MILESTONES FOR A SPIRITUAL JIHAD

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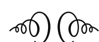
Toward an Islam of Grace



Asra Q. Nomani

Essays on Exploring a Global Dream

A SERIES SPONSORED BY THE FETZER INSTITUTE

Winter 2010, Essay Number 3

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In our attempt to welcome as many authentic voices to this conversation as possible, we remain committed to an ongoing dialogue of ideas. As this meaningful discussion unfolds, we responsibly note that the interpretations and conclusions contained in this publication represent the views of the author or authors and not necessarily those of the John E. Fetzer Institute, its trustees, or officers.

Printed in the United States of America
FIRST EDITION
PB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PREFACE

IN 1999, THE FETZER INSTITUTE began the Deepening the American Dream project as an attempt to sow the seeds of a national conversation about the inner life of democracy and the nature of our society as a community in relationship with the rest of the world. We set out to assemble a diverse group of leading thinkers and authors to explore, in conversation and in writing, the American Dream and the spiritual values on which it rests.

During the life of the project, Fetzer has extended this unfolding dialogue in the public domain, in partnership with Jossey-Bass, by publishing and circulating original essays as free pamphlets and by holding public forums. We have been concerned about such questions as "What constitutes the American Dream now?" "In what ways does the American Dream relate to the global dream?" "In what ways might each inform the other?" and "How might we imagine the essential qualities of the common man and woman—the global citizen—who seek to live with the authenticity and grace demanded by our times?"

To date, we have given away close to eighty thousand pamphlets to a wide range of leaders in various fields around the country, including members of Congress. In the fall of 2005, Jossey-Bass published the first anthology of these essays, *Deepening the American Dream: Reflections on the Inner Life and Spirit of Democracy.*

In an effort to surface the psychological and spiritual roots at the heart of the critical issues that face the world today, we are extending this inquiry by creating a parallel series focused on exploring a global dream. But what might a global dream look like, and where might we start? In his book *God Has a Dream,* Archbishop Desmond Tutu offers a beginning point as he echoes the words of Martin Luther King Jr.:

> God says to you, "I have a dream. Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a

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> dream . . . that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, My family."

In both series, we continue to invite leading thinkers from around the world to bring their gifts to bear on the world we live in, searching for the common resources that might, if held together, repair the isolations and separations that divide us today. We hope that these essays and the spirit on which they are founded will spark your own questions and conversations.

Robert F. Lehman
Chair of the Board
Fetzer Institute

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GRATITUDES

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, a band of hijackers sent jets careening into the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, changing the course of history. That day, I was "lunch lady" at North Elementary School in my hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia, volunteering in my niece's and nephew's school. Weeks later, I was on a jet plane to Pakistan with notebook in hand to try, as a journalist, to bridge the gap between my worlds of Islam and the West.

On January 23, 2002, my friend Daniel Pearl was kidnapped from the streets of Karachi after he'd left a house I was renting in the city. Some five weeks later, we learned he had been killed in the name of Islam. In the fall of 2002, I gave birth to a son as a single mother, a crime according to the strictest interpretations of law in my faith. In the early winter of 2003, I embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and later that year, I began a campaign of civil disobedience and writing activism, challenging sexism and dogmatism in my mosque in Morgantown.

In the winter of 2006, I accepted a generous invitation from the Fetzer Institute to include my voice in a selection of writings, *Exploring a Global Dream*, aimed at figuring out how we as individuals, communities, and nations can manifest grace and authenticity in the world. I want to thank my mentor, Ed Jacobs, for introducing me to the good work of the Fetzer Institute and for knowing intuitively that it would be a nurturing place for me.

That winter, I made a pilgrimage from my childhood home in Morgantown to the Institute's headquarters in Kalamazoo, Michigan, to understand this larger vision to which I would be contributing. There, from the sweep of the wind in the trees to the intentions expressed by the staff, I heard a desire to help others live authentic lives, to overcome the fears of our day to be good global citizens. The Institute has among its missions a campaign that calls on all of us to "Change Everything. Love and Forgive."

I knew what it was that I wanted to write: a call for a new reality in our Muslim world in which an Islam of peace, tolerance, and grace would

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express itself. In my mind, I pondered the notion of an Islamic dream that was not one of conquest and empire building but one of building communities of compassion and living in harmony with others. I created a Web site: theislamicdream.com.

I knew what I wanted to say. I knew what I wished we could realize: a kinder, gentler expression of Islam in the world. But for three years, I had a very hard time finding the voice with which to say it. I wrote a draft calling for a dramatic overhaul of Islamic law. I wrote another draft explaining why we needed reform. I wrote yet another draft chronicling the brave reformers in our Muslim communities. They made sense. They were fine. But they were missing the very thing I was seeking from my faith community: heart and soul.

As I try to explain this process to you, I rest my face in my hands. It has been an excruciatingly painful process. Night after night, run after run, e-mail after e-mail, I have pondered this dream that has evaded us, a dream of an Islam that is nurturing and kind, enfolding people in a spiritual embrace. It has been difficult to write as deeply as I wish to do because I am writing of things that mean a great deal to me, but from a heart that is broken. I am writing to you about the faith into which I was born. I am writing to you about the faith that is the religion of my ancestors. I am writing to you about the hopes and dreams of my faithful younger self dashed as I have seen the face of bigotry, sexism, intolerance, and sheer unkindness expressed in the name of my faith tradition. It has truly broken my heart to see the inhumanity of people's behavior toward one another in the name of my religion.

I know that others need to reform the way they relate to Muslims, but to me, the critical examination must begin within our own community. Back in 2002, when I walked up to the front of my hometown mosque, I went not as a writer or a journalist but as a single mother seeking to find a spiritual community in my faith religion. When the president of the mosque board yelled at me to take a back door reserved for women, I trembled out of sadness. When I sat for prayer in the main hall of the mosque, instead of the isolated balcony to which women were relegated, I was prepared to have a civilized conversation, and I was stunned when all I received were commands, edicts, and orders. When I chose to be honest about the fact that I had conceived my child as a single woman, I knew that some eyebrows might be raised, but I was deeply saddened by the hostility and the name calling. I am not naive by nature. I just believe in the capacity of human beings to live with honesty and grace.

To persevere, I had to separate myself from the disappointment. I had to sublimate the pain of our family being ostracized, intellectually understanding that verbal intimidation and physical and emotional abuse are the typical responses to anyone who challenges power and control. I had to garner the strength to write, to speak, and to act. I couldn't stay in the place of pain and sadness.

I am so grateful to my mother, Sajida Nomani, for always standing beside me steely-eyed, a model of grace and dignity. I am buoyed by the humanity with which my father, Zafar Nomani, expresses his understanding of faith, giving me something to try to dream about realizing universally. I thank my brother, Mustafa Nomani, for sharing with me his clarity. I wish to thank my niece, Safiyyah Nomani, and my nephew, Samir Nomani, because they are emblematic of a younger generation that is wise, compassionate, and open-hearted and give me hope for the future. And I am so grateful to my son, Shibli Nomani, because he gave me life. And to my Beloved, thank you, for allowing me to know love inside a union filled with joy, kindness, growth, healing, and the pursuit of knowledge. For so long, I have been seeking divine love. I now know it.

It has always been the well-being of our community and its citizens that drives me to seek transformation of our community. What has spoken to me always is the voice of my younger self, left without a place in the community because she didn't subscribe to the rigidity expected of her, and the young women and men, boys and girls, and older women and men who feel so alone in our communities. There are a great many friends within our community and outside who also believe in restoring the soul of Islam. Alas, we have become a community that has lost touch with its spirituality—its soul, its *ruh*.

To write, I have had to return to some very painful places so that I could try to communicate to you the urgent spiritual imperative that I believe we have for transforming the way Islam expresses itself in our world today. *Jihad* means "struggle." We must struggle to transform our communities spiritually. We must engage in a spiritual jihad, I believe, if we want to change the course of history.

What I humbly hope to do, drawing on the concept of Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones,* a book that became a treatise for dogmatism in the name of Islam, is set forth milestones for a spiritual jihad that can realize an Islam of grace in the world today.

I thank my friends Barbara Feinman Todd, Pam Norick, and Vasia Deliyianni for listening to the conversations I had with myself and

interjecting new and even better thoughts. I thank Mark Nepo and Megan Scribner for gently allowing me to listen to my own heartbeat and write to you from the heart about how it is that I wish we, as Muslims, would lift ourselves out of dogmatism to do something very simple: be kind to one another and the rest of the world—to tread on this earth with grace. This is our universal imperative.

MILESTONES FOR A SPIRITUAL JIHAD

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MILESTONES FOR A SPIRITUAL JIHAD

TOWARD AN ISLAM OF GRACE

Asra Q. Nomani

I am going to quench the fires of hell
and burn heaven,
so that both these barriers to understanding
shall vanish from the eyes of pilgrims,
so that they may seek Truth without hope or fear.

—Rabia al-Adawiiya, eighth- and ninth-century Muslim saint

IN MY HOME OUTSIDE WASHINGTON, D.C., in the early summer of 2009, I awoke with the dawn as President Obama took to the stage halfway across the world in Cairo, Egypt, to speak to the Muslim world. The years since September 11, 2001, had been filled with pain, grief, and deep sadness in relations between the West and the Muslim world, two communities in which I navigated. I wished for a new reality.

I knew there was one place where I needed to be as I heard Obama's words: next to my six-year-old son, Shibli. To me, he is the future.

Cardinals and blue jays dived through the trees outside as I slipped through the quiet of the morn to settle in beside Shibli, slumbering peacefully before his bus driver, Miss Christie, took him to kindergarten on Bus No. 1. On his nightstand sat relics of our life in the West: a Shining

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Stars blue dragon and a Batman figurine. Not far away, the Qur'an sat on our family bookshelf and a prayer rug was folded neatly in a drawer.

I am an American Muslim.

I was born in Mumbai, India, in 1965, arriving in America at the age of four and growing up in Morgantown, West Virginia, as a "Mountaineer." Through the decades, I have lived with the growing rigidity in the Muslim world. In the 1970s, following an oil boom that filled Saudi Arabia's national treasury with petrodollars and increased its national standing, I experienced the importation of the Saudis' puritanical interpretations of Islam. Far away in our West Virginia Muslim community, there was a corresponding tightening of practices. As a girl, I found the ideology alienating, and in the midst of a childhood filled with prayer and devotion to the rituals of religion, I felt a crisis of faith. In the 1980s, I witnessed a struggle for ideological footholds by Sunni and Shia orthodoxies following the Iranian revolution of 1979. In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, I saw first hand the reach of the militant ideology of al-Qaeda.

I am also a mother.

My son was born on October 16, 2002, an early member of the post-9/11 generation. When I was in the delivery room, doctors told me that my son's heart rate was falling precariously low. I started saying "*Allah hu*" with every breath, inhaling the power of the Divine and exhaling it out into the universe.

It is for the future of our children that I firmly believe we have to change the course of relations between the Muslim world and the West. So many people seem to feel that it is impossible to have an Islam of grace in today's world. I have known that feeling.

I am also a journalist.

On January 23, 2002, I confronted the darkness that has been expressed in the name of Islam. Daniel Pearl, my pal from our years together at the *Wall Street Journal,* was kidnapped off the streets of Karachi, Pakistan; was held in captivity for about a week; and was then brutally slaughtered in the name of my faith. When the FBI and Pakistani investigators came to my house in Karachi to tell Danny's wife, Mariane, that they had received a video documenting Danny's murder, Mariane ran into the bedroom she had shared with Danny, slammed the door shut, and sent shock waves of blood-curdling screams into the night air. Outside the door, I sat on the stairs, collapsing my head into the open palms of my hands, speaking to myself the Muslim prayer for protection that my mother had taught me in my earliest days.

In these two moments of peril, I tried to invoke a higher spirit for all of the reasons that religion was created: to usher forward calm and solace.

Over the next years, as I tried to make peace with my faith, I realized that our Muslim world is in a spiritual crisis. Since September 11, 2001, we have been challenged as a community. For some of us, that has meant promoting an Islam that is tolerant and good. For others, it has meant clinging even more tightly to tradition and ideology so that our identity cannot be shaken. The net effect has been devastating. We are failing our youth. We are failing the world. And we are failing our faith.

With my son asleep beside me, I listened to Obama call on Muslims to seek reconciliation, truth-telling, and peace in a "new beginning." For so long, the rhetoric had been one of demonization and fear. It was a good thing for the world to come to a place of deeper understanding of Islam. I could feel a collective sigh of relief among Muslims from India to Indonesia.

I heard clearly the call by Obama for Muslims to achieve "moral authority" through peaceful means and good action, not violence. And in that moment, I had hope for something. In that space, it seemed that Muslims could step away from the walls where too often they had felt thrust. Perhaps now, as Muslims, we could assume responsibility to change the way Islam is expressed in the world.

In this call, I could hear echoed the challenge put to Muslims by the Prophet Muhammad in his last sermon on Mount Arafat: "You are all equal. Nobody has superiority over the other except by piety and good action. Remember, one day you will appear before Allah and answer for your deeds. So beware, do not astray from the path of righteousness after I am gone."

I believe we have strayed far from the "path of righteousness." In 1964, the year before my birth, an Egyptian writer named Sayyid Qutb expressed his concerns for the world in a book called *Milestones*. In his first words, he wrote of his fears:

> Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice, not because of the danger of complete annihilation which is hanging over its head—this being just a symptom and not the real disease—but because humanity is devoid of those vital values which are necessary not only for its healthy development but also for its real progress.

He saw the same crisis I feel today for our Muslim world.

> It is necessary to revive that Muslim community which is buried under the debris of the man-made traditions of several generations,

> and which is crushed under the weight of those false laws and customs which are not even remotely related to the Islamic teachings, and which, in spite of all this, calls itself the "world of Islam."[1]

But Qutb saw a different path to resolving this crisis. For him, Islam was "the only system" that offered the world a remedy. He became the godfather of an ideology that has seeped into the twenty-first century, asserting rigidity, dogmatism, and ultimately violence as the ways to express Islam in the world.

This tension between our need for a renaissance and a solution based on rigidity has caused our communities to become places where unconditional love, compassion, and grace are too often missing. Too often we have allowed closed-minded ideologies to take root in our communities. From my hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia, to villages in Pakistan, we circle the wagons and hide our secrets, for fear we will tarnish the image of Islam.

The Muslim world is in a crisis of global proportions. Honor killings, terrorism, embassy burnings, and suicide bombings are just some of the warning signs that tell us we need a new approach to the way Islam is expressed in the twenty-first century. The Muslim world desperately needs reform if it is to be part of a global dream for a better world, but alas, we are stuck in theological quicksand. Tamim Ansary, the Afghan American author of *Destiny Interrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes,* writes that in recent years, "the community has stopped expanding, had grown confused, had found itself permeated by a disruptive crosscurrent, a competing historical direction."[2] It is time that we pull ourselves out of this quagmire and redefine the way Islam is expressed in the world. We must struggle to imbue the spiritual health of our Muslim communities with the simple principles that we have too often forgotten: living with vision, living with truth, living with authenticity, living with kindness, and living with grace.

It is time, I believe, for us to take back the meaning of *jihad*. Certain scholars of a radical interpretation of Islam pitch *jihad* as a "holy war"; indeed, in the West, *jihad* is commonly understood as "a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty." But in Arabic, *jihad* simply means "struggle." Our struggle is between caving in to an exclusive expression of Islam or charting an inclusive expression of the faith. We have to decide whether we are going to be a closed society or an open society. History has chronicled that closed systems usually come to violent ends. The healthier approach for individuals and societies is to open their systems so that they can expand, progress, and grow. The choice for us is simple, I think: evolve.

Believing

Every day, as a girl growing up in a college town in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, I would do the ablution for my Muslim prayer, washing myself in a symbolic act of purification.

I would drape a cotton scarf snugly over my hair and unfurl a soft velvet prayer rug, pointing eastward toward Mecca, the birthplace of Islam. I stepped on the rug and raised my hands to my ear, proclaiming my intention for prayer. I moved gently through my prostrations, my hands first clasped over my heart, then over my knees, and then on my prayer rug, my forehead touching its softness. At the end of my last prostration, I drew my hands before me, burying my face in my palms, and gently whispered one prayer: "Please, God, give me peace of mind." And for my mother, father, and brother, I would seek the same thing: peace of mind, or in Urdu, my native language, *sukhoon.*

As clear as it was to my young mind, I still believe that religion has an important mission to those who turn to it for salvation: to bring us peace of mind. But to me, a very sad thing has happened in the Muslim world of the twenty-first century. The peace of mind and spiritual health of our Muslim community has been lost in literalism.

As a young girl, I experienced this with the edicts I would hear from elders who demanded that women and men be strictly segregated at potluck dinner parties and that girls like me couldn't wear sleeveless shirts when we ran track. As a young teen, when I went to the mosque, I was shepherded into a small room with the other women and girls because my local Muslim community was practicing an interpretation of Islam that believed in a strict segregation of women and men.

For too long, I have observed that we have abandoned spiritual enlightenment for ritual prayer and dogma. This is a struggle that has challenged all faiths. And just as other religions have gone through transformations, I believe a new approach to Islam can become normative, reshaping Muslim communities and public policy and allowing us to realize a global dream in which all religious communities can be models for tolerance, pluralism, and social justice. It is time that we rise to a higher expression of Islam, create a new reality, and reclaim the principles of social justice, women's rights, pluralism, and tolerance with which Islam was born.

This was the dream with which the Prophet Muhammad brought Islam to the world in the seventh century. He banned the killing of girls, the abuse of women, and the wonton lust, greed, and corruption of the time. The period before the Prophet's message of social reform was called *jahiliyya,* the period of ignorance. I believe that the Muslim world of the

twenty-first century is drowning in a new age of *jahiliyya.* We can blame colonialism, foreign policy, military aggression, and Islamophobia for the woes of Muslims today and feel powerless to make any changes. Or we can accept responsibility for lifting ourselves out of the morass in which the Muslim community finds itself worldwide. We need to stand up for an expansive, inclusive expression of Islam in the world, one that allows Muslims to live with an authenticity in which our words and actions are in sync with our values. To me, realizing the Islamic dream means creating progressive, inclusive, compassionate, and peaceful communities.

In this movement, we can't wait for permission from the clerics to transform our Muslim community. We desperately need to allow ourselves to think—and live—outside the boxes of the schools of law in which we are supposed to confine ourselves. Granted, this is no easy task. Since the beginning of time, people in power have used techniques of intimidation, abuse, and even violence to marginalize new thinkers. In the Muslim world of the twenty-first century, a powerful network delivers the conservative and narrow interpretations of Islamic law to most of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims through its mosques, Islamic centers, and educational institutions with books, periodicals, pamphlets, Web sites, cassette tapes, and videotapes. It's typically led by men with titles such as *sheikh, mufti, imam,* and *mowlana.*

As I've moved through the trenches of reform in our Muslim world, from my hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia, to Barcelona, Spain, and to a village in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, India, it has become clear to me that we are in the midst of a dramatic social and intellectual movement that is sowing the seeds for a new approach to Islam based on the principle of oneness, *tawheed.* This social movement has emerged to reclaim the inclusive principles from the birth of Islam, the rightful role of women as first-class citizens, and the notion of peace. The stakes are high: the success of this movement will change the course of history.

But in seeking to transform our Muslim community, we are simply following the historical narrative of the Jewish and Christian faiths, which have survived challenges to conventional theological doctrine and allowed, though admittedly with some reluctance, for reform. Adherents in all of the faiths have stepped forward to tap the universal spiritual root that binds all of us together, inspiring us to a more humane life on earth. There is an interfaith common ground on which all of us walk, and we can be inspired by spiritual pioneers from all the faiths: Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides, Christian mystics such as Saint John

of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila, and Muslim saints such as Rabia al-Adawiiya and Rumi.

Like them, we can rise to a higher calling.

Overcoming Fear

On January 23, 2002, my friend Danny Pearl left for an interview he thought he was going to have with a spiritual leader named Sheikh Gilani. He was investigating reports that Sheikh Gilani had ties to Richard Reid, "the shoe bomber," who had tried to blow up a transatlantic flight from Paris to Miami by lighting a fuse connected to explosives hidden in his sneakers. Unbeknown to Danny, a young British Pakistani man by the name of Omar Sheikh had hatched a plot to kidnap him. In the early evening, Danny stopped answering his cell phone. Worried, Mariane, his wife, and I began searching for Danny. The next morning, after we alerted the *Wall Street Journal,* the U.S. government, and the Pakistani police, my house became a command center for the investigation.

My boyfriend had been with us the first night, but when he came over the second night, he told me that Pakistani intelligence officials had visited him to find out what he knew about Danny and me. The visit frightened him as well as his parents and friends. He said he wouldn't come around anymore. I wept that night, privately, in a walk-in closet where I knew nobody would find me. And then I wiped away my tears and focused on only one goal: finding my friend. With Mariane, I crossed boundaries rarely breached in that culture. We lived alone in that space that Muslim women rarely claim without a chaperone—their homes—and we worked alongside FBI agents and Pakistani antiterrorism specialists trying to piece together the clues left by Danny's kidnappers.

As Mariane and I entered the fifth week of our desperate search for Danny, I realized something shocking: I might be pregnant. A pregnancy test confirmed my suspicion. I was beside myself; I didn't know what to do. I called my boyfriend and asked him to visit me. He arrived that night, and I took him to my bedroom. "I am carrying your baby," I told him, sitting on the edge of my bed. He looked at me stunned. In a pause that I filled with so many dreams, he sucked his breath in hard and said, "I have to go."

The truth revealed itself. He didn't want me to keep the baby, and all of his fanciful talk about marrying me disappeared. I didn't wear a wedding ring, but I didn't feel as if I had done something wrong. I loved my boyfriend deeply and had surrendered myself to him. Even if my assumptions had been wrong, I loved him when I made this baby.

He abandoned me, but that was not because of my failure. It was because of his fears.

Despite my intellectual confidence in myself, I felt completely illegitimate. I was an American woman who believed in free will and knew that I had the right to keep my baby and raise him with my head held high. But the voices of my religion's traditions also spoke strongly inside of me. I was consumed by the shame of ignoring the rulings of *sharia,* the "divine Islamic law." In addition, during the reporting I had done on the subculture of sex, drugs, and nightclubs in Pakistan, I learned from a leader of Jamaat-i-Islami, one of Pakistan's religious parties, that laws there governed even sexual intimacy between consenting adults. In 1979, he told me, Pakistan passed laws based on *hudud,* or "boundaries" for moral conduct. Women in Islam are very much defined by *hudud,* which is used to control everything about our lives, from our sexuality to where we can pray in our places of worship. Violating *hudud* could have serious consequences; indeed, my situation could land me in prison. To me, these laws emblemize a crisis of self-determination for women in Islam.

By other names, these types of boundaries have also defined women throughout time in other cultures and religions, including Judaism and Christianity. Religion is often used to impose boundaries that deny women their rights and affect their economic life, identity, sexuality, and political power. But when I discovered I was pregnant, I realized that the deepest boundaries we have are within ourselves. We are often most constrained by the fears that keep us from crossing the boundaries.

Tragically, in the fifth week of our search, we found out that Danny's captors had slaughtered him. They had turned on a camera and taken a knife to his throat and decapitated him. They titled the videotape of his murder *The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl.* It lasted three minutes and thirty-six seconds. I was disgusted beyond belief.

The next day, my phone rang. It was Mohammedmian Soomro, the governor of Sindh, the province in which Karachi is located, and his wife, Khadijah Soomro, expressing condolences. They were on hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca, celebrating a holiday called Eid-ul-Adha, which marks a pivotal moment in the life of Abraham. Like Jewish and Christian children, I was taught that God told Abraham to slaughter his son as a sign of his devotion to God. Modern-day Muslims slaughter goats, sheep, and even camels as a symbolic gesture of their willingness to sacrifice in devotion to God. Outside my house in Karachi, goats had been bleating for days, tied up for the sacrifice. In the hours since we received the news of Danny's murder, their cries had dimmed.

I wondered about Islam in the world. In the name of religion, men punished—even killed—women like me who were unmarried and pregnant. In the name of my religion, men hijacked planes and flew them into buildings, murdering thousands of innocents and changing the course of history, both personal and global. In the name of my religion, men had slaughtered Danny, a young man with dreams no more complicated than to buy a double bass for his fortieth birthday, to love his wife, parents and sisters, and to nurture his son.

Instead of Danny's dreams being realized, the police were interrogating four young men who were charged with plotting Danny's kidnapping. They considered themselves devout Muslims. While planning Danny's kidnapping, they had interrupted their strategy sessions to bow their heads toward Mecca for the obligatory five-times-a-day prayers. His murderers videotaped Danny talking about his Jewish heritage, which, in their puritanical hatred of Jews, was an automatic sentence of death. Danny crossed the boundaries of his identity to cover the Muslim world but ultimately lost his life in part merely because of who he was. Some of his last words were, "I am a Jew." I believe he was giving voice to his personal identity before his murderers literally slit his throat.

At dawn after the news of Danny's murder, I felt I was standing in an abyss created by man's distortion of religion. I was engulfed in a pain that made me hear the angels crying when it rained that morning. I was angry. I was afraid. I was sick to my stomach. Yet in that sacred space of my womb, life had been created. In my heart, I felt fear and loathing for my religion. Could I remain in a religion from which so many people sprang spewing hate? Could I find space in my religion for my kind of woman? Could I remain a Muslim? I didn't know the answers, but I wanted to overcome my fears to venture into the heart of Islam.

I returned to Morgantown, exhausted with my life and with my self-identity in shambles. I didn't even have a bed to call my own. I lived off my parents' credit card. I had just about nothing but myself and the great divine gift of creation growing within me.

So often in life, we confront dualities, and they confront us: true spirituality versus false opportunism, true love versus lust, East versus West, male energy versus female, traditionalism versus modernity, authenticity versus hypocrisy, ego versus heart, fearlessness versus fear, reality versus illusion.

The darkness of Danny's murder made me confront the limitations of life on this earth. I had seen the worst of humanity expressed through betrayal, dishonesty, and murder. I had returned from the precipice of darkness, the deconstruction of my personal self freeing me to begin anew.

We can all choose a path in which we reject labels and arbitrary boundaries. It is a deep responsibility we carry when we work to free ourselves from convention. To do so means staring even into the abyss of darkness and choosing lives outside those preassembled for us. Doing so means overcoming our fears.

Living with Authenticity

It could be said I was an imperfect mother from the moment I conceived. I wasn't wearing a wedding ring. I was a criminal in the eyes of the strictest interpreters of Islamic law. Mothers and their children are disproportionately punished under Islamic sex laws; men very often deny their involvement and walk away scot-free. In Morocco, for instance, babies born to unwed mothers are barred from receiving identity cards, essentially denying them entrance into public education and a healthy life. Thus while my baby's father walked away from me and my swelling belly, I battled the shame of my "imperfection."

In *Milestones*, written while he was in jail, Sayyid Qutb rails against what he perceives to be the sexual immoralities of the West. In response, he argues for a strict interpretation of Islamic law that segregates the sexes and codifies strict punishments for infractions of sexual mores. What I have noticed is that the conflict and dissonance inside the Muslim community expresses itself most intimately on the personal level and very often on issues of deep importance from sexuality to domestic violence and family relations. Repression sends real societal issues into the closet, making them even more difficult for individuals and families to resolve in a healthy way. Like other women racked with guilt, I had to grapple with the question of whether my sexuality had led me astray. My religion strictly attaches sex to marriage, and since I was unmarried when I conceived, I had to wrestle with the issues of religion, sex, and sin. What I believe is that we should not encourage one value system over another—for example, promiscuity over Puritanism—but rather be compassionate realists about the societal challenges our world's citizens face. To me, it is the place of religion to help us when we most feel abandoned—not to abandon us further in a torturous psychological game of shame, blame, and illegitimacy. The doctrines of religion should not set brutal parameters for our bodies and our hearts. All of us adults, both men and women, should be able to make these intimate decisions for ourselves. That way, we can be free of all the guilt and shame that too often mark the lives of people of all religions but do nothing to promote healthy societies.

When my son was born, wide-eyed and perfect, I was reborn. I gazed at the beautiful face of my son, whom I named Shibli, meaning "my lion cub," and asked myself, could I live with honesty about my son's conception?

Others in my Muslim community have tried to answer that question for me over the almost seven years that my son has been on this earth, projecting prejudices and judgments on both my son and me. One man wrote on a progressive Muslim Web site, "I believe the responsible thing to do would have been to give her child up for adoption so he could benefit from a two-parent home. Having children out of wedlock for whatever reason hurts the children and ultimately degrades the moral fabric of society." Another reader on a spirituality and religion Web site, Beliefnet.com, raised the prospect of an evaluation report on me as a mother: "I am looking forward to another interview with this Muslim journalist five years from now. How is she raising her kid? What values is she instilling in him?" These challenges raised questions in my own mind about myself as a mother.

At one point, I received an e-mail from an elderly Muslim man in San Diego: "An Open Letter to Asra Nomani." He had read my writing. He knew my story. He told me he and his wife were praying that I get married soon to "a nice Muslim man who adopts Shibli as his son." OK, I thought. That's nice enough. I had myself posted a message on Beliefnet's matchmaking site that I could use a little prayer. But the man's logic stunned me. He said I had to get married—"otherwise when Shibli grows old and cannot tell . . . his friends and schoolmates or put [his] father's name [on] . . . forms, he will be miserable and most likely condemn his mother."

"Miserable"? I did a Google search. Sri Lankan victims of the tsunami were miserable after the tidal waves hit Asia. Was my son going to be miserable because he didn't have a father in his life? "Condemn"? Some families of U.S. soldiers condemned President Bush's war on Iraq. Irish newspapers condemned the murder of a journalist in Northern Ireland. A Florida man was condemned for the rape and strangulation of a widow. Was my son going to condemn me if I didn't get married? Was my son going to condemn me because he stayed with his grandparents instead of a father when I was on the road?

Daring to Hope

I got my answer on a wide and desolate plain called Arafat, twelve miles east of Mecca, during the holy pilgrimage of hajj.

The Day of Arafat symbolizes the day when we go before God to be judged for the acts of our life. There are no secrets from God. "The hearing, the sight, the heart—all of these shall be questioned," says the Qur'an (17:36). Since I was a child, I had heard what many Muslim children are told: on our judgment day, we will walk a tightrope the width of a strand of hair. We will be able to find our balance if our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds. "Stay on the straight path," my mother warned my brother and me. If we didn't, a tragedy awaited us: hellfires.

From that moment forward, I despised the fear that religion puts in our hearts. I always had trouble accepting the concept of sin. As in so many religions, it is used in Islam to instill a spirit of fear and punishment that I intuitively rejected. I wanted to be motivated by love of Allah, not fear.

Now as an adult, I pondered forgiveness, and I thought of Eve. The Qur'an, like the Jewish and Christian histories, says that God made Adam and Eve as the first man and woman. The angels protested God's plan: "Will you create beings there who will cause trouble and shed blood, while we praise Your Holy Name?" Indeed, God made Adam and Eve with soul, free will, intelligence, reason, and *fitrat*—an inner nature that seeks God and is disposed toward virtue. After being exiled from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were first separated, but God answered Adam's prayers and reunited him with Eve on the top of a hill called Jabal-ur-Rahma, or the Mount of Mercy, in the valley of Arafat outside Mecca. It's said that Eve spent the whole day with Adam, the two of them standing modestly, thankful and awed in worship of God. For that reason, the hill is called Arafat, meaning "recognition" or "knowledge" in Arabic.

Unlike Genesis, the Qur'an doesn't single out Eve for blame in tempting Adam toward sin. "They both sinned," the Qur'an says. Yet interpretations of Islam portray women as temptresses who can doom a man with just a glance or a strand of hair askew; hence all the prescriptions to protect women's (and thus man's) honor. The story of Eve underscores the issues of sin and redemption that Muslim women face in a religion that defines every aspect of their lives.

On the ground in Arafat, the Prophet Muhammad followed the path of Eve, riding a she-camel in the afternoon of his hajj as far as the middle part of the Arafat Valley on the Mount of Mercy. This is the main hajj rite, the day known as Yawm al-Wuquf, the Day of Standing. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Hajj is Arafat." The Qur'an (42:11) says,

"The Beneficent [rose over] the [Mighty] Throne, over the seventh heaven [to us], and he only comes down over the first heaven on the Day of Judgment." We are supposed to stand until sunset in the same valley where the Prophet stood, speak to God, and ask for mercy for past sins, as if our judgment day were at hand.

In the Uranah Valley of Mount Arafat on the ninth day of the month of Hijjah in the year 632, the Prophet seemed to know he was going to die. There, in his farewell sermon, known as the Sermon of the Farewell Hajj, he said, "O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I don't know whether, after this year, I shall ever be among you again. Therefore, listen to what I am saying to you carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today."

The essential message was one of equality in duties, rights, and obligations. "O People, listen to me in earnest. Worship Allah, say your five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in *zakat* [charity]. Perform hajj if you can afford to. You know that every Muslim is the brother of every other Muslim. You are all equal. Nobody has superiority over another except by piety and good action." And he spoke of the golden rule: "Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you."

It's said that the Prophet proclaimed, "There is no day on which Allah frees more of His slaves from fire than the Day of Arafat, and He verily draws near, then boasts of them before the angels, saying, 'What do they seek?'"

During the hajj of 2002, Saudi Arabia's leading cleric took the moment of the great sermon on Arafat to criticize the "pillaging Jews" in Israel. But I could not hear the sermon because the loudspeakers were crackling. We prayed, as the Prophet did, with *wuquf*, devotion. People around us were also praying, begging for forgiveness of sins, weeping, in the spirit of Eve and Adam. Nearby, my father was crying in prayer. The Prophet said that the prayer of this day was the best of all.

I raised my hands to the heavens, my son atop me, and I sought forgiveness first from myself for making ill-fated decisions—and then from the divine powers of this earth that I could move forward in life without judging myself. I knew that I couldn't live with lies, deceit, and hypocrisy. I didn't believe we are meant to suffer so deeply just to deny our true selves and realize societal, parental, and external expectations. I decided then that I wasn't going to live with contradictions in my own life. I looked at my son and knew that we were better global citizens if we lived with authenticity. We suffer only when we live with deceit.

Standing Up for Social Justice

O ye who believe!
Stand out firmly
For justice, as witnesses
To God, even if it may be against
Yourselves, or your parents
Or your kin.

—"Al-Nisa" (The Women), Qur'an 4:135

For most of my life, I quietly bypassed traditions instead of directly challenging rules that did not make sense to me. As a coping mechanism, I distanced my life from the Muslim community when I entered adulthood. That changed in the fall of 2003 when I discovered that I lived with deep pain over the way Islam was expressed in the world. After 9/11 and Danny's murder, I realized that I was abdicating my duty as a spiritual citizen of the world if I did not promote an interpretation of Islam that carries with it grace, compassion, and love.

Too often, Muslims like me had sat silently while ideologues wrenched our religion from us and proclaimed themselves the protectors of the faith. My immersion into darkness and my experience in the light of the hajj transformed me. It made me recognize that we all have a role in standing up for the best of religion, rather than being intimidated to follow leaders with corrosive ideas.

Having had Shibli, I wanted to find kinship in my local Muslim community. The opportunity came two weeks after Shibli's first birthday. The board of trustees at the Islamic Center of Morgantown was opening a new mosque that had cost approximately $500,000 to build. It was a three-story brick building on a street off the campus of West Virginia University, not far from a McDonald's and Hartsell's Exxon. It had a large community room, a kitchen, a small library, and a small office on the first floor, a massive prayer hall on the second floor, and a small balcony on the third floor.

Years earlier, an Iranian American professor of international communications at American University, Hamid Mowlana, taught me that the mosque plays an important role in defining and disseminating Islamic ideology in the world. He identified the mosque as a place that serves not only as a site for daily prayers but also as a place for spreading news and opinion and as a forum for political decision making.

My friend Danny's kidnappers had used a mosque in Karachi as a drop-off point for the photos the world saw of Danny in shackles. I felt

it was imperative to make mosques—not to mention all places of worship—safe refuges for men, women, and children, not safe houses for hatred, division, and puritanical ideology.

I met with a West Virginia convert to Islam at the McDonald's by the mosque, and I drafted a seven-point "manifesto for equal participation by women" that included equity in access, accommodations, facilities, and services. The women's restroom, for example, included no footbaths, while the men's restroom had spacious facilities for *wudu,* the ritual cleansing mandatory before prayer. My father joined us and took the manifesto to a meeting of the board that night. He reported to me that they didn't respond, but they listened to the points. With hope and great enthusiasm, I walked up to the freshly painted green doors of the new mosque. It was the eve of Ramadan, the holiest month for Muslims and a time when we abstain from food, drink, and sex from sunup to sundown on the path to liberate us from our attachments to worldly desires. I had enjoyed this month since my childhood days as a sort of spiritual boot camp. I wore the same flowing white *hijab* I had worn in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem.

"Sister, take the back entrance!" the board president, an Egyptian American man with a Ph.D., yelled at me. I was stunned, not only by his message but also by his tone. It had none of the warmth I'd received from both women and men in Mecca and Jerusalem. He didn't even give me the typical Muslim greeting, "*As-salaam alaikum.*" I was taken back to Mina, a stop on my pilgrimage in Saudia Arabia, where I had learned that small acts of kindness can mean so much.

He expected me to take the wooden walkway along the right side of the building to the rear door. It opened into a back stairwell that led to an isolated balcony considered the "sisters' section." I was so stunned that I proceeded through the front door. But I didn't dare go up the set of stairs to the right that led into the main sanctuary. Somehow I knew it was off limits to me as a woman. I walked through the community room and slipped into the back stairwell and climbed to the balcony. Resentful, I sat down on the carpet, cross-legged, and placed Shibli on my lap. I felt humiliated and marginal. I stared at a half wall. I couldn't see into the main hall unless I looked over the edge, and I—a woman who had fearlessly crisscrossed the globe, meeting with heads of state, the Taliban, and chief executives—didn't have the nerve to look over the wall. I heard the disembodied voices of prayers and lectures from the main hall downstairs, but with the distance, the inadequate sound system, and the chatter of women who were socializing because they were disconnected from the mosque's main activities below, I could barely make out what they were

saying. I didn't have the nerve to speak up or protest. If I had something to say, I was supposed to write my thoughts on a piece of paper, pluck some child from play, and ask the child to pass my note to the men in the main hall. I felt like a second-class citizen.

Worse yet, I was confused. I had never been treated so rudely at the Sacred Mosque in Mecca or in the Holy Sanctuary in Jerusalem. I had walked through those gates freely. I had navigated the halls without restraint. In Mecca, I had emerged into the courtyard that housed the sacred Ka'ba without interference. Even though I opposed most of Saudi Arabia's policies toward women, the government made the hajj experience more equitable than I could have ever imagined. The Saudis hadn't forced families to separate to observe the usual strict segregation that the state imposed on men and women in the public sphere. And yet it was unacceptable for me to walk through the front doors of my own mosque in Morgantown, West Virginia? I hadn't attached much significance to the moment when I had stood before the Ka'ba with my family, unhindered by gender segregation, but I was slowly learning that there were no moments from the hajj that were without meaning.

I went to my parents' home angry. I yelled at my father, "Who decided that women are so worthless?" He shook his head, sharing my frustration but feeling helpless. It was an uphill battle to assert women's rights in the Morgantown mosque. "They're male chauvinists," my father said. We were lucky that the women hadn't been consigned to a totally closed-off room. The board had originally accepted a design in which the wall overlooking the main hall would have been floor-to-ceiling. My father protested that it would cut women off too much. But the board wouldn't abandon the design until the fire marshal told them that they would have to pay thousands of dollars for a sprinkler system if it kept the balcony barricaded.

I tried to accept the status quo through the first days of Ramadan, praying silently upstairs, listening to sermons addressed only to "brothers."

On Friday, the discrimination became even more blatant. The community was gathering to break the fast at a sunset meal called *iftar.* A new female medical resident at the university arrived at the mosque for the dinner. Enthusiastic about being a part of her new Muslim community, she walked up to the front door with a covered dish. A man wouldn't even look her in the eye as he issued his order. "Women—over there!" he yelled, pointing to the old mosque. "This is the opening of the new mosque. I want to enter," she protested. But how could she penetrate the phalanx of engrained cultural misogyny and discrimination that made the new mosque a men's club? She slunk over to the cramped old mosque, where a posse of kids ran wild.

The women got a dingy room in the old mosque. We sat on white trash bags on the floor next to ratty filing cabinets that seemed ready to topple over. It was so cramped that my plate of food tumbled to the floor when I stood up as a boy ran by me in play. I went outside and stared at the brightly lit new mosque across the street. I could see the chandeliers inside sparkling in the main hall. The men streamed in and out of the mosque, happily enjoying their dinner inside the spacious community room. We were not included in their definition of community.

Fed up, my mother dispatched a boy to get my father. On the ride home, my mother expressed her frustration. “If I was a man, I couldn’t even eat my dinner if I was getting the best while the women and children were getting the worst. I would take the worst and give them the best.” I thought of my nephew, Samir, who had refused to see the Prophet’s original mosque in Medina when his sister couldn’t. This was the kind of enlightened thinking we needed to awaken in our men. Not a single one of them should have accepted their entitlement to the spanking new mosque knowing that their wives, daughters, sisters, and children were being denied access to it.

Despite my outrage, I felt I would be an interloper if I protested. But every time I prostrated in prayer, my forehead touching the carpet below me, anger and resentment filled my heart, polluting my prayer and making it impossible to attain spiritual transcendence. And each night, I lay in bed despising the men who had ordered me to use the mosque’s rear entrance and questioning the value my religion gave women.

I called Alan Godlas, an Islamic scholar at the University of Georgia, for guidance. He empathized with me immediately. He said it wasn’t Islamic to treat women as the men in my mosque were doing. He also knew that the wound I was feeling ran deep. “Your anger reveals a deeper pain,” he said. Over the next days, I wondered about what he had said, and I saw that it was true. I had witnessed the marginalization of women in many parts of Muslim society. But my parents had taught me that I wasn’t meant to be marginal. Nor did I believe that Islam expected that of me or any other Muslim. I realized that we deny ourselves our own spirituality if we live with dissonance between our actions and words and our values. For each person, this equation expresses itself differently, but I realized that as a society, Muslims must be more honest about reconciling the truth of life on this earth with our religion if we are to be healthy, productive, and peaceful as individuals and as a community in the world.

So finally, on the eleventh day of the holy month of Ramadan, in a predawn lit by the moon, my mother, my niece, and I walked through

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the front doors of our brand-new local mosque alongside my father, my nephew, and my infant son. We ascended to the hall to pray together, my stomach churning all the way.

My mother, my niece, and I sat about twenty feet behind the men. Suddenly, a loud voice broke the quiet. "Sister, please! Please leave!" It was the man who had shouted at me days earlier to enter the mosque through the back door. "It is better for women upstairs," he said.

"Thank you, brother," I said firmly. "I'm happy praying here."

"I will shut down the mosque," he thundered. I had no idea if he would make good on his threat. But I had no doubt that our act of disobedience would soon embroil the mosque, and my family, in controversy. Nevertheless, I knew we were standing up for our rights, for social justice.

The mosque leaders allowed me to worship in the main hall, but I was treated like a pariah. "Grin and bear it. It will change one day," one American Muslim leader suggested to me. A woman in my mosque pleaded with me not to talk about any of this publicly. Many women accept these rules; their apathy helps perpetuate the status quo. Their gentle ways protect gender apartheid in our mosques, and we do no one a service by allowing it to continue, least of all the Muslim community.

I am heartened that some Muslim men are fighting for women's rights. When I made it clear that I would pray in the main hall, my seventy-year-old father stood by me as a mosque elder said to him, "There will be no praying until she leaves."

"She is doing nothing wrong," my father insisted. "If you have an issue, talk to her." Four men bounded toward me. "Sister, please! We ask you in the spirit of Ramadan, leave. We cannot pray if you are here." Calmly, I replied, "I prayed like this from Mecca to Jerusalem. It is legal within Islam." I remained where I was.

The next day, the mosque's all-male board voted to make the main hall and front door accessible only by men. My father dissented and wept as they cast their vote in the mosque kitchen. "Please welcome our daughters into the mosque," my father cried.

After one of the final nights of Ramadan, considered a "night of power," my father gave me an early *eidie,* a gift elders give on Eid, the festival that marks the end of the holy month. He handed me a copy of the key to the mosque's front door, sold the night before at a fundraiser. I traced the key's edge with my thumb and put it on my Statue of Liberty key chain, because it is here in America that Muslims can truly liberate mosques from cultural traditions that belie Islam's teachings.

"Praise be to Allah," my father told me. "Allah has given you the power to make change."

I rattled my keys in front of my son, who reached out for them, and I said to him, "Shibli, we've got the key to the mosque. We've got the key to a better world."

Recognizing Many Paths to the Divine

The first centuries of Islam's 1,400-year history were characterized by scores of schools of jurisprudence, many of them progressive and women-friendly. There were many paths to God.

In the eighth century, a school of Islamic theology called *Mu'tazili* thrived in Basra, Iraq, relying on principles of logic, rational thinking, and allegorical interpretations of the Qur'an, rather than literal reads. Sadly, this intellectual development was stunted in the tenth century when certain scholars closed the gates of *ijtihad,* the process of critical thinking.

Unfortunately, only eight *madhâhib,* or Islamic schools of jurisprudence, from the ninth and tenth century have survived into the twenty-first. These eight schools control the world's Muslims with narrow interpretations on issues from family law and criminal law to interfaith relations and war. The schools come out of the men's club that controls most of our Muslim community, and each school carries the name of a man who set the religious law, or *fiqh.*

The Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali schools are in the majority Sunni sect. The Shafi'i school was founded by Imam Shafi'i, who lived in Medina, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, in the third century. The Hanafi school was founded by Abu Hanifa al-Numan, who died in 767, and is predominant in central and western Asia and India. It is the tradition that my family followed. The Maliki school was founded in Medina by Malik ibn-Anas, who died around 796, and it is predominant in Upper Egypt and northern and western Africa. The Hanbali school was founded by Ahmad ibn-Hanbal, who died in 855, and is predominant in Saudi Arabia.

The Jafari and Zaydi schools are in the minority Shiite sect; the Ibadi and Thahiri schools are among other Muslims.

I believe that each of these schools has largely failed in giving the Muslim world a moral and ethical compass by which to realize the highest principles of Islamic teachings of compassion, justice, women's rights, and tolerance. Instead, they have given us dogmatic interpretations of faith.

It is not Islam that requires women to wear a headscarf but rather these schools of law. It is not Islam that says thieves should be punished

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by the cutting off of their hands; it is these schools of law. It is not Islam that says a woman is half the witness of a man; it is these schools of law. It is not Islam that says that only men can lead congregational prayers; it is these schools of law.

Scholarly evidence overwhelmingly concludes that mosques that bar women from the main prayer space aren't Islamic. They more aptly reflect the age of ignorance, or *jahiliyya,* in pre-Islamic Arabia. Excluding women ignores the rights the Prophet Muhammad gave them in the seventh century and represents "innovations" that emerged after the Prophet died. As Daisy Khan, executive director of the ASMA Society, an American Muslim organization, notes, "The mosque is a place of learning. . . . If men prevent women from learning, how will they answer to God?"[3]

The mosque was not a men's club when the Prophet Muhammad built an Islamic *umma,* or "community." Nothing in the Qur'an restricts a woman's access to a mosque, and the Prophet told men, "Do not stop the female servants of Allah from attending the mosques of Allah."

The Prophet himself prayed with women. And when he heard that some men positioned themselves in the mosque to be closer to an attractive woman, his solution wasn't to ban women but to admonish the men. In Medina, during the Prophet's time and for some years thereafter, women prayed in the Prophet's mosque without any partition between them and the men. Historians record women's presence in the mosque and participation in education and in political and literary debates. They asked questions of the Prophet after his sermons, transmitted religious knowledge, and provided social services. After the Prophet's death, his widow, Aisha, related anecdotes about his life to scribes in the mosque. And Abdullah bin Umar, a leading companion of the Prophet and a son of Omar bin al-Khattab, the second caliph, or leader of Islam, reprimanded his son for trying to prevent women from going to the mosque.

"Women's present marginalization in the mosque is a betrayal of what Islam had promised women and [what] was realized in the early centuries," says Asma Afsaruddin, a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Notre Dame.[4] And that marginalization seems, if anything, to be worsening. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has concluded, based on a 2000 survey, that "the practice of having women pray behind a curtain or in another room is becoming more wide spread" in this country.[5] In 2000, women at 66 percent of the U.S. mosques surveyed prayed behind a curtain or partition or in another room, compared with 52 percent in 1994, according to the survey of leaders of 416 mosques nationwide.

All too often the mosque in America "is a men's club where women and children aren't welcome," says Ingrid Mattson, an Islamic scholar at the Hartford Seminary and an American Muslim community leader.[6]

One of the issues working against American Muslim women—an issue not much discussed outside the Muslim community—is the de facto takeover of many U.S. mosques by conservative and traditionalist Muslims who follow strict interpretations of Islam, some of them coming from the strict Wahhabi and Salafi schools of Islam, which largely exclude women from public spaces. Much of this discrimination is practiced in the name of "protecting" women. If women and men are allowed to mix, the argument goes, the mosque will become a sexually charged place, dangerous for women and distracting to men. In our mosque, only the men are allowed to use a microphone to address the faithful. When I asked why, a mosque leader declared, "A woman's voice is not to be heard in the mosque." What he meant was that the sound of a woman's voice—even raised in prayer—is a sexual provocation to men.

In the past hundred years, we have seen even more hard-core movements emerge from these schools in the name of political Islam. They include movements under names such as Wahhabi and Salafi, which preach and promulgate a literal, rigid interpretation of Islam that segregates women and demonizes people of other faiths and beliefs. They are the religious ideologies that fuel al-Qaeda and other militant organizations in the Muslim world.

In Saudi Arabia, the tradition of Wahhabism, spinning from these schools of law, says that a woman cannot drive a car or travel without a male chaperone. In Pakistan, women are being sent to prison under an Islamic law that criminalizes sex outside of marriage. In Malaysia, men are taking second, third, and fourth wives on the grounds that Islamic law makes polygamy legal. In Egypt, men are beaten for being gay. In my hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia, an imam preached that a husband could beat his disobedient wife "lightly" if other remedies failed.

I have heard from many women about their experiences of discrimination. Erum Afsar, a young woman in Canada, wrote to tell me about the neighborhood mosque she was afraid to enter because of its hostile policy toward women. Pamela Taylor, a Muslim convert and writer, had to step on a path of crushed, rotten cherries leading to the rear women's entrance at a mosque in south Florida. Sara Tariq, a young Arkansas physician, lost access to her childhood mosque in Little Rock when conservative men took over.

Feeling Helpless and Hopeless

Every week, I receive e-mails from young Muslim women and men from around the world, struggling with the contradictions of their values and the expectations of the Muslim community around them. They are spiritually tortured. They exhibit responses much like the reaction documented by Martin Seligman in the 1960s. Seligman, today a University of Pennsylvania psychology professor, exposed a group of dogs to shocks they could escape. The dogs remained active and alert between shocks. He exposed another group of dogs to shocks they couldn't escape. These dogs gave up and passively accepted the shocks, a phenomenon Seligman branded "learned helplessness."[7]

Much as the American psyche is often associated with attention deficit disorder, mental health professionals describe a growing phenomenon of helplessness and hopelessness permeating the psyche of the Muslim community.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, I traveled to Pakistan to report on the growing incidence of depression and suicide in the Muslim community. Traveling from psychiatric hospitals to family homes, I got to see first hand the psychological impact on people for whom Islam did not offer solace or peace of mind.

At the psychiatric clinic of Rizwan Taj in Islamabad, a survey of the posters in the waiting room offered a window into the reach and high profits of pharmaceutical drugs that send their culture-specific messages to Pakistanis. In the clinic, Mohammad Zubair, a bearded man in an embroidered Kashmiri hat and simple *shalwar kameez* (a local outfit consisting of a long tunic and baggy pants), sat in an armless leather console. Above Zubair hung a poster with "DEPRESSION" splashed across it in bold letters. It showed a gloomy young woman with long black hair, the classic image of a Pakistani woman, clutching what looks like a pillow, gazing blankly upward, brows knitted. She was selling Anafranil, the country's second-best-selling antidepressant, repackaged under the name Clomfranil, manufactured by Novartis Pharma (Pakistan) Ltd., a unit of Switzerland-based Novartis Pharma AG. Analysts report that the company saw $1.4 million in sales of the antidepressant in 2000, a 15 percent increase over the year earlier. The poster proposes that Clomfranil "makes life worth living again."[8]

At the clinic, across from the office of a "consultant dentist" and a case of Oral-B electric toothbrushes, Pfizer had a poster for the antidepressant Zoloft with a cropped shot of bright yellow flowers and the message "Bringing Joy Back to Life."[9] Pfizer brought Zoloft to Pakistan in

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1999 and was still lagging behind other antidepressants in terms of sales. Nearby, another poster for Prozac, from Eli Lilly, featured a shining sun in the *o* in *Prozac,* the same symbol used in the drug's U.S. campaign. "Depression?" the poster asked across the top. At the time of my visit, it was the third-best-selling antidepressant in Pakistan.[10]

Drug firms didn't even balk at invoking Allah. They sent prayer rugs to clients during the holy month of Ramadan. Highnoon Laboratories Ltd., a Lahore drug firm, sent doctors ceramic tiles to market its antidepressant, Faverin. One such tile sat inside Taj's office with a line from the Qur'anic sura known as Al-Naml, "The Ants." The verse asks who is better: God or false gods? He who sends rain from the skies? Or causes trees to grow in orchards? The Highnoon tile then asks: "Or who listens to the anxious [soul] when it calls on Him and who relieves its suffering (27:62)." Iram Tariq, group product manager at Highnoon, distributor and manufacturer for Solvay Pharmaceuticals, a unit of Belgium-based Solvay S.A., says, "We are not saying that our product is equivalent to God, but He has given us the problem, the disease, and the solution."[11]

On another wall, Knoll Pharmaceuticals Ltd. advertised Prothiaden as "the beacon of light in the darkness of depression." The drug ranked fifth in antidepressant sales but was the estimated largest volume seller in 2000 because of the popularity of tricyclic antidepressants over more expensive SSRI drugs.[12] Islamabad-based Pharmacia Pakistan Pvt. Ltd., a unit of Peapack, New Jersey, Pharmacia Corp., tapped state-run PTV star Noman Ejaz for a show it taped showing how Xanax, a leading tranquilizer worldwide, took the edge off a middle-class man's anxiety. Drug company executives increasingly tap psychiatrists they call "key opinion leaders," or "KOLs," to influence colleagues at industry-sponsored seminars and conferences.[13]

To be sure, depression, anxiety, and other mental health illnesses are serious medical and physiological issues that require professional attention and treatment. Religion isn't a panacea. But it can be a healing force in our lives if it expresses itself in ways that make us feel better. To me, it's crucial to fight for an expression of Islam that is healthy and positive to improve the mental health of individual Muslims and the community as a whole.

Promoting an Emotionally Intelligent Islam

Thus it is due to mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hard hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you.

—Qur'an 3:159

O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?
It is most hateful to Allah that you should say that
which you do not do.

—Qur'an 61:2–3

Alan Godlas and several other Muslim leaders and thinkers have begun conversations advocating for an "emotionally intelligent Islam." In late 2008, Esam Alkhawaga, a psychiatrist at Wright State University, presented a lecture, "Raising Muslim Children with a Healthy Self-Esteem," in which he raised the importance of working with the present generations for a positive future of Muslims.[14]

If we want to progress, we need to borrow from some of the leading thinking in improving relations between human beings. In 1983, Howard Gardner's book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* chronicled the phenomenon of interpersonal intelligence, which allows us to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people, and that of intrapersonal intelligence, which allows us to understand our own feelings, fears, and motivations.[15] Too often, amid fears, darkness, and insecurity, we have lost these gifts. Daniel Goleman's best seller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* institutionalized the concept of emotional intelligence, defined by self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.[16] Other experts consider emotions a crucial navigating tool for social environments, defined by the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions. What comes with emotional intelligence is anger management, social intelligence, and empathy. We need this in our Muslim world for the health of our individual citizens and for the health of the community.

Too often, I believe, in our Muslim communities, we are not expressing basic skills of kindness, good manners, and civil discourse, allowing instead rigidity and tyranny to trump compassion and gentleness.

It is time that we learn to be wise and kind. From there, hope and peace will flow.

Invoking the Divine

Wake up from your sleep and say, "Bismillah."

—Dawud Wharnsby Ali, Canadian Muslim singer

From our earliest days as Muslims, we are taught to say, "*Bismillah-ir-rahman ir-raheem,*" an Arabic invocation that means "In the name of

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Allah, the merciful, the compassionate" before we take any step, quite literally. The expression is intended to keep us mindful of a higher calling in all of our actions. When I was a child, my mother taught me to say this invocation before I embarked on any action—from walking through a door to taking an exam—so I that I would connect all of my actions to the power of the Divine. Dawud Wharnsby Ali also wrote of the fears he imagined the Prophet Muhammad felt on his deathbed for the future of the Muslim community, the *umma*. He sang of the stillness around the Prophet as the companions gathered near his deathbed: "As Aisha, his wife, held tight to his hand, the Prophet spoke again before he passed away. 'My *umma,* those who follow me, the future of the faith makes me worry until I cry. My brothers and my sisters in Islam, will they be strong and carry on after I die?'"[17]

I asked myself these questions through my tears: Brothers and sisters in Islam, will we be strong? What is the future of our faith?

Not long after, on the first Friday of June 2004, I realized—albeit for just a day—the kind of sisterhood and brotherhood that I had dreamed about so many times as I stood alone in my mosque. Five Muslim women and one Muslim man descended on my hometown to march through the front doors and into the main hall with me and my father, mother, brother, and son to affirm the rights of women in mosques everywhere.

They were new friends I had made in the six months since I had decided to take a public stand to claim my rights at my mosque. We all felt a deep connection. The first one in the group was Saleemah Abdul-Ghafur, who had recently left her job at *Azizah,* a magazine about Muslim women, to edit an anthology of young American Muslim women's voices, *Living Islam Out Loud*.[18] Her mother, Nabeelah Abdul-Ghafur, a civil rights activist from the 1960s, also arrived. By including Saleemah's mother and my mother, we acknowledged the powerful women from whom we came. Mohja Kahf, a poet and literature professor, flew in from Fayetteville, Arkansas. Samina Ali, a novelist born in India and living in San Francisco, flew to Washington, D.C., and then drove to Morgantown with Sarah Eltantawi, an activist and writer living in New York. The man with us was Michael Muhammad Knight, a young American Muslim novelist who had converted to Islam and started a movement called "Muslim punk," challenging traditional edicts in an unconventional way.

Before the group's arrival, I worked into the night to create a brochure for our event. We were Muslim women redefining the boundaries established to control and define us. I struggled until I finally settled on the perfect expression of what we were doing: "The Daughters of Hajar: American Muslim Women Speak."

The day before our march, the Associated Press's Allison Barker sent out a dispatch in which my mosque said publicly for the first time that women could walk through the front door and pray in the main hall. We had won the struggle to open the doors of the mosque to women. We walked down Law Center Drive, crossing the street onto University Avenue, passing Sanders Floor Covering, Hartsell's Exxon, and the golden arches of McDonald's, chanting the call to prayer that I had declared the year before on the holy pilgrimage of the hajj. "Here I come," Saleemah said, leading us.

"Here I come!" we responded.

"At your service, O Lord," Saleemah continued.

"At your service, O Lord," we repeated.

When Saleemah paused during our march, Mohja started us in a second prayer said by the Prophet when he entered a mosque: "God grant before me light, and behind me light, and on my right light, and on my left light, and above me light, and beneath me light, and grant me light."

Shibli rustled in my arms. Our voices rose in an exaltation that surprised even me as we marched to the front door of my mosque. By walking over its threshold and ascending into the main hall, we symbolically posted a message on its door: women have an Islamic right to equity in the Muslim world, and we will no longer accept the marginalization imposed by cultural traditions. Inside, we stood together, and I felt the press of many shoulders beside mine. There was hope for a new future.

For far too long, certain traditions and ideologies have contradicted the essential teachings of Islam as a religion of peace. The veteran *Washington Post* Middle East correspondent Carlyle Murphy notes, "The task of reinterpreting Islam for modern times is the essence of Islam's contemporary revival . . . around the globe. If this 'interpretive imperative,' as some Muslims call it, is fully embraced, Islam's revival will become Islam's renaissance, ushering in a new era of intellectual creativity for Muslims. . . . This is the promise of Islam, and the source of passion for Islam."[19]

I believe there are some fundamental changes the world of Islam must make in order to be true to the spirit of the religion. First, we must live by the golden rule common to all of the religions and philosophies of the world. We must respect others. Second, we must open the doors of Islam. Muslims around the world must open the doors of their mosques to women and to non-Muslims. Saudi Arabia must open the doors of Mecca and Medina to non-Muslims. Third, we must open the doors of *ijtihad,*

the process of critical thinking, in the Muslim world. Fourth and finally, we must honor and respect the voices and rights of all people.

Standing in the back rows of my mosque in Morgantown, my young niece had asked me, "Why didn't you go to the front?" It was an obvious question for a teenage girl raised in a country where she was told, as I had been told, that she could be anything she wanted to be and that she was an equal to all others. It is not enough for us to progress but leave our youngest dreamers behind. With that in mind, I set about to create a space where indeed a young girl could stand in the front row in worship in our Muslim world.

Trying to overcome my fears and tame my hopefulness, I walked up to the front door of my mosque on the first of March 2005, snowflakes tumbling around me, and posted a simple treatise, "Ninety-Nine Precepts for Opening Hearts, Minds, and Doors in the Muslim World," on the green front door. (It is reprinted at the back of this pamphlet.)

As I taped the precepts to the door, I felt an exaltation I could not have predicted. Standing there, at the front door, I felt spiritually free. When I was done, I went around back to the "women's entrance" and taped a copy of the precepts there as well. Less than two hours later, a professor of engineering arrived for the early afternoon prayer. He was a student of Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones*. He believed in rigidity, literalism, and dogmatism. He studied the precepts and then raised his hand and ripped the poster off the front door, tearing it in half and crumpling it in his hands. Tellingly, the copy I posted on the women's entrance stayed up for days, undetected by the men. It became clear to me that we could create a new reality if we simply overcame our fears.

On a clear, sunny day, March 18, 2005, Amina Wadud, an African American scholar of Islam, stood at a makeshift pulpit before an assembly of about 125 Muslim women and men in New York City, making history.

I sat in the front row, my African American friend Saleemah Abdul-Ghafur beside me, and we took back the faith, creating a new spiritual reality in the Muslim world. As we gathered for prayer, a Muslim man greeted me with respect and kindness, and a woman breastfed her baby. A woman, Sueyhla El-Attar, sang to the heavens the call to prayer that for too long in the Muslim world has been heard only in the voices of men. And I sang with Saleemah as she led us in a simple chant we uttered thirty-three times: "O light, O light, O light." We were the light. We were rejecting the darkness.

By leading the congregation in prayer, Wadud was defying traditional Islamic legal doctrine: in each and every school, Islamic jurisprudence

asserts that a woman cannot be an imam, or prayer leader, to the women and men of the community. "I do not belong to a *madhhab,*" she declared to the congregation in her *khutba,* or sermon. "I belong to the *madhhab* of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him." Invoking a "tawheed-ic paradigm," based on the Islamic principle of *tawheed,* or oneness, she laid a case for reform that challenged the status quo in our Muslim world. As I sat in the front row that day, the words resonated deeply with me.

Outside, Muslim protesters damned us to hell for daring to defy centuries of tradition. "Gender Mixed Prayer Today. Hell Fire Tomorrow," read one sign. The Internet buzzed with an e-mail carrying the subject line, "Stop Women from Leading Friday Mixed Prayers."

Inside, as Wadud said her final blessings, I turned to Saleemah and exclaimed, "We did it!" For days, I couldn't stop smiling. As a girl, I had loved reading the Qur'an and memorizing its lines in the original Arabic, as we had been taught. As I recited a chapter over and over with my mother again, I felt the pulse of my girlhood return. I felt again the enthusiasm I had once known for religion.

In the same way, I believe we can restore a vigor for our faith that too many of us have lost, beaten down by the most oppressive and unjust interpretations of our religion.

Dreaming New Realities

On straw mats in a two-room building in the bustling city of Pudukkottai in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, a band of about thirty Muslim women in animated debate are making history. Dicing through tales of marital woes and family travails, streams of tears mixing with belly laughter, they could be extras in a Dixie Chicks music video. Instead, they are part of a radical new generation of lawbreakers: Muslims who are challenging laws written in the name of Islam by men. They offer many people some of the best hope there is for realizing social justice, human rights, and political reform in the Muslim world.

From Tunisia to Toledo, Ohio, scholars, activists, and community leaders are challenging traditional interpretations of Islamic law. Women are on the cutting edge of the change because they have so little to lose and so much to gain. In Barcelona, Spain, in the fall of 2006, ten Muslim women took to the dais for the second Congress on Islamic Feminism, this one focusing on the implementation of Islamic law on matters related to family. From Indonesia, the activist Lily Munir, the "Dr. Ruth of the

Muslim world" delivering straight talk about sex, challenged Islamic polygamy laws that allow men to have more than one wife. Offstage, the Sudanese scholar Balghis Badri huddled with the Tunisian scholar Amel Grami over how to effectively challenge notions that Islamic law requires head coverings (the *hijab*).

Later that month, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Muslim women activists and politicians won passage of the Women's Protection Bill, making rape a civil crime and rejecting laws written in the name of Islam that punishs rape victims for immorality. Not long after that, in December, about one hundred women from around the world descended on the Westin at Times Square in New York City to create an international all-women *shura,* or council, which organizers said was the first of its kind in the world, to issue Islamic rulings on personal disputes.

The women from Tamil Nadu sent their leader, Sharifa Khanam, director of a nonprofit women's rights organization called STEPS, to the New York summit. Not long before, tired of sexist judicial rulings from male-only *jamaats* ("assemblies") that met in mosques in which women weren't allowed to enter, Khanam created a *jamaat* of women. Now women emerge from their houses in the predawn to ride for hours from their villages to adjudicate disputes based on progressive interpretations of Islamic law. When Khanam returned to Tamil Nadu, the women eagerly listened to her report from New York City, enjoying the Hershey's Kisses she packed for them. And they began to lay the bricks for their challenge to the old rules: the building of a women's mosque.

In the United States, Muslim community groups have come together across the country: from a small band of Muslims who meet every Sunday at the Brookville Reformed Church in Brookville, New York, to American Muslims Intent on Learning and Activism in San Francisco. Meanwhile, the digital revolution has interconnected progressive Muslims on the global and regional levels with social networking sites including Naseeb, based in Karachi, Pakistan, and MeetUp, based in cities from New York to San Diego. In addition, the Internet and self-publishing have allowed for the development of nontraditional means of communication, including the creation of a progressive Muslim electronic magazine, *MuslimWakeUp* of Mount Kisco, New York, and the *Alternate Voice,* a newsletter published by a community of Muslims in Toledo, Ohio. Yet many Muslims who would otherwise embrace new interpretations of Islam remain largely unaware of these new possibilities due to the lack of media coverage about Islam. It is our duty as spiritual pioneers to open our eyes and be inspired by the changes around us.

Breaking the Silence

In the spring of 2007, poets, scholars, policymakers, writers, business leaders, and corporate executives from around the globe jetted into the cosmopolitan port city of Dubai for a promising conference, the World Summit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The conference theme was bold: "Our Future. Inspired by Innovation." I was excited to speak in a Muslim country—the United Arab Emirates—about the global campaigns for Muslim women's rights on a panel, "Beating the Gender Odds: Creative Minds Gone Right."

That morning, I moderated a panel, "Using New Science to Rewire the Brains of Youth: Education That Dazzles," that sought to offer leaders ways to "improve intelligence to empower youth to think, to question the status quo, to dispute the facts, and to decide on the pros and cons of life." On the stage, bathed in bright lights, Danah Zohar, an American physicist, author, and philosopher, called on the Muslim world to teach its youth principles of "critical thinking" so they could progress. I heard her call as music to my ears. "In our Muslim world," I said, "we call critical thinking *ijtihad,* and we desperately need to practice *ijtihad* in order to move forward in the twenty-first century."

When the floor opened for questions, a young Egyptian woman stood up, a tight scarf wrapped around her head. "We need change," she said, her voice trembling and tears streaming down her face. She boldly told the audience, many of them conservative Muslims, that she had friends who were gay, liberal-minded, and not orthodox. When she sat down, I applauded her for her courage. Then we got a reality check: a local Muslim woman took the microphone to declare, "Stop this talk! There is only one way to read the Qur'an, and that is it."

Within hours, conference organizers told me that "the Establishment" had called to lodge a protest that the panel had been offensive. Under pressure from the office of the crown prince of Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the organizers canceled the panel for which I had jetted to Dubai to speak, "Beating the Gender Odds." "We don't want to push the envelope too far," an organizer told me.

Rather than dissuade me, however, something important happened that week: I became even further emboldened in my belief that we need a dramatic transformation of our Muslim world, led by the principle of *ijtihad,* critical thinking, so that we can reclaim the principles of social justice, women's rights, pluralism, and peace with which I believe Islam was born fourteen centuries ago.

There are important spiritual principles on which Islam rests, and it's crucial that we remember them. Instead of allowing for inequity, Islam seeks equity, *istihsan*. It seeks justice, *adl*. Rather than expecting blind faith, it requires critical thinking, *ijtihad*. Instead of lacking common sense, it invokes wisdom, *hikma*. Rather than force-feeding an ideology to the community, it considers the needs of the community, *istihsal,* a priority.

If we are open to it, we can find expansive teachings in Islam on issues related to terrorism, war, interfaith relations, women's rights, family law, criminal punishments, and personal rights.

I lived an easier life before I tried to make peace with my faith, because I wasn't dealing with the hard issues. Now I am doing that, and life has become a lot more difficult on many levels. It is hard work to mobilize people and define a movement that can stay within Islam but reject so many of the notions that keep us narrow-minded, rigid, dogmatic, and violent.

The alternative is tragic. The wife of the man who organized Danny Pearl's kidnapping had just given birth to a child before her husband hatched his plot to kidnap Danny. He had basically decided, as a father, that he was going to impart this legacy to his son. He was a young man, raised in England, who got caught up in this puritanical, ideological, dogmatic expression of Islam. So what we have now is a boy, not much older than my son, whose father is sitting in prison for this kidnapping. And Danny's son, Adam, is growing up without knowing his father. This human tragedy of twisted Islam is our ultimate crisis, I think. This is the kind of suffering we must learn to stop.

We are at an important junction in Islamic history. We are starting to develop new approaches in the form of exciting new scholarship coming from the Arab world, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran, France, England, and America. A new movement is emerging framing Islam for the twenty-first century as a religion of peace. It is the greatest responsibility that the Muslim world has to realize in the world.

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NINETY-NINE PRECEPTS FOR OPENING HEARTS, MINDS, AND DOORS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

OPENING HEARTS

1. The Loving One: Live with an open heart to others.
2. The Only One: We are all part of one global community.
3. The One: All people—women and men, people of all faiths, cultures, and identities—are created and exist as equals.
4. The Self-Sufficient: All people—women and men, people of all faiths, cultures, and identities—have a right to self-determination.
5. The Creator of Good: All people have a human right to happiness.
6. The First: A fundamental goal of religion is to inspire in us the best of human behaviors.
7. The Preserver: Religion isn't meant to destroy people.
8. The One Who Gives Clemency: We aren't meant to destroy people.
9. The Absolute Ruler: We are not rulers over each other.
10. The Owner of All: No individual or group of individuals may treat any of us as property.
11. The Mighty: Spirituality goes far deeper than mere adherence to rituals.
12. The Appraiser: We are the sum of our small deeds of kindness for others.

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13. The Inspirer of Faith: It is not for human beings to judge who is faithful and who is not.
14. The One with Special Mercy: Humanity and God are best served by separating the "sin" from the "sinner."
15. The Finder: Virtue doesn't come with wealth.
16. The Supreme One: All people are created with an inner nature that seeks divine nature and is disposed toward virtue.
17. The Doer of Good: Therefore live virtuously.
18. The Greatest: Have the courage to take risks.
19. The Possessor of All Strength: Have the courage to stand up for your beliefs, for truth, and for justice even when they collide with the status quo.
20. The One Who Honors: Respect one another.
21. The Magnificent: Glorify one another with kind words, not harsh words.
22. The Forgiver: Forgive one another, and yourself, with compassion.
23. The All-Compassionate: Be compassionate with one another.
24. The Compeller: Love the soul even when we don't love the "sin."
25. The All-Merciful: Be motivated by love of God, not fear of God.
26. The Supreme in Greatness: Be kind, respectful, and considerate with one another.
27. The One Who Rewards Thankfulness: Appreciate the freedoms you enjoy.
28. The Accounter: Know that we are all accountable for how we treat one another.
29. The Gatherer: Know that anyone you wrong will testify against you on your judgment day.
30. The Expander: Be friends to one another.
31. The Exalter: Win the greatest struggle—the struggle of the soul, *jihad bil nafs*—to do good.
32. The Highest: Rise to the highest principles of Islam's benevolent teachings.
33. The Giver of All: Rise to the highest values of human existence, not the lowest common denominator.

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OPENING MINDS

34. The One Who Opens: Live with an open mind.
35. The One Who Enriches: The Qur'an enjoins us to enrich ourselves and our communities with knowledge.
36. The Subtle One: Islam is not practiced in a monolithic way.
37. The All-Forgiving: We allow ourselves to be more positively transformed if we accept rather than despise our dark side.
38. The Maker of Beauty: Islam can be a religion of joy.
39. The Maker of Order: In any society governed by oppression and senseless rules, there will be rebellion, whether expressed publicly or in private.
40. The Guide to Repentance: Evil is expressed in the forms of social injustice, discrimination, prideful rigidity, bigotry, and intolerance.
41. The Nourisher: We were all created with the right to make our own decisions about our lives, our minds, our bodies, and our futures.
42. The One Who Withholds: Certain traditions and ideologies betray Islam as a religion of peace, tolerance, and justice.
43. The Creator of the Harmful: Repression creates fears that are manifested in dysfunctional ways.
44. The Generous: Women possess the same human rights as men.
45. The All-Comprehending: Chastity and modesty are not the sole measures of a woman's worth.
46. The Last: Puritanical repression of sexuality and issues of sexuality are self-defeating and create a hypersexual society.
47. The Seer of All: The false dichotomy between the private world and the public world leads us to avoid being completely honest about issues of sexuality.
48. The Majestic One: The Qur'an tells us: There is no compulsion in religion.
49. The All-Aware: The Qur'an enjoins us: Exhort one another to truth.
50. The Knower of All: Therefore seek knowledge.
51. The All-Powerful: Do not put any barriers in front of any person's pursuit of knowledge.
52. The Ever-Living One: Reject ignorance, isolation, and hatred.
53. The Truth: Live truthfully.

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54. The Praised One: Praise worthy aspiration, not destruction.
55. The Manifest One: Be the leader you want to see in the world even though you lack position, rank, or title.
56. The Perfectly Wise: Lead with wisdom.
57. The Originator: Open the doors of *ijtihad* (critical thinking) based on *istihsan* (equity) and *istihsal* (the needs of the community).
58. The One Who Is Holy: Honor and respect the voices and rights of all people.
59. The Sustainer: Empower one another, particularly women, to be self-sustaining.
60. The Governor: Do not allow anyone to unleash a vigilante force on any man, woman, or child.
61. The Hearer of All: Be honest about issues of sexuality in our communities.
62. The Expeditor: Lift repression.
63. The Guardian: Reject a sexual double standard for men and women.
64. The Restorer: Reform our communities to reject bigoted, sexist, and intolerant practices.
65. The Righteous Teacher: Question defective doctrine from a perspective based on the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet, and *ijtihad*.
66. The One Who Resurrects: Know that we all will face a reckoning for our deeds.

OPENING DOORS

67. The Guide: We must open the doors of Islam to all.
68. The Creator of All Power: We are in a struggle of historic proportions for the way Islam expresses itself in the world.
69. The Mighty: The Qur'an is clear: Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even if it may be against yourselves, your parents, or your kin.
70. The Satisfier of All Needs: Political expediency does not override our morally compelled duty to tell the truth.
71. The Responder to Prayer: Spiritual activism is a noble pursuit.
72. The One Who Humiliates: Sexism, stereotypes, and intolerance are the common denominators of all extremism.

73. The Giver of Life: We cannot accept murder in the name of Islam.
74. The Inheritor of All: Racism, sexism, and hatred are unacceptable in God's world.
75. The Taker of Life: Dogmatism and intolerance lead to violence.
76. The One Who Abases: Making women invisible is a defining feature of violent societies.
77. The Just: Women and men are spiritual and physical equals.
78. The Equitable One: Women's rights are equal to men's rights.
79. The Witness: Nothing we do is without a witness.
80. The One Who Prevents Harm: Rejecting injustice is more important than protecting honor.
81. The Delayer: Honor can be the worst expression of ego.
82. The Judge: Justice is not necessarily what the majority believes is right.
83. The Forbearing One: We are not judges of each other.
84. The Ruler of Majesty and Bounty: If change will come tomorrow, we should not wait but should create it today.
85. The Trustee: Therefore know that women have an intrinsic right to be leaders in all capacities in our Muslim world, including as prayer leaders or *imams*.
86. The Creator: Reach inside to create the change you want to see in the world.
87. The Forceful One: Stand strong for justice.
88. The One Who Subdues: Stand up to extremists and all forms of extremism.
89. The Self-Existing One: Break the silence sheltering injustice and intolerance.
90. The Originator: Create a new reality.
91. The Glorious: Stand up to the forces of darkness.
92. The Watchful One: Question the source of hate in order to dismantle it.
93. The Protector: Respect women's equal rights and human dignity everywhere, from the mosque and the public square to the workplace and the bedroom.
94. The Avenger: Use principles of social justice to define our communities.

95. The Everlasting: Stand up to create an everlasting Muslim world that will enrich our global society.
96. The Patient One: Exercise patience as a virtue, not as an excuse.
97. The Source of Peace: Live peacefully with others.
98. The Light: Create cities of light to overpower the darkness in our Muslim world.
99. The Hidden One: Ultimately our choice is only one. We must create communities with open minds, open hearts, and open doors.

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THE FETZER INSTITUTE

A PRIVATE OPERATING FOUNDATION based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the Fetzer Institute engages with people and projects around the world to help bring the power of love, forgiveness and compassion to the center of individual and community life. Founded by broadcast pioneer John E. Fetzer, the Institute carries out its mission in a number of ways: by sharing compelling stories of love and forgiveness at work in the world, by convening conversations to help community leaders explore the practical application of love and compassion in their work; and by supporting scientific research to understand how to increase the human capacity for love, compassion and forgiveness. The Institute's work rests on a deep conviction that each of us has power to transform the world by strengthening the connection between the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of service and action. While the Fetzer Institute is not a religious organization, it honors and learns from a variety of spiritual traditions. www.fetzer.org

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Anthology on Deepening the American Dream

Deepening the American Dream: Reflections on the Inner Life and Spirit of Democracy, edited by Mark Nepo. A collection of reflections on the spiritual meaning of being American in today's world from some of our most respected thinkers: Gerald May, Jacob Needleman, Elaine Pagels, Robert Inchausti, Parker Palmer, and others. The book explores the inner life of democracy and the way citizens are formed and considers the spiritual aspects of the American Dream—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

> This thought-provoking volume of essays challenges us to ponder the American Dream and discuss the spiritual values that can help transform the country. The interplay between history, spirituality, and current events is what makes this volume such a soul-stirring experience. It is indeed hopeful and salutary that this cultural document puts so much emphasis on spiritual values as being crucial to the health and enduring value of democracy in the twenty-first century.
>
> *Spirituality & Health Magazine*

> *Deepening the American Dream* communicates a determined and magnanimous solidarity to a fragmented age of confusion and escalating resentments. The collection is . . . a gesture of peace and goodwill that summons us to come together. It's a powerfully uplifting book that shines light in the direction of incarnate hope. That rare happening of people actually talking to each other. I highly recommend it.
>
> David Dark, *The Christian Century*

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Essays on Deepening the American Dream

Essay #1, Winter 2003: Two Dreams of America, Jacob Needleman. The inaugural essay in the series posed an important question: "What of the American Dream?" Is it a vision or an illusion? Do we need to deepen this dream or awaken from it? Can anyone doubt the importance of this question? In one form or another, it is a question that has been gathering strength for decades, and it now stands squarely in the path not just of every American but, such is the planetary influence of America, of every man and woman in the world. What really is America? What does America mean?

Essay #2, Spring 2003: From Cruelty to Compassion: The Crucible of Personal Transformation, Gerald G. May. This essay is a compelling journey to the perennial bottom of who we are, at our best and our worst, and how to use that knowledge to live together from a place of spirit and compassion.

Essay #3, Fall 2003: Footprints of the Soul: Uniting Spirit with Action in the World, Carolyn T. Brown. This essay speaks deeply about the gifts and frictions that exist between our authentic self and the society we live in and grow in, and how returning to the well of spirit keeps forming who we are in the world.

Essay #4, Winter 2004: Created Equal: Exclusion and Inclusion in the American Dream, Elaine H. Pagels. In this essay, the renowned religious historian Elaine Pagels provides a convincing exploration of the ways we have interpreted equality as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. More than ever, she says, we need to ask, who is included in the American Dream? What do we make of this dream in a waking reality? How shall we take this vision to shape our sense of who we are—as a people, a nation, a community? She calls us to deepen our understanding of the American Dream and commit ourselves to extending it to all people worldwide who would share in its promises, blessings, and responsibilities.

Essay #5, Spring 2004: Breaking the Cultural Trance: Insight and Vision in America, Robert Inchausti. This essay is a convincing look at how we see and, just as important, how living in America has impaired our deepest seeing, and how education is the sacred medicine entrusted in each generation with restoring that deeper sight that lets us know that we are each other.

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Essay #6, Fall 2004: The Grace and Power of Civility: Commitment and Tolerance in the American Experience, David M. Abshire. In a time when our country is more polarized than ever, David Abshire, a former ambassador to NATO and a historian himself, traces the history of commitment and tolerance in an effort to revitalize the respect, listening, and dialogue that constitute civility. "Which . . . is the true America?" he asks. "The America of division or the America of unity? The America of endless public and partisan warfare or the America of cooperation, civility, and common purpose? The America of many or the America of one?"

Essay #7, Winter 2005: Opening the Dream: Beyond the Limits of Otherness, Rev. Charles Gibbs. This essay explores America's relationship with the rest of the world. As executive director of the United Religions Initiative, Rev. Gibbs proposes that "the future of America cannot be separated from the future of the rest of the world. There are no longer chasms deep enough or walls high enough to protect us or to protect others from us. So what do we do? We might begin by seeing ourselves as citizens of Earth and children of the abiding Mystery at the heart of all that is."

Essay #8, Spring 2005: The Politics of the Broken-Hearted: On Holding the Tensions of Democracy, Parker J. Palmer. With his usual penetrating insight, Parker Palmer speaks to the conflicts and contradictions of twenty-first-century life that are breaking the American heart and threatening to compromise our democratic values.

Essay #9, Winter 2006: The Almost-Chosen People, Huston Smith and Kendra Smith. In this far-reaching essay, Huston Smith, a renowned historian of religion, and his wife, the scholar Kendra Smith, trace the American sense of liberty as a spiritual concept that has both inspired us and eluded us through a checkered history in which we have trampled many in the name of the very equality and freedom we hold so sacred. They trace the erosion of the American Dream in the twentieth century and look toward our inevitable membership in the global family of nations that is forming in the world today.

Essay #10, Spring 2006: Prophetic Religion in a Democratic Society, Robert N. Bellah. Steering between what the distinguished sociologist of religion Robert Bellah calls "Enlightenment fundamentalists" on the one hand and religious fundamentalists on the other, this essay argues against both the common secularist view that religion should be excluded

from public life and the dogmatic view that would exclude all secular and religious views except one. Instead it proposes a more moderate, nuanced, and robust role for faith and religion in the common life of America and Americans.

Essay #11, Fall 2006: The Common Cradle of Concern, Howard Zinn. In the winter of 2004, the legendary historian Howard Zinn explored the nature of being an American today with Mark Nepo through several conversations. This essay gathers the insights of those conversations, edited by both Zinn and Nepo, into a meditation on America, moral progress, and the myths of freedom.

Essay #12, Spring 2007: The American Dream and the Economic Myth, Betty Sue Flowers. This provocative essay examines the limitations and deeper opportunities of the economic myth that governs our society today. It asks how we might articulate a common good through which we might treat each other as citizens and not just consumers. We are challenged to imagine ourselves anew: "We can't hold up a myth of community and wait for it to take hold. We have to work within our own myth, however impoverished it seems to us. To deepen the American Dream is to engage the imagination—to create better stories of who we are and who we might become."

Essay #13, Fall 2007: The Truth Can Set Us Free: Toward a Politics of Grace and Healing, Rev. W. Douglas Tanner Jr. The founder of the Faith and Politics Institute traces his own journey, from growing up in the South to his own formation as a spiritual leader to his commitment to supporting the inner life of those called to govern our country.

Essay #14, Winter 2008: Is America Possible? A Letter to My Young Companions on the Journey of Hope, Vincent Harding. This elder of the civil rights movement suggests that the dream is never finished but endlessly unfolding. Harding suggests that America's most important possibility for the world is not to dominate, threaten, or compete but to help each other in a search for common ground. He suggests that when we simply attempt to replicate our free-market materialism, we miss our most vital connections. From this, he opens the possibility that a new conversation may begin—one that might initiate a deeper journey concerning the possibilities of human community across all geographical lines.

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Essay #15, Winter 2009: Maturing the American Dream: Archetypal American Narratives Meet the Twenty-First Century, Carol Pearson. This essay is written out of concern about the great challenges facing the United States and the world today. Its purpose is to identify the strengths that can help us tap into what is best about us and guard against our weaknesses so that we might use our power as wisely as possible and in ways that promote the common global good.

Essay #16, Winter 2010: Opening Doors in a Closed Society, Gov. William F. Winter. In this essay, former Mississippi governor William Winter reflects on the long journey from the closed society of the South when James Meredith became the first African American student at the University of Mississippi to the election of President Barack Obama. Though progress has been made, Winter points out that there are still forces that threaten to divide us and speaks to the importance of informed and responsible participation of the public in order to fulfill the American Dream for all.

Essays on Exploring a Global Dream

Essay #1, Spring 2006: Bridges, Not Barriers: The American Dream and the Global Community, Abdul Aziz Said. As the inaugural essay in the global series, this leading peace studies educator and scholar examines both the American Dream and the emerging global community with insight into the complex state of international relations while envisioning a shift in world values that might give rise to a common world based on the spiritual conception of love and cooperation.

Essay #2, Summer 2009: The Power of Partnership: Building Healing Bridges Across Historic Divides, Ocean Robbins. The founder and director of YES! ("Helping Visionary Young Leaders Build a Better World") and coauthor of *Choices for Our Future: A Generation Rising for Life on Earth* writes of his experiences in meeting and working with people from diverse backgrounds and countries and how, even at times of conflict, they have built bridges of friendship and understanding.

Essay #3, Winter 2010: Milestones for a Spiritual Jihad: Toward an Islam of Grace, Asra Q. Nomani. In this essay, Asra Nomani, former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* for fifteen years and author of *Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam,* writes of her personal journey as a Muslim American journalist and single

mother. Drawing on her own experience and the teachings of Islam, she calls on the universal values of Islam that carry with it grace, compassion, and love.

Essay #4, forthcoming: When Vengeance Is Arrested: Forgiveness Beyond Hannah Arendt, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. The author is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and senior consultant for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in that city.

Essay #5, forthcoming:* Title to be determined, *John Paul Lederach. John Paul Lederach, widely known for his pioneering work on conflict transformation, is involved in conciliation work in Colombia, the Philippines, Nepal, Tajikistan, and several countries in East and West Africa.

Essay #6, forthcoming:* Title to be determined, *Hanmin Liu. The author is president and CEO of Wildflowers Institute, a social innovation and application laboratory rooted in ethnic, indigenous, and racial communities.