

equating our faith

eleven

magazine

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President's and ELEVEN's note

Assalamu'alaikum wr wb,

All praises be to Allah for the blessing of Islam and Iman, upon which we manoeuvre in our lives. May peace and salutations be upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad, who was sent as a blessing to the whole of this universe, and may peace and blessings be upon his family, his companions, and all those who follow in their footsteps.

This is a milestone for ELEVEN Magazine; its first decade, alhamdulillah. ELEVEN began as a ground-up initiative by a group of individuals who were keen to put their writing abilities to good use. Over the years, it had officially become an annual publication under the banner of NTU Muslim Society, managed by a team of creative individuals with the support of talented contributors.

I strongly believe in the power of writing, especially when wielded with care and mastery. It is only then fit that we hope that whatever that is written in this publication will influence readers positively, with Allah's will.

In this year's publication, the team have chosen the theme of "Weaving." The first image that comes to my mind is that of a beautiful fabric woven from its rawness. The possibilities of what one can weave, and how one weaves, are endless.

However this notion will be manifested in the writings in this magazine, I hope that they will be able to provoke readers' thoughts and emotions, all with the ultimate aim of knowing our Creator and getting closer to our Creator, of knowing our place and, of knowing our purpose in this transient life.

Lastly, I wish not only the 10th ELEVEN team, but all the teams that have carried the magazine this far, my most sincere congratulations. May Allah grant them His taufiq and guidance, and reward them for their dedication. May Allah unite us all in goodness and guide us towards what He is pleased with.

Wassalamu'alaikum wr wb,
Muhammad 'Arif bin Muhammad Khairul Tan
31st NTU Muslim Society President

Connect with ELEVEN



@elevenmagazine.ntums



@eleven.magazine



eleven.ntums@gmail.com

Assalamu'alaikum wr wb,

Alhamdulillah, with this issue, ELEVEN Magazine has reached a new milestone – our 10th anniversary. Through this special issue, our team explored the ambitious theme of "Weaving." We were interested in the idea of a tapestry, its individual threads, and the act of weaving itself. Simply said, the theme Weaving encapsulates the diversity of human experience, as each thread represents an individual's personal journey. However, despite our different cultures and experiences, our team wanted to highlight the commonality of our experiences. Woven together, the multiplicity of our circumstances form the rich tapestry of Allah s.w.t's Making. Join us in this issue as we unravel the marvels of His Grand Design.

What our team did not anticipate was the willingness of our contributors to share their personal stories, and for that we are extremely grateful. In the next few pages, you will encounter a variety of content ranging from poetry, prose, expository pieces, interviews, and book reviews. We hope that you will benefit from these stories and special encounters as much as the team has.

In conjunction with ELEVEN Magazine's 10th anniversary, we urged ourselves to review what ELEVEN means to us, our readers, and the values that drove the publication these past ten years. This was inevitably a reflection on our name and our medium of print. The name ELEVEN itself derives from the simple equation of 5 + 6 – the 5 Pillars of Islam and the 6 Tenets of Faith. As such, our special anniversary feature explores the idea of using print for da'wah, and communicating the foundations of Islam through our content and initiatives over the years.

Additionally, this year, ELEVEN Magazine is also delighted to present our new online platform, Columns by ELEVEN. While our print publication has gained a steady readership over the years, in light of the current digital age, online media presents the opportunity of exploring innovative ways of communicating information and expanding ELEVEN Magazine's audience. Continuing ELEVEN's legacy of curating intellectual spiritual content for youths, Columns aims to provide digestible pieces such as listicles, think pieces, and spotlights on writers, for casual readers on-the-go. May this new venture be filled with barakah.

Once again, all of our milestones these past ten years would not have been possible without the continuous support of our readership, and without His Mercy and Bounty. May this magazine be of benefit to you and those surrounding you. May it bring us all closer to Allah s.w.t. and increase our love for Him and Rasulullah (peace and blessings be upon him).

All that is bad comes from us and all that is good comes from Allah s.w.t.

Wassalamu'alaikum wr wb,
ELEVEN '18 Team

meet the 10th ELEVEN committee

Maliah Zubir
CHAIRPERSON

Adam Rosli
ADVISOR

Asyraf Mustaffa
ADVISOR

Nurul Aida Nurhakim
FINANCE MANAGER

Nur Fatin Rosli
FINANCE OFFICER

Sharif Hidayat
FINANCE OFFICER

Nur Tatiana Azman
BUSINESS & MARKETING MANAGER

Sakinah Mohsen
BUSINESS & MARKETING OFFICER

Aashiq Anshad
CHIEF EDITOR

Natasha Kasim
EDITOR

Siti Ayeeshah Zaki
EDITOR

Yasmeen Rashid
EDITOR

Asyikin Yusoff
CHIEF DESIGNER

Nur Farhana Mahmood
DESIGNER

Siti Nabilah Romzi
DESIGNER

Sukainah Mohsen
DESIGNER

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weaving

Threads of Faith

Ikhmah Roslie

Here's to all the daughters,
whose hearts have been broken by their dads.
Isn't it sad that the first man in your life
turns out to be one of your biggest tests?
The ache that you feel, the tears you have shed,
the hurt sank so deep, it's impossible to forget
how your father was never there & it drives you mad,
but remember that He's in here, through the good & the bad.
Take it one day at a time as you handle each mess,
For He is with the silent, the broken, and the oppressed.
& believe me when I say that you deserve no less
in this world but Him, the absolute best.

Here's to all the single mothers,
whose bodies became homes for the weak & the homeless,
whose arms became shields, so strong & unbreakable.
Her love is a blessing, her affection is timeless,
& you can't figure out why, oh, why was she mistreated.
Maybe the real question here is why men are so careless
To hurt & abuse when she has committed to you?
Well, men are human, so are you. We all need reminders
but the difference between the two is they are heedless, reckless,
of the fact that He sees. & I swear if it wasn't for religion,
I would go mad watching all this injustice, feeling completely helpless.
So press on, brave warriors, for in His love lies your redemption.

Here's to all the lasting friendships,
Those who were there when my soul was crumbling with fatigue.
Humans by day but when the sun dips, the cloth over their chest rips.
When I'm distressed, alone & depressed, they are my Justice League.
Devoid of love, full of anger for the skies above, I drink their love in sips.
Home is a feeling, not just a place. & I feel it here, so what else do I seek?
I get so tired of this life, of this world, the disappointments seem to run thick.
& honestly, I'm sick of feeling so weak, over & over again.
In the dim of the night, no hope, no light, my shoulders they shake & heave.
Armed to the teeth, in His mercy they believe, reminding me, "Please, dear, just breathe.
He gives you these troubles, because you are able.
& the ease after this temporal life is eternal."

Here's to the most intriguing human being I've ever met,
Whose eyes are soft when he's happy but stormy when he's sad,
He has asked me before to choose between a sunrise & a sunset,
& I chose you, Ya Allah, for giving me him, the best view I've ever had.
Sometimes it feels as though he went to war with love & left a piece
of himself, of his soul. So he never really did come back whole.
It's frustrating when he's gone cold, the warmth is what I miss.
"To love is easy but to understand is profound." or so I've been told.
Into the deep, I dove right in. But I made a mistake – I forgot about the keys
for the gates to his mind, for the lock on his heart & the soul that he sold
for the ropes around his feet. I can't seem to untie them so all I ask is this;
pull him back to You & bring him back home with an anchor to hold.

& here's to the One & Only,
who heals all the daughters,
whose hearts have been broken by their dads.
who protects all the single mothers,
whose bodies became homes for the weak & the homeless,
who blessed me with all these lasting friendships,
those who were there when my soul was crumbling with fatigue.
& made me lucky with the most intriguing human being I've ever met,
whose eyes are soft when he's happy but stormy when he's sad.
It leads me right back to You, all these people, all these threads,
they've woven me entirely – made me strong & kept me soft, but yet
between me & You, it's a lifeline that can never be compared.

Visual by Ros Farzana

Yusuf* is a Muslim revert.
In conversation with ELEVEN Magazine,
he shares his experiences of realising his faith,
practising it, and hiding it from the most
important people in his life – his family.

by Siti Ayeeshah Zaki & Yasmeeen Rashid

**Name of interviewee has been changed to protect his identity*

Born in Singapore to a Hindu father and a Sikh mother, Yusuf was raised in an interfaith family. “Growing up, the concept of God was very prevalent,” he says. “I didn’t believe in either parent’s religion. Then, I just knew there was a God, someone I had to pray to.”

The 23-year old engineering student describes himself as a very curious child who asked a lot of questions.

“When I went to the Hindu temple, I would ask why are we praying to an elephant. When we went to the Gurdwara and we would prostrate to the Guru Granth Sahib, which is the holy book in Sikhism, it didn’t sit well with me to know that I had to prostrate to something that I can create with my own hands. I always asked my dad and mum, and they couldn’t give me an answer,” he says.

Yusuf’s first contact with Islam happened when he was about 7 years old, when he spent every June and December school holiday with his Muslim cousins. “My mum’s sister married a Muslim,” he explains. “When I stayed at their place, I got a taste of what they were practising.” It was them, he says, who planted the seed of Islam in his heart. “They would talk about Islam very often. They would talk a lot about God. That kind of touched my heart.”

Yet Yusuf affirms that that seed of Islam grew because he set out to understand about the religion. “I like to read up on religion,” he says. “I’m interested in how people shape cultures and why there are so many different faiths in the world. What I am today is because of that research. It’s because of that quest to find answers.”

In Secondary 2, Yusuf did his first rakaat, which he recognises as the first time his belief translated into action. “I bowed down and said nonsensical things,” he says, laughing at the memory. “I was going through a down period at the time. I knew I believed... but when a friend got into a coma, I was like, ‘OK I need to do this.’ I remembered what my uncle, aunt, and cousins did, and I just did it in my room.”

It was Yusuf’s secondary school friends who eventually taught him to pray. “They weren’t the best of Muslims, but I hold them very closely to my heart because they were there when I was beginning to learn about the religion,” he reminisces. “During the O Level period, we would stay in school till very late, and we would pray together at the street soccer court.”

When we asked about the most rewarding experience since he began his journey as a Muslim, Yusuf replies, “What I am today is because of Islam. When I went to Punjabi school, I hung out with a lot of wrong people. I felt Allah protected me and pulled me away from that. When I went to secondary school, I did very well in everything that I set out to do. When I went to JC and the army, I also did very well. It was because of the morals and the teachings of Islam. As long as you stay close to it, you will probably never go wrong.”

Still, Yusuf’s journey is an ongoing difficult one. Yusuf’s family doesn’t know that he’s Muslim. His challenges, he points out, are very different from born Muslims. “When you go home, you can say salam. People reply to your salam,” he explains. “You can say ‘I’m going to pray’ and nobody will say anything. You don’t have to worry about the food being placed on your table, whether it’s halal or not. Being at home is comforting.”

When people hear about reverts, they go, ‘Wow, what brought you to Islam?’ It’s very nice to tell them your story, but the behind-the-scenes is honestly very, very difficult.

For Yusuf, being at home impedes him from practising his faith. “Half of your focus will be on the prayer, the other half on the door,” he says, on trying to pray in his room. “When you hear the key turn, you know you have to stop praying.”

Fasting in Ramadan has also proven to be a challenge. “My mum will cook. If I say I’m not hungry, she’ll think there’s something wrong, because I love my mum’s cooking,” he says. “There was once, I fasted the whole day, then my mum came home at 4pm. She asked if I wanted chai and I said no. So I thought I could survive until Maghrib. Then, she came into my room and put the chai on my table.”

Yusuf recalls the time he threw away the tea his mum had made him, in an effort to keep his fast. “I felt very bad,” he

confesses. “There are times like this where it’s very hard to explain to people. They won’t go through it.”

The picture Yusuf paints – and it seems a fairly honest and frank assessment – is of someone struggling to reconcile his love for his faith with his family. It gets especially hard when the topic of Islam comes up at home. “My dad would openly condemn Islam in front of the whole family. I cannot say anything because the moment that I do, they will know that I’m taking sides. And if I’m not taking the side that they’re taking, it’s going to be an issue.”

“It’s really very painful because you see so much hate for the religion which you adore so much and you cannot do anything about it,” he says. “At this point I look at my parents and wonder how I’m going to tell them that I’m Muslim. It’s going to break their hearts. It’s going to destroy them.”

When we asked about the most challenging thing about being a revert, Yusuf replies, “Integrating into society. You don’t know where you belong. When people hear about reverts they go ‘Wow what brought you to Islam?’ It’s very nice to tell them your story, but... the behind-the-scenes is honestly very, very difficult.”

“I have a lot of friends who are Malay Muslims, but I will never feel the same thing they feel for each other. They have their ways of doing things, their own slangs. I come from a Punjabi and Hindi background, so it’s a huge part of my culture. I love Bollywood, weddings, and all that, but there’s the haram side of it. When I’m with my cousins, I’m comfortable with them. I can talk and joke with them, but the moment they say ‘Let’s go clubbing tonight,’ it goes back to ‘I don’t belong here and I don’t belong there.’ So where do I go?”

Yusuf is open about the mistakes he’s made and honest about the fact that he still has much to learn about Islam. He admits that there have been many instances when he wanted to give up: “There have been days when I’ve been so frustrated I wanted to disobey Allah. I didn’t want to do this anymore.”

But he knows there is no turning back for him. “It’s the fact that it’s hidayah... and the curse of knowledge. You can’t unlearn what you’ve learnt,” he says emphatically. “You know this is the right path, so you going away from it is just your loss.”

“If Allah guides you to remember Him, it’s a sign that Allah loves you.” – Ali ibn Abi Talib

**HIDDEN
FAITH**

synaesthesia

by Shiham M.H

In a world where our aesthetic feeds, number of retweets and followers define who we are as people, all other forms of communication seem to have been forgotten. Through these invisible lines, words aren't spoken, but typed out. Actual laughter drowns beneath GIFs and blank faces. I, however, am unable to understand the lines ever so used today. I prefer to leave my house and enjoy the outdoors, admiring the bright and beautiful colours that surround our world. My grandmama says it's a gift, my mama prefers to think of it as a curse.

Mama never believed in fairytales – she raised me to disregard the deluded, constructed happy endings, and strive for hard work instead. I grew up thinking the colours I watched mama play with were the only ones I could ever possess, shades of black and grey were all I could dream of.

Grandmama was different. She preferred the world of colours. She'd bring me around with her, exposing me to the vibrant variety of hues put on display by everybody else.

Suddenly, the stark contrasts, who once merely waved at each other, would sometimes weave together in teamwork, waltzing around the living room as I watched

in wonder, "What does this all mean?" I was never allowed to ask mama for sure, she would brush me off. I was told it was all meaningless. I wanted to ask grandmama, but the child in me never got a chance to amongst all the distractions presented to me as I explored the world on my own. I didn't notice the apparent signs. While growth consumed me, the dark consumed mama, and old age my grandmama.

I lost focus further as a teenager, absorbed by the thrill of laughter during late night talks with friends – till I came home one night to the sound of sirens. The sight of a familiar, wrinkled hand caught my eye as I pushed my way through the crowd. Everything that happened after was a blur.

It was only then that I realised that my mother hadn't always been consumed by blacks and greys. At one point in time, she used to toy with pinks and yellows, and I vaguely remember calling her my rainbow queen. Only now do I realise that grandmama's illness had affected her a great deal.

Grandmama had fought long and hard – years of trying new medicine and treatments hadn't worked. Mama's colours dimmed with each piece of breaking news till she

turned into the person she was now. She'd given up, lost hope and forgotten people. It's funny how I hadn't seen it, because even the doctors saw mama's exhaustion. She was constantly on auto-pilot, moving between work and the hospital.

Only after much persuasion from the doctors did mama seek help. She went for support group sessions, and after each session, her colours began to grow brighter. They danced around each other, waving through each other. These similar experiences, feelings, oneness weaved these strangers together. There are times, when complete strangers seem to understand you better than your loved ones. Sometimes all we can do is listen, and provide them with a shoulder to lean on, a heart to care. I should have done that.

I'm glad Mama is back to returning to becoming my rainbow queen. I hope we can all be rainbow queens and kings. Accept the blacks and greys, the yellows and oranges. Look up from your phone, look around. I've finally come to realise. Somehow, I can now see these colours alive even behind the screens. These people under pseudonyms share our experiences, too. Isn't it reassuring? Knowing you're not alone in this?

Each individual strand
Grows long and unruly.
(It's past midnight)
Tap tap tap tap
Hands
Fly over twenty-six keys
Tap tap tap
-backspace-
-pause-
Every thought leads us down
Blind
Alleys
Tap tap tap tap
Hands
Fly over twenty-six keys.
Who am I today?
A son, a brother, a student, a friend.
Each individual strand
Flows from these hands.
Tap tap tap tap
-backspace-
Hands fly over twenty-six keys
As I weave each strand of me
Tap tap tap tap
-pause-
Who am I today?
A son, a brother, a student, a friend.
Tap tap tap tap
(It's past midnight)
Who am I today?
Write, write, write, write.
May You keep us in Your sight
Hands fly over twenty-six keys
But all occurs by Your decree.
Tap tap tap tap
(It's past midnight)
-backspace-
(It matters not, day or night)
Dawn will break and night will fall
But in the end through it all
Who am I tonight?
I am Yours, Ya Rahman, Ya Raheem,
Tap tap tap tap
-backspace-
Hands fly over twenty-six keys
As You weave each strand,
As You hold us in Your loving Hands,
As You guide us, day by day,
We know who we are today.
Yours,
Ya Rahman, Yours, Ya Kareem.

Twenty-six Keys

Aashiq Anshad

Seeking Balance

by Qistina Ahmad

I've always struggled with balancing my faith and worldly affairs. Praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, attending religious classes, and *ngaji* classes – I didn't understand why I had to do all that as a kid. I remember my parents telling me that as a Muslim I have to do what God wants me to do, with no questions asked. Growing up, I saw the world as Muslims vs everyone else. I felt like we couldn't coexist with the rest of the world because our practices are so different from the secular culture.

A major concern was, and still is, the influx and normalisation of Western cultures that don't go hand in hand with Islam. Following a trend in the era of fast fashion that exposes your aurat, engaging in premarital sex as something that is "normal" in relationships, and championing the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

Is this all part of Allah's test for us? I had so many questions.

How do I socialise and have fun with my peers who aren't Muslim? Do I have to inconvenience them to find halal food all the time just because I am joining them? Do I have to opt out every time they ask me to the club even when I know for a fact that I won't touch an alcoholic drink? It's the same for the other side. How do I try to assimilate with the Muslims in school when they know that I'm not that strong in my faith based on the way I dress and act?

See, this is why I categorise myself as "too haram for the halal and too halal for the haram."

Now, as a young adult, despite learning more and more about my religion and wanting to practise my faith to the best of my ability, I realise that it is not easy. I am aware that I cannot speak on behalf of all Muslims. However, if you are like me, struggling to reconcile being Muslim and being accepted in secular society, I want to share the things that have helped me tremendously in my own journey.

Surrounding myself with friends who respect me, and my faith.

Although I have lost some friends in my journey to better myself as a Muslim, the friends that I have now are those who I am incredibly close to. Most importantly, they are respectful and supportive of my faith, regardless of how imperfect it is at the moment.

Seeking help when I need it.

I asked my ustazah (God bless her) a lot of questions about *surahs*, meanings of Quranic verses, how to read some Arabic words, and clarifying my (sometimes basic) concerns and confusions I had about Islam. What is comforting is knowing that sometimes the things you don't know and are confused about are also things that many people are thinking about. So one should never be ashamed of having those questions.

Praying.

When I expressed my intentions to become a better Muslim, the first thing my ustazah said to me was to pray whenever I can and to make time for my prayers. "Even if you have to take a selfie in your *telekung* and post it somewhere to tell people you have done your prayers, I'd rather you do that than miss your prayers altogether." I thought it odd at the time, but recall it fondly today because it reminds me that prayer should always be my first priority. We should plan our days around our prayer times and not the other way around. With prayer, everything else will come naturally, insha Allah. This I found to be true as when I started being more consistent in my prayers, I found myself being genuinely interested in reading the Quran. Now, to be completely honest, praying 5 times a day is still difficult for me, but the point is to never stop trying.

Realising that Muslims are imperfect too.

In the conversations I have with my ustazah and friends who are more knowledgeable about Islam than I am, they always remind me that religion is a personal journey with Allah s.w.t. There are always going to be people who fully embrace the religion as it is, and others who find it difficult and challenging.

The "more religious" ones are never justified in looking down on those who are having a harder or slower time in embracing the religion. Everybody starts off somewhere, and everyone has their own struggles! A real friend will accept them and guide them to the right path again.

The act of balancing the religion and secularity is indeed a difficult one, but we all can take steps in trying to allow both to coexist. Based on my personal experience, being in touch with Islam has taught me a lot about being accepting, being kind to others, and to always *husnuzon* – assume the best of everyone. Even if the religion doesn't necessarily go hand in hand with the culture that comes from secularity, it ultimately teaches us to be decent human beings. I've come to realise that Islam (just like any other religion for their believers), is truly a guide to living the most meaningful life.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Whoever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make a path to Paradise easy for him." (Sahih Al-Bukhari)

Photo by Fiqa Nasir

MENTAL HEALTH AND MUSLIMS TODAY

by A

In today's society, mental health is still something that is very much stigmatised; even the mere mention of it, is met with awkward silence. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in four people worldwide will struggle with mental health at least once in their lives. With such alarming statistics, it's a wonder that there is not much discussion surrounding this topic.

In Islam, mental health is just as important as physical health. All ailments, including mental illness, are considered as trials from Allah; so when an ailment befalls a Muslim, it can be an expiation of his or her sins. As narrated by al-Bukhari (5641) and Muslim (2573), the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Nothing befalls a believer, a (prick of a) thorn or more than that, but Allah will raise him one degree in status thereby, or erase a bad deed."

Unfortunately, the Muslim community is unwilling to resort to using Western medicine for relieving or curing of psychological disorders, even though it has been proven to work time and time again; mainly because of the misinterpretation of the same aforementioned hadith. However, there is another hadith that cancels out this inaccurate interpretation as narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "Allah has not sent down a disease except that He has also sent down its cure."

Not all Muslims are born the same. Some may have satisfactory mental health, while others may be suffering from a mental illness. Recognising the difference and showing compassion through spiritual and practical means will help aid those suffering from mental illness to ease the burden that they have to go through. We have an obligation

as the Muslim community or *Ummah* to come together and support our brothers and sisters who are hurting. As narrated by al-Bukhari (5655) and Muslim (2586), the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever."

“
We have an obligation as
the Muslim community
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”



We should be open-minded, accepting, and supportive when it comes to those who are mentally ill. There are multiple ways where we can help those who are mentally ill. A handful of them include:

1 BE THERE FOR THEM

When someone tells you they are mentally ill, do not give them unwanted but well-meaning advice. Rather, validate their experience and stray away from behaviour that may alienate them. Read up on the symptoms, as well as the different measures mentally ill individuals should take when they are going through an episode. Knowing what they are feeling and what they would want us to do as a friend plays a big role in making sure that they will be okay at the end of the day. Instead of highlighting the fact that they are going through something, take note of how it affects them on a scale and what you, as a friend, can do to send a signal saying that you are there for them and are willing to help them go through it.

2 LISTEN

You are there firstly to listen. Do not give advice unless they ask for it, and especially do not dismiss their concerns. If someone were to give you personal information that would make them uncomfortable if you were to publicise it, do not disclose it. Be someone who they can confide in and wholeheartedly trust as trust plays an overall integral role. Listen to their worries and their confessions, as it really does help in lightening the burdens off their shoulders.

3 ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Although some people may have similar experiences, the specific details are unique to each individual. So, ask them how you can help. Some people like to be hugged and comforted, while others prefer to be left alone; it is all up to the individual.

4 EDUCATION IS KEY

From personal experience, I can say that this is the most vital step in supporting a loved one because how can you possibly help someone when you don't know what their struggle is?

For the past four years I have been living with bipolar disorder and anxiety. I can safely say that most people who want to help have good intentions, but because they are ignorant about my illnesses, they are unable to take the necessary steps to help me. Instead of reassuring me and making me feel better, they aggravate the situation by throwing me into a state of panic when I am already very vulnerable.

Allah can help ease our burdens with our regular prayers, but just as Allah mentions in the Quran in Surah Ar-Ra'ad verse 11 ("Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves"), it is us who have to take the necessary steps in saving ourselves first before calling upon the help of Allah. However, we also cannot fool ourselves into relying on just medication and therapy because in the same verse, Allah mentions: "And when Allah intends for a people ill, there is no repelling it. And there is not for them besides Him any patron." Therefore, keeping faith through this process is integral to overcoming the disorder.

I am considered an anomaly amongst the uniform pattern in the tapestry of life. I often find myself being treated differently because of my illness. Many people believe that I am not capable of doing anything at all, whilst others treat me like a porcelain doll who can

break at any time. Growing up in a *madrasah* environment, news of my diagnosis spread like wildfire, because people simply couldn't believe a Muslim could be mentally ill, much less a 14-year-old. Multiple teachers came up to me with well-meaning advice about how I

should pray more, or that maybe I have displeased Allah in one way or another, and I should seek forgiveness. I have lost friends because they thought my panic attacks and mental breakdowns were all for attention. At times, even my own family found it difficult to cope with my illnesses. If it were not for the patience, empathy, and compassion of my loved ones, I'm not sure that I would be here today. That is why it is incredibly important that society at large does something about the mental health crisis. It is time we stop limiting access of amenities and resources about mental health to the general public, and start putting everything in theory into practice.

We, as a Muslim community, are bound together through our own rich and diverse experiences. Allah did not create everyone the same. Thus, our struggles are meant to be different, and it is important to validate the internal fight of someone going through a mental disorder. The differences shouldn't divide us more than unite us to be more understanding, patient, or compassionate for each other. That is the struggle that our society is facing right now, to be more accepting of those who do not fit the perfect 'Muslim' mould. However, things are changing, as we see more Muslims becoming more aware and accepting of such struggles.



FACING FEARS: BY WAN NUR RINY HIJAB AND TRAVELLING

This is for all sisters and brothers who may have fears prior to travelling, especially in today's climate. While everyone may not have faced similar experiences, I hope there can be some positive extractions from my recount, insha Allah.

ONE: FEAR

Travelling is a privilege, whether it is a short getaway to neighbouring countries, or an overseas student exchange in Europe. Travelling is good for us; it is a form of remedy and promises replenishment and rejuvenation for our tired souls. It helps us become more grateful individuals, and gives us a more objective outlook that extends beyond our daily routine. Above all, the simple act of stepping out of your comfort zone into an unfamiliar environment humbles us immensely. The Quran deeply encourages travelling: "Do they then not travel through the Earth, so that their minds gain wisdom and their ears thus learn to hear?" [22:46]

Nevertheless, it is perfectly normal to have fears prior to embarking on that much-awaited trip away from home. That

promise of independence, exploring beautiful places blessed by our Creator, and going on unique adventures you can only get outside of your home country – that wanderlust – falls short when you have to consider certain safety aspects to your travel.

No one can predict the future. No one can tell you what exactly will go wrong in your trip. But here's something I'll tell you: there will be obstacles.

Just like how we are faced with challenges in our daily life, there will be a different set of challenges when travelling. "Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried?" [29:2]

For me, my constant fear as a hijab-wearing Muslimah, is dealing with prejudices, especially since there is a seismic rise in Islamophobia worldwide. Will they discriminate me? Will I be subjected to rigorous background checks? Will I be mistreated and harmed?

People have advised me against wearing my hijab when travelling, and have urged me to consider alternative forms of

'covering up' instead. While I am grateful for their concern about my wellbeing, I had to realign my intentions and remind myself that Allah s.w.t is All-Powerful and All-Knowing. I need to put my trust in Him, have faith He will help me every step of the way because "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear." [2:286]

Ultimately, I had to approach my upcoming trips with positivity and good intentions; that is, to seek knowledge in other countries, and to have a holistic educational experience.

TWO: FEAR-LESS?

Armed with the expectation that I will be tested yet still holding on to optimism, I arrived at Leonardo Da Vinci Aeroporto Roma. This city would be my home for the next 3 weeks. Being the only hijab-wearing student from my school, I did face a couple of obstacles everywhere I went.

Right from the moment I arrived, I was requested to remove my hijab and that caused a bit of delay in my travel plans. I shrunk in fear, "This is it. It's happening," as I braced myself for the

impending humiliation of having to remove my hijab in front of everyone at the crowded airport. I tried to remain calm, but being faced with a canonical setback that I have read a lot on so early in my trip definitely dampened my spirit a little. Fortunately, I did not have to remove my hijab there and then. Instead, a female officer guided me to a private room, and I then removed it just for her. I co-operated with her fully. Besides, I am merely a visitor; I need to observe these rules.

What followed next was shocking: she hugged me, proceeded to thank me for my patience and co-operation, while apologising for the delay the standard airport protocols have caused for hijab-wearing travellers like myself. I felt immensely touched by her words. She did not have to be so kind, she did not have to say all that; she was just doing her job. I could not stop saying alhamdulillah for that enriching experience, and felt grateful I got through that unscathed.

Something positive always comes from a setback.

Rome is a city with a long history dating back to the Roman Empire in 753 BC. The city houses countless historical monuments unique to the empire. In fact, it is filled with so many artefacts that each time the government wants to improve the city with modern public transport, they are held back as they discover even

more valuable artefacts buried beneath. This explains why there are so many museums everywhere, and why there are only two major Metro lines! As beautiful the city is, it is also very dangerous, as I would later experience.

Throughout my stay, I travelled by Metro and got to witness how the locals lived. I too got to experience something that everyone warns you about, and hopes it will never happen to anyone ever: I fell victim to an attempted pickpocket.

I have a bad habit of placing my phone and money in my coat pocket, simply because it is very convenient. However, by the grace of Allah, that particular day I instinctively kept all my belongings in my cross-body bag, as I proceeded to explore the city after school. In the crowded Metro during peak hour, I felt a woman's hand rub against my coat pocket just as I was talking to my friend. We had been warned about pickpockets on the first day of school. I turned to the woman and she

had the audacity to smile at me innocently as her fingers continued to search my coat pockets. She had her bag on top of her hand, so no one could see her in action. I was too shocked to react and was afraid she would have a weapon if I retaliated or confronted

her. I knew my belongings were safe in my bag, but I remembered praying wilfully for the train to reach my destination fast so I could escape. I then felt a tap on my shoulder and an angel disguised as a woman exclaimed, "Attenzione!" while gesturing to warn me about the pickpocket. Despite our language

barrier, I expressed my gratitude to her as I alighted the train, and an even bigger alhamdulillah for constantly watching over me. Looking back, it definitely was an unnerving experience, and to walk away from this obstacle safely with all my valuables intact, epitomises Allah's grace and mercy.

THREE: FEARLESS

It is easy to feel disheartened when faced with similar events as those I experienced. It is tempting to resign to those preconceived prejudices and vouch to never travel to non-Muslim countries. Worse, it might even lead to feelings of contempt towards non-Muslims. But never indulge in those thoughts! What kept me going is this resoluteness to be brave while strengthening my faith on this journey. Islam encourages us to travel, to seek knowledge, and to never stop learning and being grateful. I hold on so dearly to the belief that I am, physically and spiritually, representing Islam and hence, always make sure I spread positivity with every step I take. For every setback encountered, have faith that there will be even more support from others. Do not be afraid to practice your faith as Allah s.w.t is always here protecting us; so please always have faith that He will provide assistance in magnitude of ways.

"And among His signs is that He sends the winds with glad tidings, and to give you a taste of His grace, and so that the ships might sail by His command, and that you might go about in quest of some of His Bounties, that you may be thankful." [30:46]

THE QUIET STRUGGLE

BY SHAFEEQ SHINJI

I have so much affection for the Khaled Hosseini novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The story is set in Afghanistan, and runs from the pre-Soviet invasion to the Afghan civil wars, culminating in the rise and reign of the Taliban.

It follows two women named Mariam and Laila, who come from vastly different backgrounds. One is an illegitimate child or a *harami* (bastard in Farsi) who grew up poor and uneducated while suffering from the stigma of her birth. The other was blessed to have both parents alive and lived a privileged and educated life.

Through a series of events, they were both forced to marry the same man, who turned out to be a monster. Their lives as his wives were reduced to cooking, cleaning, and child-bearing, all while suffering his verbal and physical abuse. They were his prisoners.

I was glad when I arrived at the story's end – because I was extremely affected by the book, which goes to show the power of the author, to write a beautifully poignant book that instills hope for a brighter future.

But after putting the book down, something else was gnawing away at the pit of my stomach. A distressing knowledge about the problems women

face, not just in Afghanistan and the Middle East, which are still grim as shown in the media and this story, but in the world. And reality sinks in, that the feeling of a bright future, is an illusion at worst. At best, it will be a long and arduous journey to reach it.

After doing some research, a few facts and figures I gathered from the United Nation (UN) Women's website unfortunately confirmed my perceptions.

Approximately 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once, which is alarming considering the current world female population of almost 3.7 billion according to Worldbank.org. That shockingly equates to around 1 billion women who have suffered from rape or physical abuse.

Also, 750 million women and girls were married before their 18th birthday, and child marriages eventually lead to early pregnancies. It's a tragedy because these girls end up not having an education, and they suffer from social isolation and domestic abuse.

I was horrified at the injustices of the world, and outraged at the capacity of men to commit such acts of cruelty and depravity. We have heard it before in our history lessons, of the innocents

murdered in Auschwitz camp, and the discrimination of Catholics in Northern Ireland, but that does not make it any less painful to hear of other people's suffering.

On the Human's Rights Watch website, reports show that in Burma, widespread rape and murder were perpetrated by the security forces in the ethnic cleansing campaign against Rohingya Muslims and non-Muslims. Many reported an infection, vaginal tears and bleeding, and post-traumatic stress disorders. The government dismissed the accusations and rarely held anyone accountable for these crimes. And in the Central African Republic, rape and sexual slavery are used as a tactic of war.

While the media has been an ally in the championing for women's rights, it has paradoxically been short-sighted and tactless in its methods. Particularly Western media, whom I feel has complicated and exacerbated things in their attempt to bring attention to the plight of women in the Middle East.

While it is true women's rights are severely limited in certain parts of the Middle East, – under 20% of the Saudi workforce is female, there is limited access to public and private transportation, and sexual violence victims are also punished – but this is not

AND FOR WOMEN ARE RIGHTS OVER MEN SIMILAR TO THOSE OF MEN OVER WOMEN. [2:228]

”

because of the clothing and dress codes that Middle Eastern women adorn, such as the hijab, burqa, and niqab.

Someone who shares the same sentiment is Saudi Arabian journalist Sabria Jawhar, who also writes for English-language news outlets. She complains that Western readers of her blog on The Huffington Post are obsessed with her veil. She calls the niqab “trivial.”

“(People) lose sight of the bigger issues like jobs and education. That's the issue of women's rights, not the meaningless things like passing legislation in France or Quebec to ban the burqa ... Non-Saudis presume to know what's best for Saudis, like Saudis should modernise and join the 21st century, or that Saudi women need to be free of the veil and abaya... And by freeing Saudi women, the West really means they want us to be just like them, running around in short skirts, nightclubbing and abandoning our religion and culture.”

Still, there have been measures taken worldwide to address these acts of

violence against women.

As more voices are heard on these issues, I am sure the spread of awareness will help to reduce such incidents.

At least 140 countries have passed laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment. Also, more data on female abuse have emerged as more than 100 countries have conducted surveys addressing the issues.

And in this era, where society is more accepting of women in powerful positions, I believe we will see change. Women like Angela Merkel, Julia Gillard and Sheikh Hasina Wajed – leaders of Germany, Australia, and Bangladesh respectively – show the world that women can rise to power and lead their countries. They might even do a better job at it, with their natural inclination towards patience and cooperation.

Women can also cut it in the business world where we see names like Indra Nooyi, Oprah Winfrey, and Marissa

Mayer – CEOs of Pepsi, the Oprah Winfrey Network, and Yahoo! respectively – highly visible and praised for their intelligence and tenacity. These are powerful women and increasingly, the world is seeing more of these type of women. And as their prominence spreads, they represent a beacon of hope to all women that their lives are worth as much as their dreams and aspirations. That they need not settle for less or accept the adversities that life hands them. They are created equal in the eyes of God and are blessed with the freedom of choice.

“And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women.” [2:228]



PHOTO BY MUHAMMAD AZLAN SELAMAT

write me a book

One day you'll write a book
It'll have many chapters, hundreds of pages
You'll be the main character, you'll explore new places
Meet many different strangers, each with their own unique personality
They'll bring you life lessons, adding colours to your story
There'll be sunshine, thunderstorms, rainbows across the skies
Only He can decide.

Then love comes, friend or foe,
A reality or memory, unfolded or to unfold,
Like a flower it can blossom, plucked and chosen as part of a bouquet
Or left to wither.

But darling, a seed can be planted and nurtured to grow
With patience, it'll mature to a flower and more
Hold to your values like roots
Guiding, nourishing.

It's okay if your book is a pop-up one
Or it has a reference page full with citings done
What matters is the message that you put inside
One day you'll have a book
And this book doesn't have to have an end
There'll be more stories to tell
There'll be many new places, many different experiences

So darling, one day you'll fill in the pages,
And then one day you'll rest.
Fill every line and every page,
And He'll fill in all the rest.

AZ

Photo by Siti Nabilah Romzi

the Weaver and the Weaving

You are the Well of Truth
The Seal of Proof
Excavating, Overflowing,
Actualising, Essential Flooding.

The Beginning and End
Ends and Begins in Your Name
Transcending this earthly plane
Persistently present, never to wane

Before The Weaving
There came The Hand
That stitched The Name
In the *Shahadatayn*¹

The Name
Inseparable from The Seal

Like seeing the crescent
and realising it's Fullness
Like receiving the Gift
and thanking it's Giver

You are The Weaving of The Weaver

In every Opening
You are The Opener
In every End
You are The Seal

Annihilation in Existence, then
Becomes Remaining in Service
Your Burial in *Baqi*²
The Excavation of *Baqi*³

Commitment to Living
Is eloquence in losing
Inside the *Barzakh*
With no End or Beginning

We are the vastness of Space
The depths of Seas
The light on that Horizon
That the Angel's wing sees

This slumber we wake
From every thunderous "Me!"
Our ego to forsake
With the mention of "We!"

As the weaving is done
All is well, right and true
So the Soul shall know God
With the mention of "*Hu*!"⁴

So Awaken to returning
Well Pleased, Pleasing!
The Hidden Treasure lies
Within The Weaver and The Weaving

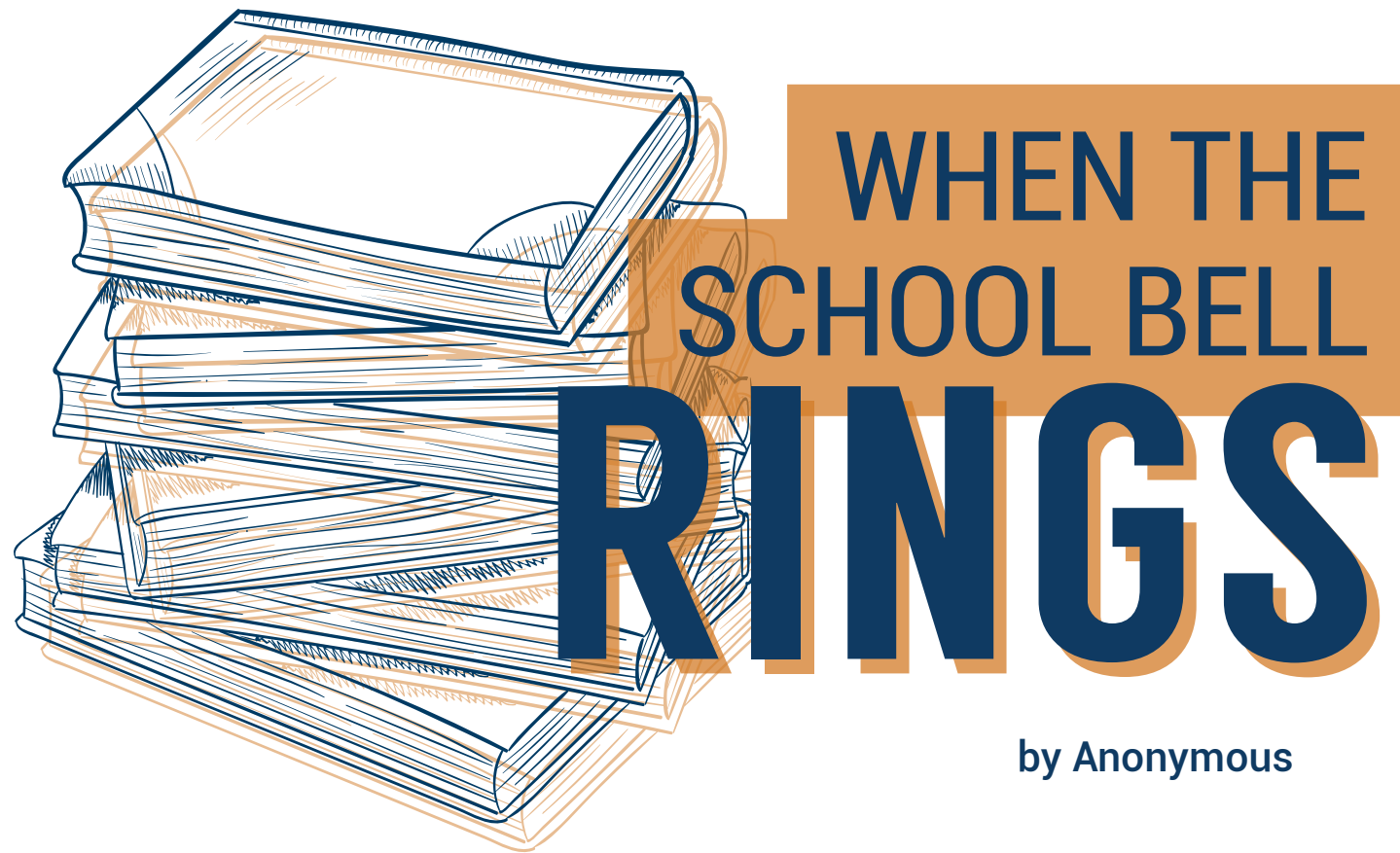
Abu Sofian Eunos

¹The shahadatayn are declarations of faith that mark entry into Islam.

²Jannat al-Baqi² is a cemetery in Medina, which contains the graves of many of Rasulullah's (SAW) relatives and companions.

³Baqi³ refers literally to subsistence/permanency, but in Sufi philosophy describes the state of life through, with and for God.

⁴Hu or Hawa is a name for God in Sufism.



I begin in the name of Al- Hakim, The Most Wise.

The movie 'My Name is Khan' has always been a personal favourite. Not exactly because of the A-listers in the movie, but the values that were educated throughout its runtime. In an early part of the movie, a mother was educating her son about the difference between a good and a bad person. She used visuals such as a person holding a sweet and another holding a bat. The person holding a sweet had an intention to share it with friends; however the person with a bat wanted to hit others with it. Amazingly, that part has since stuck at the back of my head as a definition to what is good and bad.

That Day, the people will depart separated (into categories) to be shown (the result of) their deeds.

So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.
[99:6-8]

A person's character reflects deeply about the person's values and traits. Often, the way a person behaves and thinks allows others to see who the person truly is on the inside. Should I present two individuals with the same age and of the same gender in front of

you – are these two persons really the same? Their character reflects how different they are, despite having similarities on paper. Perhaps, their personality might differ too. It is interesting to note that while personality shows who anyone is on the outside, character reveals who they are deep down. Hence, depicts the questions - what forms a person's good or bad character? Is it the experiences? The values? Or has it always been... both?

In Islam, character speaks a lot about who we are and what we are capable of. Values that emulate a good character includes kindness, compassion, and loving; shown clearly by a person very close to our hearts. Allah has decreed that success in this life and the next be judged according to the degree to which people purify themselves and attain noble character. It is thus crucial that every Muslim emulate the good characteristics of a man with the best of character, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The Prophet taught to his people the importance of compassion and softness. He took a great interest in the welfare of everyone, and had great compassion for people in trouble.

So by mercy from Allah, (O Muhammad), you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude (in speech) and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you.
[3:159]

My journey as a teacher began about a year ago. In a time when I realised that the society and generation is shifting, to own a good character becomes an even more important aspect in my life. Interactions with a particular student, though, stick in my mind like no other.

Me: Jackets off, please.

Her. But, *Cher*. I cold ah.

Me: Come on. You know the school rules. Jackets off.

Her. (As she slowly and reluctantly took off her jacket, it revealed her bandaged right forearm.)

Me: What happened to your arm?

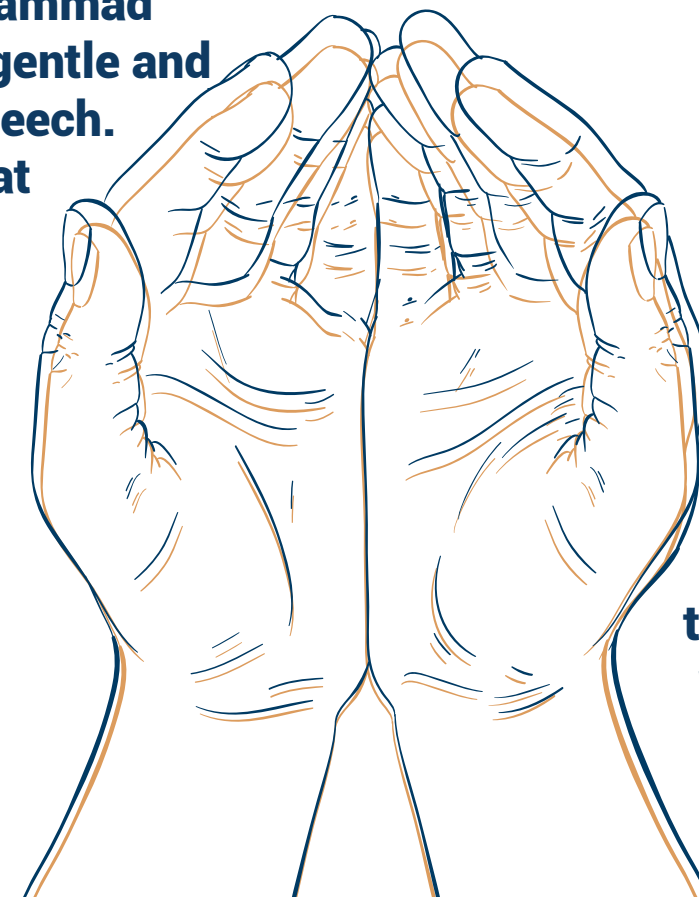
Her. I fell ah, *Cher*.

Me: You fell? How did you fall?

Her. Like that ah, *Cher*.

Every morning during assembly, I will have a teacher and student interaction time in the canteen. On that beautiful morning, it was my turn to talk to her. I held my gaze until she returned it. I knew her enough to know that she didn't have a fall. Instead, multiple cuts were hidden under the bandage. Using a micro blade, she did the act of self-harm in a public toilet. It wasn't one or two cuts; they were dense and angry, more like a barcode than anything else.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was gentle and kind in his speech. He spoke what was truthful, necessary, and kind.



Perhaps, the very reason why people come close to someone and why they break away relies upon the words we choose to utter and the way we choose to make them feel.

Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance.
[18:10]

When probed, she aloofly answered, 'Curious ah, *Cher*.' To her, her curiosity and threshold for pain held no benchmark. She comes to school with multiple piercings and self-drawn tattoos. I thought about the right words to say.

I recalled the story about the youths, a generation from the past. Their faith was strong and so was their trust in Allah. Definitely, the youths today are facing challenges that are heavy, possibly reflecting matters that are volatile and sensitive. As I tried to know her better and understand her circumstances that has placed her in such a situation, I realised one important thing. If a relationship is based on mutual love, it will improve the manner of dealings. I needed her to know that she had me on her side. I wanted her to know that I am willing to help her. Sincerity is a language that is accepted by those who need it. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was gentle and kind in his speech. He spoke what was truthful, necessary, and kind. Perhaps, the very reason why people come close to someone and why they break away relies upon the words we choose to utter and the way we choose to make them feel.

At the end of the day, good and bad character can be described in ample ways. Perhaps, the basis of all characters are then the words that we use. To choose to only speak what is necessary, kind, and truthful. I did not know what to say to her. But I do know to pray for her.



Lessons from the First Day

by Izza Haziqah

The air was dank, the space was cramped; hardly any light filtered through the tall building enough to reach its lowest floor. Drops of water from the unattended pipes formed puddles mixed with dirt and mud, while fungi grew in the corners around the area. The smell of heaps of rubbish nearby came in gusts, violently attacking the nostrils of anyone who came close.

The environment was unpleasant to the city dwellers such as me and the rest of my team. We were used to the clean air and neat pathways of Singapore. Heading up to visit the Myanmar refugees in Kuala Lumpur threw us very far away from our comfort zones.

We were walking through a poorly lit carpark that I was told was the settlement for the Chin community – a major ethnic group from Myanmar who were forced out of their villages due to the political situation in their home country. Entering the building carpark was like walking through a portal. One moment, we were out in sunny Malaysia. The next, we were catapulted into a dirty, unkempt alleyway that did not fit at all with any of the tourist brochures publicising the beauty of “Truly Asia.” It was dark, quiet, and musty.

No one said a thing. As we walked, I could feel the silence heavy with the judgment we were all trying our best to suspend. My head started to swell with doubt.

What was I thinking? *This isn't a TV show, Izza. This is real. You're dealing with people who were really displaced. You're meeting kids who are really suffer–*

“Teacha!!”

A cacophony of high-pitched screaming suddenly filled the carpark.

“Come, just keep walking,” my team leader said as she smiled for the first time that morning. “The kids just finished morning class.”

Within seconds, children in brightly-coloured shirts came running towards us. They were screaming excitedly, eager to interact with us. My team exchanged looks filled with feelings from amusement to puzzledness. The tiredness and suspicions from seconds ago evaporated completely. Soon, we began to laugh and smile as well. Though the children were speaking in their own language, their body language very clearly professed how much they had looked forward to meeting my team. The warmth in their enthusiasm as they welcomed their guests melted away all my worries.

We went through a door at the far end corner of the carpark and entered a room that looked like a large, bright box. Plastered everywhere on the walls were images of Jesus, charts with the alphabet, motivational posters in various languages, and lots pictures of animals.

Just like what my team had discussed, each person was to have at least two children with them. I sat beside a girl who looked much

older compared to the rest with her height and build. She smiled widely when I sat beside her. On her other side was a smaller boy whose face was scrunched up in a perpetual frown. His hand held on to the hem of the girl's shirt lightly, like its place was always there.

I was told that they knew a bit of English so I began to introduce myself. “I am,” I said, gesturing at myself, “Teacher Izza. What's your name?”

The girl just laughed and started talking to the boy happily. It was my first time seeing the boy smiling even slightly. He suddenly began to gesture wildly with his hands, all the time while moving his mouth. The girl nodded in response and then turned to me. She pointed at herself and said, “Aaa–aaw-wi”. In that moment, not knowing what to do, I clapped for her and she clapped along , too.

Then, the boy tugged on the hem of my shirt. Pointing to the girl, the boy said, “Rawi”. Pointing to himself, he said, “Sang.” I nodded and smiled at him. It was then when I realised that the girl is special. She doesn't communicate through words.

I nodded and from then on, I started using less words and more hand gestures. The whole hour was spent playing with Sang and Rawi. Despite his young age and his friendly face, Sang was extremely reserved. His hand never left the hem of Rawi's shirt. He only let go momentarily whenever Rawi told him through her hand gestures that she wanted to move more. Rawi, in contrast, was extremely open. She was playful and smiled a lot. When she smiled, the long scar above her upper lip became more pronounced. To me, it hardly ever decreased her attractiveness, though. The sincerity and warmth in her actions accentuated her personal beauty and strength.

We played games like “Tarzan the Monkey Man” and “Heart Attack,” which were simple because of the fact that you didn't really require much hearing to understand what was happening. You only need observation, which Rawi had a lot of. She mostly won anyway, much to her happiness, and also Sang's. He only smiled when he saw Rawi smiling. To me, he'd only stare. It took a while to accept that Sang may not like me, but in the end, it was really about them. What was more important was that they loved each other. They didn't need to love me or my team mates. We were going to leave in fourteen days. They fight hard to remain together forever.

After the ice-breakers, before we broke up and mixed around with other children, Rawi gave me a tight hug, wrapping her arms around my torso. When she let go, I knelt down and gave her another hug. A closer one, where our heartbeats could actually feel each other. When she let go, she gestured very animatedly to Sang. Sang maintained his distance, hand on Rawi as usual, so I nodded and smiled at the both of them, hoping to convey “it's okay” through the look on my face. But in a split second, Rawi suddenly pushed Sang towards me, and Sang immediately wrapped his arms around my body. Maybe Sang was not the sort to naturally open up, but when Rawi nudged him, he did. He would break down his barriers for a

stranger if she had Rawi's belief. That, I thought, was the definition of trust, and the definition of friendship.

Working with the refugee community was all about being surprised. It was like the first moment in the carpark. It was like approaching a huge source of warmth as a large block with an exterior of ice. The ice is made up of past judgments, preconceived notions, and fear conjured from the general media. When I come closer, the exterior melted away, leaving hope and spirit to pull me through. That was how the visits to the refugee communities were like. Most of the time, it was about shattering preconceived notions. It was them who taught us so much.

Our leaders made it clear time and time again to discard completely any signs of the saviour mentality many Singaporean overseas expeditors would have. We should not think ourselves as the “better” ones who are visiting and alleviating the hardships of those who are “worse.” We come as visitors and guests, with the intention to learn, and to help instil awareness into our ignorant selves.

We should not think of ourselves as the “better” ones who are visiting and alleviating the hardships of those who are “worse.”

We come as visitors and guests, with the intention to learn, and to help instill awareness in our ignorant selves.

The refugee communities live in difficult conditions every single day. They are dubbed with the term “stateless” for many reasons. Their home rejects them, and the place from whom they seek help refuse them. Their situation is such that they belong almost nowhere that would provide the home and shelter that every human being should have a right to. The gnawing feeling of anxiety is part of their daily emotions.

Though I hate to be the one to impose my own voice on their own breathtaking ones, they really do live with moments of happiness and contentment amidst their difficulties. We hardly realise that fear is not the only way that these beautiful communities live. The bright children running towards us in the dark carpark epitomised how much light they actually carry, amidst the dismal environment they were thrown into.

Knowing their conditions makes it easy for us to fall into the pit of mere sympathy, but that is not what they need. They need awareness, they need news to spread, and they need other communities to know about their situation such that more help will be given.

We met with refugees, listened to their painful stories, and learnt so much about their plight. But the most important takeaway was that we laughed and we joked, we smiled and we sang. We did not leave with hearts heavy from the things that we had seen, we did not witness horrors, we did not find ourselves pitying these children. No, rather, we left with a spring in our step, with warmth in our hearts, from the friendships that we had forged, and from the hope that they themselves had planted in each and every one of us. Images of joy are not what one would usually associate with the refugee situation, but that is the image I would like others to think of alongside the difficulties that they face. These communities are not one-dimensional. They are their experiences, and that includes their love, their joy, and their contentment.

Interfaith friendships

by Natasha Karim and Siti Ayeeshah Zaki

To develop the ability to build bonds and cultivate friendships amongst people outside of our belief systems may seem daunting in the beginning, especially if we are used to spending time with those similar to us. However, through experience, we learn to weave together the differences that tie us all together as a community, filled with different races, religions, and cultures. Such bonds, however, don't come easy. There are certain must-haves in every friendship, and especially interfaith ones.

1. Open-mindedness

The first step to embracing our differences would be to be open-minded. So we begin here, because it is the foundation of a strong interfaith friendship. Being receptive to new ideas – ideas different from your own – is the first step towards bridging the understanding of your beliefs, and those different from yours.

It is an important component in the creation and maintenance of a friendship where beliefs and practices may not necessarily align, or match up neatly. This also gives you a chance to consider different viewpoints in relation to your own, so that you have a more nuanced understanding of different issues and the way the world around you works, instead of allowing them to crystallise into a basis for overgeneralisations.

It is through being open-minded that we are able to appreciate the supposed differences that lay between us and those around us.

2. Mutual respect

The core, overarching values of many religions are similar; we preach and act out kindness, compassion, and integrity. Different faiths, though, have different ways of communicating such values, and of practising the various beliefs. It is important in every friendship to treat the different practices with respect and understanding. When asking about each others' faiths, it is important to remain respectful. The subject may be sensitive to some, given the incredibly personal nature of the matter. By being respectful, a mature conversation, in which both parties are open to different ideas without putting the ideas down, would allow for other parties to feel welcomed to open up in such conversations. This would allow for increased understanding between various religions and cultures, too!

The most important characteristic here is being able to recognise, or know your friends' individual boundaries. Conversations about faith shouldn't be stifled or awkward; they should be dynamic and open. By creating an atmosphere of respect by respecting each others' limits and boundaries to conversation and discussion, we are then better able to form and strengthen the bonds that define our friendships.

3. Curiosity

The core of many individuals' values lie in their spiritual beliefs, be it as a Muslim, Christian, or even an atheist. While the intensity of such beliefs may differ, it is especially because of this divergence that a healthy curiosity for your friends' mannerisms is required.

A strong understanding of your friends' practices and beliefs would not only increase your knowledge on faiths outside of your own, but also create closer friendships. A heart-to-heart talk on what drives your inner self would allow for stronger bonds to be formed, with a healthy respect for each others' beliefs and practices.

4. Agree to disagree

Each faith is unique. We practise differently, and we interpret things differently, too. While there may be similarities, there may also be certain aspects of our various beliefs where you may see the divergence from your own.

However, it is at this time that you have to ultimately agree to disagree. It is not a loss but a win, because you get to preserve the uniqueness of your own religion, while appreciating the uniqueness of theirs. Just because we have different stands on matters, it does not make us any different from others – it just makes us human, unique in our ways.

Naturally, the four points listed in this simple article do not constitute a definitive guide to forging friendships in any situation. They do, however, represent the fundamental building blocks of a community predicated on kindness, respect, trust, integrity, and compassion.

May we all always find the guidance we need to be appreciate the beauty of diversity, just as we appreciate the beauty of the nuances that make up our own identity, insha Allah amin.

Bear Future Self

by Nana Z

Do you remember when everyone kept saying that life was like an enormous jigsaw puzzle, and that we would find the right piece to fit in with everything else?

This meant that we had to wait, and we know that we just cannot force certain things to connect with everything else.

It was more a matter of wondering if the right piece would ever appear, let alone fit in our lives. It made us feel like we did not have a single ounce of control over our life, and it wasn't long until we began to wonder if there was any point in hoping for something when all has been written for us.

Do you remember that feeling of doubt? The lack of certainty? It felt sometimes like the jigsaw analogy did not quite fit.

Anxiously you look around for something, anything, that could point to an indication that all will be well. Unexpectedly, your vision was arrested by a single thread that was hanging on for dear life to the end of your silk sleeve, gently swaying in the wind. Since you didn't have anything on you with which to cut it, your natural reaction was to just pull it out, so that you could get it over and done with.

Do you remember how surprised you were, when you realised that by forcefully pulling the thread out, a crease was created? The once smooth cloth was now imperfect. Even after you had smoothed it out, you could still see a subtle gap, showing traces of where the thread used to be. And then you thought... How, just how on Earth, could one little thread cause so much trouble?

And it was then that we realised how nothing in life, no matter how small, is insignificant. Always remember, "Allah does not burden a soul beyond what it can bear." [2:286]

Every little experience is a thread. We weave them together to make our own craft, forming our identity in the process.

There are times when we get to find a thread that we really want, with the perfect colour and the perfect texture. Other times, we are handed a type of thread we prayed for, only to realise that it is not what we thought it would be. Not to forget those moments when we did not get what we had hoped for and it was indeed frustrating. It felt, no, it feels like life is against us.

When things did not go as planned, we just kept telling ourselves that Allah s.w.t knows best. That has been and will always be the right mentality to stand by, no matter what. So we take in that thread and weave it to the best of our ability to make it work. Lo and behold, we realised that everything still turned out fine.

We are alright.

Isn't it funny how we are already informed of how great Allah s.w.t is and yet, we still get surprised and impressed by His doings, His weavings? Alhamdulillah.

The constant struggle to make sense of everything could almost take our breath away. Do you remember that feeling when we questioned almost everything but we still held onto our faith in Him? It is simply because we know that He has always blessed us with what we need.

Even if we think it is useless, we somehow managed to turn it into something beneficial for ourselves. Alhamdulillah.

I write to remind you, and myself, that it is true – no matter how much we plan, Allah s.w.t is still the Best of Planners. He always has been and He always will be. We just keep weaving with what we have, and pray that everything will work out. "Indeed, Allah is with the patient." [8:46]

To end this little letter, remember to always be patient with what Allah s.w.t has bestowed upon us. Be patient and have faith when we weave our experiences. I am still learning, and so are you.



Bear Younger Self

by Harith Hamzah

When it comes to building friendships, don't be picky. Befriend anyone. We often hear our elderly cautioning us on getting into bad company. But younger years are usually not our proudest. You may have known about the variety of worlds in teenage years. Some of your friends were high-achievers. Most others were probably just going with the flow.

Then there were the problematics, the 'bad apples.' The thing about life is that our 'ripening' can happen after failures and mistakes. Being a 'bad' fruit doesn't spell the end. I have witnessed many friends, whom were labelled by teachers and parents as 'bad company' turned their life around and become valued by the community. This 'ripening' journey is not a solo trip. You need good company to fierce the battle together, watch each other's backs, pull you back up when you are at your low. And most importantly, a good circle of friends keeps each other in check, mentally, morally, and spiritually.

If you are the good company, befriend anyone. Be nice to everyone. You might just be part of a larger plan to induce a positive change in someone. If you are the 'bad apple,' knowing your flaws is the first step to self-improvement. Find a good company, but don't shun your problematic circle. They need help as much as you do. The pleasant smell of good akhlaq spreads through positive human interaction.

When you're younger, you're full of reserved energy, energy which is not spent on your responsibilities as a student, or other obligatory roles in life. This energy could and should be used to expand your horizons. Explore new interests, uncover your potential, hone your

skills. You will get less of this once you've gone full adult. Like they always say, opportunities don't come often. But my advice is for you to assess carefully the opportunities presented. Although I very much agree that every opportunity has lessons to offer, grabbing at every single opportunity coming your way is unwise.

Firstly, overloading yourself with additional commitment will only burn you out. You will tire yourself out before even reaping the benefits of the multiple opportunities you dived into. Efficiency-wise, this is not optimal.

Secondly, committing to one opportunity may not allow you to commit to another. You don't want to regret being hasty in accepting an offer when a much better offer comes moments after. You just have to keep your eyes open to not miss a good opportunity.

Thirdly, consult others. Ask for opinions from your parents, close friends, mentors, or people who are experienced in the field.

Pace yourself. Invest proper attention and focus in everything that you do. Never reach a point where you overcommit in multiple opportunities at the expense of the quality of your work.

Everybody wishes to be successful. And whether you like it or not, you will be forced to compete with many others for what we regard as 'success.' But a simpler measure of success is progress. If today is better than yesterday, strive to make tomorrow better than today. This way, every day will be a step taking us closer to success.

At the same time, do not be pressured by others who attain success earlier than you. True enough, everyone lives by his or her own timeline. We may take others as our role models, or learn from their failures.

But never be disheartened if your story turns out different. Create your own story. Decide on small short-term goals. Celebrate small achievements. Remind yourself of the reasons (or intentions) for the things you work towards.

And most importantly, remember: Consistent, small steps forward are better than a huge leap made just once.



TEN YEARS OF ELEVEN

BY ELEVEN EDITORIAL TEAM
PHOTOS BY ASYIKIN YUSOFF
AND NATASHA KASIM

Alhamdulillah – All praises be unto Allah.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of ELEVEN Magazine. ELEVEN has come a long way since the very first issue was published back in 2009. In the beginning, it was not yet the ad hoc initiative as we now know it. Rather, ELEVEN was produced by a number of individuals who had a passion for the written word, and a passion for da'wah. The magazine has transformed in many ways, eventually being run by the Marketing Subcommittee of the NTU Muslim Society, before finally being established as an ad hoc in its own right.

The magazine has, in its time, explored a variety of themes, each of which had particular resonance and value to the team which produced it. The theme for this 10th anniversary edition is, fittingly, "Weaving."

Fitting, because the 10th Anniversary marks a milestone, and an opportunity to take stock of the progress, growth, ethos, and objectives of the magazine itself. What better way to remember the various experiences, themes, and focuses of the issues over the years, than by remembering how each of these threads is now woven into the fabric of ELEVEN?

Experiences with ELEVEN have left lasting impacts on many of our members. ELEVEN has become a multi-generational community in itself, with strong bonds tying

each team together. For many of us, ELEVEN began as a simple desire to give back to the Muslim community in NTU, but soon evolved into much, much more. ELEVEN became an avenue to reach out to people from all walks of life, just as it became an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals who would soon become trusted friends.

Over the years, the teams have established and maintained a culture of sharing, preserving, appreciating, and developing knowledge, particularly knowledge that pertains to our spirituality. Da'wah, then, has always been central to what ELEVEN is all about. Every year, the ELEVEN team seeks a fresh theme with which to headline our content for the upcoming issue. Looking back on past issues, these themes resonate even today.

Da'wah is our shared responsibility as Muslims, as we enjoin one another in what is right, sharing our knowledge, and developing our faith as one ummah. Many of our members find themselves seeking out opportunities and means to continue to engage in da'wah, long after the publication of the issue on which they worked.

In the pages to follow, we recount our conversations with Farzana, Humairah, and Zarifah, all previous members and contributors to ELEVEN over the years. Each of them has unique insights into what ELEVEN means, what their own experience was, and how it shaped their perceptions of da'wah and of the Muslims youths in Singapore.

"YOU ARE THE BEST NATION PRODUCED (AS AN EXAMPLE) FOR MANKIND. YOU ENJOIN WHAT IS RIGHT, AND FORBID WHAT IS WRONG, AND BELIEVE IN ALLAH." [3:110]

We first sat down with Nur Farzana, a fresh graduate from the NTU School of Art, Design and Media. Farzana was the Chairperson for the 8th edition of ELEVEN Magazine, and was the Vice-President (Outreach) for NTU Muslim Society in her final year.

Farzana has worked on ELEVEN from every possible angle. Across her time in NTU, she served as a member of the committee, the chairperson, and even the advisor to the team that succeeded hers.

As an art student, Farzana was approached right from her Freshman Orientation to work on the magazine. "The moment they knew I was an ADM student, they thought, 'Hey, she can design, let's grab her first!'"

She considered the invitation carefully and eventually decided to get involved, in order to test her design potential. "I wanted to see how I can illustrate design content in a new light, because if you design for Islamic magazines, you have certain restrictions to follow and certain guidelines, and I wanted to test how I was capable in doing that."

It was the appeal of content creation, then, particularly in an Islamic space, that inspired Farzana to take on the challenge of working on the magazine. When she began, ELEVEN was not yet the annual ad hoc initiative as we now know it. It was instead maintained by the NTUMS Marketing Subcommittee, which worked with members of the NTU Muslim community to produce two editions per year. Even then, though, Farzana was confident in the potential of the magazine: "It really had a very strong foundation. The content and the writers were already very good."

ELEVEN will always hold fond memories for Farzana. Asked for a few standout moments, though, she hesitates for a moment. There are so many memories that it takes her a while to choose one. She does mention, though, that it was during the relatively informal sessions that the teams spent together that she really appreciated the bonds being

NUR FARZANA



to conversations about faith to individuals from all walks of life. "Opening up opportunities really helps us expand our audience. Through things like this, we have met Muslims from all kinds of backgrounds, but we all still uphold our faith no matter what."

Farzana also takes us through her reflections of the ways in which each of us may engage in da'wah ourselves. "I don't think I can tell people things, I prefer to show them through an example. We all have certain skills, even our Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had certain skills. I think you need a certain softness, I don't think I'm skilled enough."



forged. ELEVEN was, – and is – first and foremost, a team that felt like family.

It wasn't always easy, though. Every ELEVEN team experiences its fair share of struggles, and Farzana's experiences were no different. "Back then, ELEVEN was just starting to build its credibility. We had a really tough time convincing sponsors that, despite being NTU based, our readership was much larger."

Farzana's experiences with ELEVEN left a lasting impact on her, primarily as it shaped her perceptions of the way she engaged in da'wah. "It definitely shaped my approach to da'wah. Through my experiences with ELEVEN, I understood that certain things were not working for the society. And deep in my heart, I hope that our religious leaders move away from certain ways of teaching. Through ELEVEN, I realised that certain activities attract people who are looking to gain knowledge. Sometimes, giving someone a thick book about Islam can be very intimidating. But extract key things. Give them a lighter approach. They will want to know more!"

These experiences and lessons have followed Farzana, as she goes about her daily life. She holds fast to the philosophy of extending opportunities to contribute

At the end of our interview, she leaves us with some parting advice, and her hopes for the Muslim youths of today: "I hope that we can be more driven towards success. Sometimes we view success as an act of showing off, or we view work as being something that is not religious. I don't think this is true. By working hard and being successful, you are able to be of help to your community. You are able to extend financially and emotionally, and you are exposed to different environments. With that drive to pursue success in all things, you are able to inspire, not only fellow youths, but also, insha Allah, your children in the future."

In the interview we had with **Humairah Jamil**, a writer for the 8th edition of ELEVEN Magazine and the mind behind The Book Jacket, the writer and teacher tells us, “I want to leave this world better than I found it, to share what is beneficial to people.” And that she has, with her blog and Instagram account @thebookjacket, a platform where Humairah hopes to reach out to others through Islam.

“I want to do something where I can reach out to anyone,” she says. “If my writing resonates with them, if it’s a way for them to get back to what Islam really is, then I think that is enough for me. I want to use my passion towards something that is beneficial. I don’t want it to be a meaningless pursuit.”

It was through ELEVEN that she first conceived of the idea behind The Book Jacket, in hopes of spreading the word of Islam. “I made an account to share with people, to share the light of Islam.”

Her journey with da’wah began with a passion for writing and ELEVEN Magazine. When asked about why she decided that ELEVEN would be a good place for her to practice her love for the written word, she shares: “ELEVEN is a good platform that turns my interest into something that is beneficial for others. It involves da’wah through writing.”

When Humairah realised that ELEVEN Magazine was more far-reaching than she had expected, she decided to combine her love for words, as well as her growing consciousness of her faith, into The Book Jacket. “ELEVEN has definitely pushed me towards that direction. It was a great springboard in that sense. It put purpose in my writing.”

To this day, Humairah remembers ELEVEN with a sense of fondness and nostalgia. Working on the magazine not only resulted in her amazing platform,

HUMAIRAH JAMIL



but also left a strong impression on how passionate individuals working together could, through sweat and tears, come together to create something they would all be proud of. “We started out with our own viewpoints. It involved tears during brainstorming for the theme. At the time, there was a lot of controversies in the media, like the Charlie Hebdo case. Some of us wanted to talk about it, some of us didn’t want to. In the end, we overcame it. We saw what was more important. It stuck in my mind, that meeting. We all came together to benefit the ummah through this particular platform.”

It was not only the differences in points of view that were challenges faced by the 8th ELEVEN team. Humairah cites issues such as accuracy, meticulousness, and the tediousness of it all. However, she claims that the team worked hard for the magazine, with all believing that, given



the permanence of the written word, high quality was non-negotiable.

Having worked on the magazine with such zest, Humairah tells us about her hopes for ELEVEN in the future. She talks about increased involvement and collaboration with youths, getting different perspectives, and addressing important issues relevant to the Muslim youths of today. “It’s okay to disagree, but we must respect each other’s viewpoints. I want ELEVEN to be that platform where people can get together and understand each other better.”

With The Book Jacket being read mainly by Muslim youth, she also mentions her hopes for the future of the Muslim youth, and how her experiences being a Muslim have led her to this. Here, she offers some final words of advice: “I pray that Muslim youths will be proud to be Muslim. I know how it feels to be like always shying away from society because you stand out. As I mature, I realise I don’t care what anybody thinks of me or my faith. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

ELEVEN Magazine also sat down with **Zarifah Binti Mohmad Azhar**, a previous ELEVEN member, currently working as a videographer for *Have Halal Will Travel*. We talked about topics ranging from her experience working with ELEVEN and the impact that she hopes this magazine will achieve.

Zarifah is no stranger to ELEVEN, as she was an editor for the 7th and 8th editions of the magazine. She has written articles such as *Sunnah Foods and its Benefits* and *Body as Amanah*.

When asked why she joined ELEVEN, she says that she “always had an interest in writing and media.” She also acknowledges how ELEVEN, as a platform, provided her the ability to express herself and explore who she is as a person. Being in ELEVEN also gave her the opportunity to expand her writing repertoire, from news articles and scripts, to magazine articles.

Of course as with any endeavour, there will be challenges and she specifically singles out the beginning, when the team has to choose their theme as the pivotal and toughest decision that will set the tone for the rest of their journey.

“Coming up with the theme every year to start the edition of ELEVEN is the most difficult part. It will shape the entire publication and what you’re going to do for the next 6 months. Deciding that is the most challenging part I feel. It not only has to connect with you, but it has to connect with everyone in your team and your readers.”

To Zarifah, working on the magazine was never just another piece of work to complete. She always looked forward to ELEVEN meetings where she could connect with friends. “Remember that there are so many good things in life. ELEVEN meetings always picked me up, made me happy.”

When asked about what makes ELEVEN unique, Zarifah points out: “It reaches out to the masses. We distribute to other Muslims societies and institutions like Wardah Books. The reach and potential of ELEVEN in terms of spreading knowledge really goes very far.”



Not just that, she also notes the collaborative atmosphere of the ELEVEN team: “I love the people there – everyone is so nice! We all have an interest in making this magazine really work together. The challenges and experiences bond us as a team. For ELEVEN, we do everything. From first thinking about the theme, looking for sponsors and writers, deciding the size and paper of the magazine, the colours, printing it. The creative process, and everything in between, the business and all that. Everything in one. That’s really something unique to ELEVEN.”

ELEVEN Magazine is, first and foremost, a platform for Muslims and non-Muslims to educate and spread knowledge on Islam, better known as da’wah. This helped to shape Zarifah’s perception of da’wah, as she went on to join *Have Halal Will Travel* which, she says, has

plenty in common with ELEVEN. “At *Have Halal Will Travel*, we promote peace through travel. Non-Muslims get to see what Muslims are really like. How the media portrays us is not the best right now, so travelling is a great way to show how Muslims are really like, and how the religion is very peaceful and loving. Similar to ELEVEN, this is a kind of da’wah for me. Except with my job right now, I’m able to spread it to a wider audience. We are online and we reach the entire world.”

Zarifah made our day with very positive thoughts on the current ELEVEN team. “I think you guys are doing a good job, honestly. Your marketing is so on point! I’m really impressed by it. It’s so good. The overall aesthetic. I was so impressed that I went to show everyone in the office. It looks very professional.”

As parting advice, Zarifah left us with her hopes for Muslim youths today. “Listen to yourself! Don’t let others tell you what to do. If your intentions are right, insaa Allah, everything will go smoothly. There’s no better time than the present to pursue your goals.”



ZARIFAH MOHMAH AZHAR



Seamstress

The needle trembled in her grasp
Its eye wavering in her frail hand
She squinted, her breathing steadied
And whispered, 'a little more'
But the thread buckled, unyielding to her plea

She realised she had been stooped over
And the familiar ache raced across her back as she sat up
Small padded footsteps from outside
Greeted her even before she saw her daughter's face

Her Love sat beside her, eyeing the torn dress
Why don't we just buy another Mama?
Because we mend what we treasure, my Love
This tattered hole is a reminder of our faults
And memories etched should never be forgotten
But preserved as our lives' silver linings

Her Love grew and knelt beside her, eyeing her torn dress
Why do you still stay Mama?
Because our heart strings were bound together by Him
Woven to perfection, my Love
But we decided to create our own knots
Some stitched our imperfections together
While others were complicated by our unwillingness
To let go of our frayed ends

Because tugging these strings
Will only tighten the noose in the middle
And our hearts are not hard enough to see you suffocate

Her Love stood in the doorway, dressing her torn eye
Why does it hurt Mama?
Because pearls are born from the oyster's discomfort, my Love
And so will embroidery from a needle's prick
The beauty of your fabric rests on your fervour
To soldier on with your own hands.

She sat where her mother used to be
The needle now remained unmoving in her grasp
Its eye unwavering in her hand
She squinted, steadying her breathing
And whispered, 'I can do this'
The thread yielded to her mother's legacy
Her heart finally seamed

Asyraf Mustajja

TWIN STELLATIONS

out of the house
she goes to her
companion
where the stars gaze down
into her eyes

out of sight
welcoming
her reflection
striking
their iridescence

a tight
tugging

rope bonding
her towards Sirius

as if she could reach out
yet they would reach back
their palms
just inches away from her
round fingers

although they're apart
with
their diverging experiences
they are separate
woven as one

as if the world was condensed
and they were adjacent

she could see herself amongst them
in their hearts

And His presence reverberated
His message unambiguous
For our lustre gleams distinctively
But our network creates
A tour de force

NUR LAILI

*THIS IS A TWIN CINEMA POEM WHICH IS READABLE VERTICALLY DOWN EACH DISCRETE COLUMN, AND HORIZONTALLY ACROSS BOTH COLUMNS. EACH COLUMN HAS ITS OWN MEANING, BUT WHEN WOVEN TOGETHER, A NEW MEANING IS CREATED WITH ADDITIONAL NUANCES.

PHOTO BY NATASHA KASIM

Visual by Nur Hasyimah

On January 1st, 2018, not only did I welcome the new year, I also welcomed the long overdue launch of a project of mine: The Writeous Circle blog.

With the help of my friend, Ali Al-Qaisy, a simple platform where God-conscious poetry is shared and read worldwide was birthed. All praises be to Allah Almighty for making that happen. I am aware of how basic the blog is – it still doesn't have its own private domain (yet) but I'm grateful it's materialised from a mere long-simmering idea in my head into reality.

'Writeous,' if it wasn't already obvious, is an amalgamation of the words 'righteous' (i.e. faith) and 'writing' – both of which play a huge role in my life. They easily overlap most of the time, affecting one another which in turn shapes the person that I am at a given moment.

The question I get asked most is "Why do you write?" I always wonder if they're asking in terms of how necessary it is for me to share my deepest darkest thoughts with a few hundred people, or in terms of my actual reasons for writing. My answer to that question however, is a little bit of both.

I write for the primary purpose of healing. Which automatically means I only write when I'm sad. It's true. Only when I'm feeling down, or when I'm stressed out about a certain issue, do I tend to turn to writing to figure things out. I guess you could call this a coping mechanism. Having said this, it does not mean that the tone of my writing has to be melancholic. I could be demotivated about something and still write about something hopeful.

I grew up always having a diary at every stage in my life since K2 (age 6) and it has become a form of refuge for me for when the world gets dark and scary. Writing has helped me navigate through my thoughts, organise them, and figure out solutions to life problems.

Faith, on the other hand, is an integral part of me that I've learnt to reconnect to in recent years; to re-love, and to re-think

The Writeous Circle

by Yasmin Zaini

the way I look at it. For most of us, faith is something that has been institutionalised since birth, all throughout growing up, in school, a couple times a year during Ramadan, and the two Hari Rayas. Islam has become that box you check when the form asks "Religion?" It has become that thing we don't want to start explaining when someone of a different faith asks, "Why do you eat halal? What IS halal?" because it's "too complicated." We take it for granted. And we no longer are able to see the value it adds to our lives.

I fell in love with the deen (religion) again when it was taught to me in English. English is my choice of language for expression – I express myself best in English, debate best in English, and I daresay I dream in English too. That's who I am. And that's one of the million and one ways people fall in love with the deen. Whether you rekindled your love for it through a near-death experience, or losing a loved one, or even as a form of rebellion against those who spread hate and falsehood about it. God works in many strange ways we cannot always fathom.

It was when I was studying for my A Levels, reading writers like John Bunyan, that I discovered the perfect marriage of deen and poetry. I figured, if eloquent vocabulary and rhyme schemes can be used to spread the word of God, just as how the Quran has some poetic elements, then surely I could use the same techniques to express my sentiments in this journey of heeding the word of God. As I started to explore the genre and sharing it with

friends and family, a few opportunities opened up to me for performing my writings. I gave it a try, not even knowing what spoken word poetry was, but I began to unearth a less traversed road that is Islamic spoken word poetry; essentially poetry with Islamic elements that is performed for an audience.

Spoken word poetry was born in a reading circle in a jazz club in Chicago, in the United States, founded by a construction worker in the late 1980s. At first glance, the cultural background of it does not suit the Islamic tradition. However, spoken word poetry has always been a medium of art through which important and relevant topics were put forth, from the rough life of the hood, domestic violence, death, breaking the glass ceiling, to the estranged friend and failing at something you love doing. It is very similar to the musical genre rap. Today, spoken word poetry recitals still maintain their original purpose, but they have definitely expanded from jazz clubs, to the school stage and charity nights. This is why I consider Islamic spoken word poetry to be less traversed road, but I am passionate about championing the genre.

It is time the world stopped categorising Muslims as the Other in the human race. Muslims lead completely normal lives with its ups and downs and highs and lows. Besides happiness and joy, we too go through the pain of parting, the bitterness of betrayal, experience bouts of anger, and we too grieve. And poetry has never been exclusive to a group – it's so universal

it's able to encapsulate and accommodate even Muslim feelings, ha! Poetry is a naturally captivating method of speech delivery, but that allows the poet to use words that are sophisticated and imagery that is philosophical without shame. The art of poetry itself begs the practitioner to challenge himself to communicate in non-direct or obscure ways, using metaphors and symbols as well as clichés. A lot of the youth today are exposed to the rap music of today, which sadly has become replete with profanities and sexual references – it isn't as impactful as it used to be. So spoken word poetry actually is the cleaner and more educated alternative to expressing anything and everything under the sun.

So this where The Writeous Circle comes in. It is meant to be a showcase of how 'righteous' (read: Muslim) men and women go about their lives just like any other human being, only one thing is different: they always have God in the equation. Islam is a faith that keeps one in check, therefore whatever one may be doing, if he calls himself a Muslim, he must be conscious of God. It is his faith that ensures he does not steal, although his logical mind is telling him that his

neighbour would not even mind that he had used their garden scissors when they were on holiday, for example. It is when faith governs the conscience that he has successfully become God-conscious. Everything he writes, he is accountable for. Especially in this day and age, what a person is, is not important, rather what he reads. Where we stand today as an Ummah demands that we have Muslim writers to change the narrative of the Muslims. We should not keep relying on our scholars to do all the da'wah. In fact, poetry should be used to refute any falsehood against Islam, and propagate the peaceful message of the deen in a way that suits the age and era of the time.

This is ideally what I envision for the kind of work that The Writeous Circle would feature, and so far, alhamdulillah, all our entries have been fitting the bill quite well. The main idea is to not preach the deen per

'Writeous'... is an amalgamation of the words 'righteous' (i.e. faith) and 'writing' – both of which play a huge role in my life

se, but to make known the inner-workings of the minds of 21st century Muslims, in a 'God-conscious' way.

I sincerely hope that this project will not only pique the interests of some of our youth who might still be searching and struggling to find meaning and reconciliation along the path of the deen, but also will pick the brains of some of the God-conscious poetic geniuses of our generation, bi'ithnillahi ta'ala.

To find out more about The Writeous Circle, visit their website thewriteouscircle.wordpress.com

Have you ever felt broken?
Have you ever felt lost?
Have you ever felt like nothing is going to work out?
Or have you ever felt numb at the situation you are in?
Or just felt like giving up?

Whoever you are,
whatever you do,
wherever you go,
always bear in mind that we are all travellers.
We are humans who travel in this temporary world to cross over to another, permanent one: Akhirah.

Because of that,
that pain you are suffering, it is temporary.
That heartbreak you are experiencing, it is temporary.
That loss you are facing, it is temporary.

So what should you do?
Keep walking, because this world is like a bridge. We need to keep walking and moving on in order to reach our real final destination. If you are stuck on the bridge and stop, no one can carry you. No one can help you. Only you can help and carry yourself, with the help of Allah s.w.t.

So, let us take step back and look to the history of our prophets. Make their life journeys as a motivation.

Bringing you the story of Prophet Yusuf a.s., who taught us the importance of these 3S:

Submission,
Spiritual Strength,
Sorry.

The power of complete submission.

Prophet Yusuf was a victim of his other 9 elder brothers who wanted to kill him by leaving him to die in a well. Prophet Yusuf was tested by Siti Zulaikha, who accused him of slander. Prophet Yusuf was accused of stealing and went to prison.

But his Iman is never shaken.
He submitted entirely to Allah s.w.t.

Because he had such a strong and submissive father, Prophet Ya'qub who always made du'a: "Oh Allah, I complain my struggle and sadness only to You, because indeed, You know everything that we do not know."

So friends, submission means giving ourselves to Allah. Only through submission will we receive peace from Allah s.w.t.

There is a difference between the submission and acceptance. Submission comes before. Acceptance comes after.

When Allah commanded Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son, Prophet Ibrahim submitted without any question.

But when Allah commanded the Syaitan to prostrate to Prophet Adam, and he asked, "Why must I do that? I am better than Adam. You made me from fire, and him from earth sand." And because of that, Allah chase him away from Jannah. May Allah make us the people of submission. Amin!

The power of spiritual strength.

Prophet Yusuf loves Allah more than anything else. When he was in prison, he lived his life with true spiritual strength and found peace in it. He felt that prison was better than the world outside.

"He said, 'My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant.'" [12:33]

No matter what happens in our life, be it good or bad, find that spiritual strength in you. Find that strength through thinking of the Ummah.

When Prophet Yusuf was in the prison, he did help many others with their troubles and solved their problem.

So do that. Do something for the Ummah. Water a plant. Pick up a piece of litter. Do something.

Here, we will find strength in thinking of the Ummah, just like the Prophets.

The power of sorry.

Allah s.w.t gathered the brothers of Prophet Yusuf and his father at the castle of King Aziz.

That gathering, that union, that silaturrahim, cannot happen until there is sincere forgiveness.

Prophet Yusuf forgave all his brothers because this is true Islam.

It is called Fitrah, when we return goodness with goodness.

It is called revenge, when we return evil with evil.

But it is called Sunnah, when we return evil with goodness.

by Ustazah Su'aidah Salim

Lessons from Prophet Yusuf

From the Margins: Ruminations on Weaving

by Maliah Zubir

Weaving. Writing. Thinking. There is something to be said about the action itself; the thing in motion, the half-formed thought before a final product. As someone who writes and creates, I find myself more intrigued by people's creative processes. And what defines the creative process more than the moments when we're not creating? The moments before we begin a project? As something like notes in a margin, here are some quotes and thoughts I carry with me and recall whenever I feel the urge to make things.

Seeing with new eyes

Animator Hayao Miyazaki shares how he once tried to document the aftermath of the Depression on Japanese citizens but ended up with 'snapshots of life as usual.' "Just a typical, ordinary day, but I wanted to keep pictures of ordinary days," says Miyazaki. In the same vein, creating is the process of capturing beauty in the ordinary. You can capture the beauty of a second in a photo, a memory in words, the hue of the sunset with paint. They are all beautiful. We are all experiencing the same world, but I believe everyone can bring a different perspective to it and bring out the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Not everyone is talented and that's okay

In his memoir *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, Haruki Murakami argues that talent comes naturally. He doesn't count himself as one of the lucky ones, but he likens finding inspiration to searching for a water vein: "I have to pound the rock with a chisel and dig out a deep hole before I can locate the source of creativity... But as I've sustained this kind of life over many years, I've become quite efficient, both technically and physically, at opening a hole in the hard rock and locating a new water vein. So as soon as I notice one water source drying up, I can move on right away to another." What Murakami suggests is that creating isn't a magic act, but it requires diligence. And perhaps, diligence is a more sustainable attitude to have than relying on raw talent.

The best works are stolen

Austin Kleon offers another definition for creating; that it is an act of stealing. In his aptly named book *Steal Like an Artist*, Kleon posits that the way to create your most original work is to – paradoxically – steal from many people. Not one, because that's plagiarism, but many. He urges us to steal from our idols, our favourite movies and albums, the signboard we saw on the way home. To elaborate on my first bullet point,

I'd like to quote Jim Jarmusch: "Select things to steal from that speak directly to your soul. If you do this, your work (and theft) will be authentic." Humans are never capable of making perfect copies, so how we remix and reconfigure our influences is what makes our work original.

Read widely and read deeply

This may come as a surprise, but I realised that books play a big role in the process of creating. I realised it as a graphic design student when year after year, my lecturers referred us to the library to search for inspiration – our computer lab during our graduation year turned into a library itself, as we toiled away on our final year projects. I realised it while watching contestants on *Masterchef Australia* use their free time to study recipe books. And it showed in their performance. They read to improve their technique and culinary vocabulary, to learn the history and science behind classic dishes, and of course to gain inspiration for new dishes. Reading and learning can be a hard process, but it's a necessary step.

I feel like my thoughts on creating will never be set in stone, that maybe five years from now I may revise this list altogether. That is a process in itself.

Photo by Maliah Zubir

SHAIKHA SALMA

hundreds and thousands
of years
apart

be still, my heart
just like the night

when the revelation came
in the quiet cave of Hira
where our Beloved was residing
searching for the Truth

how can you deny
our hearts are woven together
when this was a man
who spent his days and nights praying for
you
with tears in his eyes
“Ummati, ummati”

a man who cares for you
so much more
than you care for
yourself

who wants to save you
in all the ways a person can be saved
so much more
than you want to save
yourself

tell me
has it ever occurred to you to pray for your
grandchildren,
your next few generations?
but here lies a prophet
who has been praying for you
constantly
despite having never met you
despite knowing he will never meet you
in this life

how can you deny
our hearts are woven together
when hearing Our Beloved’s words
bring peace and tranquility
to our hearts

you may not understand
but your soul knows the truth
as it comes from Allah as to how it will return
to Him
that there lies a Messenger of Allah
and his name is Muhammad (pbuh)
and he loves you more
than you could possibly imagine

the sun that we see
that is shining so bright
the moon that we see
in the stillness of the night

is the same moon that accompanied him
on his long nights
searching for the Truth
searching for what is right

he used to ponder and reflect
about the alternation of night and day
with the same signs He is giving us now
on this very day

see, nature has its way of letting us know
that everything is in due time
and one day we will have to let go
even the sun that doesn’t seem to age
after burning for millions of years
will come to its final page

but some things are eternal
and it’s the things you cannot see
just like Our Lord, All Forgiving
and the love our Beloved had,
for you and me

his love transcends through time and space
we were in his thoughts, his prayers, his
heart
despite the hundreds and thousands of years
apart

Oh Beloved
I can only long, and hope and pray
that I get to see your beautiful face
illuminating with light,
one day
for you to recognize me
as one who follows your deen
despite the thousands of years
in between

how beautiful are prayers
that it weaves our hearts to Him
and to the ones we love
in whichever world they are in
prayers are timeless

just like how Our Beloved prays for us
from thousands of years ago
and the way we pray for him
whom we hope to follow

in our prayers and in our hearts
we will always remember
so how can you deny
our hearts are woven together

PIECING THE PUZZLE

by Sitz

Ever tried following the baking instructions for a chocolate cake word for word, and it turned out looking like the aftermath of eating a Double McSpicy the night before? Or perhaps you attempted to fix an IKEA DIY, but it ended up looking like an experiment gone wrong?

Well, life is a lot like that. You can do everything right and still receive the short end of the stick. Or so it seems.

When I applied for law school, I did everything I needed to. I wrote multiple versions of my testimonial, had it checked over and over again, bugged teachers for recommendation letters, and chose schools that fit my grades. I was hopeful to say the least. But rejection came into my inbox like clockwork. With each one, I felt my dream of becoming a lawyer slip further through my fingers. For someone with a penchant for to-do lists and 5-year plans, distraught was an understatement. But I learnt something valuable from that episode.

When you put everything you have into chasing after what you want, rejection feels like being sneaked up from behind and falling face-flat onto the ground. All you can think is – where did I go wrong?

But while you’re recuperating from the side lines, you’ll realise that every runner is falling and getting up and falling and getting up again. It’s a funny thing to picture, really. We are all running a clumsy race, tripping and tumbling over. But when we’re the ones who fall, it hurts so badly that all we can think about is “Why me?” We forget that everyone else is scathed, too. Sometimes, we even forget to look at the bruises we’ve earned throughout the years. We’ve risen from so many falls that we once thought were the worst points of our life.

So what if Plan A fails?

There are 25 other alphabets, and thousands of other possibilities. Keep running and keep falling. My plan not-A eventually led me to NTU, and 4 years later, I’m a month shy of graduating from a course that I’ve grown to love. The best part? Two years after being rejected

from law school, I learnt that the overseas universities I had applied to had become unrecognised by the Ministry of Law. Essentially, if I had gone on to pursue a degree in those universities, I would have not been allowed to practise law here.

At that point, I could almost hear God telling me “See? I told you so.”

That’s another thing about rejection. It’s His occasional reminder that you don’t have to be so hard on yourself all the time; He is taking care of you. As humans, and especially as students, we are conditioned to want to obtain the right answers immediately, and we get frustrated when we don’t know them. But life is intricate and complicated, and so are the answers you seek. You may have to wait days, months, even years for your answer to present itself. But when it does, you’ll understand that it could not have come to you any sooner or later.

“
And at the end of the
day, you’ll be grateful
for this puzzle piece
because your life
picture would never be
complete without it.”

Ever tried solving one of those 1000-piece puzzles? After a while you get teary and cross-eyed, and for goodness sake, the puzzle piece you’re holding on to just doesn’t fit anywhere. So you take a breather for a day or two. When you look at the puzzle once more, something clicks, and the pieces find their right spaces.

Disappointment is a lot like that. When you’re tired and overwhelmed with emotions, nothing makes sense and you can’t think of how your current situation could possibly fit into your life plans. But once you take a step back and let time do its magic, you’ll realise that this puzzle piece you’re holding on to fits into a space you had never looked at before. And at the end of the day, you’ll be grateful for this puzzle piece because your life picture would never be complete without it.

Project Weave

In collaboration with
Hayyu Nariah

The fact that mental health issues are increasingly prevalent in our society today is an inconvenient truth that is left largely unmentioned. It doesn't help, either, that many of us hold deep-seated misconceptions as to what the realities of these sorts of conditions might be.

Enter Project Weave – a mental health ground-up initiative founded by Nanyang Technological University psychology graduate, Hayyu Nariah.

Officially founded in September 2016, Project Weave aims to motivate persons with mental health issues (PMHIs) to recovery, and bridge the social distance between them and members of the public.

Hayyu was inspired to create opportunities for youths to volunteer in the field of mental health when she was serving her internship at Club HEAL (Hope, Empowerment, Acceptance & Love), a member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) assisting PHMIs.

By recruiting high-energy youth volunteers, referred to as Weavers, Hayyu and her nine-person team, alongside a myriad of collaborators, were able to carry out their first camp and carnival, collaborate on a weekly programme with Club HEAL, as well as produce a film on mental health all within a span of two years.

Camp Yakin

Camp Yakin was a three-day overnight camp held at Aloha Loyang Chalet involving 30 PHMIs from Club HEAL. Project Weave's belief that providing physically and mentally stimulating camp activities would lead to long-term psychological and behavioural changes paid off. Alhamdulillah at least one-third of participants said they felt more confident in themselves after the camp.



Daun Dalam Daging

Daun Dalam Daging was a public showcase of a mental health film that Project Weave produced, in collaboration with Revolusi Productions. Members of the public were invited to the screening.

Family Circus

Family Circus was an activities-filled day involving 20 PHMIs from Club HEAL. In hopes of reducing social stigma and encouraging public education on mental health, volunteers were provided plenty of opportunities and how-tos in forging supportive and meaningful relationships with PHMIs.



VSOP (Very Special Outstanding Performance) is an ongoing weekly programme conducted at Club HEAL on Fridays. A new skill is introduced every few months and with different collaborators, such as *dikir barat* with Hafiz Azhar from NTU Nusa Sarjana, Zumba, boxing with Spartans Boxing Club, *silat* with NTU Silat team, photography, and Malay Dance.

Hayyu and her team have managed to weave together the communities of mental health and the mainstream collaboratively. Indeed, this is a special and important step. Only then can open dialogue and eventually recovery take place. By allowing PHMIs to share their authentic first-person narratives, Project Weave has allowed its volunteers to see beyond the statistics, and to recognise that behind every statistic is a real person with a story to tell.

VSOP

Call for volunteers!

Project Weave has a list of exciting new programmes in store for future executions, and are actively seeking new volunteers to jump onboard!

Volunteers will gain exposure and will be educated regarding mental health and the effective communication skills necessary when interacting with PMHIs.

Most importantly, volunteers will gain the comfort of knowing that we all share the same human struggles, with or without a mental health issue.

To learn more about this initiative, follow Project Weave on Instagram @projectweave or visit their website at projectweave.wixsite.com/pwyouth



Embracing mental health, towards an inclusive society

Photos courtesy of Project Weave





WEAVING OUR TRANSIENT LIVES TOGETHER

by 'Arif Tan

As I sit here in the city of Al-Barsha, Dubai, I am still struggling to let the news of the passing of my classmate's father. To think that we were just in school a few years ago got me thinking that we are still youth who do not experience what I call "adult stuff." Yet, the reality of life entertains no such delusions. While this is not the first of such news, it still feels surreal to hear that the parent of someone my age has passed on. Even as most of us are growing into adulthood, one still cannot imagine the pain until one actually experiences it.

In an era where Instagram posts take up a good chunk of our social lives, hearing such news puts things into perspective for me. The majority of Instagram posts (or at least those in my circle) tend to portray a narrative of 'good times': good news, nice places, delicious food, so much so that I wonder if this will desensitise us when we receive news of someone else's bad news. Do we make time to contemplate the difficulties of others?

I am not against good times nor the sharing of them. But a fair question to ask is this: how do we manifest them best?

Amid our experiences, can we weave others' experiences into ours? When we are faced with good news, and someone else suddenly receives bad news, can we put aside our joy while we share our condolences? Conversely, when we are experiencing sadness, do we shut ourselves out from rejoicing at other people's good news or at least praying for their happiness? These are questions that I always ask myself, and I hope I pass the test when it comes.

An observation I have made is that we tend to get tested in the things we believe in. An hour after the end of my wedding ceremony, my wife's close relative had passed away. He had been diagnosed with cancer and was predicted by doctor to pass on a few weeks earlier, but Allah had permitted for him to live till the day of the wedding. Weddings are a joyful occasion, and to come home after hours of gleeful socialising to hear of the passing of a family member is probably not the most common of experiences. But having cemented that no happiness should be treated as our sole right has helped me to adapt to unexpected circumstances better. That was indeed both a happy and sad day at the same time – woven together. To add to that, a few days after we had returned from our honeymoon, our good friend had passed on suddenly – another case of happiness and sadness woven together.

The main thing I tell myself is that it's important to give moderation to everything we experience. If we are happy about something, there must be a pinch of moderation to it. Similarly, when we experience sadness, it has to be met with moderation. Moderation does not mean we cannot express these feelings; to smile and rejoice is human, to cry is also human. But these emotions must be anchored on an awareness that Allah is the One who grants us happiness and sadness, just as He is the one who grants us life and death.

"He makes you laugh and He makes you cry." [53:43]

We might have just secured a prestigious scholarship, while a friend might be struggling to even enroll in a university. We might have just received a good job offer even before graduation, while our friend might have been struggling in the search for months after graduation. Conversely, we might have just lost someone dear, while our friend might have just gotten married. We might have just gotten the worst exam results in our history, while our friend just got nominated as a valedictorian. List all the contrasting experiences possible. The fact is that you might be in either one of the situations, while another person might be in the other. What is a good resolve, regardless, is that all of us – whichever end we're experiencing – take everything that comes to us as a test by Allah, and that we pray to be granted gratitude in ease and patience in difficulty.

To capture this message best, let's contemplate upon what the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "How wonderful is the case of a believer! There is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If good times come to him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him, and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently, and that is good for him." (Muslim)

To illustrate this further, a recent Friday sermon had shared a story about a companion from among the Ansar (people of Madinah) who hosted the Muhajirin (emigrants from Mecca) and served them food even when they had only enough for their children. The companion then asked his wife to put the children to sleep so that they may host the emigrants with the food. A verse then came down to illuminate this noble act: "And they (the Ansar) give (the emigrants) preference over themselves, even when they are in hardship." [59:9] Such was how Muslims from our early predecessors

wove others' needs into their lives, even if it meant that they had to put aside their own needs.

When we speak of gratitude in ease and patience in difficulty, it does not mean suppressing our emotions when they come, but it is that we are always calibrated and guided to know where and how we express those emotions in a manner befitting of a believer. When Prophet Ya'qub a.s., thought he had lost his beloved son Prophet Yusuf a.s., he was so aggrieved he wept until he lost his sight. Yet, in all that sadness, he remained close to Allah. In Surah Yusuf verse 86, "(Prophet Ya'qub a.s.) said, 'I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah.'" Such was his relationship with God that we seek to emulate.

In sum, no emotions that we experience are eternal. For that, we always keep ourselves in check as we look over our shoulder to see how other people around us are doing. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) describes believers as one body: when a part of it feels pain, the rest of it suffers too. Drawing from this analogy, shouldn't we, who claim to be believers, weave our experiences together so that we share each other's happiness and pain? Ultimately, happiness brings believers closer to God – through gratitude – just as sadness brings us closer to God – through patience.

**“
To smile and
rejoice is human,
to cry is also
human. But these
emotions must be
anchored on an
awareness that
Allah is the One
who grants us
happiness and
sadness.**

BEAUTY IN ALL THINGS

ELEVEN Magazine had the privilege of being able to interact with Rafaat Hamzah, a man of great talent and passion for his work; one who has established himself in many areas in the arts. The storyteller told us of his adventures, and how he became interested in the arts in the first place.

by Siti Ayeeshah Zaki

What began as everyday activities – listening to music and the radio, and watching television dramas and movies – slowly turned into a passion for storytelling, as Mr Rafaat Hamzah realised his ability to memorise lyrics and his growing interest in wordplay. He shares: “I found some songs are lyrically brilliant. How the songwriter managed to get their stories across within a couple of verses. Eventually, I looked into poetry songs, the likes of Ebiat G. Ade (from Indonesia) and Kembara (from Singapore). I started writing my own poems and short verses, telling my own stories.”

Through encouragement from his peers and teachers, Mr Rafaat grew fond of the written word and sought other areas to expand his means of tale-telling. “I want to be a storyteller, and in order for me to be a good one, I have to start watching movies and dramas, listen to more songs, read more books. So I spent most of my time doing that,” he explains.

It was only after he began to get involved in theatre, however, that he decided

to become an artist. After completing his National Service, with little to no experience in drawing or painting, Mr Rafaat enrolled into LASALLE College of the Arts. However, his thirst for knowledge in the process of art making and “what makes art, art” was decidedly enough for him to enter. Balancing both school and theatre, he tells us, “I believe that I need to know everything in order for me to tell my story. From then on, I have never stopped doing things. I direct, write, act, design sets, lights and sound, technical manage, write poetry, dance, play music, and paint. Seems like I do everything, but that is only because I have one special interest: telling stories.”

Unfortunately, things were not always so smooth sailing. Mr Rafaat experienced struggles ranging from failed businesses, a failed marriage, drug abuse, and rehabilitation. It was these struggles that inspired him to devote his efforts towards establishing himself in the arts scene. An artist, says Mr Rafaat, needs problems to work. “It becomes a catharsis. Trying to overcome all kinds of struggles makes me think more into

the problem itself. It makes me look even farther into life and humanity. Problems exist in all kinds of struggles, and it is amazing how these struggles converted into creative works.”

As he goes on to say, struggling goes a long way towards establishing an artist. It was also through this adversity that he learnt. He remarks: “The only way I took all those struggles is to see the learning points. Changes are inevitable, so I took everything as a turning point to relook, relearn, and restart.”

When asked about whether his identity as a Muslim manifests in his work, he says, “I can’t do it in any other way. It manifests in my work subconsciously. Though I don’t really deal with religious issues all the time, there will always be part of my Muslim and Malay self in all my works.”

In fact, the principles and pillars of Islam and Iman have played a major part in his journey as an artist. “I believe, especially in Qada’ and Qadar. I believe in fitrah... It becomes an amanah to an extent, that I feel that it is a sin for me not to produce. With that, I believe that all I need to do is keep working and producing works that will benefit not only the Muslims, but human beings.”

Mr Rafaat believes that the arts is a way for Muslims to be more resilient in overcoming social problems in improving their quality of life. He quotes a hadith narrated by Imam Muslim: “The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: ‘Verily Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty.’”

And isn’t art all about beauty, Mr Rafaat expresses. “All we need to do is appreciate beauty, as all beautiful things come from Allah. Appreciating beauty

is appreciating Allah’s creation. We can choose to see challenges as beauty, and problems as beautiful ways to use our brains. If we see beauty in everything, that will improve our quality of life. ‘Then which of your Lord’s blessings would you both deny?’ [55:13] Art is a blessing.”

Mr Rafaat imparts some final words of wisdom for anybody struggling through adversity: “I am not a cleric but all I can say is have faith. God knows best for every one of us, though He may seem to amuse us with a lot of things unknown to all of us. He means well. Trust God, you don’t have to trust me.”

“All I can say is have faith. God knows best for every one of us (...) He means well. Trust God, you don’t have to trust me.”



RAMADAN: A COMMON THREAD

Ramadan is celebrated annually by Muslims across the world. Naturally, we are all tied together by common practices and common beliefs, but each individual's experience may be vastly different. ELEVEN has been fortunate to hear from our brothers and sisters in Islam across the world as they share with us how they express and celebrate this blessed month in their own unique ways.

ADEEL KHAWAJA, 23
BUSINESS STUDENT IN
TORONTO, CANADA

Ramadan is beautiful in Canada. There is a large Muslim community, especially in Toronto. It is a time where the most delicious food is made, from *pakor*as, to biryani, to fruit *chaat*, which are made on a daily basis.

There is a lot of tolerance and diversity in Toronto which makes it beautiful when people from all nationalities and countries come together to break their fast in the masjid. It helps show that your skin colour, or where you were born doesn't matter, but it's the deeds you do, your intentions, and your effort.

Fortunately for Canada, the weather is not as hot as Singapore. But sometimes it is a challenge to get out of your cozy bed when the weather drops to -20 degrees!

The roar of the Azan breaking the silence of Fajr is one of the many things I love about Ramadan in Egypt.

Ramadan days in Egypt are roughly 3 hours longer than in Singapore – just below 16 hours. Ramadan also coincides with summer, so dehydration happens very quickly.

Tents pop up during the fasting month that sell dates and pastries. Carts that offer a wide range of fresh juices and also people selling the fanous, the decorative lanterns crafted specifically for the holy month, are extremely common.

When you start seeing them, it means Ramadan is here. And every morning, people walk the streets and wake people up for Sahur by beating drums and crying "Is-ha ya Naa-im," which roughly means "Those who are sleeping, perform your Sahur."

We don't celebrate Ramadan openly in Russia. If we don't go to the mosque for iftar and tarawih, we won't even notice it's Ramadan. It's just another normal hot and hungry day. So in order to 'have our iman in check,' we visit the mosque, mix around with the local Muslims, and keep abreast of Islamic events.

A highlight would be the Russian and Uzbek cuisines for iftar at mosques, or at a friendly neighbour's house. At the mosque, we would break our fast with tamr, strawberries, or cherries. Then we'd pray Maghrib first before moving to the tent built on the car park for iftar jam'ie. The usual dishes served were *beef plov*, *samsa*, lots of vegetables, and bread. And if you're lucky, you get to bring the leftovers home!

MARIAH ZAINI, 23
MEDICAL STUDENT IN
MOSCOW, RUSSIA

SURAT ESHKUVATOV, 44
TOUR LEADER IN
TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN

MUHAMMAD HAFIZ A. RAHIM, 26
BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE STUDENT IN
SUWON, SOUTH KOREA

ADBULLAH AHMAD, 24
ISLAMIC THEOLOGY STUDENT IN
CAIRO, EGYPT

Ramadan in Uzbekistan is always special, alhamdulillah. I always appreciate the beauty of the community, especially when we all come together for tarawih. Plus, every family does their best to host iftar as often as we can. In the villages, 3-4 families will host iftar each night. These families also host tarawih prayers on those nights.

I also really enjoy *nisholda* – egg whites and sugar mixed together. We serve it for iftar to help us recover strength from a long day of fasting.

Ramadan in Suwon, Korea was slightly different from Singapore, as days begin way earlier. Fajr is at about 3.30am, which means I had to eat my sahur at around 2 in the morning.

Back in Singapore, when I wake up for sahur, food is readily prepared on the table. However, in Korea, I had to cook my dinner as well as my predawn meals all by myself, which I was not used to. Plus, as a university exchange student there, final examinations were around the corner.

These challenges, though, strengthened my Iman. Though I was away from my family, there were Muslim brothers from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Malaysia that made me feel at home. They invited me to break fast together and to join them in *jemaah* prayers for tarawih. Alhamdulillah, this is one of my experiences during my exchange that I will never forget.



Photo by Asyikin Yusoff

In Conversation with Aqilah and Sarah

ELEVEN Magazine sat with two up-and-coming creatives, Aqilah Zailan of Gypsied (right) and Sarah Bagharib of Crazycat (left), to talk about self-discovery, the role of women, and dispelling the myths of success.

by Maliah Zubir

Gypsied is a brand which champions Asian textiles, boasting a selection of batik products ranging from cushion covers to apparel. However, Aqilah reveals that Gypsied was a totally different brand when it started in 2011. What started as a new hobby in university evolved into a creative endeavour, as Aqilah began sewing headbands and selling them on Etsy.

“It was called The Turban Shop,” Aqilah laughs at the uninventive name, “but somehow it picked up and it was selling!” It was this creative outlet which allowed Aqilah to navigate through a transitional stage of her life; graduating from university and finding a career path. “I think, for me, I tried way too many things in my lifetime, in terms of career or finding something that I want to do. So I started out doing more,” says Aqilah as she reflects on her experiences working at a law firm, to pursuing a degree in business, and juggling The Turban Shop.

While looking for a job, Aqilah met her husband who convinced her to think of The Turban Shop as a brand. “So that’s how Gypsied eventually became what it is today. There was still no direction whatsoever at that time! I was just buying textiles. It was just really exploring my creative side – how to brand, how to find new customers, how to build a website.”

While Aqilah did pursue Gypsied as a full-time venture for a while, she learned the struggles of building a sustainable business, such as finding investors and connections. Hence, to this day, Aqilah continues to balance a day job with Gypsied, which she terms as her “passion project.”

However, she is not discouraged. “In the beginning I was like, ‘Why do I have to do this? Why do I have to do both? Why can’t I just do one?’ In the end it was a choice that I made so I had to bear with it. I just did both.”

On the other hand, Sarah, fresh from Crazycat’s recent event “Letting Your Light Shine with Noor Tagouri,” wants to reach that level of acceptance. “I feel like I need to pick one but I don’t know how to,” Sarah shares. While Aqilah’s venture is a creative outlet, Sarah states that Crazycat is more of her “being itchy and not being able to sit still.”

Sarah kick-started her career with an internship at Channel News Asia, starting as a researcher before eventually producing and directing as well. “I loved my job and I loved that I was sharing stories that needed to be told about less fortunate communities and the voiceless. I felt in a way that I was doing my part in lending my voice, or using my voice however that I could in my job,” says Sarah, “But at the same time, I felt that I was really struggling.”

She opens up to us about her health struggles, while chasing deadlines and fulfilling her personal obligations. Pushing ourselves beyond our capacity is a struggle we all know too well, as Aqilah observes: “At some point, you just cannot trick your mind. Your body just gives way.”

For Sarah, it was a difficult fact to accept. “I was really doing what I loved. It was also the whole part of, ‘Who am I if not a documentary producer?’ It became a huge part of my identity as well, and letting that go took a lot from me. There was a goal I wanted to achieve and I hadn’t realised that goal. I was really hard on myself for a while.”

Like Gypsied, Sarah never had a solid idea for Crazycat when she started it – and it all started with the hashtag #shineonyoucrazycat. “I always used it as a collective, so whenever I use it to feature inspiring women, I would use that hashtag. And I thought, ‘Maybe someday I’ll do something more with this,’ but I just never knew what and I didn’t have time. When I started my new job, I started to think more about #shineonyoucrazycat, and what else I could do with it. Falling back on media, which I studied, I applied what I’ve learnt to start something new. So Crazycat came about.”

What you don’t realise is that your story could impact or could inspire someone else, and that’s why you should use your voice. ”

Self-discovery is a consistent theme throughout our conversation, a notion that would resonate with our tertiary readers who are at the crossroads of adulthood. However, Sarah and Aqilah stress that it is always the process that matters.

Aqilah shares, “I feel that so many parts in life are already so planned! You plan to buy a house, you plan when to get married, plan when to get kids. With Gypsied, I don’t have that kind of plan or pressure to plan and be something. I’m just slowly forming, thinking. It’s a softer approach to life.”

Sarah relates to the pressure of expectations: “I am going through this journey as a woman, and I feel like as I’m going through this journey, I’m sure many other women are also going through their own journeys. Instead of doing it myself, why not share my journey with other women who are also on their own journey?”

It is this solidarity of female experience that drives both Sarah and Aqilah’s ventures, and something they witness in their encounters. Through Gypsied, Aqilah travels to Ubud and parts of Java to meet with the women behind Gypsied’s batik prints. “Some of the women that I’ve seen making tenun (handwoven) textiles can be carrying their babies and doing tenun at the same time. Who else is going to carry that baby, nurse that baby? She still has to take care of that baby. She’s making textiles because she wants to earn money but she still has other aspects to look after. Sometimes it can be very heavy for a woman, but for me to see other women in parts of the world struggling the same as women anywhere else, I feel like there’s a silent support.

It’s really inspiring to me. If they can do it, if I’m from a first world country, it means that I can do even more. That’s just something I always keep in mind.”

This brings us to another recurring thread in our conversation: our individual agency, or as Sarah puts it, “using your voice.” Through their respective ventures, Aqilah and Sarah demonstrate their belief that everyone has the ability to affect change.

So why don’t we believe so? Sarah offers an answer: “It’s this idea of the role model cycle, and how I have a role model and my role model has a role model, who has a role model. The fact that we feel that our success is so small, we tend to belittle our own successes and think it’s nothing compared to my role models. But what you don’t realise is that your story could impact or could inspire someone else, and that’s why you should use your voice. You can think that what you’re achieving is not really an achievement but someone else sees it differently.”

Imparting some final words of advice, Sarah and Aqilah reiterate the importance of being kind to yourself; doubt and fear is inevitable, but we have to overcome the psychological struggle. Aqilah shares with us a book of female profiles in Singapore, which includes profiles on Madam President Halimah Yacob, and Worker’s Party chairperson Sylvia Lim. “One thing Sylvia Lim said that really resonated with me is that you have to give yourself time. Secondly, whatever you think that you have to do, for her, she just does it and thinks about the fear later,” says Aqilah, “so feel the fear but do it anyway.”



MEDIA GLOBALISATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON SINGAPOREANS: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

BY N KHAIRIYAH S

Media has developed and evolved throughout the years. New media are forms of mass communication that use highly interactive digital technologies, relying on them for distribution: websites, mobile phone applications, computer animations, virtual worlds, computer games, human-computer interface, and many others. According to Robert Logan, author of *Understanding New Media*, new media is very easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved, hyper-linked and perhaps, most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed.

With the evolvement of media, we cannot deny that there are effects on every individual. Society has become more technologically savvy, and news spreads faster than ever as compared to the days of traditional media. Pictures and videos can be found floating around on the internet in just a matter of seconds of being uploaded onto the world-wide-web; smartphones are now able to link people in opposite time zones of the world in real time. This is the reality we are faced with today; this is the new era of media globalisation – everyone across the world is linked in one way or another and we are weaved into one another's lives, with or without our consent or realisation. An action triggers another and a consequence of an action is never really entirely caused by a single event. Common experiences are created and shared by many worldwide. As humans blessed with intellectual capacity, and first and

foremost being Muslims who are enjoined to constantly engage in *tafakkur*, we ought to analyse the roles of media globalisation and the impacts on our lives.

Bringing convenience vs. encouraging instant gratification

With media globalisation, Singaporeans are more connected to friends, families and loved ones locally and worldwide. We no longer need to write letters and wait for weeks for a reply. People can remain in touch and remain up-to-date with one another's lives through many avenues like electronic mails, video-conferencing on mobile phones, mobile applications like WhatsApp, WeChat, and Line, and social networking platforms like Facebook and Instagram. People are able to cross boundaries to get to know others, or keep in touch with others, regardless of space and time.

Additionally, media globalisation has brought about much convenience in the realm of online retail industry and in the enjoyment of services. Customers from all over the world can now engage in online shopping not just locally, but across the globe. Products that were once out of reach for purchase or difficult to purchase due to them being sold overseas are now possible to be bought by direct online purchase, or through the help of shipping companies that do forwarding services which facilitate customers from countries that the products are originally not shipped to. Besides that, we cannot deny that with media globalisation, online booking of flight tickets and other services are also possible, doing away with the need of instances of physical presence.

However, despite the convenience we enjoy, we must also question as to whether it has inadvertently encouraged the undesirable trait of instant gratification in people. Instant gratification is a trait that is disturbingly becoming increasingly prevalent in society – people want and even demand satisfaction immediately and lack the patience to wait. For example, if a customer is served slightly late, the customer might get very upset; some may go to the extent of scolding the customer service officer, or even uploading pictures and ugly comments online, publicly shaming others without batting an eyelid. Another example is the degree at which people spend their money; some spend their money and chase material goods for instant temporary satisfaction, as doing as such makes them feel good. This is an especially detrimental habit as people often do not consider the ramifications of their actions – getting into debt, and the effect of their actions on their actual quality of life. People may not think much, equating purchasing material goods to part of pursuing happiness. Some may not even consider other pressing needs in their lives that need attention and are disillusioned by the so-called happiness that material goods bring. Did the Quran enjoin us in thoughtless spending, or pursuing material goods over essential and spiritual needs?

Furthermore, we might have caused ourselves and others unhappiness by our use of technology. The messages we send to others and the pictures we upload on Instagram and Facebook – have we followed the guidelines in Islam? Without realising it sometimes, our messages and uploaded pictures may have sparked jealousy, caused

sadness, sown discord amongst couples, and even broken up marriages and families. A picture speaks a thousand words, but a picture may also be misconstrued in a thousand ways. Although media globalisation has greatly blessed us with much convenience, we must also be wary of the undesirable effects that it brings about. Are we truly improving connectivity, or are we becoming more disconnected with those around us, and our surroundings? Will we be blinded by instant gratification and let ourselves be distracted from our long-term success?

Increase in knowledge and understanding of cultures across the world vs. increase in probability of exposure to undesirable contents that lead to moral degradation

We are also now able to gain knowledge and even adopt other cultures from all over world and their practices. For example, we can now see that amongst the youths especially, there is a preference for Korean, Japanese and Taiwanese pop culture. This is evident through the songs that they listen to, the dramas and movies that they watch, the style of clothes and accessories that they adorn, and the artistes whom they keep tabs on. This spread of cultural knowledge has also spurred many to take up learning a third language to facilitate their understanding of the cultures they adore. As Muslims, we are highly encouraged to seek beneficial knowledge and thus learning different languages is a plus point that is a result of media globalisation. However, is all that influence from other cultures actually good, especially for us Muslims?

While exposure to the various cultures around the world can be a good thing – we gain more knowledge about fellow human beings living on other continents of the earth – we must not forget that globalisation of varying cultures can be detrimental. One may get separated from one's own culture as a result of being too influenced by the current cultures that are considered to be in the trend at that period of time. Worse still, Muslims might violate Islamic principles in the pursuit of our interests in this aspect.

Have we considered thoroughly if adopting a certain practice or a style of dressing from a culture goes

against any principles in Islam? Are we brave enough to engage in self-introspection and analyse if our choices are aligned with Islamic principles? Another example could be the trend of planking – once very popular among youths, Muslims and non-Muslims alike – a careless experimentation that puts oneself unnecessarily at risk of injury or even death. In fact, planking has resulted in deaths before. Such trends are considered cool and gained popularity worldwide, but as Muslims, are we doing justice to ourselves and our faith?

Before we engage in something, we must always implore ourselves as to whether exposure to various contents and adopting behaviours and trends such as the above-mentioned violate our *Maqaasid Al-Shari'ah* where preservation of life and dignity is one of the basic principles that a Muslim is bound by. Are we adopting good things from other cultures or are we simply victims of blind imitation?

With time and the resulting evolvement of media to meet changing needs of people, it becomes seemingly difficult to conclude with certainty as to whether the effects of media globalisation among Singaporeans, particularly on the Muslims, are largely positive or negative. It would be naïve to completely negate its benefits. Thus, perhaps we ought to engage more in self-introspection and reflection – *tafakkur*; our actions affect more than ourselves more often than we realise – we are weaved into one another's lives directly or indirectly. Additionally, it might also be best for each Muslim to take ownership of our own actions and ensure we equip ourselves with the fundamentals knowledge of Shari'ah and Islamic principles that should govern our way of thinking and lives – something that will definitely help to keep ourselves in check, no matter what we wish to engage ourselves in.

“BEFORE WE ENGAGE IN SOMETHING, WE MUST ALWAYS IMPLOR OURSELVES AS TO WHETHER (...) TRENDS VIOLATE OUR MAQAASID AL-SHARI'AH, WHERE PRESERVATION OF LIFE AND DIGNITY IS ONE OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES THAT A MUSLIM IS BOUND BY.”

5 Reminders For A Rainy Day

by Nashrah Alwi

There are some days when the rain seems to never end, and the sky is a permanent shade of grey; days when lightning seems to brighten the sky for a minute, a second, but by the next, the thunder sounds and you're left alone again, enveloped in darkness, surrounded by the echo of the past. Other days, the sky is clear and the sun shines bright but the storm inside you still doesn't let up; when you want to be happy, and the world seems to want you to be happy, yet, the smile on your face just can't seem to reach your eyes. On those days, there are a few things you need to remember.

1. I am enough.

You are enough. As cheesy as it sounds, it's true. We are put on this world for an insignificant amount of time. It is up to you to make it significant, make it count. Fretting about your flaws (or what you think are flaws), surrounding yourself with people who don't see beauty in the way that you are, just as you are, is not how you go about doing that. Improve yourself, yes, try and be a better person, definitely, but remember that God made you perfect. There's no point mulling over things you can't change, or people who think that you need to.

2. Everything happens for a reason.

Things hardly ever turn out how we want them to, and we cry, and we regret and we get angry. And that's alright. But eventually, we must accept that He has planned it to perfection, and He knows what is best for you. We will know soon enough why and then, we will understand. Till then, *sabr*.

3. Love.

Love those around you. Love God, love His Prophets, His Books, the people around you, the world you live in. Love is something He has blessed us with and it isn't a limited commodity. You have an endless supply – make the best of it. Show it in your smiles, your actions, in your silent prayers. And don't be afraid to love with your whole heart, regardless of how much love you might receive, because know that above all, you have His love, and that alone is enough, and then some.

4. Breathe.

You often overlook this in the pursuit of your dreams, your ambitions, but it is key in ensuring your motor keeps running for a long time coming. Even when you feel like everything is crumbling around you, just take a step back, and take a deep breath. You will get through this. You've gotten this far already – and with a 100% success rate in overcoming everything that's been thrown your way. I can't tell you it gets easier, but I can surely tell you that you'll get tougher. So just breathe. You got this.

5. There is always something to be thankful for.

If you look hard enough, you'll find His blessings. Always.

Temanku II¹

Muhammad Johari

Temanku
Dikau sudah bersedia
Beristirehat di alammu
Pelitamu sudah bersinar
Pelayaranmu sudah berakhir
Bertemankan suluhan para kekasih Penciptamu

Temanku
Minyakmu sudah penuh
Nur di hatimu akan mengarah
Bekalanmu sudah cukup
Hasil saham duniamu seikhlasnya
Bertapaklah dikau di alammu

Temanku
Berbulan kita gigih berusaha
Titikan peluh dan bersengkang mata
Mencari keredhaan tuhan
Berhijrah ke nusantara dan tanah haram
Rupanya Khaliqmu menunggu
Penghijrahan sebenar kembali kepadanya

Temanku
Dikau sahabat sejati
Hidayah yang selama ini terbentang
Di mata kasar kami
Dengan ilmu, dikau beramal
Penuh dengan kemurnian hati

Temanku
Pabila kelak
Dikau tidak melihat kami
bersamamu dan Habibullah
Menghayati keindahan taman-taman syurga
Jangan dikau tidak memanggil kami
bersaksikan Ar-Rahman
Seperti telah kita berjanji di baitullah
Temanku
Wahai sahabat yang dikenang
Pertalian ini tidak terputus
Biar pun alam kita berbeza
Semoga kami bermanfaat untukmu
Hikmah disebalik ukhuwwah fillah

Temanku
Salam sejahtera dari kami
Diiringi pujian Illahi dan selawat ke atas Rasulullah
Pemergianmu tersentak hati
Tetap kami redha seredha-redhanya
Sesungguhnya, dari Allah kita datang, kepada Allah kita kembali

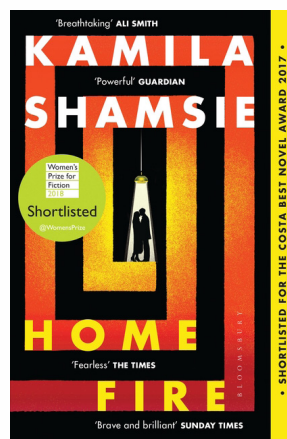
Semoga kita bertemu lagi kelak nanti, duhai temanku dan sahabatku,
Husaini Bin Md Rahim.
AlFatihah

¹This poem is written in memory of our brother Husaini bin Md Rahim. The English translation can be found on our online platform, Columns by ELEVEN.

Photo by Amirah Zubir

ELEVEN'S BOOKSHELF

Special thanks to Bloomsbury and Wardah Books for providing us with copies to review! For full, spoiler-filled reviews of these books and more, visit our online platform Columns by ELEVEN!



HOME FIRE

by Kamila Shamsie

Longlisted for this year's Man Booker prize, Home Fire follows the life of a Pakistani woman named Isma, who leaves her sisters in London to pursue her deferred dream to study Sociology at Amherst College in America.

However, she soon gets entangled into problems, as she meets a man who is a haunting reminder of her past whilst being torn apart by her betrayal of her family for informing the authorities about her brother's involvement with ISIS. Its epigram, "The ones we love ... are enemies of the state," is translated from Sophocles's classic play, Antigone, and reflects Isma's painful struggle to choose between her love for brother and her allegiance to her country. Written against the backdrop of terrorism and Islamophobia in the West, this novel unveils the nuanced complexities of an often black-and-white portrayal of terrorists and Muslims. It confronts the grappling dilemma of staying true to one's identity, of love and loyalty for the family, whilst facing bigotry from the the place you call home.

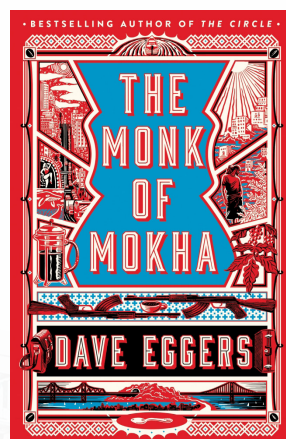
– NATASHA KASIM

THE MONK OF MOKHA

by Dave Eggers

The Monk of Mokha is Eggers' retelling of the true story of a young man of Yemeni descent growing up in the United States of America. Mokhtar Alkhanshali leads a quiet life as an unassuming doorman at a hotel, until he discovers the beauty of Yemeni coffee. Alkhanshali dedicates his efforts and energies to travelling to his homeland to learn more, rubbing shoulders with individuals from all walks of life, as he embarks on a quest to introduce Yemeni coffee to the world. Naturally, nothing ever works out perfectly as planned. Disaster strikes as Yemen is plunged into war, and Alkhanshali finds himself in the midst of a desperate struggle to make good on his promises and dreams. The Monk of Mokha charts the journey of this remarkable man, all while giving the reader a fascinating insight into the production of coffee, and more importantly, a fascinating insight into Yemen itself.

– MOHD AASHIQ ANSHAD

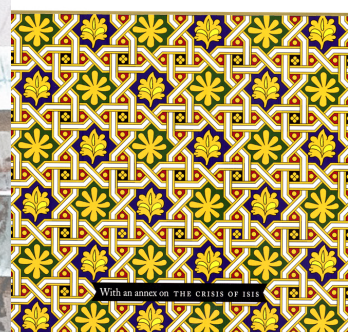


A THINKING PERSON'S GUIDE TO ISLAM

by H.R.H Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad

A Thinking Person's GUIDE to ISLAM

The Essence of Islam in 12 Verses from the Qur'an
H.R.H. PRINCE GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD
Foreword by H.M. King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein



What is the consequence of a bad definition? One might regard it as insignificant and ineffectual, but in reality, definition is all that matters, especially if it concerns Islam. Even a small misunderstanding can lead to adverse consequences as we have seen in the world today. This book calls upon us to correct our misunderstandings and inaccurate definitions of the concepts, terms, and questions surrounding Islam, for anyone who is able to think – therefore the title. It is an authoritative voice clearing our doubts in the ocean of false representations of Islam by ideologues, demagogues, and ignorance. The author, embodying deep knowledge of both Western and Islamic traditions, pens down with clarity, the correct meanings to terms such as jihad and government, together with answers to the metaphysical questions of Islam regarding religion, Islam, God, purpose of creation, Heaven and Hell, the Holy Quran, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). If you would like to know more about true love, your heart, this worldly life and happiness, if you want to know what exactly constitutes a 'true Muslim,' this book has the answers and really good definitions so that you know and can experience the true beauty of Islam as it is.

– HUSAIN BIN ABDOUL RAHIM

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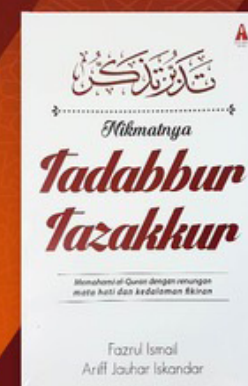
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