

IHYA

PUBLICATIONS

ISSUE 4

THE
MUSLIM
IDENTITY

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Editor's Note

As Salaam Alaikum Warahmatullahi Warabakatahu, All praise is due to Allah. It is with immense joy that we present the fourth edition of Ihya Publications. As with any work of this nature, it may contain inadvertent errors. Despite our careful efforts in proofreading and meticulous cross-referencing, we seek your patience and forgiveness should any mistakes arise. Any benefit or success from this endeavour is purely through Allah's mercy, and any flaws are due to the influence of Shaytaan. We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to our respected mentors at Cheadle Masjid for their unwavering support and guidance, particularly Sheikh Salim, Imam Abid, and Dr. Usman. May Allah grant them reward in this world and the Hereafter.

As we all know the conflicts in Palestine, Lebanon, and Sudan are tied to struggles against oppression and injustice. For Muslims, these wars should not only strengthen our identity but also drive us towards greater political activism. Palestine's fight against occupation calls for justice, Lebanon's resilience highlights the need for unity, and Sudan's instability underscores the importance of peace and inclusive governance. These struggles should remind Muslims to go beyond spiritual support and actively engage in political advocacy, humanitarian aid, and efforts for solutions that uphold human dignity.

Guided by Islam's principles of justice, equality, and mercy, we must unite in solidarity and work for a just world, fulfilling our responsibility to the oppressed and the global community. In recent months however, events much closer to home such as the Southport Riots have reminded us that the fight against oppression isn't always distant; rather something we must confront it in our local communities as well, making sure to stand firm and take action whenever injustice arises. Participating in peaceful protests and boycotts, particularly those supporting causes such as Palestine, gives young people an impactful platform to fight for justice and human rights, while nurturing important qualities like empathy, solidarity and activism.

The Palestinian struggle has come to represent perseverance and defiance, motivating youth to take action for what they believe is right and become better versions of themselves. Through

these movements, they not only support a broader cause but also grow personally, enhancing their sense of responsibility, leadership and moral integrity, values that are essential for fostering meaningful social change. In Islam, true faith in Allah goes beyond belief; it requires living according to His teachings. Allah assures us that charity does not diminish wealth but increases it in ways we may not see. Yet, many of us hesitate to give. Real belief is shown through our actions. If we truly trust in Allah's promises, we should demonstrate that trust by giving, knowing that what we give will benefit us in both this life and the Hereafter.



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Feature Article: A Piece by The Muslim Identity

BY ABDUS SABUR SHAIKH, AZED IKRAM



Bismillahir rahmanir rahim - In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Gracious.

At the time of writing, it has been 365 days of genocide, 15 of our Palestinian brothers, sisters and children are martyred every hour and one wounded every minute. 1.8 million people have been displaced in Gaza. The world has witnessed the deliberate erasure of an entire people - innocent men, women, and children. Their only crime is the Islamic identity that they hold onto so firmly. Despite global outcry, despite protests and demonstrations on every continent, nothing has stirred the conscience of the genocidal Zionist entity, its backers, or those who remain complicit through their silence and inaction.

Why has the combined strength of the Ummah proven incapable of

THEIR ONLY CRIME IS THE ISLAMIC IDENTITY THAT THEY HOLD ONTO SO FIRMLY.

sending even a bottle of water into Gaza? It is clear now that the Ummah must awake to offer an alternative to the darkness that has taken root. If Gaza has taught us anything, it is the unshakable Iman of its people, who have shown the world that even in the face of annihilation, their steadfastness in Islam remains unbroken. Ask yourself the question: if all the Palestinians had taken the chance to stop resisting the occupation, gave up their rights to their land and to their Iman, would they still be bombed incessantly after a whole year?

As ambassadors of Islam, The Muslim Identity (TMI) has been established to build people who will assist us in the Da'wah on behalf of our global Ummah. It is the responsibility of the Muslim youth to expose the very foundation of the institutions that have dehumanised us. Allah (swt) commands us in Surah Aal e Imran "You are the best of nations raised up for mankind because you enjoin the good, prevent wrong, because you believe in Allah" (3:110). From the tents of the encampment movement, youth from twenty top universities we have come together and formed The Muslim Identity, where we can all support each other in engaging with our communities.

How can we even begin to challenge the structure of a society like ours, where all kinds of Fitnah are rampant, and it is a struggle enough to grasp onto our Iman? As with all things, we follow the command of Allah and the best example of His messenger (ﷺ).

The prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was faced with brittle idols that broke the moment they fell but remained as concrete illusions inside the minds of those who used their forefathers as excuses to hold onto their ignorance. Today, we have the same laa, manaat and uzzahs (idols of the Quraysh) that seek to organise our lives, however these idols are no longer brittle objects – they are baseless concepts that seek to make everything conform to a way of life that fits its own secular worldview. This secular campaign seeks to create a perception in every section of life where the only yardstick it uses is its own – to suggest that the Ummah is backwards, that Muslims needs to integrate, and that Islam needs to reform. It uses labels as a tactic to separate the "good" Muslim from the "bad" Muslim, in an attempt to define what Islam should be to Muslims living in the 21st Century, rather than Muslims holding onto their identity and preaching Islam for what it is, with confidence knowing that their guidance is the final message from the final Messenger of Allah, that needs no conformity, integration or uniformity.

ASK YOURSELF THE QUESTION: IF ALL THE PALESTINIANS HAD TAKEN THE CHANCE TO STOP RESISTING THE OCCUPATION, GAVE UP THEIR RIGHTS TO THEIR LAND AND TO THEIR IMAN, WOULD THEY STILL BE BOMBED INCESSANTLY AFTER A WHOLE YEAR?

Our methodology therefore is to address specific concepts such as individualism, secularism or nationalism that affect our identity, using rational proof, with an understanding that it is these concepts that are holding the Muslim community from reaching their full potential. As Muslims, we realise that many of these concepts make no sense, and other times they are just baseless. Nevertheless, these concepts form "the common thought" of society. If you were to sit and write it down, it becomes the nation's constitution. Doesn't this handful of



concepts work to maintain the status quo, and organise the world's resources to benefit the few, not the many? To change the state of the world, we need to address this handful of concepts and destroy the idols of our times.

We work in the public sphere, where we use online and offline platforms to raise awareness on these topics, but also in the private sphere, where we mentor young individuals who would be able to articulate Islam and give confidence to the Muslim community. The Muslim Identity (TMI) networks are now active in 20 universities across the UK – and counting. We are constantly networking to establish suitable TMI ambassadors in institutions across the country. Brothers circles and sisters circles will gather with the aim of establishing identity on Islamic terms. One example of our Da'wah work includes tackling the issue of students living out for university and then leaving their faiths, by leading circles based on core principles of Islamic Identity at these various institutions.

If you wish to become a TMI ambassador within your university, please reach out to us. In a society like ours, your interactions with non-Muslim colleagues or classmates may be the only impressions they will have of Islam, other than in the media. Abu Darda (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that "There is nothing that will be heavier on the scales than good character," hence maintaining exemplary ikhlaq (character) is central to our mission. People don't read the Qur'an, they read us; make sure you are a good read. We are here to support you with resources, training and guidance to ensure your success in making a significant impact on our

communities. We are here to pave the way for the freedom and rights of all those repressed for their Islamic identity. From our dear brother Elias Soutien jailed in France, Dr Afia Siddiqui incarcerated in the US, Abdurehim Heyit detained in China, Muslim rights activist have been suppressed, simply for seeking justice.

It's important to note that despite the bleak nature of the current situation of our Palestinian brothers and sisters, us as Muslims have accomplished a lot. We have shifted public opinion in the favour of the oppressed and successfully challenged the narrative. Of course, there is work to do but we should feel inspired and uplifted by the resolute faith of the Palestinians and implore ourselves to do better. As an ummah history has shown us that we are capable of great things, only if we co-ordinate and communicate among one another with respect and humility. Our principles as Muslims ought to be faith, unity and discipline; among ourselves as individuals and collectively.

Ihya, the Arabic word for revival and the name of this publication, sums up our objectives. We are inspiring the youth to re-embrace their Islamic identity – and navigating challenges that appear along the way together. Many of these individuals in these positions in top universities will become the leaders of tomorrow. Allah Almighty will question us for our efforts based on our blessings, and not the results.

Interview with Abu Bakr Nanabwa - Founder & CEO of The Muslim Vote

WITH ISSA ISHAQ



For the purpose of this interview, Abu Bakr will be labelled as AB.

ISSA: So just to start off, if you could introduce yourself: just a bit about your background, how old you are, how you landed in the role you're currently in.

AB: My name is Abubakr and I'm 24 years old, I'm a Politics and International Relations graduate from the University of Birmingham. I have worked in Muslim civic political spaces for several years as a volunteer and worked particularly focused on empowering and training young Muslims into ensuring that they are confident and expressive when it comes to making their voices heard. Whether it be on university campus or in a general political system, I want to help ensure they're confident expressing their opinions as Muslims in these spaces.

ISSA: Give us an introduction to your organization, The Muslim Vote. What are the goals of TMV? How long has it been established? How has it achieved those goals? And what are the future aspirations of the Muslim vote?

AB: The Muslim Vote was established in December 2023. Conversations had begun much earlier but accelerated due to the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza, and the response of both mainstream political parties in the UK. There was a severe lack of reflection and willingness to challenge the Israeli government.

WE NEED TO MOVE AWAY FROM THIS FOCUS ON HAVING A MUSLIM REPRESENTATIVE, AND WE SHOULD ACTUALLY MOVE TO A FOCUS ON THE VALUES THAT THAT REPRESENTATIVE ENACTS.

Our aim in the short term was to support candidates at the recently concluded general election who would oppose the mainstream parties on these issues and provide an anti-genocide platform. They would be proudly pro-Palestinian, would support policies such as arms embargos, diplomatic sanctions, etc, on the Israeli state and put pressure on the American

government to end their support and isolate the American government in their support for the illegitimate and genocidal state of Israel. We spoke to people around the country in each constituency and locality to ascertain a unity candidate to answer the question of how we, as UK Muslims, can ensure our votes are of use to the Palestinians and that we are exercising our right to vote in a truly effective manner.

And Alhamdulillah, through this effort of encouraging people to do this process, five independent candidates won the election, all of whom were endorsed by the Muslim vote and another additional five, almost won.

This sent a real message to the Labour government that they could not sit there and take the voice and the votes of Muslims for granted in future elections; as we grow and establish ourselves, our plan is to select a number of high population Muslim seats and establish educated and sophisticated networks. These will unite Muslims for elections and ensure that that they are pulling in the same direction and working with the wider community to ensure that MPs are elected from whichever party, whether

it be independent, whether it be from a mainstream party, but we elect MPs who are responsive to the needs of constituents and who are people who will reflect the moral values of the of the community.

ISSA: You said, 'we'. How big is the team at The Muslim Vote? What is the structure like? How does it work in terms of people getting involved?

AB: Our central team is relatively small, mainly because our focus is on empowering locals and giving them the tools and knowledge to coordinate things locally. Our belief is very much that local policy making is the optimal and that the national team should be playing the supplementary and supportive role. As for the size of the national team, TMV is a coalition of over 20 Muslim organizations across the country, from civic organizations like MEND to businesses like Spillars to media organisations like Islam Channel. This network gives us an incredible ability to reach out into Muslim communities across the country, and the power of this, and the ability to do something like this means that we are able, when required, to reach people across the country.

But like I said, our focus is on going to local groups and asking them what they want, and asking them how they think, working with them, giving them a structure, giving them a model to achieve what they want to achieve. But the structure is based on our partner organizations. I'm a director, we have a small executive team made up of volunteers who provide advice and training and expertise in their particular skill set, and we work to empower locals, rather than building a large incohesive national team.

ISSA: Excellent. So, the next thing you've mentioned is this word unity a couple of times. I think it's a very important word. But how does TMV position itself in terms of people of other or no faith? Is there any focus on creating unity among the British public as a whole? Or is this a primarily Muslim focused organisation?

AB: Muslims have been in the UK for almost 60 years now, and the concern of Muslims are predominantly the same concerns as ordinary British voters.

Muslims are disproportionately poor in this country. They're disproportionately part of the NHS. Muslims suffer from the same cost of living crisis. Young Muslims also suffer from the disastrous housing crisis, insane bills and ludicrous price hikes for simple amenities. Especially for people in big cities like London, Birmingham and Manchester, the ability to afford a house is going to be a real challenge as they grow up. If you have grandparents, the rise of winter fuel payments and cut to pensioners allowance is significant. All these issues are issues which concern all Brits. And what we want to do at TMV is to ensure that we have strong representative voices when we help set up or work with local Muslim groups. We can then go to local Muslim communities and say, 'You unify, you coordinate'. We want to work with them to also make sure that they work together with non-Muslim organizations and groups in this area, meaning generic groups who are not focused on Muslim issues alone. For example, trade unions or maybe local campaign groups.

WE MUST GET INVOLVED WITH COMMUNITY WORK, WITH THE LOCAL FOOD BANK, IN ADVOCACY GROUPS TALKING ABOUT PALESTINE, EDUCATING OUR COMMUNITY ON HOW THEY CAN BECOME MORE ACTIVE & INFLUENTIAL

The Labour government has shown they do not care about the sanctity of life of Palestinians abroad, they do not care about the fact that your grandparents cannot afford to pay for their heating bill in the winter. They do not care about the fact that there are children who are going hungry in this country because the government refuses to uplift and support them.

ISSA: Okay, excellent. So our fourth edition of Ihya Publications is focused on this phrase, the Muslim identity, similar to the Muslim Vote. Would you agree with the notion that political visibility is a core pillar in concreting a Muslim identity in the UK? That if Muslims aren't politically active and

visible, they can't have an equal or level playing field in terms of establishing their identity compared to other people in the UK.

AB: I actually think we need to move away from this focus on having a Muslim representative, and we should actually move to a focus on the values that that representative enacts. And I think this is what is key.

I would much rather have a person of other or no faith who is articulate, principled, who is willing to stand up for the lives of the Palestinian people and the values of Muslim lives all across the country. I would much rather have them on board than having a Muslim who just represents the established view, who refuses to challenge the narrative and goes along with the status quo. There are clear examples of MPs and councillors that have strong ties to the Muslim community, Cheadle being one such example.

We want to support a politics based on principle, not a politics based on identity. Rather, our 'identity' as Muslims shouldn't be the way we dress or the colour of our skin, but the principles we hold in our life and how we engage with society.

The focus must be on our values, not on what the individual looks like or what faith they are from. I guess, this requires a grassroots engagement from Muslims, which is more fundamental to our goals.

Muslims must engage in the political process and hold their local MPs to account. We must get involved with community work, with the local food bank, in advocacy groups talking about Palestine, educating our community on how they can be more active and influential. So I think that there are two parts, the most important part is that Muslims at a local level are involved and engaged and fulfilling their local responsibilities as active members of the community. And then in terms of the front facing part, I think that can be anyone of conscience, and if we build strong relationships with our immediate and wider community, then absolutely, we will find that we all have a common struggle in British politics.

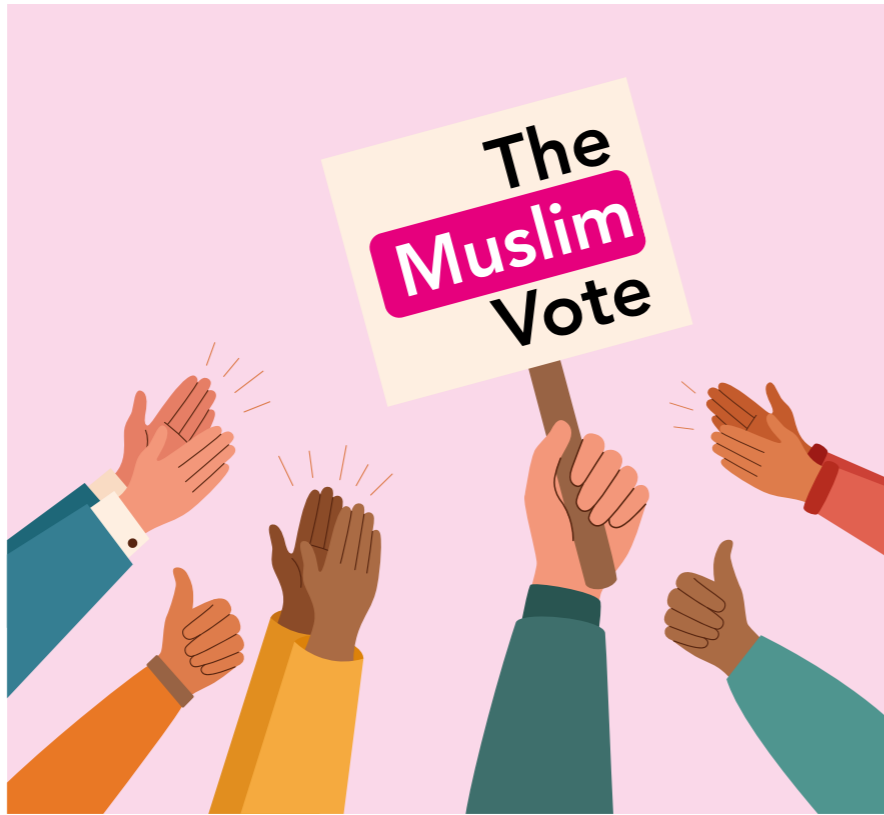
ISSA: Okay, sure. What would your message be to the Muslims that aren't engaging in the political process and believe it is a pointless endeavour?

AB: My message is simple, and the Prophet Mohammad (ﷺ) clearly said in his very famous hadith, everyone has heard it- if you see an evil, change it with your hands, and if you can't, then change it with words. And if you can't, at least hate it in your heart.

And this means that not everyone has to get involved in politics the same way. Not everyone has to go up and stand for council, not everyone has to become the future MP, not even everyone has to go out on campus. Everyone must get involved in a small way, whether it's having conversations with your friends and family, if you're a very good communicator, whether it's making social media posts, if you've got a talent for editing and videography, whether it's doing work like yourself and telling stories and raising awareness, whether it is being a local community activist and organising local protests and organising education days, or if you have a particular skill set of outreach and going into different spaces and working with non-Muslims.

We have a moral obligation that we speak up and we make sure that in our society, we fight for a just society for the people of Gaza and for the people of UK, and that we make sure that our society and our communities are one that serves the interest of ordinary people, and not the interest of warmongers, nor rich people, but that serve the interest of ordinary people and also serve the interests of justice here and abroad. And that is our moral obligation, because that is what the Prophet (ﷺ) asked us to do. And if we look at the seerah of the Prophet (ﷺ), if we look at the life of the Sahaba and the generations after, and we look at Islamic history of the past, we will see numerous examples of people who stood up for justice and made positive impacts to the lives of thousands, if not tens of thousands of people in human history, and that's what we should strive for.

ISSA: Do you think engaging in politics is the most important and effective way to leave a positive impact as UK Muslims?



AB: Not to be rude, but I just don't accept the premise of the question, because the most effective way is to do as much as you can. So as Muslims, we believe in Allah and the power of Allah and his resources and ask Allah for success in our work.

We believe in the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ). When the Prophet would be in difficulty, one of the first things he would do is pray and ask Allah for guidance. Then another habit of the Prophet (ﷺ) is he would do engage in Shura (consultation). He would call the Sahabas around, and he'd ask them for advice. And then also the Prophet (ﷺ) was a man of action. He would take action to make change, right? So I think we should be doing all of these things. And you know, again, activism for Muslims works hand in hand with commitment to our obligations such as the prayer, if not we will lose the soul or essence of what we are trying to do. But also prayer without activism, will struggle to make an impact and the change that we want to see. We must be an ummah which finds the balance of prayer and action, and we can do both, and doing both is what we should be expecting of ourselves.

I don't know if you have seen, but the recent images coming out of Gaza, I don't know who it is, whether it was a man or woman, but she's in flames.

They're in the fire and they're just burning, and it looks like a scene from a horror movie. You have an obligation to not only pray for that person and make dua that Allah (ﷻ) accepts them in the next life amongst the martyrs and accepts them in the highest ranks of Jannah, and that their children do not have to face the same horrors that they have faced in this life. You have an obligation to make dua for that person, but this should also push you to act. And ask yourself, how can I, as a Muslim in the UK, as a person in the UK, as a person of conscience in the UK, make a difference in my community and challenge the narrative, and challenge our government to stop the sales of these arms and stop the use of British spy planes in support of this genocidal mission of the Israeli government. Let us not underestimate our collective power, we are a fair and formidable community Alhamdu'Lillah.

ISSA: Excellent. JazakAllah khair and thank you so much for your time.



A Call for Unity & Action

BY OSMANLI



Muslims want to be heard. They crave the power to hold their transgressors accountable - both at home and abroad.

They seek to heal from the pain of seeing their brothers and sisters oppressed. Yet, a series of events has led us down ineffective paths, while many factors continue to hinder our progress.

A Crisis of Identity: The Aftermath of 9/11

After 9/11, many Muslims felt they could no longer live freely, fearing the prejudice that followed. In the UK and USA, Muslims felt like second-class citizens, haunted by suspicion and scrutiny. This narrative caused Muslims to feel ashamed, believing the community is to blame for the few individuals from their communities causing harm. Yet, it was never the moral right of any political faction to dictate our identity or worth. Muslims

are citizens, deserving of protection and respect. The government must safeguard all its citizens without hindering their chances of success. Instead, many Muslims felt compelled to prove they were one of the valid citizens, seeking validation from politicians whose promises often went unfulfilled. This quest for acceptance led to a loss of respect and equal treatment.

INSTEAD, MANY MUSLIMS FELT COMPELLED TO PROVE THEY WERE ONE OF THE VALID CITIZENS, SEEKING VALIDATION FROM POLITICIANS WHOSE PROMISES OFTEN WENT UNFULFILLED.

Breaking the Cycle

While Western Muslims now have greater numbers, the community still struggles to find its footing, facing several critical barriers:

1. Acceptance of Potential Suffering:

The endurance of hardship in the pursuit of justice.

2. Political Illiteracy:

Understanding how our political system works is crucial. Muslims need to be informed on how to hold politicians accountable.

3. Institution Building:

The community must create and support institutions that protect our communities and advocate for our interests.



The Urgency of Our Situation

The situation in Gaza serves as a stark reminder of our vulnerability. Political structures that claim to support the Muslims have crumbled under the pressure of Zionist influence. Said political entities fear retribution from powerful lobby groups. Historically, the Muslims have attempted but failed significantly to punish political parties acting against their interests for example with Tony Blair remaining as PM in 2005. This could be due to a lack of organised voting in the Muslim community. Even in 2024, there are still Muslim communities voting for one of the two major parties falling into traditional expectations. How can one respect the wishes of a divided community that lacks the history of being able to punish politicians that are harming them? Allah helps those that put in the effort and planning to turn their situation around.

A Unified Voice: The Power of Political Engagement

The Muslim community must unite and vote as a bloc. It can be observed that the Muslims are a central topic for every election in every Western country, yet many remain unaware of how to navigate the political landscape. A community that is satisfied with mere survival will never flourish and gain the power to enforce material change. The Muslim community must vote to demand action, based on our values.

LET US UNITE, EDUCATE OURSELVES, AND BUILD THE INSTITUTIONS WE NEED. TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE A FUTURE WHERE MUSLIMS ARE NOT JUST HEARD BUT PLATFORMED AND EMPOWERED.

The Path Forward

The community needs to create robust institutions that protect our rights and amplify our voices. The Zionist lobby has innumerable powerful groups advocating for their interests. Muslims must establish our own network of professionals in media, law, and politics. Strong encouragement and support of Muslims to innovate, start businesses, and think globally is essential. Disrupt the status quo and pursue wealth and influence to ensure our voices are heard. We must strive for power so that the outsourcing of our wealth to external organisations and establishments are no longer necessary. A balanced, calculated response is essential for our growth.

Join the Movement

The Muslim community stands at a crucial juncture. If we maintain our current trajectory, the systemic oppression facing the average UK

Muslim may escalate significantly in the next generation, cloaked in the guise of national security and government policy. The situation in Gaza has stripped away the facade of Western governments that profess to support us, revealing their true priorities. Yet, it has also illuminated our collective strength when we stand united.

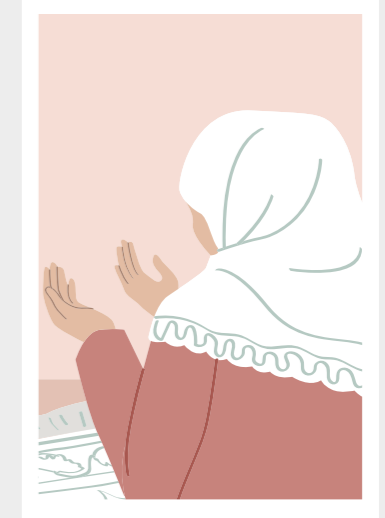
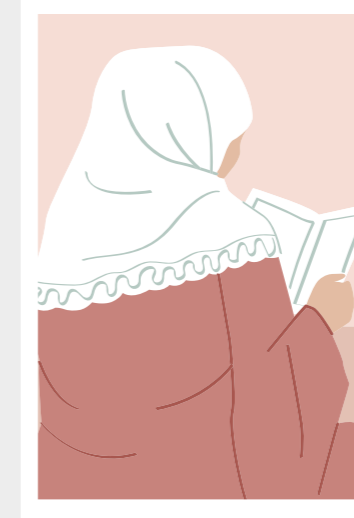
We have the potential to change our narrative, but the community must act swiftly. The western Muslim has the potential to turn the tables for Muslims around the globe. What the Muslims in the West decide to do in the next 30 years will determine our situation for the next 300 years by the Will of Allah. The genocide in Gaza is a call to action that we cannot ignore. Act by learning from political analysts, donating to institutions and encouraging a range of careers for Muslims and reinforcing the significance of Muslim-owned businesses.

Let us unite, educate ourselves, and build the institutions we need. Together, we can create a future where Muslims are not just heard but platformed and empowered.



From Unity to Division: A Call for Reflection

BY HUMAIRA BAIG



For centuries, the Muslim Ummah stood as a symbol of unity and resilience. Despite reaching spectacular heights, the spiritual foundation of the community remained unshaken. Fast forward into the modern era, we find the ummah grappling with challenges that not only test its strength, but also expose its disunity. From sectarian divides to rifts between family members; from being swayed by materialism to being influenced by social media - the issues that have penetrated the ummah are vast. What became a means for us to arrive here, and what can be done to reclaim the essence of our collective identity?

We all want to feel fulfilled. We just search for this feeling in different places. Whilst some find fulfilment in the correct avenues, others have a false, short-lived perception of it without ever truly finding it. In search of this fulfilment, many issues have infiltrated the ummah today, leading to its decline.

Amongst them, we have the desire for liberation and 'freedom' which is ultimately leading towards secularisation. Being indoctrinated by western ideologies, intellectually colonised, and apologetic for one's faith all play a part in this weakness. What is often overlooked is that we have been blessed with clear, divine guidance that - if we choose to follow with dedication and discipline - shields us from self-destruction. However, we would rather conform than stand firm in the face of external pressure. Liberalism tells us to prioritise our desires which is one sure way to destroy a nation. Islam, on the other hand, calls us to righteousness, even if it means standing alone.

As materialism and individualism take root, ideologies such as feminism have also impacted society. If women truly recognised their rights within Islam, they wouldn't seek fulfilment elsewhere. Without prejudice or bias, one can see that this is where they'll find honour instead of degradation, consideration instead of harshness, and self-esteem instead of disrespect. A fellow human being with a heart,

mind, and soul - so much more to offer than just her beauty. At a time when women were marginalised, Islam came abolishing cruel practices, granting them deliverance and emancipation. With feminism offering its own definition of gender justice, for many, it is simply a label to suit personal agendas. Where are all the western feminist voices when oppressed women of another race ask for the right to merely exist?

Women in the west are taught to assume the position of men and men are taught to be weak. A woman is made to believe it protects her rights and liberates her when, ironically, it has made her a slave to the system. Islam teaches that men and women are equal in front of God, with different - but complementary - rights and duties. Within the home, problems arise when roles are reversed or devalued. Disputes emerge when men and women focus more on claiming their rights than on fulfilling their responsibilities. Ultimately, the strength of the family unit depends on its members making one another feel valued.

But sadly, inside the home, faces are miserable. Outside the home, faces are beaming. Doors are being slammed on parents, whereas doors are being opened for strangers. Spouses and siblings are communicating with starkness, whereas classmates and colleagues are being spoken to politely. The gaze is fixed on the phone inside the house but is wondering freely outside of it. Many live double lives, disregarding Islamic principles, still wondering why they're unhappy. Intermingling with the opposite gender without professionalism or necessity is now considered the norm, thus diminishing the sacred bond and sanctity of marriage. Spouses are making comparisons - even if only in the mind - to the men and women outside.

The eyes are the window to the soul and the gaze is where it all begins. We should respect ourselves, as well as our (future) spouse. In Surah Al-Isra-32, Allah (ﷻ) says,

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزِّنَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

"Do not even go near zina/fornication. It is truly a shameful act and is evil as a way." i.e., avoid all situations that may even possibly lead to it. Cut it off at the root before it becomes a means of ruin.

This also extends to our digital lives, bringing us to the topic of social media. As well as constant exposure to shameless content affecting many minds - we are the generation of over-sharing, wanting others to see what we're doing before we even experience it ourselves. Unlike the sincere people of the past who would do much but reveal little, we do little but reveal much - our goal being people's approval. In doing this, we start competing, bringing a rise to the disease of jealousy that not only eats away at individual hearts but also erodes the collective spirit of the Ummah. The company we keep influences our spirituality, and this transcends beyond the physical world into the virtual realm as well.

Additionally, time - our greatest commodity - is wasted away through endless scrolling. So much so, we've become desensitised to the current genocide. We think it doesn't affect us, except that it does. We, too, play a role in the state we find the ummah today.

The calamities unfolding within the Ummah should inspire us to engage in more good deeds, yet we continue to be idle, couch potatoes.

Algorithms are not designed to show what's beneficial; they are designed to keep us intrigued. This strategy is certainly effective since family members are physically present but mentally elsewhere. Children spend hours glued to screens without awareness. Adults and children alike cannot take a bite of food without having something playing; yet this addiction remains unheeded. The truth is that the mindset has become weak. We should take away what's harmful and replace it with what's beneficial, but we would rather get through our day with as little effort as possible, as opposed to making it worthwhile. Many of us believe we are ready to join Imam al-Mahdi and Prophet Isa عليه السلام should the time arrive but unwilling to go through any exertion for change. In all honesty, who are we fooling but ourselves?

In Surah Taha-124, Allah (ﷻ) says,

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا

"And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a straitened/miserable life..."

It is a great tragedy that we can easily learn to understand the Quran, however we choose to remain ignorant. We have plenty of time for our phones but become too busy to acquire knowledge. Learning about Islam, even little by little, will strengthen our resolve. A recommendation I have is to download 'Quranly', a habit-building app. Most of humankind will be below the ground longer than above it, yet live as though they are here to remain. As well as working towards a successful worldly life, we must not forget our hereafter, our forever abode.

Life is a test, and the objective is the pleasure of Allah (ﷻ). This is attained through God-consciousness/taqwa and taqwa is to refrain from every disobedience to Allah. If we fail, we repent immediately, which is also a part of taqwa.

The solution is to act. Aim to be unapologetically Muslim. This cannot

happen if we don't learn about our religion. Hence, learn about Islam, learn the history (e.g., start with 'The Simple Seerah' book series), and wear it with a sense of pride. We will always be a slave to something, so wake up from the slumber, break free from the shackles and submit to becoming a slave of Allah. A student needs a teacher, an athlete needs a coach, as humans, we need our Creator. True submission comes with following Islam as a whole, not selectively. We are called to success five times a day, but continue searching for it elsewhere.

The Ummah will rise again when trust is placed in Allah (ﷻ) as it ought to be - just like the Bedouin Arabs in the middle of the desert placed their trust in Him, reaching soaring heights. Today, we think money, title and fame make us powerful, but we are still weak despite having this, as the love of the world has penetrated our hearts. Once this barrier is removed, we shall rise again.

Therefore, unite. Be sincere towards one another. Have no ulterior motive but to wish well for your brother and sister in faith. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. Work on purifying the heart and compromise... but never compromise the laws set out by Al Hakeem - The All Wise. He created us - He knows best what benefits and harms us. We don't know everything, but He knows, and that's enough.

Embrace your faith. Remember, it takes one person to ignite change and each of us holds the potential - starting with the transformation that happens within.

Allah (ﷻ) says [13:11]:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves..."

Ask yourself: Are you a brick or a gap in the wall of the ummah today?



The Seerah as a Political & Societal Guide: A Holistic Understanding of Islam

BY SHAWON SHEIKH



In contemporary discussions about Islam, the Seerah, or the life of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), is often viewed primarily through a spiritual lens. While this perspective is invaluable, limiting the Seerah to spiritual teachings neglects its broader implications as a political and societal guide. The life of the Prophet provides profound lessons in social justice, activism, and the importance of community mobilization, demonstrating that Islam is not just a personal faith but a holistic way of life.

The Seerah: A Contextual Framework

The Seerah chronicles the life of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from his early years in Mecca to his leadership in Medina and his role in establishing a cohesive and just society. It reflects a dynamic interplay of spiritual, social, and political elements, where the Prophet addressed the injustices of his

time, advocated for the marginalised, and built a community grounded in equality and justice.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST MOSQUE IN MEDINA SERVED NOT ONLY AS A PLACE OF WORSHIP BUT ALSO AS A CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES.

Social Justice and Activism in the Time of the Anbiya

Throughout history, the Prophets (Anbiya) exemplified activism against societal injustices. For instance, Prophet Musa (Moses) stood against the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, challenging Pharaoh's tyranny. Similarly, Prophet Isa (Jesus) preached compassion, equality, and care for the oppressed, emphasizing the importance of community welfare.

In the context of the Seerah, we observe the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) advocating for the rights of women, the poor, and marginalised groups. He denounced practices such as infanticide, emphasised the importance of honouring contracts, and upheld the dignity of all individuals, regardless of their social status. His unwavering and public announcement of the religion, despite the persecution, shows the example of social mobilisation and civil disobedience against oppressive powers. His establishment of the Constitution of Medina is a significant example of inclusive governance, bringing together diverse tribes and faiths under a framework of mutual respect and cooperation.

Activism and Social Mobilisation in Islam

Islam encourages active participation in social change. The Qur'an frequently emphasises the principles of justice, equity, and the collective responsibility of the community. For example, Surah Al-Hadid (57:25) states, "We sent Our

messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may administer justice...” This verse underscores the role of Muslims as advocates for justice, encouraging them to work actively against oppression and injustice.

The Prophetic model of activism is exemplified in events such as the Makkah period where the status quo of immoral acts were being challenged and preaching the oneness of God in a place full of idolatry, to the Hijrah (migration to Medina), where the Prophet (ﷺ) not only sought refuge but also established a society founded on Islamic principles. The establishment of the first mosque in Medina served not only as a place of worship but also as a centre for community organisation and social justice initiatives.

The Holistic Nature of Islam

To view Islam as a holistic religion is to recognize its comprehensive approach to life - spiritual, social, and political. This interconnectedness challenges the notion that religious practice is confined to personal rituals. Instead, it invites Muslims to engage actively in societal issues, fostering a commitment to social justice that is deeply rooted in faith.

The principles of Islamic teachings advocate for justice and compassion, urging believers to address societal wrongs and promote the welfare of others. This is evident in the concept of “Amr bil Ma’ruf wa Nahi an al-Munkar” (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong), which calls for active participation in the betterment of society.

The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Activism

In the West, the rise of Islamophobia has had a significant impact on Muslim communities, often leading to a sense of vulnerability and isolation. Negative portrayals of Islam in the media can create an environment of fear, discouraging Muslims from asserting their rights or engaging in social activism. This climate of intimidation has, in many cases, led to a state of docility among Muslims, who may feel marginalised and hesitant to speak out against injustices.



However, the historical and theological foundations of Islam encourage resilience and activism in the face of adversity. Muslims are called to be proactive, standing up against oppression and advocating for justice, as exemplified by the lives of the Prophets. The teachings of Islam provide a moral imperative to confront injustice, whether it manifests in discrimination, inequality, or social exclusion.

A Call to Action

To reclaim the spirit of activism inherent in the Seerah, Muslims must foster a culture of community engagement and social responsibility. This involves:

- 1. Education:** Understanding the Seerah and Islamic teachings on social justice can inspire individuals to take action in their communities. Educational programs that emphasise these themes can empower Muslims to engage confidently with societal issues.
- 2. Community Mobilisation:** Establishing networks of support and solidarity can amplify voices and efforts for social change. Collaborative projects that address local needs - such as poverty alleviation, advocacy for marginalised groups, and interfaith dialogue - can create a more just society.
- 3. Advocacy:** Muslims should actively participate in advocacy efforts to challenge stereotypes and combat Islamophobia. Engaging with policymakers,

raising awareness about social justice issues, and promoting interfaith understanding are vital steps toward creating a more inclusive society.

- 4. Grassroots Movements:** Encouraging grassroots activism can mobilise communities to address local issues effectively. Whether through peaceful protests, community service, or awareness campaigns, these initiatives reflect the Islamic commitment to social justice.

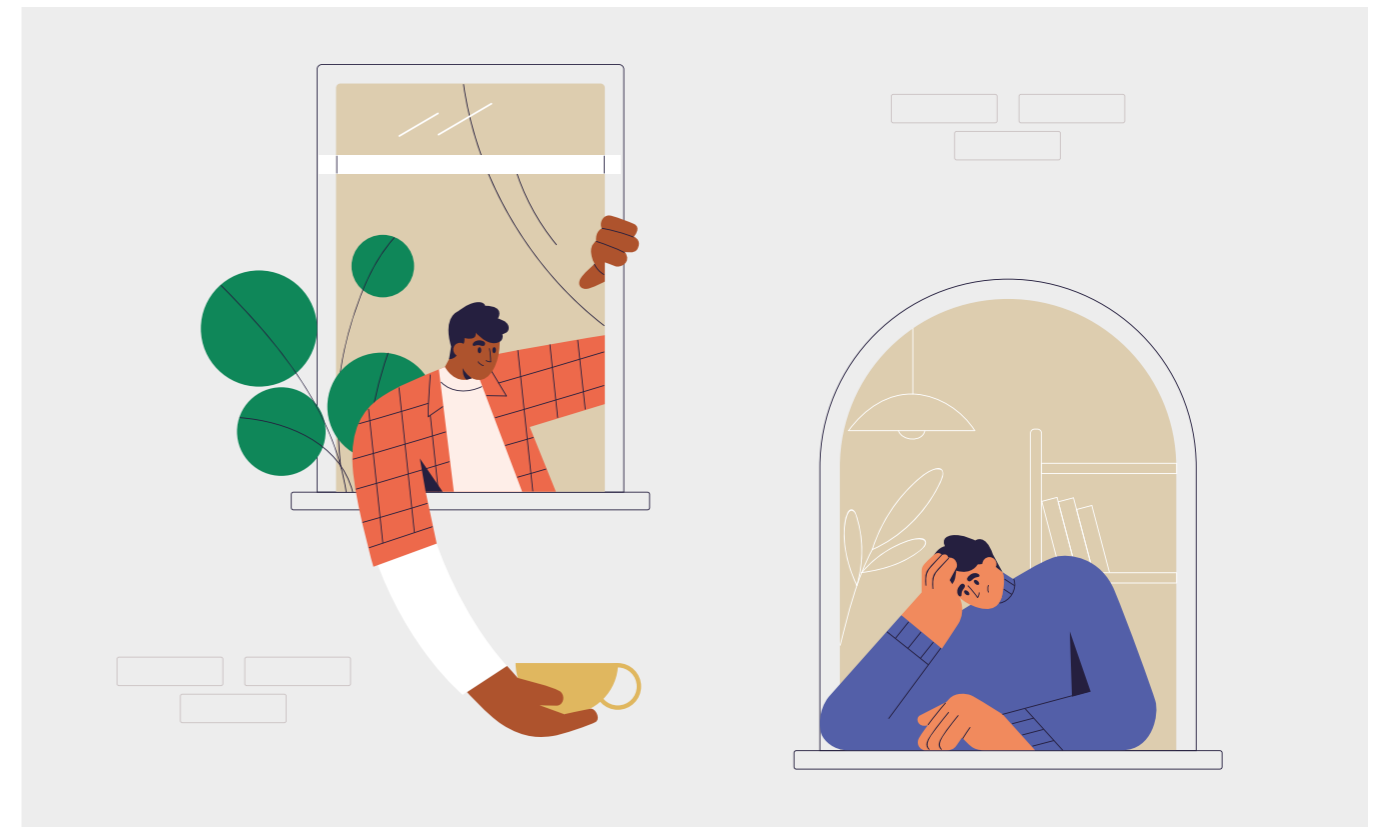
Conclusion

The Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) serves as a powerful reminder that Islam encompasses a comprehensive approach to life that includes spiritual, social, and political dimensions. By recognising and embracing this holistic view, Muslims can reclaim their role as advocates for justice and change. In a world increasingly characterised by division and inequality, the lessons of the Seerah remain as relevant as ever, calling Muslims to rise and fulfill their prophetic legacy of activism and social responsibility. By doing so, they can not only transform their communities but also challenge the narratives that seek to marginalise them.



How to Win the Hearts of Others

BY RAEES BHATTI



Life in the UK as a Muslim is everchanging. Our numbers are growing but we are still searching for our identity. Will this ever become our home? To answer this, we must truly consider why we are here and why Allah has put us in this position. Either we can see it as a test, or we can see it as an honour. This situation is not too different to those of our noble Prophets and predecessors; the honour of spreading Islam in a distant land, almost 1500 years after the religion first descended. We are used to hearing about Islam spreading by conquest, but Islam always has been a religion of the hearts and minds. If this was not the case the lands of central Asia and North Africa would have left Islam after the changing of rule. Fortunately, Allah gave us the best example of how to influence the hearts and minds through our noble Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

If we hold on to this example, we will not only lead fulfilling lives ourselves, but we will also call others to Islam, whether we intend to or not. This can only succeed if two principles are held: firmness in religion, and good character.

GOOD CHARACTER IS OF UPMOST IMPORTANCE IN THE LIFE OF A MUSLIM AND SPREADS ACROSS ALL DOMAINS OF LIFE.

Firmness in religion is an obligation upon all Muslims and is of even further importance given the difficult environment that Muslims face while living in the UK. This environment creates temptation towards the worldly life, and can tempt Muslims away

from their obligations. Whether this is through missing or delaying prayers, intermixing with the opposite gender, or using interest. As the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) says, “When the servant commits a sin, a black mark appears upon his heart. If he returns to the sin, the blackness will be increased until it overcomes his heart”. The temptations to commit sins often develop over time, hence it is important to protect oneself from a harmful environment and bad company. Further to this, young Muslims often fear worldly consequences for following their religion, such as wearing hijab at work, or missing a work function which takes place in an inappropriate environment. It is important to remember that Allah is the provider of all things, and to sacrifice a worldly thing for the sake of Allah will only lead to blessings in this world and the hereafter. We should also remember that Allah has favoured us by giving us the gift of Islam and we should not be ungrateful for this.



This firmness towards religion does not go unnoticed with the non-believers. In a time where many people lead hopeless lives, people will develop curiosity and take an interest. Reverts to Islam often will explain their decision by citing a colleague or friend who impressed them with their discipline and dedication to the religion.

REVERTS TO ISLAM OFTEN WILL EXPLAIN THEIR DECISION BY CITING A COLLEAGUE OR FRIEND WHO IMPRESSED THEM WITH THEIR DISCIPLINE AND DEDICATION TO THE RELIGION.

As said by Ibn Qayimm (May Allah be pleased with him); *"The religion itself is entirely good character, so whoever surpasses you in character has surpassed you in religion."* Good character is of upmost importance in the life of a Muslim and spreads across all domains of life. This includes with family, neighbours, friends, and colleagues, whether believers or non-believers. We can look to the life of the Prophet (ﷺ), who was sent to perfect character, as a leading example. The revelation descended in a time of ignorance and was spread in a hostile environment. The Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions were mocked and assaulted by their

own community as they tried to practice and spread the religion of Islam. However, they did not respond to this with hostility or aggression. They maintained their good character and were firm in their determination to call others to Islam. A great example of this is the events of Taif where our Prophet (ﷺ) was betrayed and ambushed while delivering the message of Islam. When the angel Jibreel came down to offer retribution, our Prophet (ﷺ), fresh from the assault, instead asked for their guidance. This provides an important lesson in mercy, particularly in our current times where the ego is dominant and will often seek revenge and retribution even for small misgivings. As said by the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ); *"The merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you."* We can also look to the example of Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him) during the incident of slander against his daughter and the beloved wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her). When Abu Bakr came to know that the source of the slander was a relative that he financially supported, he withheld his support. However, Allah sent down the ayah below which caused Abu Bakr to repent and continue his financial support.

"Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kinsmen, the

poor, and those who emigrated in God's way. Let them pardon and forgive! Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is All-Forgiving and All-Merciful" (24:22)

Good character is the best form of spreading the religion. It is something that we as Muslims should always be mindful of. Often people will judge an entire religion or ethnicity based on the character and actions of one individual. We should be mindful of this responsibility and aim to maintain good character both in private and public. The actions of good character are summarised in the hadith below:

"The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to people. The most beloved deed to Allah is to make a Muslim happy, or to remove one of his troubles, or to forgive his debt, or to feed his hunger. That I walk with a brother regarding a need is more beloved to me than that I seclude myself in this mosque in Medina for a month. Whoever swallows his anger, then Allah will conceal his faults. Whoever suppresses his rage, even though he could fulfill his anger if he wished, then Allah will secure his heart on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever walks with his brother regarding a need until he secures it for him, then Allah Almighty will make his footing firm across the bridge on the day when the footings are shaken" (Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat lil-Tabarani 6026)

We are currently living in a tolerant society where we are offered the freedom to practice our religion openly. Consequently, we should not shy away from our obligations and should have pride in our religion and stay firm in it. We should not compromise our values to align to western society. Our responsibility in influencing non-Muslims should be not be taken as a burden as ultimately Allah is responsible for guidance. However, it is something that we should be conscious of.

"Verily, Allah does not look at your appearance or wealth, but rather He looks at your hearts and actions" (Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) - Sahih Muslim 2564)



Small Deeds, Great Rewards: Uncovering Islam's Hidden Gems

BY SYED HAMZA NABEEL



Good deeds are those actions that are done in accordance with the sharia and which are performed sincerely for the sake of Allah.

These deeds benefit a person in this life, in their grave and in the hereafter, on a day where there shall be no dirham or dinar. Rather, the currency of that Day will be a person's good deeds.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنَّىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do. 16:97

The believer whose good deeds outweigh his bad ones shall enter into the gardens of delight for eternity, a place which no eyes have seen, no ear has heard and no heart can perceive.

There are countless good deeds a person can perform, some of which bring immense rewards which I will hope to highlight by Allah's will. It is important to understand that the bounty of Allah is immense for He is the Appreciative (ash-Shakur) who gives immense reward for small actions. Therefore, there is nothing strange about these great rewards, rather what is strange is our heedlessness concerning them.

Fasting

The fasting person gives up all his worldly desires for the sake of Allah and combines the three types of patience, namely patience in obeying Allah (by fasting), patience in refraining from disobeying Allah (by eating and drinking etc.), and patience in accepting His decree (the hunger and tiredness that befalls you).

Besides fasting in Ramadan, it is sunnah to fast on Monday's and Thursday's along with the three white days of each month (13th, 14th and 15th). There are numerous hadiths on the different rewards for fasting from which I shall mention one:

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: *"Every deed of the son of Adam will be multiplied between ten and seven hundred times. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, said: Except fasting. It is for Me and I shall reward for it. He gives up his desires and his food for My sake."* (Narrated by Muslim 1151)

This means that the reward for fasting is multiplied more than seven hundredfold.

Dhikr

By remembering Allah you can attain great rewards by simply moving your lips and reciting a few words. This remembrance should be a constant part of your life - whether lying down, walking, or driving. The wise Muslim understands the true value of time and is mindful not to waste even a few seconds that could be used to earn good deeds. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"Whoever says, سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ (Glorified is Allah and all praise belongs to him) one hundred times a day, will be forgiven all his sins even if they were as much as the foam of the sea.* (Sahih Bukhari 6405)

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever says

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ، وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ
الْحَمْدُ، وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

(There is no god except Allah alone with no partner; to Him be dominion and praise, and He is Able to do all things) ten times will be like one who freed four of the children of Ismae'eel."

Juwairiyah bint Al-Harith (May Allah be pleased with her), the Mother of the Believers, reported:

The Prophet (ﷺ) came out from my apartment in the morning as I was busy in performing the dawn prayer. He came back in the forenoon and found me sitting there. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Are you still in the same position as I left you." I replied in the affirmative. Thereupon the Prophet said, "I recited four words three times after I had left you. If these are to be weighed against all you have recited since morning, these will be heavier. These are:

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ ، عَدَدَ خَلْقِهِ ، وَرِضَا نَفْسِهِ
، وَزِنَةَ عَرْشِهِ ، وَمِدَادَ كَلِمَاتِهِ

Glory is to Allah and praise is to Him, by the multitude of his creation, by His Pleasure, by the weight of His Throne, and by the extent of His Words. (Sahih Muslim 2726)

Reciting the Qur'an

A Muslim should take a portion of every day to read the words of his lord with contemplation.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever reads a letter of the Book of Allah will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed gets a tenfold reward. I do not say that Alif-Lam-Mim is a letter, rather alif is a letter, lam is a letter and mim is a letter." (At-Tirmidhi 2910)

For every letter there is great reward!

Praying in congregation in the masjid

Allah commanded that mosques should be built for his worship. It is therefore essential for muslim men to exert their best efforts in offering the obligatory prayers in the mosque.

The reward cannot be enumerated as Allah has promised reward in every single step walking towards and back from the masjid, with one erasing a sin and another raising him one degree in status. The Prophet (ﷺ) promised the one who walks to the mosque in the dark for perfect light on the day of judgement and we haven't even got to the prayer itself yet! For indeed praying in congregation is 27 times better than praying alone and the one who prays fajr and isha in congregation it is as if he has stood the whole night in prayer. There are many more virtues, however we shall suffice with a hadith that should encourage us to fill the mosques.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Whoever goes to the mosque in the morning and evening, Allah will prepare for him an honourable place in Paradise every time he goes and comes." (Sahih Bukhari 631)

Upholding the ties of kinship

Think about the last time you sent a text message or called one of your family members. This is such an easy good deed and yet it has great benefits in this dunya and the akhira.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever would like his provision to be increased and his lifespan extended, let him uphold his ties of kinship." (Sahih Bukhari 5639)

Giving charity even if it is a little

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Whoever gives charity the equivalent of a date that was acquired by halal means – for Allah does not accept anything but that which is good, Allah accepts it in His right hand, then He tends it for the one who gave it, as one of you tends his foal, until it becomes like a mountain."

This hadith shows us the great mercy of Allah and that we should not belittle any good deed.

Attending funerals and offering the funeral prayer

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Whoever attends a funeral until he offers the (funeral) prayer will have one qirat (of reward) and whoever attends until the burial is done will have two qirats." It

was said: "What are the two qirats?" He said: "Like two great mountains." (Sahih Bukhari 1261)

A huge reward

"Allah's Messenger said to me: 'Whoever performs Ghusl on Friday, and bathes completely, and goes early, arriving early, gets close and listens and is silent, there will be for him in every step he takes the reward of a year of fasting and standing (in prayer).'" (Tirmidhi 496)

This immense reward is only attained by doing all the things that are mentioned in the hadith: doing ghusl, cleansing oneself, going to the mosque early, walking to the mosque and not riding, sitting close to the imam, listening attentively to the khutbah and not fidgeting.

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami said "It was said that there is nothing in the Sunnah, in any sahih report, greater than this reward, so pay attention to it."

Conclusion

There are many other good deeds that one can do. We should all seek Allah's help to do as many of these as possible and we should persist in doing them even if they are little.

'Aishah said: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "O people, you should do whatever good deeds you can, for Allah does not get tired (of giving reward) until you get tired. And the most beloved of good deeds to Allah is that in which a person persists, even if it is little. If the family of Muhammad (ﷺ) started to do something, they would persist in it." (Bukhari 43)



Rediscovering Roots: Embracing the Muslim Journey Through History

BY ZAINAB RIZVI



Topkapi Palace, Istanbul, Turkey

The sun shone brightly as I climbed the hills, driven by a spirit of adventure. A sense of nostalgia filled the air as I approached the magnificent Topkapi Palace, a timeless sentinel of Ottoman history. My initial awe at Topkapi Palace evolved into deep contemplation as I observed the Ottoman Empire's journey from courageous warriors to a focus on art, science, and eventually competition with Europeans. This competition was not restricted to only being better than them, it became a hidden desire to be like them. Over time, Islam, which once sat beside them in the front seat, was now relegated to the back. This gradual transformation ultimately contributed to the slow disintegration of a magnificent empire that spanned multiple countries and continents.

At some point, we all experience moments when we might hesitate to

identify as Muslims. Especially during our formative years, we often feel that our Muslim identity restricts our ability to enjoy certain aspects of life. As an Asian Muslim, I've faced instances where I didn't want to reveal my Asian heritage. Fitting in with the crowd often feels easier than embracing our uniqueness, as there is a sense of comfort in numbers. Frequently, these feelings stem from a sense of inferiority, believing that "my culture and my religion are less valuable than others." It's natural to occasionally feel this way, as none of us are without flaws. If I could give advice to my younger self, I would encourage myself to embrace our Muslim history better. It is loaded with examples and motivation to help find comfort in being a Muslim.

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ
بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ
وَلَوْ ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمْ
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are definitely disobedient. (Al-Imran 3:110)

This serves as such a poignant reminder of the esteemed position of a believing Muslim. However, do we truly embody this belief every moment? Honestly, I don't think we do. None of us live with this conviction consistently. While mistakes are part of being human, we can strive to embrace this idea. Our Islamic history shows that it is possible to live this way, as exemplified by the Prophets, Sahabis and other important Muslim leaders. The choice is ours to make. Who or what we want to be. Allah swt gave us the free will to choose.

I would like to share with you a few examples from our Islamic history hopefully inspiring each one of us to feel comfortable in being who we are. Allah swt has mentioned in the Qur'an to remind the believers because it benefits. So, the little we learn and understand about our wonderful faith and history should be shared as much as possible, it may be the catalyst to the change we are searching for.

Abu Bakr (Radiallahu Anhu RA)

The faith and humility of this sahabi have been widely discussed, but what truly merits attention is his comfort in his identity and his acceptance of himself, which the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) exemplified. When the Quraysh mocked the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) for claiming he travelled in one night to Jerusalem and then to the heavens (the Journey of Isra-wal-Miraj), Abu Bakr was the sole person who stood by him. Unflinchingly he said, "If he said that, then he spoke the truth." And it is because of this incident that he was named As-Siddeeq.

This moment beautifully illustrates Abu Bakr's comfort in his identity as a Muslim. He did not feel the need to conform to his tribe's views for the sake of agreement. Instead, Abu Bakr (RA) upheld the truth in every aspect during that critical moment. As-Siddeeq means a person who is constantly truthful or who constantly believes in the truthfulness of something or someone.

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab and Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Radiallahu Anhum RA)

Both individuals epitomise bravery and courage. Umar (RA), upon embracing Islam, was so confident in his new identity that he publicly declared his conversion, urging the Muslim community, including the Prophet, to pray openly at the Kaaba. As he thought it was the right thing to do since they were all upon truth. This bold action earned him the title of 'Farooq', meaning the distinguisher of right from wrong. Similarly, Ali (RA) demonstrated his profound faith in his Muslim identity when he volunteered to take the Prophet's place while he left for hijra, highlighting his unwavering commitment.



Fall of Constantinople in 1453

Khalid Ibn Waleed (Radiallahu Anhu RA)

We recognize him as "Saif-Allah," which translates to "Sword of Allah." This title was bestowed upon him by the Prophet himself. Khalid (RA) gradually rose to this esteemed position, developing his skills as a military leader under the Prophet's guidance. Once he fully embraced his identity as a Muslim, he was elevated to the distinguished status of Saif-Allah. Throughout his military career, Muslims never faced defeat in battle under his command. It's worth pondering: could he have attained such a remarkable status without being at ease with his identity?

Sultan Mehmed II

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said "Constantinople will certainly be liberated, and how excellent a leader will its leader be, and how excellent an army that army will be".

What a remarkable reflection of this Sultan's character! He triumphed in conquering Constantinople, and that achievement is why modern Istanbul is recognized as a leader in the preservation of numerous Islamic artefacts and historical heritage. This begs reflection again on the fact that how comfortable must have this Sultan been to undertake this challenge of conquering this coveted city of cities. At the mere age of 22, he used military

to outsmart the Byzantines and make Constantinople the new Ottoman capital, now Istanbul.

The story of Prophet Sulaiman (AS) highlights the significance of gratitude, humility, and commitment to serving our Creator, stressing that honesty begins with being truthful to ourselves.

So, who are we? We are Muslims. And what is our purpose? To worship Allah.

How can we worship Allah? Through the five pillars of Islam.. By adhering to each pillar, we can engage in practices that embody our faith and allow us to live fully as Muslims.

The best example is indeed the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and if that is our goal, how can we settle for anything less? Embrace your true selves and reconnect with your Muslim identity. The goal is to achieve companionship with our beloved Rasool in Paradise and regale that eternal bliss.

Cherish your Muslim identity, and let each day be an opportunity for growth and self-improvement and thus strengthening the ummah every day. Embrace the journey and rediscover the Muslim within you.



Unity Amidst Adversity: The Bosnian Muslim Experience

BY SAAD MAHMOOD



This article is a summary of a talk delivered during my trip to Bosnia in July 2024 by Ahmet Alibasic, professor of Islamic Civilization Studies at the University of Sarajevo, and will discuss various topics, including the importance of Muslim unity, using Bosnia as a case study.

Introduction

Skipping to the 19th Century, Islam in Bosnia was no different than Islam in Syria, Macedonia, Anatolia, or any other Ottoman region at the time. Bosnia went through many reforms with regards to culture and law, and was in many respects, a pilot region for the Ottomans. By the early 19th century, different religious groups started adopting different nationalities, and near the end of the century, in 1875, there was a big rebellion against the Ottomans.

THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA WAS FORMED AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR ENDED. IT WAS A PLURALISTIC STATE RUN BY THE CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX.

Austro-Hungary was given control of the region whilst the Sultan was still the definitive head. Many Bosnian Muslims refused to live under a non-Muslim leader and decided to leave. Sharia courts at this time were open but regardless, many scholars decided to leave to other nearby parts of Ottoman lands. Those that stayed, later realised that perhaps it was not as impossible to live under a Catholic empire as they may have initially thought. This is because, by that time, European states had already given some rights to minority religious group unlike before.

Bosnian Muslims became increasingly convinced in their position to negotiate with the Austrians to give autonomy in establishing and keeping Islamic education and awqaf. This process took about 30 years.

In 1908, Austria formally annexed Bosnia with the agreement of the Ottomans. An arrangement was made that ensured local scholars were chosen by the community. This agreement would then be approved officially by the Ottomans who would approve the new head of state. Unfortunately, this only happened prior to the First World War which led to a new period of approximately forty years in which the Bosnian Muslims went from an elite community to an ignored minority.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was formed after the First World War ended. It was a pluralistic state run by the Christian Orthodox. There was less rule of law



Josip Broz Tito, leader of Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1980



The Bosnian war followed the breakup of Yugoslavia



Serbs leaders were found guilty of genocide against the Bosnian Muslim population



Family members at the Genocide Memorial in Srebrenica, where over 8,000 Bosnian men and boys were massacred

and less respect for the rights of Muslims, especially with regards to land (which Muslims owned a lot of from Ottoman times) which was given to peasants to recover after the war.

IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES ALLIED WITH DIFFERENT SIDES, HOWEVER, THE BOSNIANS DIDN'T SIDE WITH ANYONE.

Whilst during Austrian-Hungarian rule, the Muslims weren't under much pressure, due to the Austrians hoping to show everyone just how good they were with the aim of extending their territory more, Yugoslavia was instead just pushing its own agenda. Due to the extreme loss of Serbians during the First World War, Yugoslavia (which was predominantly Serbian in their military) thought they had more right to neighbouring land than anybody else. Of course, many countries incorporated into the Kingdom did not accept this.

In the Second World War, the Yugoslav countries allied with different sides, however, the Bosnians didn't side with anyone. Following the war, it didn't matter much now about your religious

identity, rather your nationality was what was important, and the Bosnians were transitioning very slowly to this mindset, later suffering as a result. This later led to the existence of religion not mattering as much as nationality being a part of Bosnian law.

After the war, the Yugoslav communists came into power, and tried to push religion out of Bosnia completely by closing down Sharia schools training judges, religious schooling centres like madrassahs, Sharia courts, and more. They thought religion was a poison. However, this secular implementation was deceptive and under the false pretence of freedom. For example, they would ban children from attending madrassahs, but once they became adults, they were free to go (of course, by then, they have no interest to do so).

The displeasure of the Serb nationalists also increased following the Second World War as many of the Yugoslav countries acted for equal political representation and ended up getting their own assembly and presidents in 1974. Naturally, Serb nationalists were not happy with this as they desired a centralised Yugoslavia under the control the Serbs. This led to the idea of establishing a Greater Serbia which Serb nationalists were convinced of this as they controlled the army. In the years following, they started multiple wars with the various countries in

the Kingdom, and wanted at least two-thirds of Bosnia (and claimed they owned that much at least). Of course, as the historical record shows, Serb nationalists committed many atrocities – including genocide – in the process.

Global Outcry and Muslim Unity

The Serbs thought they would enact their plans with Bosnia in a matter of months, however, they did not anticipate the tables turning against them. Following their invasion of Bosnia, they found strong Bosnian resistance with allies amongst other Muslim nations including Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Iran. Interestingly, many western Jews were also supportive of the Bosnian plight and related to the civilian camps and reports of massacres.

FOLLOWING THEIR INVASION OF BOSNIA, THEY FOUND STRONG BOSNIAN RESISTANCE WITH ALLIES AMONGST OTHER MUSLIM NATIONS INCLUDING SAUDI ARABIA, MALAYSIA, AND IRAN.

At the time the world was relatively free of major crises. There was no 9/11, the Soviet Union had disbanded, and the only major problem was that Europe was just coming out of the Cold War following the fall of the Berlin wall, leading many to believe no-one would dare to start fighting again. In fact, many did not even believe there was conflict in the Balkans, and those that did, were hoping it would be all over quick. Certainly, no-one expected 8000 people to be massacred in ten days.

All of this and more, meant that there were enough pictures and media for global public opinion to cry out resulting in pressure on the US and NATO to intervene, which later led to the bombing of Serbia and the restoration of some Bosnian land and the ending of the invasion.



The Silver Lining

In the end, Bosnia went through a lot of power-sharing, different governments, and many more issues, which led to a lack of development and growth. However, some positives have resulted from all the suffering that was endured.

Firstly, there is now a lot of personal freedom in Bosnian Muslim society which works in and out of favour. You can wear niqab, or not cover at all. You can fast and pray, or choose not to. It's all up to individual choice. In addition, following 9/11, whilst there were some Bosnian Algerians that were unfortunately extradited to Guantanamo Bay, this was an extreme case where the Bosnian government could not protect their citizens, but otherwise, no-one has been able to push Bosnia or Bosnian Muslims around.

Secondly, the rich history of the country has led many diplomats and visiting Muslims – regardless of nationality – to exclaim their love for it country, and state how free they feel. In addition, Christian missionaries have not had much luck in Bosnia, which is good news for Muslim communities coming to Europe.

Furthermore, whilst many may not consider Bosnians to be ideal Muslims, it is important to remember that even

when they had opportunities to do so, they did not abandon their faith or own folk and ally with the occupying powers. In addition, some may argue that Bosnians now live under the EU's laws and system of human rights and not their own, but this can be countered by the fact that they have firmly established their own rights as a result. This should serve as an example for other western Muslims. That they too must challenge the standard set by the West, just as the Bosnians have done.

BOSNIAN MUSLIMS STILL USE AND BUILD MANY OF THEIR OWN MOSQUES, LEADING TO A LEVEL OF CULTURAL PROTECTION FROM FOREIGN INFLUENCES.

Finally, Bosnian Islamic affairs are mostly run internally. Bosnian Muslims still use and build many of their own mosques, leading to a level of cultural protection from foreign influences. Of course, whilst there may be some disadvantages to such centralisation, in Bosnia's case, the benefit is clear as even though it has gone through multiple plots and plans and changes of regimes, the Islamic community has

still stayed unified and has thrived as a result of this centralisation.

Taking the heroic Bosnian Muslims – and of course, the ever-enduring Palestinians – as a case study, we learn that ultimately, we must keep our spirits up and our efforts active and pray for the best to the One who controls the rest. May Allah grant victory to the oppressed and have mercy on us all. Ameen.

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