



ISLAMIC ONLINE UNIVERSITY

# INSIGHTS

MAGAZINE

## DR. BILAL BUILDS TIES WITH TOP PAK INSTITUTIONS

NO AGE BAR FOR  
LEARNING:  
70-YR-OLD  
IOU STUDENT IN  
INDIA

HOW ALLAH  
SUPPORTS HIS  
DEEN

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IT INTERVIEW  
THE  
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THE PRESERVATION OF THE QURAN  
IN THE HEARTS OF MEN

# Active Mind, HEALTHY MIND

**“Are those who know equal to those who do not know?”** (Quran 39:9)

Knowledge is a great good, yet it will be of no benefit to a person who is unaware of the straight path and how to stay on it, and of course, actually walk on it. It is never too late to begin that march. As long as the servant of Allah will take advantage of His blessings, he can strive for the pleasure of Allah until the angel of death visits him.

The Prophet ﷺ said, **“There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) Health and free time for doing good.”** (Bukhari)

Besides the fact that seeking knowledge, with the combination of wisdom, piety and adherence to the correct Islamic teachings, gives a person higher status in Paradise, it also has a positive impact on the health of the person’s mind.

Keeping one’s mind active is as important as keeping one’s body active. While not taking care of the ageing body will most likely lead to limited mobility, which may be compensated for by crutches, wheelchair, transplants, and similar; the unhealthy ageing mind will cause immeasurable suffering, which cannot be made up for.

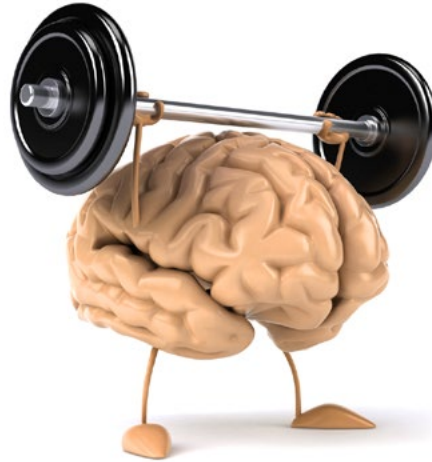
Around the world, dementia, a general term for a

decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life, is widely recognized as one of the most pressing problems facing healthcare systems and an ageing population. Memory loss is an example. Alzheimer’s is the most common type of dementia and it accounts for 60 to 80 percent of such cases.

It is estimated that between 6 and 15% of Canadians aged 65 years and older suffer from Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia (Government of Canada). In the USA, Alzheimer’s is the sixth leading cause of death, and more than 5.4 million Americans are known to be living with Alzheimer’s and many more go undiagnosed (Alzheimer’s Association). By 2030, the number of people with dementia is expected to be 65.7 million and an astounding 115.4 million in 2050. The increase is mostly attributable to the hike in dementia in low and middle income countries (The Muslim Observer). Hence, the Muslim population is not immune to the illness’ of the ageing mind.

As of today, there is no known cure for dementia. Hence, the focus is on its prevention. Research has suggested that combining good nutrition with mental, social and physical activities may have a greater benefit in maintaining or improving brain health than a single activity.

Seeking knowledge in every stage of life is a



very good method to keep our brains active and engaged. An active brain means a healthy and sound mind in an ageing body. Moreover, a healthy mind soaked in beneficial knowledge will strive for the rewards of Allah in this life and in the next. May our last breath not be an end to our rewards!

The fact that the Islamic Online University is online and easily accessible allows anyone to join. Therefore, it is of no surprise to find students from different ethnicities, social backgrounds and age groups.

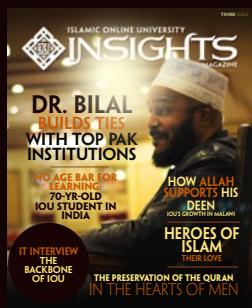
It is always amazing to hear people’s inspiring stories. However, coming across stories of the elderly among us who are on a quest for knowledge gives a different meaning to lifelong

learning. If the seniors of our ummah enter the world of knowledge and our younger generations hold steadfast to the path of knowledge, we will become a healthy nation, spiritually and physically.

In this issue, we look into the lives of two of IOU's elderly students who have embarked on this blissful journey of knowledge, so we may use our active minds and reflect.

We also have a special section on IOU's Quran memorization program and how it has helped people from different walks of life.

— **Insights Editorial Team**



## MEET THE TEAM

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## YOUR VIEWS

We would love to 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](mailto:info@iou-insights.com)

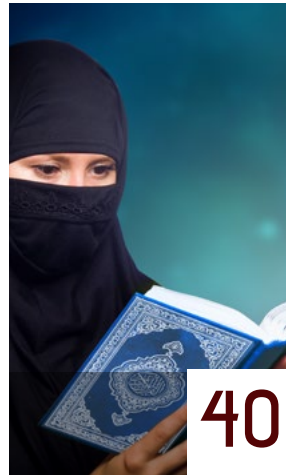


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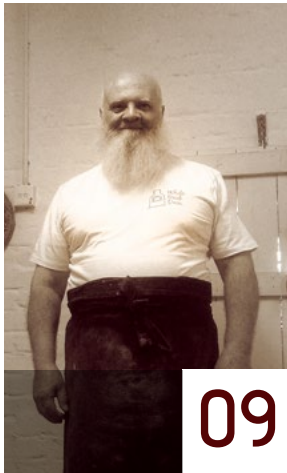
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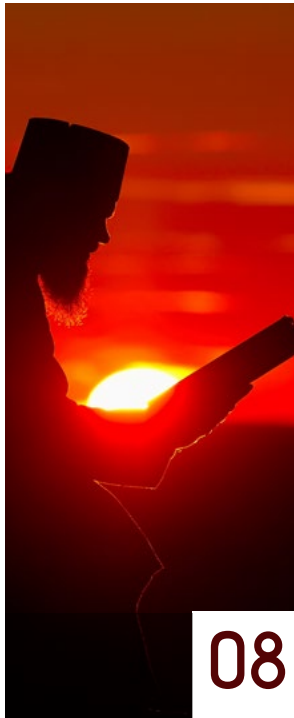
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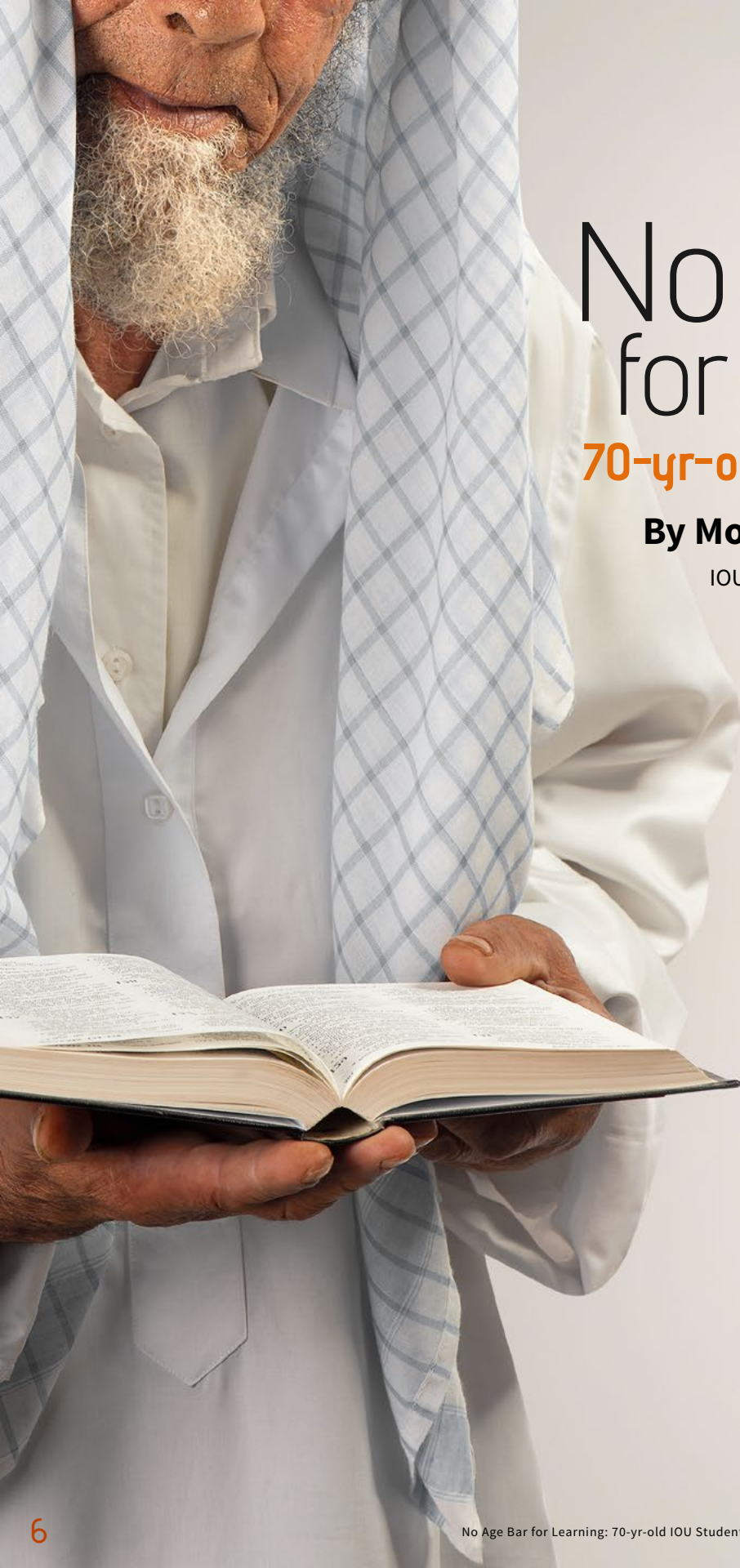
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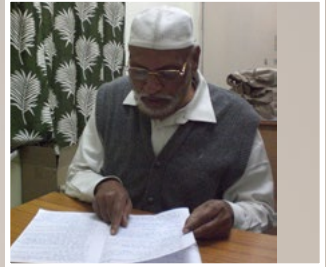
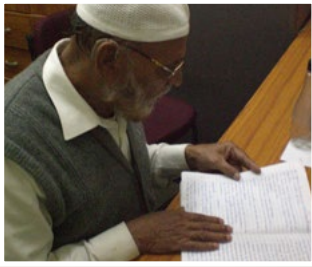
# No Age Bar for Learning: 70-yr-old IOU Student in India

**By Mohammad Shajjuddeen**

IOU Global Representative Director

**A** special student visited the IOU India office in Hyderabad recently. Aged 70, he was a retired army officer from Tirupati, a prominent pilgrimage city for Hindus in the southern part of India. He introduced himself as Syed Ismail and that he was an IOU diploma student. I was intrigued as I had never met an IOU student his age before.

The questions he asked were very basic showing that his computer skills were lacking; however, his interest in learning was high. I clarified his doubts but speaking to him was not easy as he cannot hear from his left ear-and his right-can grasp only about 5% and for that he uses a hearing aid. Listening to videos is therefore difficult and he studies as much as he can from the online textbooks. He prepares his own notes to grasp the topic in depth.



Brother Syed Ismail at the IOU India office in Hyderabad.

He visited again after few months with more questions which were very simple. Though I appreciated his interest, enthusiasm and his commute from so far away to clarify doubts, I was unable to attend to his queries with care due to my primary job responsibilities and I showed some signs of frustration. *Alhamdulillah*, I realized that I should have attended to him with more care. Allah made me remember the first verse of *Surah Abasa*, Chapter 80: *Abasa wa tawalla*. (The Prophet) frowned and turned away.)

I then made sincere *du'a* for Allah to send him again and soon my prayers were answered. I was out of the office when one of the staff called saying someone had come to meet me. Upon enquiring, I was told it was brother Syed Ismail. A feeling of joy enveloped me as I realized that I could play some role in helping him continue his studies. However, I was very far away and it would require a 3-hour commute to reach the office.

Although it took long time, he patiently waited for me. When I reached the office and met him, *alhamdulillah*, his enthusiasm to study was as before and I now took great pleasure in answering his questions. Allah brings us many paths of achieving His pleasure, and there is no path more worthy than helping a Muslim learn correct knowledge.

I believe IOU's success is due to the blessings from facilitating things for such students and providing free authentic Islamic education throughout the globe.

Mr. Syed Ismail comes from a part of India where there is a lot of shirk and misunderstanding of the Islamic creed. Upon embarking on his quest for knowledge, he is eager to put into action the lessons he is learning. I remembered in his first visit, he greeted me with salaam but folded his hands in the typical Indian style as many non-Muslims do. I pointed to him that this was not correct Islamically and he abandoned this habit.

**I believe IOU's success is due to the blessings from facilitating things for students and providing free authentic Islamic education throughout the globe"**

When I asked him what he learnt at the IOU so far, the first thing he said was *tawheed* as he never knew the three categories of *tawheed*, i.e., (1) *Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah*, (2) *Tawheed al-Asma wa Sifaat*, (3) *Tawheed al-Ibaadah*. *Alhamdulillah*, he grasped this part from the course so well, *Allahu Akbar!* This is indeed a major achievement considering he comes from a place where Islamic knowledge is greatly distorted.

He has positive plans for the future. He wants to build a mosque from his pension money and has also mentioned that he wants to open an IOU center at his place of residence. We ask Allah to grant him the highest ranks in Paradise and make his plans a success for both this life and the hereafter.



# 'I have been trying to learn Arabic for over 40 years'

It is always inspiring to read about other people's struggles in seeking knowledge, and a student's email did just that to the staff of Islamic Online University.

**Mustafa Martin W. Prior**, an aged artisan baker in the charming village of Kubu Gajah, Sungai Buloh, Selangor, Malaysia, shared his amazing story of striving to learn the beautiful language of Quran with IOU teaching assistant Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Petersen:

*Asalaamu alaikum,*

*I just wanted to inform you that I am unable to attend the live sessions because I am a baker. I start my day at 03:00 and on Sundays, finish around 19:00. I am 68 years old and after that time on my feet, I am totally exhausted and go to sleep after prayers. I do however follow the recordings on Monday morning. Thank you for those.*

*You may have noticed that my test results this semester are not as good as before. The reason for that is that I do have a problem reading the multiple choice questions on screen and the time limit does cause me to "panic" a bit and choose the wrong answer. After the test is over, I do go over them again*

**"The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is today"**

*and figure out the correct answer. I am afraid that this is an age-related problem and not much we can do about that.*

*A further example is during the live sessions when you throw open the tests, answers are flying up the screen and I am still on number 2 :(*

*I have been trying to learn Arabic for over 40 years and had many courses. Alhamdulillah, this course I really feel that I am learning due to the structure and guidance the IOU gives.*

*At my age, I am not so interested in grades but results and I feel that I am getting them.*

*Alhamdulillah.*

*Jazakallah for your efforts and patience.*

We asked Martin to share his story, which continues on the next page in **Martin's Lifetime of Wanderlust**.

Most people in his situation would have given up on acquiring knowledge. His dedication is incredible to say the least.

So, if you are wondering if the time is "right" for learning or if you're "a bit too late," then think again!





# Martin's Lifetime of WANDERLUST

*Continued from 'I have been trying to learn Arabic for over 40 years'*

I was born in England in Poole, Dorset in 1946, but I grew up in Bristol. I was not a good student and disliked school, which on reflection, I believe was due to my awful handwriting. I was more inclined to working with my hands. I made things from wood, repaired cars with my father, and loved walking and rambling in the fields.

On days that my father was pleased with me, my reward was to listen to his short wave radio in the garden shed. I would sit there for hours with my headset listening to the world. If I found a station I liked, I would listen to it even without understanding. Only much later did I realize that it was Quran Radio from Mecca

(or Egypt?) that I was hooked onto. I was just 9 years old at that time.

I remember once when I was around 11 or 12, my father had brought some books from the library by the Victorian explorer, Sir Richard Burton. They were about his explorations of Africa and his journey from India via Afghanistan to Hajj in Mecca. All of these books captured my imagination and like young boys do, I fantasized that it was I making these great discoveries and journeys.

Confident that I knew everything that ought to be known, I dropped out of school at the earliest opportunity, which in those days was 14.

I then worked in a men's clothing shop, a coach builder's factory, a department store and did some repair works too. Frankly speaking, none of this interested me. Then one fine day, I passed by the Royal Navy recruiting office and two weeks later, I was learning how to march!

I went on to study electronics at the Navy School and after a couple of years, I was onboard my first ship en route to the United States and Canada. I was then sent to Aden, where apparently, we were not liked very much. It did not take me long to see why. I got on very well with the Yemeni people and used to go out on their fishing boats in my spare time. This was the start of my Sir Richard Burton dream.

From Yemen, I went to Bahrain where I practically did nothing for about a year, except drag a fire cart up and down the small jetty daily to practice fire drills. I guess they figured that I was not very good at electronics.

Eventually, I was returned to the UK and put aboard a ship patrolling the English Channel. Due to the rough and appalling English weather, I did not enjoy myself at all.

At this point, I decided to quit the Royal Navy. I had enjoyed it but felt that there was more I could do. Soon after, I took up a job of a store manager selling bed linens and curtains. The saying, "beggars can't be choosers" was apt for my situation at that time.

It was during one of these days that I received a telegram from London for an interview.

To call it an 'interview' would be an overstatement. Let me tell you why. The interviewer, an American ex-colonel, simply informed me that I had to work with a team of American and English people in some rough areas of the world and that I was perfect for the job. Also, I would have to leave to the site of work immediately.

As is my nature, I usually make decisions very

quickly, and hence it was no surprise that I promptly agreed to the offer. I was posted in Australia where I was to explore oil off the coast of West Australia along with my companions who I met in Rome. In particular, my role was to set up and look after some electronic equipment for the same purpose. The work also required traveling to Indonesia where I was able to renew my acquaintance with Muslims and I must say that I liked working with them.

I was about 21 at that time. The Western culture of spending hours consuming alcohol did not amuse me at all. It seemed pointless and worthless. Fortunately, after travelling around South East Asia, I was posted in Yemen. At that time, it had recently been opened by a road from Sana'a to Hodeidah on the coast. I made many friends over there and it was in that year I became a Muslim in Singapore, *alhamdulillah*.

Shortly after that, I went to Egypt and was able to establish my own company in Cairo in the same field. My aim was to create job opportunities for Muslims as I had always found them to be reliable and skilled. I expanded my business to all the countries surrounding the Red Sea including Somalia. I was once again reliving the journeys of Sir Richard Burton.

In 1988, I sold my business and returned to the UK where I set up a company for designing and building computer systems. In the mid 90's, I dissolved this company and spent time consulting on computer related issues with Kuwait Petroleum in Thailand and England.

Tired of travelling, my wife (who I married in Malaysia) and I finally set up a small Internet cafe in Bournemouth in the late 90's. This gave me some spare time to spend in the local mosque and familiarize myself with the local Muslim community. However, shortly after the events of 9/11 took place, we were a bit uncomfortable running our cafe as the majority of the visitors were Muslims. It was then that we decided to return to Malaysia.

This may sound strange, but one of the things that I missed the most was bread! So much so that I ended up baking it myself using the techniques my grandmother had shown me years before. Shortly afterwards, we set up our bakery which sold only halal products. Finally, I had found my home and was able to settle down. My physical journey was over, but I was still lacking in my spiritual side. All the travelling had made it difficult to study Islam as I would have liked to.

When I look back, I am convinced that my life was guided by Allah. I knew that it was high time that I started studying our deen. I have seen Islam in many guises around the world but the common link I found everywhere was the Arabic language. It was the key I had to gain to unlock the understanding of Islam, to understand the way of life.

Thus, I began my journey to seek knowledge. My poor 'rapport' with academics continued here too...until I came across my current teacher. I finally began to understand texts written in Arabic.

Our study method includes conversing with him thrice a week for an hour. In nearly every lesson he teaches me some new tidbit about the language. For example, once he asked me how would my cousin introduce himself if s/he came to my home. Of course in English, they would simply say 'cousin', but in Arabic, the word used would inform the listener of the person's exact relation to him, and hence decide if it was appropriate for them to meet or not. I once heard a talk by Nouman Ali Khan on the Arabic word '*baab*' where he mentioned that the word is not what we call a door but the hole that is closed by it. This and many such minor intricacies of the language were enough to persuade me to learn Arabic.

Islam as practiced in many countries these days is quite similar to the practice of Christianity. We all assemble on Friday, various committee members play a role in performing the prayer

and we are all led in dhikr, quite similar to the Sunday meet in Christianity. As a result, I am constantly on the look out to locate mosques that adhere to the Sunnah. I find this very sad as this was one of the reasons that distanced me from Christianity.

*"As humans, we cannot stop learning and if we do, we become ignorant and dull. Learning strengthens the mind and improves the faculties"*

It is also sad that we feel the need for grand places of worship rather than small humble buildings which are close to the populated areas enabling the Muslims to attend every prayer. But these days, due to the enormity and glamor of the masajid, huge areas are required for such constructions and hence they need to be located at distances far away from the residential areas. In short, we are distanced so much from the *masajid* that we need a car or motorcycle to take us to a prayer.

I want to have a one-to-one relationship with Allah. In order to achieve this connection, I must learn Arabic from the original texts. This is the actual journey of my life and *in sha Allah* it will continue. As humans, we cannot stop learning and if we do, we become ignorant and dull. Learning strengthens the mind and improves the faculties. Along with the mind, must come the body and so I regularly exercise to keep myself fit. This also helps to improve and maintain our mobility so that we can continue to perform our prayer.

May Allah fill us with the thirst to gain knowledge about His deen and give us the ability and sincerity to implement it in our lives.

Yours truly,  
*Martin*



# NEWS: IOU **STRENGTHENS** ACADEMIC TIES GLOBALLY



**From the beginning of 2015, Islamic Online University has been signing several Memorandums of Understanding with universities around the world.**

- 1) Al-Qalam University, Katsina (AUK), Nigeria (June 1, 2015):** The Al-Qalam University is Nigeria's first Islamic University. The University offers various courses spreading along five Colleges including Humanities, Education, Applied Sciences, Management and Social Sciences.
- 2) Virtual University of Pakistan (VU), Pakistan (April 25, 2015):** The Virtual University is Pakistan's first university that is based completely on modern technology. It was established by the government as a public sector, not-for-profit institution to provide extremely affordable world

class education to aspiring students all over the country. The university delivers education through television and the Internet.

- 3) Royal University of Dhaka (RUD), Bangladesh (March 15, 2015):** Royal University of Dhaka (RUD), Bangladesh is a private institution of higher education offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.
- 4) Bayan Institute of Higher Education, Afghanistan (Feb. 24, 2015):** Located in Kabul, Afghanistan, this institute offers degrees in Economics, Computer Sciences, Law and Political Science. They also have online and distance learning programs.
- 5) Islamic University in Uganda (Feb. 24, 2015):** Located in Mbale, Uganda, the university aspires to function as a highly academic and cultural institution based on Islam and love of the country. The faculties include the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Management Studies.

**The MOUs signed recognize the importance of academic interchange and encourage collaboration between the two institutions. Furthermore, this understanding will facilitate the exchange of experience in designing new programs and identifying faculty members for short-term or long-term teaching assignments.**

**Under the MOUs, both institutions will provide financial support to a specific number of deserving students in the form of teaching and research scholarship or other stipends that are appropriate and available.**

# Pakistan Trip: Dr. Bilal Builds Several Partnerships for IOU

**By Hunain Aijaz**

IOU Chief Academic Coordinator

**D**r. Bilal Philips' consecutive visits to Pakistan in February-March 2015 saw a number of developments for the Islamic Online University. I had the pleasure of accompanying him during the trip.

As IOU's chancellor, he met officials of several reputed universities and signed memorandums of understanding. He took part in the 2015 Vice Chancellors' Forum on Universities in the Islamic World: Facing Global Challenges and was a guest speaker at Shifa Inter-Scholastic Tournament (SIST

2015), one of the largest Islamic events for youth in Pakistan.

The Shifa Student Society, organizers of SIST 2015, hosted Dr. Bilal's first visit from Feb. 7-12. His second visit from Feb. 22 to March 4 was mainly to participate in the VC Forum on Feb. 23-24. During his trips, he visited Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Karachi, delivered several public lectures, and closely interacted with IOU's students and its student committee.

The IOU has more than 6,500 registered students from Pakistan in the free Diploma campus and over 2,300 in the degree programs.

## PICTURE GALLERY

### SIST 2015



Delivering a talk on "Islam - A Contemporary Solution to Moderns Woes" at Convention Centre on Feb. 8 in Islamabad.



Visiting the International Islamic University of Islamabad auditorium during the SIST 2015 event on Feb. 7 and delivering an impromptu lecture to inspire the young students.





Visiting the IOU stall at Convention Centre on Feb. 8.



Asim Hamid (right), a team leader of a software engineering team in Islamabad and EnMedical Systems, holds a BS in Computer Science from National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Islamabad, Pakistan; and an MS in Software Engineering from Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida.

**S**hifa Inter-Scholastic Tournament (SIST), which debuted in 2011, is a series of Islamically-themed competitions in public speaking, debate, art and design (including calligraphy, photography, and filmmaking), *anasheed* and recitation, project presentation, and more. The Shifa Student Society is a non-profit run by students of Shifa College of Medicine under the guidance of senior faculty members.

## INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD



Dr. Ahmed Yousif Ahmed Al Draiweesh, president of International Islamic University of Islamabad (IIUI), presenting a university crest to Dr. Bilal Philips after a meeting on Feb. 9. Al Draiweesh is a reputed scholar who has received the Tamgha-e-Imtiyaz award from the president of Pakistan for his work in comparative jurisprudence. The two agreed to take steps to enhance cooperation between the two universities.

Founded in 1980 and located around the iconic Faisal Mosque, the IIUI is a public research university in Islamabad and regarded as a noted institution of Islam and science.



## RAWALPINDI



Speaking on Entertainment in Islam during the Deen in Dunya seminar organized by Tafheem-ul-Quran Academy on Feb. 9 in Rawalpindi. The academy focuses on Islamic education for women and kids.



## SHIFA



Meeting top officials of Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University (STMU), including Prof. Dr. Mohammad Iqbal Khan, the dean; Prof. Dr. Syed Shoaib Hussain Shah, principal of Shifa College of Medicine; and Dr. Manzoor H. Qazi, the CEO, on Feb. 10 in Islamabad.

## PRESTON



With Dr. Abdul Basit, chancellor of Preston University, on Feb. 11.

## STUDENTS' MEETING



An exclusive meeting and QA session with some of IOU's students at Al-Falah Manzil Islamic Community Center on Feb. 11 in Islamabad.





## VC FORUM



Group photo of all the heads of institutions from around the world who attended the forum on Feb. 23-24 in Islamabad.



Participating in a panel discussion on day two.



Signing an MoU. Dr. Bilal Philips signed MoUs with COMSATS Institute of Information Technology of Pakistan, Bayan Institute of Higher Education of Afghanistan, Islamic University of Uganda, and The Advanced Institute of Modern Arts and Emerging Sciences of Pakistan.

The VC Forum is jointly organized by Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW) and Pakistan's Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Higher Education Commission and COMSATS Institute of Information Technology. The participants proposed several recommendations to the global challenges faced by Islamic institutions. More than 70 MoUs were signed during the event.

## RIPHAH INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Visiting Riphah International University



Speaking on "Challenges Faced by Youth."





Signing an MoU.

## COMSATS



Delivering a lecture “Time does not belong to you” at COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT), Wah Campus on Feb. 25 in Islamabad. CIIT is a multi-campus, public research university ranked among the top 5 universities in Pakistan.



## KARACHI TOUR

Feb. 26 – March 4

## STUDENT MEETING



With IOU students at Role Model Institute on Feb. 26.

**D**r. Bilal Philips first met with the vice chancellor of Riphah International University on Feb. 9. On Feb. 11. Officials from the university presented him with a university crest at Ramada Hotel and invited him for signing an MoU on Feb. 25. Riphah is a private university (chartered by the government in 2002) established with a view to produce professionals with Islamic moral and ethical values. Riphah has been an important exam center for the IOU for a long time now.



## PUBLIC LECTURES



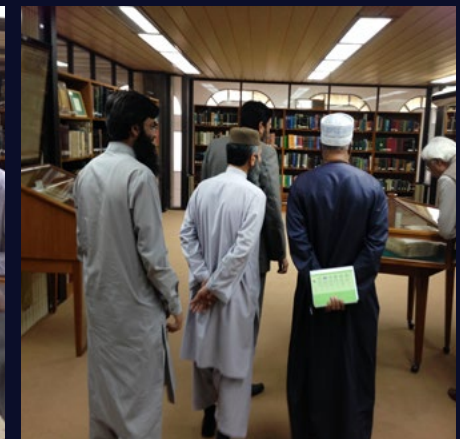
Delivering lectures and workshops hosted mainly by Live Deen from Feb. 27-March 1 at Marriott Hotel in Karachi. Right: IOU stall at the March 1 event.

## ISRA UNIVERSITY



With Prof. Dr. Ghulamqadir Kazi, vice chancellor of Isra University, after signing an MoU on March 3. Isra is a private university noted for its faculty of medicine.

## HAMDARD UNIVERSITY



With Prof. Dr. Hakim Abdul Hannan, vice chancellor of Hamdard University, who presented him a university crest after the signing of an MoU.

Visiting Hamdard University's central library, Bait-ul-Hikmah, which is one of the largest research libraries in South Asia with a collection of over half a million books, some of them dating back to the 17th century.



# Community Service: IOU Awareness Week in USA

**H**ave you ever wondered whether you could earn the requisite credit hours for community service doing activities that assist Islamic Online University (IOU) and facilitate da'wah? The Volunteer Representatives and Student Committees at IOU have their doors wide open to assist you to this end. Different states across the USA are inviting IOU students to take up leadership roles and leave an impact on local communities by organizing student committees and events.

Often students at IOU see the community service hours requirement as a burden rather than the awesome opportunity that it was designed to be. Originally, Dr. Bilal Philips had asked students to undertake any form of community service for these credit hours as a requirement for graduation. Recently, however, he decided to allow students to serve IOU by working as Volunteer

State Representatives or as members of student committees. This provides IOU students with a unique opportunity to make practical use of the knowledge they are gaining.

We now have representatives from different states actively creating events to promote IOU in their area and earning credit hours simultaneously. It is heartening to see their genuine feelings of happiness when they successfully organize a major event. While some have prior experience in the field, others are first-timers. Nevertheless, their efforts, dedication and hard work to promote IOU are equally appreciated and recognized.

Kansas State Representative, Yasmine Nilofar, organized an outstanding event for Awareness Day this year at the Matt Ross Community Center in Overland Kansas on Feb. 21. She managed to fundraise \$2,300 which she used to secure a hall



with state-of-the-art sound and technology for the IOU presentation. The venue seemed tailor-made for the event and the entire US IOU staff was flown in to Kansas, including National Director, Sheikh Muttahir Sabree and National Representative, Yasmeen Rolland, who are both international speakers. Over 150 enthusiastic brothers and sisters attended the program to learn more about IOU and be motivated to walk the path of seeking knowledge. The event also featured a nasheed by children from the local community and English nasheeds to draw in the crowds.

The IOU team is proud of her efforts, especially since it was her first attempt at organizing such an event. The hospitality was amazing and everybody had a great time socializing at the end of the program -- topped off with delicious biryani!

Sr. Yasmeen Rolland, international speaker and the developer of the Volunteer State Program, spoke about how she felt attending the event:

*"Alhamdulillah, I felt so proud of the accomplishment of Sr. Yasmine Nilofar! It was incredible to see the fruits of the hard work put in by state representatives come forth before my eyes. The end result made it all worth it.*

*"I look forward to more IOU students across the nation coming forward to serve as state representatives and emulate Yasmine's efforts in Kansas in their locality. This will help us all work together for one of the most rewarding aspects of community service: calling others to improve their practice of Islam through sound Islamic knowledge.*

*"It is amongst the greatest blessings in my life to work with Dr. Bilal Philips, Sheikh Mutahhir Sabree, Muhammad Shajiuddin and the entire IOU staff in Changing the Nation through Education."*

*If you are in the US and would like to volunteer for the IOU, contact: [national.usa@iou.edu.gm](mailto:national.usa@iou.edu.gm)*





# Dr. Bilal's Talk & IOU Stall Attract Students in Kashmir

**Dr. Bilal Philips**, along with other renowned speakers, addressed students of the University of Kashmir through a recorded video during their Islamic Fraternity's Global Convocation on Feb. 28, 2015, at Srinagar, India.

The IOU student committee of Kashmir also organized a promotion during the event, which saw dozens of students enquire about the educational opportunities at the Islamic Online University.

A stall was set up outside the convocation complex. IOU brochures were distributed and people were made aware of the university and its courses in the hope of increasing awareness of its various activities and its pivotal role in the educational sector.

The University of Kashmir is a leading institution spread over 247 acres of land.

Originally founded as the University of Jammu and Kashmir in 1948, it was bifurcated in 1969 into two full-fledged Universities:

University of Kashmir at Srinagar and University of Jammu at Jammu.





# IOU's Growth in Malawi: How Allah Supports His Deen

Incredible initiatives sprung forth from the International IOU Meeting of Spring 2014 in Malawi, a landlocked country in southeast Africa with a significant Muslim population.

A large delegation of volunteers and representatives from across the globe gathered to discuss the potential enhancement of IOU projects in Malawi. The meeting kindled a spark of hope

for our country.

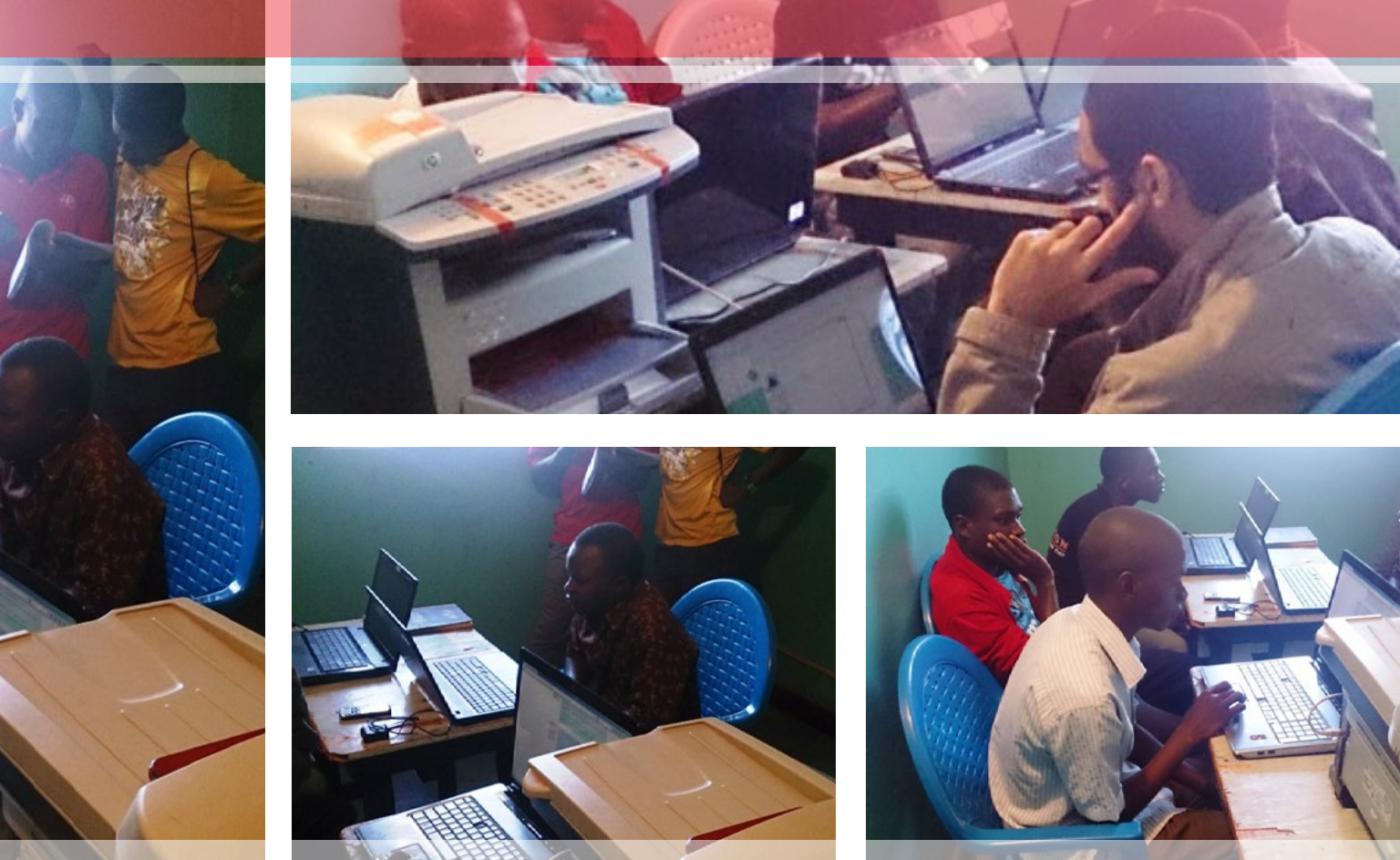
Following in the footsteps of IOU Kenya, a dedicated team of organizers not only established the IOU Malawi Student Committee, but also secured campuses in two of the country's major cities. However, with the country going through a severe economic crisis, the goal was not just to provide IOU's Islamic education in the country,

but to do so at zero cost via a scholarship program.

Due to the critical state of the economy, it is difficult to promote IOU in the country, as most students do not have the financial means to pay for the Internet, let alone enroll.

Mohammed Moshin, chairman of IOU Malawi's Student Committee, says that not only is the "country well below the





poverty line,” but as a result, “the minimum wage of people living here is less than US \$1” – a shocking reality.

The committee had established a campus in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi, and another in Blantyre. However, the question was no longer about establishing, but about staying established; the finances of the two centers combined amounts to a challenging US \$2,000. This includes paying for rent, employee salaries, Internet access and other utilities.

Despite the apparent difficulties, the student committee’s continuous and sincere efforts brought about an avenue for

financial relief. Elevated Trust, a local financial institution, was willing to affiliate with the committee. “*Ma sha Allah*, they allocated a separate office for IOU,” Moshin states, “with two computers exclusively for IOU, with full time Internet access.”

As IOU continues to gain stability in Malawi, the committee is putting in place a scholarship fund. This fund is for students with financial difficulties looking to join the Degree programs offered by IOU.

In Fall of 2014, the Malawi Scholarship Fund sponsored 27 students, and yet another 19 students were granted full scholarships for Spring 2015,


*Ma sha Allah*. It is incredible to think how the seed of IOU planted itself in the small country of Malawi, by the continued mercy of Allah, through a select number of dedicated brothers and sisters. Finance is becoming less of an obstacle for Malawi students as they acquire an accredited IOU degree through the scholarship fund, *alhamdulillah*. Despite the obvious challenges, the perseverance and dedicated efforts of IOU Malawi Students Committee are surely paying off.

**“For indeed, Allah does not waste the efforts of those who excel.”**

(Surah Yusuf: 90)



# 'Every department is dependent on IT'



*The IT team, headed by **Jamal Aruna**, is the backbone of Islamic Online University's operations. In this interview, Jamal and his team share the challenges they face in meeting the growing needs of IOU.*

**With more than 200,000 students from 228 countries -- may Allah bless IOU -- how does the IT team handle such a large online organization and what challenges do you face?**

*Ameen. Alhamdulillah*, IOU has grown a lot since its inception in 2009. What started as a very small online website has now grown into a complex system of web applications built around the main Learning Management System (LMS). IOU uses Moodle (an open source LMS), and a lot of custom PHP applications built around it like centers management, admin reports, student portals for exemptions, complaints, transcripts, etc. Being on Moodle gives us the advantage of benefiting from the open source community; we keep adding new features that are developed by the community.

With IOU being completely online, IT plays a very integral role in the functioning and growth of the university. Every department in IOU has some dependency on the IT department to develop systems for their tasks. Over the past years we have worked extensively with each department trying to automate many of the admin tasks to ensure the admins can manage the huge number of students, courses and streams. *Alhamdulillah*, now at the click of a button, the admins can do what would have usually taken them days; for example deduct marks,

hide or show tests and give class participation marks.

Due to the complex nature of requirements at the IOU, we have been required to customize Moodle and to accommodate the changes. We have developed systems and customized Moodle at places to ensure that the entire student experience at IOU is smooth and enjoyable. We are constantly working on trying to implement the best features of virtual learning, so our students can benefit from them. These systems are constantly being improved with new features and bug fixes.

**How large is IOU's IT team? What special talents do we have in the team?**

We are currently a team of seven core members and other volunteers. I, Br. Jamal, am the head of IT. I'm managing the entire team. Br. Farhan assists me and loves customizing Moodle and developing plugins for it. Br. Yousuf Tafhim and Br. Raja Mohammed handle the front end operations. They design and maintain the numerous websites at IOU. Br. Romie Syah Putra and Br. Saddique Shaikh are our server admins and managers, who keep the server alive. Br. Muhammad Ahmed is our android developer.

**Could you share some interesting data or stats about IOU's complex IT operations and needs?**

IOU has around 20 different websites, some of which are built on Wordpress and we have four active Moodle instances. We use a variety of other PHP applications like OrangeHRM, PHP Lists, etc. Over the past 18 months, the IT team has completed more than 2000 tasks involving developing new systems or maintaining old ones. Our database has 750 tables that store various student records.

**What are some of the major challenges faced by the IT team in the past and how did you handle them?**

In 2014, IOU introduced many new streams and programs that had to be hosted on the single Moodle instance. This required a major change in the infrastructure to organize the courses in these programs. Some courses like Aqeedah 101 would be common in all streams, while others would be separate. *Alhamdulillah*, we customized many of the core files of Moodle and developed a custom course page that displays the course list according to the user's stream. We also enhanced the display of this page to show the user an attractive dashboard with progress bar that showed the next module, course grades, etc. A list of completed courses (according to the stream) was also made available. We had to revamp many of our systems to now log the user's stream while accepting requests.

**What is the future looking like with regards to IT at IOU? What new advancements are we looking at *in sha Allah* and what challenges do you foresee?**

*Alhamdulillah*, in terms of the e-Learning, IOU is keeping itself updated with the latest trends and newest features, which we will continue to implement. We have also started gradually targeting mobile apps that would let users connect to our website, and hence to make it even easier for people to study Islam.

**It has been great to hear about how the team has customized Moodle's core to meet IOU's complex needs, *ma sha Allah*. A common worry that people have when customizing is that they may not be able to update the software when the community releases new versions. How do you get around that?**

We keep customizations to the core at a minimum, maintain details about the customizations

done, and reapply them after upgrading to newer versions of Moodle. We are in the processes of moving to a version control system to smoothen this process.

**“One of our contributions has been the Quran Recitation block for Moodle. We also share knowledge by answering questions on the Moodle forums”**

**Does the IOU team also contribute plugins to the open source community? If so, how has its response been?**

One of our contributions has been the Quran Recitation block for Moodle, which can be found at [https://moodle.org/plugins/view.php?plugin=block\\_quranrecitation](https://moodle.org/plugins/view.php?plugin=block_quranrecitation). *Alhamdulillah* there have been 342 downloads so far. We also share knowledge by answering questions on the

Moodle forums.

**What does IOU's success say about the ummah's strength in the IT field?**

IT has become a popular field in today's time, especially amongst Muslims. Although IOU did not succeed solely on the strength of its IT department, IOU's success shows what the ummah can achieve if they make use of the latest technology for the sake of Islam. This is the age of technology and we need our masjids and our da'wah centers to go hi-tech to make maximum use of technology for its benefits.

**How can IT professionals who would like to volunteer get in touch with IOU? Does IOU need such extra help and what kind of skills are you looking for?**

With IOU's ever-growing needs, we are always on the lookout for any extra help we can get. People with a good knowledge of PHP, Moodle, User Interface Designing, Mobile application development can reach out to us by filling the form here: <http://islamiconlineuniversity.com/volunteer.php>.

***Editor's Note: Muslim IT professionals can use technology in a way that benefits Islam and Muslims. Helping Islamic centers and taking them online is the need of the hour.***

***A Muslim IT professional can do his part in da'wah by making websites, mobile applications and web applications that help people come closer to Islam. Stay tuned for the upcoming IT and CS degree programs at the IOU!***





*A focus on*  
GQMC's Hifdh  
program







# The Preservation of *The Quran* in the Hearts of Men

**And We have certainly made the Quran easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember? (Quran 54:17)**

Islamic Online University introduced the Global Quran Memorization Program in 2013 for Muslims around the world who desire to memorize the Quran but don't have means or time to travel.

**Beata Gwaliczek**, coordinator of the GQMC department, shared her insight into this life-changing program.

## Why GQMC?

IOU's priority is to impart high quality education to its students, whichever field it may be. GQMC is no less. All our Tutorial Assistants are *huffadh*, have *Ijazah* (Islamic certification) in Quran memorization and are excellent reciters. We have seven female and five male tutorial assistants; most of them hailing from Egypt. Also, our classes are segregated for men and women.

Due to the flexibility and ease of the program, we have at the moment 193 students who have embarked on this transformative imaan-boosting journey from the comforts of their home. Our students are as young as 12, along with others who are teenagers and adults in their 20's and 30's.

One of the major benefits of teaching Quran over the Internet is that there is absolutely no need of going to an onsite school. You can simply turn on your device from wherever you are, be it your laptop or phone, log in and you're directly led

**"Our aim is to simplify and enhance the learning experience of our students."**

into the virtual classroom where your teacher is readily awaiting your arrival to share his/her knowledge and offer his/her support.

Hence, you get the opportunity to study under qualified *huffadh* from all around the globe, which would have been impossible otherwise unless enduring hardship of travels.

## What Do We Offer?

Our aim is to simplify and enhance the learning experience of our students. Hence, GQMC levels have been designed to cater to the needs and requirements of all students. What's more, students have the freedom to choose any level they desire.

We offer three levels:

### 1. Beginners Level:

This level is for absolute beginners. Students who do not know even a single surah can join this level. It commences with *Juz Amma* (juz 30) and the rate of memorization is only one page per week.

### 2. Advanced Level:

This level is for those students who have already memorized *Juz Amma* and *Tabarak* (juz 29). This level is spread over four years:





**Year 1:** Surah az-Zumar to Surah an-Nas (2 pages per week; the last 2 juz to be recited by the students)

**Year 2:** Surah al-Anbiya to Surah Sad (3 pages a week)

**Year 3:** Surah at-Tawbah to Surah Taha (3 pages a week)

**Year 4:** Surah al-Fatiha to Surah al-Anfal (4 pages a week)

If a student wishes to enrol into the Advanced Level but has not memorized *Juz Amma* and *Tabarak* yet, s/he is encouraged to join our Preparatory Year group, wherein the student will memorize the two juz following which s/he will be eligible to enrol into an Advanced Level group, *in sha Allah*.

### 3. Juz 26-30 Hifdh With Complete Khatma Recitation:

This is a dual feature level as it is also a course in itself. In this level, students will memorize the last 5 juz. The format of these sessions is as follows:

1. Memorize 1 page per week (half page per session).
2. Study tajweed rules with instructor.
3. Recite a *khatma* to improve recitation by correct application of tajweed rules.

Along with class work, students should ensure that they practise the pages memorized for at least 2 hours daily.

## Qira'at Type at GQMC

The method of reading (*qira'at*) employed for teaching is *hafis*. Hence, students learn the transmission of the Quran recitation of Abu Bakr 'Asim that the majority of the Muslim world is familiar with and which is the universally accepted transmission of the Quran.

## The Methodology

### 1. For Beginners and Advanced Level:

Each group will have 4 classes per week – beginner groups have 3 classes per week, preparatory year have 3 classes and advanced level have 4 weekly sessions. In these live sessions, students listen to the teacher's recitation, repeat after the teacher; receive the teacher's feedback on their recitation along with instruction on areas of improvement. The last live session of the week is dedicated to the student's recitation from memory. The same procedure applies throughout.

Usually, most of these sessions last for about 60



minutes. However, the duration of live session may vary slightly from one group to another depending on the number of enrolled students.

Students also attend a weekly evaluation session which is 120 minutes long in almost all groups.

**“Allah has promised to preserve the Quran in the hearts of mankind and IOU makes it easy for you to be a part of this preservation.”**

## 2. For Juz 26-30 Hifdh Course:

There are 2 weekly sessions per week which are 60 minutes long. In these sessions, students memorize half page per session and also study the tajweed rules.

### Duration

The program of the Advanced level is for 4 years. However, if students enroll into the Preparatory Year, it would extend upto 5 years.

However, if students opt only for the Juz 26-30 Hifdh course, the duration is 2 years only.

### Who Can Join?

1. The student applicant should be 12 years and above.
2. The student applicant should be proficient in reading Arabic language.
3. Knowledge of the basic rules of tajweed is a must.
4. Reasonable ability to recite Quran with tajweed.

If the applicant is not proficient in Arabic or tajweed rules, he/she should take our Advanced Diploma program in BAIS and opt for the Arabic 100, Tajweed 101 and Tajweed 102.

It must be noted that only the students of Level 3: Juz 26-30 Hifdh course will be taught the tajweed rules.

### The Ijazah Program

As a continuation to the GQMC program, IOU has also introduced the Global Quran Memorization Center's Ijazah program alongside for those who wish to attain a certificate in Quran memorization.

An added advantage of this program is that students will be given certificates for memorizing two poems: *Tahfat Al-Atfaal* and *Al-Jazariyyah*.

The interested candidates must have memorized the entire Quran with tajweed or a minimum of 15 chapters on condition that the student will complete the memorization with a teacher in the same IOU Ijazah program. The new 15 chapters will then be reviewed over 1 to 2 semesters until they have been fixed in the memory according to the student's ability to memorize.

Unlike GQMC where the sessions are held in groups, the students enrolled in the Ijazah program hold one-to-one Skype/Ekiga sessions with their instructor. There are 3 sessions per week (each 60 minutes). In first two sessions, a student recites from the memory to his/her teacher 5 pages of the Quran. After having listened to the recitation, the teacher evaluates it, corrects any tajweed mistakes and gives the student tips on how to improve the recitation. In the third session, the student will study a poem.

The estimated duration of the program is 1 or 2 years depending on the recitation skills of the student.

**Note: For both GQMC and Ijazah program, male instructors will teach men and female instructors will teach women.**

Our mission is to provide a center for Muslims all over the world to learn under certified *huffadh* who not only help you to memorize the Quran but also know how to teach it in the most effective and easy manner.

Allah has promised to preserve the Quran in the hearts of mankind and IOU makes it easy for you to be a part of this preservation.

Join NOW and experience the bliss of the words of Allah! For more information, please visit our website: [www.iou-gqmc.com](http://www.iou-gqmc.com)





# 'My sons' behaviors have changed' A Mother's Insight

By Shamila Lafir

I am really glad that Global Quran Memorization Center (GQMC) is available for my sons to do their Hifdh online. It is a very convenient method for my children and I. As a working mother, it was not possible for me to have them continue with local Hifdh programs due to various obstacles. So when IOU announced their launching of GQMC in 2013, I grasped the opportunity to register my son, Zaidh, who was twelve years old at the time. My other son, Umar, was not old enough to enroll yet as he was only ten. Although both my sons were already doing Hifdh through Skype lessons, the payment method was not convenient for me. Eventually, Umar also joined GQMC last year when he turned twelve.

I am very satisfied with the lessons and method of teaching. Both, Sh. Mustafa Raslan and Sh. Muhammed Tahwawi, are well qualified teachers. They are kind and equally strict in making the boys keep up with their lessons. They are also patient in correcting tajweed mistakes and explaining the rules. Although the memorization is going at a slow pace (2 to 3 pages per week), it is suitable for my sons to balance their school studies with their memorization. I believe that the quality of learning is more important than the quantity.

I have noticed changes in the behavior of my sons as young adults. They are responsible in their studies as

well as in

helping me with the house chores.

Undoubtedly, their good behavior is a blessing from Allah due to their memorization of His Book. I would highly recommend parents to enroll their children into the GQMC Hifdh program as it is a very convenient and stress-free approach to memorizing the Quran. It is also a convenient mode for adults to memorize from the comfort of their home.

I would like to conclude with the following *ahadeeth* on rewards for memorizing the Quran.

Narrated from 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr that the Prophet ﷺ said: "It will be said to the companion of the Quran: Recite and rise in status, recite as you used to recite in the world, for your status will be at the last verse that you recite." Recorded by Al-Tirmidhi (2914) and Abu Dawud (1464) classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 5/218, no. 2240.

In another hadeeth, the Prophet ﷺ said: "Fasting and the Quran will intercede for a person on the Day of Resurrection. Fasting will say, 'O Lord, I deprived him of food and desires during the day, so let me intercede for him.' The Quran will say, 'O Lord, I deprived him of his sleep at night, so let me intercede for him.' Then they will both intercede for him." Narrated by Ahmad, al-Tabarani and al-Hakim; classed as saheeh by al-Albani in Sahih al-Jami', no.3882.



# Blossoms of a *Quranic Garden*

*Areeba Masood shares her experience of  
GQMC's Ijazah Program*





It has been four years since I completed my memorization of the Quran. Throughout this journey, my mother served as my guide, teacher, and the inspiration which persuaded me to sign up for Global Quran Memorization Center (GQMC), *alhamdulillah!* Since my completion, I have been teaching younger children the recitation of the Quran with tajweed and working to instill within them a love for this divine text, just as my mother had done with me.

Upon completion, I sought to acquire a hifdh certificate for my academic record. Therefore, I searched for a qualified Quran teacher who could test my memorization, and help me perfect my hifdh and tajweed. When I heard of the new Ijazah program offered by the GQMC last Ramadan, I was overjoyed that my *du'as* were being accepted and I joined the program.

Studying online has been a wonderful experience. It gives me the convenience of flexible timings and learning from the comfort of my home. Sometimes we are faced with challenges such as weak internet connection or other technical difficulties. But to achieve something, one must cope with these situations through patience. Although I got married a few months ago, it has become easy for me to continue my studies, *alhamdulillah.*

The Ijazah program requires me to revise at least 4 to 5 pages for each class. I have to recite these verses to my teacher from memory and with

proper tajweed. Each class is an hour long, and we have three classes per week. This course has immensely helped me develop consistency in my recitation and revision. It has made the Quran a real part of my life and daily routine, *alhamdulillah.* At first, I faced much difficulty in fitting this course into my new schedule of responsibilities and a newlywed life, but with the help of Allah, I have been able to complete 18 juz thus far!

To all those who have memorized the Quran and wish to make it a part of their life, I definitely recommend this course to you! I also recommend it to those of you who are in the field of teaching and da'wah.

My teacher, Sara Khazbak, is a gem of a person, *ma sha Allah.* She not only helped me polish my tajweed, but has also served as a motivator for me to recite the Quran in my prayers. I am so grateful to the IOU for allowing me the opportunity to be her student and benefit from her vast knowledge of the Quran and tajweed despite the distance between us!

I would like to sincerely thank my mother and my sister for motivating and encouraging me to join this program. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Bilal Philips and his sincere team! May Allah accept and tremendously reward your efforts of bringing authentic Islamic knowledge to our doorsteps! May Allah help you succeed in your goal to change this nation through education. *Ameen!*



# A Tween's Journey of Doing Hifdh Online

By Zaidh Imran

I started my hifdh with the Global Quran Memorization Center (GQMC) when the IOU launched it in May 2013. I was twelve years old at that time. My mother suggested I join GQMC as we encountered many obstacles in continuing with local hifdh classes. It's been a very rewarding experience, *alhamdulillah*.

## How do I study?

We get at least two pages to memorize each week, and we do revision every week. I usually take about an hour on a daily basis to memorize one page and another hour for revision of previous surahs. After I finish memorizing the week's pages, I revise them repeatedly until I'm fluent in my recitation.

When memorizing, I first recite the page at least seven times while looking at the mushaf. After that, I break the ayahs into four or five words at a time and memorize them. Each time I finish an ayah, I recite it over and over until I perfect it. I will then recite it by heart from the beginning of the page up to the ayah I learnt. I repeat this procedure until I finish the whole page.



## What I love?

- GQMC teachers teach the Quran along with tajweed, which is more rewarding. It makes you enjoy the memorization process. Listening to your own recitation makes it a beautiful experience. Our teachers even encourage us to listen to media recitations by various qaris which helps us to practice to recite in a slow and beautiful manner.
- It is also much easier and less tiring than going to a madrasah on a daily basis after school.
- There are no transport issues and it is a lot easier to do it sitting in the comfort of your own home.
- It is quite cool to do hifdh using an electronic device, making it a pretty good reason for you to get your own laptop, tablet, etc.
- Since I am not sitting face-to-face with my ustaadh, it prevents him from pinching or hitting me while I make a mistake as opposed to my previous experiences with other ustaadhs. So, it is a less painful and more enjoyable method of memorizing the Quran. :)
- I even have time to go for sports practice after school hours. This program allows me to enjoy life as a normal teenager as well as do hifdh to please Allah.

I am currently in Form 3 (Grade 10) and it is much easier to cope with my studies at school while doing hifdh online. As I mentioned before, it is less tiring and less stressful, but the rewards are magnanimous. I enjoy learning online with GQMC because it enables me to get to know other students from all over the world.

My sheikh (Sh. Mustafa I Raslaan) is an Egyptian and this helps me improve my understanding of the Arabic language as he speaks in Arabic sometimes. Occasionally, he explains the meaning of the ayah or even the ruk'u. This is a lot more beneficial than memorizing the whole Quran without understanding it.

## Drawbacks?

There is just one major drawback in this method of study, which is the internet connection. A very strong and stable connection is required. Sometimes, the voice breaks or is not very clear, which makes the process time consuming. There aren't any other complex issues, *alhamdulillah*.

I highly encourage more people to join GQMC so that they also could benefit from memorization with tajweed and increase their understanding of the Quran in order to please Allah. It's a journey that comes with endless rewards in *dunya* and *akhirah*.





# Struggle, Sisterhood and Sweetness of Faith: **MY GQMC JOURNEY**

By Umm Abdul Rahman

I did not think twice. It was something I had prayed for and wanted for quite a long time. I just jumped in!

My journey towards memorizing the Quran started when I was 13-14 years old. A new imam had joined our masjid and we started to memorize *Juz Amma* under him at the *madrasah* -- it took us a year to memorize the whole juz.

Prior to that, it never once occurred to me that I wanted to memorize the Quran. I tried to continue the memorization of *Juz Tabarak* on my own after *madrasah*, but the effort did not last long. I don't recall if I even revised the surahs (chapters of the Quran) I had learnt after that. It was only when I reached university that I went back to the surahs I had memorized and began revising them.

From then on, I tried to start memorizing again several times. I completed *Juz Amma* and *Juz*

*Tabarak* and tried again with several surahs with not much success. Finally, I decided to memorize Surah Yaseen and did not rest until I finished it, *alhamdulillah*.

By then, I knew I had two problems: my *imaan* was low and I needed a teacher.

## An Answer to My Prayers

Soon after I graduated from university, I came across a post on Facebook about the Global Quran Memorization Center (GQMC). It seemed as if all the *du'as* I had been making after salah and at iftar time had been answered by Allah, because by then, I wanted to become a *hafidhah* of the Quran. I felt like it was my duty to spend time learning something to attain Allah's pleasure which would help me in the Hereafter. It was important for me and for my faith to work for my *akhirah*.

I have to admit that some doubts did creep in

whether I should start memorizing the Quran right away or wait till I was done with my secular studies as I was about to start a 9-month intensive professional course. But the doubts faded away as quickly as they occurred, because one thought echoed constantly in my mind: If I were to die right now, what would I answer Allah? What good had I done in this life?

From then on, nothing was going to stop me. I clicked on the post and emailed the coordinator for details about classes, fees and the enrollment steps. I learnt that classes had already started two weeks earlier, and that I would have to wait until the following month to get in a new group. I could not wait though, I wanted to join ASAP!

I was afraid that if I hesitated, the opportunity might just evaporate. Finally, I was enrolled.

I had skimmed through my teacher's profile online and found that she was from Egypt. The only experience I had with an Arab teacher was my Arabic teacher back in high school, who let's say was not the nicest person I knew. I was dead nervous.

"Relax sister, it is your first day, so most probably the teacher is only going to ask you to read." I still remember the sister who said this – her name was Faeza – and her kindness. From that point, I felt I was thrown into a new world, where mornings felt like *Jannah*, filled with the indescribable beauty of Allah's words being recited and divine peace piercing your heart.

I did not know exactly what to expect when I began, but my journey to memorizing the Quran with GQMC went beyond my expectations. I went from resolving to memorize the Book of Allah to understanding that memorizing the Quran is not just about memorizing the words of Allah *`azza wa jall*. No, it's a lot more than that.

Amazingly enough, I got the teacher I needed. She is perhaps the kindest person I know: gentle, soft and caring, light-hearted and easygoing, kind, understanding, loving and lovable. Perhaps you are

thinking why on earth is that important or why does that make GQMC so uniquely special?

You see, memorising the Quran means you'll tread paths you never thought you'd tread. It will challenge you, test your limits, break you down and only then rebuild you anew. This might sound like mere words to you, but it really feels this way. Having my teacher constantly encouraging us, pushing us no matter how much we were struggling, no matter how much we kept failing (I have been there too many times) in class tests or exams, no matter how many times we stumbled was and still is a pillar of strength in my memorization.

## Struggles and Sisterhood

Six months into my memorization, I started the professional course, which meant attending university six days a week. It also meant returning home late, not having an ounce of energy and intensive, long hours of learning. I am working currently and until very recently the only day I was home was Sunday. I will be sitting for eight intensive modules in September and I cannot tell you how many times I wanted to give up and still feel that way sometimes. This is why having a teacher who is supportive and understanding is a huge blessing, *alhamdulillah*.

I cannot emphasize enough how much of a privilege it is to be studying under a highly qualified teacher and learning from her. GQMC gives you this rare opportunity to interact with real people of knowledge from the comfort of your home, and this alone is a huge blessing from Allah, *alhamdulillah*.

I live in a developing country which is unlike Islamic countries (and some developed countries), in that if you decide to start memorizing the Quran, you do not have *tahfidh* schools around the corner. Most probably you will not find a female teacher and if you do, you might have to travel to some remote places to study, and even then, they would not be as qualified as the teachers at GQMC. Besides, when you are juggling studies and work,

it helps a lot to just flip open your laptop and join class at the click of a mouse rather than having to take an hour to get ready, another hour to travel to class and yet another hour to return home.

If you think my story is inspiring, consider my teacher, who has been juggling kids, family, pursuing a university degree while being a student of knowledge herself and teaching!

I met some incredible sisters since I started my journey at GQMC. It has been an amazing potpourri of cultures, something you simply do not have the privilege to experience through traditional memorization school. I know sisters who would wake up at four in the morning to come to class while others would stay up till midnight! (Don't worry, classes are flexible, so you will *in sha Allah* find a time that suits your schedule). I got to know sisters with four or five kids who were still coming to class and doing brilliantly. I met a sister who went home from university to a husband and a child while she was pregnant and memorizing the Quran.

Above all, I discovered a whole new dimension of friendship: sisterhood. This is where you love for the sake of Allah, where you only want the best for each other, a world where selfishness does not exist, and where we become each other's support system through this journey.

Back in the days when I was memorizing *Juz Amma*, I remember memorizing a portion every day and that was a time when I was coming closer to the *deen* and becoming increasingly practicing. My imaan and taqwa were building up and these are two absolutely essential ingredients (I cannot emphasize enough) that take a person through this unique journey.

Once I read an article on how some medical students could finish their memorization before other students, despite their hectic and grueling

schedule. The reason was their higher level of imaan. Many times, I have been there trying to memorize a page, and it just would not happen. If it did, I would forget it the next day, because I felt that the heart had become hard. At GQMC, I was blessed to be in the company of amazing sisters and that definitely rubs off on you. Of course, only you can work on increasing your imaan and taqwa, but being in the company of people with soft hearts and kind souls, who are always mentioning Allah, praising Him, thanking Him or seeking His help and making *du'a*, makes you want to be better. My class feels like a nest that nurtures growth as a believer.

**“My class feels like a nest that nurtures growth as a believer”**

One important thing on this journey is continuity. My teacher always says that if you leave the Quran for one day, you will forget it. And you will, I have experienced this myself. You might not feel it at

the beginning, but after memorizing two or three juz, this advice will echo through your mind.

## Unforgettable Moments

I would like to share some unforgettable moments from the class (if I can pick them out, because every class is precious, *alhamdulillah*).

There were times when the sisters in class would be reading the Quran and find themselves unable to continue, choked with tears. I can never forget those tears which were shed when verses on Hellfire were being read or over our entrance in *Jannah* (*in sha Allah*) described in Surah Az Zumar. Tears shed when reading the verse where Allah says not to despair of His mercy. Tears hanging between hope and fear. There were yet other times when the tears just rolled down, and the whole class would be in tears. Such is the power of the Quran. That is the power of Allah's words which if revealed to a mountain, it would have crumbled out of fear <sup>[1]</sup>.

[1] Quran 59:21



The reason I want to share these precious moments which I have preserved in my heart is because they are among the most beautiful moments in my life. These are the moments which bring your heart back to life, where you truly feel the *barakah*, blessings and mercy coming down from our Lord in such blessed gatherings where His Book is being remembered.

I ask Allah *'azza wa jall* to soften my heart and to increase, protect and preserve my sisters, because memorizing the Quran is a journey designed specifically for you, and it is unique to you.

Don't run lest you stumble, don't dally lest you miss the signs, and don't stop lest the gale winds throw you off. It is a journey where you will learn what patience really means, what endurance is, what reliance tastes like, where sincerity comes from, what it means to believe in yourself and most importantly, it will teach you that your success in life and this unpredictable path truly comes from Allah in accordance to who you are, who you want to be, and the level of your faith and driving force.

DON'T stop! Days and nights will never be the same again. You will struggle with yourself and others, you will feel such pain that only Allah knows of, but the sweet taste of *imaan* will never let you give up. There will be dashed hopes, failed attempts, and you might miss the train more than once, but the flame of your passion will not let you be, so carry on. You will be tested and taught your boundaries -- not as a punishment, but as the greatest act of kindness you will ever witness. Being shown your barriers shows you that they are just that: your barriers, not Allah's.

He will truly show you your strengths and increase them for you, show you your weaknesses and help you overcome them. You will battle forces from Shaytan, forces from your surroundings and emotions, and you will battle the greatest force to reckon with: your own mind and soul. Because the Quran FORCES you to change. There is no other way. Allah will let you fight in these plains and He

will make sure that you not only win the battle, but that you win the entire war.

One advice I want to give, which was given to me, is to seek *istighfar*. A LOT. Always. Because those who repent are those with the softest hearts, and only a soft heart absorbs the Quran, its words and the power and heaviness of the words of the Almighty.

## Journey of a Lifetime

To be honest, I don't think studying online will ever be better than studying with teachers in person. Couple this with poor internet connections, sound disruptions and technical problems on WiziQ, and it can get pretty frustrating at times. But I know for a fact that even if I were to start learning face to face with a teacher tomorrow, I would never leave GQMC. I do not want my journey to ever come to an end. It is that dear to me, for all the reasons I wrote and for all the reasons you can only understand once you are part of the journey.

Two years through GQMC, my Quran has become my best friend and companion. It is easily the most precious thing I possess. It's like a friend who understands your every sorrow and grief, your every worry and problem, the type of friend who will tell you the exact thing you need to hear, and give you the best solution to your problem and whispers of comfort and peace. Because, simply, it is Allah, the Lord of the world speaking to you through His Book. And who knows you better than the One who created you?

If you haven't come across it already, take a couple of minutes and watch the interview of the blind boy qari by the well-known reciter Fahd Al-Kanderi on YouTube. I have watched it innumerable times and each time it comes to an end, there is only one thought in my mind: What excuse will I have on the Day of Judgement before Allah for not memorizing His Book?

# ONE STEP HIGHER

By Nasmira Firdous

**M**y journey in getting close to the book of Allah started almost five years ago. I was desperate to know why the word of Allah had such a profound effect on some people, whereas on me, the effect was quite feeble and wavering. However, when I started studying the tafseer, the Quran had an incredibly powerful effect on me. That is when I made the decision to take my closeness to the Quran one step further and memorize His words, so that it can be a constant source of comfort and peace to my heart.

After several attempts to try to memorize the Quran sitting all by myself and failing to stick to a schedule, I completely gave up on the thought of memorizing. Until Allah blessed me with GQMC. Having already enrolled in IOU's BAIS program, I knew this would be nothing short of amazing and *alhamdulillah*, I have not been disappointed in the least bit.





I enrolled during the Fall Semester of 2014 and I want to share my experiences with you:

## So, Why GQMC?

### Flexible Timings

The first barrier towards memorizing something or committing to a program is always the lack of time or being unable to dedicate a fixed time to attend a program. From household chores to taking care of family, memorization automatically takes a back seat for many of us. But this is where GQMC stood out. I was offered multiple timings and different groups to choose from, making the entire process of memorization easy and in accordance with my schedule. Therefore, the no-time factor or time rigidity was automatically cut out.

### Groups

One of the biggest plus points of GQMC was the complete freedom to choose the group I wanted, in turn allowing me to choose which days of the week I'd like to attend class and at times that were convenient for me.

### Teachers

The most heartening aspect of IOU that always stood out for me was the high qualification

and dedication of the teachers employed for BAIS. I was sure GQMC would be no different and I was right. I can proudly say that the biggest motivation and inspiration for me to continue my hifdh journey has been my teacher Mariam Fathi. Hifdh requires patience, commitment, lots of sacrifice and tears, but having a teacher who gives a constant dose of encouragement with gentle words has helped me look at the Quran in a completely different light. I pray Allah gives Mariam Ma'am the highest rank in *Jannah* for her unimaginable patience and perseverance in dealing with students.

### Levels

While contemplating on memorizing, I was very specific on doing it at my pace: neither too fast nor too slow and GQMC offered me just that: Advanced or Beginners level to choose from.

### Syllabus and Structure

One of the biggest challenges after memorizing something is the "review and retention" part. This is where I found GQMC's syllabus structure and my teacher's amazingly simple yet powerful formula highly effective. At GQMC, we memorize a new portion and revise the previous week's portion at the end of each

week. This constant reviewing and memorizing technique had made me progress and not stagnate or forget.

What's more, you are taught with correct tajweed and are reviewed with tests each week, increasing the bond between your soul and Allah's words in ways that can't be described.

### Why You Should Memorize

I will not be going into the multiple rewards of memorization because there are enough resources and content available online and elsewhere. What I will tell you is the effect memorization had on me.

In those fleeting moments of memorizing His words, I realized my incredible weakness and His magnificent Might, my utter dependency and His powerful independence, my need for love and His ability to heal that which I didn't even know was broken, my yearning for peace and His ability to nurture my emotions, my dreams and His mind blowing promise: *Jannah*.

Everyone wants Paradise but imagine being one step closer to your goal just because of one extra verse you memorized!<sup>[1]</sup> The delights increase manifold with each step, and don't we all desire the highest step? So what's stopping you from memorizing His words?

**References:** 1. 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr said that the Prophet ﷺ said: "It will be said to the companion of the Quran: 'Recite and rise in status as you used to recite in the world, and your position will be at the last verse you recite.'" Narrated by Abu Dawood, 1646; al-Tirmidhi, 2914; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in *Saheeh Abi Dawood*. Al-Mundhiri said in *al-Targheeb*: al-Khattaabi said: It said in the report that the number of verses in the Quran is the number of degrees or levels of Paradise in the Hereafter, and it will be said to the reader: 'Rise through the levels to the extent that you used to read the verses of the Quran. Whoever recites all of the Quran, will reach the highest degree of Paradise in the hereafter, and whoever recites part of it will reach a level commensurate with that, and the limit of his reward will match the limit of his reading. *Al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, 2/228

# How I became a GQMC teacher

By Amani Wahb

**“The best of you are those who learn the Quran and teach it to others.”** (Sahih Bukhari).

I grew up seeing and hearing my father recite the Quran every morning before he went to work. He was an architect originally from Egypt. We lived in Saudi Arabia. When I was six years old, my family moved to Beirut, Lebanon, where I attended Al-Maqassed Islamic School for Girls. We had daily Quran and tajweed classes and this is where I first began to learn the Quran. I always loved reciting Quran, and had the passion to memorize it completely. After studying a few short surahs from *Juz Amma*, the first verses I learned by heart were the last verses of Surah Al-Kahf. Then, I continued until I had memorized *Juz Amma* completely, as well as a few other verses from here and there.

After completing secondary school, I enrolled in King Saud University in Riyadh majoring in English Language and Literature. My passion for studying Quran grew stronger so I started to memorize Surah Ar-Rahman. Soon after, I had the burning desire to start memorizing the Quran in its entirety beginning with Surah Al-Baqarah.

Emulating my father, I would sit after fajr prayer memorizing a quarter of a juz of the Quran until the sun rose completely. This method enabled me to memorize over seventeen juz of the Quran by the age of 19. Then, at the age of 32, I had the whole of the Quran ‘encased’ in my heart. In June of 2010, I

received my Ijazah in “Hafs from ‘Aasim” with the *sanad* back to our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, from Sheikh Hassan Saleh (Imam of New Jersey Islamic Center in New York, USA who has a BA in Quranic Knowledge and Recitations from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt).

Over the years, I have always had the passion to teach what I have learned from the Quran. Even as a teenager, I would share my tajweed knowledge with whoever was seriously interested among my classmates in school, friends at the university, and friends in all the cities where I have lived in the United Kingdom, and United States such as Bradenton, Florida and New York.

In July of 2011, I left the US with my seventeen year old daughter and currently reside in London. One day, a close friend of mine from the US (Sister Rabia) told the Head Facilitator of IOU’s Diploma section during their monthly meeting that she knows someone interested in teaching Quran at their newly opened center.

My dear friend, Rabia, is a facilitator with IOU’s Diploma campus and she introduced me to IOU. This is how I began teaching Quran to sisters in the Fast-Track Group in the Global Quran Memorization Center (GQMC) in 2013 and enjoyed every minute of my time instructing others in the recitation of Allah’s words.



**When asked for advice on how to memorize the Quran by heart, I mention these important steps I followed:**

- 1.** Begin immediately after fajr prayer and memorize a quarter of a juz from the Quran.
- 2.** Keep repeating the verses being studied until they are memorized.
- 3.** Repeat what was memorized that morning and after each meal: breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- 4.** Repeat it again after every salah.
- 5.** Repeat it again before sleeping.
- 6.** The next day, revise the juz from the previous day before memorizing a new quarter of a juz following the same routine.

**There are two necessities if one wants to successfully memorize the Quran:**

- 1.** Purity of intention, serious dedication and steadfastness to achieve this target.
- 2.** Continuous revision of the Quran for the rest of one's life.

A woman wearing a black niqab is seated at a white desk, writing in a notebook with a pen. The background is a dramatic sunset sky with orange and purple clouds. The text 'STUDENT Diaries' is overlaid on the image.

# STUDENT *Diaries*



**“Take advantage of five matters before five other matters: your youth, before you become old; and your health, before you fall sick; and your richness, before you become poor; and your free time before you become busy; and your life, before your death.”** (Musnad Imam Ahmed)

We must have come across this hadith at least once in our lifetime, but to what extent have we incorporated its message in our lives? Imagine a time when your health, wealth, and youth has been taken away from you. Will you then be able to serve the ummah?

There is a reason we must take advantage of the ‘precious five’ for Allah can take our life at any point in time: would we like to be from the losers? As Allah says in His Book, some people would beg Allah to give them life again so that they may do more good deeds.

“When death comes to one of them, he says, “My Lord, send me back that I might do righteousness in that which I left behind.” No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected.” (Quran 23: 99-100)

Alas there is only one lifetime, so hurrying to accumulate spiritual rewards must be the goal of our lives in this dunya. Some of the most successful people are those who set their goal early in life – the likes of Sulaiman Abdul Aziz

# FIVE BEFORE FIVE: GET *Inspired!*

**By Sania Aziz Rahman**

Al-Rajhi, the co-founder of Al-Rajhi bank in Saudi Arabia – which is the world’s largest Islamic financial institution. Shaikh Sulaiman and his brother used to exchange money for pilgrims during Hajj when they were younger, and finally opened their bank in 1957. Al-Rajhi bank strictly follows the Islamic principle against riba’<sup>a</sup> (interest) and has hundreds of branches in Saudi Arabia, with three of them being in Malaysia, Kuwait, and Jordan.

Shaikh Sulaiman is not only a banking tycoon, but has also done great service to the Muslim ummah. He has worked for the welfare of African nations and established marriage trusts for the youth. Most remarkable of all, he gave away half of his wealth in charity and the other half to his children. Today, Sulaiman Al-Rajhi is a billionaire without any

money. The spiritual rewards he has accumulated account for the richness of his imaan.

Shaikh Sulaiman could never have done any of this without working hard in his youth. However, we don’t need to be billionaires to serve the Muslim community; the smallest of our deeds can turn into a chain of rewards that we call sadaqah jariyah.

At this point, a poem by sister Amal Ahmed Albaz serves as a great reminder:

“Tick tock, tick tock is all I hear coming out of my clock,

Sharper than a bell and louder than a knock,

And it struck me on the day I turned 18.

I was still young or so they’d say but I think I saw the wrinkles make their way,

So I started to think: what have I done in the past 18 years alive?

Did I neglect peace or for it did I strive?

And then I realised I did nothing.

All the Friday nights I spent talking on the phone,

I thought time would last but it has surely flown...”

SubhanAllah, at the age of 18, we think we are still young but before we know it we lose our youth and life gets taken away in the blink of an eye. What better inspiration are you still waiting for?

*Sania is a diploma student at IOU.*

# The Journey of a Homeschooled IOU Scholar

By Rameesa Masood

I would like to begin by thanking Allah for blessing me with an amazing set of parents, who have always strived for the best for their children, *alhamdulillah*. I believe my mother is a reflection of the beautiful mothers of the past who sacrificed their life trying to better the lives of their children by equipping them with knowledge of religious studies.

Her sincere intentions for our betterment caused her to protect us from the evils of the outside world. She filtered our company of friends through homeschooling. *Alhamdulillah*, I have been homeschooled throughout.

After having completed my private GCSE's from London, my mother encouraged me to apply to the Umm Al Qura university in Makkah to further my studies. It had always been her dream to have her children study in Makkah and Madinah. I applied to the university; however, I was told to wait until I turned 19. I couldn't imagine living without my family while studying, and my mind struggled to accept the hijrah for Islamic studies. I waited for Allah's plan. In the meantime, I decided to join the Islamic courses to build my basics in the subject, and I was told to join IOU's BAIS program.

I began my studies at the age of seventeen. It seemed challenging at the beginning as I felt I was too young to pursue my Bachelors right after my GCSE's. The subjects seemed difficult at first as I was unable to understand or focus, but as time went on, the work

became easier and comfortable. Few months later, my mother and my older sister also joined IOU. Studying and learning the deen together made it easy for me to understand and implement what I learnt. I never imagined how easy it would be for me to gain Islamic knowledge; everything I studied and learned,



I would share with my family who would readily accept. What I have gained through the course has been never ending, *alhamdulillah*. I even gave up my dreams of Umm Al Qura after gaining admission at IOU.

I had always thought that studying on my own is unfair for me; I need socializing, I need friends! Truly, only Allah knows what resides deep in our hearts. A group of IOU sisters were just a click away on Facebook. These sisters, regardless of their ethnicities, are real gems for each other. They are a multiethnic gathering of sisters united upon one deen, *alhamdulillah*!

My parents not only homeschooled me, but simultaneously protected me from the evils of society, gave me their company, and literally told me that IOU would be my home. They taught me to be who I am today. The *du'as* and pure intentions of my parents made their way through the best, *alhamdulillah*.

Being satisfied with my studies, my parents launched an Islamic Institute (Al Falaah Institute) a year later. This would serve as the platform upon which my siblings and I would share our teachings of IOU and Islamic education. The basis of the institute served as a source of Islamic education for the youth. I taught character building based on the book I studied in my first semester "Etiquettes of Seeking Knowledge". I also designed Arabic books for children aged 3 to 5 after having completed the Arabic 101 course. Moreover, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed* by Dr. Bilal Philips course served as aqeedah sessions for teenagers in order to clear misconceptions and innovations which had formed in our societies. With time, Al Falaah Institute expanded its branches to the cities of Multan and Karachi, as well as in the towns near Lahore, and it continues to expand, *alhamdulillah*.

A new door opened for me within the home of IOU: the GQMC (Global Quran Memorization Center). Although, I had memorized the Quran with my mother, I had always dreamed to have the company of a Shaykha to revise my Quran. I did not find any

teacher that would be of better company to me than Sara Khazbak, a teacher from the Hifdh session. Thereafter, my mother, my sisters, my brother and I embarked on our journey to revise the Quran.

IOU has served as a great source of guidance in our religious pursuits. It provided us with insight on major areas as well as minor. It not only molded our thoughts, but also showed us a clear vision of how to live a life that is more pleasing to Allah with the correct aqeedah and understanding.

As my mother says, "Whosoever works hard, strives for the deen by gaining knowledge, patiently bears the hardships, and sacrifices some of his desires for the sake of gaining knowledge, shall be among the successful, *in sha Allah*."

I feel my experience has been an example of what Allah says in Surah Al Baqarah, ayah 216, "But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not."

*Alhamdulillah*, I am currently involved in completing my fourth semester of the BAIS course, revising with the GQMC program, and volunteering at Al Falaah Institute. I plan to serve the deen even more ahead, *in sha Allah*.

I believe that if religious studies are started from a young age, they can discipline our routine and make us aware of the amount of knowledge we have gained through tests and exams. Therefore, I find that studying Islam academically is very beneficial as our academia has a great impact on our lives.

I pray that Allah grants Dr. Bilal Philips immense rewards and makes my family and me a *sadaqah jariyah* for him. My parents make *du'a* for him from the depths of their hearts. May Allah keep my parents healthy and grant them the best in this world and the hereafter. *Ameen!*

*Rameesa Masood, 19, born and raised in Pakistan, moved to London few years after her middle childhood. She now lives in Pakistan and volunteers at Al Falaah Institute while studying BAIS at IOU.*

# Reclaiming My Heritage

By Fatima A.

**M**y name is Fatima and I joined Islamic Online University (IOU) when I was sixteen in 2013. I enrolled for the BA in Islamic Studies (BAIS) program because I wanted to become a better Muslim and learn more about Islam. I have considered myself Muslim my whole life, but there were a lot of things I didn't do when I was younger like pray or wear the hijab when I hit puberty. So technically, I wasn't a Muslim for a couple of years because I wasn't praying (I would only pray during Ramadan while fasting).

I have always believed in Allah and His prophets and never doubted that Islam was the one true religion, but I only wanted to follow certain rules, not all of them. Around the age of 16, I realized that I had no right to call myself a Muslim if I didn't follow

Allah and His prophet Muhammad ﷺ. I can't remember what exactly happened to make me realize that, but I thank Allah for giving me guidance when I needed it the most. I started reading the Quran, reading more Islamic books, praying, and wearing the hijab.

Before this, I was being homeschooled and was considering the colleges I could go to. When I started becoming a better Muslim, I realized that I didn't want to go to the colleges in America -- not because I didn't want to learn or work -- I just didn't want to deal with the unavoidable interest that comes with the student loans (American colleges are very expensive). Plus, *in sha Allah*, when I get married, I would rather be a stay-at-home mom than work in a mixed-gender environment and I wouldn't want to dump the debts

onto my husband. When my mom and older sister told me about IOU, I wanted to join it right away and so my sister and I signed up.

There are some challenges I face as a student. Since IOU is an online school, I have to do all my work at home where there are a lot of distractions and sometimes I procrastinate. I am working on self-discipline though, so it's not that bad. I started making a to-do list for the day so that it helps me complete my work on time. Another challenge as a native English speaker is learning Arabic. It's hard for me to understand and wrap my head around the different grammar rules. However, practice makes perfect and *in sha Allah* I will be able to master it one day.

The last major challenge for me is remembering Arabic





names; I have never been good at remembering exact names especially in a different language. Though it might seem challenging and difficult initially, the benefits make up for it. I'm so excited at the prospect of being able to open the original Arabic Quran and understand it and read it one day, *in sha Allah*.

I'm also happy to learn about Islam and its history as I find it interesting and take great pride in it. There are times when I am listening to a lecture or reading a book and I just feel so happy and grateful to Allah for leading me to the straight path. I am far from the perfect Muslim, but I'm proud to be a Muslim.

The knowledge I gained from IOU has influenced me greatly. There were many things I didn't know

earlier, for example, the harms of horoscopes, fortune telling, charms, and magic. Having been born and raised in the USA, magic is seen as something "fun", "innocent" and "fictitious" (although I'm sure some people genuinely believe in it). The same

**“Around the age of 16, I realized that I had no right to call myself a Muslim if I didn't follow Allah and His prophet Muhammad ﷺ”**

goes for charms, horoscopes, and fortune telling; so, it was a shock to learn that these are major sins and forbidden in Islam. I have also learned how to pray properly.

I think my knowledge influences my family because from time to time, I share the new things I have learned with them.

I would definitely recommend IOU to young people. It's a great program to learn about Islam: there are so many interesting classes, it's affordable and you can learn at your own pace since it's online. My advice is to plan out the modules you want to do each day and stick to them. Plus if you have sensitive eyes like me, take breaks from the computer every so often and set the brightness low because sometimes staring at a computer screen for a long time can bother your eyes.

That's all I have to say. Thank you for reading my story. May Allah guide us always!

# Heroes of Islam

# Their Love



*By Mansoor Danish*

*Mansoor Danish is a Semester Two student of IOU, da'ee and founding member of two Islamic organizations in India.*

**W**hen we analyze the love that a mother has for her child, we see a level of devotion and sacrifice which is unparalleled. A mother never complains in her process of providing comfort to her child. She forsakes her sleep when necessary and is always beside her child to protect him from any physical harm.

However, in today's article we shall speak about a love that outshines even the love between a mother and her child. This was the love that existed between the greatest man to have ever walked on the face of the earth, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and his beloved Companions.



So intense was the love of the Companions towards the Messenger of Allah ﷺ that they were ready to die for his honor. No sooner would a word of advice be uttered from his blessed tongue than the Companions would apply it in their lives. Love is incomplete without obedience and respect for the person who is loved. Imagine a husband who always says, “I love you, my beloved wife” but does not take care of her needs, her comforts, her requirements, nor does he give her her rights. What do you think the wife would think and ask him? She would say, “Why do you say what you do not mean?”

Nowadays, many Muslims say they love the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and that they are ready to die for his honor, but when it comes to following his example in deed or word, you will hear the excuse, “Oh, it is only a sunnah.” We have to wake up and realize that this was the motivating factor for the Companions. They would hasten to internalize a practice of the Prophet ﷺ in their lives simply because it was a SUNNAH; yet, we casually dismiss his commands because it is ONLY a Sunnah. So the question remains for us all, “Do we really love the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?”

If we truly wish to love Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, we must know the qualities of the people who flocked around him. They were people with varying degrees of faith and taqwa (consciousness of Allah), but the moment they came in contact with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the levels of their faith and taqwa rose by leaps and bounds. It would be no exaggeration to say that prior to Islam some of these same people could be regarded as the worst of the worst; but no sooner did Islam permeate their hearts, they went on to become the best of the best. Today, Muslims are weak and not held in high regard by much of the world. And truly, if we analyze our own lives, we must acknowledge that though Islam is the best religion, it is indeed we who

are poor followers. We have abandoned so many essentials of Islam and have allowed our ideology to be tainted by disbelief from a society which does not worship Allah.

The true heroes of Islam were those men and women who trusted in Allah, believed in Islam and the promise of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ and through this firm belief spread Islam within a few years across several continents! This was due largely to the trust the early generation of Muslims had in Allah. Today, our growth is floundering. We need to take a step back and try to figure out where we went astray. This series of articles is a simple effort to remind ourselves of the teachings of the Best of the Best and how we can apply these teachings in our lives and reinstate Islam as the leading force it once was.

The heroes of Islam are truly our role models and the reality is we need to resonate with their lives. Fictitious novels, such as Sherlock Holmes and Robin Hood, may make a good read, but they can never be an inspiration for a nation which desires nothing less than Jannah.

If Jannah is our focus, then we must spend our time reading and learning about the traits of the people of Jannah. Our lives should be filled with mesmerizing stories of the truthfulness of Abu Bakr As Siddiq, the uprightness of Umar ibn Al Khattab, the generosity of Uthman ibn Affan, the strength of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the sacrifices of Khadija bint Khuwaylid, the intelligence of Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the martyrdom of Sumayya, or the bravery of the children of Abdul Muttalib i.e., Saffiyah bint Abdul Muttalib and Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib.

Through the Heroes of Islam series, *In sha Allah*, we will discuss incidents from the lives of many Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and extract lessons, which can help us transform our own lives and make us more Jannah focused.



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