I am a Muslim Woman
by Nadia Khan

I am a Muslim woman. The ruthless ignorance to which I wake up every morning has finally forced me to hold my pen and dispel those myths that have become associated with me. More than defending myself, however, I want to convey the message that instead of taking the media information passively, we must strive to get our facts straight. If we actually do some unbiased research, we are bound to reach the truth that is otherwise ravaged by the onslaught of ignorance. Just as we were disappointed after finding out that Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction, we might be disappointed to find out that Islam does not have any weapons of mass oppression either.

I am a Muslim woman. To a naïve eye, I may be “oppressed”; my covered head and body telling a tale of suf- focation, but to an informed eye, I am a pearl that is protected deep within the shells of my clothing. From a feminist’s viewpoint, I may be “oppressed”, my religion and about my rights so that I can benefit my children, my society, and me. I am also supposed to gain education about my Creator, my religion and about my rights so that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education so that it can benefit my children, my society, and me. I am also supposed to gain education about my Creator, my religion and about my rights so that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education so that it can benefit my children, my society, and me. I am also supposed to gain education about my Creator, my religion and about my rights so that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Muslim and only through knowledge that I ought to get education in order to be a true Islamic fanatics, or a neo-Johnny Walker type, but no. I assure you neither of these are the case. Shareef Jihad translates into “noble” or “honorable struggle”; in hopes that the struggle of my becoming Muslim would one day become shareef, insha’Allah (God Willing).

It all started on 9/11, on that crazy day, one that will live on with us for many years to come. After that fateful day I was saddened as two friends were lost as well as an acquaintance of mine. Faces would just become memories as they were no longer there. At the funeral, my close friend’s mother just kept asking, “Why?” Why her son, so young and innocent died? The more and more I allowed her words in, the more and more her words echoed within, the more and more my saddened heart grew cold and angry.

I started to feed into the false and ignorant news that filled the airwaves, television, and people’s minds about Islam as well as Muslims. Muslims were being programmed into my mind as being the enemy. Despite my extreme awareness, I allowed myself to become duped about a people, a religion, and a way of life of which I had no knowledge.

Then one day I woke up. I remembered all that I read about American history and I couldn’t believe everything they taught me in school. So I tasked myself as becoming knowledgeable of these terrorists. So I could have facts in case of a discussion, instead of being part of the ignorant that flock to our society like sheep. I was going to wake up, and maybe even write a book. I went all out and got Islamic books from Muslim authors and non-Muslim authors, and two transcriptions of American history, I am invulnerable to being exploited by those who sexually harass women. For an eye that judges on a higher dimension, I possess a character and an intellect that is pure, without being sugar-coated with accompanying deceptions.

Yet it is not me who has chosen to dress the way I do. Rather, I only comply with the choices of a Higher Being in whose Wisdom I have complete faith; the All-Knower, the All-Wise, who calls Himself Allah. He has blessed Muslims with a book that is free of any doubt or contradiction and for those who do find doubt in it; it puts up an open challenge. Allah says in the Quran addressing the disbelievers: “And if ye are in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a chapter of the like thereof and call your witness beside Allah if ye are truthful” [2:24]. It is not a surprise, however, that His words remain unprecedented even after the passage of more than 1400 years. Quran is a complete code of life that provides injunctions about almost all the major aspects of life, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and finance. Regarding my dress code, Allah says in Quran: “O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their veils over their bodies. That will be better, that they should be known and not to be annoyed [33:59].”

My Hijab, therefore, is a shield that gives me protection and is definitely not an instrument of oppression as perceived by others. I belong to a religion whose messenger, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was the first to make it incumbent on every Muslim man and woman to acquire knowledge at a time, when ignorance was rampant. It is obligatory upon me to seek education so that it can benefit my children, my society, and me. I am also supposed to gain education about my Creator, my religion and about my rights so that I may not be exploited unlawfully under the banner of Islam. For example, I have come to know that Islam does not have any weapons of mass destruction and that those who prevent me from doing so are not following Islam but are asserting their own stake beliefs. I cannot be forced into marrying someone against my wish either since Allah says in the Quran: “Do not prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree between themselves in a lawful manner.” [2:32]
This publication contains the name of God, please respect it. Nasihah welcomes submissions and articles from everybody. Articles may be edited for content and length at the editors’ discretion. Submit all articles to alnasiyah@yahoo.com The opinions expressed in Nasihah are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily represent that of ISRU or the staff of Nasihah.

Visit ISRU and Nasihah online at http://muslims.rutgers.edu/newsletter.htm

Statement of Purpose

Assalaamu Alalikum Wa Rehmatulahihai Wa Barakaatuhu,

As you will notice, we took a new turn with this issue which is why we will like to refer to it as a ‘da’wah’ issue, an issue meant to spread the message of Islam. Many of the articles discuss the definition of Islam, what it means to be a Muslim, and the justification of the existence of God through Islam. Our audience this time is not only Muslims but non-Muslims as well. We want to educate others on Islam and at the same time encourage Muslims to go back to the beginning and recall the meaning of Islam and being a Muslim. For without knowledge of the basics, one cannot understand the eloquent message of Islam whether one is Muslim or non-Muslim. Through this installment of Nasihah, we pray we can eradicate your misconceptions of Islam and replace them with positive and reassuring feelings that Islam encourages only good in human beings. It is only the faults of people that stain the beautiful message of Islam and replace it with ignorant, self-constructed criticisms. We truly pray the articles, poems, and overall content of this issue allow you to witness the majesty and perfection of this peaceful, God-loving religion.

If you are new to Islam and are reading Nasihah to learn more about this religion, then we hope to help you understand the reality of Islam misunderstood by many. Throughout this issue, you will find articles and poems on what it means to be a Muslim, the five pillars of faith in Islam, and the purpose of life in Islam. All of these are meant to help you understand the eternal meaning and solid practices of our faith. Islam does not remain in the personal realm, but this religion incorporates a person from the inside and outside the home.

God has purpose and justification for the rules and commands He sends forth to mankind. This has always been the beauty of Islam, nothing goes unanswered or left in the air to ponder. People become and remain Muslim for their love and understanding of Islam. They have discovered the answers to their questions as to why there is a God, what possible reason can there be for human beings and this universe to come to be, and why is there suffering? Our writers have strived their utmost to answer these questions through their understanding and references to Islamic knowledge in the center page articles. And I guarantee you Islam does answer these questions.

Do we suppress our women? Well see for yourself on the front page. A sister writes on the issues of today, how outsiders portray the Muslim woman as weak, abused, and shunned. People become and remain Muslim for their love and understanding of Islam. Nothing goes unanswered or left in the air to ponder. People become and remain Muslim for their love and understanding of Islam.

Go to “Note” on page 11
A Book Review of *Even Angels Ask* 

by Sharmin Begum

“Summer has become my favorite season, with its sunshine, warmth, long days, and long walks in the late afternoon…” (xi). This is how Dr. Jeffrey Lang, a mathematician, starts his book *Even Angels Ask: A Journey to Islam in America*. I thought to myself, “Hey! This guy loves summer the way I do…” And I also wondered if he ever took the long walk with his mother as I often did. From the very first page I began to relate to him. It is true that he is a reverted (converted) Muslim, but he is also a struggling American Muslim who most of us can relate to.

Why would I recommend this book for you – yeah, you! Because, it is going to make you ask questions! I remember, as I walked to the cozy book store of DC’s Islamic center, my eyes landed right on the blue title: *Even Angels Ask*. My eyebrows came together and I whispered to myself, “Even angels ask? What are the angels asking? And why would they ask? Who are they asking?” I felt an urge to get this book, as I wanted to know what the angels want to know. Anyway, spending $10 isn’t much, right?

And that was one of the best decisions I have made, so far. Reading this book I discovered that Jeffrey Lang did not write a typical Islamic book, guide book, or a book that simply tells the stories of American Muslim reveres. He wrote a meticulous book, based on an analysis of verses from the Quran, a description of Islam in such a way that anyone, Muslim and non-Muslim, can benefit, and mostly his personal experiences as an American Muslim. I thought that each line held a metaphor about the many Muslim students that he met while he was teaching. Most of the students, if not all, are not in touch with their religion. According to Dr. Lang, I would be a first generation Muslim in America, and my children will be second generation Muslims. He has discovered that, “…the children of second generation Muslims…do not believe in Islam…[But] we should not conclude [from] this that the other 90% abandon the faith; the fact is that most who turn out not to believe in it had little or no exposure to Islam when they were growing up” (220).

Throughout the book, Dr. Lang reflects on his personal experiences. When he described how he felt the first time he prayed, I began to weep. Later I thought to myself, “Alhamdulillah I didn’t read this part in the bus! I probably would have started crying in front of everyone in the bus!! How embarrassing that would have been! Thank Allah, indeed!” His experiences would touch anybody, especially when he began to weep uncontrollably, for the first time, feeling the powerful existence of the Creator, Allah (Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala). He made, what I think is the best dua (supplication): “Oh God, if I ever gravitate towards disbelief again, then please, kill me first – rid me of this life. It is hard enough living with my imperfections and weaknesses, but I cannot live another day denying You” (161).

Therefore, just as Dr. Lang prayed, we should not waste a day without remembering Allah (SWT). We, especially being first generation Muslims in America, should work our way up to gain as much knowledge as we can, and apply the Quranic teachings in our daily lives. And please do not forget! I encourage you all to read a book as inspirational as this one!

“Say, ‘Truly my prayer and my sacrifice and my living and my dying – all belong to God, the Lord of the worlds’” (6:163).

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Marriage: What’s Love got to do with it

by Shazia Ansari

The evening of Tuesday, March 23, 2004, the Rutgers Community was given the auspicious opportunity to listen to a lecture by Br. Muhammad Alshareef. It was held in the Multi-purpose Room of the Livingston Student Center. The lecture was entitled, “Marriage: What’s Love Got to Do With It?”

Judging by the large turnout of attendees, it is obvious that this topic is of great interest to today’s college students.

Br. Alshareef stressed many important points to keep in mind as a Muslim looking to get married. One of them was that people should observe modesty and obey Allah (SWT) until they are blessed by Allah (SWT) and get married. True reward is gained between two people only when they are married. Those actions that are haram and punishable before marriage are halal and rewarding only within the bonds of marriage. As a Muslim, you should be open-minded when looking for a spouse. Br. Alshareef stated that one must be the person he or she is looking for. If you want to marry someone who prays Fajr every morning, you have to be that way too. If you want to marry an honest person, you have to be honest too. Why? Because “birds of a feather [will] flock together.” You have to better yourself if you want someone that is good for you. A lot of people will put a word in here or there about themselves, but will not look inwards at themselves to see what they should change.

Women and men should marry because of their faith, not their wealth or what they look like. If looks are all people run after, they will fall into the trap of Shaitan. The concept of beauty today, Br. Alshareef humorously pointed out, is not based on anything that is real - it is based on the latest version of Adobe Photoshop. The people’s looks one aspires to may not even exist! Why should you have to put on a mask to hide what Allah (SWT) has given you? You will see spouses that will only look beautiful or handsome outside of the home, not inside. Running after the “love” and “beauty” defined by Western society will not get you very far.

When people work hard, they will be blessed with a very happy companion and family. People who learn the Qur’an, learn their deen, and lower their gaze - they are the ones who will be blessed. Once you respect yourself, you yourself will stand out to people. You will not have to struggle. People will come to you in a way pleasing to Allah (SWT). You will then Insha’Allah live a very rewarding life and have a pleasant companion and family to live with.

Women and men should marry because of their faith, not their wealth or what they look like… ‘The concept of beauty today,’ Br. Alshareef humorously pointed out, ‘is not based on anything that is real - it is based on the latest version of Adobe Photoshop.’

“The tennis ball’s random path represents my own, not only on the subject of hijab, but my thoughts on the whole.”

I Prefer...

by Shireen Khan

I prefer computers over typewriters. I prefer sleep over getting up early just to have more time to put on some makeup. I prefer art over physics. I prefer tennis over soccer. I prefer Adidas over Nike. My friend owns a Nike pencil case. And so in class I study its logo. “Just Do It.” I will do it. I will use a computer instead of a typewriter. I will sleep, even if it means only for five more minutes. I will play tennis instead of soccer. Tennis: one of the things that I am always looking forward to play, to do, to get better at. I do not play in many tournaments, but I play for my own pleasure. But it means a lot to me. The squeaks of my shoes on the court, the solid smack of the ball against my racket. The ball’s steady yet random path from one side of the court to the other. Perhaps it represents my own thoughts, from one side of my head to the other. From yes to no, wrong to right, wait to go. Wait to go. I wondered if I should wait to start hijab or to go ahead. Hijab. The head cover that all Muslim women must wear. But these days, not all young women wear it, and like me, many do not think of it as important as we should. The tennis ball’s random path represents my own, not only on the subject of hijab, but my thoughts on the whole. As for the subject of hijab, it was difficult to decide on what to do. The ball would bounce on my side of the court, and I would consider starting wearing Hijab in my high school career. And then it would bounce back on the other side of the court, and I would come up with setbacks that would come along with wearing hijab. This game that consisted of only one set was long. I had to think about it a lot because once the young Muslim woman starts, she cannot stop. And so therefore, once I started, I could not stop. With no pressure from my parents, this decision was totally mine and mine alone. I wanted to win this game. And then, I finally scored. I gathered up any final strength that I had not been using and hit the ball back on the other side of the court. Lo and behold! The opponent missed; perhaps I was my own opponent. I scored. And like in a tennis match, when I put on my hijab and went out for the first time, all eyes watched me. And all eyes still watch me. Watching not because they disapprove, or not because what I did was unusual, but perhaps watching me because I played the game and won. And now they wait to see what comes next. But I played that long set. That one long match. I broke the ball’s random path. I scored that one point which counted the most to me. I went ahead and did it. And I never regretted it.
Why am I a Muslim?
by Nadia Khan

Why am I a Muslim? Why am I a Muslim by choice as well as by birth? I am not a brain dead” who blindly follows the crowd. Instead; I spend most of my time reflecting, and struggling with my conscience. I reflect on my existence, on my religion’s existence; on my family, my own religion, my own mind. Why am I supposed to gain worldly and spiritual knowledge? Why must I respect my parents and teachers? Why should I spend my wealth on poor instead of hording it? I do not seek refuge in Quran to validate my prejudices. Instead, I seek in Quran, answers to my questions. It opens my eyes to the Infinite Wisdom that is pursed safely inside it. The Unfathomable and Complete Wisdom…

I do not find it “Unfathomable” because I have been parroted to believe such and such. Rather, whenever I find myself empty, it never fails to appease my heart and my mind. And in the process, creates more crevices inside me that keep howling for more wisdom… I am not a Jew, Hindu or a Christian. Not because I am arrogant or plain ignorant. But because I find my religion immensely pleasing and satisfying. I love to learn about other religions. Because in their light, I come to appreciate my own religion. Islam sits perfectly with my conscience. Whenever I follow its injunctions, I am at peace with it. And when I go against them, the tides of my conscience keep striking against my shores.

SHAREEF continued from page 1

Wism had been anticipating this morning for the past two weeks. It was going to be his first chance to sit with the men during breakfast. Breakfast would come later, though, as first he would have to complete the task that made his father finally see him as a Man. As they got closer to the Masjid, the road filled up with more and more Believers. Tidings of peace here, tidings of peace there, praising of Allah here, and praising of Allah there. Wisam took off his shoes and stepped onto the cool marble floor, which he always found out of place amongst the wartorn remains of the buildings around them. When he entered the main prayer hall, an amazing cool went through him, making his insards almost sigh in relief. He prayed two nafl with his dad in the first line of the Masjid, and they both sat, awaiting the Adhaan. Wisam loved to look at his father during the short time before the Call to Prayer. All the stories

My Heart is Not Beating
by Saba Rathore

My heart is not beating right. You see, it is only beginning to feel tight, And I cannot breathe anymore. Can’t you see? Dreams and desires that pour Into a house of cards They melt And drip And drip, And drip All the way to an infinite inkwell In my mind, Where I cannot tell But it is surely there, Creeping like an octopus, Disguising behind black air, Black tears flow From my eyes, And fly away like crows, The smell of ashes Hides dark death But opens my lashes To a beautiful yard, With roses of all kinds, And big gray cards, Frozen in time, My heart is not beating, No one shall know my crime.
I ran away from my Lord

by Hassan Khaja

I ran away from my Lord to chase a beautiful woman in a hot rod. She was riding roughshod until she pulled over to the side of the road. I picked up on her silent code. It said, “I need a ride to my abode.”

I’m sure it’s not the mode that Allah showed you to live. But something’s gotta give; technically we’re all the same. I was created from your rib.”

I gave her a ride, not aware that it was suicide. I took it all in stride even when she asked me to hide the book of my Lord. My Guide. She opened a glove compartment and saw a French lesson and a bottle of depressants.

Discouraged, she told me, “The essence of happiness is to lessen your troubles and struggles. And turn your house of worship to rubble.”

Remain huddled in a bubble with all your possessions. You’ll be seeing double.

Two gods, Allah and a checking account With nothing less than a six-figure amount.”

I relented to her demands and ignored the day that I sincerely repented. In retrospect, she seemed rather demented. But when she said, “It doesn’t matter that your faith’s a little dented.”

To make me happy, we rented a car and drove to the nearest Islamic lecture. I conjectured that she was sincere until she kept yanking out hairs from my beard because I wouldn’t keep my eyes on the women on the other side.

She said, “Don’t be an extremist, it makes me so squeamish. I’m one of those ‘good’ demons. You keep screaming for a divider or a barrier. How do you expect to find a hot girl so you can marry her, and carry her anywhere she wants? To her uncle’s and aunt’s. So they could tell you, ‘You look like a terrorist, go shave.’ Go out to some rave; sell our niece’s body to some men so you can pave your driveway.”

And the road to hell with good intentions, which we’re sure you got, but you won’t mention.”

I felt the tension build. Her affectionate rubbing killed all my doubts and stilled my agitation.

We rushed to my house and I laid her on my couch. Automatically, I thought she had to be the one who could set me free.

With the “truth” of Armani suits and poisoned Bacardi juice. I could run loose knowing it would dull the pain.

I had an umbrella of insane thoughts to shelter me from the rain. But I found out it would all be the same.

And I could go home having done all this in vain because my life really hasn’t changed for the better. I didn’t realize I was still a debtor who owed The Most Merciful. For everything, down to the last letter.

Until I saw God’s book, then God shook the ground beneath, and I felt belief. The path to Him... it’s in pure faith. Belief in fate.”

by Amr bin Muhammed Gharib

Have you ever wondered what is out there? Have you ever just wondered, what is beyond the moon and the stars? Is there anything else out there, or is it just us? According to the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI), the universe has been expanding, and will continue expanding until The End of Time, when “the universe will expand so incredibly that it will end in a Big Rip. All matter - galaxies, then stars, then planets, and everything right down to the atomic level - would be torn apart.” But when exactly The End of Time will be, they do not know. What happens after that end of time? What happens to all the matter that was in the universe? Will it just disappear, or will it come back together? Will the matter actually become destroyed (disproving Isaac Newton’s Law of Conservation of Matter)?

Reflection on these questions leads you to other pertinent questions: Could such an encompassing order of life and its organization purely be by accident? “Or could there be an intelligent originator to this spectacular array of living and non-living forms - a designer that may have developed them through processes which have yet to be fully determined…? We know that we are not the cause of ourselves, for embryonic development is organized and directed in stages under natural laws. But directed by what and by whose laws? Chance? Or Intelligence?” (www.Islaam.com). If you asked someone why they eat or drink, you would get an answer like “for proper nutrition.” The like is so for many other questions that you would ask them such as the reason for sleep, washing, and clothing themselves. But why is it that, when people are asked what their purpose in life is, you will get a million of different answers? It is because many people are confused as to what their real purpose of life is. The belief that this Universe came into existence without a defined reason! Thus there is no sense of moral right or wrong. Who defines the right and the wrong? Man therefore, is just a responding tool that, according to Darwin, acts haphazardly.

Having this belief in your mind, you go on with your daily life. Yet you feel an emptiness in your body; not a physical emptiness, but a spiritual emptiness. You succumb to the materialistic philosophy that the more money you have, the happier you will be; so you work the extra shifts at the company and get your hands on an immense fortune. Then you come to realize that the more money you get, the emptier you become. You sit down at home, longing for a better life. But I found out it would all be the same.

And the road to hell with good intentions, which we’re sure you got, but you won’t mention.”

I felt the tension build. Her affectionate rubbing killed all my doubts and stilled my agitation. We rushed to my house and I laid her on my couch. Automatically, I thought she had to be the one who could set me free. With the “truth” of Armani suits and poisoned Bacardi juice. I could run loose knowing it would dull the pain. I had an umbrella of insane thoughts to shelter me from the rain. But I found out it would all be the same. And I could go home having done all this in vain because my life really hasn’t changed for the better. I didn’t realize I was still a debtor who owed The Most Merciful. For everything, down to the last letter. Until I saw God’s book, then God shook the ground beneath, and I felt belief. The path to Him isn’t through green wreaths or worshipping a cow or an ox, or counting on prayer rocks. But it’s in pure faith.

The Sha
Have you heard?

by Humayun Khan

How many people have heard the news about the ship in the Atlantic Ocean? There is a ship that contains different goods on board. There is no one steering it or maintaining it. But it is able to go back and forth from harbor to harbor on its own, traversing the waves that come by it. It stops at the location that it is supposed to stop at and heads in the direction it should go. This ship has no captain or anyone planning the trip.

How many of us believe this story? I don’t think anyone in this or her right mind will accept this story as plausible. However there are people who believe this world just came to be on its own, that this world runs exactly and precisely without a creator and a maintainer. I mean look at the world around you. The stars hanging in the sky, the perfection of the heavens, the alteration of day and night, the orbit of the planets, and the balance of nature all give credence to the existence of Allah. Think about it, if the sun was a little closer we would not be able to survive as a human race, if the moon’s orbit was even a little off, we would not receive proper light. Think to yourself the chances of all of this coming into perfect harmony coincidentally. If you were to see three bricks lying on top of each other you would conclude that someone put those bricks in that fashion, and those bricks did not just come to be like that coincidentally. Well, isn’t it foolish to believe that this harmoniously designed world just came to be without an intelligent designer?

Some may ask why, if so many evidences point to the existence of Allah, there are so many people in the world that deny or doubt his existence? One of the reasons is that so many of us have isolated ourselves from nature. Think about the time that we spend outdoors compared to the time that we spend indoors. How often we do just sit outside and reflect upon the creation of Allah? How often do we sit and stare at the moon and reflect upon its beauty? By creating and living in an artificial world, we have lost touch with reality.

Another reason we have lost our connection with Allah is because we have become distracted by the lifestyle we lead. All we seem to be doing is chasing wealth and trying to gain prestige. This has caused us to forget to remember Allah. According to Islam, every human being is born pure and is put on the road to heaven. It is the way he or she is brought up in this world that determines whether he or she reaches hell or Paradise. It is the way he or she is brought up that determines the place where he or she will spend eternity. According to Islam every human is naturally inclined to believe in Allah. Every human being has a manual in Islam to tell them the use of the human body. This Islam is not a culture; it is a COMPLETE WAY OF LIFE.

verse, and everything around man, in all due proportion.”(Br. Ahmad Ibrahim, www.islam.com)

Allah (glorified be He) says in the Holy Qur’an, “O people, you were not created in vain, nor will you be left to yourselves.”(75:36) All you are commanded to do is believe in Him, and He will guide you. He will give you the contentment that you need, because therein is a bliss and a comfort for your body. He knows what you need; for He is your creator, maintainer, sustainer, and benefactor. He is the fairest judge who will reward you when you do right, and punish you when you do wrong. He is the one who will protect you from harm; never afflict you with a test except that He has an IMMENSE reward waiting for you.

Allah says (glorified be He) “Son of Adam: fill your time with My worship, and I will fill your heart with richness, and end off your poverty. But if you do not, I will make your hands fully busy (i.e. with worldly affairs) and I will not end off your poverty” (Tirmithhee). For it is impractical after one has recognized that there is a creator, to not obey what he says. If one were to buy a household appliance, there would most surely be a manual that came with it. This manual would tell you how to use the appliance and what not to do with it. Similarly, human beings have a manual in Islam to tell them the use of the human body. This Islam is not a culture; it is a COMPLETE WAY OF LIFE.

I just want to remind anybody reading this that your Lord is Most Merciful; He accepts repentance and forgives all sins. His Mercy encompasses all things. He calls all of humanity to worship Allah every minute of his or her life. The concept of worship in Islam is less narrow as is thought in other religions. The word “worship” includes doing good deeds and living every part of your life in accordance with Allah’s laws. For example, providing a living for one’s family constitutes worship because it is a virtuous act that does not earn Allah’s anger. Is it too much for our Creator and Provider to ask us to worship Him sincerely for a limited amount of time? Isn’t it more than fair for our Lord to ask us to temporarily struggle on His behalf in exchange for eternal bills?

Every culture or civilization that has ever existed has some mention of a Higher Being in some form or another. Even today’s non-believing scientists and atheists use phrases like...
THE FIVE PILLARS

Shahadah: Our Fortress of Faith

by Mona Mallik

To this day, my mother and I often reflect how life would have turned out differently had I not met my husband of six years. Growing up the youngest of four daughters, whose lives and decisions were marked well before we were out of our diapers, life couldn’t be simpler. According to our timeline, we were to have graduated from high-school with distinctions, entered medical school and only medical school pursued a decent specialty, married to men of equal lineage and gotten on with our lives as respectable women. Fortunately or not, life has a habit of throwing a curve, and that’s when destinies are made or broken. At least, that’s what happened in my case. Even so: Allah creates what He wills: When He has decreed a plan, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is! (Al-Imran, 45-48)

My husband Farid and I met in our senior year at high school. Coming from different social and religious backgrounds (he was a Buddhist), neither of us really knew what to make of our friendship. That is, until we got older and wiser. Realizing that our feelings for each other were only growing stronger, I (as a Muslim) decided to take a definitive step. Knowing that Farid would have to accept voluntary conversion before we could exchange vows, I proceeded to introduce him to the wonderful world that is Islam. The possibility of his conversion being only for the purpose of marriage had long crossed my mind, and I had determined that this marriage would not be one of convenience... Farid and I went about learning and understanding a religion that suddenly answered all our questions.

See “Shahadah” on page 12

My Prayer

by Eman Younes

As I direct myself toward Mecca, I begin to prepare myself for an important meeting. As I stand between the hands of the Most Merciful, I begin to empty my mind of worldly matter and fill myself into a focused yet relaxed mood while raising my hands to my head and proclaiming “Allahus Akbar” (Allah is the Greatest). At that point, I feel complete submission to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds, and I begin to pray.

Salah, the Arabic word for prayer, comes from the word salah meaning connection. Also, the word Allah is God’s name in Arabic and is also used by people of other religions in the Arab nations. Prayer is a direct link between Allah and His worshipper. We do not believe that there must be a middle man between Allah and His creation. If I sin, I ask Allah directly to forgive me. If I do a good deed, I ask Allah directly to be pleased with me and accept my good deed, and so on.

Praying, the second pillar of Islam which is performed five times a day, is such a beautiful act of obedience which involves making wudu’, or cleansing certain body parts (such as the hands, face, and feet) with pure water. Wudu’ not only cleanses you physically, but as you wash away impurities from your body, you are also washing away the minor sins you committed. Praying in itself purifies you from the minor sins you commit between prayers. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) compares praying to bathing: if one bathes five times a day, no filth will remain on him. Just like if one prays five times a day, Allah will obliterate all his minor sins and none will remain on him (Muslim). What a blessing.

During the actual prayer, we recite verses from the Qur’an. In short, we first praise Allah and ask him to guide us. Then throughout the prayer we bow down and prostrate to our Creator in humbleness and gratitude for all He has given us and for the Mercy He has shown us. As we stand there speaking with Allah, He is there listening to us, and if we are sincere and humble with our supplications, He will grant us what we ask. Allah says in the Qur’an (2:277), “Those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayers and regular charity, will have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” Praying is so simple, yet its blessings and rewards are beyond this world.

See “Salah” on page 12
Ramadan

Allah. No one will be able to see whether you are really fasting or not, in comparison to praying or giving charity where someone might be able to see you. Fasting is really one pillar that is purely covert, only between the Creator and the creation (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 3, Hadith 128).

Ramadan is also a time for us to tune our character and morale. Refraining from cursing, backbiting, and such, one is really reminded of the purpose of Ramadan. Upon the completion of one month of fasting, it becomes hard to badmouth that girl you “can’t stand” or mock a professor. After being “so good” for 30 days, you are just going to ruin it all, and blemish your soul and conscience with one silly, unnecessary word? It just doesn’t make any logical or moral sense, and this is the reason for the long lasting benefit of Ramadan.

As we increase our good deeds, kindness, and generosity to all mankind, our piety is augmented and intensified. As we fear Allah in the things we do or say, and know that we will be held accountable one day for everything and anything that comes out of us, we grow more aware of our actions and perform our acts of worship carefully and with sincerity.

Laylatul Qadr, the ultimate finale of Ramadan. This is the night in which the Qur’an was first revealed. Allah multiplies the rewards of good deeds and worship on this night especially. Allah says in the Qur’an that Laylatul Qadr is “Better than 1000 months.” (Qur’an 97:3). Therefore, a great deal of prayer, supplication, and recitation of Qur’an is done by Muslims worldwide and is greatly encouraged during Ramadan, especially on this special night. When you reach this part of Ramadan, you feel like that’s it, you either make it or break it. Do you really have the willpower to spend long nights in pure, concentrated and sincere devotion to your Lord, the Most High? This is when I really get a chance to prove myself and test my iman.

Economy of Balance

by Nadia Khan

One of the most important principles of Islam is that all the wealth belongs to Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala). One may appropriate it as much as one pleases as long it does not imply moral violations such as theft, cheating or coercion. However, just as the acquisition of wealth has to be governed by moral laws, its consumption or continued possession must also be supervised by Islamic laws.

Islam’s tenet is that wealth, once acquired, has to be shared with others especially with the less fortunate ones. Not only does Islam encourage the giving of “charity” as was encouraged by Prophet Jesus (Alayhi salam), but it also ensures that the moral ideal of charity does not remain unobserved. Therefore, Islam has made the charity obligatory in the form of “Zakat”. While the voluntary charity or “Sadaqah”, of which God and your conscience are the only judges is highly esteemed in Islam, one cannot escape the requirement of paying “two and a half” percent of one’s total wealth every year so that it is available for the “poor and the needy.”

The word “Zakat” literally means “purification” or “growth”. Zakat purifies one’s wealth by deducting two and a half percent from it to be distributed to the deserving. It purifies the heart of the wealthy from selfishness and greed. It also purifies the heart of the poor from envy and jealousy. While Zakat is a reminder to the rich that their less fortunate fellows have an equal right to life and sustenance, it also assures the needy that their fellows will not passively see them suffer misfortunes. “Zakat” also causes one’s wealth to “grow” because it involves the sincerity of those who give it and the prayers of those who receive it. Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) says in Qur’an: “But that which you lay out for Zakat, seeking the countenance of Allah, (will increase); it is that for which you will get a recompense multiplied.” (30,39)

Therefore Zakat not only purifies Islamic society from social evils but also ensures the multiplication of Allah’s blessings and wealth.

Zakat, along with other four pillars of Islam, helps sustain the building of Islam which stands firmly for equality of all human beings regardless of their race, color, creed or financial status.

Rejuvenating the Soul

by Sana Khan

Breath taking, mesmerizing, and eye catching are a few words that can be used to describe the scene of millions of Muslims from all over the world gathering together at one focal point: al-Kaba. Located in Makkah, one of the three holiest cities for Muslims, this black draped cube is surrounded by an elaborate and elegantly designed mosque which entices the human senses. It is a vision, whose enormous is appealing to the eye, possessing rhythmic prayer chants melodious to the ears, and a venerating coolness that appeases any remaining sensation. It is a place for which a wordy description does not do justice because in order to grasp the reality of this vital location, one must physically be there to absorb its essence.

Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of the religion of Islam. Those Muslims who possess both the financial and physical ability are obliged to perform this pilgrimage to the city of Makkah during the twelfth year of the Islamic calendar where they follow the steps of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), may God (Allah) be pleased with him. The required steps for the performance of Hajj stem from the struggles of Prophet Abraham and his wife Hagar, may God (Allah) be please with them both. It is a week long pilgrimage where Muslims from all over the world, of various ethnicities and speaking a spectrum of languages, gather together in order to praise God (Allah).

In bringing together the Muslims from all over the world, this pilgrimage symbolizes the essence of Islamic teaching: the unity of mankind under the belief that there is one God and that Muhammad (sallAllahu alayhi wa sallam) is the last and final messenger of God. It is a reminder to the followers of Islam that mankind is created equal; no race is superior to the other, that Islam is a religion of peace which promotes sincerity, tolerance and brotherhood. Muslims who perform Hajj experience a spiritual revival and strive to not only maintain but also further this spiritual boost when they return to their daily lives. The individual experiences relayed to friends and family encourage and incite a desire in the listeners to also perform the Hajj and it is encouraged to the reader to ask Muslims about this pilgrimage for it will prove to be story worth hearing.
Belief in fate
And that all worship is a cape
That covers what makes us truly alive
I arrived at that point where I could contrive a way out
So I grabbed some knives, killed the demon, and threatened Base Desire, telling him,
“I’m going to fast you to death”
He said, “Chill, brother, I got a few kids from my ex-wives,
I didn’t mean to make you take a nose dive into a house of lies,
Where everyone who resides there tries to make sure everyone else buys into their own demise.”
I replied, “I’ve been a great friend to you; you’ve been getting a free ride,
Because of you, I’ve eyed every girl I could find,
And dined on fine food while you whined that the waitress didn’t smile when you harassed her and asked her for sex
You’ve kept me from clarity, so I think I’ll just spend my money on charity
Between what you and Allah told me, I found great disparity.”
“My dear brother, will you listen to me or some guy that hovers over your head
Telling you that some Ay-rab named Muhammad (PBUH) is more important than your mother?”
I said, “Guidance is like water, in order to get maximum benefit and stay among Prosperity’s denizens
Those who seek self-betterment,
Good water comes from a vessel that is free of impurities and sediment,
Dasani’s a buck a bottle,
So how much is the guidance of our role model?
Whose motto was that God is one,
And though you don’t need isolation in a grotto to please Him,
He’s still your reason for not appeasing those who want you to commit treason by defying Him
You can’t lie to Him, and don’t try to deceive Him.
And why is it that we are the quickest to leave Him, but He was always there when we were grieving the loss of our friends
Or our Benz
Or all those times when we were looking for the meeting point of ends
He sends us on tranquility, and the ability to be among those
Who chose the Higher Path
Decided to pray and look away when the next girl passed
And they knew that the most flammable object is cash.”
He responded, “But last night you and that girl really bonded
She’s going to feel very despondent that tonight you will have rather gone into a mosque than her bar.”
I said, “My Lord will find me someone purer without all that STD drama and furor
He’s the Healer and the Curer of the virus that I contracted through my iris”
He was filled with fright, grabbed a knife and tried to stab me until he heard me recite the Qur’an, and he melted out of sight.

“Mother Nature” to describe Allah’s creation.
The fact of the matter is that everybody has a natural disposition in believing in Allah, consistent with the Islamic belief.
Just think about all the prophets from the Bible and the Torah who have preached to mankind to worship Allah.
From Abraham to Noah to Moses to Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them all), all have commanded us to love and obey Allah and his commands. Was it just a coincidence that all of these men who happened to claim prophethood at different points in history also happened to preach a similar message? I urge all of us to step back, slow down and start reflecting on the world around us. Sooner or later every one of us has to pass away. Do we want to risk eternal damnation for the temporary pleasures of this world? I suggest all of us to try to rebuild the relationship with Allah that we have lost. This will be the first step in working towards our salvation.

According to Islam, every human being is born pure and is put on the road to heaven. It is the way he or she is brought up that may make him become an unbeliever.”

Take the Challenge
Think you know all there is to know about the Islam? Well try your luck at taking the challenge below and find out how well you score. Do you break past the labels and stereotypes that surround this religion, or do you fall into them?

1. Muslims are violent, terrorists and/or extremists.
   Yes No

2. Islam oppresses women.
   Yes No

3. Muslims worship a different God.
   Yes No

4. Islam was spread by the sword and is intolerant of other faiths.
   Yes No

5. All Muslims are Arabs
   Yes No

6. The Nation of Islam is a Muslim group.
   Yes No

7. All Muslim men marry four wives.
   Yes No

8. Muslims are a barbaric, backward people.
   Yes No

9. Muhammad was the founder of Islam and Muslims worship him.
   Yes No

10. Muslims don’t believe in Jesus or any other prophets.
    Yes No

Figure out your percentage to see how well you did and read on if you want to learn more....

FOR ANSWERS GO TO PAGE 12
WOMAN continued from page 1

As a Muslim woman, I enjoy the same rights and privileges that are enjoyed by Muslim men. I do not even have to fight for equal rights because they have already been decided upon and granted to me by Allah. He says in the Quran: “And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women” [2:226]. I am entitled to receiving the best treatment as a mother, daughter, wife and sister. My responsibilities, on the other hand, are much less in comparison. In case I decide to work, I am not obliged to spend even a penny on my family except out of my own free will. In contrast, it is the duty of my husband to provide for my family and I. He is assigned the strenuous part of being “the maintainer”, while I am to be the “nurturer”. I do not have to face the harsh world if I do not want to and if I choose to, no one can stop me from doing so.

A devastating outcome of the widespread ignorance about Islam and Muslim women is the banning of hijab by President Jacques Chirac in France. The supporters of this action contend that hijab was banned in order to promote “integrity and tolerance”. But what if Chirac forces all French women to wear hijab? Wouldn’t he be still promoting “integrity and tolerance”?

Everyone among us would laugh at the absurdity of this idea, but do we also find ourselves crying out at the absurdity of Chirac’s actions?

The French government thinks that by donning my hijab, I am posing a threat to secularism. However, contrary to the popular belief, hijab is not meant to be a symbol that announces in public, “I am a Muslim woman”. Rather, it is a declaration to my own self that I submit completely to Allah. Hijab is my faith, my comfort, my security, my happiness and taking it away is stripping me of all of these rights that are essentially undeniable to my existence. Hijab is not the only element that defines my faith. In fact, each of my actions is carried out in the name of “Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful”. Would the next step, then, be to prevent me from carrying out all my actions and ultimately forcing me into banning God from my life altogether?

I am a Muslim woman who is widely misunderstood. Therefore, I feel the need to urge you that you learn to distinguish between a religion’s teachings and the dogmatic edicts imposed by those who use the mantle of religion for their own purposes. Before floating a religion, we must make sure that we do not end up flouting ourselves for our ignorance and bias. Cursing a religion’s teachings by judging the so-called followers is akin to cursing the Church by judging the actions of a pedophilic priest. Instead of accepting everything that seems to affirm our pre-existing stereotypes, we must sort out the incoming information actively before making it a part of our distorted realities and must emerge as informed Americans.

NOTE continued from page 2

of Islam are the basics but more importantly, they are the foundation of our deen, our religion of Islam, and they are important reminders of what it is a Muslim must accomplish in this world.

We set a section in this issue focusing on the five pillars with students presenting their knowledge and experiences of performing these fundamental five duties. I know you are thinking, “The pillars, we talk about them all the time. Are they really necessary to go over again?” Yes it is necessary. Is it not an Islamic teaching that once you hear and gain knowledge, you hear and read it again. Do not pass up an opportunity to remember and preserve the knowledge of Islam which will only benefit you the individual in the end. Reading about something is one thing, but really understanding and comprehending it is another.

The same goes for understanding creation and our existence in this world. We have three great articles on the purpose of life and how to connect with God and understand His purpose for existence. And remember that this is not just something to read about and know, but truly grasping and comprehending the concepts of creation to apply to everyday life is the key. And what better way to understand life than through using scientific facts and theories which we read about and hear all the time. Such a method clarifies for us that “Allah’s way is the Straight Path and He truly is All-Knowing of the heavens and earth.” These are common statements used throughout the Qur’an. Only by remembering these ideas and our purpose in this universe can we have a true appreciation for life and cautiously proceed every moment, abiding by the teachings of Islam. If there is no understanding, there can be no internalizing of Islam. And if there is no internalizing, there is no concern for the value of life. So it should be our goal to realize every morning when we wake up that this day may be my last so I should live it that way. But who usually has this on their minds first thing. We should, however, make this our goal. Understanding creation and having a true appreciation for life is the key to being a true Muslim.

We pray these articles remind everyone of who they are and of the rules and commands we cannot let go of as long as they bear witness to be servants of Allah. And for those coming new to learning about Islam, we pray you gain a better understanding of the Islamic message and use it to teach others the truth about Islam. We pray your misunderstandings are cleared and that you see the truth in this peaceful, spiritual religion of God, Isla/Allah (God-Willing).

We would like to thank everyone on behalf of the Nashah staff for their submissions and efforts. This issue could not have been possible without the help of our writers and editors. May Allah reward you all for your efforts. Thank you for bearing with my thoughts. If I have said anything wrong then I ask Allah for forgiveness and May we all be successful in striving in the way of Allah, achieve the proper guidance and knowledge to help ourselves and others, and receive God’s grace and blessings, Ameen.

Thank you for your time and may peace be unto you.

Jazak-Allah Khair Wa-Alaikum Assalaam,
Sabah Chaudhry (Editor-in-Chief)
year before we mutually agreed that he was ready to take the Shahadah. He did not know everything there was to know about Islam, but he was well versed with its fundamental beliefs and values. This was Farid’s personal decision, however, and I encouraged him to take as much time as he wanted. And soon enough, one day, it all happened. It was the third week of a warm July morning, 1996. We met at the doorstep of our Islamic Community Center, and as we made our way inside, I identified in him an individual sure of his intentions and secure in his newfound knowledge. The witnesses were collected together and Farid was then asked to recite the following, “Ash-hada anla illaha illa-lahu Wahdahu la sharika labu wa ash-hada anna Muham- madan abduhu wa rasu-luhu” (translation: I bear witness that no God or Deity has the right to be worshipped other than Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is his slave and messenger). We recall that day together as being particularly clear and beautiful, and as though a new journey were about to begin. As obvious as it was to read my future husband’s eyes, I realized at that time, the impossible responsibility I had undertaken to demonstrate myself as a primary example of a believing Muslim.

Prayer can be done alone or in congregation. The reward for praying is multiplied when praying together either at home or in a Mosque (Masjid, a place of prostration) because unity in Islam is very important. Showing care and concern for one another brings people closer together and decreases any tensions that may exist between one another. The unity is amazing: we all pray facing the same direction, for the same purpose, and at the same time. Christening your purpose on Earth, mid-day, late-afternoon, sunset and nightfall. There is so much corruption, so many desires, trials, and tribulations we may be faced with every single day. Personally, and many Muslims will agree, prayer gives me a break from this world, and it reminds me of my presence here on Earth, to worship and please Allah. In prayer, every muscle and bone of the body joins the soul and the mind in the worship and glory of Allah.

Prayer after feeling refreshed, revived, energized with faith and the things that were bothering me before, like a bad grade on an exam or a parking ticket, really don’t matter anymore or even seem significant. Praying even helps me keep track of time. Time can fly by and before you know it, the day is over and you haven’t accomplished all that you wanted. Praying throughout the day makes me well aware of the time, and makes me plan out my day better and therefore I become more productive. It also acts as a discipline, training me to be on time to anything I do. If I am going to pray five times a day at certain times, attending meetings or arriving to work on time becomes no sweat.

My friends and co-workers would always ask me “Isn’t it so annoying to have to drop what you are doing and go pray FIVE times a day?” Annoying? If anything, prayer, to me, is an honor! Allah, the Powerful, the Mighty, provides me with a time to meet and speak with Him directly, and He will listen to me and answer my prayers. Why miss out on that chance? Nothing in this world could be more important than that. Allah gains nothing from my prayers, but it is me who gains everything. I gain Allah’s pleasure, His Mercy and His rewards, blessings on Earth and heaven in the hereafter.

Shaykh Abdul-Rahim used to tell them, of the Satan and made Fahd een, of the real men who walked this Earth. It was in his father that he saw all those characteristics. Abu Wisam would always say that it was his son that changed him into the Man he was today, that it was in this precious gift from Allah that he found his way onto the Straight Path. It was Wisam that made him pay attention to the love he had for his wife, and it was Wisam that reconciled him with his own father. Qasim, the Mu’etthin, rose up and walked to the front of the Masjid to make the call. Umm Wisam sat in the dark of her room, awaiting the same call the men were eager to hear in the Masjid “ALLAHU AKBAR!” Qasim’s voice resonated from the Masjid, through the rubble, and into Umm Wisam’s heart. It was at that moment, as it was every morning for her, that a tear fell from her eye. “ALLAHU AKBAR”, and her heart trembled. “ALLAHU AKBAR! ALLAHU AKBAR!”. So the Call continued, and as it came to an end, Umm Wisam wiped the tears from her cheeks; tears spent thanking Allah for the child and husband He had given her. Thanking Allah for the warmth her heart felt when she turned to Him. Thanking Allah for the respite of this Deen amidst the chaos all around them. “SubhanAllah wahlamunAllah”. Qasim arose once more to make the Iqama. The Men stood up, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, foot-to-foot, brother-to-brother, keeping the Shaitaan away from infiltrating the ranks of the Believers. As the Men submitted to Allah, the Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters of the area were busy preparing the first meal of the day. Umm Wisam remembered her son used to watch his mother as she cooked, joking with her, and telling her not to worry since he was the Man of the house while Abu was gone. Mother and Son would always share a quick breakfast before the Men returned, and the busyness of the day began. That was before, though, and Umm Wisam smiled as she thought of her eleven-year-old Man praying in the Masjid.

Next door, Fatima bint Uthman prepared three water balloons in anticipation of Wisam’s return. It was time to get him back for his constant “I’m a Man, I’m a Man” talk. She was ready to show him the wrath of a Woman. Never will he call her “Batteekah!” again, she thought to herself, yet she couldn’t help but smile at the word when she thought of it. She peered out her door, and in the distance saw Men beginning to leave the Masjid. She grabbed two balloons in her hands, and stood with her back against the wall.

Wisam joined his father in greeting all the Men. Fajr reminded souls of their fitra, so all the faces were happy and full of cheer, with not a gruff or tired look in sight. Wisam bent down to clumsily tie his shoes, as his father said a few words to the Imam.

Umm Wisam picked up the dishes and placed them on her tray.

Fatima knew that it was a wait of a only a few moments more.

Wisam smiled at himself when he finally got the last tie in place. He did not see the Fire that claimed all in its path.

AP Newswire - It is reported that the Oppressors were forced to attack the Masjid of some town in that place where all are supposed to be evil. The Oppressive General said that it was suspected that there may, possibly, at one point or the other, in some way or the other, have been some kind of activity that could be deemed illegal going on in the Masjid. The rocket attack was a necessity due to the stealth and speed required in such a dangerous mission. When asked if he had any words for the bystanders killed, he said “I don’t think there’s a need to apologize. This is all for the good of people.” Report filed by One Who Has Forgotten the Use of His Profession.

Answers for Take the Challenge (from page 10)