

equating our faith

e1even

magazine



President's and Eleven's Note

Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Alhamdulillah, all Praises be to Allah, from only whom we receive blessings and grace, and to whom we shall return. May blessings and salutations be upon our Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., his family, companions, and those who followed thereafter. 9 years have passed since ELEVEN MAGAZINE was first published and Alhamdulillah, we are grateful to be given yet another opportunity to publish its 9th issue.

ELEVEN MAGAZINE has continued to serve as a platform for the Muslim community to share perspectives, ideas, thoughts, and expressions, all underlain with the beautiful message of Islam. Year after year, the committee, writers, and contributors have collaborated to produce a magazine which caters to the tastes of the whole Muslim community. With the collective effort of skilled and creative individuals, the variety of writing genres used for the content keeps reading ELEVEN MAGAZINE engaging and vibrant.

Before I end my note, I would like to express my thanks and well-wishes to the ELEVEN team. May all your efforts in making this publication successful be counted towards your good deeds in this life and the other. May we continue to live in His acceptance and blessings.

Ameen.

Muhammad Harith Bin Hamzah
President
30th NTU Muslim Society Executive Committee

Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.

Producing this magazine, each of us definitely felt the theme of this edition - Dawn - resonate with us on some level. Dawn is a time of reflection, of hope and of change. For some of us, this experience was beautifully fresh. We learned plenty about ourselves; this could be the start of something new.

For others, working on the magazine has been an exercise in spirituality, introspection and reflection. In rubbing shoulders with so many fascinating individuals, and in being on the front lines where content is generated for such a publication, we found in these few months a hijrah of sorts, by the end of which we had gotten closer to our own souls and to our own sense of faith than ever before. At times, this has undoubtedly been tiring, yet here we are at the launch event, and you hold in your hands the fruit of our labour. We have marched through the night, and dawn has indeed arrived. We pour our hopes and prayers into you, dear reader, and into the belief that you, too, will find this humble publication as illuminating as we found it's production. The break of day is gradual - the sun first appears as the faintest sliver of light over the horizon, visible only to those who look for it. As time goes by, though, the light is visible to more and more people until, eventually, half the earth is illuminated. Our magazine similarly mimics the dawn.

First, you will find articles of a personal nature. These are the thoughts and feelings of our various contributors distilled into the far-reaching medium: words. We pray that these will be the sliver of light over your horizon, the first rays of the sun that herald the beginning of a new day.

You will next encounter pieces which reach out to more people, pieces which chart the good that our brothers and sisters in Islam and in humanity are doing on a daily basis - the light that they spread reaches further and further. Finally, you will come across content which inspires and excites us to join hands and pay it forward - only with this unity of purpose and clarity of thought can we hope to light up the world in the way that is our duty.

Truly it has been an honour and privilege to put all this together. Insha Allah this Dawn will be poignant, meaningful and transformative.

See you in the morning!

9th Eleven Team (2017)

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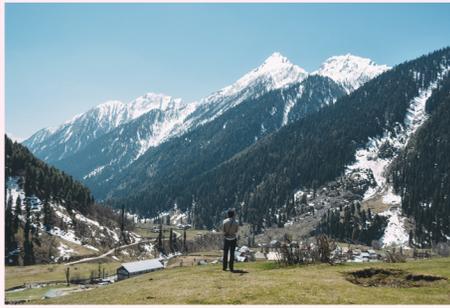
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“Faithful believers are to each other as the bricks of a wall, supporting and reinforcing each other. So saying, the Prophet Muhammad clasped his hands by interlocking his fingers.”

(AL-BUKHARI)

CONTENT PAGE



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DIVINE

05 *Before Dawn*
Husain BAR

06 *Layla*
Aqilah Minhaj

08 *Keeping Up With
the Khushoo'*
Hijanah Jailani &
Iqbal Firdaus

10 *The Success
Formula*
Interview: Shafie Shamsuddin

FAMILY & LOVE

13 *Ode to my
Mother*
H.S.M.

14 *Barbershop*
Faiqah Rizliana

18 *Stigma*
Nadiyah Isa

STRUGGLE

21 *Hues of Faith*
Ikhmah Roslie

22 *The Moths of
Dawn*
Noraine Kuswadi

27 *Essential
Start-Up Tips*
Tengku Nazihah &
Noor Jannah

30 *Project Nomad*
Interview: Haziq Rashid

TRAVEL

32 *Kismet*
Noor Iskandar

36 *Project 'O'*
Interview: Suhailah Mazlan

38 *Reasons to
Travel*
Have Halal Will Travel

COMMUNITY

40 *7 Inspiring
Personalities*
Remy Mahzam

45 *10 Cafes You
Must Visit*
Have Halal Will Travel

48 *Tearing
Down Walls*
Shabira Basheer

ART

50 *The Lost Art
of Jawi*
Hadra W.

52 *Conversations
With God*
Interview: Noor Iskandar

54 *The Hero: You*
Interview: Baraka Blue

HOPE & BLESSINGS

56 *The Sun Will
Rise Again*
Shaikha Salma

58 *There Is
Always*
Suhailah Mazlan

BEFORE dawn

/ By Husain BAR

Before Dawn, tears fell like rain
There is nothing else to gain
Except the only True One
As all the Lovers¹ had done

Yearning to be of the Right²
Hearts are shattered³ in the night
Except the Majestic Name – Allahu Allah
Nothing else came⁴

They dived into the ocean deep⁵
When everyone else was asleep
Standing up in prayer reciting
With hands raised up pleading

O Beloved of the Beloved!
O King of Kings!
This Self is in need of You
There is no one else to turn to

It can't bear this pain
Ooh the blood⁶ and tears again...
On their cheeks rivers flow
Light, Mercy and Heaven's Glow

Separated from the Real⁷
The pain of the world they feel
Suffering and destruction and sin
What a sad state the Muslims are in!

O Lord, there is nothing else to do
Except to return back to You
In repentance and regret
Forgiveness for those who forget⁸

They are our Saints and Scholars
The Truthful and the Pious
Their hearts are alive remembering
Following the path of our Master Muhammad, peace be upon him

Lā ilāha illa anta
There is no God but You – Allah!
If our love was ever true
Following their way is what we must do

To reach You

1 Lovers of God, Muhibbin. Those who aspire to achieve the love of God

2 People of the Right as explained in Surah Waqiah refers to people who are saved and enter Paradise as they will receive their book of deeds from the right.

3 Alluding to the Hadith Qudsi, which God says 'I am with those whose hearts are broken for my sake'. Therefore, they cry to Allah for their shortcomings in being a servant to Him through following His commandments and staying away from His Prohibitions.

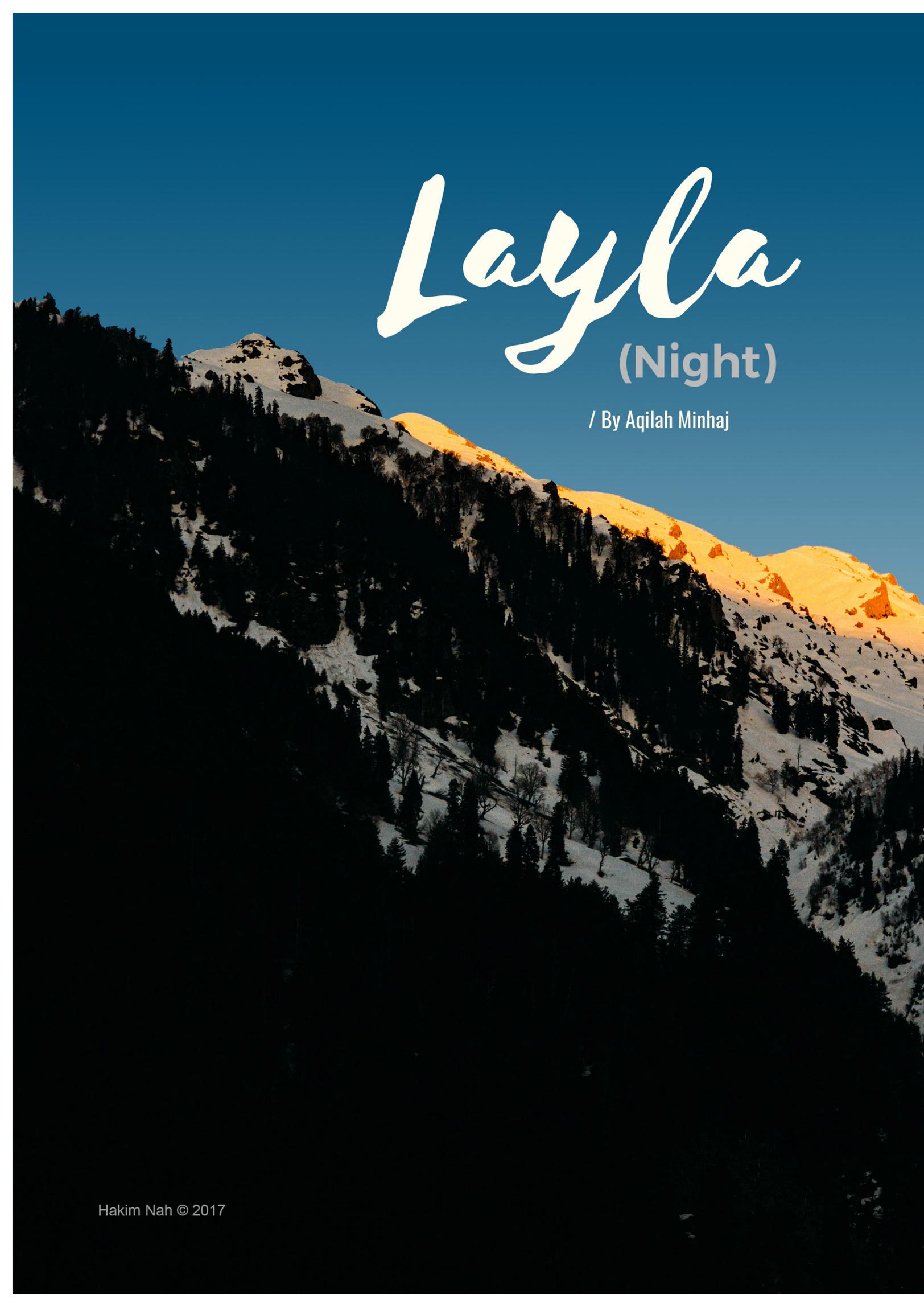
4 Only the zikr of the Majestic Name, 'Allah' fills their heart, no other thought enters their hearts.

5 Ocean of love achieved through waking up at night and praying tahajjud. Alluding to the hadith of Rasulallah saw. "Spread peace, give food, rectify ties of kinship, and pray at night when the rest of mankind is asleep and you will enter Paradise in peace."

6 Intense form of love and crying can lead to blood vessels in the eyes to burst and blood to be mixed with tears.

7 The true Reality is referring to God. Separation from the divine source when one enters this world from the realm of the souls.

8 Those who are heedless of their purpose in this world which is to worship God.



Layla

(Night)

/ By Aqilah Minhaj

On a trip through a fissure in time's flexing planes,
twas a night in the month of Ramadhan
I watched Layla lying face up, arms behind her porcelain head
her small back flat against the swirled whites and golds of the marble floor;
and while I inhaled the fragrant breeze thick with attar coddling the girl goodnight
she exhaled,
'with the stars for friends and the clouds as my canopy, should I not be a grateful servant?'
At the gentle nudge of her mother, Layla turns to her side
the sunnah of Rasullullah SAW Layla, the sunnah of lying on your right
In the background, Layla's veiled ears sharpens when she overhears
the faint chorus of crickets singing an ode to The One in lilting notes
in unison with pilgrims -
their tongues tasting the wine of dzikr spilling
forth from lips quivering so much
from hearts trembling much
at the mention of

Alif

Laam

Laam

Ha -

hushed

yet loud, abashed

yet proud -

both in (circles of litanies) and [lines of congregants]

adjusting their saf, in deference to the call

of a muezzin atop a towering minaret

towards Al-Musawwir, the Shaper

of the Sun, the Moon, the galaxies,

of the oceans, the earthen spread,

Al-Musawwir, the Shaper of our father Adam, and our mother Hawa,

Al-Musawwir, the Shaper of our master Muhammad al-Mustafa SAW.

Al-Musawwir, the Shaper

of you.

From a distance of a good two decades and a series of fevered dreams
Layla (imagination unfettered, soul unbattered
and a wildheart vast enough to contain a universe/ not yet asunder)
seemed the perfect portrait of peace
and while Qadar dictates
and the slave follows (and so does Layla)
and the slave struggles (and so must Layla)
till her arrival at Jannah's gates,
Layla urges me to author a life authentic and ripe with His remembrance
a life designed, that clamours for His acceptance
for life is a gift that Allah has entrusted.

May our hearts be ever in prostration.

Layla, Qadar, on Laylatul Qadr.

We have all been there before. We are at the campus musollah, performing our prayers, when our thoughts absently drift away.

“Have I studied enough for the test later?”, the mind whispers.

“Ugh! The deadline for that assignment is today, not tomorrow!”, your memory suddenly functioning again.

“Hmm what should I have for dinner later?”, the stomach wonders.

In all honesty, this is something we have all faced at least once during our prayers. None of us are immune to distractions in salah, but that does not make it acceptable to continue offering salah that is tainted by distractions – salah without Khushu’.

Khushu’ refers to the submission, tenderness, and longing within the heart. When the heart swells with Khushu’, the body naturally follows during our salah. The Prophet ﷺ said in a hadith:

“Beware, in the body there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body will be sound, and if it is corrupt the whole body will be corrupt, and hearken it is the heart.”

[Hadith narrated by Muslim]

It is also about being cognizant of Allah’s Greatness, and the awareness of one’s own shortcomings. It grants us the humility needed to complete salah accordingly. Thus, guarding our Khushu’ is important. However, our Khushu’ fluctuates with each prayer depending on the strength of our faith at that point in time. Renewing our intentions and Imaan is therefore paramount to renewing our Khushu’, and the onus is then on us to continually equip ourselves with relevant knowledge. Not only will that help us improve the level of humility in salah, it will also help us take the most important step to succeed in dunya and akhirah. InshaAllah.

So how do we better our Khushu’ during salah? Here are some practical steps toward achieving that goal:

1. Knowledge

يَوْمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالِدَوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ يَخْتَلِفُ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

“And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colors similarly. Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving.” [Surah Fatir, verse 28]

It was narrated that Anas bin Malik said: “The Messenger of Allah said: ‘Allah has His own people among mankind.’ They said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, who are they?’ He said: ‘The people of the Qur’an, the people of Allah and those who are closest to Him.’” (Sunan Ibn e Majah, Book of Sunnah, Hadith no 214, Classified as Sahih By Allama Albani) – Would this be more relevant?

In this hadith, the term ‘people of the Qur’an’ refers to those who learn and ponder it. The hadith above demonstrates how increasing our knowledge on the religion helps us brings us closer to our Creator. Thus, garnering knowledge for the sake of improving our salah such as tawhid is certainly the right step towards building our Khushu’. However, it is important to seek knowledge under the guidance of Islamic teachers and scholars (without relying too often on Ustadz Google).

2. Seeking Refuge

We should also seek refuge in Allah s.w.t from Satan by reciting *“Aa-udhubillahi min As-Shaitanir Rajim”* before starting the salah and even during the salah itself. Reciting Bismillah (In the name of Allah) before beginning the salah is encouraged not only to ask for guidance and help in staying Khushu’ but it also serves as a reminder of our intentions for praying.

3. Being Mindful

Borrowing something from contemporary knowledge, the psychologist-subscribed Mindfulness-Based Cognitive therapy suggests that reminding oneself to come back to the present moment as soon as one realises that one's thoughts have drifted away can help to maintain focus in the present moment. It has been shown that this technique prevents our mind from being engrossed in our own thoughts and helps us stay grounded. This is definitely an applicable tip for our salah!

4. Understanding recitations

How many of us truly understand what we recite during our prayers? To fully understand and to mean the recitations of our surah will lead to better khushu' as we are able to appreciate the intricacies of our ibadah. Hence, it is highly advisable to read the tafsir of the surah, surah Al-Fatiha especially, to comprehend the verses. It is only through understanding that we can fully immerse ourselves in our salah.

5. Visualising

Reminding oneself that one is standing in front of Allah s.w.t, and praying as though you see Him will help maintain your Khushu' as well. Being aware that He is seeing you as you perform your prayers keeps you focused.

6. Good pace

Perhaps the most challenging issue for us while praying in school is the sheer rushing from one place to another. On a busy day, especially, we will try our best to squeeze in time between our schedule to catch our fard salah. Be that as it may, it is still crucial that we remain attentive and relaxed by keeping a good pace between salah actions, taking 5 seconds or more per action. Put heart into every takbir you recite and make a conscious effort to prolong your sujood by reciting duas during the sujood and before the last tasleem.

7. Remembering it could be the last

There are two things certain in life – death and grades. While calculating our GPAs may be quite unlikely for most of us during our salah, we should remind ourselves of the inevitable reality of death. Perhaps the most morbid tip on this list, it does not however change the fact that all of us will meet our Maker one day. We may not know when, but one day we will be praying our last rak'ah.

Besides mastering the methods to increase Khushu' during the prayer itself, we should remember that what happens outside our salah would affect our state of imaan and hence, Khushu' during prayer. Our conversations and interactions with God do not only take place five times a day, but 24/7 as He sees all that we do and knows what resides deep in our hearts. Therefore, spend your time doing what reminds you and brings you closer to God, whether it is by helping others, marvelling at His creations or surrounding yourselves with good people who remind you of Him. This awareness of Allah's presence, known as taqwa, is fundamental to maintaining Khushu' in the long run. Ultimately, we should perceive the five daily prayers not as an obligation but as a gift from Allah to us to lighten our burden and act as a source of peace and comfort. After all, what could be more comforting than knowing that you have a strong relationship with God?



Fresh out of Nanyang Business School in 1996, Mr Shafie Shamsuddin made his first forays into Carrefour as a management trainee. Little did he know that he would, within the span of a short ten years, rise to become the youngest president director within the Carrefour Group at the age of 35.

Having been promoted to department head in 1997 and to division manager in 2000, he soon gained recognition for his business nous and was posted to Indonesia as a bazaar merchandise manager in 2003. Having held that position for two years, he was appointed managing director of Carrefour Singapore and operation director of Carrefour Southern Malaysia.

Mr Shafie secured a remarkable eight promotions within his first ten years, leading more than 3000 associates, jointly responsible for sales worth 450 million euros annually.

About his motivations, Mr Shafie had this to say;
“I always reminded myself that when we do things, it is not to prove to others. When we do things, it is not to inspire others. We have to inspire ourselves.”

Mr Shafie specifically used his understanding of the responsibilities of a good leader, applying the teachings and leadership principles of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his inspiration and role model.

Huda Razak © 2017



**“Leadership is about
inside out, not
outside in.**

Leadership is not showing outside people how good we are, and coming back home to shout at our spouses and our children. And I always remind myself and my children to build an authentic leadership inside out.”

Continue to the next page for Mr Shafie’s take on success, goals and their relationship to the pillars of Islam.

https://www.sph.com.sg/system/assets/2376/SBA%202016_Mr%20Shafie%20Shamsuddin.pdf



Interview with Shafie Shamsuddin

islam the success formula



1 PURPOSE

Always ask ourselves what our purpose is so as to maintain a sense of direction.

2 CHOICE

Choices come with purpose. Each choice is like a strategy. With the ability to connect the two, each will come into greater focus as essential.

3 CONNECTIVITY

The ability to connect is the ability to adapt. In choosing to connect, we choose to adapt, rather than to wait for conditions to favour us.

4 TIME

Time is crucial as it is the yardstick against which we can measure our success.

5 JOURNEY

The journey of life is never ending as long as there are new things to be learned and discovered.



HEART

The heart keeps us grounded in our values, equipping us with the sense of compassion we need to remember our true motivations for working toward our goals.



HEAD

The head, or the intellect, allows us to conceptualize and plan what we intend to do, and why we intend to do it.



HAND

The hands are our tools for doing the work we believe in and putting our thoughts into action.

SOUL

When the head, hands and heart work in tandem, the soul is nourished and can flourish.

MR SHAFIE ON THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

1 TWO TESTAMENTS OF FAITH

"I always remind myself, let's understand who we are. That means our identity, what we represent. And this is connected to the recitation of the 2 kalimah syahadah (declaration of faith), the first pillar of Islam - a declaration of who we are."

PRAYER 2

"I always remind myself, let's understand who we are. That means our identity, what we represent. And this is connected to the recitation of the 2 kalimah syahadah (declaration of faith), the first pillar of Islam - a declaration of who we are."

3 FASTING

"Let's learn to make choices with responsibility and accountability -- make reflections, make disruptions, make changes in our life. Allah said every year, you have to do your fasting. Why fasting? Because Allah say you need to make your disruptions (to your daily lifestyle and food consumption). Once you disrupt, you disorganise yourself and then you start to reflect and re-analyse yourself more. And in companies, we must do the same. We must disrupt and not do the same thing. That is why Allah ask you to fast so that you can feel more."

ZAKAT 4

"Learn to give more than we take everyday. Giving is not only about money because if you think giving is only (in the form of) money, you are believing that you are poor." This is related to Zakat, whereby we are encouraged to give more, especially the underprivileged.

5 HAJJ

"Let's learn to love before asking for love, in my point of view, (this is) the most challenging." He explained in a combination of English and Malay, "Why did Allah say to go for Hajj when we can afford it? - What does that mean? But if you understand the meaning of Hajj, it means if you already go once, and you have the money, why go again? Let others go. That's what we call true love, unconditional love, the real learning about Hajj is about sincerity."

ODE TO MY mother

/ By H.S.M.

Dear Ma, I can't imagine how it was like for you,
Single handedly brought us up just like how real parents should,
Never left us all alone not even once tho many times you could,
Many didn't believe you would succeed but still strong you stood.

No one understands your sacrifices and how much they cost,
And now you care for the same people who doubted you. Why I'm kinda lost?
See, remember you taught me to be kind to everyone that I have crossed,
Well I ain't strong enough and most of my sorries were kinda forced.

But it's all okay now all your pain should have gone away,
Coz it's all in fate that brought us here to this very day,
And now you can say that you've taken care of us proudly,
With Abang doin' what he does best and I'm one of the best barbers proolly.

So please believe that you've done more than enough for us,
When we were young and porous you protected us from all the horrors,
And if we could go back and choose to have our lives another way,
It's still the same, you'd still be the mother and father to both our names.



BARBERSHOP

/ By Faiqah Rizliana

Staring at the barber pole, Ahmad debated if he should enter. He considered that his presence might not be welcomed but it had been years since then. Figuring it was finally or never, Ahmad walked in.

The familiar ringing of the bell coincided with the opening of the door. Ahmad could see the man he was looking for, knees bent, face turned away in concentration as he snipped the hair of a young man who clearly looked as though he had somewhere better to be.

“Just a moment, I’m finishing up here.” Uncle Siva’s voice was still the same, albeit a little tired. Ahmad did not know what he was expecting. He had changed so much and to be back was like walking into his past.

While waiting, Ahmad glanced around the shop. The air was thick with the musty smell of mothballs. He was glad to see the ’90s-styled interior and brick design of the walls remained.

The room was just as he remembered it, the walls were filled with jokes and movie posters, newspaper clippings with comic sections which were already turning yellow, vintage gear collected and donated by loyal customers, and male-modelled haircuts. While Ahmad remembered the flimsy plastic chairs he used to sit on as a child, now there was a metal park bench flanked on a wall for those waiting their turn.

Ahmad glanced back at the old man, still preoccupied with his customer. Ahmad practically grew up here. He still remembered the cacophony of intermingled languages as the regular customers often spoke in Malay, Tamil or Mandarin to Uncle Siva, who managed to build a close rapport with them as he worked on their hair six days a week for nearly 20 years and counting.

Uncle Siva was mostly self-taught and his beloved tools were the simple metal scissors, straight razor, and manual clipper which he kept alongside his brushes and blades in a small trolley he often carted around.

That day did not seem like a busy day but he remembered that the shop was often full of regular customers, most of them elderly men, waiting patiently for their haircuts. Ahmad was an easily distracted child and even the comics that Uncle Siva bought specially for him could not contain his attention for very long. Watching the men in the shop became a means of entertaining himself.

There was always one who would quietly read a newspaper and leave after he was done. Then there were chattier others who would speak passionately about topics such as the rising cost of living. His customers also share snippets of their life to Uncle Siva about home, work, and children. Uncle Siva listened raptly to their stories, interjecting occasionally to ask questions or provide sage advice, but he was mostly a good listener.

“Okay, I’m done— Ahmad? Is that you?”

Ahmad faced the old Indian man that he now was towering over. Ahmad took a moment to examine his grown face. He was expecting Uncle Siva to be old - he himself had just celebrated his thirtieth birthday - but he was not prepared for this.

“Hello, Uncle Siva.”

“My boy! It is you! It’s been, what? Eight years since I’ve last seen you!” He walked over and leaned in for a hug, his hand clasping firmly on Ahmad’s shoulder. Ahmad returned it with equal fervour.

A cough broke them out of their reverie.

“This reunion is nice and all but can I pay now?”

They had almost forgotten that they had company. The young man handed over his money, muttering something and promptly leaving the shop.

“Kids nowadays very rude ah. Don’t respect their elders anymore.”

Uncle Siva picked up an old broom resting in the corner of the room and began sweeping the hairs on the floor. Ahmad, not knowing what to do, was content to let Uncle Siva pick up the conversation.

“So you got married?”

“Yeah. Got a little boy. Another one on the way.”

Ahmad could see the misty eyes of the barber but he kept silent. It was a lot to take in. Uncle Siva stopped sweeping and looked at Ahmad.

“I see.” he started, before slowly continuing another topic, “I heard that he’s sick. That’s why you came back, right?”

“Yeah, the doctors said... It’s not good.” Ahmad’s relationship with his father had always been fraught at most but even then, his father’s rapidly deteriorating health distressed him.

“I tried to visit him, you know? Your mother let me in but as soon as he saw me, he went crazy!” Uncle Siva let out a coarse laugh. “Started screaming bloody murder.”

They shared a small smile. They knew his father’s personality all too well. That man could really hold a grudge. But for how long? Wasn’t the certainty of impending death enough to bury the past?

“I have to go. I just came to say hi. It was nice seeing you, Uncle Siva. I’m... I’m glad you’re still around.” Uncle Siva gave him a firm pat on the back and told him to visit again. Ahmad walked out of the shop, the all-too familiar bell triggering a memory in his head.

* * *

Ahmad waited patiently in line for his order of iced Milo and teh tarik at the coffeeshop. It was his daily after-school ritual to buy the drinks for himself and Uncle Siva. The old man loved his teh tarik and he considered it a payment for the hours he allowed Ahmad to stay at his barbershop.

“Did you hear? There’s a fight at Uncle Siva’s!”

“Wah! Where you hear one? You want to see or not?”

“Yah, yah, let’s go!”

Ahmad perked his ears at the sudden information. Drinks forgotten, he made his way to Uncle Siva’s. From outside, he could make out two figures through the windows. People were starting to gather.

“Isn’t that Hamid?”

Ahmad pressed his face closer to the windows. Sure enough, he recognised the broad shoulders of his father, looking imposing and tense. Ahmad tried to make out what his father was saying but his words were muffled. All Ahmad could see was the face of Uncle Siva facing his father, brows drawn together and mouth curled in a snarl. Debating temporarily before deciding, Ahmad opened the door and winced at the clanging sound of the bell that accompanied the action. His father and Uncle Siva stopped their argument but they continued staring menacingly at each other.

Distracted by the commotion, Ahmad had thought that the shop was empty but he realised that there were others in the shop but they were congregated in the corner, ready to intervene should the need arise.

Uncle Samad, someone Ahmad regularly talked to when he spent his afternoons at Uncle Siva’s shop, stepped towards Ahmad. “Ahmad, go home. You don’t need to see this.”

Ahmad made no move to leave and instead, looked at his father. “What’s going on?”

His father ignored his question but moved towards him. He reached for Ahmad’s wrist and tried to lead him out the door. Just as he was about to leave, Uncle Siva spoke, “Don’t come anymore. You are not welcome here.”

Ahmad struggled out of his father’s grasp to look at the man.

“You too, Ahmad.” Uncle Siva added coldly.

“But,” Ahmad started sputtering but his father’s firm grip was bordering on painful and he was pulled away from the shop and away from the stunned silence of the audience around them.

When they were finally alone in the lift of their flat, his father let go of his small wrist. Rubbing gently at it, Ahmad was still trying to process what had happened.

“That man! Thinks he can tell me what to do about my own child. I’m his father. I can do whatever I want. Who does that bastard think he is?”

Ahmad could only listen as his father muttered angrily to himself. He wanted to press further, but he knew the consequences of angering his father when he was in one of his moods. He still had the welts to prove it.

The ding of the lift signalled that they were close to home. As his father stepped out, he was still muttering but he stopped and looked at Ahmad squarely in the eye.

“I don’t want you going to that shop anymore, do you hear me?”

Ahmad thought about Uncle Siva. Sweet, kind Uncle Siva who welcomed him everyday after school and did not mind when Ahmad completed his homework at the shop. Uncle Siva who bought him comics and left them in the shop after Ahmad mentioned that he was a fan of Iron Man. Uncle Siva who had been his friend and confidante since his father brought him to the barbershop for his first haircut as a little boy.

Ahmad did not want to follow his father’s orders but he nodded even when the tears threatened to spill from his eyes.

“If I see or hear about you going anywhere near that shop, I will make you regret it. Do. You. Understand?” He had grabbed Ahmad by the shirt and shook him as he said those words, his question coming across as less of a statement, more a threat.

“What’s that commotion? Hamid, what are you doing?” Ahmad breathed a sigh of relief as he heard his mother’s voice.

“Stay out of this, Salmah.”

His father let go of his shirt and stormed off into the house, brushing roughly against his mother who had rushed out to help her son. Ahmad could only cry against the comfort of his mother’s embrace.

* * *

Ahmad braced himself as he knocked on the door of his parent’s bedroom while trying to hold the bowl of porridge balancing on a tray. His mother had left him a note saying that she had to leave to collect something and left Ahmad with the task of bringing lunch and medicine to his father.

His father laid silent on the bed. Was he asleep? Ahmad stepped closer to make sure. His eyes were open but he appeared deep in thought, not noticing Ahmad was there at all. Ahmad took the opportunity to take a good look at him. It had been eight years since he had left and facing his father for the first time since then, he did not quite know how to feel.

Ahmad stood there staring at the wizened face, adorned with wrinkles but what was the most pronounced detail was the skin that had drooped on the left side of his face. A burst artery. Stroke. That was what the doctors had said.

His father’s left arm was curled up against his side, essentially paralysed and Ahmad could see how much both his left arm and leg had atrophied after months of disuse. Ahmad was informed about his father’s condition but seeing it for the first time, he almost felt sorry for the man.

“Abah...” his father turned his head slightly towards the sound, blinking owlishly at his son.

“Abah.” He tried again. “I brought you your lunch.” He lifted the tray slightly to show the bowl of porridge.

Silence. Ahmad was used to his father being silent but this situation unnerved him. Recalling his conversation with Uncle Siva earlier, Ahmad was determined to set things right.

“I met Uncle Siva just now. He said you didn’t let him visit you?” Ahmad took a scoop of the porridge and blew gently at it before placing it on his father’s lip, urging it open. The old man turned his face away.

“Don’t be stubborn. You have to eat.” Ahmad let out a sigh. “You have to make things right with Uncle Siva also. He still cares about you, you know.”

His father used his working arm to push away the bowl Ahmad was holding, causing it to crash onto the ground. Ahmad looked at the shattered pieces of glass and globs of porridge on the floor.

“Why are you so stubborn, hah?! Even now, even on your deathbed, you still don’t want to forgive him?” Ahmad could not believe that he had felt sympathy for the withered man lying before him. “You keep pushing everybody away when all they are trying to do is help you!”

“He should’ve...” His voice was soft and mostly slurred, but Ahmad moved closer to understand what his father was saying. “He should’ve minded his own business.”

“All this anger, all this unnecessary suffering you’ve put yourself and everyone else around you...” Ahmad seethed at those words.

When his father did not respond, Ahmad decided to take matters into his own hands. He gripped his father, struggling a little under the weight. His father protested but even as he did so, the left side of his body was too paralysed to move. Ahmad carefully picked his father up – the old man still thrashing about as much as he could – before setting him on the wheelchair in the corner of the room.

* * *

The bell clanged as Ahmad pushed the door open.

“Ahmad! I know I asked you to visit again but I never thought it would be so soon!”

Ahmad did not reply. He was a man in a mission. Keeping the door open, he went out and returned with his father, struggling a little to lift the wheelchair over the step.

“Well...” Uncle Siva’s eyebrows were raised. “This is a surprise.”

“Uncle Siva, my father... He...” Ahmad did not think ahead. “He needs a haircut.”

“Well,” Uncle Siva paused. “Alright.” He walked over to his cart and dragged it over to Ahmad and his father. He unfolded a plastic cape and draped it over Ahmad’s father who tried to push the offending material away from his body.

“Hamid, your hair really is too long. It’s been a while, right?” Uncle Siva lifted a matted lock of hair off his head. It was greasy and clumped together. “Just let me do this for you, okay?”

His father sat, not making a sound, had no energy left to argue. Finally, he gave a little nod. He used his right hand to scratch at his head and then at the straggly hair growing around his chin. Uncle Siva watched his movements, understanding immediately what the other man wanted. He reached for his clippers and pushed the other man’s head downwards, going through the unruly mess. Hair began to pile up on the man’s shoulders.

“I hate the new electric razors. I prefer them old school you know.”

Hamid harrumphed in reply making Uncle Siva laugh out loud, the sound surprising both of them.

“Glad we can finally agree on something.”

Ahmad, satisfied with the exchange, picked up a comic before settling down on the bench.

They had a lot of catching up to do.



STIGMA

/ By Nadiah Isa



Mohd Haiqel © 2017

He was just laying there motionless on the hospital bed. His eyes shut tight, his lips cracked and dry. I stood by his bedside, only affording to look on and admire his blank face.

I watched as the fluid level fluctuates in the IV drip which was inserted into the vein in his right arm. The male nurse checked up on him occasionally, taking his blood pressure and pulse reading, giving him medicine through the tubes connected to his nose. My uncle used to be tall, robust and chatty. But all I see in front of me on the sick-bed is a worn-out and scrawny man with short stubbles of grey hair dotting his head, his body somewhat had shrunk in size since the last time I saw him and the most striking realization was how painfully silent he had become. I was in dismal looking at my uncle's condition but I was even more frustrated in myself for taking his healthy self for granted. How I never really spent much time visiting him when he was well and how I had always dismissed his non-stop chattering as nonsense. I guessed the regret slowly consuming my heart could be a positive indication that I still cherished my uncle although I was not one to express my gratitude towards him when he could consciously receive it.

"Faris, what do we do with him? He's only going to get worse, I'm afraid I can't handle him anymore," Aunt Alia shared her concerns with the rest of the family, furrowing her brows, deep in thought.

My mum and three of my aunts were at Aunt Alia's house, gathered for an informal, impromptu family meeting. Aunt Alia had called for my mum, the oldest sibling and few other aunts to discuss Uncle Faris' progress. Earlier in the afternoon, out of desperation, Aunt Alia called the police when she realized Uncle Faris had locked himself in the bedroom as well as hidden the master key for all the rooms in the house. This was not the first time Uncle Faris behaved so impulsively and worryingly. What was even more unsettling was the fact that after the police managed to unlock the door, Uncle Faris was found sitting on the floor in a fetus position, legs cradled up to his chest drenched in a pool of his own urine. He rocked his body back and forth vigorously while panting heavily, his eyes darting across the room, his lips mumbling repeatedly, as if afraid someone or something was going to capture him. The state Uncle Faris was in almost drove Aunt Alia to tears as she could do nothing but watch her brother live in a make-believe reality – a world far beyond what our normal minds could ever imagine let alone comprehend.



Nur Aisyah Bte Mohamad Shamsul © 2017

“I think it’s best for him to stay in Sunlove home. He’ll be safe there, he won’t harm anyone and nobody would harm him. He’ll be in good hands,” my mum suggested, hoping for everyone else to unanimously agree.

Everyone remained silent, all sat at the dining room, exchanging glances between one another, afraid that speaking up might come across as giving the wrong signal. The deafening silence was sufficient to realise that the final, unspoken decision was already made.

I had to say goodbye to Uncle Faris.

Throughout my entire childhood I was ignorant of Uncle Faris’ health condition which rendered him somewhat irrelevant as a functioning member of society. Not only that, he had to endure the stigma associated with the illness he was suffering from. Although Uncle Faris was sometimes unaware of the negative perceptions society has of him, my family and close relatives definitely felt the harsh judgments unfairly placed on them. As I got older, Aunt Alia whom was the main caretaker of Uncle Faris, began to share some unusual stories about him to warn me to always stay alert and be on my guard whenever I was around him. I was never allowed to be alone with Uncle

Faris in a room or he was never allowed to enter the kitchen as knives and other sharp objects might tempt him to commit dangerous and life-threatening acts. This was in stark contrast with my experiences with Uncle Faris when I was little. When I was a toddler, I vividly remembered Uncle Faris carrying me onto his lap as he read to me and showed me toys to play with, which I later found out were picked up from the dumping area near Aunt Alia’s house, where people disposed their unwanted items. Uncle Faris, so I thought, was just like any ordinary uncle, loving and harmless. Little did I know that Uncle Faris was battling a war that lasted his entire lifetime, a war that only he could fight in hopes of triumph.

“I can hear them... They always tell me to do things. After I do the things they asked me to, they will stop. But, they never really go away,” Uncle Faris confessed as he gave me a confused look.

I just smiled and nodded, pretending I understood what he just said. I was visiting him with my mum at his new home which housed patients with mental illnesses. Gradually, our weekly visits turned into monthly and became even more infrequent as time went by. I could give a million reasons to justify my lack of visits to see him but those were merely excuses I was deeply ashamed of.

Every time I went to pay a visit to Uncle Faris, without fail he would always ask me for my watch and complimented my long hair. Once, I gave him my watch and made him promise that he would take good care of it but the next time I visited him, he admitted he had sold the watch to his friend for some cigarettes in return. I learnt my lesson and did not give him any watches whenever he requested for one. Before we leave, he would also always gesture with his fingers the number two, indicating that he wanted \$2 so my mum would give him some money but also reminded him not to simply give away the money to his friends inside. Uncle Faris was always overjoyed when he saw us visiting and bringing his favourite food, Mee Rebus. I loved seeing a huge grin plastered on his face whenever we came. Nobody would even think Uncle Faris was a person suffering from schizophrenia without witnessing his bouts of tantrums or extreme changes in behaviour.

Recently Uncle Faris complained of having stomach pains as he disliked the food provided in the home. My mum and I just assumed his complaints as him wanting to leave the place and roam freely so we paid little attention to his whining. My mum kept assuring him that he would get better if he took the medicine and rubbed some ointment on the part where it hurt. Uncle Faris mentioned that when the pain got unbearable, he would think of Allah and make dhikr. My mum constantly comforted Uncle Faris that he would recover soon and that he should not make worrying claims like saying he could just pass on anytime and requesting for all his siblings to attend his funeral.

Few days later, Aunt Alia called my mum informing that Uncle Faris was admitted to the hospital due to severe stomach problems and he was not allowed to eat or drink, making him dehydrated and exhausted. We rushed to the hospital to find him unawakened, laying still on the hospital bed. My mum and I rushed over to his side, gently stroking his arm and head, just staring silently at his serene face. Watching him asleep made me realise how strong of a person Uncle Faris was.

He was all alone in the home, trapped and isolated from the world, forced to face his inner demons every waking second of his life and yet he managed to put on a smile for me every time I visited him. Every time before I leave him to return to the prison he called home, he would always remind me to visit him soon but I never once did give it a second thought and just shrugged it off as another petty request.

My heart breaks when I am reminded of the fact that the daily life struggles I go through is nothing compared to the torment Uncle Faris had to endure his entire life. The opportunities he was deprived of, the achievements he could have attained, yet I still had the nerve to complain about the blessings Allah showered me with, that came in the form of challenges.

Soon enough, light rays peeked through the blinds drawn shut to keep the sun from illuminating the ward, indicating that dawn is upon us all whether we liked it or not.

“Pass me some water, I’m thirsty...” muttered Uncle Faris, his eyes slowly opened as he managed a weak smile, while slowly nudging my hand to hand him some water.

I blinked away a tear. I could never beat Uncle Faris’ courage and determination to rise every time he gets knocked down flat on the ground, this time being on the hospital bed. He never fails to wake up and face his ordeal despite having many reasons to stay defeated and allow those voices to overwhelm him. I feel ashamed to admit that I dread waking up every morning, surrendering easily when faced with seemingly impossible tasks to accomplish while here Uncle Faris remains undaunted by his ordeal, ready to battle his inner demons.

hues of faith

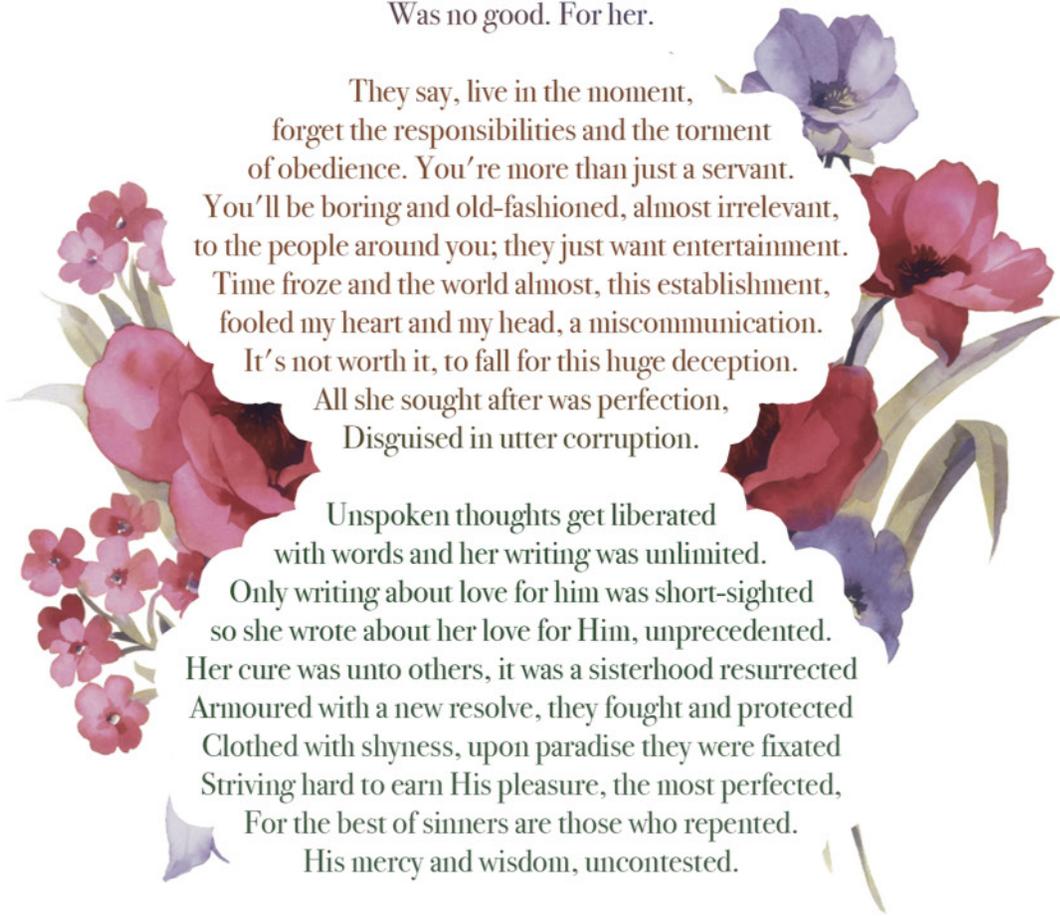
/ By Ikhmah Roslie

Low on faith, high on anger.
Just another girl, writing about her
irk. Hatred & angst, the words caught fire
at the peak of emotions. The tears came after.
Decelerating, her knuckles regained its colour.
The biting numbness was as white as the paper.
No wait, traces of red. The pain grew sharper
as the broken pencil stabbed deeper.
You see, holding on tighter,
Was no good. For her.

They say, live in the moment,
forget the responsibilities and the torment
of obedience. You're more than just a servant.
You'll be boring and old-fashioned, almost irrelevant,
to the people around you; they just want entertainment.
Time froze and the world almost, this establishment,
fooled my heart and my head, a miscommunication.
It's not worth it, to fall for this huge deception.
All she sought after was perfection,
Disguised in utter corruption.

Unspoken thoughts get liberated
with words and her writing was unlimited.
Only writing about love for him was short-sighted
so she wrote about her love for Him, unprecedented.
Her cure was unto others, it was a sisterhood resurrected
Armoured with a new resolve, they fought and protected
Clothed with shyness, upon paradise they were fixated
Striving hard to earn His pleasure, the most perfected,
For the best of sinners are those who repented.
His mercy and wisdom, uncontested.

She felt the wind on her face
and saw the beauty in His grace
She came out of Twilight, into solace
From dusk to dawn, the hues too vivid to erase,
He is the Best of Painters, magnificent in all ways.
Upon the prayer mat, with humility, she takes her place
The bittersweet taste on her lips as she prostrates,
questioning herself, 'What was it that I chase
which was better than His embrace?'
all this time. What a waste.



Afiq Fairuz © 2017

THE MOTHS OF DAWN

/ By Noraine Kuswadi



“Urgh!” She exclaimed, flailing her arms to ward off the moth. She cringed at the insect’s indifference to her wild gestures. “It’s here,” she sighed, “it’s happening.”

Just as quickly as it had arrived, her fear for the critters had promptly returned. Every year like clockwork swallowtail moths settled quietly where she lived. The sky was pale and dark despite the sunrise, signalling the welcome of the grey season. They had nestled on her study, where she had left the 2 tickets to the National Gallery’s *Amore Omnia Vincit* that she had planned to attend later that month. Hovering, the moth refused to budge despite her attempt to salvage the contents on her desk before she realised the time.

Her fear shadowed her even to the bus-stop, where it met others of its kind. The place was dark, the light encased with the ashen wings of the *Lyssa Zampa* and their swollen breathing bodies. She looked at the ground to avoid their intense gaze and swung her suspended feet. Just then, she was approached by her schoolmate whom she had not seen in a long time.

“Hey, are you waiting for the bus, too?” he asked, breaking the silence between them. The moths that plastered the ceiling began to flutter about anxiously, caressing the pillars that surrounded her. Her swaying feet continued to rock about at a faster pace. She felt herself almost fall off the edge of her seat. Her eyes were fixed, surveying the floor.

“You’re late. I didn’t think that you would-”

“Yes,” she coldly replied. She had hesitated to cut him off, but she knew she had to. She looked up to see the mass of perturbed insects twitching by the light. Startled by them, she stood up abruptly and shifted her position. She looked forward in the direction of the road where the bus would pull up. She boarded the next bus to arrive, and once it turned around the bend, she almost could feel the way that she had annoyed him, the way that his eyes were flared with irritation- although in reality, there was no such thing.

She had always felt uncomfortable with the way she spoke, with the way she dressed, with the way she smiled, with the way she everything-ed. She had a strong network of friends and family, however, she was always overshadowed by more interesting individuals who came and went, came and went, and sometimes went altogether. Bold, bombastic individuals who made her mediocre mimosa of a personality dissolve in on itself, sinking themselves further and further yet never blossomed again with the dawn of a new day. It was not that she was not interesting

herself, or bold, or bombastic, but like the mimosa, she was afraid of embracing herself lest she wanted to dissolve into a small stalk of self-loathing.

Today you shall be better, she convinced herself, today you’re going to be how you’ve wanted to be for a while now. You won’t embarrass yourself, and things will be great.

Throughout the day, the commotion that accompanied the break of the moth season made everyone feel on edge. Everyone was swatting the air unwittingly, peeling lemons and spreading superstitions about how the density of the season that year had come to be. The moths, large and fluttering, settled like a large grey blanket upon the premises, unwelcomed but with nowhere to go, they slept soundly in the strangest of times.

Her knees up to her chin, she sat in the library for a long time. With her eyebrows narrowed she thought about the ways her day could get any worse. Was that supposed to make her feel better somehow? She had not attended her lecture that morning, holding no excuse except to isolate herself from potential disdain for school altogether.

They hate you, they hate you. Take a look in the mirror and see how much they hate you.

Just then, she felt something stir beneath her foot. Tilting her head, she saw that she had been stepping on dark, thick wings that broke out in spasms of pain, violently convulsing to be free.

“Ee!” she jerked back, knocking the library stool over. How could she have not noticed the huge moth beneath the table? She watched it ponderously hover up and down due to its immense weight, heading out of the library through the window ajar.

Disgusted, she wondered what she was thinking about before she was rudely interrupted by the presence of the moth. Suddenly, off in the distance, she heard faint sobbing.

Was someone crying? She followed the sound of the cries which led her to a section of the school that she had never ventured before. Peeping through the windows of a classroom by the corridor, she stood on tiptoes and saw a young, impressionable girl who sat alone.

“Hey, are you-” she hesitated asking the girl about emotion so outrightly, having been in that situation before, but she knew she had to do it. “Are you okay?”

The girl turned around abruptly and stared right at her, shocked. She quickly tried to hide her face and scrambled to pack her things to leave.

“No, no it’s okay. Don’t be embarrassed, we can talk!”

The young girl halted her escape and sat down. The both of them stood facing each other in awkward tension for a few moments before one of them broke the silence, “What’s your name?”

“I’m- I’m Hannah,” the young girl replied, still rubbing her stinging eyes from embarrassment.

“Hannah, you don’t have to feel bad. Everyone has bad days.” She spoke cautiously, conscious that she was a year or two older than Hannah. She sat facing her from a considerable distance to not scare her. “Do you... need to talk?”

After much reassurance, Hannah began to open up. She felt so many of the insecurities Hannah was facing resound within her, yet she said nothing, afraid to make herself seem narcissistic in front of a stranger. No one says anything but I feel so out of place, you won’t understand, but I feel like I’m just tagging along everyone. It’s different. It’s not normal. Hannah’s outpouring rang in her ears and struck a chord in her heart. She knew how it felt. You won’t understand. It’s different.

At the end of the day, she bid farewell to Hannah with a heavy heart. She walked home wondering what she could have said to Hannah to make her feel better. She stared at the moths along the footpath she walked that were still but plenty, distracted by her thoughts of how to console someone so insecure.

The next day, she sneaked into the library again, determined to avoid the social interaction she would be subject to if she went to class. To her surprise, she found Hannah sitting at the corner of the library, with her knees up to her chin, staring blankly at the table.

“Hey, why aren’t you in class?” she asked, settling down beside her.

“I just don’t feel like it. Some days I just don’t feel like it.”

“I know how it feels, but you have to face them somehow, sometime, right? You’ll get used to it, it’ll be fine.” She surveyed the doubt on Hannah’s face, momentarily forgetting her own insecurities although only for a second. “Really.”

She hesitated saying this, aware of her hypocrisy. She was insecure as well, should she really be giving advice when she was not exactly perfect either? Nonetheless, her concern outweighed her insecurity. Was this how she looked like? To others, to herself?

As she walked away for the day, the moths surrounding her hovered about, gently floating, resolving onto surfaces like lilies on a pond. Their dark wings were translucent in their stride, threshing the air slightly agitatedly, but calm nonetheless. She was consistently bothered by them, but she was more occupied about how she could help Hannah. She understood how it felt to loathe oneself. But what could she do?

They met almost everyday, where she found herself giving Hannah better advice as the days rolled on.

“I see you came late to the library, did you try making friends today?”

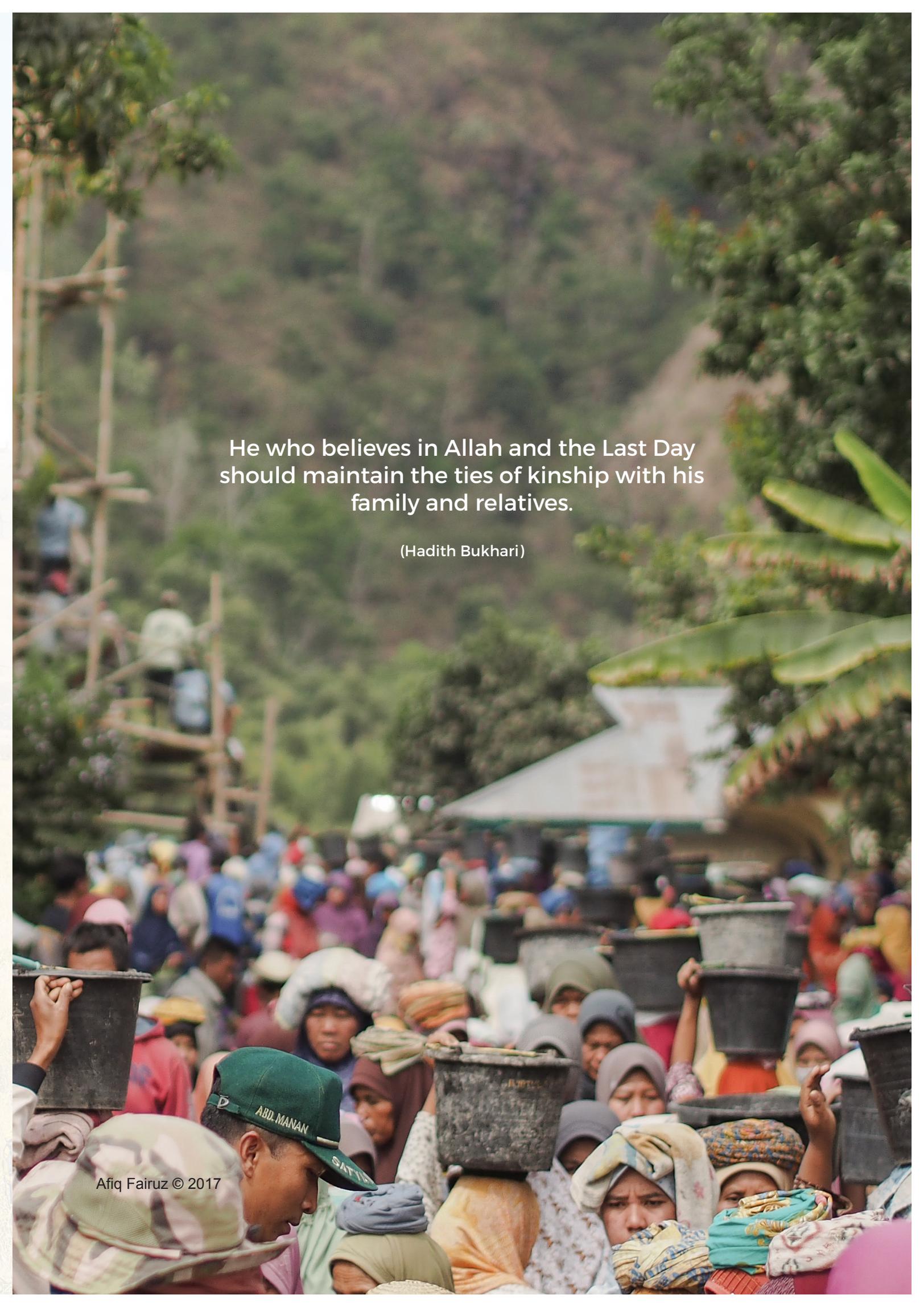
“Hey, you should try to go to this event. Not a lot of talking, just artwork.”

“Maybe you should try taking yourself out somewhere nice.”

Eventually, she felt herself becoming more confident with her interactions with Hannah, which gave her a boost of self-esteem. She did not feel so misunderstood anymore. She told herself that perhaps she should bring Hannah to the National Gallery with her, seeing that she had two tickets anyway.

Bringing the two tickets with her the next day, she walked into the library with a renewed, slightly more confident stride. She glided down the hallway and noticed that the moths that were usually there were sparse, and that she felt less bothered by the season. Some lay plastered on the wall, intimidated, yet sleepy with tranquillity. Amidst the noiselessness, she felt that she could see the rays of sunshine peeking through the corridor parapets, finally revealing the dawn.

Reaching the library, she opened the door only to find no one. A moth settled on her shoulder, hushed and breathing.

A large crowd of people, many carrying pots on their heads, in a rural setting. The background shows a lush green hillside with trees and a traditional building with a thatched roof. The foreground is filled with people, some wearing headscarves and others carrying pots on their heads. The overall scene suggests a busy, communal activity in a rural area.

He who believes in Allah and the Last Day
should maintain the ties of kinship with his
family and relatives.

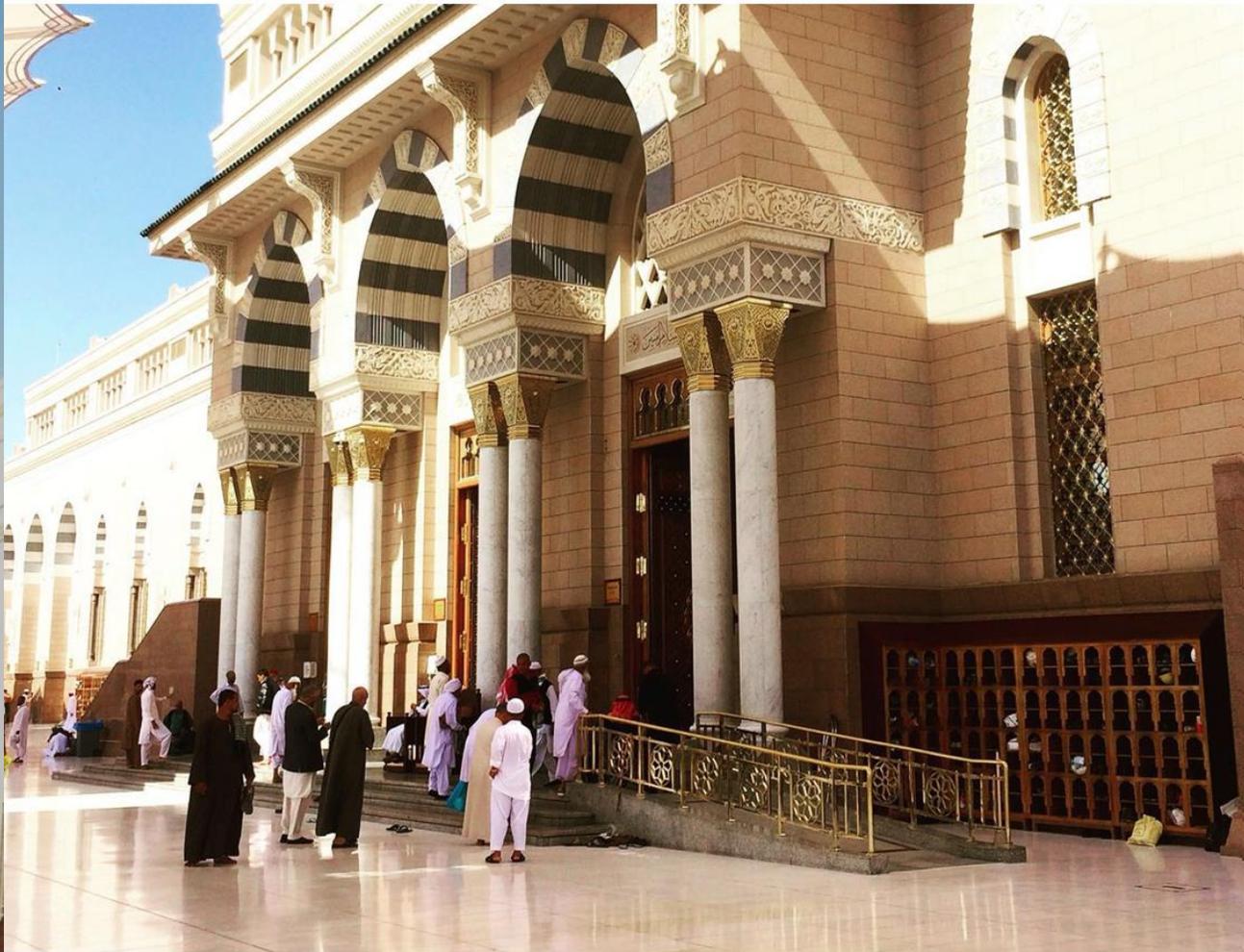
(Hadith Bukhari)



09:41



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abd.iman1990 Alhamdulillah. I am finally here.
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for young entrepreneurs

essential start-up tips

/ By Tengku Nazihah & Noor Jannah

You have a great cause that you're passionate about. You want to change the world. You want to start your own business.

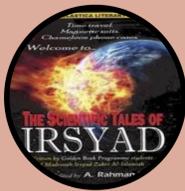
But you don't know how to.

Fret not young, ambitious ones.

Before you venture out to be the best entrepreneur you can be, these are essentially the best tips we sourced out first-hand from the inspirational entrepreneurs themselves, just for you.

And who better to get advice from apart than those who have been through it themselves?

We've interviewed 6 local entrepreneurs from all walks of life, serving the community in different ways. They shared with us the fine bits of their experience in believing in something they are passionate about, and here we have it just for you.



Scholastica

Abdul Rahman Basrun

A journalist turned entrepreneur who started his own publishing company, A Rahman Basrun shared more about his career, what he has learnt, and life lessons that we all can learn from. Scholastica is the marriage of arts and science - he shows that these two branches do not have to be mutually exclusive. After publishing 'The Scientific Tales Of Irsyad', another book by Scholastica is already in the works.



ePure Flavoured

Iskhandar

With years of being a server (*kendarat*) during weddings under his belt, Iskandar started ePure Flavoured after seeing that there were not many ice-cream vendors at weddings. Starting out from one of NTUMS' adhoc, Yusra, and getting encouraging responses, the rest as they say, is history.



Carizqilea

Nafsiah Halik

Owned by NUS nursing student Nafsiah Halik, Carizqilea is an up and coming online clothing shop. With over 13,500 followers on Instagram, you can find an assortment of clothing for both females and males, suitable for casual wear and special occasions alike. With only the help of a few loved ones, Nafsiah has greater aspirations for Carizqilea to expand further.



On Cookie 9

Hayyu Nariah

Spunk and spontaneity led to the start of On Cookie 9 by founder Hayyu Nariah with very favourable results. She trusts that doing something you love with the support system backing her will ease her journey in baking and sharing her cookies with others. Hayyu also lives by "hustling" for whatever it is that she wants to pursue.



Safinah Institute

Ustaz Mizi Wahid

Safinah Institute was started in 2009 for the people who have perhaps missed the boat for their Islamic education in their younger days. Having said that, it is for everyone and anyone who wants to learn with accessibility and ease as their top priority. The institute provides Islamic education at your convenience in these busy times.



SkyEducators Hub

Faris Malik

Service to the community was what led the founder, Faris Malik, to start his own tuition agency for those who want to learn but do not have enough resources to. Other than providing tuition, Sky High Educators also partners with mosques to provide accessible education in a conducive space at a low cost for students who want to be helped.

1

Get the ball rolling

“To future entrepreneurs, it is normal to be afraid to start. If your dream doesn’t scare you, it means it’s not big enough. You can have many ideas but you need to make the move and do it. It’s okay to fail but it’s wrong to not learn from the mistakes made.”

- *ePure Flavoured, Iskhandar*

“When I got the letter [of employment] saying that I have served for 20 years (at Berita Harian), that forced me to re-examine my objectives, my personal agenda. I realised that although I enjoy journalism a lot, I also enjoy other things that I have actually left behind. So I need to catch up on my passion in writing.”

- *Scholastica, A Rahman Basrun*

2

Scale that first mountain

“I started off by selling many of my pre-loved items and I used to love shopping online myself. Most were sold within days and (thus my interest grew). I believe if you have the passion to do something, you will be able to do it.”

- *Carizqilea, Nafsiah Halik*

“So the challenge is to be humble enough, eat humble pie, and try to learn from others, number one. Or even when you feel like you really really need to collaborate or find a partner who is good in the areas that you are not good at. So that kind of balance is required. Having mentors is useful.”

- *Safinah Institute, Ustaz Mizi*

3

Know what it is for

“I saw how hard my parents worked. They had a business before but it didn’t work out. I asked myself what went wrong - was it because they didn’t know much about finances or made bad decisions? But they are very persistent, that’s what inspires me the most. They are not afraid to try new things, they are not afraid to say they failed. Because they have been through it before, so they don’t want me to make the same mistakes. Because of this, they are my biggest inspiration.”

- *Sky High Educators, Faris Malik*

“I think it’s got to do with purpose. If your purpose from the very beginning is clear, then that’s what’s gonna keep you going. So the purpose was to spread Islamic knowledge (*dakwah*). To reach out, Safinah wants to reach out to people who are not attracted to coming for events, syarahans at masjids, for example. These are the kind of people we want so having that clarity and that purpose keeps you going.”

- *Safinah Institute, Ustaz Mizi*

4

Market your business well

“[Be] practical, you must prove yourself, which leads to word-of-mouth - it’s very important. I realised that. You can advertise at Islamic events, other platforms, Berita Harian, but if word-of-mouth is non-existent, it won’t take off. Your quality must be there. Networking can only get you so far. But after that, you must continue to prove yourself. Because after that event, there must be another event. You must have the effect, the multiplier effect.”

- *Scholastica, A Rahman Basrun*

“We are now based online because we are trying to address the problem of Singaporeans getting busier and having more responsibilities. We need to make it accessible, convenient and affordable for them. We need to improve. The concept, subscription model, content, approach, interaction - we’re always adapting. In the past, people were more than happy to sign up for a one year program with us. Today, even 12-week programs are not popular. So we are compressing our programmes - it’s easier for them to sign up.”

- *Safinah Institute, Ustaz Mizi*

5

Be sure of your intentions and goals

“Of course, in every business, we will look at profit. Besides that, I would like to help my community through creating jobs and opportunities for them to learn and grow with me, especially the youth.” – *ePure Flavoured, Iskhandar*

“Basically, the concept of serving food out of sincerity, not money. I realise it doesn’t take much to make people happy. Good food does it well. Real well. What roots me down is my belief in this concept.” – *On Cookie 9, Hayyu Nariah*

6

Widening your network

“I was a very shy person in the past. When people talked about networking, I got very scared. I remember I was at an event and the GOH was PM Lee. I think that’s the scariest person I talked to, but he’s a very nice guy. So after talking to someone that important, you realise other people aren’t so scary. Everyone wants to know what you are doing too. The important thing is just starting the conversation.” – *Sky High Educators, Faris Malik*

“You must do your research. Let’s say if I want to go into education, I must know who in the education sector can help me. If I don’t know the top people personally, then I look at their connections, maybe someone can connect me to the top person. But I always start from the top first, because you have nothing to lose.” – *Scholastica, A Rahman Basrun*

7

Constantly pick yourself up!

“At first, I did not know how to start. As time went by, I learnt and I managed to find my very own suppliers. When it comes to searching for suppliers, it can be quite scary. You never know when you will get duped as there are many scammers nowadays.” – *Carizqilea, Nafsiah Halik*

“I think coping mechanisms need a few rounds of trial-and-error. Don’t be too hard on yourself. We all learn; from both successes and failures. For me, what works now is the phrase, “it’s okay, Hayyu,” I repeat that until things eventually get okay.” – *On Cookie 9, Hayyu Nariah*

8

Pick the right & best team

“To me, working alone is easy as I know my standards and how I want things to be. Having a team is different; there needs to be some form of understanding between one another. Everyone is unique and as a leader I have to engage all my colleagues differently.”

– *ePure Flavoured, Iskhandar*

“I would advise to refrain from doing business with your close friend or even a friend as you might lose your friendship because of that. Keep your loved ones with you by your side, don’t forget them even when you are at the top, and always know that they can never be replaced with the income you get.”

– *Carizqilea, Nafsiah Halik*

9

Inspire others!

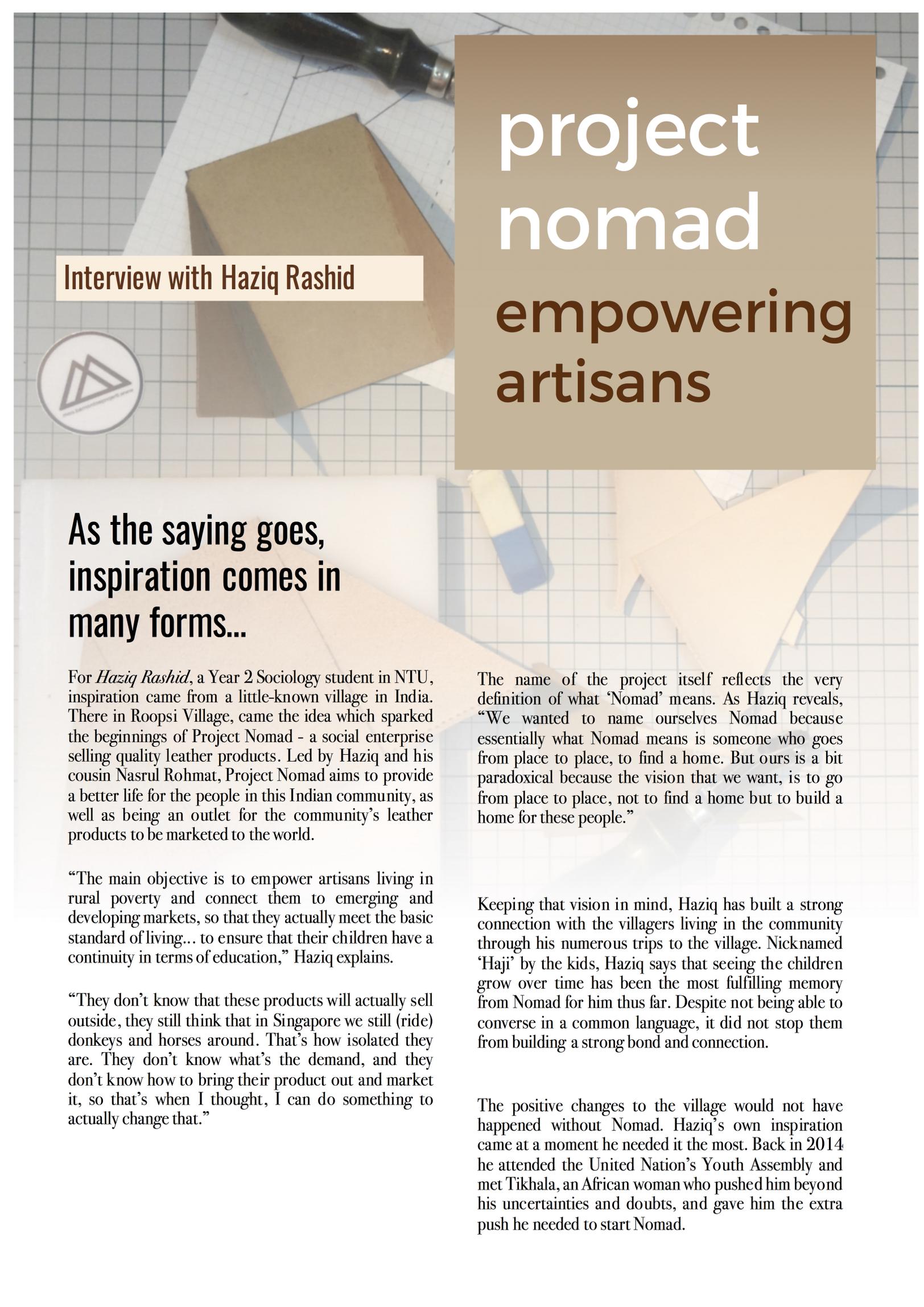
“Go with what you’re passionate about, that will keep you going. If you’re passionate about it and really want to see the cause through, insha Allah you will be given opportunities.”

– *Sky High Educators, Faris Malik*

“The start is always the hardest - decide on the start and the drive will keep us running. We don’t have to speculate too far into the future, the only way to know is to find out. Find that drive in you and hustle your way through.”

– *On Cookie 9, Hayyu Nariah*

And there you have it! With the expertise and advice from those who have done it themselves, you’ll be sure to be inspired to delve into this entrepreneurship journey as well. No matter what idea or cause you’re passionate about, there’s always that big road down ahead for you and we hope that this list has given you the motivation you need to start your journey.



project nomad empowering artisans

Interview with Haziq Rashid



As the saying goes, inspiration comes in many forms...

For *Haziq Rashid*, a Year 2 Sociology student in NTU, inspiration came from a little-known village in India. There in Roopsi Village, came the idea which sparked the beginnings of Project Nomad - a social enterprise selling quality leather products. Led by Haziq and his cousin Nasrul Rohmat, Project Nomad aims to provide a better life for the people in this Indian community, as well as being an outlet for the community's leather products to be marketed to the world.

“The main objective is to empower artisans living in rural poverty and connect them to emerging and developing markets, so that they actually meet the basic standard of living... to ensure that their children have a continuity in terms of education,” Haziq explains.

“They don't know that these products will actually sell outside, they still think that in Singapore we still (ride) donkeys and horses around. That's how isolated they are. They don't know what's the demand, and they don't know how to bring their product out and market it, so that's when I thought, I can do something to actually change that.”

The name of the project itself reflects the very definition of what ‘Nomad’ means. As Haziq reveals, “We wanted to name ourselves Nomad because essentially what Nomad means is someone who goes from place to place, to find a home. But ours is a bit paradoxical because the vision that we want, is to go from place to place, not to find a home but to build a home for these people.”

Keeping that vision in mind, Haziq has built a strong connection with the villagers living in the community through his numerous trips to the village. Nicknamed ‘Haji’ by the kids, Haziq says that seeing the children grow over time has been the most fulfilling memory from Nomad for him thus far. Despite not being able to converse in a common language, it did not stop them from building a strong bond and connection.

The positive changes to the village would not have happened without Nomad. Haziq's own inspiration came at a moment he needed it the most. Back in 2014 he attended the United Nation's Youth Assembly and met Tikhala, an African woman who pushed him beyond his uncertainties and doubts, and gave him the extra push he needed to start Nomad.

“I told her about this idea, and then she give me a quote that punched my heart so hard that I had to do something about it. So she said, ‘Haziq you have a lot of ideas, but why are you not doing anything about it?’

And she said, ‘When the silkworm dies, it leaves behind silk for people to use, but when you die, what are you gonna leave for the people around you?’

So that punched me really hard, and inspired me to start Nomad. I guess her words always ring in me. Like what you leave behind for people around you. That’s what keeps me going - the fact that one day I die and I leave no impact behind. That’s really scary, it’s the same as me not being born, then what’s the purpose of me being born? So that’s what keeps me pushing forward everyday.”

These were the very words that kept Haziq and his team going, bringing Nomad to where it is now - but Nomad is still growing. Despite Haziq insisting that the team spends minimal effort on marketing the brand, Nomad has enjoyed their fair share of media exposure as well, being featured in big names such as Berita Harian, Vulcan Post, Medium.



Nonetheless, no successful enterprise would be born without first overcoming a hurdle of challenges. Haziq explains that, “One of the biggest challenge is what every entrepreneur face, [which] is funding. It’s constricted by that. And me and Nasrul, we tried in a few places, but we couldn’t get any. We start making our own calendars, [and] I was working part-time in my first year in University, and Nasrul too. We pumped in our own money and we started it, until we got a little bit of traction.”

Besides initially facing struggles with funding, Haziq also felt he had to prove that he was a worthy entrepreneur despite his lack of experience in the business field. Without any prior knowledge in any business majors, he believed in his capabilities of running Nomad. He ultimately believes that the success of the business speaks for itself, and if their performance is good, it will shine through.

“We were also in an 8-month Young Social Entrepreneurs Program with Singapore International Foundation, where we were actually the finalist and got funded by them. So through that we got mentored by Temasek Holdings and entrepreneurs. So that’s how things got started and a lot of people really like what we are doing basically, I mean it’s great having people believing in what you believe in,” he tells us.

Haziq also shared his team goal for Nomad; for it to be a local brand recognised by an international pool of audience that believes and appreciates its artisanal crafts and social mission. With this in mind, he hopes to even market the brand to the US.

With a social enterprise that is rising up to greater heights, Haziq only had words of encouragement for the next go-getter out there.

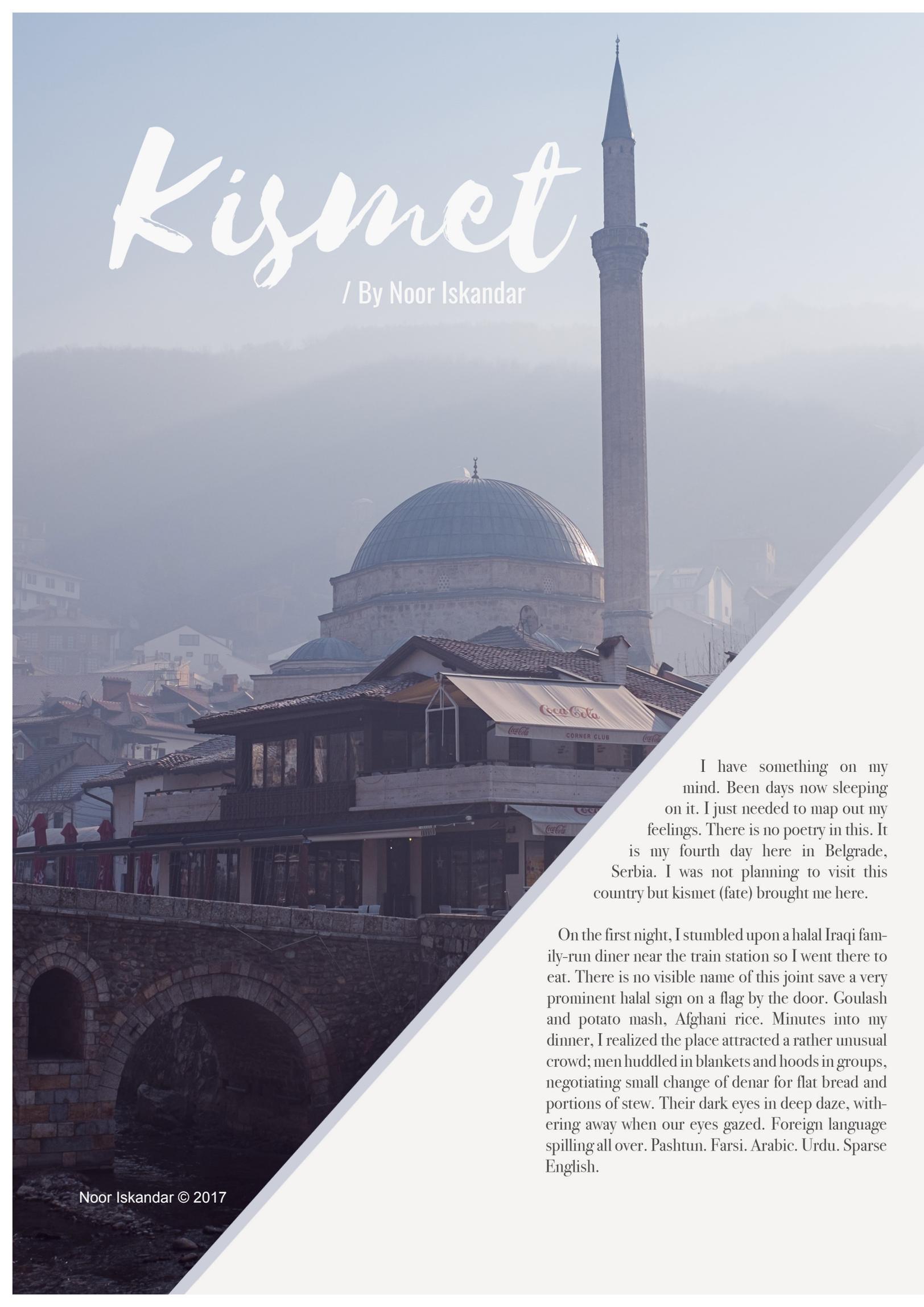
“There’s a lot of Muslims who are doing great things and I feel like the only thing that’s challenging us is the fact that there’s always been a mindset of conformity: that we should be whatever that the society deems to be the best for us. But at one point in time when you’re going to leave this world, is there something else you wish you did that would make you contented? Because if there is a spark in you that wants to do something else, I feel that you should go for it. Because ultimately, especially now that you’re young, you’re a university student, there is no reason to be afraid to fail, and so many reasons why people will not judge you for failing, and so much more opportunities to learn.

So basically to really just go out there and do it, don’t conform.”



Kismet

/ By Noor Iskandar



I have something on my mind. Been days now sleeping on it. I just needed to map out my feelings. There is no poetry in this. It is my fourth day here in Belgrade, Serbia. I was not planning to visit this country but kismet (fate) brought me here.

On the first night, I stumbled upon a halal Iraqi family-run diner near the train station so I went there to eat. There is no visible name of this joint save a very prominent halal sign on a flag by the door. Goulash and potato mash, Afghani rice. Minutes into my dinner, I realized the place attracted a rather unusual crowd; men huddled in blankets and hoods in groups, negotiating small change of denar for flat bread and portions of stew. Their dark eyes in deep daze, withering away when our eyes gazed. Foreign language spilling all over. Pashtun. Farsi. Arabic. Urdu. Sparse English.

Then it struck me like snow sleet. The refugee crisis! These men are stranded here. They are everywhere; at carparks, behind the train station, under the bridge. Spilling.

Belgrade snowed over that first night and temperatures dropped to some say the coldest January in decades.

I take the same path every night, a few metres down the block and a diagonal trail across a park to the diner. I noticed an odd looking container building along the street and it was packed as always. I went in on the second day thinking it was a supermarket but nope, Refugee Aid Miksalište. I climbed back down and stood there in harsh snow. I was shook.

I remembered the Malaysian Chinese lady who ran a vegan place in Budapest during my first few nights of this sojourn. She spoke about spiritual progression and how we heal one another. How she opened up the doors of her "soul harbour" to the refugees near Keleti railway station when everyone turned them away and how she recounted the deadest stares in their eyes. Three days in, I had not seen any parts of Belgrade except for the trips to the diner to stare into their eyes. I saw cities and cities in them. Ruined, rebuilding, ghost, gone. I wondered what is on their mind. Is it God? Is it the absence of God? Of trust? What do they think of Allah? Do they miss home? Where are their mothers? When were their last hugs? Do they feel less alive? Less human? Empty or so full? Where do they pray? Do they pray at all? Is there a void to be filled? What is 'hope' in Farsi? What is 'faith' in Pashtun?

I frequented the diner for the lack of an option but I invested so much now I just blended in. A new server thought I was a refugee, the idea of having a foreign tourist at that time amused everyone. I wanted to be so available for them, unguarded. But I was so vacant, bordered.

Two boys came to join me at my table and I extended my regards. They were both aged 15 from Afghanistan. Encouraged by their families who were under attack by Daesh and Taliban to flee home and make a future for themselves. They walked for three months across Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria. But Hungary would not open the borders for them so they were stuck here. Some for months, others a year. And still waiting...

"Waiting is a part of intense living." I read that at a museum in Madrid almost exactly a year ago. Now it echoed so hauntingly. I texted friends back home for comfort. I was lost at being lost this time.

I also texted the refugee center. I felt compelled to comprehend this confusion. I met Ivana, the communication manager, the next morning. We spoke and toured the space. The place was crowded as the refugees wanted to charge their devices and wifi, seek company and assistance basically.

I spoke to Hijjaz and Vahed, two of dozens waiting in line for shower. There were children and women too. Lots of volunteers, medical personnel, supplies, care. They had everything save the border opening which still hangs the noose.

A boy was carrying a fleece blanket down the steps of the barracks, eyes darting at me. Lifting a melodious form with odd breaks like a search for a cry. A calling. A signal smoke.

I wished I spoke more Farsi. All my obsession over Iran but there I was, feeling sorely out of place and redundant. I felt hypocritical that my temporary passing would be an added burden of confusion. That my asking of "how are you feeling" felt like a rhetorical question harsher than winter. That my "Hey, I am Muslim too" felt like a disloyal abandonment. That my "May God keep you safe" as I wait for my plane home on Sunday showed my prerogative for moving while they were left with none. That my desire to understand was only trying to fill my void but rob them. So I left the space. I was so heartbroken until I read this.

"Stay strong. You're a musafir, Isky! Your prayers are the most maqbul, insyaAllah! Make use of that for now and seek for betterment for both you and those around you. I'm pretty sure you're already helping them as much as you can in your own ways but ask and keep asking Him for more."

Last night, I went back to the diner. It was full so I asked if I could join a table. Again, I melted into the foreign tongues as I tucked into my kebab. A lady in her late thirties and two men smoking and chatting, sipping çay, they look Mexican but apparently Afghani. The lady resembled my mum. She offered chat and spoke of her struggles.

I noticed a pair of Central Asian looking men across us. They reminded me of myself and my dad, just passively sharing the spring chicken, few words exchanged. Eating in haste, lingering eyes. Then they came over and spoke to the lady in Pashtun.

I smiled and asked if they were Afghani. Morteza and his uncle, Akbar. I told them now I understood why when I was in rural Iran the old men thought I was Afghani. We shared some similar features. They were so surprised to hear that I was from Singapore and just touring the Balkans.

My heart sank again when they said, "You live in the best country." I joked they should follow me back to Singapore. They apparently fled from asylum camps in Iran trying to reach Paris. But after months of poor predicament, tonight they plan to make a detour to Greece.

That was their last meal there. Their smiles glossed over their sorry states. I was on the brink of tears when I shook their hands to wish them a safe journey when Morteza embraced me so tightly.

"Khoda Hafez" (May God be with you)

God is Giving, indeed.

“Stay strong. You're a musafir, Isky! Your prayers are the most maqbul, insyaAllah! Make use of that for now and seek for betterment for both you and those around you.



**Be in this world as though you were
a stranger or a wayfarer.**

(Hadith Bukhari)

In a sleepy lounge on a late Thursday night, we sat down with one of the founders of Projek O, Suhailah Mazlan, to uncover the story behind their humanitarian project based in Cambodia and Indonesia. She sat calmly and exuded a peaceful aura, and at the same time, there was an eagerness in her eyes to share the experiences gained from initiating such a venture on their own. It all started with NTUMS' overseas expedition (OE) to Cambodia with the Cambodian Islamic Association (CIA). After the trip, five like-minded individuals from the team decided to return as an independent body to carry out a smaller project, without proper sponsorship and a school behind them. Three expeditions later, Projek O is still going strong.

When asked about why they started such an initiative, she explained that they wanted to provide a platform for youths in Singapore to serve.

“People always think that they have nothing to offer, but even though they have no possessions or money to give, they can always give their time and effort.

We want to remind the youth that we don't live in this world on our own but are part of one big community who depend on Allah, sometimes through depending on each other.

They have to learn that we have to give back somehow because being born in Singapore is already a huge privilege.”

She added, “We also want to act as a bridge and form ties with these communities, communities that we feel indebted to because they opened up our hearts to let go of whatever worldly worries that we used to have. So that's why we wanted to give back, not just by providing material goods but by opening doors”.

And build bridges they did. So far, they have formed close ties with Al-Ishlah in Indonesia as well as the Cambodian Islamic Association (CIA), returning annually to offer assistance. On the occasion that they do not have sufficient resources to travel, they transfer funds when needed. But these relationships run much deeper than solely on a professional level. She recalled the closeness and warmth she felt whenever she returned.

“When I go back, I honestly feel like I have a family there. The ustaz always tells me I'm their daughter, you know? They always say I'm coming back home...it really feels like a part of us was left there. Or it was already meant to be there.”

Projek “O” Opening doors

**Interview with Suhailah Mazlan
and Nur Hidayah Mudzaffar Shah**

Her eyes lit up as she marvelled about how such close human connections could be formed despite language barriers.

“And I have to tell you something interesting. When you go Cambodia, you don't understand anything. You're like a chicken talking to a duck. But don't you think it's amazing that for all the times I've been there, I've felt as though I know these people, although I don't know what they're saying to me? They give you food and try to tell you about their lives by showing you things and using broken English and Malay. Sometimes it's not the words they say but how much heart they put into it.

**It's not two people
conversing here, but in here
(points to heart).”**

Such close relationships undoubtedly opened her mind to a different perception of reality. She stressed on the value of embarking on such trips as a reminder to oneself of the true purpose of life. One realisation that stuck with her was the way we should look at hardships. “Because of the fact that they stay in such countries, they know that they are being tested and they know that all this is temporary. I'm not saying that they like their hardship, no, but they treasure it. They understand that there's a deeper meaning to whatever they're facing. When I go there and see it for myself, I try to embody it though I will never be able to reach their level.”



Huda Razak © 2017

Hidayah, another founding partner of Projek O, added on in an online interview, “There is something that the Ustaz in Cambodia never fails to mention every time we come back. He would always quote this hadith,

Narrated `Abdullah bin `Umar: “Allah’s Messenger (pbuh) said, ‘A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim, so he should not oppress him, nor should he hand him over to an oppressor. Whoever fulfilled the needs of his brother, Allah will fulfill his needs; whoever brought his (Muslim) brother out of a discomfort, Allah will bring him out of the discomforts of the Day of Resurrection, and whoever screened a Muslim, Allah will screen him on the Day of Resurrection.’

He would always repeat the first line. It is always nice to know how we are all family by faith and through humanity. It is amazing at how Ustaz always puts the guests before himself and his family, ensuring we have nothing but the best even though, his family may not have enough. He tirelessly reminds us to regard them as family, and as family, nothing is too burdensome. This spurs me to keep serving and loving, what Suhailah calls, families bound by faith and humanity.

It can be said that what we see is a reflection of ourselves. Whatever less we thought we see in those living in these communities, is what is lacking in ourselves. We are the poor ones. Hence, Projek O hopes to enrich our empty hearts and souls so we can learn what is gratitude.”

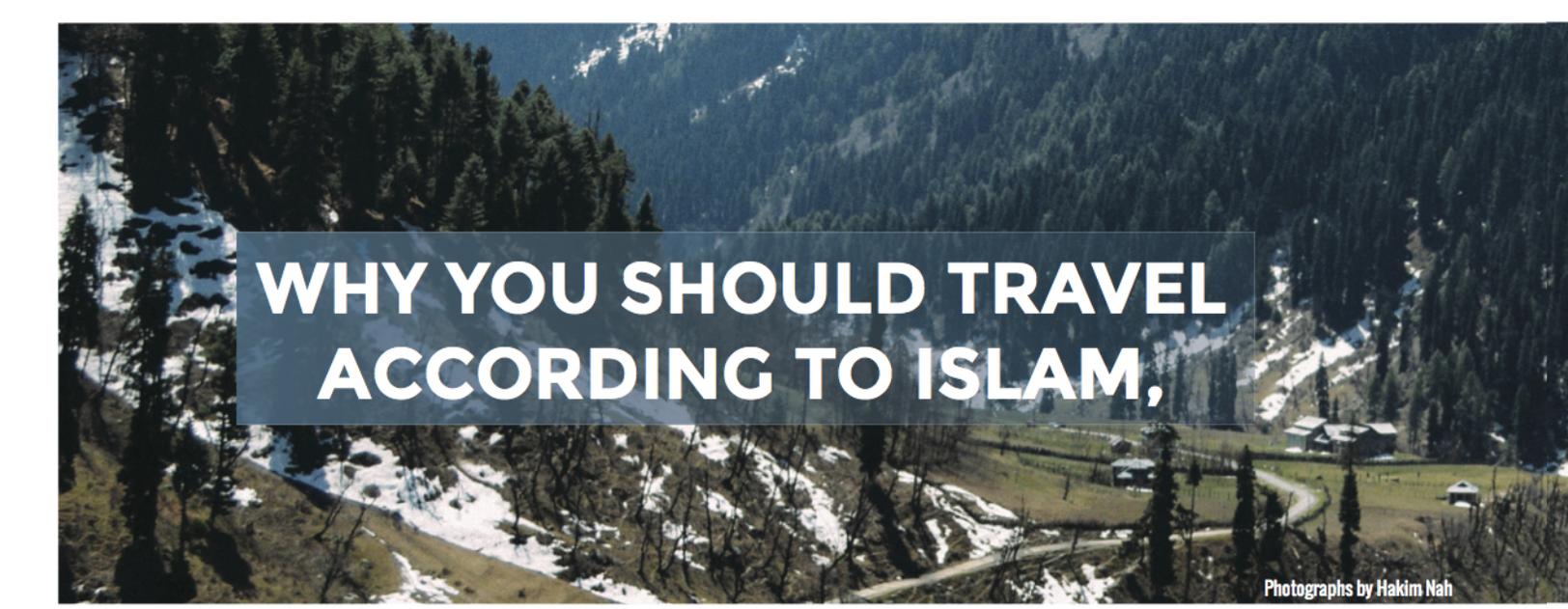
The founders of Projek O saw many opportunities for the youth in Singapore to gain from the expeditions as much as they did, which was why they brought along five individuals aged 14 to 18 on their most recent trip.

“They went there and felt like they wouldn’t be able to do anything. But when I saw them lead certain events, I saw that they understood that they could make an impact. They saw that there is something more in this world than the trivial things they regard as problems back home. There was that awareness, that stepping stone. That is all that we hope for. Also, in a way, the project is to try and call people back to the path of Allah because it’s easy to forget in Singapore.”

The number of lives impacted by Projek O, whether those of volunteers or those in need, are ever-increasing. Though it might seem like a project simple enough to execute based on its success, there are always challenges that need to be overcome. Take, for instance, the fact that the founders are all working adults, leaving little time left for the project. There is also the constant need for more funding and the desire to expand their project to even more communities.

Nevertheless, they persist in tackling whatever hurdles that come their way, driven purely by their passion for service, the love for the people they now call family and the strife for self-betterment.

If you would like to know more about them, do head over to their Facebook: [TheProjek.O](#), or their Instagram: [@TheProjek.O](#)



WHY YOU SHOULD TRAVEL ACCORDING TO ISLAM,

Photographs by Hakim Nah

“Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a wayfarer.” (Hadith 40)

We are all on this continuous journey, moving towards the gardens of Jannah in our hearts and in the heavens. This hadith conveys a strong notion of detachment. The Prophet (SallaAllahu ‘alayhi wasallam) once said: *“What is the dunya for me. An example of me and the dunya is that of a traveller who naps under the shade of a tree, then departs and leaves it.”* [Reported by Ahmad and Al-Tirmidhi].

Travelling acts as a reminder. This idea of being able to be detached from this dunya and not allowing it to become home – is essential to all Muslims. It subtly reminds you, living in this world should be a constant state of transit.

As we travel in the literal sense, be it plane, boat or foot, we automatically travel on a metaphysical and spiritual level. Travelling reminds us of our purpose on this earth and where we are ultimately striving to. Travelling through the world is symbolic of yourself. Your whole life is a process of journeying, whilst truly never arriving at a destination. Our existence *“is a constant quest for mizan (balance) and harmony”*, (Shaykh Fadhlalla). And as we inwardly travel for our spiritual growth, it is equally important we outwardly travel for the same purpose.

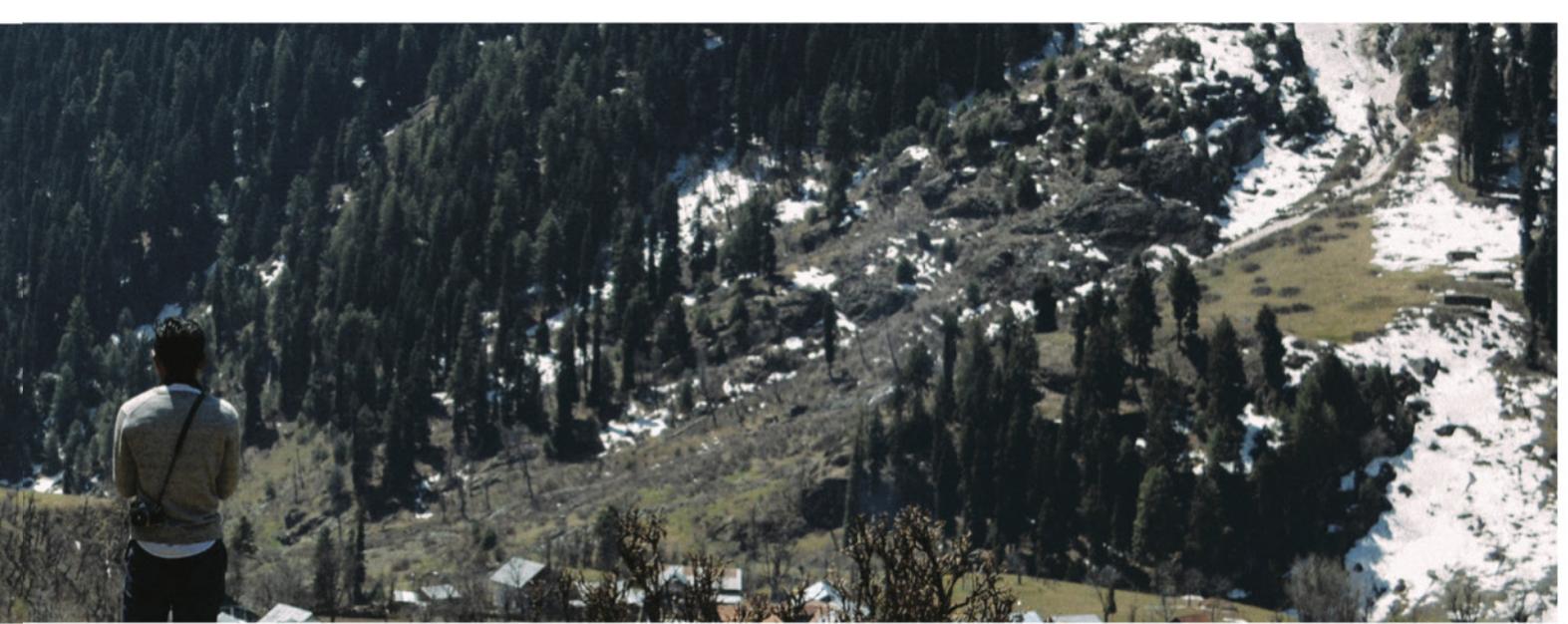
Travelling is perspective, which at times can only be achieved through the departure of our everyday surroundings. Travelling can, however, be a privileged experience. With an increasingly bordered world, geographically and socially constructed, it can at times feel inaccessible. I’m not saying book yourself flights to the furthest place across the ocean but go somewhere, maybe a different city or town and perhaps just for a few days, explore the *you*, away from the everyday 9-5 living.

As cliché as it may be when said, *“through travel you find yourself”*, it holds truth. We often become a creature of habit and who we really are becomes somewhat lost. So venture the real *you* in different surroundings, where boundaries are pushed and routines escaped. At first, you may find yourself nervous, but eventually you will become a little bit braver and a little less inhibited. Not trying to romanticize travelling, but it can provide you with renewed senses, like a child you want to taste, smell, touch and see everything. To smile and hold a conversation with everyone you meet. It becomes more of a rediscovery of yourself than a discovery of anywhere new.

Travelling is humbling and helps us practice humility. Often it provides you with that much needed spiritual renewal. When work, errands and surviving becomes your entire being, it becomes easy to miss the Divine beauty and lose touch and sight of His creation. When you travel you actively seek it all. You want to visit every mountain, forest, desert and sea; all emblematic of God’s vastness, Al-Wasi. And *nothing* is more humbling, when you realise how little humans occupy in comparison to the natural wonders of the world.

Rumi reminds us;

**“Witness His wonders, lose yourself in awe,
When one beholds the wonders of God
abandoning pride and the claims of the ego
contemplating His work, you find your true station
and fall into the silence concerning the Maker.
Then you will say from the depths of your soul,
“I cannot praise you enough”.**



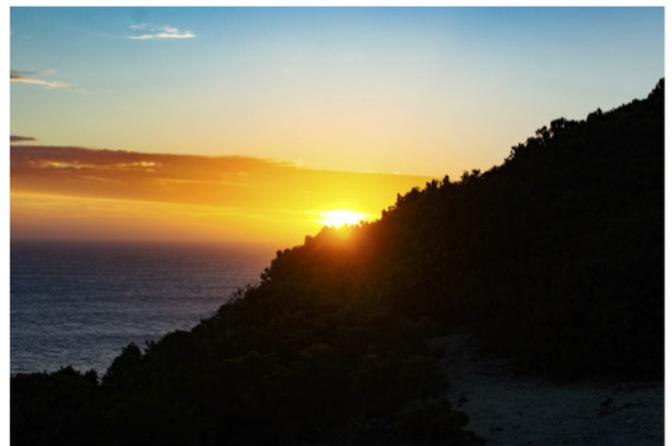
This spiritual journey that opens for you when you travel is unlike any other. When you come across places of new heights or tranquility, the world almost stops – just for you to say *SubhanAllah*. Through travel you are continuously invited to have moments of remembrance and reflection of our connection with our Lord.



Travelling is ummah. The word ummah in loose definition means community. And I have never really felt the depth of the word until I travelled. From the moment you enter the airport and you see your fellow Muslims who are also waiting to be “randomly” checked. Or when you wait in the airport prayer rooms and exchange pleasantries with sisters from all over the world in broken languages and unifying smiles. From when you are sick and the Muslim aunties of the world, hug you, care for you and rub your stomach till you are better. Or the uncles who will drive you from A to Z, proudly showing off their motherland whilst passing on life advice as you sit in the back of their car, taxi, rickshaw. Imam as-Shafi echoes this when he states; *“Leave your country in search of loftiness and travel! For in travel there is five benefits: Relief of adversity, earning of livelihood, knowledge, etiquette, and noble companionship.”* (Imam as-Shafi)

And indeed through travels you will find noble companionship; strangers who will restore your faith in

humanity; with their unconditional kindness and generosity Travelling is the gift we give each other. For me the most revolutionary form of dawah, lies in you, your presence and your mannerism. Travel to places where Islam is limited or unknown. In times when Islam is overly represented for all the wrong reasons, it is crucial that we share its truest and purest form. Engage with street vendors or your Airbnb host, show and converse the beauty of your religion. Sharing and feeling the presence of Islam wherever you go, even in the most unexpected places becomes a blessing. My parting words to you; let 2017 be the year of your travels. Venture to new places, engage with fellow wayfarers of life. Enjoy what the world has to offer and let there be infinite journeys of remembrance, reflection and re-discovery as you strive towards your final destination.



This post was written by guest blogger, Shabana. Find her online at [Noormadic Ventures](#) | [Instagram](#).

/ By Have Halal Will Travel (#HHWT)

7 inspiring personalities that will change the way you see

2017

/ By Remy Mahzam

The notion of change has been a recurring leitmotif in the Al-Quran.

The command to change the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Makkah in *Surah Al-Baqarah* epitomizes the final covenant of God with Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), unifying the *ummah* through a common spiritual orientation.

In *Surah Ar-Ra'd*, it was mentioned that God does not change the condition of people until they themselves change what is within them.

As we sail into a brand new 2017, it is only fitting that we embrace this progressive idea of change – and what better way to do this than to look at seven inspiring personalities who have demonstrated ‘change’ in their respective ways, stimulating a revolution of their own whilst impacting society through their ideas and actions.



Shahib Amin

Founder of Syukran.com

Instagram: @shahibamin.

Facebook: Syukran.com)

Founder of Syukran.com (Instagram: @shahibamin, Facebook: Syukran.com)

Shahib Amin is amongst the first generation of independent video bloggers who create original online content for Islamic info-tainment and *da'wah*. In 2006, he co-founded a video series called DYN TV with local radio deejay Dyn Norahim. Seeing the increase in the number of online followers and video viewership, he incorporated Syukran.com, producing free Islamic learning videos as well as paid online courses.

Through Syukran.com, Shahib sets a benchmark for aspiring video bloggers in producing creative online content with a quality that puts him on par with non-traditional media outlets such as BuzzFeed and AJ+. Shahib with his partner Dayat Ismail, have produced by far 250 videos which attracted over 2,084 subscribers on YouTube as well as over 24,304 followers on Facebook.



Taufiq RnB

Instructor at Alqudwah Academy

Instagram: @taufiqrnb,
@alqudwahacademy)

Taufiq Radja Nurul Bahri, affectionately known as Ustadz Taufiq RNB initiated Alqudwah Academy, an Islamic education provider delivered in English since 2013. A graduate from Al-Azhar University in Cairo in the field of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence, who is also currently pursuing his Masters at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Taufiq runs Alqudwah's programmes with his brother Hidayat in a quaint, 2-storey conservation shop house at Pahang Street.

What sets the Alqudwah Academy apart from other religious education centres is the characteristic hipster approach towards Islamic learning. Alqudwah which also runs its own internet café attracts an audience of curious youths struggling with their religious identity and meaning. Classes at Alqudwah make traditional scriptures such as *Ihya' Ulum Ad-Din* by Al-Ghazālī, *Tafseer Al-Qur'an Al-Azim* of Ibn Kathir and *Bidayah Al-Mujtahid* by Ibn Rushd more accessible to a new generation of learners.



Liyana Musfirah

Trainer at Safinah Institute

instagram: @liyanamusfira

As the leading female instructor at Safinah Institute, Liyana Musfirah wins the hearts of hundreds, if not thousands ladies seeking spiritual solace both online and in the offline realm. Liyana had spent 3 years studying at Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro Foundation located in Damascus, Syria before the start of the civil war. Her experience of being a young mother has also made her a sought after speaker for discussions on marriage, parenting and pregnancy.

Liyana is known for her active engagements on social media platforms delivering live-streaming self-development lectures that tackle issues relating to intricacies of relationship, women-related matters as well as spiritual remedies for the purification of the hearts. Together with Ustadz Mizi Wahid, Liyana contributes extensively to SOUL Academy, a curated series of "live" sessions with downloadable audio, notes and assignments catered for the busy individuals who could not commit to full-time classroom-based Islamic learning.



Rahayu Mahzam

Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC

Facebook: Rahayu Mahzam

Mdm Rahayu Mahzam is the chairman for Bulan Bahasa (Malay Language Month) which will run for two months from 15 August till 15 October 2017. The efforts to promote the Malay language would ensure that both Malay and non-Malay speakers can appreciate the language and culture better. Funding such as the Malay Language Learning and Promotion Committee Fund (MLLPC) and the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism has been made available to develop programmes to enhance the Malay Language proficiency of students and other Malay language users in our multicultural society.

Bahasa Melayu being a national **language** plays a pivotal role in strengthening ethnic roots and national identities, forming an integral part of Singapore's heritage. "It is through language that we build kinship and connection to our roots, values, heritage and culture, preserving it for the young and generations to come," as quoted by Mdm Rahayu. As an advocate of the Malay language, Mdm Rahayu has volunteered with the Malay Youth Literary Association (4PM) since 1997 and is active with the youth debate scene. She was previously a Management Committee member of 4PM and also sat on the board of Singapore Muslim Women's Association (PPIS).

It is hope that the personalities highlighted above which includes community leaders, social media influencers, sportsmen and an arts practitioner, will inspire the way you see 2017. In their respective niche areas, these personalities have demonstrated how change comes from within, while impacting the people around through one's ideas and actions.



Mohksin Rashid

Executive Director of Majulah Community

Facebook: Majulah Community

Little is known about the driving force behind Majulah Community, a non-profit movement which is very humanitarian in nature. Mohksin Rashid aspires to provide pathways for youths to be the change agents of tomorrow. This is made possible by partnering various organizations such as People's Association, Yayasan Mendaki, Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College Central, Community Leaders Forum, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and Ground-Up Initiative. Through these partnerships, Majulah Community offers not only volunteering opportunities but also funding and skills training for youths so that they will be more equipped in running community-driven projects.

Project Peduli is a social initiative started by Mohksin and his colleague, Khairu Rejal under Majulah Community to address immediate humanitarian needs in the region through crowd-sourcing and crowd-funding. On 26 December 2014, Majulah commissioned Project Peduli – Pantai Timur (East Coast) that aims to provide short and mid-term relief to the flood-affected victims in East Coast, Malaysia.

Be the



Farris Rahman

Professional Skateboarder

Instagram: @farrisrahman

Farris Rahman is Singapore's leading professional extreme sports athlete to be sponsored by the popular energy drink, Red Bull and lifestyle-skate shoe, Vans. A brother of two other local skateboarding heroes, Firdaus and Feroze Rahman, Farris has travelled to distant places to showcase his skills in vert as well as street skate competitions such as 2011 KIA Asian X-Games in Shanghai, 2012 Maloof Money Cup in South Africa and 2014 Vert Attack Malmö Skatepark in Sweden.

For the upcoming 2020 Olympic Games, Singapore's medal chances might be resting on Farris and his brother, Feroze who will be representing Team Singapore after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced its approval of five new sports for the Tokyo Games which includes skateboarding. Not many would have thought that skateboarding would be taken seriously as a competitive sport that would bring fame and honour to one's nation.



Faddho

Calligraphy & Khat Practitioner

Facebook: @Faddho

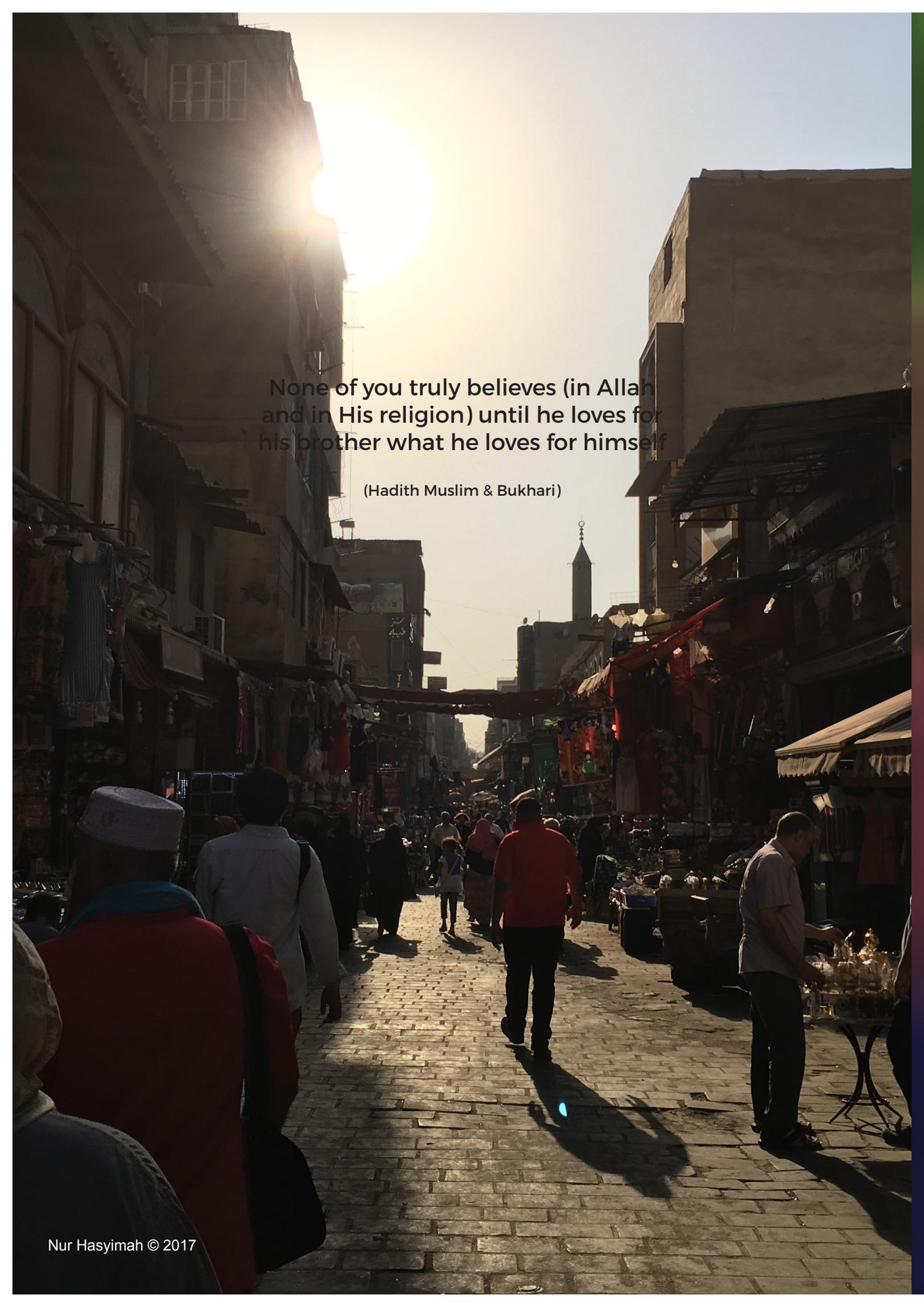
Instagram: @themvac

Faddho is the pen name for Faizal Somadi, an arts practitioner who is also a Khat (Arabic Calligraphy) enthusiast. Faizal is the grandson of Ustaz Ahmad Sonhadji, a renowned and respected Muslim scholar in Southeast Asia. Through Faddho, Faizal embraces the way of the pen which is seen as merely a tool to illustrate messages. Faizal had the rare opportunity to receive tutelage with Turkish master calligrapher Ahmet Kocak, referred by Klasik Türk Sanatları Vakfı (Classical Turkish Arts Foundation). He was formerly trained at Restu Foundation in Malaysia where he learnt the five Arabic scripts, Kufi Fatimi & Kufi Mushafi, Nasakh, Riq'a and Thuluth. Apart from mastering the scripts, Faizal also practised the transcription and transcribing of Al-Quran, as well as the Art of Illumination and Ornamentation.

Over the years, Faizal has made Islamic calligraphy accessible to arts enthusiasts regardless of their faith and ethnicity. He conducted various exhibition showcases and art demos including Esplanade's Tapestry of Sacred Music festival, Asian Civilisations Museum's Journey of Arabic Calligraphy, National Museum of Singapore's Trading Stories: Conversations with Six Pioneering Tradesmen, Mediterranean Visual Arts Club (MVAC) Khat Jam Session and National Library Board's Aksara: The Passage of Malay Scripts.

he change!

**All photos have been used with permission*



None of you truly believes (in Allah
and in His religion) until he loves for
his brother what he loves for himself

(Hadith Muslim & Bukhari)

10 cafes in Singapore

YOU MUST VISIT BEFORE THEY BECOME MAINSTREAM

/ By Have Halal Will Travel (#HHWT)

With Singaporeans' love for all things new and yummy, there's little wonder why cafes are mushrooming all over the place! If you want to be known as the fun-guy of the group, take your friends to these cafes before everyone else gets there!

1. Blisshouse

Blisshouse is a fairy tale themed cafe – and if that isn't enough for you to keep on reading, it's even got a story of its own! The cafe is based on two ill-fated lovers who upon eloping, found themselves in a Garden of Eden. The lovers set up home in the garden, inviting dwarves to bring in a grand piano and goblins to forage for the freshest ingredients. As if brought together by the peaceful ambience of the garden, the mystical creatures are now surprisingly amicable and get along. With the Blisshouse having been certified halal in September 2016, one can look forward to many dreamy lunch dates! A hot hit is the Black Pepper Chicken Chop, a Singaporean-style Western dish topped with a fruity raisin black pepper sauce and served with bright vegetables and creamy mashed potatoes. The Seafood Pizza has an addicting crisp crust and is adorned with a layer of mixed seafood and mozzarella. This is the kind of dish Sebastian the lobster warned everyone about! If your childhood had been Disney-tinted like ours, you would believe that every fairy tale should come with a sweet ending! Keep your head in the clouds with the tall Pyramid of Love – a stack of cinnamon-sugar toast cubes drizzled with kaya sauce, and crowned with ice cream!

Address: 6 Eu Tong Sen Street, #03-21 Clarke Quay Central, Clarke Quay Central, Singapore 059817

Operating hours: Open daily; 12PM-10PM
Nearest MRT station: Clarke Quay

2. The Malayan Council

The Malayan Council (TMC) is the place to T.M.C – Talk, makan (eat) and chill! The food served here is a fusion of Western and Malay cuisines, but we don't mean in the same way Western food is prepared at home! Served in true talk-makan-chill style, the food portions here are generous and great for sharing. Case in point – the large *Roti Kirai Beef Ribs* –

fork-tender beef ribs with a side of roti kirai to soak up the addictive secret sauce with! And if you don't want to share these ribs, that's totally fine. No one has a bone to pick with you. If you're looking to strike gold in the form of golden salted egg yolk sauce, you've hit the jackpot with the Salted Egg Softshell Crab and Mudcrab Linguine! Fresh shredded crab and softshell crab are sun-kissed with creamy linguine noodles that aren't too cloying. P.S. We ain't yolking with ya when we say salted egg everything is pure gold. Check out 5 Halal Salted Egg Dishes You Have To Try In Singapore! If you've got a hankering for an all-Western dish, check out the Chicken Parmigiana. Brazilian chicken breast is pan seared and smothered with hearty tomato and mozzarella, and then served with some seriously good truffle fries! You've got to give the Classic Ondeh-Ondeh Cake a taste one-deh! Crumbly pandan cake is layered with syrupy gula melaka and grated coconut.

Address: 22 Dunlop Street, Singapore 209350

**Operating hours: Mon-Fri; 11.30AM-11PM,
Sat-Sun; 11AM-11PM**

Nearest MRT station: Bugis

3. All Things Delicious

This bakery-cafe known for its wholesome baked goods and sandwiches now has a dinner menu that's also made of all-natural ingredients! Less excuse to cook at home. The steaks have been raised. The texture of melt-in-the-mouth ribeye gets an added contrast from crunchy crisps. You'll be over the moo-n! For lunch, have the soy yummy Soy-Glazed Salmon Ricebowl, complete with avocado, cherry tomatoes, shimeji mushrooms and a six-minute egg! Incidentally, this bowl satisfies all food groups of the food pyramid! But wait... Don't forget your sugars, of which, according to the food pyramid, are to be taken "sparingly". And with All Things Delicious' all-natural desserts, you can stretch that word a wee bit more! Pains-takingly-sourced gula melaka goes into the Gula Melaka Scones just so you can have no preservatives (yes, we're aware it's not a real word) about preservatives! Its predecessor, the zesty Orange Cranberry Scones made with USA cranberries,

have been a sustaining crowd-winner. Buttery and tender to the bite, these aren't your average crumbly scones.

Address: 34 Arab Street, Singapore 199733

Operating hours: Tue-Fri; 10AM-10PM, Sat-Sun; 9AM-10PM

Nearest MRT station: Nicoll Highway

4. Commonground

Established by the folks behind Pastamania, this cafe aims to be the Commonground for people from all walks of life. Here, you'll find family-friendly meals that won't burn a hole in your pocket! If you and your company tend to have trouble deciding on appetisers, order the *Commonground Jumbo Appetisers Platter* and set aside more time to ponder over the extensive mains menu! At \$20, you'll have a taste of the *Breaded White Fish Fillet* (\$6), *Fried Chicken Cutlet* (\$6), *Ravioli Nachos* (\$6), and potato wedges. Ain't no thang like a chicken wing! Say open sesame to these *Oriental Sesame Chicken Wings* that are decadently crispy, yet juicy. If like us, you think that there's no such thing as too much cheese, the *Baked Cheesy Salmon Ravioli* will make you say, "This is *grate!*" Salmon-stuffed ravioli dumplings are soaked in bubbling, ooey-goey, mozzarella and parmesan. And it was all yellow. Is your dessert compartment attached to your stomach everywhere you go? Pro-tip: Never neglect it, because "dessert" spelled backwards is – well, you know the drill. With a *Desserts in a Jar* (\$8), two scoops of ice cream, and a sweet serving of toast, you'll have a few reasons to smile with the *Commonground Merry Desserts Platter*.

Address: #01-103, Our Tampines Hub, 51 Tampines Avenue 4, Singapore 529684

Operating hours: Sun-Thu; 10AM-10PM, Fri; 10AM-12AM, Sat; 8AM-12AM

Nearest MRT Station: Tampines

5. Fleur Cafe

Friends of Fleur Cafe will be delighted to know that the place has relocated to 76 Shenton Way, which is touted as the new Halal Street. We say "friends" because people keep coming back for its top-notch service quality! "We are not in the food business serving people – we are in the people business serving food." An updated take on Sup Tulang, fans have waited *tu-lang for this Red Mutton Stew in Bread Bowl*. Its smokiness is perfect for rainy days and the dish is so moreish, you'll even want to eat the bowl! Fleur Cafe's *Honey Wings* are air-fried, so what you'll get is

crackling skin without the oiliness of deep fried chicken wings! Remember to order a cup of Joe, as its perking effect isn't its only perk. Fair trade Vietnamese and Aceh coffee beans are used in Fleur Cafe's cuppas, so coffee farmers get paid the full price demanded by middleman traders.

Address: 76 Shenton Way, Singapore 079119

Operating hours: Mon-Fri; 9AM-9PM, Sat; 12PM-6PM

Nearest MRT station: Tanjong Pagar

6. Brothers in Fine Food

Coined by the same guys from Penny University, Brothers in Fine Food (BFF) is a spanking new Asian fusion cafe, serving up refreshing interpretations of food. Its sister cafe is known for its reasonably priced brunches, and you can expect no less from Brothers in Fine Food! Beetroot puree lends some earthiness and colour to this affordable *Beef Steak with Beetroot Thyme Puree*. The dish is cooked sous vide, resulting in a lusciously tender steak. Thyme to turn up the beet! There are so many fish in the ocean, but we're dreaming about this *Salmon Fillet* – cooked sous vide with brown butter miso sauce, topped with curried breadcrumbs and Chinata-spiced salmon skin, and served on a bed of giant Israeli couscous. Phew, that was a mouthful, though you'll definitely want one! The hipster dessert that took the Singapore cafe scene by storm is back – and with literally more depth, we must say. With this comforting *Red Velvet Hot Chocolate*, you can have your cake and drink it too!

Address: 5 Tampines Avenue 3, #02-07, Tampines West Community Club, Singapore 529705

Operating hours: Tue-Fri; 12PM-10.30PM, Sat-Sun; 9AM-10.30PM

Nearest MRT station: Tampines

7. Simply Sinless

Love desserts but don't have a non-moving waistline to express that love? Located at Halal Street in Shenton Way is Simply Sinless, a guilt-free cafe baking up sweet treats that are actually sweeter for your health! This *Thai Milk Tea Lava Cake* is sure to tea-ckle your taste buds! As are all of Simply Sinless' desserts, this one is low in sugar and fat. We're fans of the ultra sugary drink, and it's hard to believe that this delightfully rich morsel is a lighter version of it! Normally, healthier foods or taste good – which don't look this pretty is why this indulgent

Gold-Dusted Salted Caramel Chocolate French Butter Tart caught us unaware! We really wish no one had told us that these desserts were guilt-free, or we'd have stopped at one! For a one-of-a-kind cupcake, try the nostalgic *Roti Bakar Kaya Cupcake* – a twist on a local favourite of toast with coconut jam. Note: The bakery has relocated as of December 2016. We will update accordingly once the new address has been announced.

Address: 76 Shenton Way, Singapore 079119

Operating hours: Mon-Fri; 11AM-8PM

Nearest MRT station: Tanjong Pagar

8. Kaw Kaw SG

At Kaw Kaw SG, everything is Instagram-worthy. From its rustic brick walls to eye-popping art pieces to its drool-inducing dishes, one would go mad refraining from taking pictures! Even if you're a stickler for beef patties, sink your teeth into Kaw Kaw's lamb burgers! 175 grams of minced mutton is sandwiched between buttery buns. The mutton patties aren't gamey at all, though they're a *game* changer for many beef lovers out there! At an additional \$2, you can have the *Lamb Baconizer Burger*, an upgraded Classic Lamb Burger with beef bacon slices. Here's one for the vegans! Kaw Kaw's meaty *The Portobello Burger* is *nacho* average meatless burger. Topped with roasted capsicum and pesto, this will take you to umami heaven. At just \$5.90, you get a waffle with 2 sauces, such as banana and caramel, and a topping of your choice! Its crispy edges are perfect for holding ice cream, which, when melted down into its crevices, turn the waffle into sweet cloudy goodness without making it soggy.

Address: 28 Aliwal Street, #01-01, Aliwal Arts Centre, Singapore 199918

Operating hours: Sun-Thu; 12PM-9.30PM, Fri; 3PM-10.30PM, Sat; 12PM-10.30PM

Nearest MRT station: Nicoll Highway

9. Konditori

If Fika Swedish Cafe has transformed you into a true Swedish food lover, you'll be further taken down that path at Konditori, their new artisan bakery! This place is worth a mention, despite only having a single table and designed to have your pastries to-go. These treats don't contain artificial flavours, colouring and preservatives – pretty *Sweet-ish* in our books! For a traditionally Swedish experience, first have the *Semla Bun*, a Swedish delicacy that's filled with almond paste and whipped cream. Supposedly served only on the first

day of Lent, at Konditori, you can have one all year round! *The Blackforest Croissant* breathes new life to a seemingly forgotten cake flavour. The pastry here has a raspberry jam filling and is denser and less flaky than the usual croissant. Topped with chocolate flakes, this is our *jam!*

Address: 33 Bussorah Street, Singapore 199451

Nearest MRT Station: Bugis

10. Hungry Bazterdz

Serving up unadulterated grub, Hungry Bazterdz is the place to go if you don't care about looking as glamorous as those models in stock photos who eat too eerily neat, and just want quality sandwiches. For a borderline vulgar portion of cheese, grab the *Mighty Cheese Steak*. Grilled beef and 4 types of sinful cheese go into a warm, buttery hoagie bun. Hungry Bazterdz's serving sizes are generous, so share your sandwich with a partner! Or don't – if you resonate with the café's name. Too much of a good thing can give you heart burn, so wash your meal down with an icy *Nomad Cold Brew* (\$7), or a *Thai Iced Tea* (\$4). Your inner hipster won't be able to bottle up any feelings about these undoubtedly cool bottles!

Address: The Arcade, #01-06, 11 Collyer Quay, Singapore 049319

Operating hours: Mon-Fri; 7AM-6PM, Sat; 8AM-3PM

Nearest MRT station: Raffles Place

Here you are - 10 places that give us a reason to wake up to and have breakfast for dinner.

Hop away, cafe-hoppers!
hop away, cafe-hoppers!
hop away, cafe-hoppers!

TEARING DOWN WALLS

/ By Shabira Basheer

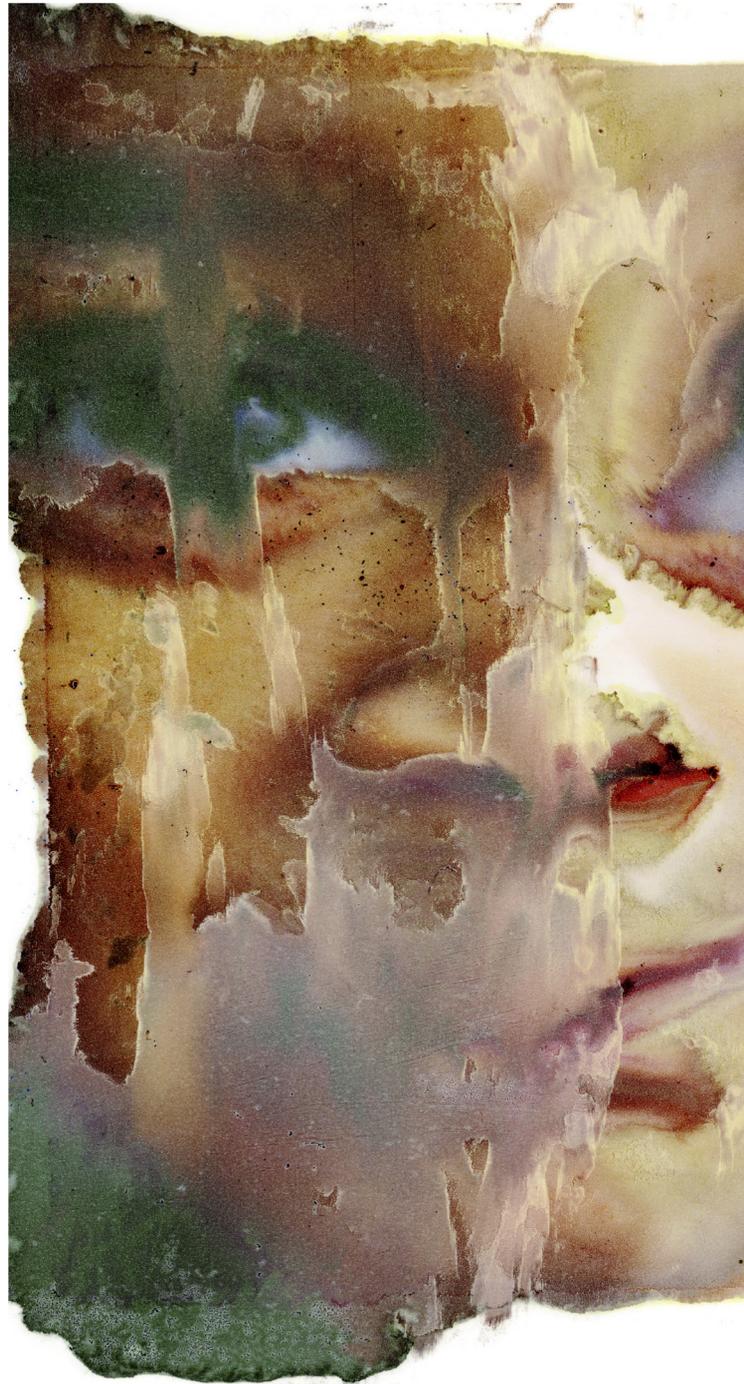
It was a normal day for me; I woke up, got dressed and headed to school. As I commuted to school, my phone started buzzing. There were notifications from BBC, Al Jazeera and New York Times, all alerting me of Trump's latest attempt to ban Muslims that he so passionately promised to white supremacists and nationalists during his election campaign. Wow. He managed to pass an executive order banning Muslims from 7 Muslim-majority countries from coming into America. Imagine the chaos, the panic, the confusion that would ensue.

I opened my Facebook app and scrolled through my news feed. The number of posts on politics that day on my news feed was unprecedented. I watched AJ+ videos, of their reporters going down to the various airports in the US and I saw, through

their lens, numerous protesters who banded together as they resisted Trump's ban in the hopes that the power of the masses would put pressure on the authorities to overturn the order. Later that night, I saw a photo on Twitter that immediately went viral. I loved that photo from the moment that I saw it. It was the most meaningful photo ever taken amidst the pandemonium, the hopelessness and the confusion. Amidst the protesters and the heated environment they were in, the subjects of the photo encapsulated the beauty and the solidarity of the human race.

“Everybody, regardless of one's race, religion, creed, sexual orientation, gender, wants peace. And they want love.”

Noor Iskandar © 2017





It was the photograph of seven-year-old Meryem, a Muslim, and nine-year-old Adin, a Jewish boy, on their fathers' shoulders, looking and smiling at one another as their fathers talked about the similarities between halal and kosher diets at Chicago's O' Hare International Airport. The photograph was captured by Chicago Tribune's Nuccio DiNuzzo.

People talk about the power of words but they forget how powerful pictures can be and how a single, simple photograph can be rife with social and political messages. The photograph captured the hearts of many, because it showed unity amidst diversity. In a time where this very diversity is not being celebrated, but instead, used as a weapon to incite hatred and xenophobia as well as a division of Us against Them, this photograph is a beautiful subversion of Trump's anti-Muslim and overtly-nationalistic rhetoric. The photograph establishes hope amidst troubled times. It is a reminder that diversity does not and will not divide us. Everybody, regardless of one's race, religion, creed, sexual orientation, gender, wants peace. And they want love.

The attempt to ban Muslims will forever remain a horrifying moment enshrined in the 21st century, a chilling revival of what the Jews faced in Germany during World War II. Yet, Trump's Muslim ban also showed various people, not just from different faiths, but people from various socio-economic backgrounds coming together to help. Lawyers came down to the various airports to provide free legal services to those who were detained. Here, humanity transcended class differences as lawyers were willing to offer their services, with no strings attached, to help complete strangers. Here, empathy transcended economic imperatives. Here, solidarity triumphed over differences.

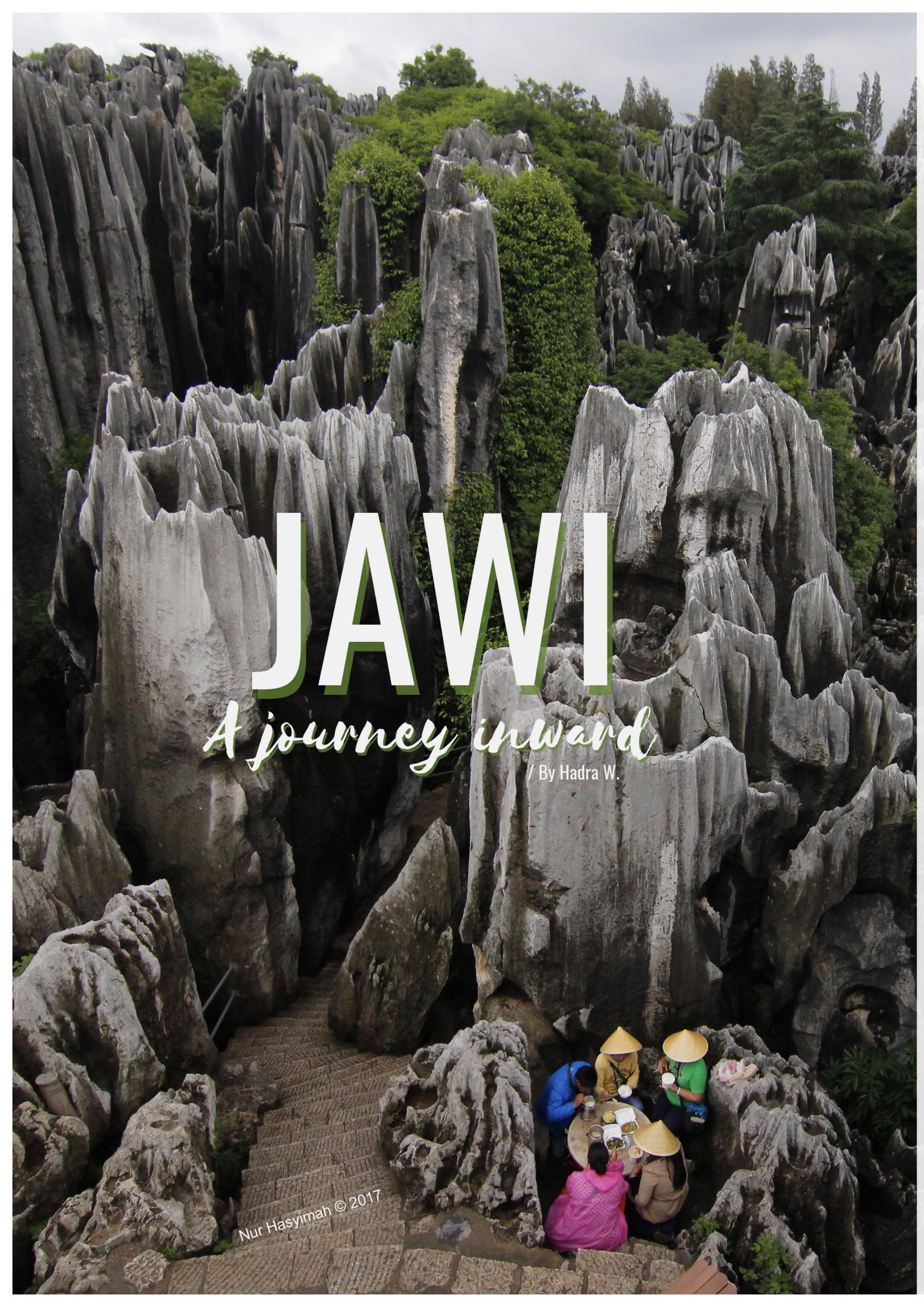
This display of true humanity did not occur just once. It was evident as well in the Women's March that was held a day after Trump's inauguration. Women and men alike came down to Washington in a bid to fight for women's rights in an administration that disregards the value of women and polices women's bodies. The amazing show of crowd - a stark contrast to the small crowd a day earlier at Trump's inauguration ceremony - signalled that a new dawn is approaching on the horizon. Although there needs to be numerous follow-up actions to sustain the Women's March movement and to produce effective change, these individuals from all walks of life - from different religious, racial and socio-economic backgrounds - came together to challenge

entrenched stereotypes and deep-rooted prejudices for equality and change. This is social awareness, which is producing a society of informed individuals who can contribute something substantial to society and effect profound change, someday.

Even music and fashion have become politicised and have been turned into platforms to promote social change and social awareness. In this year's Grammy Awards, A Tribe Called Quest, with Anderson.Paak, Busta Rhymes and Consequence, delivered an extremely politicised performance that strongly condemned President Trump and his Muslim ban, even boldly labelling him as "President Agent Orange", while Q-Tip repeatedly roared out to the crowd to "resist", as they literally kicked down a faux wall, in a symbolic act of resistance and non-acceptance. In this year's New York Fashion Week, designer Anniesa Hasibuan is making history yet again as she intends to cast her feature made up entirely of first-generation and second-generation immigrant models, wearing the hijab. In a time where the political climate is so charged when it comes to Muslim women and the hijab as well as the immigrant issue, she aims to raise awareness of equality and spread the message that the hijab should be celebrated as a sign of diversity, not as something to be feared or condemned. Want to make a statement? Do it through music, do it through fashion. It works, it sends the message across. People's interests are captured, their attention is piqued. Music and fashion have become platforms for awareness and change.

What this generation has, something that is powerful and potent, is courage. The courage to unite, the courage to raise social awareness and the courage to challenge deep-seated prejudicial narratives in the name of progress and equality, fearless of the backlash and the retribution. And courage to do all these is a sign of hope. It promotes the betterment of ourselves and the society we are in.

“ So, don't lose faith in humanity just yet. There resides great power in the masses. ”



JAWI

A journey inward

/ By Hadra W.

Nur Hasyimah © 2017

I remember when my Chinese friends would quip about how strict their teachers were with their Chinese handwriting, the stroke orders, and how complicated it was. I deeply adored the foreign, pictographic script – enchanted by the intensity and depth of meaning in one single character.

On the other hand, I had been secretly grateful that as a born-Malay, I escaped the troubles of writing in another script other than the romanized script, which usage we were already accustomed to for English language.

It was only through my Nenek (grandmother) that I came to know – Bahasa Melayu in its origins, had existed and was formalised in Arabic script, known as Jawi, up till the 1950s. Afterwards, it was dropped from our tradition in the name of peaceful relations to prevent political conflicts or controversies between Malaysia and Singapore at that time.

Ignorant to its full implications on our society, I felt the gentlest rush of pride. Like Mandarin, Malay language can be beautiful and unique too. The sensation was, though, fleeting. After all, how could one truly be pained for the loss of something she never possessed? Growing up, Jawi simply was to me the mode of writing Nenek used when she was a girl. I readily accepted it as an ancient script, forever lost in our modern world.

For as long as I can remember, my maternal uncle has had a portrait of a Malay man in the typical white garb of a Shaykh in his living room, none ever questioned his identity. Like Jawi, I treated the monochrome portrait just like any other as trivial furniture with the enduring apathy typical of modern youth.

At eighteen, I finally asked my uncle.

“Cik, who is that?”

“He was my guru (Teacher) from Kelantan...”

He showed me a thin yellowed book, a well-preserved biography of his guru, entirely in Jawi. I asked if I could read it. So deeply precious it was to him, he only allowed me to keep it for one day. Foreign, yet familiar. Safeguarded within the exquisite letters, a lost understanding of the great spiritual and intellectual tradition of our ancestors. To not know them, was to not know myself.

Growing up, even the Malay language was second best. What connected me back to the Islamic tradition, were books written in English, for Malay was a language I found difficulty in comprehending and appreciating. I admired all the foreign thinkers, intellectuals, shaykhs, given that much of my own exposure to Islam had been through the English

medium. My own ignorance struck me. Here, on the wall, had been an exalted Malay Shaykh from Kelantan, a descendent from the Prophet, the guide (murshid) for thousands of muslims in Nusantara. From my limited understanding, Islam is a universal religion, one does not have to be Arab or Persian to be muslim. However, the deeper question was, does being muslim mean to detach oneself from your own culture? My idea of an Islamic society had been a cut-and-paste standard from the Middle East. Universality had meant that we conform to certain seemingly idealistic standards.

In reality, Islam is fitra, in accordance to our primordial state. Instead of setting “standards”, it lays the foundations for human beings to return to God, to submit to His Will. Being Muslim is not to negate one’s ethnicity, rather it enhances our ethnic identity and culture, a state given and ordained by God. Islam was sent down, not to demolish the pre-existing culture of the community, but to remove destructive aspects of cultural practices. Thus the people will be adorned with the beauty of Islam, while retaining their unique culture and identity.

In Surah al-Hujurat, God (Mighty is He) says

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)).”

God had created diversity within us, to witness His Greatness, in the variety - to humble ourselves to the “other”, to learn from them and most importantly, to know and acknowledge who we are.

Perhaps, it had been the flux of modernity dichotomizing our self-identity from our own tradition. Like a tree, deprived of its roots, part of me was dying, or already dead. The Jawi language, perhaps, most accurately reflects the state of our community. Its greatness is pregnant within, but due to our ignorance of self-identity, nothing is born and all is wasted away. In the words of the American shaykh, Dr Umar Faruq Abdullah, “Islam, historically, is never countercultural. We were people who looked at different cultures, accepted everything good about the culture, built a new culture, Islam, that has the best elements of different cultures.”



Interview with
Noor Iskandar

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD THROUGH ART

People see art and they think of it as an excess or even frivolity. But not for Noor Iskandar who uses his art to get closer to Him.

“People ask me, ‘How can you do Art? When you’re a practising Muslim. Isn’t Islam against Art?’ That’s where I come in and say, ‘no, in fact for me, I use Art to fathom my religion (faith) in ways unimaginable. To get close to Him.’ When I write, it’s always a confession to God or something which only He knows - or a prayer if I may. When I make images, it’s to document and present to my audience and myself that people have different modes, metaphors, distance, nature, nearness of/towards spirituality. Also, I love to travel. So there’s the whole point where it is not to just have fun but on a journey to find. It’s really to show that one understands religion through varying lenses (pun intended) and that’s what I feel this notion of spirituality ought to be.”

To him, art has formed a bulk of his understanding in his religion. Back when he was a Bachelor’s student at NTU’s School of Art, Design and Media, he wanted to explore themes on identity, gender politics or spatial poetics in Islam. These are all elements that he experimented on as an undergraduate student, after graduation and even now as a graduate student. They represent a running theme that you can see through his works such as ‘Paradie’ (2014) and ‘How Dust Floats’ (2015). Although the themes may revolve around tropes deemed controversial to a few, he sees art as a way to mediate these crises in softer light and gaze.

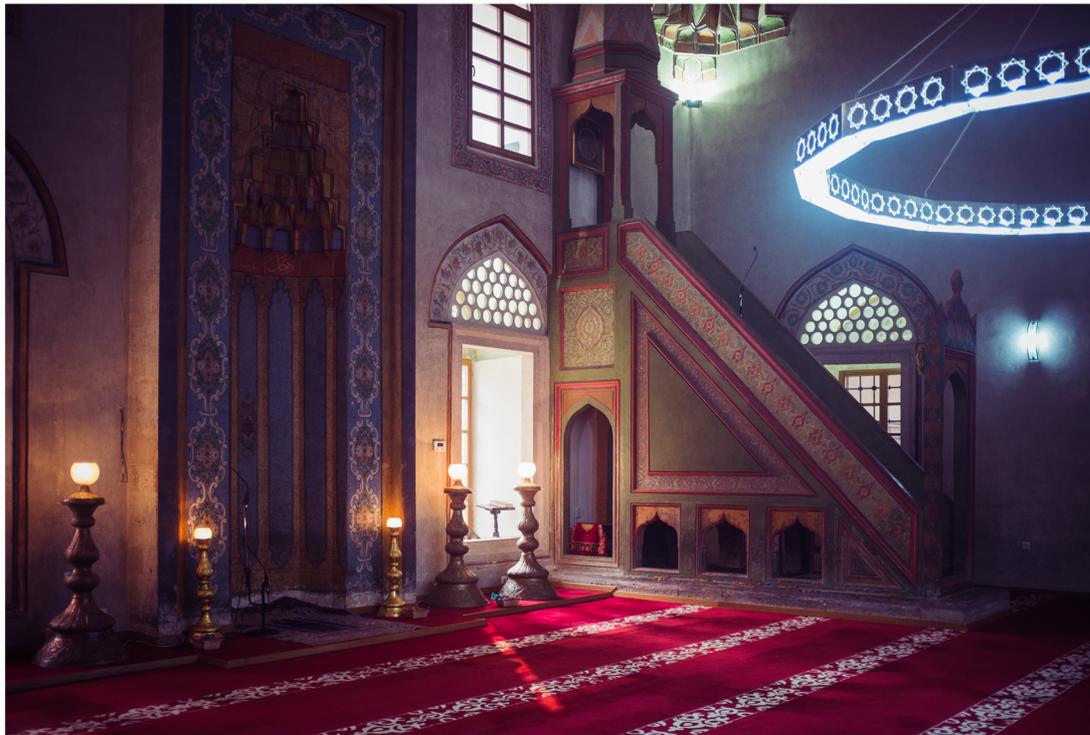
“So when it comes to more obvious cultural and societal dilemmas, that’s what I wish art can do to kind of, not settle or solve things, but to provide avenues and different kinds of alternative and access for people. That’s because not everyone will be present when you shout, ‘I’m speaking on behalf of women,’ but people might be keen when you show a picture of one holding her own ground in Iran, for example.”

Spirituality, art and faith as the core of one’s own identity are things that cropped up during our conversation with Noor Iskandar. He highlighted how art and faith seem to be disconnected here in Singapore. It is not just about Islam, but different faiths in our multi-religious society.

“It’s daunting. Again, it’s not just an Islamic thing, basically, it’s an Arts thing as well. This is not just about Islam because we’re talking about the Singaporean society itself - that perhaps do not revere art to its beneficial gains to the society.”

We have this disconnect, almost like a collective cultural amnesia between art and faith. ”

Noor Iskandar goes on to explain himself. “I feel like a lot of people in Singapore don’t have that kind of affinity towards art. In the sense that these notions cannot co-exist, Art and Faith. Like if we go to the mosque, we’d better [not] talk about Art. How can you say you’re not into art when you are actually in the belly of art because the architecture of mosques, I feel, are the grandest expression of Islamic aesthetics.”



Noor Iskandar © 2017

“Even the Adhan is aurally artistic. If you read the Qur’an, it’s the most sublime. The poetry in the Qur’an, the symbolisms, the imaginations, the steps of the salah, the phrasings of supplications, everything is so artful. To dispense the converging of these ideas seem like a travesty to me. A very unfortunate one.”

Noor Iskandar desires the conversations that are lacking in our society, more importantly, in the academic circles. These conversations can and will eventually lead to a better understanding of our own religion. “I feel like we lack conversations along these streams and we are not willing to give these kind of viewpoints a chance. Art has a very sensitive way of trying to deal with this, [for example] story-tell. We are all in an academic environment right, so why not talk about things [or] ideas on a different spectrum. So, I feel like we should start talking about this. It’s really the whole idea of conversations. People need access into the religion. And if you’re just going to be a bit guarded and actually put more barricades into unto people, then that’s such a pity.

As part of his thesis for his Masters research also at his alma mater, Noor Iskandar is attempting to once again amalgamate these rhetorics. Using art explorations, he proposes to excavate the understanding of losing, in relation to Islamic aesthetics, in effect to spirituality. He imparts this gaze upon the contemporary mosque spaces in Singapore. In our conversation, Noor brought up this peculiar term

“mosquelessness.” A term he was toying around with, as he tries to make sense of this shift between nothingness to Light, to Nur - something he finds beauty and solace in.

It came about from his travels to Iran, the Andalus, the Balkans and countries in the West and Turkey in his efforts to trace the footsteps of Rumi, someone who is such a big part of his inspirations. It was through his travels that he saw the difference in aesthetics of the mosques there as compared to mosques here at home.

“Even Mevlana Rumi and Shams, Hafez, a lot of the mystics and poets in contact with the religion of Islam that spoke of the idea of spirituality that transcends a physical entity or space or forms or place, it exists beyond texts, beyond the mosque, beyond the imam, beyond worldly divisions. It resides in the heart of the true lover to God. We’re not familiar with this idea of beauty in this region. But when I travel, I sense the colours, the dance, the diversity in unity, the intimate ways of how people perceive Islam. We are so hard and I feel art brings softness to our heart.”

As with art and its interpretation of the person seeing it, art is a lot of empathy of the person seeing it. As the artist himself, it is what Noor Iskandar experiences. “Everything that I involve myself with through the artistic medium, reflects my own perception and derived interpretation of ideas - curated, captured, collected through the years of wayfaring, wondering, wandering.”

Baraka Blue is an intensely engaging and fascinating individual, perhaps best known for his spoken word poetry and raps. By and large, his art focuses on taking spiritual notions and issues and presenting them in a format palatable to a contemporary audience.

Hailing from Seattle and based in Oakland, California, he is among the most respected figures in the landscape of Islamic art today. Much of his work is inspired by the mystical poets such as Rumi and Hafiz. We at Eleven Magazine knew that it would be incredible if we could hear from the man himself. Thankfully, just such an opportunity presented itself as our sunny island was one of the stops in promoting his new book, *Empty & The Ocean*.

Meeting Baraka in person, it is instantly clear that the charming, cerebral persona that we see through the lens of the internet is, in fact, his true self. He possesses a disarming candour, speaking openly and from the heart.

We were most curious to understand more about the inspiration and motivation behind his work. He was happy to share, particularly with regards to his most recent book.

“This book, for me, has been very much about growth and transformation and introspection.

For one thing, the poems in the book were written over a span of 3 or 4 years. That is a significant period of any individual’s life, and so almost necessarily, a book written over that expanse of time will reflect a certain range of experiences, realizations, and changes of perspective.”

As for his poems in particular, Baraka goes on to say;

“The topics that I am most drawn to explore in my poems these days - generally concepts around expanding the boundary of the self, experiential knowledge of the unseen interconnectivity of reality, as well as exploration of the great myths and sacred stories about the mystery of human existence - these are topics which demand changes of perspective, but also, to be done well, they must create the doorways into realizations and contemplations.”

Little wonder, then, that Baraka’s work speaks to so many people on such a fundamental level, inspiring thought processes that would otherwise have remained untouched in the deeper recesses of our minds.

Baraka describes the act of writing as a contemplative practice, first and foremost.

“It is only secondarily what I do for a living. And I think, for any true artist, this must be the case. When it ceases to be the case you become an entrepreneur, which is not necessarily a bad thing. But it is not an artist and being polluted desire for wealth and fame destroys true art like it destroys true spirituality. Of course, I too live in the world have to pay my bills, so it can be an interesting dance.”

Such concerns definitely resonate with many of us. Where do we draw the line between spirituality and more pragmatic concerns? Is it even possible to draw such a line? It was comforting to hear that even someone as accomplished as Baraka also had such things on his mind.

Something else that often feels like a point of contention among many of our peers is the relationship between Islam and art. We were keen to hear Baraka’s views on whether art has been given enough importance in the modern Muslim world.

“Traditionally, yes. In the modern Muslim world, no. This is a sign of spiritual decline.”

Beauty is the splendour of truth, as Plato said. If we stop creating beauty it is indicative that our souls are not well.”

This is undoubtedly an issue worth pondering. As the generation on which hopes for the future lie, it is up to us to arrest this slide and make the most of the opportunities we have to reverse the spiritual decline that Baraka warns of.

The conversation soon turned to Baraka’s plans for the future. Seeing as he has already accomplished so much, it was interesting to hear what else he had in store and how he himself felt about his progress.

“Art always reflects where the artist is and where he or she would like to be.”

Looking back there is definitely a degree of consistency in my body of work. My writing, even from my teenage years, is the writing of a seeker, someone seeking for deeper meaning in the world. It has just evolved as I discovered different meanings, or perhaps, different understandings or realizations of the same meaning.

For one thing, I have been focusing on poetry more than music in the last few years. That has just been how it has unfolded. Recently I have been experimenting with poetry accompanied by music. I like that direction.”

Baraka went on to explain that he is also in the process of planning and launching an online poetry class of his own.

“I really want it to be a means for people to deepen in not only their writing or other creative endeavours, but to deepen in their ability to love and their capability for gratitude and positivity.”





Interview with Baraka Blue

Baraka Blue

“the
hero:
you”



Hakim Nah © 2017

Finally, as the interview drew to a close, Baraka gave some parting words of advice to us and to Muslim youths at large.

“It is your path. It isn’t anyone else’s. It is your journey. You have been gifted this unique life. You are the hero of your story. If your life was a movie and you were the hero... what would the hero do now? Do that.”

Interacting with Baraka was hugely illuminating, and we were most fortunate to have had the opportunity to do so.

Insha Allah we will be able to apply his advice to our own lives. Each of us needs, personally, to understand our own journey, where we are going and where we want to go, and hopefully we will be able to find our calling in this wide world just as Baraka Blue has.

What would the
hero do now?
Do that.”

A full-page photograph of a sunset over a beach. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, red, and pink, with a large, bright sun in the upper center. Numerous birds are silhouetted against the sky, flying in various directions. The beach is sandy and curves along the water's edge. Two small figures are visible on the beach near the water. The background consists of dark, forested hills. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.

THE SUN WILL RISE AGAIN

/ By Shaikha Salma

Shafiq Sapie © 2017

Your wings will be strong enough to fly again one day. You will be brave enough to take the plunge and flap your wings again. You will not only walk on the ground, my dear, you will be soaring through the vast blue sky. You'll soar across the oceans, see the world in a way you never have, and realize the strength and courage in you you never knew existed. The darkness in your heart, like the darkness right before the dawn, will disappear. In its place will be the warmth of the sun radiating. You'll be able to feel it on your skin, you'll be able to feel it in your heart.

I know how it feels to have the world crashing down on you. I know of that one time, where you looked up at the sky, took a leap of faith. And crashed.

It was the only time you tried to flap your own wings, but you crashed so hard. The world made you believe you were not good enough, that you were undeserving. And so you broke your wings.

You never flew again.

But dear one, sometimes the only thing stopping you from soaring is that little voice in your head whispering that you will not be able to do it. That you will not be good enough, that you are not capable. Do not listen to that voice. Listen to the voice of hope. Keep the flame of hope burning in you, ignite that light within your heart and spread it to the rest of your body, from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. I

Illuminate yourself with the magic of hope and do not believe, for one second, that you do not deserve this light. You deserve this light, you are the light.

Remember how Sayyidina Abu Bakr (r.a) was so afraid in the cave, where he and Rasulullah (saw) were hiding from the people who were trying to kill our beloved. "La tahzan innallah ha ma'ana". Do not be sad, our beloved said, Allah is with us. He is with you, He is with you, He is with you.

When the place where your forehead meets the prayer mat feels damp with your tears, He is with you. When you feel there's nobody around who cares for you, who loves you, He is with you. And He loves you more than you can possibly imagine.

Drown yourself with love and the remembrance of His blessings upon you. Look around, you are so blessed.

And you are never alone. When you see the old man smiling at the young boy chasing after birds at a playground, he feels hope, and for a blissful moment, he feels the presence of his wife beside him again, and he remembers the days they spent together.

The old couple living in a small home prays together, their prayers always more for each other than themselves. They dream of the day they get to visit the Kaaba, for their feet to touch the cold marble slab outside Masjid Nabawi. Their hearts always overflowing with faith, with hope, because they know He never disappoints. "If not in this life, then in the next", the husband comforts his wife with his wrinkled smile and kisses her on her forehead. For He is always listening, even to the silent prayers.

When you see the woman covering her head with a cap, because she doesn't want people to know that she has cancer, celebrating her son's second birthday, she feels hope, remembering how blessed she is to be able to love someone so deeply. In that moment, she thanks Him, and almost forgets about her illness. A quiet serenity.

At the park, you see a man on a wheelchair looking up at the sky, smiling. His near-death incident happened nearly 10 years ago. He could have died that day, but is now smiling at his two children chasing after each other. "This life is a miracle," he thinks to himself, as a tear rolled down his cheek. "Thank You for this miracle."

Hope. It is the most powerful thing we have. So when darkness surrounds you, and life seems to be throwing challenges at you, reignite the light in your heart, and remember that the darkest of nights are right before the dawn.

And the sun will rise again.

there is always

/ By Suhailah Mazlan

It is easy to forget.

Some of us try to attain all things tangible;
In this rapid river flow.
The struggle keeps us afloat,
How afraid are we to drown?

Some of us try to attain all things intangible;
A feeling, a belief, a light in the dark-
and for some, a certain kind of sound.

And then it comes.
We have not met for a long time now;
Familiar, heavy and dark.

I have seen you before;
Like a stone inside.
Insufficient. It whispers.

Doesn't it make you shiver,
How He gives when you never asked,
and how He does because you did?

I am here.

Though, for now
These hands are too weak to grasp.
This heart too small to contain.

And yet,
The blessings are undeniable.
The showers of reminders.
All around me.
All around us.
All from You.
It can only be from You,
no matter how it comes.

There is always You.
And for today,
for just a little while.
I hope to be a reminder,
mostly to myself -
but maybe to you too.





Nanyang Technological University Muslim Society

Towards the development of Mu'min personalities, leading society towards
Mardhatillah (the Blessings of Allah)



Islamic Awareness Programme



Seekers Garden



Muslimah Empowerment Series



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Yusra



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If you are interested in sponsoring or providing any other forms of assistance to the different projects organised by the NTU Muslim Society, please feel free to contact us whenever.

Please handle with care and if need be, dispose it off properly either by burning or super-fine shredding as it contains Qur'anic verses.

Thank you.