

Volume XXVI, Issue I

Al-Ṭālib



Al-Ṭ Facts

LETTER NOT FROM A DICTATOR

Asalaamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu comrades,

“Alternative facts’ is a phrase used by U.S. Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway during a Meet the Press interview on January 22, 2017, in which she defended White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer’s false statement about the attendance at Donald Trump’s inauguration as President of the United States. When pressed during the interview with Chuck Todd to explain why Spicer ‘utter[ed] a provable falsehood’, Conway stated that Spicer was giving ‘alternative facts.’ Todd responded, ‘Look, alternative facts are not facts. They’re falsehoods.’” Wikipedia article on “Alternative Facts,” as of March 14th, 2017

For at least a couple of weeks since that January 22nd, Muslim American circles took a special interest in the phrase “alternative facts,” virtually exclusively as a synonym for “lies.” Since then, every utterance of the phrase necessarily carries with it the subtext “remember when a representative of our government was called out for their manipulation of reality, and pathetically tried to deny it?” Of course, we know that the manipulation is not the novelty; US presidencies have been known to provide provable falsehoods to the public since its inception from all parties and individuals. The novelty, then, is the contradiction between appearance and reality exposed to the ears and eyes of millions of people at once. Such an accusation and then denial was never witnessed when George Bush Jr.’s claims about WMDs in Iraq turned out to be provably false, when the Spanish sinking of the USS Maine turned out to be provably false, when Fred Hampton’s violent resistance as he was assassinated by the FBI turned out to be provably false. The Alt Fact is then also a celebration of a victorious battle in a wider war of cultural hegemony.

This issue of Al Talib seeks to not only carry proudly the aforementioned subtext, but offer facts that are alternative to the dominant narrative, the set of facts that are fed to us by the White House, the news channels approved to be on the oligopolistic broadcasting networks, the politicians and websites whose PR departments are well-funded enough to influence elections more strongly than the values of the electorate itself. These facts of ours need not be political, and need not be world-historical in form or function. They need only propagate a piece of the reality we have lived and found as Muslim American students. Armed with this reality, we may become stronger in our struggle for justice and mercy. We need all of the strength we can get as our faith is a charcoal in our hands that is warming up ever more quickly.

May Allah (swt) be with you,
Chakib Mouzaoui

P.S.
“The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.” United States Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8a



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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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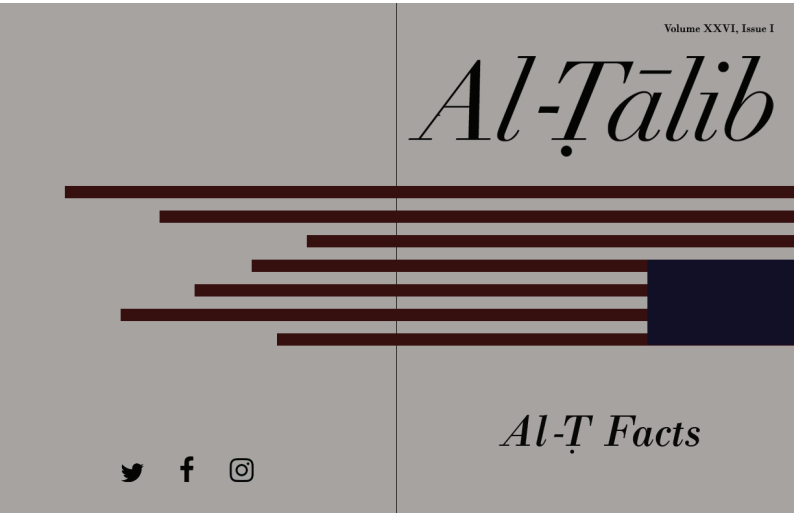
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Cover: Sadira Matin

Al-Mujeeb

BY: AISHA BILWANI



Photo: Aisha Bilwani

After Trump was elected, many of us tried to find resources for help: finding an attorney for immigration issues, a therapist for advice on how to manage the stress brought upon by the recent political climate in a healthy way, or a sheikh for spiritual guidance. All of these are very beneficial resources for receiving support, but the one entity that many of us may have been neglecting is Allah SWT. We have been looking to cope with the current political climate using external sources, but not from the ultimate fixer, Allah SWT.

In the Qur’an, Allah SWT mentions many stories demonstrating the power of du’aa. One story He mentions is about Prophet Zakariya (Peace be upon him). As he grew older, he longed for a child, not only for the sake of having a child, but also as an heir to carry on his religious duties. However, he was at an old age, and his wife was infertile. During his time, there were no other ways to conceive a child, so his only option was to turn to Allah SWT. For a period of time, Prophet Zakariya (pbuh) made a lot of du’aa, and trusted that Allah SWT would answer his prayers, and He did.

This is just one of many examples that prove that Allah SWT can make even the impossible possible, which is why we should turn to Him no matter how unlikely our request seems to be. In the Qur’an, Allah SWT

says, “And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he crieth unto Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright” (Surah Baqarah, v. 186). Allah SWT responded to Prophet Zakariya’s (pbuh) du’aas: his prayer was accepted, leading to Prophet Zakariya’s (pbuh) wife being fertile. This proves that if we call to Allah SWT, he will respond. It is crucial that we remain patient when we make du’aa, just as Prophet Zakariya (pbuh) was.

One of the ninety-nine names of Allah SWT is al-Mujeeb. Al-Mujeeb means “the one who responds.” In times of distress, such as finals week, I turn to Allah SWT for guidance. I am at peace when taking an exam knowing that I have prepared to the best of my abilities, and having previously prayed to Allah SWT for a good grade. If I do not get the grade that I want, it does not mean that Allah SWT ignored my du’aa. If the du’aa is not answered when we want it to be answered, it will be answered at a better time, or in the hereafter, because Allah SWT knows what is best for us. Jabir narrates from the Prophet (pbuh), “Whoever does du’aa to Allah, Allah fulfills his seeking or in exchange averts misfortune until the du’aa is not related to sin or breaking some relation” (Tirmidhi).

Allah SWT has made it clear to us in the Qur’an that we should call upon him during our time of need. Not only that, but He dislikes it when we neglect to turn to Him: your Sustainer says, “Call unto Me, [and] I shall respond to you! Verily, they who are too proud to worship Me will enter hell, abased” (Surah al-Mu’min, v. 60).

We should have complete trust in Allah SWT because he is al-Mujeeb. Depending on Allah SWT is also very important because He is the only one who knows what is right for us and the only one who is powerful enough to provide us with what we want. Allah SWT loves those who trust and depend on him, and he is merciful and kind to his believers. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “If you had all relied on Allah SWT as you should rely on Him, then He would have provided for you as He provides for the birds, who wake up hungry in the morning and return with full stomachs at dusk” (Tirmidhi). Countless verses in the Quran and sayings in hadiths show us that if we turn to Allah SWT, He will respond. However, in order for Allah SWT to answer our du’aas, we need to trust that He is listening, and that He will eventually respond if not in the dunya, in the hereafter. We have to be patient and not lose faith in Allah SWT.

The Daily Renewal

BY: NADIYAH PRIASTI



Photo: Alfin Pamula

The act of self reflection is not just a hobby that someone who has free time to spare picks up, though it could be. It is a rigorous process that prods at the most vulnerable and undesirable part of a person. For this reason, self-reflecting is an exhausting process. However, just like anything difficult, if done sincerely and with the right intention of self renewal and understanding, the rewards are unequivocal to even the most precious of tangible items. Self reflection can help one stop making assumptions about people by evaluating their true intentions and any hidden ones that may be present, and can help stop backbiting because they don’t know a person’s true intention. All these factors help one to become a happier person in general, which will in turn increase the amount of sunnah since you’re just bound to smile at every face you see!

One of the most trying tests in life is being conscious of one’s nafs (lower self). Ego is difficult to overcome because one must first recognize its presence in order to start the humbling journey of refining it. When embarking on this journey, one should constantly remind oneself that this act of self improvement should be done for the sake of Allah (swt). The first step is to recognize that no one is perfect, nor will they ever be. So it is important to constantly strive to become a better person, and in the process, a better Muslim. Self reflection is a powerful tool that allows you to humble yourself by exposing the errors of your way, whether it be in the form of physical actions, wrong intentions, etc.

The Prophet Muhammad (saw) set a precedent in spiritual decorum that manifested into thoughtful and conscious actions in order to aid the future ummah. Whenever you feel or experience any sort of negative emotion or experience, evaluate the situation and your response as the Prophet (saw) would with patience, and understand that you are experiencing this discomfort as a test from Allah (swt). During hardships, we often close ourselves off in this bubble of self despair, and no matter how many times we mentally prepare ourselves with the knowledge that Allah will test us countless of times during our lives, everything becomes bleak; because of this, we need the clarity that can only be found through self reflection.

The beauty of self reflection is that there are no guidelines to it; there are no right or wrong ways to go about this act of worship. The essence of self reflecting lies within pin-

pointing a certain emotion or moment in time, and then uncovering the underlying factors that come into play with the end goal being a deeper understanding of both our intentions and the intentions of those who may be involved. This is where the act of self reflection becomes the defining factor between a progressive lifestyle, and a lifestyle full of relapses. This act is key to healthy relationships because it forces you to pause and analyze a situation, from a person’s reaction to their action, rather than jumping to conclusions. The answers are all there, you just have to be brave enough, and patient enough, to read between the lines. A fair warning, what you discover is not always this great, positive epiphany, but it will ultimately help you grow as a person, and will help you avoid going down the same road again.

Partaking in self reflection is free, but disclaimer, it is heavy on the critical thinking, so don’t take your time exploring and learning what works for you. It is an exhaustive process that requires getting down to the roots of problem, so don’t feel discouraged if you don’t see uplifting results right away. A good way to get into self reflection is just . Without even realizing it, you’ll soon catch yourself pausing during a particularly challenging time, and thinking through every single dimension of the situation, and you might be surprised to find that either your initial thought is wrong, or that the result may not have been as much as you would have thought.

The notion that attaining beauty is a rigorous and painful process could not be more relevant when dealing with self reflection. Looking beautiful inwardly is ultimately what we will be tested on, and I dare say that this feat is impossible to attain without self reflection. Though it may seem like a daunting task, the reason why people often brush it off, or belittle its effects, is because they are either too afraid or are in denial of the truth that lies beneath them. Those who brush off reflecting until the Day of Judgement are doing a disservice to themselves, because those who do self reflect understand that it is a process that one can find solace in during the tribulations of life. It is a lot of critical thinking that may come with self deprecation, but when done thoughtfully, the first wave of self loathing turns into an understanding of deeper rooted issues, which can ultimately lead to the purification of the soul.

The Hypocrisy of Modern Philanthropy

A Tale of Ethnic Cleansing

BY: SAMEENA RAHMAN

In psychology, the human ability to tune out unimportant details and focus on what really matters is called selective attention. Selective attention allows our brains to deal with a barrage of sensory information by determining which to let through and which to ignore. As senseless killings and violence in third world countries are rising at an alarming rate, we are becoming selectively attuned to disregard it if it doesn't come with heavy political implications; or if it isn't sad enough; or if it concerns a grossly mislabeled religious minority. Such is the case in the ethnic cleansing of Muslims of Rohingya in Myanmar. (Myanmar is also referred to as Burma).

There is quite a bit of scholarly debate regarding the origins of the Rohingya, with some scholars dating it back to the 15th century colonial era. Even though the number of Muslim settlements was low then, the population increased steadily after WWII. The Muslims, according to the Economist, were thought to be Middle Eastern "seafarers and traders and were joined in the 17th century by tens of thousands of Bengali Muslims captured by the marauding Arakanse. Some were forced to serve in the King of Arakan's army, others were sold as slaves and yet more were forced

to settle in Arakan. 'Rohingya' simply means 'inhabitant of Rohang', the early Muslim name for Arakan. The kingdom was then conquered by the Burmese army in 1785."

Geographically speaking, this minority is mostly situated in the Rakhine State, also known as Arkan, in Myanmar. A unique characteristic of the Rohingya is that they have been facing ongoing persecution at every turn in history, either by the government or by invading forces. Kurt Jonasshon, a former professor at the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, described how during WWII the invading imperial Japanese forces committed acts of mass torture against the Rohingya Muslims, causing some 22,000 of them to flee Bengal in India. In the 21st century, the UN declared, "Rohingya may be victims of crimes against humanity." A Reuters article published in 2015 reported that despite "handing power to a semi-civilian government in 2011 and vowing to end forced labor" the military has yet to make good of that promise. From testimonials obtained by Reuters, the Rohingya villagers narrated instances when they were dragged away and "were loaded up with heavy sacks of rice and ordered by soldiers of the 552 Battalion to march for two days

through forest covered hills with little food and water - and no pay. Some who resisted were beaten." Burmese politicians, however, vehemently deny these claims. Moreover, through a yearlong probe, the UN found "an alarming increase' in incitement to hatred and religious intolerance by ultra-nationalist Buddhist organisation against the Rohingya." This is due to the locale believed that the Muslim immigrants were stealing their jobs and resources and, as one Rakhine politician put it, "we are therefore the victims of Muslimisation and Burmese chauvinism." In addition, post-war Myanmar saw themselves as the legitimate victims of colonial rule, which did not leave much room for sympathy for the Rohingya. The Rohingya, to this date, have not been formally recognized as an indigenous group. Without citizenship, they additionally face persecution as illegal immigrants despite having roots preceding the country of Myanmar itself. In 2015, a huge number of Rohingya fled the country in boats to neighboring Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia, and therefore became known as the 'boat people.'

Furthermore, the UN hoped that the 2012 election of Aung San Suu Kyi would lead to better conditions for the Rohingya. She was also awarded international honor through the

Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Keeping in mind that Nobel Peace Prizes have been previously awarded to individuals as a gesture of political goodwill, Suu Kyi deserved this honor for her contribution of Burma's new political structure, transitioning from a military government to a democratic one, albeit partially. Being someone who had her share of political persecutions including being on house arrest for two decades, the UN urged her to improve conditions for the Rohingya as she vowed to bring forth a democracy.

Also in 2016, she assumed the post of State Counselor. Suu Kyi's rise to power, however, came with zero action in regards to the Rohingya. Despite international plea, she remains absolutely indifferent to their plight, thereby condoning the wave of mass violence, abuse and killings. She also refuses to acknowledge them as a religious minority in the country and basically has done nothing to improve their conditions by denying them easy access to clean water and food, schooling, healthcare and even infrastructure resulting in an incredible violation of human rights. She also refuses to take concrete action against the widespread violence and routinely tries to discredit independent news sources despite first hand testi-

monies from villagers. For example, Noor Haiba, a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh, claims "the military came to her small village of 3,000 and killed half of the people there. They started killing and burning. They shot us from helicopters, and one air attack killed my husband," she says. "Our houses were completely burnt to ash." Neighboring countries like Bangladesh have also displayed a blatant disregard of human rights, and it is perhaps one of the darkest moments of Bangladesh's 46-year existence that in a moment of crippling humanitarian crisis its government chose to close the borders to those who, to this day, speak and live the culture of Sonar Bangla.

According to the US State Department's website, since 2012, the US has provided almost "\$500 million to support Burma's transition, advance the peace process, and improve the lives of millions, including by assisting communities affected by violence and combating hate speech and communal violence." Also, from the wars waged in just the last 17 years, we know the US doesn't take action without political gain. For example, the Middle East is the prime region of interest due to their oil supply, and more recently, America's manic obsession with wiping out ISIS. Without any

considerable threat or resources to be gained for the region Myanmar sits in, there really seems no vested economic interest for the US to take a strong political stance. This, unfortunately, differentiates refugees from the Middle Eastern countries like Libya, Syria from Myanmar. This could very well be the reason why there's so little in the mainstream media about Rohingya. Moreover, Muslim countries around the world have been shamefully silent in advocating against these ethnic cleansings. This issue of selective provision of humanitarian aid presents a stark image of the hypocrisy of modern philanthropy.

In conclusion, as Muslims we are painfully aware of the widespread suffering of the Ummah, and oftentimes, all we can do is pray. However, as Americans we found that the election of Donald J. Trump showed us the power of numbers as seen in the backlash against his immigration and refugee ban. We also learned that we, as a community, have a lot more in common than not. So despite the hypocrisy in philanthropy exhibited by our government and those around the world, there is no better time than now to join forces with our community allies and push for or create policies dedicated to the prevention of such killings. We the people should rise up stronger than before to push our government to increase political pressure on the Burmese government, to fund the UNHCR, and to help increase access for the delivery of humanitarian aid. This is so very crucial now because in addressing the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, warned that the government "may be trying to expel the Rohingya population from the country altogether." Finally, as Muslims, it is our duty to break free of this atmosphere of hypocrisy and stand up for the Rohingya, whom the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called the most friendless people in the world.

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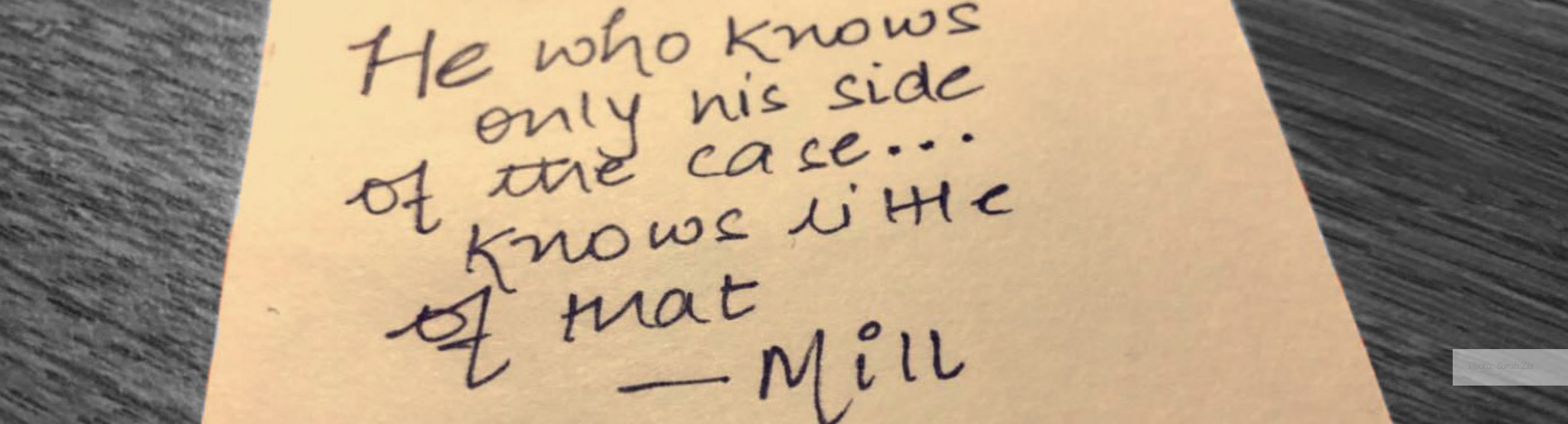


Photo: Sarah Zia

Al-T Media and its Al-T Worldview

By: SARAH ZIA

This morning (March 4, 2017), I woke up bright and early to get a head start on my day: finish and edit my article for Al-Talib, and then tackle the few hundred pages of readings I had to do for my classes. Naturally, the first thing I did after opening my eyes was reach out for my phone, and on the screen, I saw a CNN alert informing me that President Trump claimed, via Twitter, that Former President Obama obtained authorization to tap into Trump’s telephone conversations. I sat bewildered at the ludicrous claim, and thought to myself, “here goes another day where the news feed is jammed by another ‘alternative fact’.” However, when I started to think about it, I concluded that Trump wouldn’t conjure such a serious accusation against a former president just for his own amusement, which led me to wonder about his motivations behind such a statement. I decided to rewrite my article, which was previously supposed to be a satirical take on the alternative facts manufactured by the White House, and decided to trace the origin and motivation behind claims like this.

On February 25, President Trump claimed in a Twitter post that during his first month in office, the National Debt went down by \$12 billion, and compared it to the increase of national debt by \$200 billion during President Obama’s first month in office. There is nothing wrong with this statement, as these figures are compatible with the official report by the U.S. Department of Treasury, but the framing and implications of the statement is what makes it a false claim. As reported by Politifact¹, the fall and rise of the national debt is a constantly changing figure, which is determined by arbitrary independent factors such as “quarterly tax payments” and “predetermined expenditure patterns.” Considering the fact that up until that date, President Trump had not enacted any fiscal legislature, crediting this figure to his actions is unfair; yet, President Trump used this data to boost his image. The most disturbing thing is that Trump was not the first to broadcast this alternative fact. President Trump’s tweet mirrored an article published by Gateway, a conservative news

¹ *A non-partisan news agency which covers political news and provides official fact checking for presidential and other political speech.*

website, which was then carried by Fox news. President Trump just copied and pasted those headlines into a tweet.

Similarly, during his first congressional address, President Trump claimed that “According to the data provided by the Department of Justice, the vast majority of individuals convicted of terrorism and terrorism-related offenses since 9/11 came here from outside of our country...” Not only is his implication false, but his sources were also misinformed; according to Politifact, President Trump was not quoting the Department of Justice. He was instead quoting an analysis done by the senate committee led by Jeff Session, who used the Department of Justice’s list of individuals convicted for terrorism-related offenses. The problem with that is neither the Department of Justice nor the immigration officials specified in that data whether or not the convicts were foreign or domestic born. The data compiled by the Department of Justice was based on investigations that started off as terrorism investigations, but ended up being cases of immigration fraudulence and misdemeanor.

The data compiled by the Department of Justice that was quoted by President Trump did not clarify or report on whether or not the rise in terrorist activities was caused by new immigrants. It did not mention how many of those cases involved foreigners. Using these figures within this alternative context is a smart move for someone who wants to enact an immigration ban under the cover of strengthening the nation’s defense. Unfortunately, President Trump was not the originator of this fraudulent claim. He was just restating Fox News’ press release and coverage of Jeff Session’s analysis on June 2016.

Conspiracy theory mogul, Alex Jones of Infowars, said on August 2016 that “It is surreal to talk about issues here on air, and then word for word hear Trump say it two days later.” President Trump’s claim regarding former President Obama is just a reiteration of an article published by Breitbart on Friday, March 3rd, which speculated President Obama wirelessly tracking the then presidential nominee’s phone calls.

The antipode of the objective mainstream media is the advocacy media. This media caters its content as news, but is usually an interpretation of the facts in a way which supports the advocacy of their previously held beliefs. Infowars, Breitbart, and Fox News are all

part of spreading this advocacy media apparatus. They are not illegitimate in their objective because their mission statement is reporting the “real” news to which the “biased liberal” media does not cover. They are engaging in a “public service” that is aided and reinforced by their own biases, which violates all journalistic standards, but is upheld by a more sustaining and important value: The First Amendment right to free speech. According to the consensus definition, this right is the “freedom for the thought we hate.” This sustaining constitutional right is what allows the advocacy media to flourish, and for me to freely share my opinion of it. John Milton conceptualized that in a free market of ideas, the truth of free debate will arise and prevail. Furthermore, John Stuart Mill concluded that in order for our beliefs to be made from rational thought rather than be a result of prejudice, we must defend it against other ideas. The theories of philosophers such as Milton and Mill are what The First Amendment is based on.

While it may be our usual reaction to dismiss the reports of this advocacy media as being widely recognized false conspiracies, the truth is that these media houses have impacts and influences. They are supported and enabled by a sector which holds similar views, and find their opinions validated by the advocacy journalism practiced by this apparatus. President Trump is a member of said sector, and he is not making up stories to amuse him-

self; he advocated them because they confirm his views. This alternative media is not an agenda driving tool for him, but a replacement for the mainstream media, which according to him cannot be objective due to the liberal bias present. At the age of 70, it will be impossible to change Trump’s views, and dismissing his statements as a tendency to falsify information is not beneficial, because there are people who believe his claims: people who are the audience of the very agencies he derives his “facts” from. Instead of dismissing his claims as blasphemous, it is important to trace and analyze the origin of his claims, because that gives us perspective as to why the other side has the views that it does. This way, we can understand their frame of reference and point of origin. Understanding the point of origin of a contradicting viewpoint is the key to forming any argument against it, and we need to use the President’s advocacy of alternative views to understand people who find validation in his claims. Only then can we communicate effectively and accurately our side of the argument, and hopefully influence their opinions. Maybe if we understand the perspectives of Breitbart readers, we will be able to have a conclusive argument that proves their beliefs and viewpoints baseless, and maybe the “liberal bias” will eventually arise and prevail as being the truth in this marketplace of ideas.

Labbayk: Summer Camp in Saudi

By: MALIHA LAKHANI

To the sound of someone screaming, you awaken only to find out that it is your mother reminding you that you have to leave for summer camp in a few hours. My day began in Kakia, a city near Makkah, where I was packing my belongings for my journey. I was thinking about my upcoming four days of traveling in the desert that included sleeping on the floor, and worst of all, not showering. As I sat in the bus that was heading towards the entrance of Mina, I looked out the window and saw several people walking – all of different ethnicities, but with the same iman (belief in Allah) and purpose. The Saudi government estimated this year’s Hajj to be the largest, with over 2 million people. Growing up, my only recollection of seeing different kinds of Muslims in one area was during my masjid’s Eid prayers, and Ramadan iftars.

When I reached Mina, my group leader escorted us to our tents. On the left side were the tents for men, and on the right side were the tents for women. Since the paved floors were too hot, our campsite had green rugs rolled onto the floor. The inside of my tent had red rugs, red armchairs that transformed into beds, coolers for water, and a flower decoration on the wall. The armchairs were lined in rows since there were about fifty women in my tent. Above the armchairs were storage compartments where we could store our belongings. Outside the tents were bathrooms, and a table lined with chafing dishes and trays for our meals.

Our first day of Hajj was in Mina, and it felt like a retreat. We just stayed in our tents, prayed salah, read the Quran, got to know one another, and rested. The day in Mina was supposed to relax us and help us store energy for the upcoming days. The following day, we would head to Arafat, and then around Maghrib time, we would head on over to Muzdalifa.

On the morning of day two, I raised my head to the feeling of someone tapping my shoulder. It was Anbarin auntie trying to awaken me from my daze, and notify me that we were leaving for Arafat soon. We would be climbing stairs and going up steep slopes in the

boiling heat. Arafat is in the middle of a desert, making the Day of Arafat the hottest day of the whole journey. Thinking back to Islamic school classes, I remember my Imam saying that the Day of Arafat resembles the Day of Judgment due to the heat and the crowd.

As I stood outside my tent, tears rolled down my cheeks. To my right was my older sister, Umbreen, and to my left was my mom. I lifted my head to the sound of sobs and the scent of sweat; I noticed that everyone surrounding me was in the same state as I was. It was day two of Hajj, the Day of Arafat; I was still in Ihram, facing the direction of the Kaaba, and begging Allah (swt) for forgiveness.

My mom noticed that Umbreen and I seemed sluggish, so she insisted that we both go back inside the tent. While I sat on the floor of my tent, I fiddled with my thumbs while I reflected on my Hajj preparation, and how I was already at day two. I closed my eyes, and I envisioned myself somewhere else; the heat was draining my energy, and was playing games with my mind. “Maliha! Maliha!” I looked up to find my Hajj buddies, Sameena Aapi and Nani, standing over me, and gesturing to the “astronaut food” that had arrived. Our neatly packaged meals included pastries, crackers, water, dates, and milk. On the Day of Arafat, Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) drank goat milk, thus, in my meal package, there was a carton of goat milk, which was sunnah to drink for energy.

At Maghrib time, we left Arafat and headed for Muzdalifa. Muzdalifa resembled an outdoor slumber party scene, with rugs on the floor, blue and pink concrete bathroom structures, and a hill with rocks surrounding the area. In Muzdalifa, I was told to pick seventy-six small pebbles and put them into a bottle. These pebbles were to be used to throw at the three shatan structures at Jamarat.

As I sat on the rug with Umbreen and Sameena Aapi, I saw Bashir uncle wandering aimlessly in the distance. He gave me a water bottle of pebbles for his wife, Fathima auntie. When Fathima auntie came back from



Photo: Maliha Lakhani

the bathroom, I told her that Bashir uncle had picked pebbles for her. She refused to take the bottle, and insisted on picking her own pebbles like the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did. At Hajj, we all wanted to help each other, but sometimes there are things you want to do for yourself.

After praying Fajr salah in Muzdalifa, we returned to Mina. From Mina, we had to walk to the area where we would pelt the shatan with pebbles – jamarat. Since there were so many people, our group leader insisted that we all stay close together in order to avoid getting lost. Since my dad and I were the tallest people in our group, we became the posts – so if one got too far behind, one only had to look forward for the tall girl with the red scarf, or the tall bald guy.

I felt the sweat drip down my head and onto my arms as I held an umbrella over Umbreen’s head. I looked from left to right, there were so many people ahead of me. I saw my imam waving an umbrella, indicating to us to hurry, otherwise we would get lost. Some of the Saudi guards were pointing water guns at us, and spraying us with them. After climbing several stairs, we finally reached the jamarat

Unveiling Iman

By: AYESHA BAIG

One common interpretation of hijab is that it is supposed to represent a Muslim woman’s faith. It is often seen as a sign of modesty and more importantly, as a symbol of pride in one’s religion. Hijab played a big role in my life growing up, helping me become who I am today. However, it was not the decision to wear hijab that helped me realize who I am, rather it was the decision to take it off that connected me with my deen and strengthened my iman.

Most of my upbringing was in your typical Islamic school where boys and girls sat on opposite sides of the classroom and took turns playing in the sandbox rather than playing together. As is common in most Islamic schools, hijab was encouraged, and after the 5th grade, enforced as part of the school uniform. I started wearing hijab in school in the 3rd grade. A few of the girls in my class had

started to wear it to school, so I too started to keep my hijab on even after prayer time. A couple years later, hijab became part of my school uniform. I never gave thought as to why I was wearing it in school or the purpose behind it. All I knew was that girls, once in the 5th grade, had to wear it. It didn’t even seem difficult because everyone around me was doing it.

My experience with hijab changed once my parents decided to enroll me in a public school. My mom encouraged me to continue wearing hijab to my new school. Again, I did not think much of it. After all, I had been wearing hijab to school since the 3rd grade. How could this be different? Aside from the expected culture shock of transitioning from Islamic school to public school, I was also shocked to realize how differently people reacted to my wearing hijab. My first

area, where there were three jamarat pillars that we had to pelt seven times each with pebbles. For each time that you threw a pebble, you had to recite a dua. Since I did not have the dua memorized, Sameena Aapi’s husband, Hisham Bhai would read the dua out loud, and I would repeat after him; this kind of felt like a High School Musical moment: “We are all in this together!”

After jamarat, the women returned to their tents, while the men went to get their heads shaved. I closed my eyes and fell asleep. When I woke up, there was a girl behind me with scissors. The sound of snipping hair made me smile. I was now a Hajji.

ple about my hijab began to bother me. Every time someone asked me why I wore “that thing” on my head, I became more uncomfortable with wearing hijab because I knew that answering with just, “My parents want me to,” wasn’t a sufficient answer; however, I continued answering like that because I had no explanation or justification. I did not know the value or importance of wearing hijab. Fast forwarding to my 8th grade history class, my teacher would often ask me questions about my hijab. Despite it being obvious that I myself didn’t completely know why I wore it, he continued pressing me about it. Eventually, he started making jokes about hijab. He would often make fun of me by saying that I looked like a ghost. Obviously, this was nerve wrecking and humiliating. One time as I was walking from lunch to class he even pulled off my hijab from the back to be funny. At only 13 years of age I did not have enough courage to stand up to someone teasing me about my religion. Nor did I understand my religion enough to be strong enough to represent it when others were bashing me for it. Being put on the spot like that, especially by a teacher, further confirmed the doubts I had about wearing hijab. I thought if I didn’t wear it, no one would notice I was Muslim, and no one would tease me about it. What I didn’t know was that I would encounter people that made ignorant jokes about my religion even after I stopped wearing hijab. When I discussed taking off hijab with my mom, she continued to encourage me to wear it, reminding me that it was my duty as a Muslim woman to represent my religion. She did not want one unpleasant experience to be the reason I took off hijab. So she asked that I try to wear it through high school and then make a decision after graduating hoping that by then I would understand its importance.

So I relentlessly wore hijab throughout high school, knowing that once I graduated I wouldn’t wear it. During this time, I never tried to understand hijab; I just wore it out of habit. Though I knew “my parents want me to” wasn’t enough of an answer, this phrase became my default whenever anyone asked why I covered my hair. The frustration of being unable to understand or explain hijab to myself or anyone else built up in me, and I noticed myself becoming more and more distant from other aspects of my faith. I no longer told people that I was fasting in Ramadan, hung out with Muslim friends in school, nor talked about religious holidays. Despite knowing that my hijab was a marker for my

religion, I tried distancing myself from my faith in front of others, thinking that doing so would draw less attention towards me. By shying away from my religion in front of others, I actually did become distant from my deen. I noticed myself praying and making dua less frequently. My frustration of having to wear hijab began to affect my imaan. This distance from my faith made it even harder for me to answer people’s questions about hijab and Islam in general. As I grew older, I realized I did not want to keep reinforcing the negative stereotype that Muslim women are oppressed by using my parents as an explanation. So when I graduated high school, I decided to stop wearing hijab. I saw my other hijabi friends wear their hijabs with pride and I felt like I was taking away from its meaning by wearing it out of practice rather than pride. Also, a part of me hoped that the constant questions, comments, and jokes about my religion would stop once I no longer wore it.

In college, I stopped feeling the frustration of being unable to understand hijab. I no longer felt like I was being forced into representing something I did not completely understand myself. A part of me always felt guilty for taking off hijab. But I also noticed that I was no longer shying away from my religion, as there was no pressure to represent. I started interacting within the MSA and made more Muslim friends. Taking off hijab rid me of the frustration that was keeping me from building my imaan. Additionally, the lack of pressure to represent allowed me to explore Islam and

learn about the value of the many practices that I had been doing since I was a kid. As I understood the importance behind practices like wearing hijab or praying 5 times a day, I began to feel proud of being Muslim. I actually had answers for people when they questioned my faith and was able to defend my beliefs. I also quickly learned that ignorant comments and jokes about Islam were something completely unrelated to wearing hijab. Even within my first year of college, I encountered many occasions where people made jokes about my religion. This time around, I did not have my hijab to blame. Back in 8th grade I figured my hijab made me an easy target for such jokes, but I realized in college that that was not the case. The only way to stop that was to have a strong enough imaan to stand up for myself. Hijab or no hijab people will be ignorant and make comments and jokes. I came to learn that once others see that I’m someone who has strong beliefs, they will back down. Taking off hijab brought me closer to my religion. It allowed me to learn more about Islam and the value in its teachings. Wearing hijab again is something that I am open to in the future. But if I choose to wear it again, I want it to be once I’ve developed a strong enough understanding of my beliefs that I can represent my religion with conviction.



Photo: Sadira Matin

حرّر عقلك

“Free Your Mind”

I remember a time
when I wanted to drown in feeling
for it to consume me.
A time when everything was black and white
and choices had clarity.
A time when I wanted every single
word, action, thought, movement
to be deliberate
for every single thing to have a greater meaning
or just meaning in general
and for nothing to be without purpose.

Now, I crave freedom in every sense of the word.
I want liberation to
buzz in my heart
and through my hair
tingle on my skin
sting my eyes.

I don’t want to feel claustrophobic-
to feel stuck in my own body
or be a prisoner of my own mind

I Crave freedom
from Myself
My thoughts
and the limitations I placed on myself;
freedom from others’ expectations and judgements,
my Own judgements,
the discipline of my values,
the intensity of my beliefs,
the choice between a right and wrong
and binaries;
from embarrassment,
shame,
guilt,
remorse,
freedom from my Own insecurities
and inner dialogue
from purpose
feeling,
reason.

I want to transcend the boundaries
of my mind,
this society,
this culture,
this world,
this universe.

