won't even go into how spiritually backwards this is) to Han Solo frozen in carbonite (wait.... but how do you move around if you're stuck in the conjugate base to carbonic acid?) to cereal killers (it was only funny the first time).

And don't forget the people who, God forbid, dress up their *pets*. I think it's pretty safe to assume that most dogs *don't* enjoy getting their fur shaved to look like a camel, or being forced into an absolutely *adorable* costume that no doubt causes intense discomfort and humiliation to all canines involved.

As I write this, I am sitting at my desk and ignoring the doorbell's sudden obnoxious chimes (OK, well I'm not really ignoring it if I just mentioned it in my writing, but whatever). I quickly glance out of the window. It is 8:00. The streets are nearly dark, and the scene is post-apocalyptic: a steady line of little kids marching down the sidewalk in a hurry, motorcycles infesting the road, screams filling the occasional silences. Of course, all of the elementary school kids are having a blast, taking candy from people they don't know,



screaming at anything remotely frightening, and avoiding houses with creepy decorations. But is it really what fun has come to mean for us?

When you consider that the original pagan holiday that became Halloween, involved dressing up so that evil spirits wouldn't recognize you and leaving offerings to appease them, I think it's pretty reasonable to avoid this tradition based on that alone. Although I have to admit that I was once among the ranks of those over-excited children who don the clothes of those who were burned at the stake in colonial New England for economic and religious regions.

Anyway, is there something stopping Americans from buying their own candy from the grocery store? Are they just being altruistic in their own misguided way by buying concentrated quantities of sucrose and food coloring for people they don't know? What's the big difference? Maybe you're allowed a *little* more candy than usual, but when you buy your own candy, you're getting exactly what

you want, and you don't have to deal with getting rid of that one candy you hate. On one hand, you have perfectly safe, normal candy that you bought from the grocery store, and on the other hand, you have an assortment of toothbrushes, apples, and candy that may or may not contain poison or some other lethal item. And on top of that, in the second scenario, you spent your precious time tagging along with your younger siblings or something while in danger of kidnapping, and humiliating yourself by wearing some incredibly foolish costume while yelling: "trick-or-treat!"

Like, seriously, how can this even be considered normal?

I know it's part of our "American" culture and everything, but all I'm going to say is that I'm incredibly glad my family decided against trick-or-treating way back in fifth grade, although in school, we had a Halloween wax museum every year, so in 5th grade I went as myself. So original, right? Being slightly socially different for a year is much better than having to cope with losing a treasured yet demented tradition halfway through high school because it's not cool anymore.

So, when your friends ask you with wide eyes why you won't go trick-or-treating, tell them you're Muslim and proud of it (oh my gosh, I can't believe I wrote such a cheesy sentence! Well, I guess it can't all be rarefied sarcasm.)



# Ask Ayesha...

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

Ayesha Khan M.D., MPH

Dear Ayesha,

*I am finding it very hard to balance school and being a good Muslim. Homework and other activities are taking over my life. I find myself rushing through my prayers and not having time to read Quran. I feel so bad about it. Please help me.*

Sincerely,  
Frazzled to the bone

Dear Frazzled,

We lead very busy lives. Between school and homework, and other activities, a person barely has time to eat a snack and chill out for a while! Usually, when we get too busy, we start to prioritize the things we are doing so that we do the most important things first. School and homework seem like the ones that are the most important because not only do we have regular tests and grades to let us know how we are doing, our parents and our teachers have expectations for us and give us feedback (good and bad!) on our performance.

When we are getting tested so regularly, it becomes easy to let the unsupervised things, prayer and Quran, lag a little in quality. So how can we keep up the quality and consistency of our spiritual life?

Well, I find it helpful to keep in mind that even though we don't always have little tests to remind us, life itself is a big test! Who you are and what you do matters. It matters more than anything else in the whole world because it influences your relationship with Allah. And in the end, this relationship with Allah is the thing that will bring you inner peace in this world and everlasting joy in the next life. The most important thing you can do, is sit and prioritize what is important and why.

Here is a verse from the Quran that can help you:

57:20 Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children - like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion.

This verse reminds us that everything passes away except for our soul and our soul is shaped by the good we do in life. Life is an opportunity to do this good and get closer to God.

In the end, that is all that matters. Let's try a thought exercise to help us see if this is true. Sit down and make a list. A list of all the things you want in this life and beyond.

Then try to put them in order of the most important and think about why those things are important to you. What will last? What is something that only makes you happy now?

Hopefully the things on your list that rise to the top have something to do with being a good person and getting closer to Allah. That is what life is about, and keeping that at the front of our minds all the time is our big test. Of course time spent studying is not wasted time.

***The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "One who treads a path in search of knowledge has his path to Paradise made easy by God..." - Riyadh us-Saleheen, 245.***

As long as we have the right intention - to study so we can improve ourselves and work for the greater good by serving others - it is a great use of our time. We must try our best to not get lost in the praise or blame of others, or to focus more on our grades than the overall quality of our educational experience.

Because life is one big test, and we

aren't always constantly supervised, it's easy to forget about doing our best to get closer to Allah in everything we do. That's why we pray five times a day. If you make sure that you understand the words of your prayers, they will help you to keep focused on what's most important.

Other little reminders are also helpful. I find the Surah al-Asr very helpful.

103:1 By the time!

103:2 Surely mankind is in loss,

103:3 Except those who believe and do good, and exhort one another to Truth, and exhort one another to patience.

This is a tiny chapter with meanings you can easily memorize. It reminds us that we are fully accountable for how we spend our time. Time spent doing things not beneficial is time that is lost in the end—because nothing lasting comes out of it.

In the end, remember, when you are planning your day, to take a

moment and reflect on what is most important and lasting, and then plan your day around that. On the weekend, take a moment to reflect on how your soul is, as well as how your grades are. Even if you have time to read one verse of the Quran a day, it can keep you anchored and help you grow in faith. Most of all, pray that Allah enables you to lead a balanced life. One of the best dua for this is: O Allah, grant me good in this life and good in the next life and save me from the punishment of fire.

# Geometry

By Roshnara Musthafa

Lines, shapes, and models all  
Begin from a point, the smallest ball.  
Or the smallest box, a lego block,  
A multitude of them, quite a stock.  
Without a point, there would be no geometry.  
The world would be pointless, without geometry.

The two sides of a road would run and run,  
Never to meet, the thought comes to no one  
That there are lines, and parallel ones,  
Side by side, never to merge or overrun!

Three pencils on a table would stare  
And never would anyone care,  
To realize, that there is only one,  
Triangle, borne of three pencils, or none.

Millions would circle around the Kaaba,  
And no one would see the circle or the cube,  
Neither would the Kaaba seem like a point,  
Nor the people seem like circles, concentric.

Lines, shapes, models all  
Make the world, overall.  
Beneath the shapes, find the meaning,  
What is, and what is only seeming.



# What did I do today?



The sun comes up, and down it goes,  
Each fresh new day, is here and gone,  
And that is how the days fly,  
One by one, life flows by us,  
And how did we spend our time?

When we read books, played games,  
browsed the Internet,  
Did we think of Allah?  
Once, ever, all the time?  
Was our intention, to glorify Him

To please Him?

Did we give our hearts to God,  
When we gave our hands to work?

Let us watch the setting sun and think,  
Of what this day gave to us,  
And how we used it  
And let us hope, that the rising sun  
Is a witness, to all our efforts  
Dedicated to the Creator and Nourisher,  
To whom belongs all praise and thanks.