

IKHLAAS

The OUISoc Magazine

GROWTH

LETTER FROM
A SCHOLAR

UNLOCKING YOUR
POTENTIAL

A FLOURISHING
COMMUNITY

RISING RECIPES

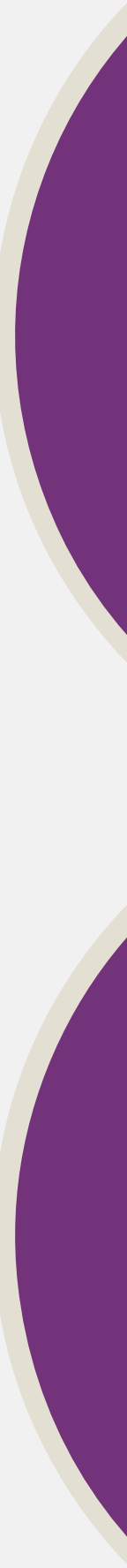
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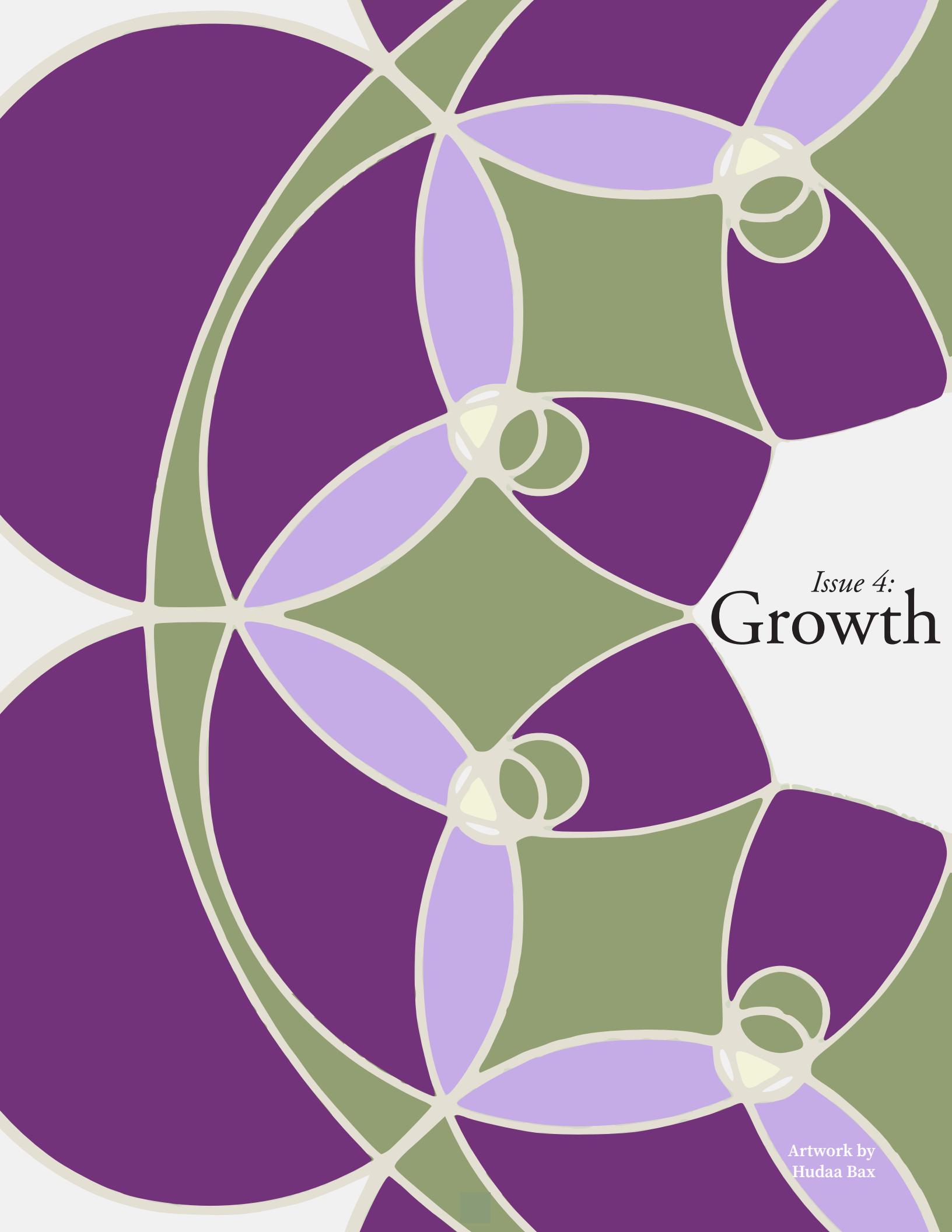


إِخْلَاصٌ

Ikhlaas

[Noun] Sincerity





Issue 4:
Growth

Artwork by
Hudaa Bax



IN THE NAME OF GOD,
THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

FROM THE EDITOR

As-salamu Alaykum!

Working on the fourth issue of the OUISoc magazine has been a rewarding experience, and it has been a pleasure to get to know our community better. The incredible talent of this community never ceases to impress us.

Growth can be uncomfortable and can feel unnatural, but it is only through discomfort that we develop and flourish. Against a backdrop of spring and a hint of optimism over the last few months, we felt the theme of 'Growth' was particularly pertinent.

As flowers bloom and trees grow in spring, change accompanies growth, for change is a catalyst for progression. One change of note in this issue is the brilliant artwork alongside the articles we curated. A second change is that the Student Research Projects section of the previous issue has evolved into the Research Showcase section of this issue; we've opened it up to 'Topic of Interest' articles, in which students (both undergraduate and graduate!), can write about a specialism, or as the name suggests, a topic that interests them.

To give you a taste of this issue, we were fortunate enough to publish a letter by Shaikh Riyad Nadwi, an Oxford scholar. In his article, he brings together cognitive science and his extensive knowledge as an Alim to write about mental health.

"It is through the sum of little acts that the ISoc truly grows."

Thus writes Younes Saidani in the final article of this issue. He explores the history of this society, as well as reminding us that our strength as a community lies in our strong sense of inclusion and unity.

As always, we end this magazine with puzzles. Farabi's cryptogram, a staple of this magazine, has branched out into two: one easy and the other more difficult, so there's something for everyone. We've also included a new puzzle created by Siddiq to test how well you know the OUISoc logo!

Despite the experience of creating this magazine being new to all of us, we've thoroughly enjoyed working on it. The previous magazine team (special thanks to Basim Khajwal!) have been incredibly supportive. It's been a while in the making, but insha'Allah, this issue will benefit our community and readers everywhere.

Wasalaam,
Khadijah Hafeji

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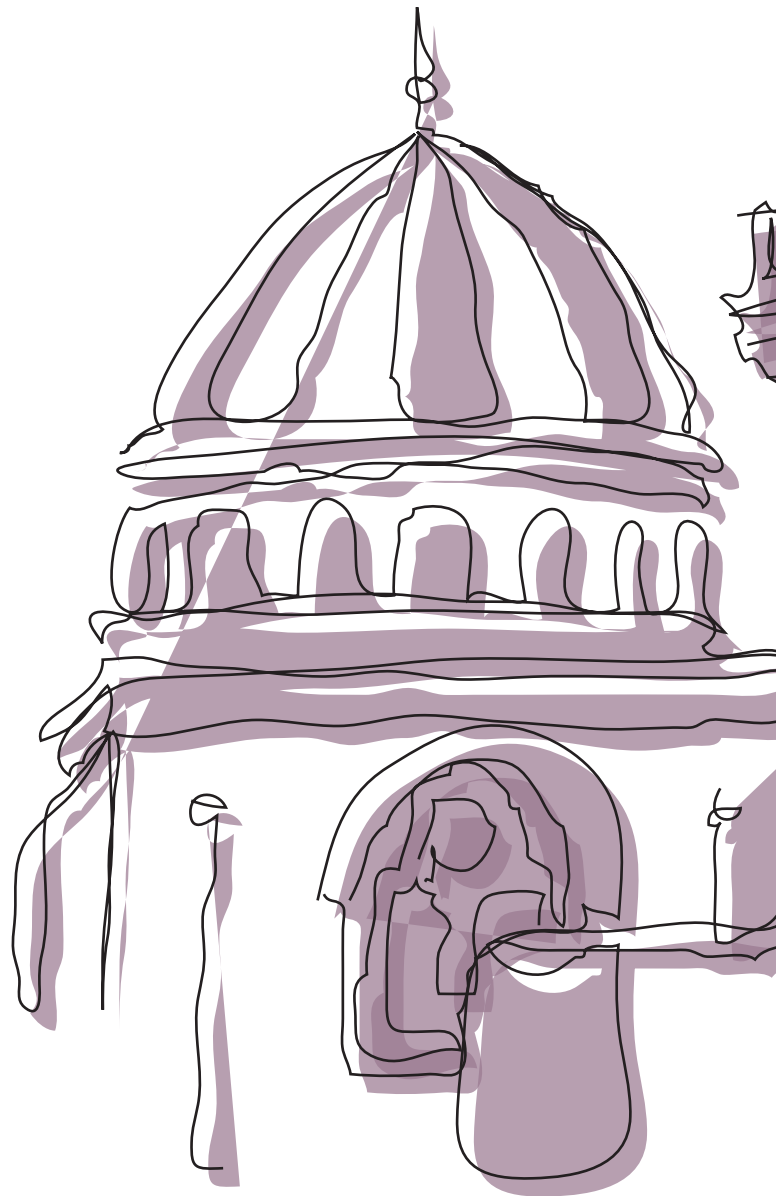
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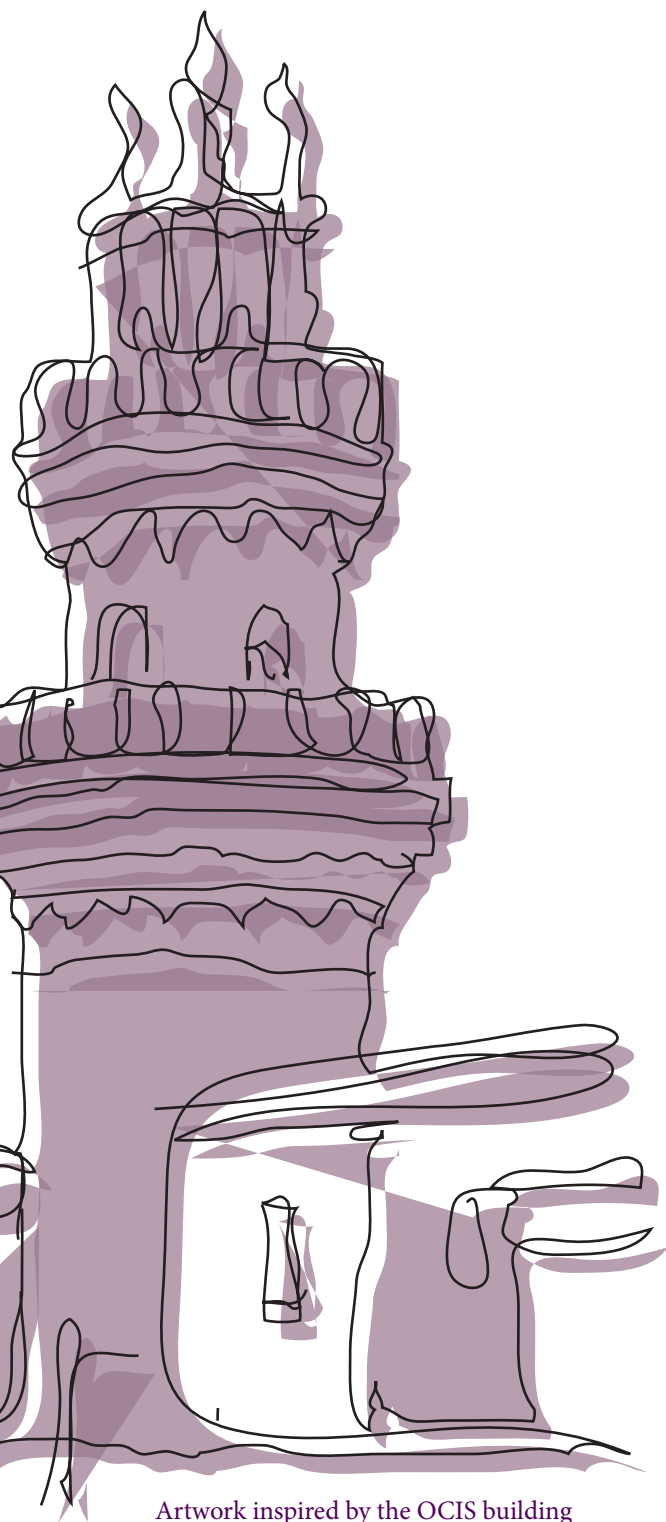
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Letter from a Scholar

Mental Health: Finding Room to Grow

Shaikh Riyadh Nadwi

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

There is a growing concern over mental health in our modern world, especially among students, as the stresses of academic life mount and are now amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Historically, mental health and the absence of mental illness used to be known in the West as “mental hygiene”¹ which has parallels to the Islamic conception of *tazkiyah* (purification). Purifying the heart, mind and body from the entire spectrum of harmful influences is a foundational precept in Islam, for salvation hinges on maintaining a pure and sound heart.

Protection of Mental Wellbeing

The Prophet Muhammad’s (ﷺ) mission is described repeatedly in the Quran as “a purification” (e.g 3:164). Among the five principle purposes of the Shari’ah (*maqasid al-shari’ah*) that the scholars of Islam have always included, is the protection of the mind (*hifdh al-aql*). For a Muslim, mental purification and maintaining sound mental wellbeing is of primary importance. Islam offers a full spectrum of protection that extends from the blanket prohibition of intoxicants that impede the proper functioning of the brain to refuge in the Divine from negative whisperings in the mind.

The word *tazkiyah* has two main meanings. The first is *al-tathir* (cleansing or purifying) and the second is *al-ziyadah* (increase or growth). When the mind is cleansed and protected from harmful influences it flourishes with mental growth in positive and beneficial directions.

Positive and Negative Mental Growth

The activities and influences in which we engage drive the growth and strengthening of our neural networks. Neural plasticity in the brain allows neurons that fire in unison to wire together and those that fire out of sync

to lose their links. In other words, the neurons in our brains appear to run on the principle of the “survival of the busiest”. We are designed to be habituated or sensitised respectively on the basis of our activities. The more we engage with a certain thought or activity, the more our brain optimizes its wiring to resonate with it.

If instead of counting our daily blessings and being grateful for what we have, we habitually lament over the past and agonise about the future then our neural networks for negative thoughts will grow and strengthen at the expense of positive ones. Engaging repeatedly with messages telling us how impoverished our lives are because we do not own such and such material items eventually takes its toll on our mental wellbeing. Likewise, good intentions alone cannot mitigate the mental harm that may come from prolonged indulgence with the wrong company.

In Islam, the slow incremental growth in negative or positive mental and spiritual capacities is described by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as the laying of strands in the way a reed mat is weaved². The laying of negative strand upon strand forms a dark encrustation upon the heart which renders it impervious to positive influences. Whereas a heart that avoids and repels negative influences becomes more receptive to benevolent ones while being protected from trepidation and anxiety.

The Anxiety Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the mental health of people across the world. According to the Great British Wellbeing Survey³, there has been a 42% increase in the rate of people reporting feeling anxious every day and

the highest anxiety levels were found among those in their late teens and early twenties.

Based on the tools available to us in neuroscience, the neural pathways to anxiety can be placed into two broad categories in terms of initiation. The first is the cerebral cortex pathway (negative-thought-led-anxiety) where our thoughts proactively lead us into anxiety - for example worrying about future job prospects. The second is the direct amygdala pathway (fight-flight-freeze-emotion-led-anxiety) where we are overtaken by emotional reactions to our situation.

Both of these pathways are addressed among the four specific things the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) advised that we should do during a plague⁴: *al-mukth fi al-bayt* (staying put at home), *sabr* (practice control of emotional reactions), *ihtibab* (proactive channelling of thoughts towards positive directions as in seeking heavenly reward) and *iman bi al-qadr* (reaffirming of belief in destiny).

In addition, we must know, as creatures with an invisible soul which is beyond the reach of the tools of science, that there are further realms of positive (Angelic) and negative (Satanic) influences that bear on our hearts and minds⁵. For holistic psycho-spiritual well-being, we require help to prune out the negative and strengthen the positive through Divine protection and following Prophetic guidance. As we are informed in Hadith, the build-up from sin, negativity, despair and cynicism that forms encrustations on the heart can be washed away if we do two things. First, remember often the ephemeral and transient nature of life in this world and, second, engage regularly with the Words of our Creator⁶.



Words with the Power to Heal: A Prescription

The help that sufferers of anxiety and depression receive from therapists is most often in the form of words. A few wise or kind words often lifts a person from the depths of despair, even when the speaker makes promises they are unable to fulfil. Now consider the effect of words and promises from the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, the One who is the Source of all peace and tranquillity, *As-Salaam*.

What greater comfort and reassurance can there be than His promise that He and His Angels will send multiple salaams and mercies upon you?

Abu Talha reports from his father that the Prophet (ﷺ) appeared one

day beaming with joy on his face. His companions asked, “Why do we see joy on your face?” He said, “The Angel Gibrail asked me today, would you not be pleased, Oh Muhammad, that your Lord has promised that whenever someone from your Ummah will send salaam and salaam to you once, He (Allah) will send salaam and mercies upon them ten times, and I replied, yes, of course.” (Al-Nasai)⁷

What better purifying words of comfort and sustenance for one’s positive growth can there be than those that bring Divine peace and tranquillity into our hearts? Salaam and mercies from the One who when He intends something, He simply says “Be and it is.” (Quran 2:117).



References:

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2408392/>
2. قَالَ حُدَيْقَةُ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ " تُعْرَضُ الْقُلُوبُ عَلَى الْقُلُوبِ كَالْحَصِيرِ عَوْدًا عَوْدًا فَأَيُّ قَلْبٍ أَشْرَبَهَا نُكِبَتْ فِيهِ نُكْتَةُ سَوْدَاءٍ وَأَيُّ قَلْبٍ أَنْكَرَهَا نُكِبَتْ فِيهِ نُكْتَةُ بَيْضَاءٍ حَتَّى تَصِيرَ عَلَى قَلْبَيْنِ عَلَى أَيْبَسٍ مِثْلِ الصَّقَا فَلَا تَضُرُّهُ فَتَنَةٌ مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَوَاتُ (Sahih Muslim) وَالْأَرْضُ وَالْأَخْرُ أَسْوَدُ مُرْبَادًا كَالْكُوزِ مُجْحَبًا لَا يَعْرِفُ مَعْرُوفًا وَلَا يُنْكِرُ مُنْكَرًا إِلَّا مَا أَشْرَبَ مِنْ هَوَاهُ
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4sC7RZ6Htj0cS1Nyrw0rXjj/the-great-british-wellbeing-survey>
4. وعن عائشة رضي الله عنها أنها سألت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم عن الطاعون، فأخبرها أنه كان عذاباً يبعثه الله تعالى على من يشاء، فجعله الله تعالى رحمة للمؤمنين، فليس من عبد يقع في الطاعون فيمكث في بلده صابراً محتسباً يعلم أنه لا يصيبه إلا ما كتب الله له إلا كان له مثل أجر الشهيد“ (رواه البخاري).
5. وَعَنْ بِنِ مَسْعُودٍ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِنَّ لِلشَّيْطَانِ لَمَّةً بِابْنِ آدَمَ وَلِلْمَلِكِ لَمَّةً فَأَمَّا لَمَّةُ الشَّيْطَانِ فإِبْعَادُ بِالشَّرِّ وَتَكْذِيبُ بِالحَقِّ وَأَمَّا لَمَّةُ الْمَلِكِ فإِبْعَادُ بِالبَخْرِ وَتَضْيِيقُ بِالحَقِّ فَمَنْ وَجَدَ ذَلِكَ فَلْيَعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ فليحمد الله وَمَنْ وَجَدَ الأُخْرَى فَلْيَتَّعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ثُمَّ قَرَأَ (الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدْكُمْ الفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكَ بِالفَحْشَاءِ) الآية) أخرجهُ التِّرْمِذِيُّ
6. وَعَنْ ابْنِ عَمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِنَّ هَذِهِ الْقُلُوبَ تَصْدَأُ كَمَا يَصْدَأُ الحَدِيدُ إِذَا أَصَابَهُ المَاءُ». قِيلَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا جِلْدُهَا؟ قَالَ: «كَثْرَةُ ذِكْرِ المَوْتِ وَتِلَاوَةِ القُرْآنِ». رَوَى التِّرْمِذِيُّ
7. عن عبد الله بن أبي طلحة عن أبيه أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم جاء ذات يوم والسرور يرى في وجهه، فقالوا يا رسول الله إنا نرى السرور في وجهك، فقال ” إنه أتاني الملك فقال يا محمد أما يرضيك أن ربك عز وجل يقول إنه لا يصلي عليك أحد من أمتك، إلا صليت عليه عشرًا، ولا يسلم عليك أحد من أمتك، إلا سلمت عليه عشرًا؟ قلت بلى ” ورواه النسائي

It only takes 10 minutes to recite the following a hundred times ~ morning and evening.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ
وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلِّمْ تَسْلِيمًا كَثِيرًا

*Allhumma salli ala Muhammadin wa ala aalihi
wa sabbihi wa sallim tasliman kathira*

O Allah bestow salat (salutations) and salams (peace and mercies)
abundantly upon Muhammad, His family and His Companions



Shaikh Riyadh Nadwi is a scholar in Oxford who hails from the world-renowned tradition of esteemed Islamic scholarship Nadwatul Ulama.


He is a polymath in the mould of scholars of the Islamic Golden Age. A distinguished Alim with a doctorate in cognitive science, his writings beautifully emphasise the intersection between Islam and science. He is also an accomplished artist and fluent in half a dozen languages.

The Muslim community and students in Oxford and beyond have benefitted from his intellectual and spiritual guidance for almost three decades.

Scan the QR code to visit the
Shaikh's YouTube channel.

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/
UCcWP1Z4m0qjp36cOjAusC8w](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcWP1Z4m0qjp36cOjAusC8w)





Student Blog

In this section, we delve into the significance of 'Growth' for Ahmad, Ameerah and Ameer. Each article explores this theme in a way that is personal to them.

'Misty Canals'
by Muaz Nawaz



Almost six years after the attack, on 6th October 2020, I arrived at LMH as an undergraduate, and all of a sudden, as I entered my room, it dawned on me that my life could have gone many different ways that did not lead here. It was almost six years of sheer perseverance to not only become a better person myself but also help make our society a better place.

The journey truly began on the day of 16th December 2014. It is an average school day for 14-year-old me, who doesn't think about much beyond cricket and food. I am with my friends in the morning assembly, talking about cricket when we are asked to quiet down. As the silence takes over, chaos erupts. Gunshots from every direction, loud explosions and screams surround us and we 14 years olds duck under our chairs in hopes of survival. It was almost as if I were having a horrible daydream after falling asleep to my teacher's same old morning speech. I open my eyes, and I see the massacre take place before my eyes. A scene, I wish, no one ever has to see.

I come out of the incident severely injured after being shot and having lost my younger brother. All this at 14 years of age. I will never be able to even think about anything other than what happened and what I witnessed that day.

Laying in a hospital bed in Birmingham about a month after the incident, I ask myself that question that many of us still at this stage haven't asked ourselves: How do I want my life to go after this? I remember facing two choices: I could try to forget about the whole incident and try to make it through life without thinking about it, or, I could

use the incident, to not only grow as an individual but also to motivate me in making sure that what happened to me never happens to anyone ever again.

I chose the latter, and with a determination of ridding the world of such atrocities, I campaigned against radicalization, extremism, and hate crimes through the provision of adequate education about major societal issues. I spent the last six years of my life speaking on hundreds of different platforms, conducting projects for refugees, and engaging with young people to ensure that our society becomes a place where we never have to see someone go through such massacres.

I think if there's one thing that I've learnt from the incident of 16th December, it is that in life, we always face choices similar to those faced by me. One could very well choose to be overwhelmed by them, or one could use life events to grow further and become a better human not only for oneself but also for the wider society.

Today, as I sit in Lady Margaret Hall Oxford as a first-year undergraduate, studying Philosophy and Theology, writing this blog, I feel proud of having grown from the incident that could well have destroyed my life. Everyone faces problems of a distinct nature, but I wish that every one of us learns to grow from them and use them to evolve into better human beings.

**Ahmad Nawaz,
1st Year,
Philosophy & Theology,
Lady Margaret Hall**



I can't really summarise what I owe ISoc in just one article. After a pretty traumatic interview experience, I was sure I wouldn't be taking any offer Oxford might make me. But then the offer did come. All of a sudden I knew, I had to take it whether I wanted to or not. In a bout of desperation and frustration, I decided to just google 'Are there any Muslims in Oxford??' and alhamdulillah I stumbled across our ISoc. I looked around the webpage and thought, "This seems all right, maybe I won't hate every second of Oxford after all".

Once I did arrive at Oxford every nightmare I'd had about it seemed to be unravelling before my eyes.

When I'd turn up at an Isoc event though, no matter what type of event it was, I could breathe a sigh of relief, yeah my accent was still funny (ha ha)

but I didn't need to pretend I was something I wasn't. I liked ISoc because it was fun and it was safe. And if all I ever got from ISoc was some fun and a safe space, it might have been enough, but alhamdulillah, it was much more than that.

In Oxford, for the first time, my religion was solely my own, and I was without my family's support. ISoc felt like a new world: here I could pray Jummah, I could attend talks on topics I hadn't even thought to consider, and I had direct access to esteemed scholars. More than that, ISoc gave me friends that spoke about Islam freely, and we encouraged each other in our deen.

Alhamdulillah, the ISoc surrounded me with knowledge and love, and Allah SWT blessed me beyond what I deserved. My first year changed me a lot as a person; it gave me a deeper appreciation for my religion than I'd ever had before.

Then I became what is commonly known as an ISoc sucker and ran for committee. Somehow I became even more ISoc-obsessed, and I learnt more than I had as a passive observer. Being WOS and learning from our community taught me a valuable lesson in loving others for the sake of Allah SWT. It also taught me more trivial, practical things like running events, and I became

more self-assured, but that was inconsequential compared to the knowledge and lessons imparted on me by other members of the community. As a result, I became hyper-aware of

"I became hyper-aware of the need to purify my intentions routinely and to ensure that there is a balance between academia and deen."

the need to purify my intentions routinely and to ensure that there is a balance between academia and deen.

I ran for VP last year to give back to my community, but I can honestly say that I received more than I ever gave: in confidence, in friendships, and in experiences. Alhamdulillah, the past year was as transformative as the two before it. While I might not be involved in ISoc for much longer, the community won't soon be forgotten in my heart and duas.

**Ameerah Latif,
3rd Year,
Biomedical Sciences,
St Hilda's College**

My name is Ameer, and I am a second-year PPE student at Keble College. My spiritual journey was not linear by any means. My spirituality operated almost entirely within the Islamic framework, but with varying levels of Imaan and constantly changing environments, the journey was most definitely not a smooth one.

Before life at Oxford, it is now evident to me that my spirituality was at a low. My concerns, worries and priorities all revolved around worldly matters, and I had little regard for religious or spiritual issues. Being blessed with hindsight, it is clear to me that I was in a state of disarray, not because I had the wrong kind of spirituality or I was pursuing it in the wrong manner, but because I was not concerned with my adherence to my religion in any dimension whatsoever.

This issue was compounded by arriving at the prestigious University of Oxford. My arrival had two very different but equally dangerous effects on my spirituality. Firstly, I had adopted an arrogant attitude, as I now believed I was capable of anything. This attitude made me turn my nose up at the thought of being spiritual or religious, as it did not look like I needed these things, increasing my already dangerous lack of spirituality. The second effect stemmed from being placed into an alien and unfamiliar environment in which I became concerned with fitting in. My new environment made me even more concerned with worldly matters and thus, as a result, even less concerned with those matters of spirituality and religion.

However, it was at this point I met the most accommodating of the OUISoc, which led to two crucial catalysts for my spiritual growth. Being surrounded by people far more emotionally mature than me made me wonder where this stemmed from, and as a result, I became far more interested in Islam. I re-learned the practices I had previously disregarded out of arrogance, and by surrounding myself with an honourable group of brothers, I began to restore the spirituality I had so recently lost.

The second catalyst that came from this is that even at my lowest point of Imaan, Allah provided me with an opportunity to increase it and further it to a far greater extent than it ever had been. Allah had provided for me in a time where my most prominent emotion was loneliness. Even now, amid a lockdown, where one should feel loneliness more than anything, the effects of the above events still ripple through my life to remind me that Allah is always there and one can always, always turn to him. As a result, my spiritual journey was not smooth by any sense of the word, but one that left me in a position to always trust in Allah, especially when you are at your lowest.

For anyone else embarking on their own journey, Surah Ad Duha is my personal choice when adversity manifests itself in my life. When others face their issues in solitude, the Surah reminds us that we are never alone, and whatever adversity we may be facing, we do so with our Lord. Nothing in this world can be so reassuring. However lonely we may feel, or however troubling life may be, Allah is with us, and for me, this has aided my journey greatly.



**Ameer Khan,
2nd Year,
PPE,
Keble College**

The image shows the interior of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, featuring a series of double arches with red and white stripes, supported by dark columns. The floor is made of reddish-brown tiles. A hanging lantern is visible in the center.

Cordoba in the

Islamic Golden Age:

A Tale of Growth and Prosperity

Imran Naved

By the 7th century, the Iberian Peninsula was an intellectually and culturally stagnant place. The Western Roman Empire had collapsed centuries prior and now the Visigoths, infamous for sacking Rome in 410 CE, ruled Spain. By the 10th century, however, the peninsula was transformed. Whilst the rest of Western Europe was entrenched in the Dark Ages, Islamic Spain shone like a beacon - a melting pot of Arab and European culture where the arts and sciences flourished in an Islamic Golden Age. As the 10th century nun Hroswitha of Gandershiem wrote: 'The brilliant ornament of the world shown in the west, a noble city newly known for the military prowess that its Hispanic colonizers had brought, Cordoba was its name and it was wealthy and famous...'

Why was Cordoba considered the greatest European city of the Medieval era?

In 711, Tariq b. Ziyad (d. 720), with 7000 men, crossed the straits of Gibraltar¹ and quickly conquered the Spanish towns of Cordoba, Guadalajara, and Toledo. By 719, they ruled from Gibraltar to the Pyrenees. For a while, al-Andalus remained a backwater until the reign of the caliph, 'Abd al-Rahman I (d.788), who came to Spain as a fugitive – fleeing from the downfall of the Umayyad Caliphate in the east² – and established his own independent nation there.

As Islam settled in Spain from the 8th to the 14th century, the land flourished. The seat of the caliphate lay in the great city of Cordoba which at its height, hosted over 500,000 inhabitants. It is said that its streets were paved and well-lit with streetlamps, the lights being attached to the outer doors and corners of the houses. One would be able to travel for 10 miles in the light of these lamps³. The city was extremely clean by medieval standards. Ibn Sa'id, a 7th/13th century historian who

knew Cordoba especially well, notes that 'Spanish Muslims are the cleanest people on the earth in respect of their person, dress, beds and in the interior of their houses.' Indeed, by the reign of Hakam II, the city would be renowned for its gardens and promenades with over 900 public baths.

As well as being renowned for its sophisticated architecture and infrastructure, Cordoba was a city of artists, philosophers, and scholars. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'Seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim'⁴. It was a deep appreciation of this tradition that drove the intellectual pursuits of the Andalusians. According to Ibn Sa'id:

"Cordoba held more books than any other city in al-Andalus, and its inhabitants were the most enthusiastic in caring for their libraries; such collections were regarded as symbols of status and social leadership. Men who had no knowledge whatsoever would make it their business to have a library in their homes; they would be selective in their acquisitions, so that they might boast of possessing unicas⁵, or copies in the handwriting of a particular calligrapher."

This was a marked contrast to medieval Europe where, as Scott⁶ writes, 'At the time when ninety-nine percent of Christian people were wholly illiterate, the Moorish city of Cordoba had eight hundred public schools, [. . .] and it was difficult to encounter even a Moorish peasant who could not read and write'.

Cordoba at its zenith contested with Baghdad for the intellectual leadership of the Islamic World. The Great Mosque⁷ was famed as a centre for higher learning on par with Cairo and Baghdad and was the earliest Islamic University in Europe. Thousands of students were taught the conventional Islamic sciences and beyond including music, philology, geography, history, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, botany, philosophy, and mathematics. Among

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As well as being renowned for its sophisticated architecture and infrastructure, Cordoba was a city of artists, philosophers, and scholars.

its famous scholars were the great physician Abu 'l-Qasim al-Zahrawi of Cordoba (d.1013) whose textbook on medical practices was translated into Latin and used in Europe until the 1800s, Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri (d.1064) who produced over 400 works and the leading proponent of the Zahiri school of jurisprudence and al-Idrisi (d. 1165), the famous geographer who created some of the most advanced medieval world maps. Possibly the greatest was Ibn Rushd⁸ (d.1198), whose works on philosophy influenced Western Europe for centuries to come, most notably for his commentaries on the works of Aristotle for which he was dubbed 'The Commentator'. As Roger Bacon famously said: "Nature was interpreted by Aristotle, and Aristotle interpreted by Averroes."

**With four things, Cordoba surpasses all
the metropolises:**

**The bridge over the valley and its Great
Mosque to see**

**These two plus the city of Zahra is the
third of those**

**And knowledge reigns supreme, and
that is the fourth of those.**

[Ibn Atiyyah of Granada]⁹

Non-Muslims contributed significantly to this cultural renaissance. Given intellectual and religious freedom, religious minorities thrived. Christians operated as administrators and in the early centuries, they had their own schools and libraries. Likewise, Hasdai b. Shaprut (d.970), a prince of the Andalusian Jews, became vizier to the caliph, Abd al-Rahman III (d.961). Christians started adopting Arabic language, art and customs such that Paul Alvarus, a Christian luminary in 10th century Cordoba lamented: 'The Christians love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not

to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or apostles? Alas!'¹⁰ In fact, great works of translation from Latin into Arabic took place in al-Andalus such that after the *Reconquista*, Arabic texts were crucial in recovering the works of Latin and Greek masters.



Ultimately, Cordoba, and by extension, al-Andalus, represented the pinnacle of Islamic civilisation in the 8th to 13th centuries. A Golden Age wherein Muslims enriched the small, impoverished towns and cities of Spain and within 100 years established the most advanced city in Europe. Driven by conviction and God-consciousness, the Muslims prioritised education, showed tolerance to other faiths, and developed the land. Thus, God granted them glory and a civilisation that matched any that came before or has come since.

But all good things must come to an end. Over several centuries, the Muslims grew rich and complacent in their luxury and became disunited. The divided Muslims fell into infighting and civil war, and the Christian nations to the north seized the opportunity. One by one, the Muslim states fell to the *Reconquista*¹¹. Amongst other artefacts, the Grand Mosque of Cordoba - converted to a Church – and the Alhambra Palace in Granada remain as testimonies to Muslim life in Spain. Whomsoever chances into the streets of Cordoba, Seville, and Granada will feel an afterimage of the Muslims that lived, studied, and worshipped there.



Al-Idrisi's planisphere.

Note how Europe is depicted to the south.

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1. The Legacy of Muslim Spain, Salma Khadra Jayyusi
2. The Ornament of the World, Maria Rosa Menocal
3. The New Cambridge History of Islam
4. A History of Muslim Spain, Montgomery Watt
5. Islamic Spain: Model of Peaceful Coexistence, Gabriela Profeta Phillips

Let someone explore the relics of Cordoba.

The arches and portals of mosques lying in ruins

Arabian palaces which sparkled like Nova

The rise and fall of the Caliphate's strongholds.

In debris thus shine their visages, I am told

As in dust there glitters fine silvers of gold

[*Hali*]¹²

Footnotes:

1. 'Jabal al-Tariq' – literally mountain of Tariq
2. The Umayyad caliphate was supplanted by the Abbasids in 750. During the revolution, the entire Umayyad royal family were killed except Abd al-Rahman who fled to Spain.
3. J.W. Thompson: Economic and Social History; p. 549; in W. Durant: the Age of Faith; Simon and Shuster, New York; 6th printing; 1950. Chapter 13; p.302.
4. Sunan Ibn Majah
5. Unica is a term for the single surviving copy of a text.
6. S.P. Scott 'The History of the Moorish Empire in Europe'
7. The Mosque was considered one of the wonders of the medieval world and remains the only overt trace of Cordoba's deep Islamic past.
8. Known in the west as Averroes.
9. Translated by Dr Abu Zayd, 'Journey to Andalus, Shaykh Mohammad Akram Nadwi'
10. The Ornament of the World, Maria Rosa Menocal
11. After 1502, Muslims were forced to hide their religion and convert to Christianity. These 'converted' Muslims were known as Moriscos and watched closely by the rulers. By 1609, King Philip signed into law an edict expelling all Moriscos from Spain. Many of them emigrated to either North Africa or the Ottoman Empire though a few scattered communities remained in Spain, preserving their Islam secretly.
12. Hali's Musaddas: A Story in Verse of the Ebb and Tide of Islam. Translation by Syeda Saiyidain Hameed.

Welfare



& Lifestyle

This issue's Welfare and Lifestyle section includes five articles, all relevant to the theme of 'Growth'.

In 'Unlocking Your Potential', Hira Javaid writes about the importance of a 'Growth Mindset', a wonderful reminder that we can develop and improve. Imad Ahmed has written '365 Days of Ramadan', a piece detailing how to continue increased worship beyond Ramadan.

We've also got some light-hearted pieces in this section - 'How Not to Kill Your Houseplants' explains just that and features some beautiful artwork by Sophie Thomas. In 'Rising Recipes', Zain Raza presents two recipes involving yeast, an unorthodox take on the theme of 'Growth'.

Featuring artwork by Coral Benfield, we end this section with 'Perspective During Exam Season', in which Lamis Hamdi offers her advice on getting into the right attitude just before exam season.

Unlocking Your Potential

A lot of us hold ourselves back from achieving our true potential because we have what is called a 'fixed mindset' - the widespread notion that people who are good at something must be because they have a natural talent for it. This mindset has been challenged by research that shows that what is crucial for success is effort, practice, and investing time rather than some inherent ability. Even child prodigies that seem miraculously gifted have already spent years in training. Mozart, for example, was trained extensively by his father from the age of three. This alternative - the growth mindset - coined by Professor Carol Dweck at Stanford views the ability to do something as skill rather than talent.

This simple difference is incredibly powerful because while talent is inherent, fixed, and out of your control, skills can be developed, improved, and grown.

A study showed that children with a fixed mindset easily got frustrated in the face of challenging questions because they felt they weren't smart enough, while children with a growth mindset believed that

with enough effort, they would eventually solve them¹.

Over time children with the growth mindset were able to grow with the challenges, eventually becoming better at the problems than the other group.

In Islam, too, we have the concept of putting in the effort and in return, God providing *Barakah* - growth and increase. God says in the Quran, "**And say: my Lord increase me in knowledge**"²

and "**He Who taught man what he knew not**"³, which show that knowledge and skill are not something man is born with, but rather something that is gained and always has the potential to increase. When we give in to the fixed mindset of "I can't do this" or "I'm just not good at this," we are not just limiting ourselves from reaching our full potential, but also underestimating God's ability to teach us what we don't know. God also says: "**We shall give increase to the Muhsineen**"⁴. The word *Muhsin* is linked to *Ihsan* which means doing something with excellence, sincerity, and your utmost effort. Thus, the concept of action and effort is intricately linked to growth and increase.

References:

(1) Blackwell et al, Child Dev. 2007 (2) 20:114 (3) 96:5 (4) 2:58

How To Build a Growth Mindset:

1 Be Conscious

Just like any thinking bias, learn to identify when you are behaving or thinking in a fixed mindset way. When you feel frustrated during the learning process, stop and ask yourself: is it because you think you're not good enough to learn something? That points to a fixed mindset.

2 Be Proactive

After reading this article, commit to learning one new thing that you have always wanted to but have been putting off because you thought you didn't have the talent for. Find someone good at it whether that is a friend or YouTube and learn from the experts. Stay at the very edge of your comfort zone – a place where you could reach the wonderful 'flow state'—a state of clarity, alertness, and losing yourself in a task. This happens when you are comfortably stretched outside your limit with a task that is neither too easy and thus boring, nor too difficult, and thus frustrating.

3 Let Go of the Fear of Failure

The biggest drawback of a fixed mindset is a crippling fear of failure because any failure is a reflection on who you are and what you can achieve. On the other hand, people with a growth mindset know that failing at something doesn't mean they are a failure. They use failure as constructive feedback to figure out what went wrong and what they need to do differently in order to succeed. In this way, failure becomes the most useful feedback you could get!

4 Add a "Yet" to Every "Can't"

Dweck also writes about the power of "yet" that a growth mindset brings. You might not be able to do something right now, but that doesn't mean you won't be able to in the future. "I'm not a creative person? Yet." "I am just not good at this subject?—Yet!" Do you see the power of that?

5 Learn How To Learn

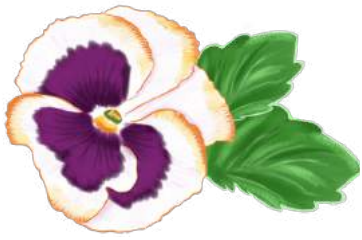
Learning a new skill is itself a skill. This is because learning includes a very specific process of repeated effort, evaluating improvement, and fine-tuning efforts to the aspect that needs more work. So the better you get at learning one thing, the better you get at learning other things because you improve your brain's ability to carry out this process.

6 View Adversity as Opportunity

Many things we see as personal qualities are in fact skills that can be grown—resilience, patience, strength of character, etc. Difficult times force us to grow in a way that is almost impossible to do when things are perfectly well. It is only when we are tested to our limits that we grow beyond them. Just as the Prophet said, "Wondrous is the affair of a believer, as there is good for him in every matter."

Hira Javaid





HOW *NOT* TO KILL YOUR HOUSEPLANTS



Houseplants can brighten up any uni room, and now that we are indoors more than ever before, they are an essential connection to the natural world. Studies have suggested that having plants in your room may increase concentration¹, reduce stress² and even help you to heal faster³! If, like Coral, you've ever struggled to keep your houseplants alive, we've got your back with these tips for helping your plants to flourish with some common problems and solutions!

Coral's Problem: My plants are making my room smell weird; should I throw them away?

Aaliyah's Solution: Wait! If the soil of your plant smells weird (or "swampy"), paired with curling and wilting leaves, you've most likely got a case of root rot. This can be treated, but you have to act fast. First of all, you'll want to remove your plant from the soil and wash the roots gently whilst trying to wash away as much of the affected area as possible. Next, trim off the affected roots. If it's a very severe case, you may want to trim off some of the leaves to give your plant a better chance of survival. Dispose of the soil and wash your plant pot thoroughly before repotting your plant. After this, take care not to overwater your plant as its roots grow back, and you should hopefully get your plant back to its original state.



Coral's Problem: I've finally kept a plant alive for longer than a year; when should I repot my plant, and how do I do it?

Aaliyah's Solution: Congratulations! A good rule of thumb would be to repot your plants every 12-18 months. If your roots start growing out of the drainage holes, that's also a good sign that it is time to repot. You will want to begin by removing your plant from its current pot gently and loosening the roots. If you would like, you can trim off some of the extra-long roots, but ensure that you keep the thick roots at the base of your plant. You'll then want to replace your potting soil, and if your pot doesn't have any drainage, layer the bottom with rocks/gravel before putting in your fresh potting soil. You can now add your plant and add more potting mix around it to ensure it's secure whilst still giving the roots room to breathe. And with that, you have successfully repotted your plant!



Coral's Problem: The leaves on my plants are wilting, and I'm not sure why – please help!

Aaliyah's Solution: Wilting leaves can be challenging to diagnose. It requires a bit of trial and error to recognise the problem. The most apparent reason is under watering, and this is one of the easiest to identify. If you haven't watered your plant in a while or the soil is dry, add some water, and your plant should be back in shape in no time. They will generally need more watering over spring and summer when they are actively growing. Another cause could be overwatering - make sure to let your plants dry out a little between watering.

Wilting leaves can also mean that your plant is not getting enough sunlight. A way to prevent this is to ensure that you dust your plants from time to time using a damp cloth, a duster or even a clean toothbrush! Think about the positioning of your plant, and make sure to rotate it from time to time. Most plants enjoy a well-lit, draught-free spot, not near a radiator. But the specific requirements of each plant can vary, so it is important to check. In general, flowering plants (like peace lillies and hydrangeas) need the most light, but others (like spider plants and snake plants) may prefer indirect sunlight. Try changing its position if your plant is not growing or flowering as it should.

**"THE WORLD IS BEAUTIFUL AND VERDANT,
AND VERILY GOD, BE HE EXALTED, HAS MADE
YOU HIS STEWARDS IN IT, AND HE SEES HOW
YOU ACQUIT YOURSELVES."**

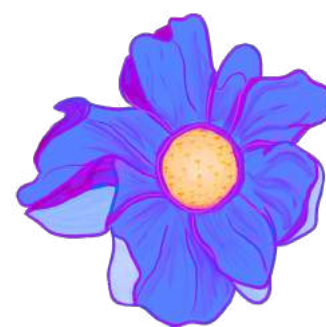
(SAHIH MUSLIM)

Being a plant mum or dad can seem intimidating at first, but it's also very rewarding, and your plants can provide great company in situations where you can't leave your room. If you're new to being a plant parent, some low-maintenance houseplants to start with include spider plants, succulents or rubber plants. They're (almost) unkillable and won't mind if you forget to water them! Insha'Allah, the tips above will give you the confidence to get green-fingered with some houseplants this term!

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Coral Benfield & Aaliyah Natha
Artwork by Sophie Thomas



365 Days of Ramadan

“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous”
2:183

In this verse of the Qu’ran, Allah has commanded fasting upon us not purely to refrain from eating and drinking, but to gain piety. Fasting is an opportunity for us to build our stamina against our natural enemy – Shaytaan – whose purpose in life is to get us to slip up, controlling us by our desires. But it’s an opportunity that we must seize to grow closer to Allah (SWT) - not only for one month out of the year, but for all 365 days of the year. It’s not necessarily about doing the grandest acts of worship, it’s about continuing our increased worship throughout the year Inshaa’Allah. No matter how small that action is, being consistent in it is beloved to Allah (SWT)¹. What long term gain is there if we do not grow as Muslims, we will have left the blessed month of Ramadan with nothing more than hunger and sleepless nights².

The main act of worship that we engage in during Ramadan is fasting and

it’s one of the most beloved actions a believer can perform. Apart from the compulsory act of fasting in Ramadan, one thing we can do throughout the year is to engage in the optional fasts as these have numerous recorded virtues. It’s a beautiful way for us to grow in our character as when we fast, we are encouraged to stay away from bad habits of speech and be on our best behaviour. Of course, some find it easier to fast than others, but as mentioned before, growth comes from making gradual steps. Firstly, fasting on the particularly virtuous days throughout the year; the days of Ashura and Arafah have both been reported to be

“It’s an opportunity that we must seize to grow closer to Allah (SWT) - not only for one month out of the year, but for all 365 days of the year.”

particularly significant to the believer³. More regularly occurring fasts include fast of the white days, the 13th, 14th and 15th of each Islamic month⁴. A step above that would be the fasts of Thursday and Monday⁵ where the only fast better than that is the fast of Prophet Dawud (AS) of fasting every other day⁶.



Our relationship with the Qu'ran is often neglected. It's easy to blame our busy schedules, but Ramadan was a perfect opportunity to rebuild that bridge as we were constantly surrounded by the Quran, such in long prayers of Tarawih. Now leaving the month of Ramadan, there are ways we can maintain that relationship throughout the year. This can be done in three ways: the recitation, the memorisation, and the pondering over the words of Allah. A post I constantly saw on social media was how to break up your days to be able to finish reading the Qu'ran from cover to cover. This is done by reading approximately 5 sides after every salah. What I would recommend is to allocate one time in the day that you will sit down and read 20-30 minutes of Qu'ran a day. The amount you read doesn't matter too much, but stay disciplined in always trying to read at that point in the day. I would also recommend no matter how much Qur'an you read, try to incorporate reading with tafsir, or at least a translation. One tafsir I would recommend is the tafsir of Imam Tabari.

Finally, memorisation can definitely seem daunting, but again, starting small is key. Surah Mulk is a great starter to try to memorise, it has 30



verses. Dedicate a day to a verse and within a month, you should have the whole surah memorised. The added bonus of this is when you come to revise this surah, it should not take longer than 5 minutes each day and it's a virtuous surah that is reported to intercede for its companion until he is forgiven⁷. This can propel our journey to memorisation as we can continue to build like this throughout the year Inshaa'Allah.

These are just some of the techniques one could implement, it's not just restricted to this. Whatever good habits you currently practise in, increase the output. Starting small is just the beginning to get you started. Whatever you choose to do, I cannot emphasise this enough, let us not waste the motivation that Ramadan gave us, allow the practises we take forward to be indicative of how beneficial the month was as we may not have the blessing to see another one.

Imad Ahmed

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4. Sahih Al-Bukhari 1981
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6. Bukhari 1976
7. Tirmidhi 2891

Rising Recipes

Zain Raza

Rising and growth are principles that extend through our daily lives and we can incorporate them into the mundane and ordinary parts of life. In this article, Zain has prepared two fantastic recipes for you to make at home, allowing you to view growth in action. Yeast, an active raising agent, is required for both of these. The sourdough bread recipe does require some preparation, but we promise you won't regret it.

Before you can get started with sourdough bread baking, you need a sourdough starter.

What is a sourdough starter?

A sourdough starter is a fermented mix of flour and water containing wild yeast and bacteria (lactobacilli). Provided it is healthy and active, a sourdough starter is what will make your bread rise.

You can buy one from most online stores or grocery shops.

Ideally, you want to use your starter 4 -12 hours after you feed it or when it doubles (or triples!) in volume after a feeding.

Ingredients

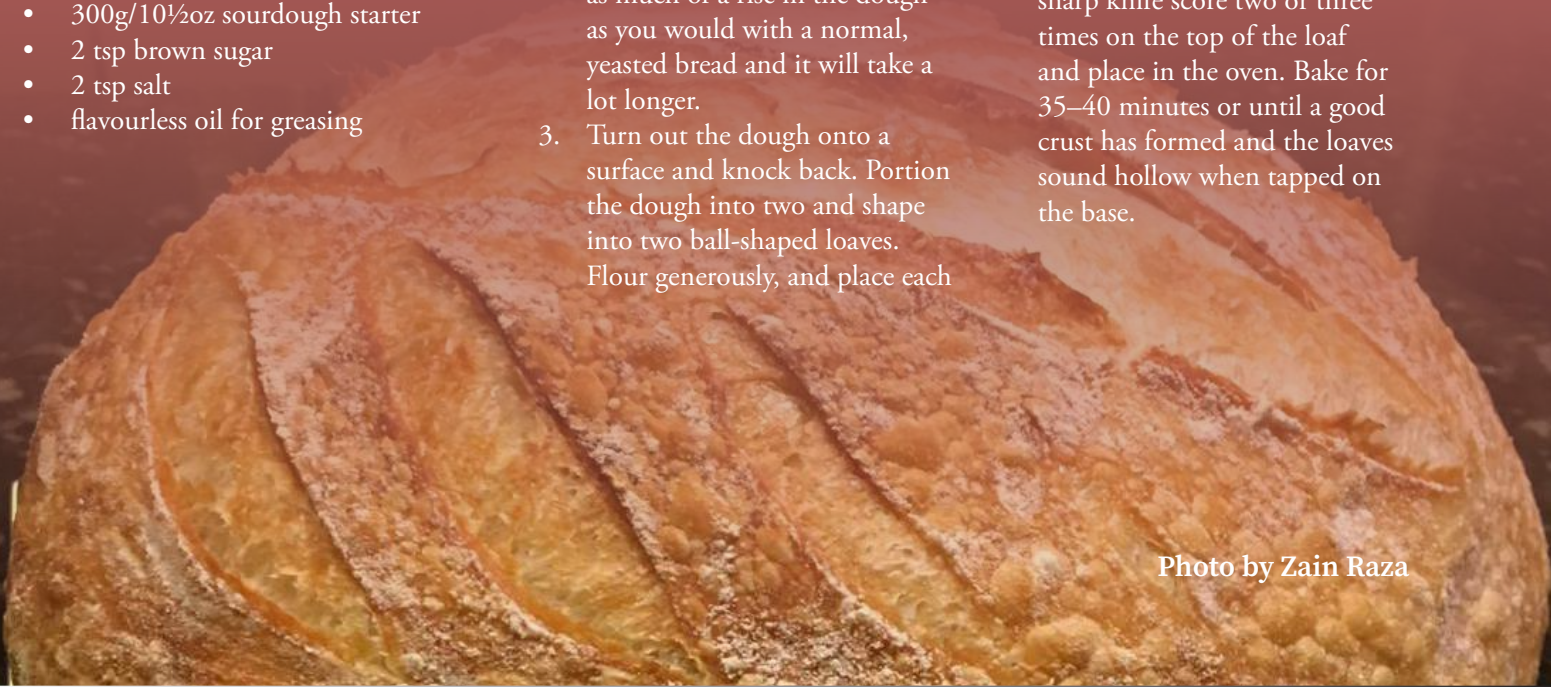
- 500g/1lb 2oz strong unbleached white bread flour, plus extra for dusting
- 300g/10½oz sourdough starter
- 2 tsp brown sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- flavourless oil for greasing

SOURDOUGH BREAD

Method

1. Mix together the flour, sourdough starter and 250ml/9fl oz water in a bowl. Add the sugar and salt. Turn out on to a surface and knead for 10 minutes or until the 'windowpane effect' is achieved (where the dough can be stretched until it is so thin that it becomes transparent).
2. Put the dough into a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a damp teatowel and leave to prove for 2½–3 hours. You won't notice as much of a rise in the dough as you would with a normal, yeasted bread and it will take a lot longer.
3. Turn out the dough onto a surface and knock back. Portion the dough into two and shape into two ball-shaped loaves. Flour generously, and place each loaf seam-side up in a bowl, lined with a couche cloth or a heavily-floured teatowel – without the cloth, your loaf will stick in the bowl and you won't be able to turn it out. Leave to prove for a further 2½ hours.
4. Preheat the oven to 230C/210C Fan/Gas 8. Put a few ice cubes or cold water into a baking tin and place in the bottom of the oven to create steam. Turn the loaves out onto a baking tray or hot baking stone. Using a thin sharp knife score two or three times on the top of the loaf and place in the oven. Bake for 35–40 minutes or until a good crust has formed and the loaves sound hollow when tapped on the base.

Photo by Zain Raza



CHICKEN BUNS

Whole Wheat Buns

- 240ml warm milk
 - 50g sugar
 - 1 packet active dry yeast
 - 125g all-purpose flour
 - 375g whole wheat flour
 - 3 tbsp of melted butter
 - 2 eggs
 - 3/4 tsp of salt
1. Warm the milk in the microwave for around 20 seconds.
 2. Add sugar to milk and mix well.
 3. Then add in the Active Dry Yeast and set aside for 10 minutes. The dough should have “ballooned” by this time and be frothy.
 4. Add 1 cup all-purpose flour and 1 cup whole wheat flour to a bowl, and then add the milk/yeast mixture. Mix with a wooden spoon - not metal, please!
 5. Then add (one) egg, salt, and melted butter.
 6. Add in the other 2 cups of wheat flour and mix well. Now use your hands to knead the dough.
 7. When the dough is slightly sticky, place it in a large greased bowl. Wrap the bowl with plastic wrap. Place a warmed towel over it and place in a dark, dry place for 1 hour to proof.

Spiced Chicken Stuffing

- 3 tbsp oil
 - 1 onion
 - 4 cloves of garlic
 - 1 tsp grated fresh ginger
 - 1lb ground chicken (455g)
 - 1 tsp smoked paprika
 - 1 tsp coriander
 - 1/4 tsp turmeric
 - 1/4 tsp cumin
 - 3 tbsp tomato paste
 - 1/3 tsp salt + 1/3 tsp pepper
 - 1/2 tsp chilli powder (optional)
 - 75 g frozen peas
1. Chop the onion and add it to a pan over a medium flame with the oil.
 2. Sauté onion for about 10 minutes, mixing with a spatula.
 3. Chop the garlic and grate the ginger and add to the onion. Sauté for another 2 minutes.
 4. Push the onion mix to the side of the pan and add in the chicken.
 5. Add the smoked paprika, coriander, cumin, and turmeric and saute until all the liquid from the chicken has evaporated.
 6. Add in the tomato paste and salt and stir well. Add in the pepper and chilli powder if using. Taste the filling and adjust seasonings according to your taste.
 7. Add in the peas, saute another 2 minutes, and set aside to cool a bit.

Assembly

1. When the dough has proofed and has doubled in size, remove the plastic wrap and towel and knock the dough back. Then, split the dough into two.
2. Wrap one part with plastic to keep it moist and spread the other one out using a rolling pin.
3. Use a bowl to cut the dough into circles.
4. Spoon two tablespoons of filling into each circle.
5. Seal the buns by folding, flipping the sides over the filling and pinching them together.
6. Repeat with the second half of the dough.
7. Lay the buns down, with the sealed side on the bottom on a parchment-lined baking tray, repeating until all the dough and filling are used up.
8. Preheat oven to 175 degrees Fahrenheit, place a damp kitchen towel over the stuffed buns and place them in the oven to proof for another 30 minutes.
9. Remove the proofed stuffed buns from the oven; they should look slightly larger.
10. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
11. Beat the remaining egg and brush it over the buns.
12. Sprinkle the buns with sesame seeds and place in the oven for 20-22 minutes, until the buns are cooked and the tops are golden.
13. When the time is up, remove the buns from the oven and enjoy them warm or at room temperature.

Perspective During Exam Season

It's midday and you're stood under the unrelenting, steaming rush of the shower. The sweat of all that hard work and pressure (alongside all the remnants of trashing material and the weird and wonderful bugs of the Cherwell river), slip away effortlessly. It's a day you've been looking forward to endlessly. The stress dissipates as quickly as it had set in. Passing the examinations is another thing, but you've done it! You've sat them, and you're still (barely!) alive, life goes on, and you've garnered yet another achievement that can be placed in your battalion. But how does one get to that point where they feel this way?

To put it simply, it's a combination of discipline laced with gentleness and understanding, as well as trust in Allah SWT that He will make good of your continued efforts and deliver.

A theme that rears its ugly head during examination season is that of control. The waters here become murky quite quickly, and the primary culprit of the muddying is losing sight of how much control we possess in our lives. Whether it be trying to run through every technicality, to feeling so utterly overwhelmed that you cannot fathom how eons of students before you have ever sat these exams and passed, we all experience this tug of war to varying extents. We all sit on

the scale of creating a semblance of control, constructing the perfect façade. Everybody else seems to be doing this too, but we don't happen to recognise it at all.

It's tricky to navigate this. Personally, the faith in Allah SWT that He is in complete control helps. It starts with intention, intimate prayers and a promise to do the very best you can, given your own unique set of circumstances, which can vary wildly from person to person. It's building your self-confidence and self-esteem in your knowledge and capabilities, despite all the previous setbacks or non-binding indications that you are not up to scratch. Time may be seeming to slip away with no signs of slowing down, but the barakah that Allah can bless us with can make mere minutes stretch to moments of experience, understanding and learning.

It's also important to note that this mindset isn't a permanent one. It can oscillate so often, plunging to the deepest depths of feeling inadequate and at a loss, to the highest of zeniths where you think you have a handle on things. Honour the human in the process whilst also remembering that the Best of Planners already has your tapestry woven for you, allowing for changes following sincere supplication to Him.





‘Bridge of Sighs’
in watercolour
by Coral Benfield

So, whilst I think the aforementioned forms the crux of preparing for exams, there are some practical things too which are equally important in placing yourself in the best position for sitting examinations.

- 1 Have a realistic plan of what you will complete and when; this can be extremely useful. I like to create a weekly plan with a list of things that I will delegate amongst the days of the week. This allows me to be flexible with my days and to account for the unexpected calls of life without feeling unsettled at having not completed a certain task on a particular day.
- 2 Identify the times you work best and exploit those times, place the most challenging content for when you are most productive.
- 3 If you have to memorise a lot – Anki, Quizlet, or something of the sort is incredibly helpful!
- 4 Ensure that you schedule regular breaks – around prayer and food are ideal.
- 5 Talk to your peers about things and build a network of support. Your support network can be cross-subject too, and not necessarily limited to those studying the same subject matter as you.
- 6 Have something fun to look forward to – a film, a phone call, a walk - whatever tickles your fancy.
- 7 Look after yourself and do things you enjoy doing amid all the chaos!

Having explored this, a strong foundation of an unwavering belief in oneself set in stone, something I believe to be a cornerstone for success (this being your definition of the word, not that of others). Regardless of the outcome, you can look back with humble pride that you reached your absolute potential and that there was nothing you could have done any better at the time. Be kind to yourself too, which is easier said than done. If things get in the way and you are having an off day, take that day/morning/afternoon off. You are not solely defined by what you study, so indulge your multi-faceted self in the myriad of things that make life rich.

Lamis Hamdi

Small Steps to Stewardship

As we move past Ramadan and reflect on the blessings we have, it is increasingly vital that we assess our relationship with the natural world. Our social environment and spiritual and mental health cannot be divorced from our natural environment, as each affect the other. Life is holistic and whilst separating spiritual wellbeing from physiological and psychological wellbeing can be of use, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) reminds us that “(our) religion *is* social interaction” - it is the holistic sum of what we do in our daily lives.

Modernity, however we wish to define it, has undoubtedly set man apart from nature, both in our philosophical understanding of our place in the order of creation and also physically, in our interactions with our physical environment. Over 77% of the world’s population now lives in urbanised environments. In the UK the figure is 85%. One of the most important features of this separation, is that individually we are now unable to take any meaningful responsibility for our actions. For those following a spiritual path, where we are individually required to act in a morally defensible manner, this is a serious issue. The Quran urges us to act as stewards or *Khulafa* for the Earth and to maintain the natural balance (*Mizan*). Yet in our daily activities, all of us, lay persons, community leaders and religious scholars, are often unable to meet even the basic standards. Unwittingly perhaps, we are all breaking

the sacred law in obtaining our daily bread, in how we construct and heat our homes, in the production of our clothes and our all so important gadgets and our modes of transport.

The Quran repeatedly urges social action, caring for the needy,

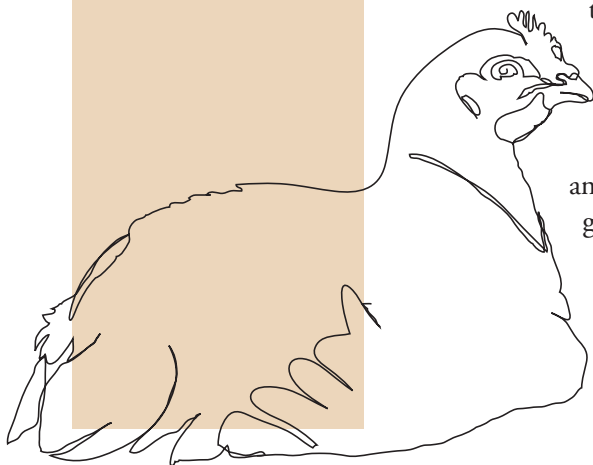
controlling base impulses and living a life of balance. It even warns of the pitfalls of monasticism, that separates us from the trials and tribulations of the real world, where our true mettle should be tested. It is only in the functional interactions of mind, body and spirit, that personal growth occurs.

So how can we encourage spiritual growth? Ramadan provided a space where our routine is upended. Prayer became the primary routine to punctuate our day and we were presented with more time for our private thoughts and reflections. The Quran urges us to strengthen the nexus between contemplation and action and the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) emphasised that “one hour spent in contemplation is better than one year spent in prayer”.

Significantly scholars have always stressed that reflection and contemplation should focus not on the nature of the Creator himself but rather on his signs or *Ayaat* in the natural world around us. Amongst these are the balanced nature of our climatic forces, the water cycle, the health of our oceans and the flora and fauna placed under our supervision. Consideration of the condition of these *Ayaat* and the destruction we wreak upon them should serve as a vital corrective, encouraging us to make meaningful changes in our daily lives.

“Pollution and corruption have appeared on the land and the seas as a result of humankind’s actions in order that they may be given a taste of their own actions and in order that they may turn back (to the right path).”
(30:41)

The role of steward for all creation may seem a heavy responsibility, and indeed it is. However, in practice, God’s will unfolds, even when that is by our own hands. We are only responsible for our own intentions and actions and how we impact those around us



and the world we live in.

Fortunately doing the right thing, in association with friends and family, is a lot more fun and fulfilling than passively accepting what is easy. Although requiring more effort and some sacrifice, the results heal our souls, our societies and our environments. So in a springtime of rebirth and growth, it is important to take stock and embark on positive changes to nurture our individual growth. We need to make an assessment of how 'balanced' our lives truly are and begin to disentangle ourselves from a global system that is built on social injustices and engages in the systematic destruction of our natural environment. We need to recognise the sacred nature of the created world and value our responsibilities of stewardship.

And every journey begins with small steps.

Established on islamic principles of stewardship and responsibility, we seek to farm holistically using natural

methods. Above and beyond the care of our animals and crops, we also seek to address issues of energy use, recycling and waste management. We hope to contribute to the development of an alternative economy, where nature is valued, produce is reared with respect and responsibility is taken for our energy use, our waste and our buildings.

Over the years we have also built all the structures on the farm and have sought to use simple self-build techniques and natural materials. This culminated in the completion of our Earthen (Cob) farmhouse in 2015 which is constructed entirely of natural materials mostly drawn from the farm itself.

We have installed wind and solar power systems on the farm which provide a large proportion of our electricity needs. In addition we have planted over 5,000 trees across the farm offering diverse habitats for a multi layered ecosystem, whilst at the same time providing a sustainably managed source of fuel for our biomass boiler.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr Lutfi Radwan spent the first half of his career as a lecturer and consultant at Oxford, working on soil and water management in arid zones. Subsequently, along with his wife Ruby, they turned their focus to home and in 2002 established Willowbrook Farm, in Oxfordshire, to put their values of responsible stewardship into practice. For more about Willowbrook Farm: www.willowbrookfarm.co.uk



Current Affairs

The theme for this issue's Current Affairs section is 'Understanding' and we were pleased to receive submissions ranging from a dissection of the law industry from a Muslim perspective to articles on understanding the self and understanding of The Other. As always, the views and opinions expressed in this section are only representative of the author.

Your Unique Lens

A friend of mine once asked: ‘How is it so, that many scholars view the same set of objective data across the globe, and yet come to various conclusions?’. Initially, the answer seemed straightforward: ‘They have different perceptions,’ I replied. But then, the more I dwelled on the question, the more intriguing it became.

To begin, we ought to define and limit the scope of the crucial elements. The ‘Unique Lens’ is a metaphor used to highlight the individualistic sense of one’s vision: one’s perception. The three main stages are: to identify the lens that we possess, to accept the lens and recognise where it derives from, and finally, to develop and challenge it.

Identification

Identifying a pre-existing perception that one grows accustomed to is almost as difficult as recognising the rhythm of their heartbeat in mundane life - simply because it resides in the subconscious. The Unique Lens is often challenging to identify, let alone scrutinise. However, it is not impossible. For one to identify their Unique Lens, a moment of separation is crucial - a moment of stepping out of one’s self. Has your Unique Lens incited prejudice against others? Or has it helped you build strong relations? Using these questions and growing aware of one’s Unique Lens will aid in understanding one’s self.

Acceptance

It is hard to interact with what is intangible. In order to actively interact with one’s Unique Lens, it is fundamental to accept its existence. ‘Understanding is, thus, first of all conceived as human experience².’ A social experiment exploring child development in the first year of life, conducted by Rochet and Striano³, emphasised the importance of

active, in-person interactions over passive, external observations. The children who actively engaged with others were more likely to widen their understanding of human interactions, suggesting that the Unique Lens becomes established via what one undergoes, rather than what one actively observes. Thus, accepting the Unique Lens connotes coming to terms with previous and current experiences, whether positive or negative.

Development

‘Although much can be learned from watching people at a distance and not being directly in a social exchange, such learning cannot replace the learning of opportunity provided by shared social experiences³.’

I believe most logical people would agree that a developing child learns more effectively with hands-on experiences rather than hearing about detailed descriptions of how to ride a bike. Yet, one might fail to apply the same principle to adults. Especially in modern society, where the media provides unlimited access to information about the world, we tend to forget that real, hands-on experience is still crucial to our social perception.

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim⁴

If I go back to my friend’s question now, I would answer it differently. I believe that all individuals ought to view new information through their Unique Lens. Through pre-existing knowledge, experiences and ideas, tangent lines are drawn and then developed. It is understandable to cherish and build on the Unique Lens throughout one’s life, not only to increase harmony within local and global communities, but also to refine and perfect our knowledge on internal and external matters.

References:

1. Hilyat al-Awliya’ 10/208
2. Helmstad, G. (1999). Understandings of understanding: An inquiry concerning experiential conditions for developmental learning (Göteborgs studies in educational sciences 134). Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis
3. Philippe Rochat, Tricia Striano, ‘Social-Cognitive Development in the First Year’, 2010, Emory University, Psychology Press, Ch. 1, pp 4-10
4. Sunan Ibn Mājah 224, Grade: Sahih, Hadith

Raqiya Isse



Tawbah:

A Tussle Between Guilt and Shame

If we cast an eye inside ourselves, we find that the world of emotions is a murky one. This world revolves around you yet, at the same time, you may feel as though you are *ghareeb* (a stranger) within it. In what follows, we will trace its terrains to uncover one of its hidden battlefields, found deep below the surface. Hold onto this image; we will return to it.

Every single one of us sins, violating the laws of our protective Lord. When we do so, we transgress against ourselves, and are forced to experience difficult 'emotional' states. Namely, our souls are catapulted into a turmoil that is difficult to make sense of, one which we feel passive – even utterly powerless – to do anything about.

Now, spend a moment reimagining yourself in this state of despair and ask: What could I say to this past version of myself that would be helpful?

For a long time, I found the most intuitive answer to this to be a reminder that 'the doors of repentance are always open'. However, I've come to realise that this response evades the issue entirely and leaves it painfully unresolved. In the same way that we've come to understand that 'cheer up' is a damaging thing someone that's clinically depressed, we must be more careful in the way we talk about *tawbah* (repentance).

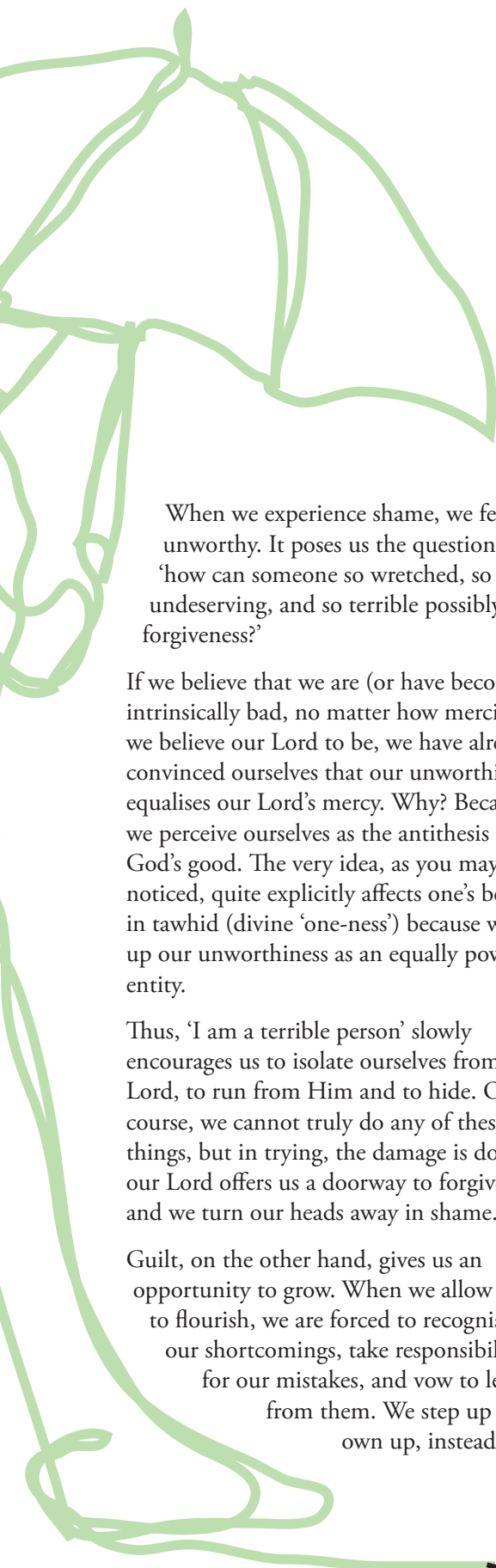
This comparison may raise an eyebrow, so I'll offer a brief justification. In theory, our Lord is the origin of mercy, closer to us than our jugular vein, a Lord that vows to forgive it all if we are only sincere in asking. But recall the memory that you identified earlier and reflect: if the doors of *tawbah* are truly always open, then why does it sometimes feel like they're closed?

The question is potent and pressing because it exposes a contradiction between the

theory of *tawbah* and our lived experience of it. However, the answer that many of us have is a remnant of what we were taught as children: that it's because of shaytan (the devil). Although this is accurate, it is also incomplete and leaves us unconvinced in our adult lives. What we truly seek is an understanding of how we are manipulated into forgetting the forgiveness of our Lord, *al-Ghafoor al-Rabeem* (the Forgiving, the Merciful).

To reach this understanding, I would like to draw your attention to a simple but revolutionary idea: that guilt and shame, often considered synonymous, are two very different emotions, vying for your validation.

When you sin, your guilt tells you 'I did something bad', whereas your shame tells you 'I am bad'. If you sceptically believe that this is nothing more than semantics, please bear with me because this difference has theological and practical consequences.



When we experience shame, we feel unworthy. It poses us the question: 'how can someone so wretched, so undeserving, and so terrible possibly access forgiveness?'

If we believe that we are (or have become) intrinsically bad, no matter how merciful we believe our Lord to be, we have already convinced ourselves that our unworthiness equalises our Lord's mercy. Why? Because we perceive ourselves as the antithesis of God's good. The very idea, as you may have noticed, quite explicitly affects one's belief in tawhid (divine 'one-ness') because we set up our unworthiness as an equally powerful entity.

Thus, 'I am a terrible person' slowly encourages us to isolate ourselves from our Lord, to run from Him and to hide. Of course, we cannot truly do any of these things, but in trying, the damage is done: our Lord offers us a doorway to forgiveness and we turn our heads away in shame.

Guilt, on the other hand, gives us an opportunity to grow. When we allow it to flourish, we are forced to recognise our shortcomings, take responsibility for our mistakes, and vow to learn from them. We step up and own up, instead of

cowering away behind a perceived sense of unworthiness. In doing so, we remove the self-imposed barriers between ourselves and our Lord, and He embraces us in His mercy.

By choosing guilt over shame, we recognise the concept of the fitrah (intrinsic goodness) and reject the doctrine of 'The Original Sin' that we may have picked up from Christian theologies. From an Islamic perspective, humans are perpetually guilty about all sorts of sins, but (while we still live and make choices) we never become intrinsically bad.

I stress this point repeatedly because it is particularly significant in the context of addictions – compulsive sins that we repeat so often that they become second nature to us. So, let us now return to the murky world of our emotional states and observe this battlefield from afar:

Shame tells you to hide; guilt tells you to show up.

Shame tells you to isolate yourself; guilt pushes you to seek help.

Shame fuels your addiction; guilt is your way out.

At each moment, you have to pick a side. Which are you choosing?

I end with a saying attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) on the need to know the world within:

من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه

He who knows himself knows his Lord

Ibrahim Hariri

Further reading:

Daring Greatly (Dr Brene Brown)



Navigating Law

Law is an industry known for its selective nature, exclusive to those from privileged backgrounds. While there has been a significant shift in the demographic of lawyers, there is still much to be done to widen access to the industry and level the playing field. Increasing accessibility to the profession is one step, but reaching equal representation of all backgrounds is a goal yet to be achieved.

Challenges to entry into the legal profession are many; one of the biggest concerns is the prevailing drinking culture, alienating Muslim students disproportionately. A further barrier is the significant underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups. Bilkis Mahmood, Senior Partner at Blackstone Law, highlighted the move towards diversity and inclusion policies is insufficient: 'there is still a bottleneck, very few people are actually appointed, a firm belief that law is a traditionally male white orientated profession'. The 2019 Solicitors Regulation Authority report highlighted that 21% of lawyers attended a fee-paying school (3 times the UK average), while 51% had a parent with a degree-level qualification. These statistics illustrate that the industry is still dominated by those who receive high quality education and have access to support from within their homes, accentuating the importance of advice and guidance from people in the industry.

Firms within the legal industry have welcomed the diversity and inclusion discussion. Recruitment teams are adapting their hiring approaches to increase the diversity of their workforce. Despite this, a survey concluded that ethnic minorities make up 22.9% of all pupil barristers, 15% of all practising barristers and only 8% of QCs. This demonstrated that while there is a more diverse intake at the entry level, the top end of the profession is scarcely diverse. Hence, the existing perception is that the bar is a closed profession, as chambers do not have large recruitment teams

undertaking a comprehensive analysis of unconscious biases. As a result, those from disadvantaged backgrounds feel distant and unwelcome. Justice Tanweer Ikram is one of few Muslim judges who has successfully entered the industry. Leading on recruitment, he now utilises his position to write selection exercises on new judges within his jurisdiction, aiming to level the playing field. In a Law Links Conference, he stated, 'There has to be justice in who becomes judges, as justice has to be served everywhere.'

An interesting perspective raised by Ashar Qureshi, Partner at Fried Frank, argues that many recruiters do not fully understand the conversation of racial equity. Equality of initial access isn't the only issue; the challenge is retention and ensuring career development happens, particularly in certain groups, such as female Muslim lawyers. Habibunnisha Patel, General Counsel of Save the Children UK agrees, asserting that there needs to be greater emphasis on career progression as the numbers dwindle further up the industry ranks. This can be achieved through facilitating access to good mentors and sponsors. She also advises that ethnic minority students should be self-aware of their intersectionality and what values are important to them.

Thus, through confidence and embracing their identity, aspiring Muslim lawyers can look forward to the time where their candidacy is taken at face value and not solely based on others expectations, nor granted consideration on account of diversity quotas and initiatives. There is a pressing need to reach a stage whereby it is the norm that religion, race, ethnicity or background are no longer reasons preventing access to the industry. We can achieve this goal if we are true to our morals and unapologetic in our religious matters. The priority we give to our own beliefs will only enhance the respect given to what is most important.

Humairaa Patel

Understanding the East in the West

Understanding the Other is a founding tenet of Islam. The Other is quite an ambiguous term - here, that is quite useful. An understanding between the Muhajirun (Muslims arriving in Madinah) and the local Jewish tribes led to the formation of the Constitution of Madinah and the City-State of Madinah. Understanding the religious Other is not the only important thing; understanding the ethnic Other is crucial also. We see this with Bilal (RA); he achieved his high status despite the many difficulties he faced due to his slave status and dark skin. However, truly understanding and embracing the Other cannot come at the expense of the Islamic principles by which we live our lives, a tradeoff that is often an issue for Muslims like ourselves living in the West.

Understanding and accepting the Other is a complex topic, but it begins with our own thoughts. We must accept the Other as they are and learn about how and why they live their lives in a particular way. Empathy is necessary to achieve such understanding and begins with the development of what psychologists term "Theory of Mind" - the comprehension of another individual's emotional state, a concept closely linked to empathy. Of course, this does not compare to experiencing the difficulties faced by another group first-hand, but this goes some way towards understanding the Other. Often we take little notice of the significance of the differences between ourselves and the Other, but this comes with our own emotional maturation and studying the history of other groups of people.

Throughout history, we have seen attempts to accept the Other with varying degrees of success. However, we have also seen situations where people have left their Islamic principles in order to be accepted and to accept others. Indeed, embracing the Other is something we know to be virtuous.

In 1492, when Jews (and Muslims) were exiled from Spain, the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II accepted the exiled Sephardic Jews as his own subjects. The recognition of these people's skills over the native Muslim, Ottoman subjects and their introduction into the Ottoman administration helped it continue to prosper. This acceptance did not come to a change in the way these people lived their lives. They stuck to their general Islamic principles and did not adopt their ideas on a society-wide level. However, the later Tanzimat Era led to the adoption of western ideals throughout Ottoman society; it was during this time in which later secular Turkish leaders like Atatürk grew up.

During the late 19th and early 20th Century, the UK was the global superpower; their colonial subjects became forced to accept western values; in many cases, at the expense of their own. Their Muslim citizens, including those in British India, faced similar challenges to ourselves, accepting Western values whilst also maintaining Islamic traditions. Allama Iqbal's poetry exemplifies his disappointment at the loss of Islamic values he saw in society at the time. In his poem "To a Young Man," he describes how his "eyes weep blood" as he saw people seeking "the contentment of Sulayman" in the "glitter of today's civilisation," even though contentment can only be found in our Imaan. Whilst we, living in the West, must embrace some of its values, we must not hold too tightly to this world. Fundamental to our faith is that this world is only temporary, we leave this dunya with none of the material things we have accumulated, only with our good deeds - we must continue to hold steadfast to our Imaan.

Bilal Qureshi



On Pigeons & the Perils of the Golden Rule

Sitting on the droppings-stained steps of the Martyrs' Memorial at the intersection of St Giles', Beaumont Street and Magdalen Street, I eyed a few pigeons below pecking at what looked to be the remains of some chicken wings. Something made my stomach turn to see those birds picking at leftover flesh on fragile chicken bones not unlike the skeletons supporting the movements of their own agile, lively wings. Instinctively, I held my fingers tighter around the Najar's wrap I was eating, lest any cubes of succulent chicken tikka would fall over and add to the feast. My first, rather naïve, unscientific thought then was: is it cannibalism for a pigeon to eat chicken? It was my gut instinct that something felt wrong, and immediately I had only pity for these creatures: forced by urban life to forage among food waste left by careless people, straying from their natures when they should be feeding on seeds and fruits in the wild instead, or at most, insects. Gradually though, another thought occurred

“How often do we, when dealing with other human beings, self-righteously project our own thoughts, feelings and values on them, and use them as a basis for moral decisions?”

to me: was I perhaps anthropomorphising these animals? Was I misguidedly attributing too much human emotion to beings who should know better themselves, following the instincts that they were born with?

At once, I was confronted with the absolute incomprehensibility of the Other. Let's not

even talk about animals – how often do we, when dealing with other human beings, self-righteously project our own thoughts, feelings and values, and use them as a basis for moral decisions? How can we even begin to understand another, with the gulf of differences, whether in terms of race, religion, language, nationality, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, family history or life experience, that separates us? Time and time again, diverse faith traditions and cultures have converged on some permutation of the Golden Rule as a guide to ethical behaviour, which in one antiquated formulation reads ‘Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you’. Yet, that assumes ‘they’ want to be treated the same way as we do, and it privileges the similarities we think we share with another party, but, well-meaning as we may be, we might inadvertently erase or override the inalienable differences that make the Other a unique individual in their own right in our attempt to create some reciprocity or mutuality.

My mind harked back briefly to a philosophy program in school, when I was first introduced to the ethical thought of the 20th century Lithuanian Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas¹. For Levinas, who had lived through the Holocaust, the Europe of the Enlightenment which had placed



reason and rationality on a pedestal was the same that had engineered the Nazi death camps. It was this system of ethics which assumed similarities between two parties that enabled a conditional system of morality premised on sameness, one that, taken to its extreme, just as easily relegated the Other to the status of non-human beings when they did not apparently share the traits of the Self in question. Thus, entire categories of people were seen as vermin, or somehow less than human, the same way colonial European

nations could countenance the exploitation of natives in their colonies, who were perceived as less deserving of human rights because they did not fit in with certain notions of what a “rational” human being might be, even while championing liberty, equality and fraternity on home ground, or why women had been denied suffrage for so long in so many societies. Levinas’ challenge to us is to create an ethics based on difference, one in which our actions unconditionally respect an individual’s radical otherness

without reducing them to something we can understand or claiming that we know about them and how they want to be treated.

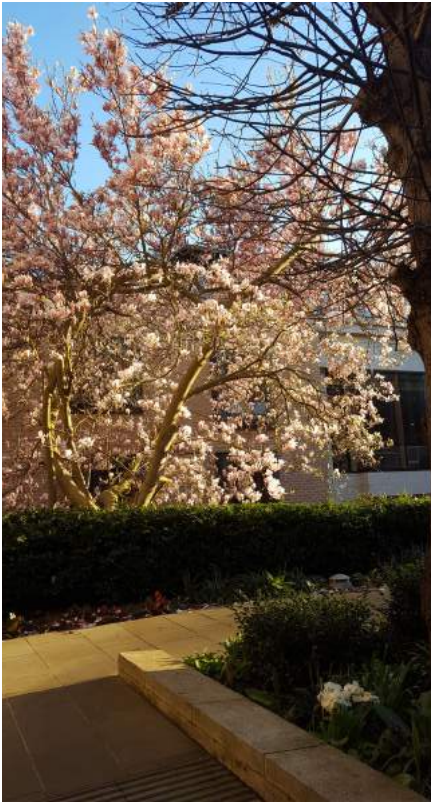
While sitting on the steps of the Martyrs’ Memorial, I was reminded not just of pigeons and how I should never presume to understand them, but that the very Memorial on which I was perched greedily gobbling my lunch was erected to the memory of men who had been burnt for their faith in centuries past by the religious intolerance of regimes which failed to comprehend the fundamental otherness of human beings in their zeal to uphold what they thought was right and good.

**Muhammad Hameem
Bin Sheik Alaudin**

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1. The following overview of Levinas’ ideas is based on my encounter with them from my philosophy lessons, and my own subsequent interpretations, as I have not had the chance to study his works directly, so it should not be endorsed as a rigorous representation of his ethical thought but rather only what I understand of it.



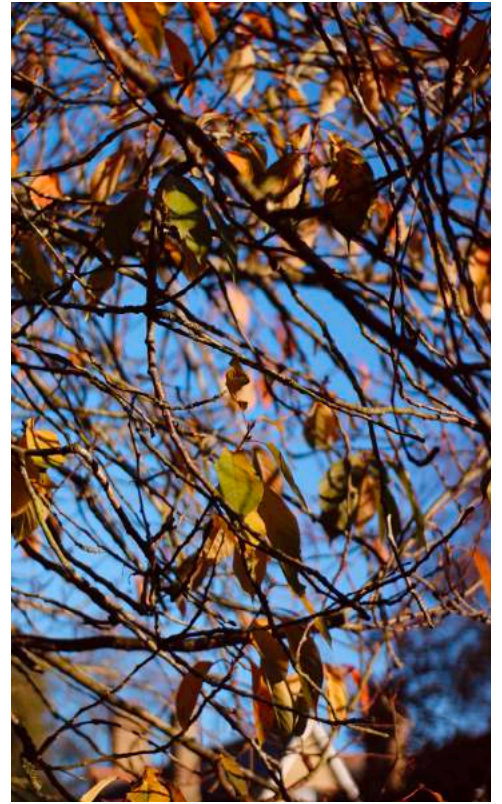
Community Works



Magnolia in Pembroke
Rashma Rahman, Pembroke College



A Traditional Turkish Lamp
Muaz Nawaz, St Hugh's College



Autumn at Hugh's



Magdalen River



Port Meadow



Minhaj Rahman, St John's College



Souldust

Zuhaira Deen

The stranger arrived at my tombstone
And place upon it a withered rose
He wept profusely, without teardrop
Weeping only in confused memory

He recalled not the countless hours
Spent upon the sanctity of my throne
Transparent walls rising round us
Intertwining both of our souls

Gifting me with flowers; my namesake
Admiring them in peaceful silence
Chasing the stars, struggling to keep pace
My chest rose and fell, a final instance



Hibah Hassan,
Harris Manchester College



Botanic Gardens



Radcam



Ameerah Latif,
St Hilda's College



Fatemah Akbarpoor,
Magdalen College



Return

Rohan Kaya

Only he knew,
Not He, but he, another
Who obeying our *khashā'a**,
We title our Moulana

In the light of Shams
He gladly bathed
Yet his great pleasure
Was soon unmade

For he who clings to
The idea of a lover
Belong seven-times over
To an even greater Lover

As such, returned Shams
Leaving Urmia all grey
And Moulana in despair
In the depths of day

But when rose a red moon
His pain was subdued
He spoke: inna ilayhi raji'un
And his mourning was through

And this is why he tells us
To gladly, freely suffer
For only through such pain
Will we know our real Lover

With soul shot through,
Heartbroken, inchoate
Moulana's only option
Was learn his greater Fate

This is it, how growth begins
For each lamentation, every dolorous holler
We breathe, and speak three syllables
Ey Khoda, Ojalá, Ya Allah!

Each step Moulana took
Inching closer in his pain
Brought him ever closer
To his Beloved's Name

And this is why we suffer
Live through our aches and pains
For even when we stray the path
We will return again

**khashā'a*: being open to learning; the act of abandoning pride and arrogance



A Painting



A Creepy Eye

Aisha Sadiq, Brasenose College



Boo but with an M



Mam Tor

Taslina Sheikh, Corpus Christi



The View From My Window
Rhidwaanah Khanom, Pembroke College



The Golden Hour
Mahira Muhsanat, St John's College

Growing Sleepy

Siddiq Islam

Dare I recline?
I grow much too sleepy
And human design
Is too weak to keep me
From downwardly drifting
To dreams buried deep,
The loads of life lifting
In velvety sleep.

Dare I lie down?
My dark eyes are sinking
And temptations drown
My weaker-willed thinking.
Succumbing to slumber,
My soft, calm mistake.
I must not plunge under.
I must stay awake.



Aisha Rasul, St Hugh's College



Oxonian Backyards



Fariha Uddin, Keble College



London Developments



Blue Skies
Beheshta Harghandiwal, Magdalen College

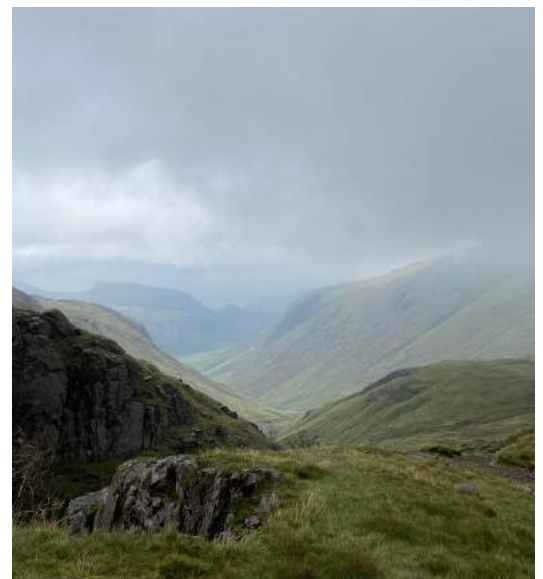


Groot
Amirah Shaikh, Mansfield College

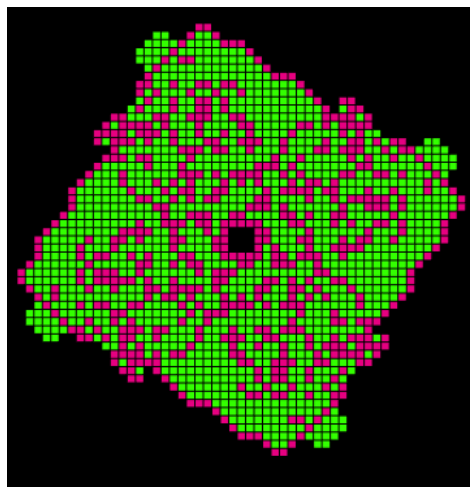
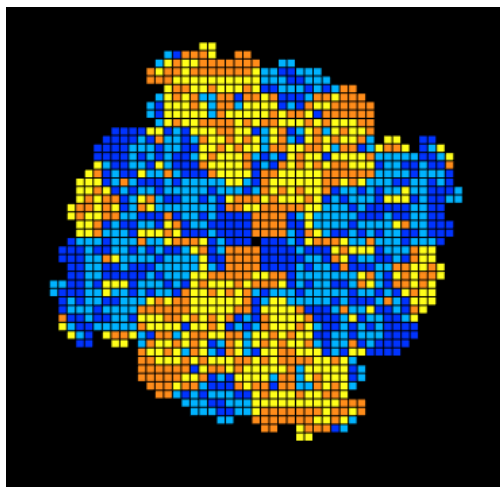


Looking Onto The Distant Knife's Edge

Mehrin Abedin, Worcester College



Mam Tor



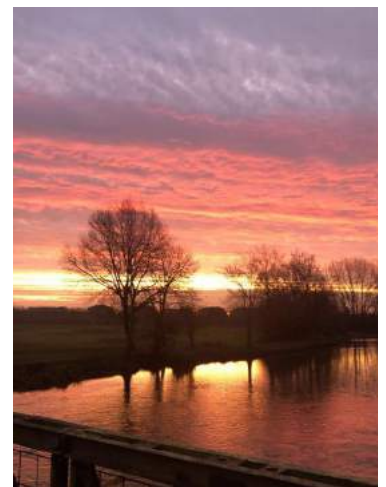
Langton's Ant

This is Langton's Ant, a cellular automaton that follows simple rules but can generate fascinating patterns which grow and spread over time. The ant will turn right or left depending on the colour of the square it is standing on. It will then change the square's colour and move onto the next square.

I have created these patterns by coding multiple ants using MATLAB, the coding language we learn in the Oxford Maths course. I placed them in symmetrical arrangements and applied different colours, and these are the results.

Siddiq Islam, Oriel College

Scan the QR code to watch these patterns grow in real time!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQgax-DEfLyY>



Rafiah Niha, Magdalen College



Aaliyah Musa, Jesus College



Research Showcase

As mentioned in the Editor's Letter, the 'Research Showcase' section of the Magazine builds from the 'Student Research Projects' section of the previous issue - we're hoping that this section has something for everyone, while still serving as an insight into academia for those interested.

Andalusian Farming: Our Relationship with Nature

Having worked in environmental management for a few years, I started seeing that most of the debates around sustainability which I had been part of reached similar stalemates. I felt that there was too much of a focus on technology-based solutions and an assumption that nature was an intact whole, external to human settlements, cities, towns, and villages, as if it somehow existed on a continent on its own. I was very attracted to alternative ways of conceiving of nature and its relationship to humans and decided to look to the past for inspiration.

The importance of the relationship between humans and nature to the question of sustainability can seem minimal, but I argue that it is central to our current environmental crisis. The current state of 'unsustainability' which we are living in is due to a way of doing things. Our current technology is not the only possible technology which could have emerged from history, it is very tied to the circumstances in which it was developed. The Industrial Revolution, to cite one, reflects a particular worldview and relationship with nature, one of nature as resources waiting to be exploited, and one of no planetary boundaries. Such a worldview, it can be argued, is conducive to technologies which are unsustainable by design. Thus, to avoid being stuck in the same mindset which has led us to the environmental crisis in the first place, humanity needs to step back and reform its relationship with nature to one based on values of stewardship: a devotional management of nature for otherworldly purposes.

Throughout my time learning about permaculture and spending time with Muslims interested in it, the time of al-Andalus kept coming up in conversation as a time of high agricultural success and innovation. Andalusian farmers had managed to grow a variety of crops in a semi-arid climate, thanks to a combination of water-harvesting, irrigation, and fertility management techniques. Although very different to permaculture in essence, I was interested in Andalusian farming not for its techniques, but for the kind of relationship it would have created between humans and nature.

The refinement of the science of *Filaha* (agriculture) which took place in al-Andalus was not only a culmination of efforts to revive an ancient knowledge passed on from the Greeks and the Islamic East, but also the creation of a 'homely' landscape, increasing the productivity of a land which was mostly arid and could not support a big population of humans. Big cities such as Cordoba and Seville, and whole regions were reliant on a stable and predictable output from the farms and estates. It was a labour-intensive landscaping effort to negotiate permanence on this newfound land, a medieval conception of sustainability. I think this conception would be very refreshing to the discussions on Islamic environmentalism, and the creation of a new narrative to accompany environmental change in general. I hope to be able to deliver insights on it at the end of my DPhil.

Maximality, Maths, and Metaphors

For an object existing in d dimensions, it has d independent ways to describe it. For example, in addition to the three spatial dimensions and the temporal dimension, we can also include more exotic ones such as “temperature” and “colour”. We can also ask this object questions about where it is on these dimensions, like “Is your hair colour (in RGB) equal parts red, green and blue?”. My research tries to find a set of multiple-choice questions for this object such that answers for one question give no hints to any other (i.e. they are pairwise unbiased.). Each question must have d choices, and we try to find the maximum number that n could be. We know that n cannot be greater than $d+1$.

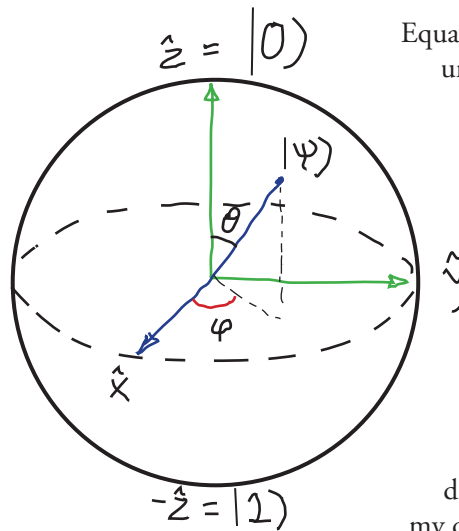
I am publishing, alongside two coauthors miles more brilliant than I, a research paper in the Journal of Quantum Information and Computation; a précis of which I offer below:

In dimensions of prime power, maximal sets of pairwise unbiased questions have already been found ($n=d+1$). Six is the smallest dimension not of prime power, the size of its maximal set remains unsolved. The best result is $n=3$, and there exists a conjecture that $n=4$ sets are impossible. There are an infinite number of potential questions, so exhaustive searches have been impossible over 10+ years. In the paper, we introduce a novel method to consider only special kinds of questions (they represent infinite classes of other questions). Although we could not find an $n=4$ set, we were still able to make an incomplete extra question, having four choices rather than six. As the prior assumption was that incomplete questions were impossible, this method should now lead to even more interesting results.

In quantum theoretic terms, we search for a family of orthonormal bases in a Hilbert space such that the inner product of vectors from two different bases is constant. This is our only instantiation of such

terminology here, but details are available under the title of mutually unbiased bases.

The motivation begins philosophically: there is no reason, a priori, why objects behave well in prime-power dimensions but not composite ones. Although these dimensions possess nice properties when seen via the lens of number theory, the conjecture that this extends to quantum information is unconvincing. Even so, I was alone among my coauthors in having optimism for disproving the longstanding conjecture - this waxed and waned until it was eventually extinguished upon the pre-print release.



Equations governing the pairwise unbiased questions were totally intractable, so the first few months of the project were to get familiar with 1) our nascent approach of representative questions, and 2) a computational algebra language to implement the approach. Only after this were we autonomous in pursuing any research direction we wished - with the proviso of daily Skype calls (the highlight of my day).

If maths is an edifice, research is appearance into a room unlit: armed with just the sense of touch and the toolbox of experience, you try to create a mental map of the environment. Objects are turned over and experimented with so they may be discerned, and only once you have it all do you find the light switch, fully appreciating how everything fits together. Other than sating curiosity and seeking beauty, there is no other motive here; this type of research is the most selfish endeavour one could do. If you are fortunate, you will happen upon an enigma: we discovered a pattern within the special questions where there should be neither reason, rhythm, nor rhyme. These mysteries could be shadows of a room above - currently unnavigable and hitherto undocumented - the perfect direction to chase next.

Cancer: When Growth Goes Wrong

We usually think of growth as a good thing. But can growth ever be bad? Certainly, when it comes to cancer!

The process of growth in our body is very tightly regulated. If it didn't, you would wake up taller every day! In cancer, normal cells in the body acquire changes that dysregulate these control mechanisms, giving the cells the ability to divide in an uncontrolled manner. This leads to the formation of a mass of uncontrollably dividing cells, which essentially is the lump or "tumour" associated with cancer.

Conventional cancer therapy includes surgery or chemotherapy which targets all rapidly dividing cells in the body. This includes cancer cells but also normal cells leading to a multitude of side effects. A better way to treat cancer is through 'targeted therapy'. This entails targeting specific changes such as genetic mutations or overactive enzymes that are only present in cancer cells and not in normal cells. These treatments are more effective and have fewer side effects.

So what exactly is the hindrance to 'finding the cure' for cancer? A common misconception is that there is one miracle cure to cancer that we still haven't found yet.

Or that there is no cure to cancer which is also not true. Many cancers have a very high cure rate. The challenge is that while this process of 'uncontrolled

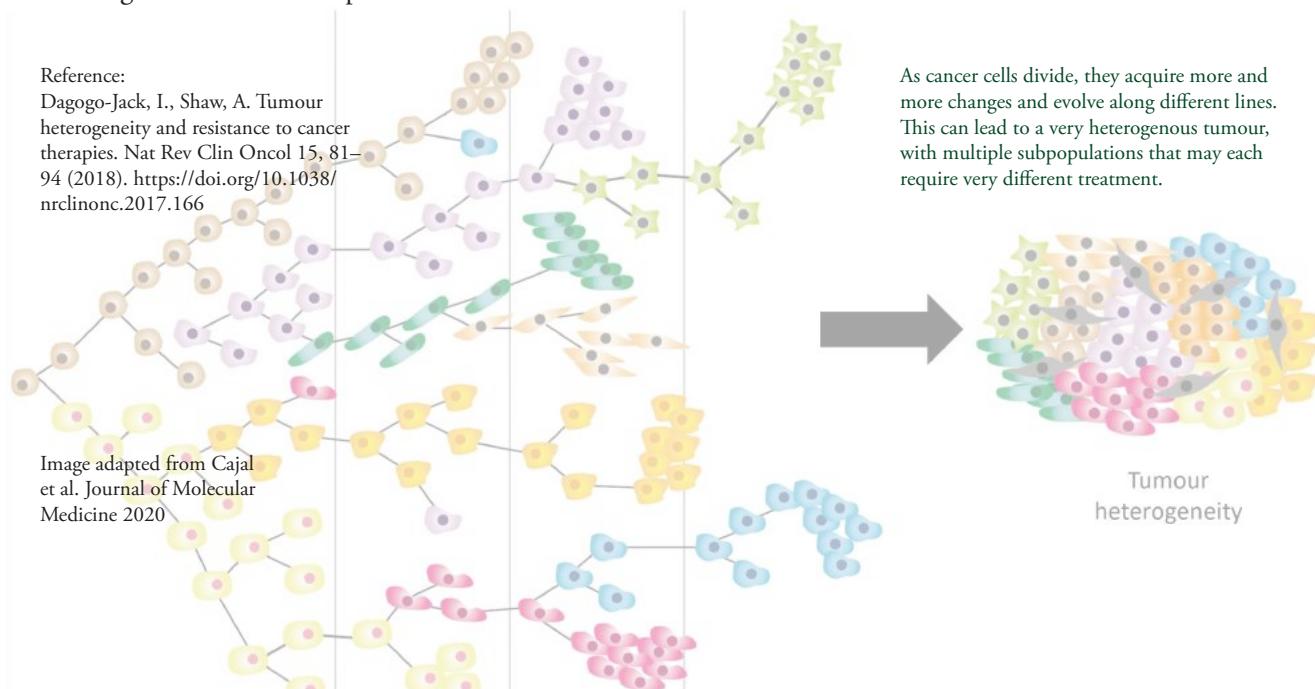
growth' is the basic feature of all cancers, every cancer type is still very different. Given that any cell in your body can turn cancerous – that is already over 100 types of different cancers because of the different cell types in your body. Not only this, there are hundreds of thousands of different ways a cell can acquire the changes that make it cancerous.

If there are so many ways to acquire cancerous properties, if we are to treat them in a targeted manner, we would need almost as many types of treatment. That in itself is extremely challenging, but the problem doesn't stop there! What makes it even more challenging is the problem of 'intra-tumour heterogeneity'¹. What researchers have found is that as cancer cells divide, they continue to acquire changes and evolve along different lines. Thus, every cell has the potential to form its own subpopulation within a tumour type. So, when you look at one tumour mass, you don't just see only one type of cell, but many types, each requiring their own treatment! A drug that is effective against one subpopulation might not kill off other cells—the problem of resistance. Even if a single cell with the ability to divide uncontrollably remains, it could give rise to a whole new tumour in a few months or years –the problem of recurrence. These are just some of the challenges facing cancer researchers. The more we study cancer, the more we realize how complex and challenging it is. Now that's a problem that keeps growing!

Reference:

Dagogo-Jack, I., Shaw, A. Tumour heterogeneity and resistance to cancer therapies. *Nat Rev Clin Oncol* 15, 81–94 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrclinonc.2017.166>

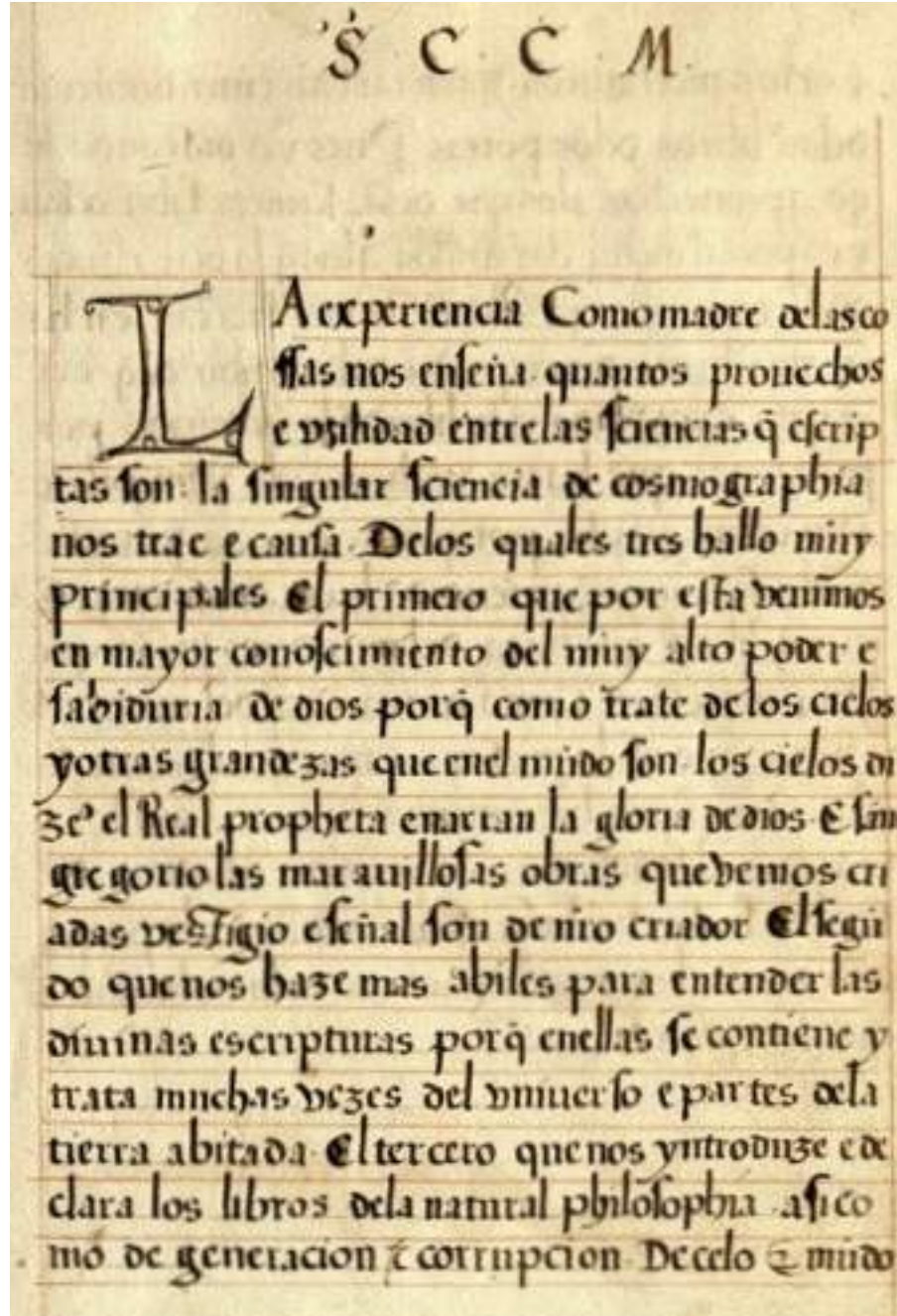
Image adapted from Cajal et al. *Journal of Molecular Medicine* 2020



Expanding the Na

The Weston Library at the University of Oxford is home to a variety of fascinating manuscripts including MS. Canon. Ital. 243 or acclaimed Spanish cosmographer, Pedro de Medina's (1493-1567) *Libro de cosmographia* (1538)/*Guide to Cosmography*. As a branch of knowledge, cosmography comprised the study of the natural world and encompassed what would eventually become astronomy, meteorology, chronology, and geography. To borrow from historian of science, Maria Portuondo, in 16th century Spain, cosmography was a "secret science" or imperial secret due to its inextricable ties to vulnerable Spanish territories in the New World and so work published in the field was heavily censored and rarely promulgated in printed form. As a result, manuscripts like Medina's were the most important vehicles of 16th-century Spanish scientific knowledge.

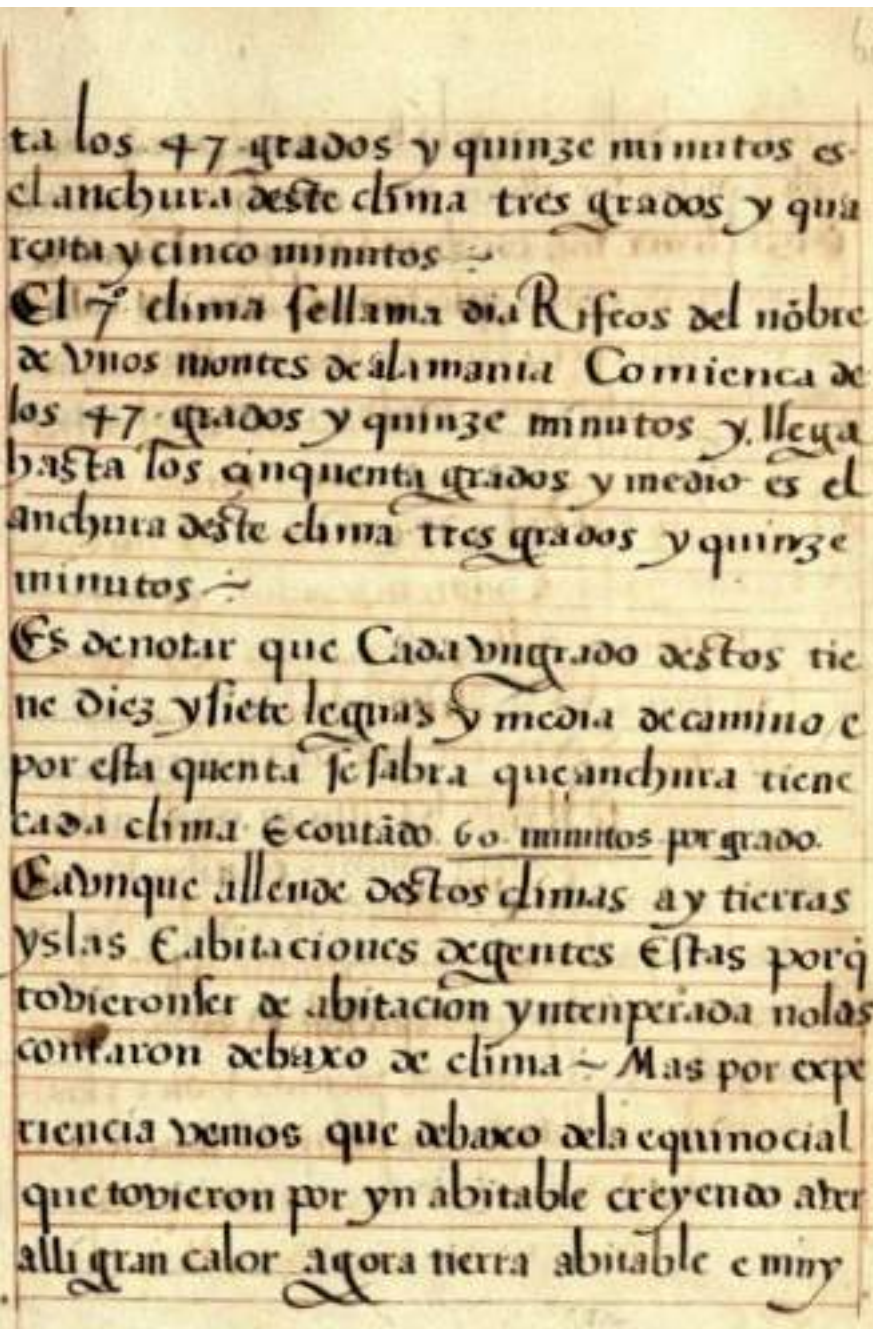
The first and last time Medina's manuscript was taken as a serious object of study was in 1972 after historian Ursula Lamb printed a black-and-white, facsimile edition and English translation of it, entitled *A Navigator's Universe*, to largely negative critical reception. Critics, and even Lamb herself, were convinced that the manuscript was wholly medieval in its view of the universe and ignored how the discovery of the New World challenged classical models. This retrograde understanding of the manuscript follows centuries of what historians of science refer to as the



MS. Canon. Ital. 243 fol 6r: "Experience as Mother of All Things"

"polemic of Spanish science" or the view of Early Modern Spanish science as backwards or inferior to its "modern" European counterparts because of 17th century skepticism towards the Copernican Revolution. As historians of Iberian

vigator's Universe



MS. Canon. Ital. 243 fol 64r: "Torrid Zone"

science such as Juan Pimentel have already noted, it is unfair to compare the height of European science to the decline of Spanish science in the 17th century. Moreover, as I set out to prove through a digital intertextual edition

of the manuscript, 16th century Spanish scientific manuscripts like Medina's were more "modern" than critics gave them credit for.

My digital edition of the manuscript integrates a coloured facsimile side-by-side with a modernized XML transcription with hyperlinks that explicate Medina's numerous overlooked modifications to classical/medieval texts. It shows how Medina used the idea of "experiencia" or experience to work outside the scope or authority of the classics. Rather than directly contradict Aristotle, Sacrobosco, or Ptolemy, Medina's cosmography borrows concepts from their works and corrects their applications. Medina's corrections draw from his contemporaries' "experiencia," or knowledge of the newly-conquered Indies, and appears to be a precursor to the later 17th century understanding of the term as it relates to empirics. This challenges the manuscript's critical reception by illustrating both that its adherence to classical models is not purely medieval and that as early as 1538, Spanish scientific texts had begun to valorize experience as a metric for science— an often-cited hallmark of scientific modernity. It also suggests that manuscripts dated earlier than the *Relaciones geográficas* (1579-1585) conventionally used in Early Modern Spanish and Renaissance History to mark the advent of a more empirical science can provide insight that allows us to move beyond the "polemic of Spanish science" towards more diverse perspectives of scientific modernity.



Alumni

The growth of our community would not be possible without the contributions of former members. Alhamdulillah, in this issue, we're hearing from two former students. Muhammad Meki, Sultan Hassanah Bolkihah Fellow in Islamic Finance at OCIS, reflects on his career journey and offers his advice for those interested in pursuing a career in academia. Our second alumni article is by Younes Saidani, former president of ISoc, who has written a piece on what growth truly means for our community.

Reflections on Academia

As we reach the end of another academic year, the topic of career growth inevitably emerges. Some students may be considering a career in finance, economics, or development, so it might be useful to share some of my personal experiences having worked in these fields in academia (with the usual caveat that this is my unique personal experience; others may have had different experiences and advice).

I remember enjoying reading about finance and economic development, and academia appealed to me as a way of combining those interests and developing an independent research agenda at the intersection of these two fields. I recently read an interesting piece of advice on the challenges for those making the jump to academia; students interested in academia often enjoy consuming research, but the process of producing research can be a bit of a shock (and much less exciting than anticipated!). In economics, it often takes a few years to get a paper published (with very low acceptance rates at top journals), and the research itself may have taken years to complete. This can be a frustrating process, requiring patience and 'portfolio diversification' through pursuing multiple projects with various co-authors. For example, I submitted one of my DPhil chapters to a journal in November 2019, and I am still in the process of revising the article and waiting for feedback as of May 2021 - a typical experience for many researchers. The expression 'publish or perish' comes to mind, and there is some truth in that, which prospective academics should consider.

Along with my talented collaborators, I am experimenting with new microfinance models to help finance investments for low-income entrepreneurs in developing countries.

We currently have projects in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Kenya, and I have enjoyed conducting multiple visits and learning about these fascinating countries and their people. Academics often attend many conferences throughout the year to present their work, and this provides a wonderful opportunity to experience new places that one may not otherwise visit. Moreover, one of the greatest privileges of being in academia is engaging with young students; I often find myself being challenged by their fresh perspectives and thought-provoking questions, which help me in my own development and understanding of my subject.

To wrap up my reflections on pursuing an academic career, my initial impressions are that it helps to be self-motivated and disciplined when managing one's time and multiple projects, teaching responsibilities and administrative work, all while trying to maintain a healthy(ish!) work-life balance. A large dose of patience is crucial in the face of pressure to publish and long publication times. It can also help to be entrepreneurial in seeking out new opportunities for funding and collaboration. Finally, do not think of teaching as a burden – it can be a very fulfilling experience that helps others and not, as some academics see it, an unwelcome distraction from the 'main business' of research.

Muhammad Meki



Muhammad Meki completed an MSc in Economics for Development at St Peter's College, after which he did a DPhil in Economics at St John's College. He served as OUISoc Treasurer (2014 - 2015) and was Alumni Officer (2016 - 2017). Currently, he holds a joint position between the Department of International Development and the Centre for Islamic Studies.



A Flourishing Community

“Hold fast to God’s rope all together; do not split into factions. Remember God’s favour to you: you were enemies and then **He brought your hearts together** and you became brothers by His grace...”
(3:103)

Scan the QR code to learn about the OUISoc History Project:



<https://ouisoc.org/history-project>

Only those who have experienced a toxic environment - full of infighting, fake courtesy, and unempathetic selfishness - can truly understand how valuable a healthy community is. Without it, fulfilling our purpose through worship and personal development is extremely difficult. Such a community, modelled after the Prophetic example, is not made in a day – it is hard to establish and easy to lose. The culture that has developed over the last few years in ISoc gave me a glimmer of what living in Madinah must have been like. Growth, for ISoc, then means to maintain and refine this culture, to create strong bonds of unity between our hearts. That is a continual struggle, and only possible if each Muslim student genuinely cares.

The ISoc has indeed expanded significantly in size and capacity since I came to Oxford in 2014. 2016 was the first year that we organised Taraweeh in the Prayer Room. OMAC started in 2018, the same year that the first Muslim Research Conference took place, and many other small and big events have become regular fixtures on our termcard – to the extent that, as far as I am aware, ISoc is more active than any student society apart from the Oxford Union. At the same time, with the expansion of the committee from 12 to 19 roles in 2016, the Society has become more professional in its organisation, at times resembling a small start-up in its managerial approach and logistical capabilities.

While it is beautiful and inspiring to see ISoc expand, that is neither its primary aim nor its biggest achievement. Events are only a means to a higher goal: establishing and

maintaining a community that is not just a safe social space for Muslims, but an actual ‘Islamic community’ in substance. This, I believe, is the underlying aim behind all committee meetings, newsletters, and room bookings. It is also the single most powerful experience we can take with us after leaving university, one that may shape us for our entire lives.

God says in His book: **“Hold fast to God’s rope all together; do not split into factions. Remember God’s favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace...”** (3:103).

And the Prophet ﷺ said: **“O people, spread peace, feed the hungry, and pray at night when people are sleeping and you will enter Paradise in peace”** (Sunan Ibn Majah).

It is this Prophetic instruction that Shaykh Sohail Hanif, then a PhD student at Oxford, narrated to us in the Prayer Room in Trinity Term 2016, where we had gathered to discuss “The Muslim Community in Oxford”. And it is these words that now, five years later, come to mind when thinking about what it means for ISoc to grow. The ‘Islamic community’, as Shaykh Sohail reminded us, manifests itself as a God-given spiritual state of unity in our hearts. It is the feeling of trust between each other, the sense of instinctive closeness to the stranger whom we pray next to, the knowledge that we can let our guard down. It is a special bond that we ought to strengthen, cherish, and be grateful for.

Alas, we all fall short in our obligations of brotherhood and sisterhood towards each other, perhaps

unknowingly, thus damaging the peace between us, allowing Satan to create discord and bad feelings towards each other. It is in this light that we should understand the stern Divine warnings against backbiting, thinking ill of other Muslims, or hurting each other through word or action. A community thus becomes healthy and truly 'Islamic', when it follows the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ – the epitome of perfection both in his worship and social interactions.

All this starts with an internal state known as *Nasiha*. I am not referring merely to giving advice (one manifestation of it), but rather sincere concern for the religion and fellow believers. The Prophet ﷺ said, **“Religion is *Nasiha* ... To Allah, His book, His messenger, the leaders of the Muslims, and their common people.”** (Sahih Muslim) **“Those who do good (*muhsinūn*)”** are those who **“are sincere (lit. *idhā nasahū*) toward God and His Messenger”** (9:91).

Putting *Nasiha* into practice, I believe, means taking responsibility for the community, thinking of it as ours rather than theirs, and of ourselves as members rather than guests. Joining the committee is one way of contributing, and may God bless those who

give from their time and energy to benefit others. But a community is no top-down organisation, and all the managerial prowess in the world cannot force mutual love into people's hearts. Instead, it is up to us as individual community members to put the Prophetic Sunnah into practice: helping each other with our studies, cooking food for each other, gently reminding each other to pray on time, and consciously spreading the light of Imaan in our social circles. It is not enough to care about our friends: deep faith manifests itself when we proactively reach out to those who are lonely, cheer up those who are stressed, integrate those who have not found their place in ISoc yet, and start a conversation with that random person in the Prayer Room who comes and goes without being noticed. It is through the sum of these little acts that the ISoc truly grows.

During my five years in Oxford, I attended many ISoc events, and no doubt benefitted immensely from them. But what sticks with me are the role models I observed, the friendships I formed, and the memory of a community that comes together to put God's religion into practice.

Younes Saidani

Younes Saidani studied PPE at Hertford College (2014 - 2017) and completed an MPhil in Economics at Wolfson College in 2020. After being RE Chair in his second year, he served as President of OUISoc, and spent his final year at Oxford as Graduate Chair. Currently, he works as a data scientist in Hesse, Germany.



OUISOC Termcard - Trinity Term 2021

All events hosted on **Zoom** will have links posted on the WhatsApp Groups

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Week 1 25 th April	Ramadan Series Ep.7 (6:30-7:00pm)	Ramadan Series Ep.8 (6:30-7:00pm)	Studying During Ramadan (4:30-5:30pm)	Ramadan Series Ep.9 (6:30-7:00pm)	BsOc and ISoc Joint Iftar (8:50pm)	Ramadan Series: Special Ep.10 (6:30-7:15pm)	
Week 2 2 nd May		Bros' Post Tarawih Chill & Suhoor (10:00pm)			Ramadan Series Ep.12 (6:00-6:30pm)	Ramadan Series Ep.13 (6:30-7:15pm)	
Week 3 9 th May	Ramadan Series Ep.14 (6:30-7:00pm)		Eid Brunch (12pm)	Eid Brunch (12pm)		Post Isha Chill And Munch (10:00pm)	
Week 4 16 th May	Grad Take-Out In The Park (12:30-2:30pm)	Sunrise Walk & Post-Fajr Breakfast (6:00am)	Q-Club (7:00-9:00pm)	Current Affairs in France: (6:00-7:00pm)	Bros' Online Social (9:00pm)	Grad-Undergrad 'Networking Like a Boss' Workshop (5:30-6:30pm)	Eid Garden Party (2:00pm)
Week 5 23 rd May	Managing Mental Health During Exam Season (7:00-8:00pm)	Understanding Halaal Farming: Animal Welfare Talk (6:00-7:00pm)		Faith Communities In A Secular Society: Environment (7:00-8:00pm)	Salaah Series: Essence of Prayer Part 1/3 (7:00-8:00pm)		Sisters' Saturday Outdoor Sport (11:00am) Charity Bake Sale (1:30-3:30pm)
Week 6 30 th May	Grad Bike Tour (2:00-4:00pm)	Subject Advice Session (6:00-7:00pm)	Bros' Online Social (9:00pm)	Relationships And Healthy Boundaries (Sisters) (6:00-7:30pm)	Salaah Series: Concentration in Prayer Part 2/3 (7:00-8:00pm)	Grad-Undergrad Sisters' Pizza and Punting (12:00pm)	Grad-Undergrad Bros' Post Isha Chill (10:00pm)
Week 7 6 th June	OxGrow Interfaith Volunteering (2:00-5:30pm)				Salaah Series: Virtues of Prayer Part 3/3 (7:00-8:00pm)	Sisters' Mocktails (7:00pm) Bros' Bowling (7:00pm)	Understanding Halaal Farming: Volunteering Day (8:30am-2:00pm)
Week 8 13 th June	OUISoc-MRN Publication Masterclass: Getting a Nature Paper (2:00-4:00pm)		Q-Club (7:00-9:00pm)	Come Picnic with ISoc (4:00-5:30pm)			Grads' Games Afternoon (1:00-3:00pm)

REGULAR EVENTS

Event	Grad-Undergrad virtual study sessions	Grad-Undergrad Coffee Shop Study Sessions	Dua Kumayl Recitation	Sisters' Reflection (Picnic) Circle	Bros' Fajr Breakfast	Sisters' Tilawah Circle
Date/Time	Weekly	Sunday 10:00-12:00pm	Thursday After Isha	Sunday 3:00pm	Friday 08:00am	Saturday 10:00am

KEY

Religious Education	Community	Politics	Other
	Graduates	Islamic Awareness	Welfare & Social

Leavers' BBQ : TBC InshAllah...

OUISoc Committee

Everyone on committee is always willing to talk to you and help with any questions or concerns you may have. For more details, please visit the OUISoc website.



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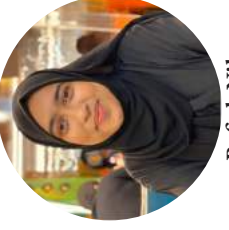
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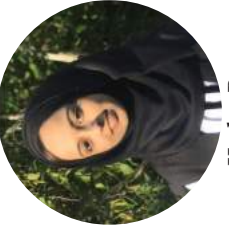
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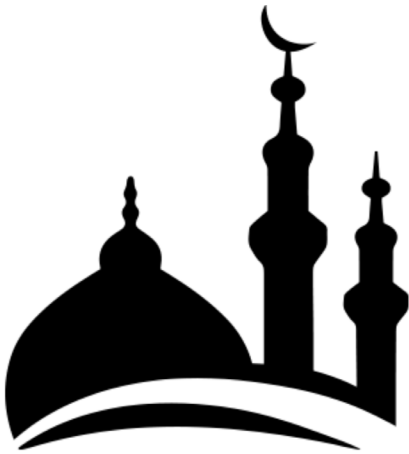
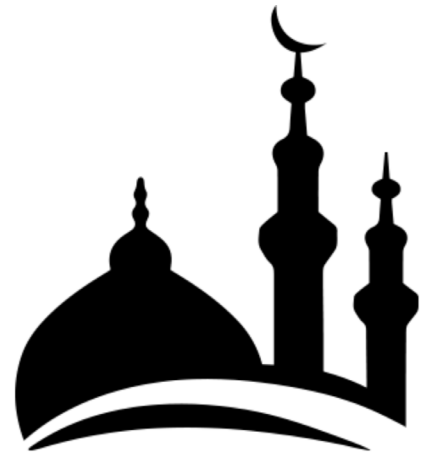
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“Our Lord! Accept (this) from us.
Indeed! You are the Hearing, the Knowing.”



IKHLAAS

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