

ISLAMIC ONLINE UNIVERSITY



INSIGHTS

MAGAZINE



ISLAMIC ONLINE UNIVERSITY

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FOUNDED & HEADED BY
DR. BILAL PHILIPS

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Daood Butt, Canadian Islamic preacher, at an IOU promotion in Hong Kong

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EDITOR'S DESK

Making the Most of Every Situation

Allah ﷻ gives us opportunities to test our limits, expand our horizons and learn exactly what we can achieve. Sometimes these opportunities come from adverse situations. Believers recognize Allah's tests and are grateful to Him for the opportunity to succeed through patience, charity, humbleness and gratitude. Speaking of the believers, Allah says in *Surat Al-Insaan* (interpretation of its meaning):

They [are those who] fulfill [their] vows and fear a Day whose evil will be widespread. (7) And they give food in spite of their love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive, (8) [Saying], "We feed you only for The Countenance of Allah. We wish not from you reward or gratitude. (9) Indeed, we fear from our Lord a Day austere and distressful." (10) So Allah will protect them from the evil of that Day and give them radiance and happiness. (11) And will reward them for what they patiently endured [with] a garden [in Paradise] and silk [garments]. (12)

The verses continue to describe the rewards found in Paradise for those who are patient in this life and give to those less fortunate. It is actually those blessed with material wealth who should thank the less fortunate, for it is they who are a means to the opportunity to earn reward with Allah and to have good in both lives. Likewise, it is through Allah's

blessings and favor that one is able to give the poor a temporary respite from the hardships of this life.

A believer remembers that all wealth belongs to Allah and that we are only managers of that wealth and are obligated to give it to those in need.

Allah grants us opportunities to do acts of goodness in all aspects of our lives: our interactions with others, our trials and difficulties, and with every breath we take. With this in mind, and I remind myself first, we should focus on the opportunities to earn blessings through patience and giving than seek ease in this life. For Allah has promised us in *Surat Al-Sharh*:

For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. (5) Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. (6)

Two very powerful verses that, through repetition, guarantee a believer that hardship is only temporary. Allah, Himself, promises ease. Let us facilitate that ease by giving charity when we are facing difficulty, increasing our prayer and supplication, and increasing our gratitude as difficult times cause us to become closer to Him. Such times are indeed better than those times of ease, which lead us farther from Him.

Allah, we ask you for the best in this life and the best in the next life and seek Your protection from the punishment of Hell. Ameen.



MEET THE TEAM

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YOUR VIEWS

We would love to you hear from you. Please let us know what you liked or would like to see in the magazine. If you have a particular piece or feel you can make a valuable contribution to IOU Insights please email: info@iou-insights.com

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IOU'S INCREDIBLY LONG JOURNEY IN 7 SHORT YEARS

Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *founder and chancellor of Islamic Online University*, and **Sameer Khan**, *vice-chancellor*, share the journey of how this institution, loved by its students worldwide, came into being.

Islamic Online University began with a vision to make Islamic education accessible through the Internet to anyone in the world. Starting with humble beginnings, the IOU had to face a multitude of challenges to make this incredible vision a reality – none of which would have been possible without Allah's support and then IOU staff's hard work. Today the IOU has over 190,000 registered students from 228 countries, *alhamdulillah*.



DR. BILAL PHILIPS

EDITOR: HOW DID IT ALL START?

DR. BILAL: After teaching Arabic and Islamic Studies at the American University in Dubai (AUD) for 6 years, around the year 2000, I got the idea of starting an Islamic university online using the material which I had developed at AUD as an alternative to the distance learning method of mailing tapes and books to students, exams over the telephone, papers mailed, which were used by the American Open University in Washington, D.C. and the London Open College based in al-Muntada's headquarters in London.

My son, Yusuf Bilal Philips, was studying programming at the time. I enlisted his technical support to create a system where students could register online. Their details were saved in a database, payment of fees was by bank-to-bank transfer or Western Union, and students could access the course material online.

I started with one course, *The Moral Foundations of Islaamic Culture*. This is based on a book which I published at that time; which was itself based on a course I had taught at AUD. The online course was without video or audio and was just a text divided into modules. Each module had questions which were to be answered and submitted online with a mid-term and final exam consisting of multiple choice questions. Dr. Judy Muhammad, who was a professor at the University of Phoenix in their online distance-learning campuses, advised me as to how to prepare the classes for online study. I informed many people who were in email contact with me about the launching and an increasing number of students registered. Among the early students was our vice-chancellor, Sameer Khan of India, who was living in Oman. As the registrations increased, the management system devised by my son began to falter. By the end of the first year, my son informed me that he did not have sufficient knowledge of programming to save the system. He advised that I shut it down until he learned how to do it properly. Learning management systems at that time were extremely expensive for me to contemplate purchasing. I had no other choice, sadly, but to close the university and inform students that once we reopened their payments and credits could be transferred, otherwise they would

be reimbursed if they did not wish to wait.

EDITOR: HOW WAS THE DIPLOMA SECTION CREATED?

DR. BILAL: Sameer Khan contacted me after the IOU was closed and offered his voluntary services for any online work that I needed done. I gave him some tasks on my website including the research on good and bad Islamic sites which may be seen here: <http://www.bilalphilips.com>

Sometime in 2006, I was informed of an Open Source Learning Management System called Moodle. Being "open source" meant that Moodle was free.

I asked Sameer to look up Moodle and see if he could learn to manage it and deliver IOU's courses through it. My son, Yusuf, installed the Moodle software on the IOU server and Sameer managed the front end of the system. After some time studying the system, we were able to re-launch the IOU with the Diploma courses. Sameer took on the role of coordinator. We started off with two courses: *Foundations of Islamic Studies* and *Da'wah Training Course*.

SAMEER KHAN: It has been our observation that Allah has always provided the IOU with the personnel it needed at the time it was needed, *alhamdulillah*. Throughout IOU's history various people, recognizing its potential to spread knowledge and finding in it a fulfillment of the yearning they themselves felt, have contributed in a multitude of ways. It would not be possible to mention all of them here although all their contributions were invaluable. Some of the very early volunteers of the IOU and their contributions are briefly noted here.

After the initial start, the IOU faced technical challenges again because Moodle, being open source, needed programmers and developers to support it. Sadiq Shaikh, an Indian working as an IT Consultant in Oman, stepped in to support with his multi-faceted skills, which included programming, web designing, server management and even graphic designing. He was the first regular contributor to IOU's IT needs and remains a core part of the IOU team to this day.

Among the early students was Imran Ayub who became our first facilitator. His insightful posts in the students' discussion forums earned him recognition and he was invited to be a facilitator after he completed some courses with top scores. Those who had joined in the beginning may still remember his fitting refutation of a deviant post by a student in one of the courses in the early days of the GDIS (General Diploma in Islamic Studies).

Also, among the early students was Hunain Aijaz. His path to joining the IOU team was a small step on his part that proved the start of a long journey by Allah's will. On Sunday 21 October 2007 at 5 p.m. GMT, Dr. Bilal Philips did the first ever live chat session with the students of the FOIS (Foundations of Islamic Studies) course. This session was a text-only chat as the IOU did not have a platform at that time for audio/video live sessions. Hunain attended the chat as a student and wanted to ensure that the chat could be made available to those who had not attended. Having saved the chat text, he emailed it to me. I recognized his spirit of wanting to spread Islamic knowledge and invited him to join the fledgling IOU team.

Hunain came in at a critical time of the expansion of the diploma section. Students were joining by the thousands and the demand was increasing for more courses. At this time, Hunain took up the role of course creator with gusto. He was instrumental in setting up 14 courses of the Diploma section, *ma sha Allah*. He also served as the facilitator for several courses and is currently the Chief Academic Coordinator of the BAIS.

Farhan Karmali, another student of the Diploma campus, was introduced to me by Hunain. He had just completed his BSc (IT). Being a programmer himself, he wanted to improve the learning system and tweak it to IOU's needs. He took up the task of learning Moodle programming at a professional level. With his joining, IOU advanced on the technological front in its quest to give the students the best learning experience possible. Farhan has now completed his Masters Degree in Computer Applications and is part of IOU's IT team as a Virtual Learning Environment Developer. He is an invaluable asset to IOU's operations and in keeping the

campuses online and running smoothly along with a dedicated team of IT experts who joined later.

Sister Muminah, who started as a student and did well in her courses, became a facilitator and then the first official head facilitator. Under her leadership, the facilitator service was strengthened. She is now IOU's Centers Manager and handles the registration of and communication with all 920 registered exam centers globally.

Sister Faria then took over the helm of facilitator services from Sister Muminah when the latter was entrusted the task of Centers Manager. Sister Faria took it further. A bright and vibrant personality, she added a spirit of energy to facilitation. May Allah bless her in her talents and abilities. *Ameen.*

The Head Facilitator of IOU manages a team of volunteer facilitators, identifies potential facilitators from among the top students and recruits and trains them. Since Sister Faria has moved on to other tasks within the IOU, the new Head Facilitator is one who many students know: Sister Umm Afraz.

EDITOR: WHEN DID REGISTRATION AND INSTRUCTION BEGIN?

SAMEER: IOU's free diploma courses section started its operation in April 2007.

EDITOR: WHO CREATED THE CONTENT AND FROM WHERE WAS IT TAKEN?

SAMEER: Initially for the diploma campus, the courses were from lectures and lessons recorded by Dr. Bilal. Later, we approached other scholars for permission to use their recorded

courses that we found useful and in a format that could be used online by the IOU.

EDITOR: WITH WHAT COURSES DID THE DIPLOMA CAMPUS OPEN AND WHAT COURSES WERE ADDED LATER?

SAMEER: It all began with The Foundations of Islamic Studies and Da'wah Training Course. In time, more courses were added, some of them being:

- The Moral Foundations of Islamic Culture
- Qadar: Predestination
- Fiqh of Fasting (FQH 031)
- Usool al Hadeeth (HAD 021)
- Usool at-Tafseer (TAF 021)

Currently, there are 30 regular courses and 5 sisters-only courses.

EDITOR: HOW MANY FACILITATORS WERE THERE IN THE BEGINNING AND HOW MANY ARE THERE NOW?

DR. BILAL & SAMEER: Initially the courses were managed by Sameer who was the coordinator. But within a short time of starting the courses, Imran Ayub from the UK joined in and became the first facilitator of the diploma section. Currently, there are 20 facilitators serving as volunteers.

EDITOR: HOW HAVE THE NUMBERS OF STUDENTS INCREASED SINCE 2007?

SAMEER: In 2007, we started with 1,450 registered students. The IOU now serves over 190,000 students from 228 countries. The statistics are available here: <http://islamiconlineuniversity.com/statistics.php>

DID YOU KNOW?

- In the initial days, email IDs were not configured on the IOU domain. Sameer used iouinfo@yahoo.com to communicate with students.
- The first official IOU email ID was coordinator@islamiconlineuniversity.com and the next was facilitator@islamiconlineuniversity.com
- More than 20 students signed up on the first day of GDIS' launch.
- The IOU diploma section to this day is managed mostly by volunteers.
- IOU currently serves over 180,000 students globally around the clock.
- Among the early testimonials we received on the Diploma was from a 70-year-old revert Muslim living in the Australian outback.



IOU'S FIRST LOGO

IOU's first logo made using a template-based logo making software

IOU'S EARLY VOLUNTEERS & THEIR POSTS:

- IOU COORDINATOR—Sameer Khan
- IOU FACILITATOR 1—Imran Ayub
- IOU FACILITATOR 2 – Ramla Abdullah
- IOU FACILITATOR 3—Umm Ahmad
- IOU FACILITATOR 4—Hunain Aijaz
- IOU FACILITATOR 5—Sara Tariq
- IOU FACILITATOR 6—Fatimah Zahra Dawood
- IOU FACILITATOR 7—Umm Mussab
- IOU FACILITATOR 8—Muminah Sayin
- IOU FACILITATOR 9—Nickole Atkinson
- IOU FACILITATOR 10—Haadia Ashique
- IOU's 1st Graphic Designer—Sister Haadia

IOU appreciates the efforts and accomplishments of all its volunteers. May Allah accept and make them heavy on the scale of good deeds. *Ameen.*

The university has the following online campuses offering different courses of study:

- 1. The Diploma Campus**
- 2. The Global Quran Memorization Center**
- 3. Degree Campus**

- a) Department of Islamic Studies
- b) Department of Psychology
- c) Department of Education
- d) Department of Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance
- e) Department of Arabic Language and Linguistics

In the 2014 spring semester, the IOU introduced four new degree programs. We ask Allah to continue to bless the IOU and make it a source of Islamic education for many more people. Ameen.



IOU AWARENESS DAY AROUND THE WORLD

Students and representatives of Islamic Online University around the world hold seminars and set up booths to introduce Islamic Online University's diploma courses and degree programs in their communities.



HONG KONG



BANGLADESH



PHILIPPINES



INDIA





KENYA



AUSTRALIA



KUWAIT



SAUDI ARABIA





UNITED KINGDOM



NIGERIA



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

A Proud & Humbling Moment: IOU's **First Batches** of Graduates

In Jan. & Sept. 2014, Islamic Online University saw its first batches of graduates. Thirty two students received their BA in Islamic Studies.

Shakti Banskar	Nepal	Zeshan Ullah Qureshi	Norway	Thasneem M	Qatar	Muhammad Mazhar Yasin	Qatar
Ismaa'iyi Bond	Morocco	Saba Nasir Majgaonkar	India	Hamisi Miriti	Kenya	Jainaba Mohamed	Kuwait
Hassan Ali Didi	Maldives	Shafa Nasir Majgaonkar	India	Najibullah Safi	Afghanistan	Abdelmadjid Mokhtari	United States
Nahid Egan	United States	Syeda Madeeha Bokhari	Bangladesh	Abdul Reyaz Satar	Guyana	Muhammad Lamin Fatajo	United Kingdom
Naeema Halim	Pakistan	Thashrifa Farook Ali	Sri Lanka	Bibi Samina Satar	Guyana	Amina Hassan	United Kingdom
Ismail Mohamed Kamdar	South Africa	Radhiya Adam	Oman	Asma Sheikh	India	Abdul-Somed Ibrahim	Ghana
Abderrahman Khalladi	Canada	Azni Alias	Malaysia	Raya Shokattard	Malaysia	Adetoro Opeyemi Muritala	Nigeria
Pakize Krasniqi	Kosovo	rahima shakeel	Kuwait	Haroon Surma	United Kingdom	Bibi Omeemun Hakh	Canada

It was an emotional moment, as the students shared their journey of Islamic learning:

“Being an IOU student was life changing. IOU is a blessing, all thanks belong to Allah! May Allah preserve Dr. Bilal Philips, and reward him with every good in this world and in the hereafter for his generosity in sharing the most valuable wealth, that is the knowledge, *Ameen!*”

– **Pakize Krasniqi, Kosovo**

“*Alhamdulillah*. Reflecting on my student years at IOU, I feel honoured to have been a part of this dynamic institution. Learning Islam under esteemed teachers, interacting with sisters around the world, all through a smooth online experience, I can say that my journey with IOU was nothing short of a dream.

– **Saba Nasir Majgaonkar, India**

“*Alhamdulillah*, these four years have been among the most spiritually enlightening ones of our lives. JazaakumAllahukhair to our dean Shaykh Bilal, all our dedicated TAs and the staff working backstage to make it the best Muslim university online.”

– **Umm Adil**

“[I could] fulfill my dreams of gaining authentic Islamic knowledge from qualified instructors, and at the same time gain a BA in Islamic Studies. Instead of dreaming about going abroad to study Islam, and for that dream to never materialize, I was able to study in the comfort of my own home. Studying with IOU has been an experience which I will never forget and *alhamdulillah* I can see the benefits in my life already.”

– **Haroon Surma, UK**

“The knowledge I have gained is priceless, particularly the inheritance laws among others. The hard work begins now: putting the knowledge into practice.”

– **Hamisi Miriti,**

“As an IOU student, I feel truly blessed to have been able to study Islam from some of the very knowledgeable scholars with the constant guidance and support of a wonderful set of tutorial assistants. *Jazakumullah khayr.*”

– **Shafa Nasir**

500+ attend 1st graduation ceremony

Over 500 people attended IOU's first online graduation ceremony on Jan. 3, 2015. Sameer Khan, vice chancellor, praised and thanked the team for a successful planning and execution of the event.

“It was a wonderful ceremony. It was well planned, presented and executed with precision. And it was interesting, enjoyable and I am sure memorable for the graduates, their near ones and for all of us at IOU,” he said in an email to the staff.

Alumni website launched

On Jan. 5, 2015, the IOU launched its alumni website. The portal offers paid membership options for a variety of benefits, including a lifelong learning program with access to exclusive content, webinars and TA support. Members can also connect with other alumni, receive a copy of the Insights magazine and get special gifts and discounts.

The website can be accessed at:

<http://alumni.islamiconlineuniversity.com>

Accreditation in Somaliland a new milestone for IOU

BY RABIYA FAHMA DAWOOD

Dr. Bilal Philips' visit to Somaliland in July 2013 saw the accreditation of Islamic Online University and a fruitful meeting with the country's president Ahmed Mohammed Mohamoud (Silanyo) and other top officials. President Ahmed welcomed our chancellor, who expressed sincere gratitude for Somaliland's recognition of the Islamic Online University. The president promised his government would continue to work closely with the IOU. Future collaboration was also discussed.

Dr. Bilal also conferred with Minister of Education and Higher Education Ms. Samsam

Dr. Bilal pledges assistance in developing the country's educational curricula



From Left: Ahmed Mohammed Mohamoud, President of Somaliland; Dr. Bilal Philips, IOU Chancellor; Barkhad Jama Hersi, Advisor of the President in Social Affairs; and Saeed, IOU East Africa Representative, greeting the president.

Abdi Adam at the meeting. The minister thanked Dr. Bilal for his visit and discussed IOU's educational approaches. Officials proposed that Dr. Bilal and the IOU help their consultants develop

Somaliland's educational curricula and Dr. Bilal readily agreed. In closing, Dr. Bilal presented a certificate of appreciation and a copy of the Noble Quran to the president.

CIH Desk brings massive change; handles 70 chat sessions, 650 emails per day

The Chat, Info & Help (CIH) Desk of the IOU has brought a massive operational change in the administration, Sameer Khan, vice-chancellor, said in a recent announcement.

The CIH Desk offers email and live chat support to new and existing students.

"To really appreciate the extent of the impact of the work of the CIH team we need to look at the sheer number of students IOU has. We have close to 160,000 registered users combined on the degree and diploma campuses. If each were to send just one email that would be 160,000 emails. Of course the numbers are much higher," Sameer wrote in the email announcement.

"Earlier the mails would land in the boxes of the admin staff, the Registrar, the Coordinators etc. The daily barrage of mails meant that a lot of time of these staff would go in just clearing the mails thus leaving no time for working on improvements. There would also be inevitable delays in answering mails and some mails would be lost in the crowd.

The admin staff have been able to devote the time to improving the systems and creating a better experience for the students.

working totally in a virtual environment. There were some other well meant concerns as well.

"But, *alhamdulillah*, the CIH team has proved that with sincere, determined and coordinated efforts anything is possible. The CIH team handles: Live Chat; info@islamiconlineuniversity.com box (for new enquiries); and HelpDesk@islamiconlineuniversity.com (for enrolled students).

"When the CIH desk was proposed, some concern was voiced over its feasibility. A major concern was how would multiple staff handling the same inbox be able to coordinate while

"Besides this they also chip in for some of the Registrar's office works during peak promotions. Account activity reports on the two inboxes the team handles shows an average of 650 email conversations per day.

"Chats done in the last six months reached 13,000 chat sessions i.e an average of 70+ sessions per day. *Alhamdulillah*, the CIH team handles all this cheerfully without delays and the mails are answered within 24 hours. (There is help) 24/7.

"The result is that there are no direct mails between students and admin staff except in rare cases and the admin staff have been able to devote the time to improving the systems and creating a better experience for the students.

"The best part is the way the team coordinates and manages the same inbox without any confusion *alhamdulillah*."

CIH Desk team members: Nabila Atchcha, Atufa Ali, Mohammed Moshin, Roshan Razvi, and Maha Khan. Supervised by Hira Adnan.

IOU makes a mark with several firsts in The Gambia

BY RABIYA FAHMA DAWOOD

Dr. Bilal's visit to The Gambia last year saw a number of positive developments for the Islamic Online University. The IOU established a Gambia office, opened an English Language Center for madrasah graduates and won a license from the country's Ministry of Higher Education to operate the university. The IOU has since registered its edu domain – www.iou.edu.gm.

THE TRIP

In the beginning of 2013, Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, chancellor of Islamic Online University, received several requests from the Gambian community in Toronto, Canada to promote the IOU in their home country. Their humble invitations

pushed Dr. Bilal into planning a trip to this tropical country soon after.

And so it was in February 2013 that Dr. Bilal Philips travelled to the smallest country in the African continent, The Gambia, home to some 2 million citizens (95% of whom are Muslims).



Madrasah students in Talinding Kunjang, The Gambia.

OVERCOMING THE ENGLISH BARRIER

On reaching, Dr. Bilal met with concerned officials in order to set up a fertile base for the IOU. However, offering the IOU for the thousands of *madrasah* graduates ran into one major stumbling block – the lack of English proficiency among them. Throughout the 12 years of study in the *madrasahs* in the Gambia, English is taught only one period per week. As a result, most graduates know very little English while the language of instruction at the IOU is primarily English.

However, without losing hope, and in an effort to make the IOU accessible

to Arabic *madrasah* graduates, Dr. Bilal proposed a remarkable solution to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE). He offered instituting a one-year Intensive English Program for the *madrasah* graduates.

The MoBSE embraced this idea whole-heartedly and offered 100 scholarships for 5 years of study for the graduates. The ministry also approved the building of computer labs in major *madrasahs* based on an Islamic Development Bank's grant for The Gambia.



MEETINGS WITH ISLAMIC LEADERS

During his stay, Dr. Bilal met with leading scholars of the country and with members of the Supreme Islamic Council. He delivered talks in the University of the Gambia campuses (Brikama), the UTG Law faculty, and at the School of Medicine (Banjul). He gave Friday *khutbahs* at a number of masjids and delivered public lectures at various venues in the country. He also appeared in a number of programs on national television

(GRTS), including an interview with Malik Jones who is The Gambia's most popular TV commentator and journalist.

Furthermore, Dr. Bilal also met with IOU students and formed an IOU student committee. The IOU was also formally incorporated in The Gambia as the Islamic Online University Company Limited, while a national IOU representative was appointed.

INAUGURATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Dr. Bilal returned to The Gambia in September 2013 to launch the one-year intensive English program for madrasah graduates and participate in the official opening of the IOU Gambia office.

He also participated in radio shows of a newly established Islamic radio station, Al Falaah and met with officials of the

Ministry of Higher Education for an operational license. The IOU received its license in May 2014, *alhamdulillah*.

The future of the IOU in the small country of The Gambia looks bright indeed as we strive to:

“Change the Nation through Education”.

– Rabiya is a 7th Semester Student

New departments and degree programs initiated in 2014



Islamic Online University is growing, *alhamdulillah!* Four new departments and three new degree programs were introduced in the Spring 2014 semester while an MA in Islamic Studies is scheduled to begin soon *In sha Allah.*

The departments and programs introduced are as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

- **Intensive Arabic program**

This is a two-year program (eight courses; two courses per semester) with concentration on reading, writing, listening and basic conversation skills. Course is open to everyone and while there are no admission prerequisites, those not fluent in reading Arabic script are required to complete Arabic 100 program before joining this program.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- **Certificate in Education (C.Ed)**

This is a one-year (two semesters) Certificate in Education program. Credits can be forwarded towards Bachelor of Education. Minimum admission requirement is a high school diploma or higher.

- **Diploma in Education (D.Ed.)**

This is a two-year (four semesters) Diploma in Education program. Minimum admission requirement is a high school diploma or higher. Credits can be forwarded towards Bachelor of Education.

- **Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)**

The degree program has three streams:

- **B.Ed. Degree:** Students with a high school diploma or higher qualification are eligible to receive a Bachelor of Education upon successful completion of the program.
- **B.Ed. Advanced Diploma:** Students who do not have a provable educational qualification or do not hold high school diploma or higher qualification will receive a B.Ed. Advanced Diploma upon successful completion of the entire Bachelor of Education program.
- **B.Ed. Audit Courses:** Students who wish to audit courses without taking exams at our supervised exam centers will be issued a Certificate of Attendance upon completion of the whole course of study. There is no minimum qualification to audit a course.

DEPARTMENT OF ISLAMIC ECONOMICS, BANKING AND FINANCE

- **Certificate in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance (CIBE)**

This is a one-year (two semesters) Certificate in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance program. Credits can be later forwarded towards B.Sc. in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance. Minimum admission requirement is a high school diploma or higher qualification.

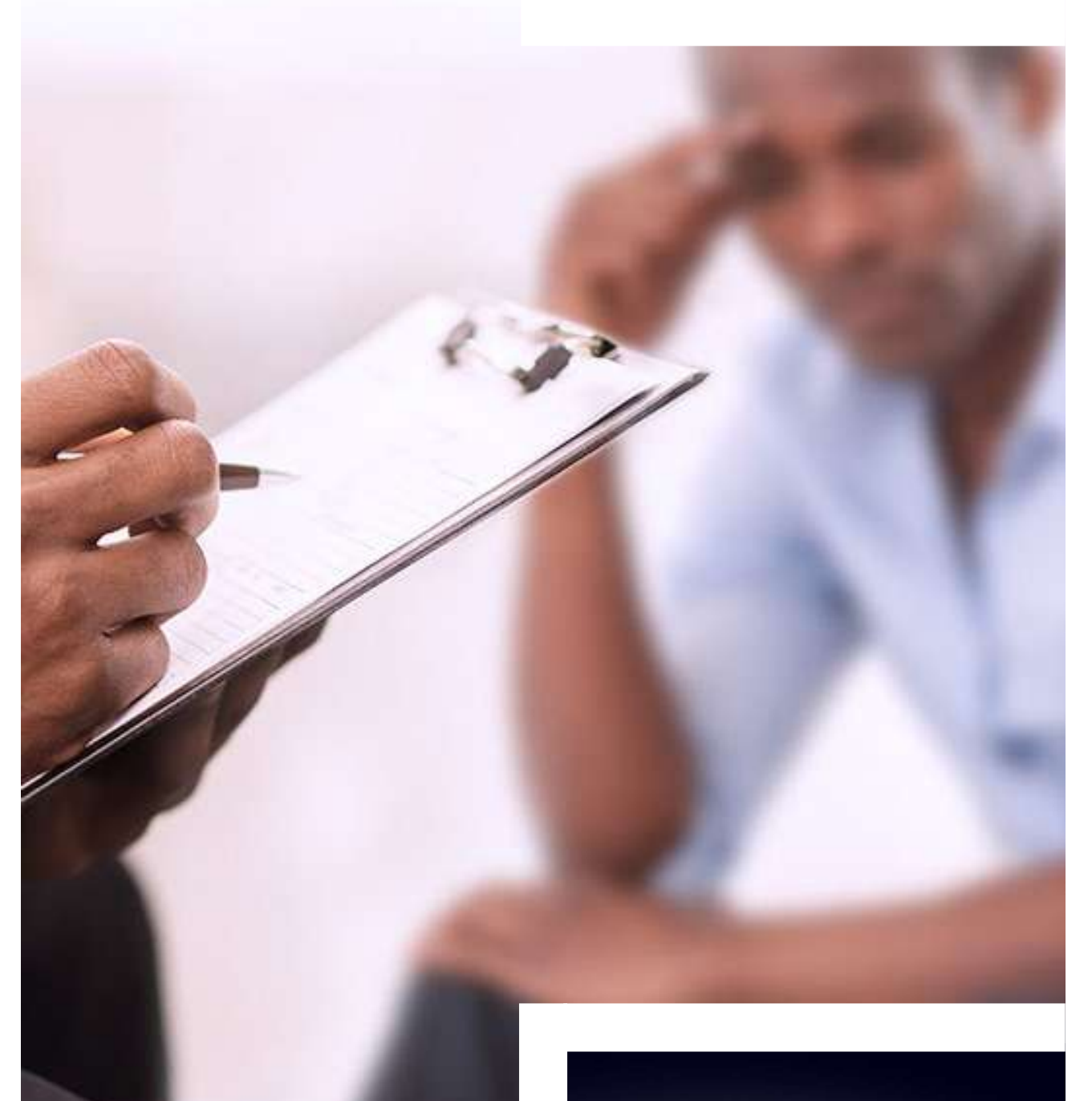
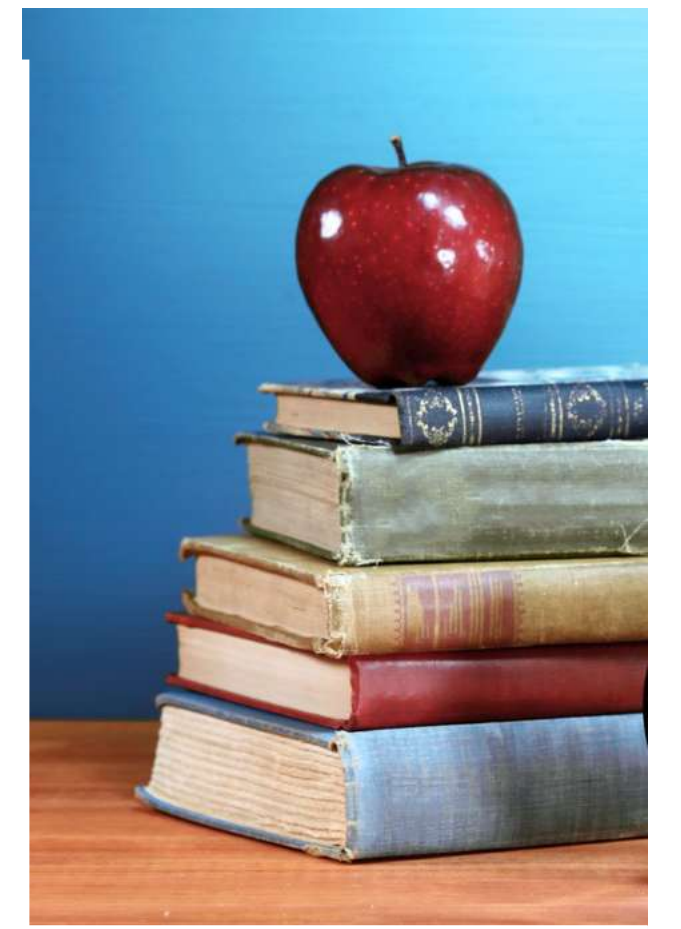
● **Diploma in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance (DIBE)**

This is a two year (four semesters) Diploma in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance program. Minimum admission requirement is a high school diploma or higher qualification. Credits can be forwarded towards B.Sc. in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance.

● **Bachelor of Science in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance (B.Sc. IBE)**

The degree program has three streams:

- B.Sc. IBE Degree: Students with a high school diploma or higher qualification are eligible to receive a Bachelor of Science in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance (B.Sc. IBE) upon successful completion of the program.
- B.Sc. IBE Advanced Diploma: Students who do not have a provable educational qualification or do not hold high school diploma or higher qualification will receive a B.Sc. IBE Advanced Diploma upon successful completion of the entire Bachelor of Science in Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance (B.Sc. IBE) program.
- B.Sc. IBE Audit Courses: Students who wish to audit courses without taking exams at our supervised exam centers will be issued a Certificate of Attendance upon completion of the whole course of study. There is no minimum qualification to audit a course.



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

● **Certificate in Psychology (CPSY)**

This is a one-year (two semesters) Certificate in Psychology program. Credits can be forwarded towards B.Sc. in Psychology. Minimum admission requirement is a high school diploma or higher qualification.

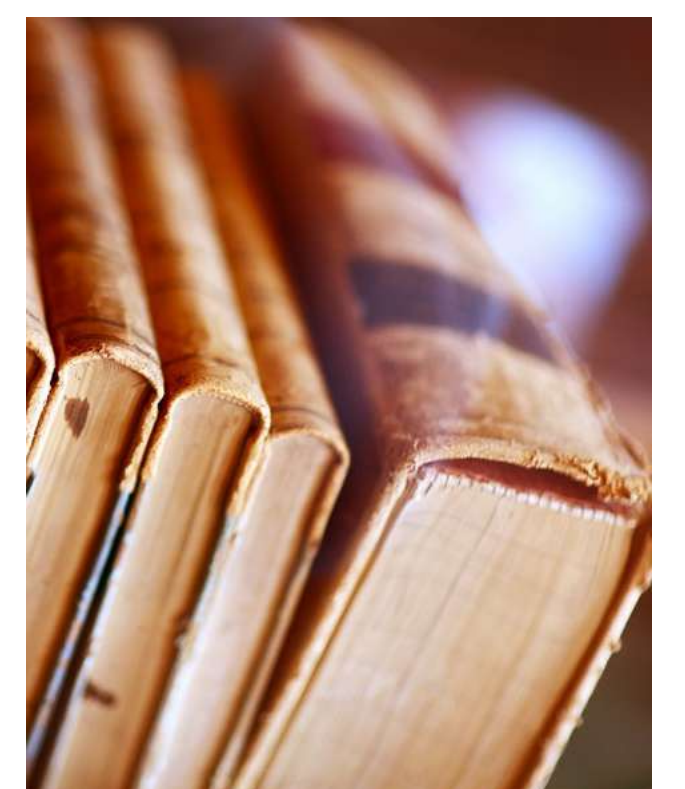
● **Diploma in Psychology (DPSY)**

This is a two year (four semesters) Diploma in Psychology. Minimum admission requirement is a high school diploma or higher. Credits can be forwarded towards B.Sc. in Psychology.

● **Bachelor of Science in Psychology (B.Sc. PSY)**

The degree program has three streams:

- B.Sc. PSY Degree: Students with a high school diploma or higher qualification are eligible to receive a Bachelor of Science in Psychology (B.Sc. PSY) upon successful completion of the program.
- B.Sc. PSY Advanced Diploma: Students who do not have a provable educational qualification or do not hold high school diploma or higher qualification will receive a B.Sc. PSY Advanced Diploma upon successful completion of the entire Bachelor of Science in Psychology (B.Sc. PSY) program.
- B.Sc. PSY Audit Courses: Students who wish to audit courses without taking exams at our supervised exam centers will be issued a Certificate of Attendance upon completion of the whole course of study. There is no minimum qualification to audit a course.



IOU student in Gaza reflects on life under occupation

‘WHAT SHOULD PALESTINIANS DO?’

BY ISRA MOHAMMED MIGDAD



WHILE on my knees praying, I vividly remembered how I had sat in the exact same posture on my prayer mat six years ago. It was 2008 and Israel had unleashed another massacre in Gaza.

During that time, my mother, siblings and I were all repeating my dad's supplication to Allah to save and protect us from that hard situation we were going through. Our building was surrounded by more than 20 'Israeli' bulldozers. We spent nearly 23 hours in the corridor of our apartment building not knowing whether we will see each other again due to the large number of rockets, airstrikes and bombs being fired at our building.

I also recalled the 2012 'Israeli' aggression against us in Gaza when we, upon returning home, found out that 'Israel' had airstriking our apartment and partially damaged it. We shuddered at the thought of what would have happened had we stayed home.

One of my friends from abroad once asked me why don't we vacate our house as it was near the buffer zone and dangerous to live in? I could only reply, "The only thing more unthinkable than staying is leaving; the only thing more impossible than staying is leaving."

Today, I am trying to convince myself that the ongoing situation will soon come to an end and that, even though there has been massive damage and loss to Gaza, life will continue from the way it was before the 'Israeli' aggression. But, what if I'm wrong? What if this time the ending will be different? What if it will be the end of our lives?!

This loss upon loss for our people in Gaza has left me feeling sad and brittle. Needless to mention that I have arrived at a situation where one awaits his or her death, which becomes closer to reality than anyone can imagine every time I hear the news that 'Israel' has targeted and destroyed a family's house along with its inhabitants. The question that comes to our mind, "Who will be next...?"

Imagine yourself receiving a warning message from 'Israel' that your house will be destroyed in about 10 minutes. What is the first thing you would do? What would you take? Who would you carry? Imagine having an old grandmother who cannot walk living with you. What would you do if you see your parents and/or siblings



injured? Whom would you help first?

Even worse, imagine seeing most of your family members lying dead in front of you. What would your first reaction be? You would never be able to forget that once upon a time you had a house to live in and a family to live with.

The reality is much more painful than these typed words. The tears of a young child who lost his or her mother are enough to show that the story of humanity is over.

What should Palestinians do?! Imagine thousands of bombs being fired day and night at your people. Imagine continuing airstrikes aimed deliberately at civilian homes by the 'Israeli' occupation. What would your country do? Doesn't Palestine have a duty to protect its citizens? Palestinians have no other choice but to defend themselves. Palestine is just like any other country and has the right to defend its citizens.

The following verses, besides the resistance, are the two things, which make it all endurable for me:

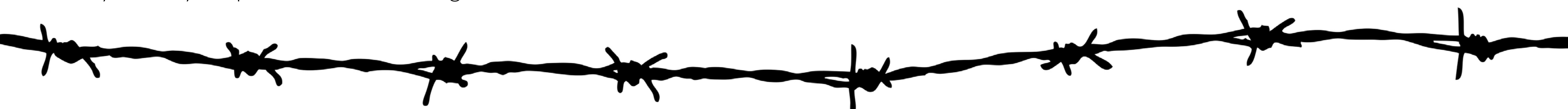
"You, who believe, seek help through steadfastness and prayer, for God is with the steadfast. Do not say that those who are killed in God's cause are dead; they are alive, though you do not realize it. We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives, and crops. But

[Prophet], give good news to those who steadfast, those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.' These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided." [Qur'an, 2:153-157]

"Those whose faith only increased when people said to them, 'People have gathered against you, so fear them,' and who replied, 'God is enough for us: He is the best protector,' returned with grace and bounty from God; no harm befell them. They pursued God's good pleasure. God's favour is great indeed." [Qur'an, 3:173-174]

In the end, maybe it is wiser to say '*alhamdulillah*', all praise be to Allah, as long as we are living for the *jihad*, patience and satisfaction He has provided us with. May Allah preserve these very precious bounties for us. May He strengthen our hearts to face all difficulties and support the *mujahideen* with more power, patience and tranquility. I also ask Allah, the Almighty to help those whose houses were damaged and compensate them with a better life.

Isra, 24, is a first year student of BAIS. She studied Business Administration at the Islamic University of Gaza and is an entrepreneur.



‘Ya Allah, please bring her to Islam’

BY MICHELLE K. PHILLIP



“

After quietly listening to me without any interruptions, and despite all my efforts to make her understand, her response was a sharp retort, ‘And you believe that?’

”

A Christian friend who is also my colleague asked me for a lift recently. I took the opportunity to give her some da’wah. Quite familiar with my Christian history, she is unsupportive and confused like so many others by my conversion to Islam. Still, in my excitement and as my duty to share the message of Islam, I eventually steered the conversation to what suited me.

She shared something with me, to which I deliberately responded, “Thank God!” “Yes, thank GOD!” she emphasized. Recalling that she still does not believe that Allah is the same God referred to in her Biblical scriptures and that instead considers Allah to be a “demon”. I began to explain to her about the history of Islam, the time of ignorance, and the Arabs’ worship of idols at that time. I explained how Allah sent the message of Islam through the Prophet ﷺ to return to the worship of One God, similar to what He had done many times before, as with the children of Israel. She listened intently and I prayed that what I was saying was reaching her. However, after quietly listening to me without any interruptions, and despite all my efforts to make her understand, her response was a sharp retort, “And you believe that?”

I was stunned. Although other people had dismissed me many times before, for some reason, this time it hurt. There was silence for a few seconds and then all I could ask was, “And you don’t?”

It may not have been the best response but I simply could not believe that out of all I had said, nothing had penetrated any part of her intellect. There was no clarity, no curiosity, no conviction in her... nothing. It was as if there was a wall between us and she had not heard nor understood a word I had said. She just quite bluntly responded, “No.” Again, there was another stab in the heart.

Why was I taking this so personally this time?

I dropped her off without hinting to her how I felt, and we exchanged the usual friendly greetings as she left. But as I drove away, I was close to tears. All that came to my lips then was,

“Ya Allah, please bring her to the truth of Islam,” which I repeated many times.

While driving home, I realized that I was not hurting because she had offended me, but because I felt like she had offended Allah ﷻ and had literally slammed a door shut to His mercy. I was grieving not only because she was rejecting the message of Islam, but also the Lord of the Worlds, *Rabbil ‘alameen*. If only she knew!

Although I knew that Allah is not in need of His creation, I instinctively wondered

how Allah - The Maker of the universe and everything in it - would feel when people choose faith based on lies and stories rather than faith based on truth and evidence.

It still bothers me even at this moment, yet I try to find solace in the words of Allah in the Qur’an that say (translated meaning):

“Then is the one to whom the evil of his deed has been made attractive so he considers it good [like the one rightly guided]? For indeed Allah sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. So do not let yourself perish over them in regret. Indeed Allah is Knowing of what they do.”

[Surah Faatir (35), Verse 8]

“But those who deny Our verses are deaf and dumb within darkneses. Whomever Allah wills— He leaves astray. And whomever He wills— He puts him on a straight path.”

[Surah Al-Anam (6), Verse 39]

I witnessed firsthand that day that indeed

“whomever Allah guides, none can misguide, and whomever Allah misguides, none can guide.”

Although I am far from where I need to be as a Muslim, today my belief in “*La ilaha illa Allah*” has been strengthened and reaffirmed. *In sha Allah*, I will never reject Allah after He has graciously and by His mercy chosen me to enter into the Ummah of Islam and will always be grateful.

We should grieve for the disbelievers and not gloat over the fact that we are Muslims. We should make prostration in gratefulness that we are Muslims and fear Allah! We should be humble and never take for granted the perfect religion of Islam and the message of the Prophet ﷺ. We should remember the life of the hereafter and the Day of Resurrection, the punishment of the Hell-fire, and beg to not even feel the heat of its flames, *In sha Allah*.

We should always make dua for the misguided disbelievers and those who have gone astray; just as we pray every day that Allah continues to guide us, keep us on the straight path and make us among those whom He has favoured and among those that are rightly guided. *Ameen*.

I still have much to learn, but I will not give up on her. Since I know that I will continue to benefit greatly from the Da’wah Training courses at Islamic Online University and also *In sha Allah* grow in knowledge as a first year student of BA in Islamic Studies, to help prepare me for next time!

My journey to embracing Islam, becoming an IOU student & a magazine publisher

By Sister Samara

I TOOK my shahadah on 27 Oct. 2010. It was a spiritual journey that began with being raised in a Mormon household with a Christian upbringing and being an ardent attendee of the church i.e. getting baptized, receiving communion and confirmation. As an adult, I adopted atheism as my belief system for about 20 years.

With the help of www.IslamReligion.com, I began to read about Islam. I would use their “chat” feature to ask questions. One day they offered to give me a call and I took my *shahadah* with them over the phone.

I began learning about Islam from a boxful of books that IslamReligion sent me. *Fundamentals of Tawheed* by Dr. Bilal Philips was included in the package along with a couple of other books by him, so I continued learning from his books. I quickly learned that there were many deviant factions within Islam and decided it was better to stick to what I call “a family of Muslims” I trust – Dr. Bilal, Yusuf Estes, and Yusha Evans. I knew I could trust their comments and lectures and I soon found other reliable personalities who were associated with them.

I learned about the Islamic Online University (IOU) and began studying in the Diploma section. I also registered with the Bachelors of Arts in Islamic Studies (BAIS) section of the IOU. However, I felt it was better to continue with the General Diploma in Islamic Studies (GDIS) courses until I had attained a broader knowledge base before continuing with the degree program. So, I halted my BAIS studies and returned to studying the GDIS.

Through student groups on Facebook, I got to know some sisters from the IOU. There was one sister in particular, by the name of Sumaiya Ali, with whom I teamed up to discuss our courses and study. Our goal was to get the certificate for every course offered on the IOU Diploma page and eventually get the Diploma in Islamic studies.

Then one day, while we were discussing how we could encourage others to study with us, we realized that there was a pile of gold just awaiting us on Facebook. In August last year, we started several IOU study groups online.

We began advertising study groups for 'Usool At-Tafseer' in Dawah Monthly Magazine (a magazine that I founded by the Will of Allah), on Facebook pages and our personal pages. We also opened groups for the 'Dawah Training Course' and 'Arabic Reading and Writing.'

These groups progress at a pace that is comfortable for all the sisters, as our members vary in their ambitions, with some being more casual and relaxed, while others more persistent and hard working. At this point of writing, the 'Usool At-Tafseer' group has more than twenty sisters, and we are only one test away from the final exam. Once our final exam is complete, we will receive the certificate in *Usool At-Tafseer* from IOU signed by Dr. Bilal Philips and will be one step closer to the Diploma in Islamic Studies.

In the study groups, we share notes, help each other by clearing up doubts and difficulties in understanding the lessons. We also 'Skype' in groups for further convenience. Even though we may be busy in our personal lives and find it difficult to find the time to sit and study, IOU makes it possible for us to listen to the lectures on our phones and iPods at any time, even while driving! Even if we can set aside just 5 minutes a day to study, this is progress, because even tiny steps in the right direction is still a step ahead.

"All of this began with some questions about Islam, some books by Dr. Bilal Philips, and authentic information"

This is how we encourage each other in our study groups. So rather than wasting time and making excuses, we click on a group to at least read the notes. We constantly find ways to encourage ourselves and others to persevere. The rewards for this feat alone keeps us focused on our goals.

Our group members are sisters from the United States, Sweden, Saudi Arabia and all the way from Singapore! We have a global community of sisters committed to keep moving forward and hopefully to one day "Change the Nation through Education"!

I also started Dawah Monthly Magazine in June 2013 and use it to advertise the IOU and our study groups. Digital versions are available on the website while hard copies are distributed locally in the US. Now available in one local library, we are working on making it accessible in more libraries around the area. Right now, in my hometown, seven businesses (each of which is frequented by a majority of non-Muslims) display Dawah Monthly in their respective outlets. One such business is a chicken restaurant that sells halal food. The majority of its customers are non-Muslim, and yet this restaurant goes through 20 issues a day. The manager says there is one customer who regularly asks questions about Islam and (he believes) may accept Islam, *In sha Allah*.

He also reports that most customers anticipate the next issue. *Allahu Akbar!* Also, in the state prison, 100 - 150 copies of the magazine are distributed to the Muslim inmates there as a means to help in their rehabilitation.

In October 2013, Dawah Monthly Radio started broadcasting online and on mobile devices. Lectures, interviews and other authentic Islamic teachings can be heard on iTunes, RealPlayer and other players like WinAmp and Shoutcast.

With the help of our managing editor, Sumaiya Ali, also an IOU student, and our dedicated volunteers, Dawah Monthly magazine has quickly gained in popularity and works to spread authentic Islamic knowledge as taught at the IOU and in Dr. Bilal's books. The website has rapidly grown to over 100,000 hits per month since its launch in August last year. We are currently working with a sister in Singapore for local promotions there.

All of this began with some questions about Islam, some books by Dr. Bilal Philips, and authentic information free from deviation from what the Prophet ﷺ brought. It is a testimony that if Muslims are sincerely dedicated to Allah and the spread of authentic Islamic knowledge, then Allah truly will open doors for them and others to learn.

A tragedy early on in life left Ayan Mohamud, a young Somali American woman, physically disabled. But her gratitude-filled life, as she shares with Maira Mukhtar, is anything but a tragedy.



INSPIRATIONAL IOU STUDENT

‘I’m in a wheelchair... I can only move my head and use my left hand’

MAIRA MUKHTAR: When were you born and where was your childhood spent?

AYAN MOHAMUD: I was born in 1990 in Somalia as a normal and healthy child. During my initial years my family and I lived in a Kenyan refugee camp before we moved to America.

MM: Can you tell us about the life-

altering period in your life?

AM: When I was two and half years old, I got ill with a very high fever. My mother took me to a doctor who told her that I didn’t have enough blood. As treatment, I was given a blood transfusion through the arteries in my neck. During the process, however, I started to bleed through my nose and mouth and I went into a coma for three

months. After regaining consciousness, I could no longer eat, talk or walk. The staff at that clinic didn’t know what had happened. I was eventually treated for meningitis, but remained physically disabled.

MM: How has that changed your lifestyle?

AM: I can eat food normally now,

although I prefer certain kinds of food. I can speak, but I have a speech impairment. Those who are often around me get used to my speech. I'm in a wheelchair. I can move my head and use only my left hand to help with tasks such as typing. Although I can do many things on my own, I need a lot of help with my daily needs. I need assistance with dressing, feeding myself, hygiene, transferring in and out of the wheelchair, etc. Also, I cannot cook or clean but, *Alhamdulillah Rabbil 'Alameen*, I am mentally stable.

MM: When did you move to America?

AM: In 1993, my family and I came to the USA.

MM: How was life in the States?

AM: I grew up quite Americanized. I avoided the Somali community as I didn't like criticism. Even though I was born a Muslim, I knew little or nothing about my *deen*. I don't ever remember going to a masjid as a child, although my family went while someone always stayed behind with me. Growing up, I was told that I didn't have to wear hijab. No one ever gave me *da'wah* except relatives who told me to pray every once in a while, I didn't know how to perform wudu, or even the importance of it. I tried to learn how to pray at age 11 by asking and copying people, but I wasn't consistent. I liked the Quran, but I couldn't read Arabic.

MM: What changed your attitude towards religion?

AM: In 2007, we moved to another state and I wasn't too happy leaving my so-called friends behind. Two years later, I started watching Islamic lectures and, consequently, I became more aware of my religion. One day I saw two of my classmates leaving the class to pray and I joined them. Since then I started staying after-school and carrying a scarf so I could pray regularly. When summer vacation started, I cancelled all plans. I wanted something, but I didn't know

what. I decided to wear a *khimaar*. I went towards my *deen*. From there on, the more I learned, the more I changed, *alhamdulillah!*

MM: How did you come across IOU?

AM: It was about a year after I decided to practice my *deen* that I found the IOU on Google. Initially, I started with the diploma courses. Last year, I applied for an IOU scholarship which was approved, *alhamdulillah*. I started the BAIS program this year and am enjoying it very much.

MM: How do you manage online learning?

AM: I follow instructions like any other student. I use two fingers on my left hand to work on my laptop. If my hand

Alhamdulillah, I am almost always smiling. What is there not to be happy about? Allah has given me so much

is tired or I am in a different place, I ask someone to type for me. If I have trouble with other aspects of the course or need any accommodations on homework, I contact the TA (Tutorial Assistant).

MM: What goals have you set for yourself?

AM: My goal is to please Allah. I deeply yearn for *Jannah*. The people of Paradise are those whom Allah has mercy on and is pleased with. Those who truly fear Allah are those who have knowledge, thus I'm striving to learn. *In sha Allah* my dream is to become a *da'eeah*.

MM: How do you fulfill your religious obligations?

AM: I pray either in my chair or lying down. I recite the Quran and say the *athkar* with my tongue. Whichever family member is around helps me with *wudu* and my hijab. My family takes care of me, especially my mom, who I like to call my African queen. *Alhamdulillah*, Allah has given me a big wonderful family; my parents, my 6 brothers, 2 sisters and another sister in Islam whom I grew up with. All are older, except for one.

MM: Has this change in you impacted your family, too?

AM: My parents have become more practicing, *alhamdulillah*. Sometimes it's hard to convince them of certain things (even if I bring proof) because it contradicts how they learned and how they understand the religion. My siblings are average Muslims but they are gradually improving. I have been given a variety of names, but I try to let it slide as I know this is the right path, *In sha Allah*.

MM: Tell us about your favorite book and some of your favorite courses?

AM: My favorite book, without a doubt, is the Quran. My favorite class so far is Aqeedah, taught by Dr. Bilal Philips.

MM: You mentioned that you were a "happy" person, why is that? Most people would be depressed to be in your situation.

AM: Yes, *alhamdulillah*. I am almost always smiling. What is there not to be happy about? Allah has given me so much—a loving family and the very fact that I can read Allah's words, the Quran. I am truly blessed and a very happy person indeed! *Alhamdulillah*. Although, bear in mind that I am not perfect, rather I am a servant of Allah like everyone else. Only our Lord, Allah, is perfect and the best of creation is our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

SHERIFFA BRINGS IOU COURSES TO HER MASJID IN TRINIDAD

Islamic Online University has inspired its students around the world to 'change the nation through education'. **Sheriffa Mohammed**, an IOU student from Trinidad, shares with **Falak Ghalata** her experience of teaching and introducing the IOU in her community.

“Being the daughter of an Imam, my upbringing always revolved around Islam and it has remained the cornerstone of my life. I have always been involved in da’wah and was recently given the responsibility to teach and execute programs for the sisters’ wing at my local masjid.

“I used IOU’s diploma program *Foundations of Islamic Studies I* as the base for teaching. The sisters were all very excited. A total of 12 students strived together to complete the

diploma program. Prior to the start of a session, I would cover the entire content on my own and advise other sisters to do so as well. Then we would meet and go over the topic thoroughly, and either complete the module tests at home or at the masjid.

“By the Grace of Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta’ala), there have been huge improvements in sisters’ knowledge of *aqeedah*, Islamic etiquette and manners. We also had an open-house event at the masjid to introduce others to the IOU.

“My future plans are to complete the diploma courses and move on to receive my BA in Islamic Studies (BAIS), *In sha Allah*. I have completed the *Leadership* course by Sister Zohra Sarwari and enrolled in the *Understanding Qur’an* course by Brother Abdulazeez. I plan on starting similar sessions at a different masjid in Trinidad in 2014, *In sha Allah*.

“I am also working on getting the IOU accredited at the Trinidad & Tobago Accreditation Council *In sha Allah*.”

Advice for Online Learning Challenges and Solutions

BY VERONIKA MATULOVA

Being a student in an **online university** is quite different than being a student in a physical institution. There are many conveniences, but also several challenges. Very often, we don't know the challenges or the solutions to them until we walk along the path of online studying. Here, I will present some **common challenges**, as well as give you some helpful advice about the **practical solutions** which, by the grace of Allah, will help you overcome them.

1. Organization

Many of us are new to online education. We are accustomed to the classic classroom setting where almost everything is prepared for us. One of the requirements for successful online education is “better preparation” if we wish our studies to run smoothly. “Thinking beyond the classroom” becomes a necessity.

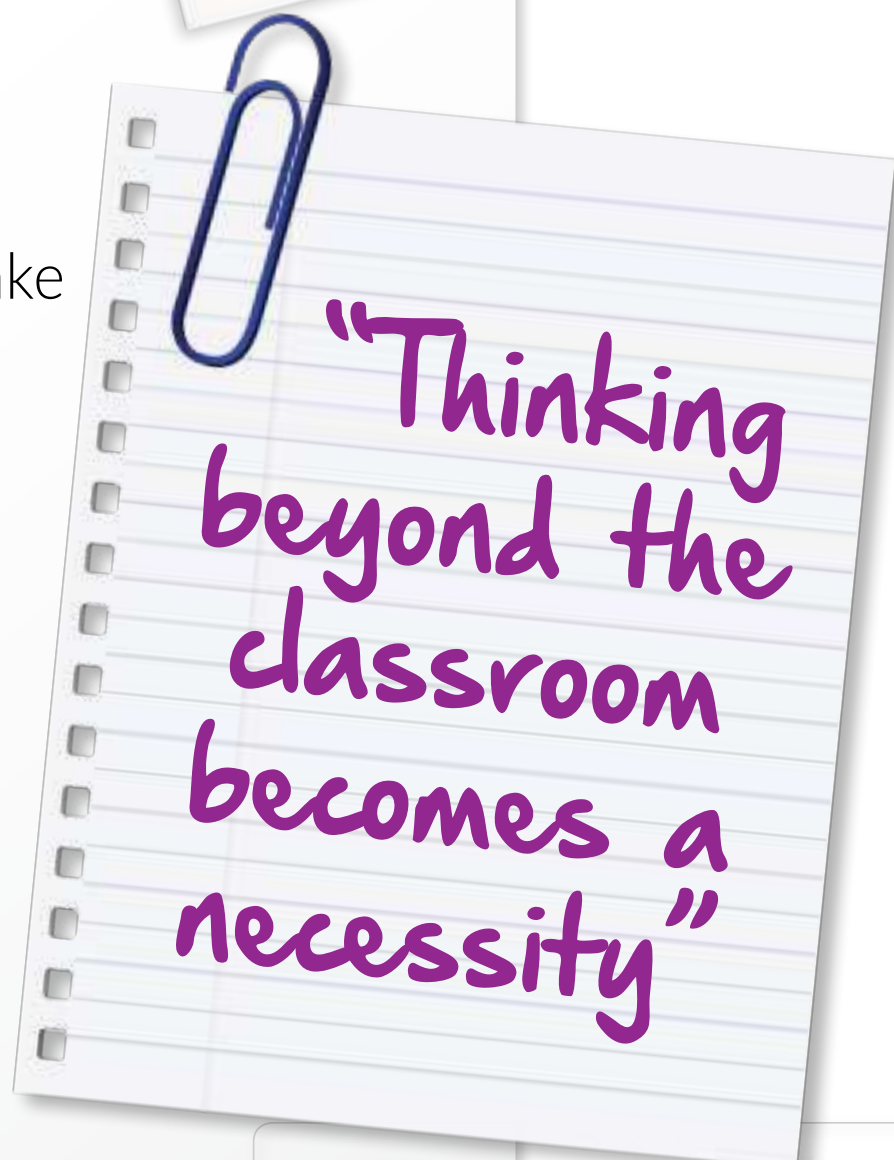
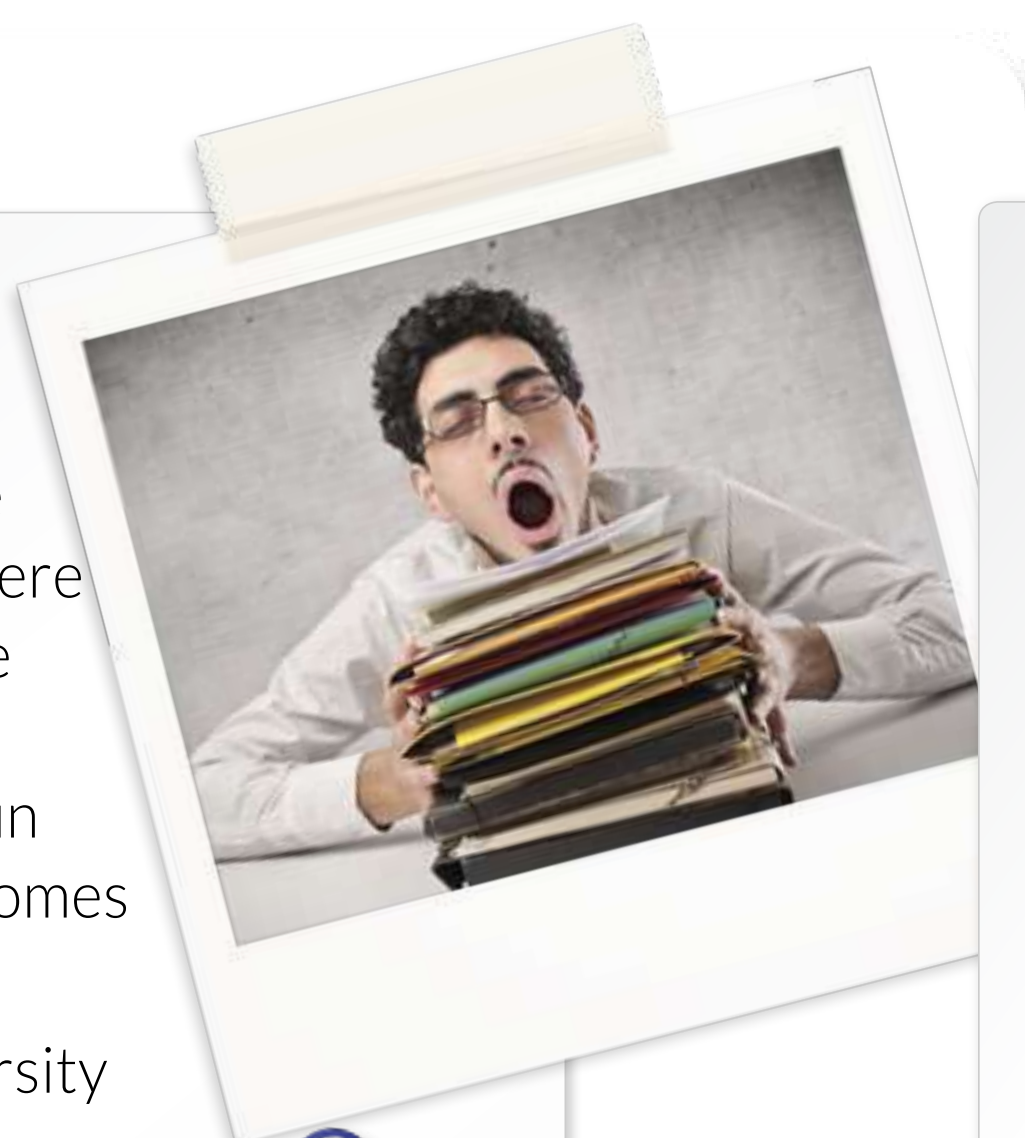
First, get familiar with the Islamic Online University website as you would normally do with any other institution you would be attending. *Ma sha Allah*, nearly with each new semester, new features are added to enhance students’ study experience. Make sure to read IOU’s policies and get to know your university.

The next step is to organize the selected subjects you have in mind by downloading and printing the “Events Schedule” which will help you to plan and organize your studies throughout the whole semester.

After this, look at your chosen subjects and read their syllabus. This will give you an idea of how much new material you will need to learn, as well as set a clear goal. With your syllabus and the events schedule at hand, you will be able to plan your studies. Try to follow your planner as much as possible and adjust and customize it accordingly, as our days do not always go as we plan.

Do not forget to download all your study materials and prepare your study place. This will help you to be more serious about your studies and give you that “classroom feeling”.

Finally, remember that the IOU has a “free dropping period.” If you will find yourself overwhelmed with the amount of studies and daily duties combined, just take advantage of this grace period. It will allow you to continue with your studies without an overwhelming amount of stress.



2. Procrastination

Online education does not have a typical classroom environment. The beauty, and at the same time the challenge of online education, is the flexibility that goes with it. Do not abuse this flexibility, because it will cost you dearly. Students of knowledge should be aware of their time and not waste it. Once you land in this situation, you will find yourself compromising your studies due to a lack of time. With the last minute rush, you will also be an annoyance to other students, since you will be looking for quick solutions to your studies, by asking them for help while they are revising for exams.

Don’t forget that procrastination can also occur when you indulge in other activities, like watching TV. Look at how you spend your day; look out for those “time eaters” and *In sha Allah* try to eliminate them as much as possible. It will only benefit you.

3. Motivation

When you are required to be somewhere five days a week, you force yourself even if you don’t feel like it. This obligation will keep you going through those difficult times until they are over. However, in online education, there is no one to push you but yourself. Therefore, you must first be sincere in your studies and constantly re-evaluate your intention. Islamically, this is very crucial as your reward, blessings and pleasure of your Lord depend on it. Likewise, know your goal, remind yourself of it often and stay focused. Do not let yourself get distracted. Remember, with the right intention your studies will be an act of worship, so strive for it. Do not study to achieve good grades or a certificate only, but also study to gain deeper understanding and the pleasure of your Lord, since **those who know are not equal to those who do not know** (Qur’an, 39:9).

4. Technology

Traditional school means books, pens, paper, black or white boards, etc. The teacher does all that needs to be done. You just enter the classroom and sit in your seat. However, virtual educational institutions and their classrooms are entered through various devices. If you are a person who knows only the “ON” button on your computer, you will face great difficulty studying online.

So prior to enrolling in such institutions, you need to have basic computer knowledge. Also, take advantage of different devices

available to enhance your study experience. If you are a tablet, iPad or iPhone owner, research different options available to attend online classes or view video recordings. Hard copies of the textbooks will not always be available, and if you don’t want to print or wish to economize, look at the different eReader devices. You may also research different media viewing programs that allow you to speed up the recording, like VLC player.

If you are a person who spends a lot of time getting to work, or you are a domestic engineer (housewife) with lots of cooking and other chores, take advantage of MP3 formats. You can fulfill your everyday duties while listening to your lessons.

5. Daily duties

The advantage of online studies is to study according to your own schedule. You don't need to give up working or other commitments, rather you can combine them. Managing daily duties is especially important for wives and mothers who seem to work 24/7. In order to be able to study effectively, try to evaluate your tasks and see how you can make them easier. Delegate; assign to everyone at home some task, so your workload will decrease. Combine; merge duties as much as possible and take advantage of MP3 player while cooking, cleaning, ironing or doing some other tasks that do not require too much of your attention. Exam time is very stressful, so look for the best options in managing your time. For example, try to cook in advance or choose simpler meals.

"Joining different study groups will further boost your morale"



7. Health

Studying long hours into the night, snacking on unhealthy junk food, sitting for long periods, and staring at the bright computer screen can take its toll on your health. Health is a precious gift and we should try to preserve it. Many students, especially females, experience unwanted weight gain due to sitting, snacking and studying. Try to replace your snacks with healthier options like fresh or dried fruits, vegetables, nuts or healthy treats. Blink often when in front of the screen and take breaks to stretch your limbs. And if possible, try to add daily exercise to your routine which will boost your energy and make you feel and perform much better throughout the day.

I ask Allah to grant you successful and beneficial online studies.

Veronika is a 7th semester student of IOU. She is a speaker, teacher, writer, and translator. She is also a da'eeah, mainly for the Czech-speaking community under the PROIslam o.s. organization, where she is vice-president. She is co-founder and administrator of the first online community group of Czech and Slovak sisters established in April 2002. She is also a regular contributor to the Islamic Online University blog.

6. Social Interaction

Typically, in the classroom settings, you will interact with your teacher, as well as your classmates face to face. One of the biggest challenges that online students face is the lack of this direct interaction. *Alhamdulillah*, apart from the audio and video recordings, the IOU gives you the opportunity to attend the weekly webinars, live online classes. Try to attend live classes as much as possible. It will give you an opportunity to clear up any doubts or misunderstandings in the course material.

You can also participate in subject forum located on the IOU course page or join various study groups that IOU students have set up. Subject forum is more formal and study-like, while different study groups, e.g. Facebook study group, will give you the opportunity to also know your classmates beyond the classroom. You will also get to know students from the different semesters and *In sha Allah* make friendships based on the love of Allah for life.

It is always a good idea to have a study-partner with whom you can clear up your doubts and review the study material, test each other and share notes. Joining different study groups will further boost your morale, since you will always find support and help, if not physical, from other students in your area, at least spiritual and psychological.

“ The competition to pile up the good things of this world continues to distract you, until you visit the graves (i.e. until you die) ”

[Surah Takaathur, 102:1-2]

In modern terms, we can translate “the competition to pile up the good things of this world” as “the rat race”, and that summarizes the modern world and lifestyle quite well. We spend much of our lives chasing after bigger homes, fancier cars and smarter gadgets just so that we can show off in front of others and get ahead of the competition. Yet what do we really get out of all this? Does it really make us happier or grant us inner peace in any way?

BY **ISMAIL KAMDAR**

SIMPLICITY: A STUDENT'S BEST FRIEND



The rat race and its trappings are hardly conducive to a student's lifestyle. When a person chooses to study Islam, he is choosing to tap into the inheritance of the prophets. This inheritance is not made up of information and facts only, but rather it is a life-changing force that reshapes perceptions and alters one's priorities in life.

One major change in priorities that occurs in the life of a student is to realize that there simply is not enough time in this world to chase both the world itself and the afterlife, and so one needs to prioritize. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said,

"There are two blessings about which people are at a loss: good health and free time for doing good deeds." (Saheeh Bukhari, 8:76:421)

This prioritization of what is important over what is unnecessary leads to abandoning the rat race and opting for a simpler, more beneficial and happier life.

What is a simple life?

It is difficult to define a simple life as it differs from person to person, culture to culture and family to family; however, I can tell you what simplicity is not.

Simplicity is not about living as a pauper and abandoning the basic essentials of life. We know this because Islam obligates a man to work and provide for his family, and we see this in the biographies of the prophets and righteous predecessors.

Simplicity is not about dressing shabbily, wearing tattered clothing or neglecting to take care of ourselves. Rather, there is great emphasis in Islam on being presentable, clean and tidy.

Simplicity is not about putting ourselves or our families into difficult situations in which we deprive them of the halal things in this world that they need and we can afford. Rather, Islam teaches us to treat our families well and take care of their needs.

In short, simplicity is not about harming or depriving oneself or one's family; rather it is about cutting out excesses and limiting one's worldly possessions and goals to that which is necessary or beneficial.

What can a student do to make the transition into living a simple life?

To start off, a student should look at his life and arrange it according to his priorities. These priorities include whatever is needed to fulfill our obligation primarily to Allah, and after that to our families, ourselves and our Ummah. This prioritization gives one the insight to recognize things in one's life that are unnecessary and a waste of valuable time and money. A decision should then be made to eliminate such waste, as both the wealth and time of a student are precious.

The next step is to understand that Allah is The Provider, and if

we are working and earning a halal income then Allah will take care of us and not deprive us of the necessities of life. With this perspective, we should realize that if we cannot afford something, it is probably because we do not need it right now. As a result, we should commit to living within our means. Living within one's means will assist in avoiding debt, interest and all the anxiety and worry they cause. This will then lead to an increase in contentment and happiness which is what we all seek.

However, in order to live within our means, we need to cut ourselves off from sources of temptation. This means to avoid the modern advertising industry as much as possible, as these advertisements are designed to incite greed and to disguise wants as needs. This has a negative impact of tricking people into spending their money on all types of things which are neither useful, necessary nor affordable. Avoiding these advertisements and other sources of temptation helps us remain content and focus our thoughts, energy, time and wealth on what is important in life.

A simple life also means being a conscientious purchaser. This means that a student should always think before purchasing something and look at whether the purchase is worth spending

money on and beneficial or if there is something better they could purchase instead. So, it is advisable to do a cost-benefit analysis before any purchase, as we will be answerable to Allah on the Last Day for every dollar we spend.

It is also important to have good company. Staying in the company of the simple, the humble, those who are not attached to this world and the righteous is important, as it is the company we keep that directly affects our goals and desires. Righteous company is crucial for a content and happy life.

Good role models are just as important as righteous company, and in Islam we have no shortage of these. Our history is

full of righteous people who chose to live within their means and prioritize their time and wealth on what is best for the Ummah. From the Prophet ﷺ and his companions ﷺ to the scholars (Allah's mercy be upon them) we have enough role models to provide us with a framework for a simple life.

What do I gain from this?

By eliminating debt, unnecessary expenses, time-wasters and distractions, a student of knowledge gains more time for studying, teaching and serving Allah's religion. Contentment, happiness and peace of mind come from all of these, knowing that you are debt-free and out of the rat race.

It is strange that many people seek these very same goals of contentment and happiness by chasing this world, while in reality they are running away from what they seek.

The definition of living a simple life and its benefits can be summed up in the words of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when he said,

"The successful person is the one who has accepted Islam, been provided with enough for his needs and has been made contented with what Allah has provided for him." (Saheeh Muslim, 5:2293)

"THE SUCCESSFUL PERSON IS THE ONE WHO HAS ACCEPTED ISLAM, BEEN PROVIDED WITH ENOUGH FOR HIS NEEDS AND HAS BEEN MADE CONTENTED WITH WHAT ALLAH HAS PROVIDED FOR HIM"

— Prophet Muhammad ﷺ



LOST in our mazes of desires and trials, we often forget the simple, yet important blessings bestowed on us by Allah ﷻ. As an example, the gift of sight, which is incomparable and irreplaceable, is a faculty which most of us enjoy from birth to death. It is a sense that enhances all other senses and adds to the pleasures of life. Every one of us should pause and reflect upon this blessing and how we use it to enrich or promote Islam.

Abu Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Ismail Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Al-Mughirah Ibn Bardizbah Al-Bukhari should be a motivation for all of us. He presented the world with *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, the most authentic work in hadeeth literature ever compiled and

HE LEFT A **MARK** ON THE PAGES OF **HADEETH** *forever.*

BY
SARAH MARIAM

unanimously agreed upon by scholars. He was born in Bukhara on 13 Shawwal, 194 A.H (21 July 810 CE). His father, Ismail, passed away in Imam Bukhari's childhood leaving him along with an older brother in the care of their mother, who nurtured them with love and care.

Historians relate a remarkable incident that occurred during the imam's childhood. He lost his eyesight when very young. Though his parents were grieved by it, his pious and virtuous mother spent her days and nights in endless prayer, weeping. By means of a dream in which Prophet Ibrahim ﷻ had appeared, the imam's mother was informed that:

**“BECAUSE OF YOUR BOUNTIFUL
AND SACRED PRAYERS, ALLAH
HAS RETURNED THE EYESIGHT OF
YOUR SON”**

The dream came true. The next morning the imam's sight was miraculously restored. He began to learn traditions (hadeeth) by heart around the age of 10 and gained popularity for his intelligence and astounding memory. His elder brother, Ahmad Ibn Ismail accounted that the young imam used to attend the lectures and discourses of learned men along with him and other pupils, but unlike others never took notes. Once, being annoyed by their constant criticism of his carelessness, Imam Bukhari narrated all the 15 thousand hadeeth from his memory with the minutest details which had not been noted down by the fellow pupils.

At the age of sixteen, after having memorized the compilations of both Imam Waki and Abdullah Ibn Mubarak, he made the pilgrimage to Makkah, accompanying his mother and elder brother. Upon completing the pilgrimage, the imam decided to remain in Makkah. He would spend the next six years in Hijaz (Makkah and Madinah) in the pursuit of hadeeth (traditions).

He was just 18 years old when he compiled the books '*Qadaayas-Sahaabah Wat-Taabi'een*' and '*Taareekhul-Kabeer*', with just the moonlight as means of lighting.

Imam Bukhari traveled a great deal in order to expand his knowledge. He made two trips to Syria and Egypt and stayed six years in Arabia. He also returned to Kufa, Baghdad and Basra four times and at times remained there for a period of five years. Also at Hajj season, he used to return to Makkah. The Scholars who taught the imam were towering personalities, like: Muhammad Ibn Salam and Muhammad Ibn Yusuf Baikandi, Abdullah Ibn Muhammad

Musnadi, Ibrahim Ibn Ash'ath and even Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. However, he had mostly benefited from Ishaq Ibn Rahway and Ali Ibn Madeeni. It is reported that the imam has heard traditions from 1080 different people, all of whom were scholars.

A spectacular incident took place in Baghdad when the imam had taken up temporary residence there. People there decided to test him to see if the imam was worthy of the attributes that were being issued to him. One hundred different hadeeth were chosen that had their testimonials and texts altered. These altered hadeeth were to be recited to Imam Bukhari by ten people. One by one, each altered tradition was recited. The imam remarked at the end of each recital: "Not of my knowledge."

After all the traditions had been presented, the imam demonstrated the power of his memory by correcting the testimonial and text of each tradition in order.

Imam Bukhari had memorized over 200,000 traditions and written over 300,000. Unfortunately, some of these traditions were not authentic or reliable, for he was born at a time when traditions (*ahadeeth*) were being forged and distorted, either to please kings and rulers or to corrupt the religion of Islam. Due to this, Imam Bukhari decided to dedicate the rest of his life in compiling a book that would be strictly comprised of authentic traditions. The imam's mission was further strengthened when he was advised by his respected teacher, Sheikh-ul-Hadith Ishaq Ibn Rahway, to compile a book that would exclusively contain 'Sahih' (authentic) Prophetic traditions.

What fuelled his determination was the dream where he saw himself standing in front of the Noble Messenger (ﷺ) with a fan in his hand and driving away the flies

from the Prophet ﷺ. On relating the dream to numerous scholars who were experts in interpreting dreams, he was told that it meant that he would drive away and remove false traditions.

After sixteen years of exceptionally hard work, his famous book *Sahih Al-Bukhari* was concluded, after altering it a total of three times. In all these years, the compilation has always remained constant. Allamah Ayni رحمته reports of Ibn Tahir's remark that Imam Bukhari had written *Sahih Al-Bukhari* in his hometown of Bukhara. Ibn Bujair however, relates that he had started his compilation in Makkah, and some have reported of seeing him in Basra.

Despite the excessive number of traditions that the imam had memorized, he only selected 7275 hadeeth because these were the traditions that held strong testimonials, as well as having no doubt in their authenticity. It is reported that the imam would first have a bath, then perform two *rakat salaah* and pray for guidance before inserting a new tradition to his book. The book was reviewed and approved by great scholars of his time, including Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Ali Ibn Madeeni and Yahya Ibn Mu'een.

Despite the high status and respect the imam was worthy of, he would always search for ways, however small they might be, to please Allah ﷻ. The imam had inherited a fair amount of wealth which he decided to spend in the path of Allah leaving him with no money. He would spend his days surviving on one or two almonds.

Imam Bukhari returned to his native birth place, Bukhara, at last and was given a rousing reception by the entire populace of this great cultural city. He later migrated to a town near Samarkand. Here he breathed his last on 30 Ramadan, 256 A.H. (31 August 870 A.C.) The entire population of

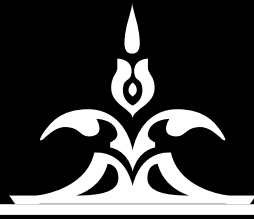
the town and the vicinity came out to pay their last homage to one of the greatest sons of Islam. His monumental work, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, established his reputation as one of the greatest compilers of hadeeth in Islam. This epic work of Imam Bukhari has been acclaimed by thousands of scholars and erudite theologians as a rare accomplishment. More than 53 commentaries, some of these in around 14 volumes, have been written on *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.

This book is divided into various chapters, for which he had planned a complete scheme. In his selection of hadeeth, he exercised great prudence on his part. Imam Bukhari is the author of about two dozen other books on religion, Islamic philosophy and history. However, it is his *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, whose hundreds of commentaries and translations have appeared in different languages during the last one thousand years, that is the most renowned.

Imam Bukhari رحمته also had a great number of students. It has been stated that approximately 9,000 people were privileged to sit in his lessons where he taught his book *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Students traveled from all corners of the world in order to join these pious sittings and to be honored with a glimpse of the knowledge that he held and which never failed to astonish anyone who came in contact with him.

Great inspiration and lessons should be drawn from the imam's resoluteness, piety and manners. May Allah strengthen our love for the beautiful traditions of our beloved Prophet ﷺ and may Allah bless us and accept our efforts in the cause of Islam and help us to grow and achieve success like the man who has left a mark on the pages of hadeeth forever. Ameen!





LESSONS FROM
**SURAH
 YUSUF**
 PART 1



I LOVE the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), peace be upon him. It is a tale of inspiration, filled with manifold lessons such that it can take a lifetime to understand the blessings and wisdom of each one of them; and Allah knows if it is even possible to learn them all.

We see the chapter of Yusuf as a dynamic story detailing forty years of trials and sufferings of an innocent child separated from his family who eventually grows to be a man subjected to further unimaginable hardship. He struggles at every turn which increases our empathy for his plight but to our satisfaction, we are left with the comfort that it all works out in the end. It is a happy ending that many of us can only dream of. A

family reunited, an oppressed child able to overcome the challenges of the world to rise as a great man and a great leader over a vast and powerful land. What more can we ask for in a good story?

From the very beginning of the story, Allah, The Glorified and Exalted, emphasizes that this is not just another story for us to casually read.

We relate unto you (Muhammad) the best of stories through Our Revelations unto you, of this Quran. [Surah Yusuf, 12:3]

BY
GARY LAROCQUE

The best of stories, as expected, would contain plenty of wisdom and the best of lessons. Some of the great lessons that we learn early on in this story is that some people are given greater gifts than others; we learn that great challenges can come from those around us including our own families; and we also learn about the ideal relationship between a father and his son.

If we look at the world today, we see that we live in an age of disconnection, wherein we, as parents struggle to connect with our own children. We chase them to be involved in their lives and often even resort to spying and invasion of their personal space due to our inability to have a solid relationship with them. This is not so in the case of Yusuf and his father Ya'qub (Jacob), peace be upon them both. There is a bond between these two Prophets of Allah that forms a model for every father and son.

As the story of Yusuf begins, we see on the surface a strange dream that a child has - a dream where eleven stars, the sun and the moon bow down to Yusuf. It is a dream that many (had they seen it) would just ignore or keep to themselves. But Yusuf wants answers. He wants to learn and understand. So he turns to someone for guidance. We would expect Yusuf to turn to his friends or his siblings like most children do, but instead he turns to one he truly trusts and loves above all others - he turns to his father.

(Remember) when Yusuf (Joseph) said to his father:
“O my father! Verily, I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves to me.”
[Surah Yusuf, 12:4]

We learn quickly that it is a situation of honor as well as of great concern, love and profound wisdom. Ya'qub, peace be upon him, recognizes the great blessing that has been bestowed upon his young son, along with the trials and dangers that will come with it.

He (the father) said:
“O my son! Relate not your vision to your brothers, lest they arrange a plot against you. Verily! Shaitan (Satan) is to man an open enemy!
[Surah Yusuf, 12:5]

“Keep your dream a secret.” This is the warning Yusuf receives from his father. It is a lesson many of us ignore because of our need to chat. We forget that not all things need to be revealed, especially if they are going to cause us harm. Yusuf has been given a gift he does not yet understand. It is a gift and a sign of what he will become, and Ya'qub is aware that this can bring Yusuf harm. Ya'qub teaches Yusuf that envy is powerful and that even his own brothers can be influenced by the whispers of Satan. So Yusuf needs to be careful and tell no one about the gift Allah has given him.

We know that as a Prophet of Allah, Ya'qub is given insight into matters which the rest of us cannot comprehend; but as Ya'qub continues advising his son, we notice that, as a man, he (peace be upon him) takes great pride in his son, Yusuf, and in the fact that he has been chosen by Allah to carry on a wonderful blessed lineage.

Thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of dreams (and other things)

and perfect His Favour on you and on the offspring of Ya'qub (Jacob), as He perfected it on your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaque (Isaac) aforetime! Verily, your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise.” [Surah Yusuf, 12:6]

In just six short verses, we have been given examples of the benefits of a loving relationship with our parents, the dangers of envy and the threat of the enemy of man (Satan) who waits to exploit it. This is only just the beginning of what *Surat Yusuf* has to offer.

In sha Allah, in this series, we will continue to extract various other lessons from Surah Yusuf because as Allah clearly reveals:

Verily, in Yusuf (Joseph) and his brethren, there were Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) for those who ask.
[Surah Yusuf, 12:7]

- Translations of the meaning of the Quran by Mushin Khan.

Gary Larocque, a 5th Semester student at IOU, has been active in da'wah in Toronto, Canada since accepting Islam in 2007. He features on local radio and is founder of the websites Sahaba.net and TSPMuslim.com.

Be Exemplary

As a teacher, you should not simply strive to be good in a generic sense; instead, you should try to be exemplary in everything you do.



ENGAGE STUDENTS!

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would ask inviting questions.



What makes a Good Teacher?

BY DAWOOD VAID

Case 01

Fourth-grader Aasim is a bright and curious boy with big dreams of becoming an architect. But, like many students from low-income families, by the time he joined Mr. Mansoor's class, he was already a year and a half behind in reading. Aasim and his family are now looking to Mr. Mansoor, who himself was raised in the Zakah Foundation project, for assistance.



Case 02

Fateh has just completed his engineering degree and is reluctantly applying for a job in the optical lens sector. He feels his calling is in the field of da'wah. He has spent hours listening to orators and scholars in Islam and diligently studied the Prophet's ﷺ manner of giving da'wah. Alas, due to the lack of a proper degree or qualifications, he is unable to realize the immense potential that the field of da'wah has in offer.

If you can identify yourself or someone you know in the two scenarios above, then Teaching Methodology 101 course at Islamic Online University is tailored for you.

What Makes a Good Teacher

Whether one has a talent for teaching, wishes to contribute to knowledge, is dedicated to education or simply has the zeal to teach, this course helps the student combine the power of Islamic knowledge with essential teaching skills.

Although students are free to choose to take the subjects in any order they prefer, Teaching Methodology 101 is placed in the 8th semester for the students who are preparing to graduate in order to round out their education with the proper abilities in proliferating Islam and using their knowledge to educate others.

When we began the course, our initial undertaking was to identify the goals of the BAIS degree course in general, and that of Teaching Methodology 101 in particular. Here are two documented responses from the participants.

My first goal in joining the BAIS program was to gain beneficial knowledge, so that I can find real meaning in practicing my religion, to best understand the deen, and to worship Allah for He asked us to do that.

- Student A

The two main goals that I would consider from this class are: To learn the principles of education and how to clearly and professionally convey the message of what we learn to other people. **- Student B**

What to Teach?

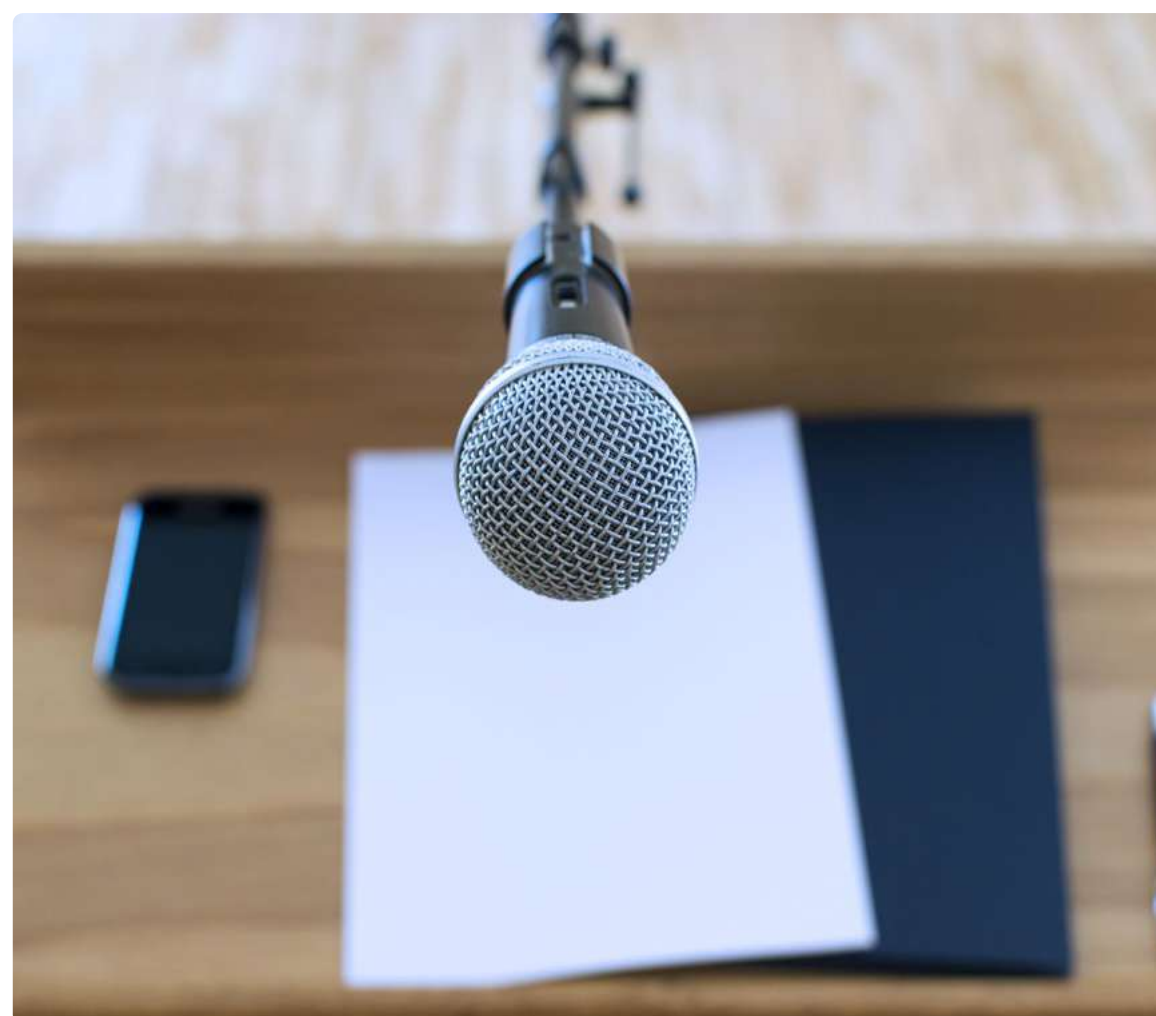
The course is wonderfully woven around the book appropriately entitled *The Skillful Teacher*. The entire course is sub-divided into two modules: *Classroom Management* and *Teaching Instructions*. However, the best part of the course is that it can be easily integrated with a da'wah workshop or a *jumuah khutbah*.

A key skill that the orator or teacher must be equipped with is the art of presentation. This is termed 'soft skills' and has been integrated into the course along with 'learning skills'. The combination results in an effective da'wah program.

An important 'learning skill' reiterates the use of visual aids to facilitate better memory. By using skills like listening, repetition, structure of material, gestures, and visual stimuli, the students' learning experience is enriched.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ is an excellent example of a teacher who utilized all of the above skills. He was proficient in using visual aids or to structure the information in a few numbered points, which helped with better retention. For example, there are hadeeth similar to the following: Islam was built on five (pillars) or there are seven (persons) under the shade.

To engage his audience, the Prophet ﷺ would ask inviting questions like "What are the three signs of a hypocrite? They are: when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he breaks his promises; and when he is trusted, he breaks his trust." (Bukhari and Muslim)



Quotes from the Salaf

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab used to encourage Muslims concerning four activities which are popular even today. He would say, "Teach your children swimming, archery, horseback riding and good poetry."

This '*balaga*', or the flow of language, is an essential art in instruction or oration. The course provides ample opportunities for the students to practice and perfect this art of communication.

Good Teachers Have a Sense of Purpose

As a teacher, you should not simply strive to be good in a generic sense; instead, you should try to be exemplary in everything you do. This means that you should know exactly what is expected of you and be thoroughly prepared to fulfill those expectations. Before the class begins and even before walking into the classroom, you should have set goals that you will focus on and work towards achieving.

In teaching, as in life, it is all about knowing your purpose.

Dawood Vaid, tutorial assistant for Teaching Methodology 101, lives in Mumbai with his two daughters and enjoys horseback riding lessons and storytelling sessions with them. He heads Burooj Realization, an Islamic educational organization, and Red Camel International School.



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