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A JOURNEY OF A LIFE TIME

editorial

Islam and the forefront of technology are not typically thought of together. Friday sermons and religious classes might drop hints of social networks or smartphones; however, the content is not tech-centric. Conversations might walk down Nostalgia Lane to reminisce about the wonder years of technological advancements in past eras of Islamic history. Yet not much is said about Islam and technology in the contemporary sense.

2011 was marked by dramatic changes brought on by the internet. Today, social media sites such Facebook have been used for many purposes with its membership now growing to over 700 million users – larger than the population of any country in the world, barring China and India.

The world's attention was recently riveted on WikiLeaks which introduced a new form of guerilla journalism that called for more transparency from both political and corporate leadership. WikiLeaks granted individual whistleblowers the power to publicise confidential information about government and corporate mishaps, allowing for miscarriages of justice to come to light.

The past year also has seen the overthrows of the Presidents of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. All three rebellions were primarily coordinated and broadcast through Twitter and Facebook. These social media tools have also allowed for news of the uprising to spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East, with copycat protests happening across the region.

As the internet allows for increased networking and communication, it has also added an entirely new dynamic to the global Muslim community. The power of connecting people from across the world is enormous. Political strategy can be shared by activists across country lines;

a student of knowledge can read classical books on their personal laptop etc. Used appropriately, the power of the internet is vast.

Keeping the above in mind, our latest issue of the Message Magazine will explore a range of topics on "Islam and the Internet" such as:

- Da'wah in the Age of iPhones
- The Fiqh of Facebook
- Pursuing Islamic Knowledge Online
- Avoiding the Social Ills that Pervade the Net
- Shaykh Google
- Spiritual Purification for the Muslim Blogger

While there is so much more that still needs to be discussed and understood about how the internet is revolutionising the world, one thing is clear: the potential for Islamic work in this medium is unparalleled. As we move forward towards utilising new avenues for community development, we pray that Allah (swt) blesses our work and guides it and that the technological revolution will mark a new golden age for our global Muslim community.

This issue of 'The Message' is not intended to be comprehensive, but to explore and highlight some of the major trends and issues related to Muslims and their use of the internet. We pray that it has been a means of encouraging deep-thinking and discussion on these issues and is the start of a higher level conversation about ways we can use the World Wide Web in positive ways.

Your brother in Islam
Mohammed Adra

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Ahlam Yassin

LIVING IN THE iWORLD



Ipad, Itouch, Iphone, Blackberry, Mac, Apple, Coach, Reebok; trying to stay up to date with the trends can be overwhelming. If you live in a modern society you cannot help but be bombarded with the sights and sounds of the latest and coolest gadgets and trends. How do you stay grounded amidst a consumer culture?

And if not grounded, how does consumerism drain your productivity?

If you are someone who has ever saved your money to buy a particular item- let's say the latest mobile phone- and all of your energy is directed toward reaching this goal. Any extra money you have you find yourself putting aside, bringing you closer to this latest and very cool phone.

You eat, drink and sleep thinking about how your life will somehow change once you have it (If you've ever found yourself in such a situation, you know very well how energy consuming and mentally draining this can be!). So, you've worked hard and you've saved your money and you finally have this new piece of technology. But nothing happened.

Your life hasn't miraculously changed.
You still look the same.

And, a few days after your major investment something fancier and a little more advanced is on the market.

Where does this leave you? Sure, you have a new phone (or any other material possession) but think of the journey which led you to this 'thing'. Think of all the time invested (directly and indirectly) leading to this possession. Could it have been time otherwise spent more productively, for a better cause?

Narrated Abdullah Bin Mas'ud Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: "A man shall be asked concerning five things on the day of resurrection: concerning his life, how he spent it; concerning his youth, how he grew old; concerning his wealth, how he acquired it, and in what way he spent it; and what was it that he did with the knowledge that he had." [SahihBukhari]

When put in such a perspective, measure all of the energy and time you put into acquiring this material possession.



3 Tips to Avoid Consumerism's Productivity Drain

1. Evaluate your goals



Ask yourself why you're consumed with chasing after material goods to begin with? Is it because you're not really certain of the path you're on now? Take a look at your short and long term goals, you may find that you could probably be doing so much more to fulfill these goals. In doing so you're automatically taking away control from the need to constantly consume and redirecting your energy.

2. Get involved!

Too often, when we get caught up in the material world we forget how fortunate we really are. When you get involved in social activities and become exposed to people who are struggling to meet even their basic needs, you are automatically forced to put your own desires into perspective.

3. Create a habit of Sadaqah (giving charity)

Not only will this help increase the barakah in your wealth but when you incorporate this into your budget regularly you are reminded of the beauty that accompanies humility.



Does it make sense? This doesn't apply only to the latest technology but to your life in general. If you find yourself chasing trends you'll inevitably trap yourself in a never-ending cycle of want, work, spend – want, work, spend; a cycle with no higher purpose.

Narrated Abu Wail: Hudhaifa said, "The Verse:—"And spend (of your wealth) in the Cause of Allah and do not throw yourselves in destruction," (2.195) was revealed concerning spending in Allah's Cause. [SahihBukhari] Granted, it's not necessarily bad to want nice things for yourself and family. After all we are humans living in a material world.

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: "Of the dinar you spend as a contribution in Allah's path, or to set free a slave, or as a sadaqa given to a needy, or to support your family, the one yielding the greatest reward is that which you spent on your family." [Sahih Muslim]

On the contrary it's just a matter of control. It is about being in control of your wants instead of your wants for material goods being in control of you.

3 Ways Uncontrolled Consumerism Drains Productivity

1. Hindrance of your pursuit of knowledge

When you are constantly chasing material possessions, how much time are you investing in yourself? How much time are you investing in building your wealth of knowledge? Take a careful look on how you are spending your time chasing material wealth as opposed to building a wealth of knowledge in your own life.

2. Hindrance of focus

Sure, you might be focused on acquiring stuff, but how's the pulse of your focus on the bigger issues at hand? When was the last time you seriously took note of those around you – your family, your community; or the direction you're steering the course of your life?

3. Lack of Consistency

Again, there can only be so many 'things' a person can acquire until there is ultimately a disconnection, then what? If Knowledge+Focus+Consistency=Productivity and your hunger for material gain is draining all three ingredients to a healthy and productive lifestyle, it's time to reassess.



A recent study by match.com found that 1 in 6 couples that got married in 2010 met on a matchmaking site. This is not surprising considering online dating and matchmaking websites now make up a \$4 billion business worldwide. Their increased popularity over the last decade is proof that matchmaking sites will continue to grow and couples will increasingly meet for the first time through the Internet. This phenomenon is also apparent in the Muslim community. A Google search of "Muslim matchmaking" calls up over 400,000 sites. With more Muslims turning to the Internet to find a spouse, there needs to be a discussion of the positive and negative aspects of meeting people online.

Accessibility

Muslim marriages have traditionally occurred with friends and family as the intermediaries but now the Internet has become an option for bringing potential couples together. Matchmaking websites have removed the "personal" connections people have always relied on when finding a spouse. Individuals can post their own profiles of who they are and what they are looking for in spouse. Meeting individuals who have no connection to family and friends can be common and finding a spouse on one's own has become a possibility.

The Internet has created a virtual network and provided accessibility to seek and meet Muslims from various regions of the world and of various origins. Online matchmaking sites have created a greater pool of people to meet and choose from; this is beneficial for new Muslims

Prolonging an online relationship can be a problem, because the "connection" could be based completely on false information, which will ultimately lead to major disappointment.

and those living in areas where there are few like-minded people, because meeting a potential spouse offline can be difficult if there is no social network established. However, with the greater opportunity of meeting someone who lives in another city or even another country, the challenges of long distance relationships becomes more common. A person who is not willing to move to another region should make this point clear at the beginning of their interactions. However, for those who are interested and willing to move to where their potential spouse lives, they will need to meet offline as soon as they determine they have a connection. They will also need to meet in person often to see if their relationship can develop into a marriage, which requires both individuals and their families to make a commitment to travel.

Anonymity

The Internet makes it very easy to be anonymous; therefore creating an online profile can become the perfect opportunity to be someone different, someone better, someone more attractive, more wealthy, more educated, etc. The biggest complaint made about online matchmaking sites is that there is a lot of exaggeration and even deception. Individuals can exaggerate or lie

about everything from their age and profession to what they look like and where they are from. Some will even lie about their marital status. Because of this the Internet makes it impossible to know whether the person you are communicating with online is a “real” person at all. People who are not serious about marriage may create profiles on matchmaking sites because they enjoy perusing people’s profiles and enjoy the “game” of meeting people and flirting online. For this reason, it is important that people who are serious about getting to know someone for marriage must move from the online setting to an offline meeting as quickly as possible.

Meeting in person is also the only way to confirm any initial compatibility that the individuals are feeling for each other as well as confirm their truthfulness and character. The Prophet Muhammad (s) advised, “When one of you asks for a woman in marriage, if he is able to look at what will induce him to marry her, he should do so.” (Abu Daoud) Prolonging an online relationship can be a problem because the “connection” could be based completely on false information, which will ultimately lead to major disappointment. Therefore, remaining exclusively online to establish and maintain relationships can become a complete waste of time and even a distraction from finding a true match. Seeking to meet in person and develop a relationship that will lead to marriage needs to be the intention.

Communication

For many people, meeting someone for the first time can be awkward because both people are usually seeking to impress one another and determine if they have a connection. Meeting a potential spouse online reduces the initial anxiety and nervousness when being introduced since it removes an element of vulnerability. When people “chat” online the computer screen reduces any personal inhibition and it becomes much easier to impress the other person. The Internet lifts real world boundaries so people fall easily into flirtatious and immodest behavior, become prone to saying things online that they normally wouldn’t say to someone in person or chat for longer periods of time than they normally would with any individual. Online mixing also removes any exclusivity, which is why chatting with numerous people at the same time begins to resemble a season of “The Bachelor.” You can never be sure that you are the only person a potential spouse is chatting with unless you ask them upfront, nor determine the seriousness of the relationship if conversations continue only online. Another obstacle with continued online communication is that real interpersonal skills are lost because subtle cues like tone of voice and body language cannot be heard or seen. Ultimately, determining if there is a real connection can only happen once the individuals actually meet in person. Communicating in person is vital



to creating a real relationship through verbal communication as the couple will engage in the art of listening and speaking.

What To Do

Anyone who meets a potential spouse online must maintain appropriate Islamic and personal boundaries throughout the process. Be aware of the language you use when chatting with someone and try to speak in the same way you would in person. Stay in tune with your feelings: if something doesn’t feel right or if someone seems too good to be true, it is probably your intuition telling you something is wrong. If you are chatting seriously with someone online, you should share this with your parents so they are aware and can further encourage you to meet offline. Taking time to know one another offline is critical in order to determine authentic compatibility beyond the Internet connection; this should be a goal when meeting someone online. Finally, making du`a’ and istikhara prayers for guidance to what is best in your search for a spouse is essential. Maintaining a connection to Allah and relying on Him will help give you clarity and inner peace when making the important life decision to marry or not marry someone.

As technology continues to change, how we as Muslims interact with one another will inevitably play a role in how people meet—we must be aware of the pitfalls and dangers of this medium. Online matchmaking has become a beneficial resource for Muslims all over the world seeking a spouse. The diversity of people and the potential to meet has made the internet a very attractive way to find a compatible spouse. Yet, the nature of interpersonal relationships is that they cannot remain as cyber relationships. The human touch is still necessary when it comes to a relationship with another human being. The most successful pathway to developing a marital relationship will require disconnecting from the internet and connecting with people live.

GUIDELINES TO STUDYING

ISLAM ONLINE

Amatullah Iman

Within the last decade, Muslims have experienced a massive shift in the way they study Islam. In this advanced technological age, Islamic knowledge is available for mass absorption at the end of our fingertips through online resources. Twenty years ago, scholars and students had to search through their books. Today's online portal to Islamic knowledge has given students the chance to learn without leaving their homes. However, while our access has benefited us greatly, it also comes with its own pitfalls.

Online Learning: A Reality Check

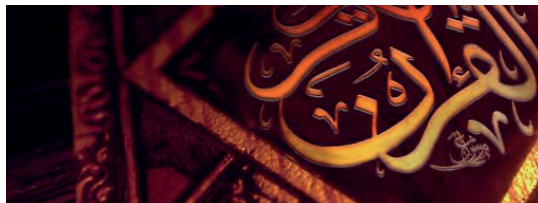
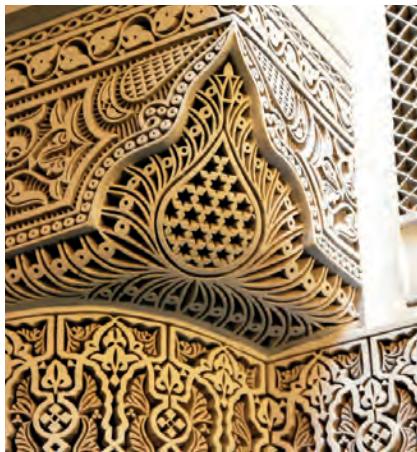
Many Muslims do not realise that studying Islam through the internet requires a lot of self-discipline. Not only do you have to sit in front of a computer (a big distraction), online students are not accountable to anyone but themselves. Those who are interested in beginning a course online need to figure out why they are willing to spend this time learning and what they wish to achieve out of it. If students do not have their intentions ironed out and their drive ready to go, they will not have the self-discipline needed to move forward properly. Studying Islam online is not the best method for everyone, so it is up to each student to prepare themselves before they commit to a program.

The most important thing students should know is that knowledge is a means, not the goal. Knowledge is a means for us to gain Jannah (Paradise) and this is how we should view it. It is also important for us as students to remember that knowledge is gained in stages. One of the righteous predecessors said, "Whoever gains knowledge all at once will lose it all at

once!" Gaining knowledge is a gradual build-up which takes years. In fact, some of the scholars viewed seeking knowledge as a lifelong commitment. Abdullah ibn Mubarak (rahmatullah) was asked; "How long will you seek knowledge?" His response was, "Until I die, for probably I have not yet learned the things that will benefit me most." Going through the stages of knowledge also requires patience and a very high commitment level to remain consistent. As online students are not accountable to anyone but themselves, they require even more patience and commitment than students who study "live."

It is very easy to commit to online programs because of the initial hype it draws. After a few classes, the number of students slowly starts to dwindle. This initial phase is separating the committed students – those who have the self-discipline to study online – from those students who weren't as serious or realised online studies was not for them. Students who are just beginning to take online classes should internalise the fact that they will be tested during these first few classes to see if they are able to commit.

The biggest drawback to studying online is the lack of interaction with a teacher. In many of the books on seeking knowledge, the longest chapter is how a student should behave with their teacher. A teacher is not only the source of knowledge, but also the source of manners. It is important for students who study online to focus on improving their character since they lack valuable interaction with the teacher face-to-face. It is said that knowledge is a tool that needs manners to make it run. The best way for students in online programs to learn manners and character is to read books and listen to lectures on the character of the Prophet (pbuh), the Companions and the lives of the scholars. Remember that knowledge and manners go hand in hand and without manners your knowledge will not take you far.



The most important thing **students should know** is that **knowledge is a means**, not the goal. Knowledge is a means for us to **gain Jannah** (Paradise) and this is **how we should view it**.

Etiquette for the Modern Student of Knowledge

There are countless books written on the etiquette of seeking knowledge; however much is not applicable to us in the West because we live in a different time. For most of us, we do not study at the feet of scholars, or have daily lessons at the masjid. Due to our different circumstances, we should ‘modernise’ some of the etiquette of the students of knowledge to be applicable for us now.

‘Netiquette’

- Punctuality. We should give knowledge the respect that it is due.
- Complete focus. One of the biggest challenges for online students is focusing during their lesson and not distracting themselves with chatting, browsing and reading other unrelated websites.
- Respecting your teacher. Respect for teachers is hard when you are not facing them. The student does not think about the time and effort the teacher put into preparing their lesson because it is online. Respect your teacher’s time and efforts.
- Stay in contact with your teacher. This could be through emails, discussion forums or interacting in class.
- Do not record without permission. Students should take permission from their teacher about recording classes, even if they are not sharing it with others.

- Giving your online studies the same importance you give to “live” classes. Since our online classes are in the comfort of our own homes, it is very easy to forget that we are in a serious commitment. We should treat it as so and not as a marginal past time. Students should have the intention of starting and finishing their classes.

- Have patience with what you already know. In a lesson you may get distracted if you are devaluing a particular part of the lesson. When your teacher covers something you’ve already learned, think of the benefit of repetition and be humble: you always need more knowledge. This repetition will only make you more grounded in what you already know.

There is much more to be said about ‘netiquette’, but these are some of the main points for online students.

Tips to Maximising Your Online Learning Experience

- Have a “study buddy.” This will increase your motivation and keep you accountable. This person can also share notes with you if you happen to miss a session.
 - Close all tabs or websites that are not related to your class until it is over. If you find this hard to do, then move the computer away from you or block all other programs.
 - Take notes on paper if you know the computer will be a distraction for you.
 - Do not sit on your bed or a couch when you are learning. Sit at a desk, which will help you focus more in a study-like environment.
 - Prepare yourself for class like you would for a “live” class. Have your pencils/notebook ready, turn off your mobile phone, and go to a quiet area.
 - Keep a journal of “gems” of what you have learned to keep yourself motivated.
 - Teach your family or roommates what you have learned after each session, even if it’s only one thing.
 - Time management. Balance your time studying online and other life commitments to make sure you are giving each its due rights (huquq).
 - Review and implement what you have learned before your next class. It is important to make sure you have enough time to understand, review and apply what you’re learning.
 - Make du’a’ that Allah benefits you through your knowledge and allows you to complete your program/classes.
- Insha’Allah this basic overview will help existing and future online students to maximise their online Islamic studies.

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What types of apps do you think a Sheikh might have on their phone? Well Sheikh Shady Al-Suleiman sat down with members of the 'Message Magazine' team and gave us access to his mobile phone.

The Sheikh mentioned how like never before, the iPhone, Kindle, iPad and other devices allow for volumes of sacred Islamic texts and teachings to be accessible within the palm of our hand. They place gems at our fingertips, whether they are the noblest of adkhar (remembrances) and du'a' (supplication), quotes from the premier scholars in Islamic history, or extraordinary tools for understanding Arabic and the Qur'an.

Note that by no means is this list intended to be comprehensive. The descriptions after each item provide brief highlights. Tell us what you think of these or what your other favorite apps are by visiting messagemagazine.com.au.

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QDu'aas [Full - \$2.99, Lite with 3 du'as - Free] – Has over 40 du'as found in the Quran

Fiqh

Fiqh Us-Sunnah [\$2.99] – Complete compilation of the English translation of the book Fiqh-us-Sunnah by SayyidSaabiq.

Qur'an

alQuran [Free] – Has an Arabic search engine too, can access over a 100 translations in more than 30 different languages

Al-Mus'haf – [Free] – Actually mirrors the Madinahmushaf commonly used for memorization exactly! Many other great features as well (see site). can be difficult to navigate.

Quran Reader [\$2.99] – Allows the Quran to be read in all-Arabic or all-English. Arabic is in beautiful, HD Othmani text. Includes full text search in Arabic or English

Salah

iPray [Full - \$3.99, Lite features are quite sufficient - Free]

QamarDeen [Free] – Tracks and give stats & charts on your prayer, fasting, & more!

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MUST HAVE ISLAMIC APPS



Other

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Torch Bearers: Scholars of Islam [Free] – Motivational quotes from 48+ of the Ummah's greatest scholars

May we benefit from these resources and be a people that brings benefit to others, a people that helps uplift all of humanity.

The Message Magazine Team

THE FIQH OF facebook

SOHAIB SAEED

Online pursuits are consuming an increasing amount of time of young people, and no less the Muslims. Those among the 500 million global users of Facebook (FB) know how it functions as a platform for many of these activities (such as news, entertainment, correspondence, campaigning, da`wah) going far beyond its description of a social networking site.

As an avid Facebook user of a few years, I have tasted its fruits but also experienced the sickness of excess and felt the danger of getting lost among the trees. Whenever Muslims are faced with a new environment, they enter it carrying their principles with them. We also need a sound understanding (fiqh) of the realities of this environment and how to handle some of its specifics.

If I dwell here on the potential and actual problems with Muslims' use of Facebook, it is not to de-emphasise the great things that can be done with it. I say this as dictators have fallen from power across the Middle East with social media playing its role.

Fittingly, the genesis of this article was a series of short FB statuses I posted over 2011, each of which generated interesting discussion from friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances and contacts (all of whom are designated by FB as "Friends"). Here, I shall address a few of the most crucial aspects for the conscious user to consider, with a few quotes from the original "Facebook Fiqh" series.

A Question of Time

If time is life, then Facebook is many people's favorite weapon of suicide. We struggle to find time to seek beneficial knowledge, yet trivial comments about trivial matters get more than

their fair share. Someone remarked on my FB "wall" that we check out people's latest FB updates more frequently than we check our Qur'an to take benefits from its verses. That remark inspired the following status update:

SohaibSaeedwants a "Like" button in his mus-haf (written text of the Qu'ran) next to each ayah. "Like OMG that's so true!"

In a recent discussion with some students of Islamic sciences, we wondered aloud how the great scholars of the past managed to be so prolific in their writings and how they managed to utilise every moment of their – often quite short – lives. Someone raised the point that nowadays we do indeed manage to write a lot, but it is mostly spent on trivial discussions and debates. The angels are writing down all the useless things we say in our days and nights. What do you think if you gathered all the comments (other than social niceties) that you have left on Facebook and other such forums? For many of us, it would add up to at least a small book.

The technological aspects of Facebook, particularly with its ever-updating interface, can have an intoxicating effect. It is built upon the principle of maximal stimulation of the eyes and brain; it is not far from the imagination to compare it with hypnosis. All this has a long-term effect on the mind and on the spiritual heart. This is why our attitude to such time-consuming activities is to use them for a purpose (even if that purpose be recreation) and not allowing it to eat into time better spent on other things. For some, this may mean taking conscious note of how often they open the page and how long is spent on each visit.

facebook

What are the signs of excess?

Specialists in addiction can list a few, but let me point out one thing that I believe is frighteningly common. I noticed once that when Twitter went down for a few hours then resumed, someone commented on the experience, writing: “When Twitter went down, all I wanted to do was tweet about it!” Ridiculous, yet I would suggest that it is quite representative of a common urge to use these media as a natural outlet for all our thoughts, desires and emotions. As I once wrote: “We express our thoughts in the form of a status update instead of turning to Allah with our fears and joys. The day of a believer should be a constant conversation with God.”

Is this constant babble not a blatant distraction from the remembrance of Allah? Yes, even when we are reading and forwarding religious content, if we do so with hearts unaware. To quote from Shaykh AbdallahAdhami’s FB comment: “By all means: share, post, sms, blog, im, email, tweet... (though most importantly, internalise)”. This is the point! If you read a supplication with your eyes, it is no use if your tongue remains dry and your heart remains silent. Is reading a du`a’ (supplication) anything like making du`a’? Many times, we write such things robotically in the same way we type “LOL” with a completely straight face. I won’t go so far as to call it lying, but it certainly is bizarre when you ponder on it!

Clicking “Like” is not a sign of commitment any more than saying “I love Allah.” The Prophet (s) was commanded to say, “If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful” (Qur’an 3:31). Our Islam is built on actions, not mere declarations.

Public and Private

Let’s be in no doubt that FB is a public space, though certain aspects (messaging) allow one-to-one communication. Even things you post on your own wall will come up on your friends’ homepages. Therefore, rather than merely decorating your home awaiting their arrival, you are actually dropping in on them every time you post something.

“If Facebook is like a public street, doesn’t it have rights? The first is lowering the gaze: not just from unseemly images, but from everything that doesn’t concern you. Think about it as hundreds of conversations are presented before you.”

The above FB Fiqh advice was based on a hadith (report concerning the Prophet (pbuh) reported in Sahih Muslim, in which Allah’s Messenger (s) questioned some people sitting in the road and instructed them to avoid doing so. When these Companions explained their purpose, the Prophet (s) said: “If you must sit, then fulfill the rights of the road: lower your gaze, respond to greetings and talk in a good manner.”

Many of the problems with people’s Facebook usage stem from the confusion between public and private spaces. Consider a few such cases:

1. Saying aloud what ought to have been silent or sharing with everyone what belongs to a certain group.

Such a public forum is not the ideal place for potentially confusing ideas (such as controversial questions of theology) to be shared, as people without the relevant background knowledge may get the wrong idea.

Moreover, Facebook is not the place to develop your thoughts, wondering aloud with things that could cause others to doubt. If you have a question, direct it to someone who knows. If you’re working on an idea, try keeping a private journal. Most importantly, beware of spreading unsubstantiated rumors. If in doubt, clarify and make certain of the reality, as the Qur’an (49:6) instructs. The following is also a thinking point: The Prophet (s) said: “It is enough of a lie for a person to narrate everything he hears.” (Sahih Muslim)

In short: before posting anything, ask yourself “Why?” – is it something that will be of interest or benefit to those who will read it?

2. Doing things shamelessly in front of respected people and near-strangers.

Examples of this include using bad language, or writing flirtatious things in plain sight of people who could make hasty – possibly unfair – judgments. Perhaps someone would suggest that writing on the FB wall of someone of the opposite gender is more appropriate than a private message, but that is only true if the public nature of the communication does not become an excuse for a lack of etiquette.

People are clicking “Like” for the craziest things, associating themselves sometimes with immoral and unethical people and ideas and promoting this on the newsfeeds of all their friends. It would be wise to slow down and think, if only for the following reason:

Be careful whom you love and “Like” – do you want them by your side on Judgment Day? The Prophet (s) said: “You are with whomever you love.” (Bukhari& Muslim)

Another common sight is photos of activities, with Muslim friends pictured in compromising positions. Rather than uploading and tagging photos of these lapses, the right course of action is immediate repentance, as in the hadith: “All my nation are safe except those who publicise their sins. A servant does an evil deed by night, and wakes up having Allah’s cover upon him. Then he tells someone, ‘I did such-and-such last night!’ – He went to bed with Allah providing him cover, and woke up to throw off Allah’s cover.” (Bukhari& Muslim)

Privacy in general is a major and widely discussed issue of concern regarding Facebook so a Muslim should be even more aware of the issue. Both sisters and brothers need to beware of broadcasting details that could be misused, and especially pictures in which they are more exposed than they ought to be in public. Even a “private” FB album is never truly private, when you think about it.

These few thoughts on Facebook Fiqh are by no means exhaustive, but I hope they provide a starting point to a greater consciousness and care when using new technology and emerging media.

SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY

= IQURAN

Narjis Assal

Ever wondered what the Quran, Science and Technology all have in common? Well the winners of the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics have shown that the answer to this question should be quite a lot. The recipients of the award have demonstrated how 21st century technology has reaffirmed the many scientific wonders of the Quran.

The astounding discovery that our universe apparently is expanding at an accelerating rate has earned three scientists the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced recently. However, Allah (swt) has informed us of this scientific fact 1400 years prior where He states in the Quran: "It is We who have built the universe with (Our creative) power, and verily, it is We who are steadily expanding it" (Quran 51:47).

The discovery turned the world of physics and astronomy on its head when it was first reported in 1998 by competing teams of scientists, two from the United States and one from Australia. It helped lead scientists to the conclusion that nearly three-fourths of the universe is made up of "dark energy," a mysterious force that seems to be staying gravity's hand in stopping the universe from expanding forever.

The nature and role of that force has become what the Nobel organization described as one of the most enigmatic mysteries of modern physics.

Half of the Noble award will go to Saul Perlmutter from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the University of California, Berkeley. The other half was awarded to Brian P. Schmidt of Australian National University and Adam G. Riess of Johns Hopkins University and the Space Telescope Science Institute. The prize in physics is worth 10 million Swedish kronor, about \$1.44 million.

The two teams, working separately, each measured the light coming from a specific kind of exploding star, or supernova, in what began as an effort to confirm expectations that the expansion of the universe was slowing down.

Instead, they found that the exploding stars they were using as

galactic yardsticks were dimmer than they had expected, indicating that the galaxies containing them were racing away from each other and the rest of the universe at an accelerating rate. The widely celebrated discovery indicated that a mysterious and invisible form of energy is counteracting the force of gravity, pushing matter apart at an ever faster rate.

What is clear is that it has only been through the use of modern high-tech instruments that scientists have been able to prove that the universe is constantly expanding. One then should ask, how could the verse mentioned above be stated 14 centuries ago by the Prophet Muhammad (s) without divine intervention? When I first heard of the announcement of the winners being reported, the discovery reminded me of a verse in the Quran where Allah (swt) states: "There are certainly signs in that for people who reflect" (45:13).

"Today, we know that 74 percent of the universe consists of this dark energy," Riess wrote on his website before the award was announced. "Understanding its nature remains one of the most pressing tasks for physicists and astronomers alike."

The discovery means that the universe is likely to continue expanding indefinitely, instead of reaching a steady state or collapsing back in on itself in what some call a "big crunch."

"The findings of the 2011 Nobel Laureates in Physics have helped to unveil a universe that to a large extent is unknown to science. And everything is possible again," the academy said in announcing the prize.

Without doubt this discovery amongst other recently scientific discovers only uncovers how very little we actually know as Allah (swt) states "And they will never compass anything of His knowledge except that which He wills" (Quran 2:255).

I ask Allah (swt) to make useful for us what He has taught us and to teach us knowledge that will be useful to us. Ameen.

Your sister in Islam

Narjis Assal

"O you who have believed,
do not consume usury, doubled
and multiplied, but fear Allah
that you may be successful."

Holy Qur'an (3:130)

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Uma Outreach

O N T H E G R O U N D I N

SOMALIA

Assalam Alaikom wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu,

During the month of Ramadan we decided to embark on a fundraising drive to help our brothers and sisters in the Horn of Africa – Somalia and Kenya. Not only to raise the money, but also go to the famine stricken land to assess and help with our own hands. UMA Outreach had a goal of \$50,000 to raise and Alhamdulillah with your support we were able to overachieve that target and reached \$70,000. At the same time some during the last ten nights of Ramadan, a handful of brothers performing I'tikaf (seclusion) in Omar Mosque Auburn and GIYC Liverpool pushed the fundraising even further. In a blink of an eye it seemed like the whole community was behind this project and Sydney4Somalia (an IDO initiative) was born.

Alhamdulillah we've just returned from our journey to the region to help with the relief effort. Below is a snapshot of what we experienced but you need to read it with an amplifier as words cannot explain what we saw, heard, smelt and most importantly felt.

We started in Nairobi (Kenyan Capital) went to Mogadishu (Somali capital) for 24 hours, headed to Wajir (north east Kenya).

Mogadishu

Mogadishu was insane, everything has been torn apart from 20 years of war. From the bullet holes on every structure, barb-wire, pot holes, buildings falling apart etc. basically everything we saw had something wrong with it. At the airport instead of a boom gate they use a forklift to move a concrete barricade to let cars through. Where ever we travelled we had armed security with us (6 men with AK47s). It's so rough it felt surreal, we were so far



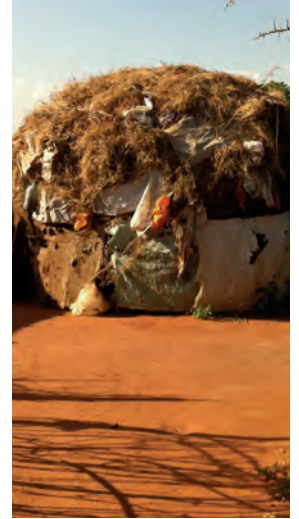
from home.

We went to a food distribution centre and witnessed firsthand the IDPs (internally displaced people). There were about 4000 people in this area that escaped from their land and walked over 100kms, but there was only enough food for 700 of them. So they go through a selection process to make sure the neediest receive the support.

We met a 62 year old displaced unemployed man that has to provide for a family of 13.

We also met a 14 year old boy providing for a family of 6 or 7. They have no home, no money, no security, no food, no plans, only the clothes on their back, half their family killed by the famine, suffering from diseases and malnutrition, but they still smile and say Alhamdulillah. Even the relief workers who live there broke down from what they saw. You would think they would be desensitised from seeing this every day but with sincerity, the heart always remains attached.

You want to help but where do you start. They need



homes, food, schools, medicine, sanitation, livelihood, security, water and the list goes on. On top of all that we were told we were staying in the best part of Somalia.

Wajir

Wajir is in north east Kenya. The people of Wajir are of Somali origin living in huts for the last 20 years. But the majority moved there after the Wagalla massacre where 5000 Somali men were executed.

We drove two hours on a dirt track to get to Kilkily, one of the many villages of Wajir. Try to imagine leaving your home after your family has been massacred, you come to an area with no roads, no electricity, no plumbing or toilets, no homes and no government.

On top of that you just went through 2.5 years of drought. Compare that to how we live and complain to our mothers if the food doesn't have enough salt, or to our wives that we eat the same thing for 2 days. Alhamdulillah the rains have returned and their crops are thriving again. But the living conditions don't improve by much.

It got so bad even the animals left the bush and came towards the human villages for survival. That includes the likes of antelopes and giraffes looking for water. And hyenas, lions and jackals looking for meat, including humans. We found giraffe carcasses and bones crushed by hyenas.

Insha'Allah that gives you a brief idea of what we've seen, but like I said words cannot explain the situation.

Our brothers and sisters need our support. We need to help with awareness, money and dua. The majority of the funds raised from the UMA are being directly used for food distribution and approximately \$10,000 was used for over 150 eye cataract surgeries.

We would like to thank the entire community for its overwhelming support which has encouraged us to multiply



our efforts to include projects in other countries which are in need of assistance.

Therefore there's a lot of hope. After coming back we have intensified our work on the ground through IDO (Islamic Development Organisation*) and now have several pilot projects planned for implementation over the next six months. These projects include "Safe Communities" for Orphans – where were moving away from Emergency food distribution to the Development and Recovery phase. This includes relocation to their original village or one with a water source, agriculture and livelihood, and Islamic education initiatives.

Wasalaamu Alakiom,

Brother Moustafa Sanoussi

***Further Donations can be made via IDO**
(Islamic Development Organisation)

Bank details: ANZ

BSB: 012257

Acc# 18466 2315

For Cash Donations

call 0432 380 466 or 0422 034 236



“By (the Token of) Time (through the ages), Verily Man is in loss, except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Constancy.” (Qur’an, Chapter 103)

In the 103rd chapter of the Qur’an, Allah (swt) gives us a blueprint for our lives: Have faith, do righteous deeds and join together to teach people truth, patience and constancy. Our first priority then is to have this faith and to do good deeds as individuals, as families and as a collective community. Secondly, we need to teach others.

Everyday people interact and learn from the internet. The world is now so wired that people sleep with their iPhones so that they don’t miss anything. (Yes admit it!) The statistics on how obsessed people are with social networks such as Facebook are mind-boggling. The internet ‘cloud’ is now the living space of the world. Everyday there are new and more sophisticated anti-Islamic websites, rants on YouTube and powerful bloggers that publish their latest Islam phobic tirades. Where are the Muslims?

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf once said; “Spend a little time on the Internet, and search for issues related to Islam, the way people who have little or no knowledge about Islam might do if they were curious about our religion. Try Google searches for terms like “jihad” or “women in Islam,” and see the top websites and links that appear. Compare some of the websites run by Muslims with the ones run by people attacking the Muslims, and note the difference.” Indeed, what we will find is that we still have a lot of work to do. Not just for non-Muslims but for Muslims as well. We need to do something to counteract this disinformation about Islam.

“Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knows best who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance.” (Qur’an, 16:125)

My philosophy since the 90’s has not been that we need to convert people. That is not our job. Faith is something that is between a person and Allah (swt). Our job is to present the real, true, good Islam. It is up to people if they want to believe, understand, sympathise or hate (there will always be people who won’t believe and we should accept that). However, we should not accept when many begin their “terrorism, honour-killing, jeehad, shariah-izlam” rants and present that to the world as our faith. That is not fair and it’s about time that each of us participates in taking back our own narrative. The Qur’an asks us to join together in this mutual teaching. We need to step up, participate, represent and bring true Islam to the people.

You might ask at this point if one person/website/blog/video/tweet can make a difference. The way I look at it is that; if one person is affected positively by what you’ve created, it is well worth the effort (it can even be beneficial to you).

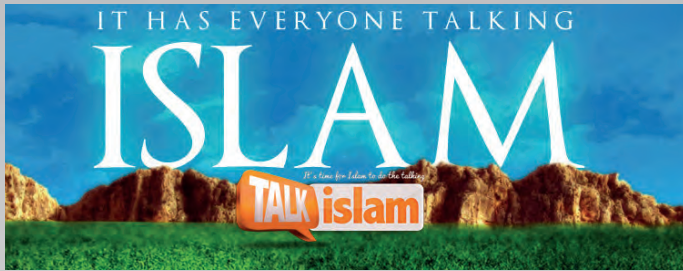
So the typical image of an Islamic website you might have is of an elderly scholarly Shaykh (with a big beard) posting long religious edicts! Or perhaps of a programmer in big glasses typing feverishly away in complex programming languages. Yet the websites of today are far more nuanced and don’t have to be in ‘traditional’ website form. Easy software, helpful guides and simple interfaces make everything accessible, even to those not technically inclined. You also do not have to be a scholar or “perfect” in religiosity to show different aspects and positive sides of Islam.

There are so many Muslims that have such great talents and skills. Each of us can contribute to this mutual teaching. So how do we get started in making something beneficial? And what are some steps in the process?

Pre-Step 1: Purify your intention
Anything we do should be for Allah (swt), so it’s important to keep in mind our goals and original intentions.

Step 1: Find your niche

Do you have any special abilities or talents? Do you know how to program Islamic widgets, themes, apps, software? What are you interested in? Do you like politics? Art? Software? Poetry? History? Fashion? What kind of website do you want to create? Do you want to start a blog? Create some funny videos? Gather articles on a specific topic? Live stream local lectures and study circles? Start a forum for a certain hobby? Open a Yahoo group for people similar to you or for your local community? Every Muslim can contribute in their own way, so think of the way you can best contribute using your interests and skills.



Step 2: Do some research

See what's out there in the areas you're interested in. Who is the audience you are targeting? Muslims, non-Muslims – both or a specific group? Do you think your website will be useful to them? Does it add value to what is already out there? How is it different or needed? Analyse what works and what doesn't. Seeing other things might spark some new ideas or help you find where you are most needed. If the idea is out there already, you could do something similar or a little different. If someone is already doing what you're interested in, then you should join and strengthen them. You might even want to contribute something or help an established site out there already instead of starting something new.

Step 3: Get started

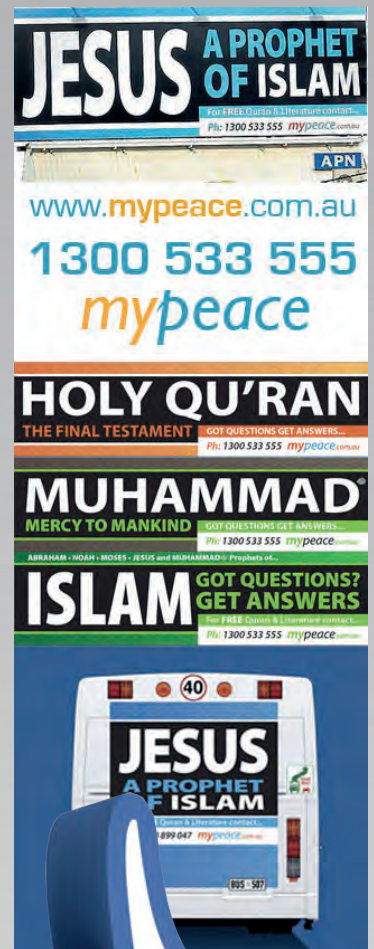
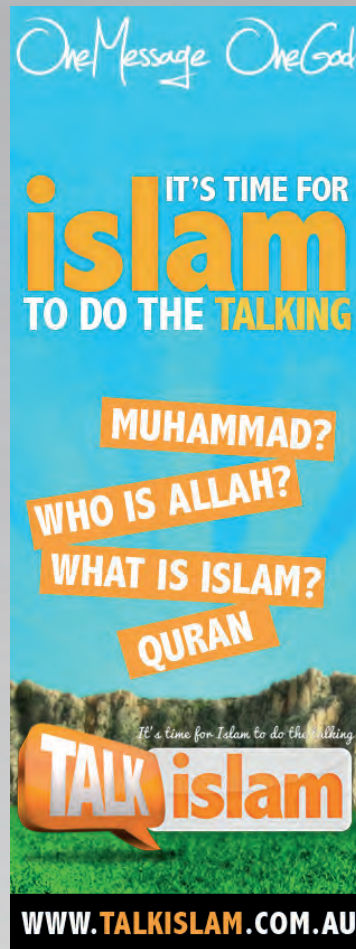
Create some content!

You don't have to buy your own domain and host your own site at this point, which can be expensive and technically complicated. You can use free services like WordPress, Blogspot, Tumblr, You Tube, Vimeo, Flickr, Deviantart, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Find things you can use for your site and don't forget to write to publishers and authors for permission. Write articles, create videos and start tweeting. Be smart, innovative, creative and fresh. There is so much potential for us out there with so many great ideas.

Step 4: Advertise and allow for feedback

Advertise in Google, post comments on other blogs and list your site in Islam related search engines. Ask other website owners, friends and those who might be interested to take a look and give you suggestions. Tweak and change where needed. Keep your goal in mind and don't mind negative criticism. Don't be discouraged if you don't get the response you wanted. The internet is a big place, but know that you have contributed positively, insha'Allah (God willing).

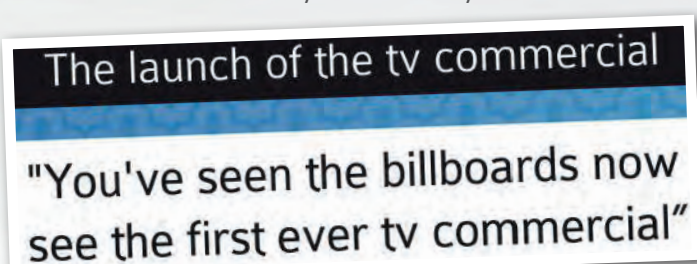
Step 5: Try to keep it up. This is actually the hardest step. There are so many outdated and orphaned Islamic sites out there. Or



worse, good things that were completely deleted! Don't destroy good work. Pass it on, delegate or encourage others to continue. Keep updating and posting, be current and in touch.

"The World is three days: As for yesterday, it has vanished, along with all that was in it. As for tomorrow, you may never see it. As for today, it is yours, so work in it." - Hasan al-Basri

I hope one day to find such diverse sites such as; a comprehensive commentary on all those 'controversial verses' in the Qur'an, academic and interesting responses to current Islamic issues in the media, a detailing of the Muslim response to 9/11, Muslim bloggers and tweeters with thousands of dedicated inter-faith followers, interactive live streaming of every Muslim-related event in Australia and, of course, even a site on how to make the perfect Ramadan cupcakes! Jazakamullahu khairan. May Allah reward you all.



THE SHEIKH GOOGLE

PHENOMENON

Googling The Sheikh

The term 'Sheikh Google' generally refers to an amateurish approach of studying Islam, more specifically to the study of Islamic Law (fiqh) and theology ('aqīda). Yet of course this does not imply a wholesale negative judgment on studying Islam online but instead highlights a pitfall which some may fall into whilst reading on Islamic law or theology by themselves: equating basic literacy with scholarship. In other words, to simply 'Google' a topic (hence using it as one's Sheikh) one may then think of oneself as an expert or at least act like one. One aspect that has plagued so many of the websites online providing knowledge on Islam is polemics; even when article(s) are written by a single author, there are straw-man attacks on other valid Islamic perspectives. For someone who wants a balanced and nuanced understanding such sites are best avoided or they can be used as a spring-board to generate questions, which can then be presented and discussed with a teacher. This is because when embarking on learning something new it is dangerous to let someone's deep held views have an unrestrained influence on your understanding without you engaging the material critically.

Engaging The Text

Avoiding websites that offer partial information is perhaps easier said than done. Sometimes we may need an immediate answer to a pressing question or can sometimes be shy to ask the local imam etc. In such scenarios the usefulness of being critical cannot be over emphasised. What do we mean by being critical? One thing for sure: it certainly does not mean being rude and difficult; rather, it simply means

sheikh google

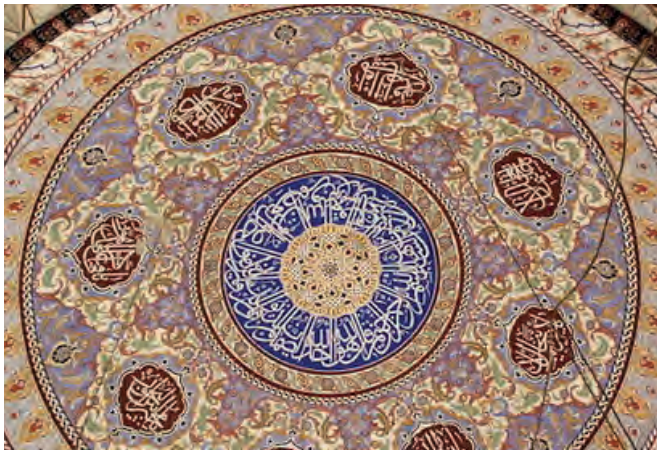
asking questions to clarify what is being said or to inquire for further information. However, this can be difficult to achieve online. This is because the process of reading involves reading what the author has to say and then processing the information then ultimately making a judgment on whether to accept or reject the information. Usually one cannot engage in critical dialogue with the online author and ask questions to seek clarification, all of which help to refine our understandings. And even if we do have this opportunity, it is usually limited in the form of comments. This fact should humble us if we get overzealous about an issue and seek to engage in polemics or act as if we 'know it all.'

Imām Abū Hanīfa (d. 150 AH) used to sit with several of his students, engage in long discussions over points of fiqh and only after listening to all of what his students had to say, he used to state his opinion. Thus the understanding of his pupils was in a sense validated by their teacher. Although that is not to suggest he dictated his opinion to them, as this is proven by the fact that his two most famous students Abū Yūsuf (d. 189 AH) and Muhammad (d. 189 AH) frequently differed with him. Nonetheless it at least made sure they did not misunderstand him. It is this vital aspect that can be missing when we read online. What we take from a text might not be what was intended by the author and although authorial intent has been dismissed by some modern literary theorists, as far as I am aware, it still has its importance when studying Islam.

When Facing Contradictions

The above also helps to highlight another challenge in learning from what 'Sheikh Google' and similar websites may present. One frequently comes across conflicting information and doesn't know which to accept, so while one website says "xyz is permissible," another not only says it is prohibited but is from the major sins! Without recourse to a teacher for further clarification one has to inevitably decide independently on which opinion to give preference.

This can be loosely identified as "tarjih." Tarjih usually refers to the scientific process of a jurist giving preference to one view over another, which can be a complex process, and hence usually it is the activity of scholars.



Online Fatāwā

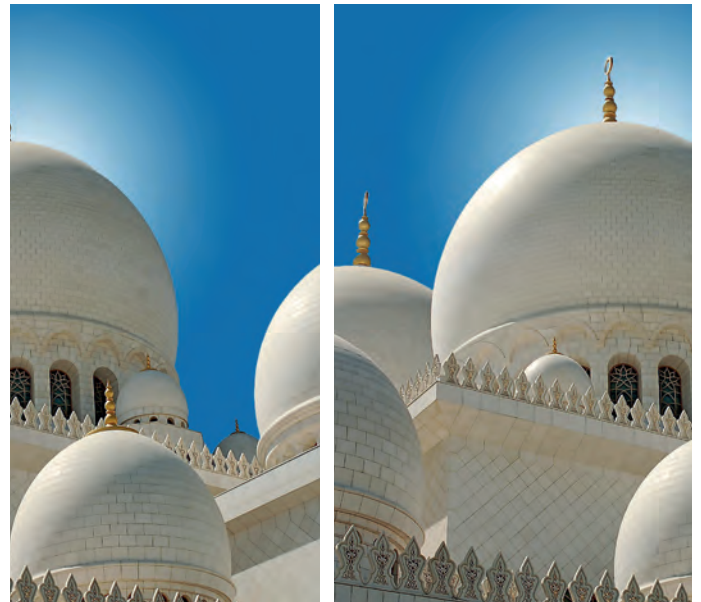
It is not difficult to recognise the fact that the Internet has facilitated access to the knowledge of many great scholars without which many people would have been deprived of such knowledge. And for this we should be grateful. This has obviously seen the rise of sites offering fatāwā. Again, whilst it is undoubtedly useful to seek answers to questions one may have, it is important to remember that whilst specific answers can be helpful for immediate practice, it should not be used as the main source or the only source of one's education at the cost of a holistic approach. Ad-hoc answers can form scattered knowledge, which without proper guidance, can lead to confusion and/or an imbalance in one's attitude. Being critical also involves making sure a fatwa does actually apply to one's situation. Indeed this can be a difficult task at times and as part of the training of a sheikh, certain institutions offer specific training on how to apply fatāwā to different contexts. If in doubt it is best to seek clarification before acting upon the fatwa. It is also important to check the credentials of the person issuing the fatwa, especially if they follow an exclusivist approach e.g. 'every other opinion is weak or wrong.' If however someone is merely narrating the opinions of other scholars, then they need not be sheikhs themselves.

In terms of the actual topics of fatāwā, rulings can be found on every topic under the sun. Though this can be seen as something positive, it also is worrying due to the possible implications of misapplying a fatwa. Therefore, a good criterion to follow is to discuss beforehand with a sheikh the issues related to the rights of others such as in marriage and divorce, as well as inheritance. Such issues have immense social implications and it is best to tread carefully.

Scanning Your Teachers

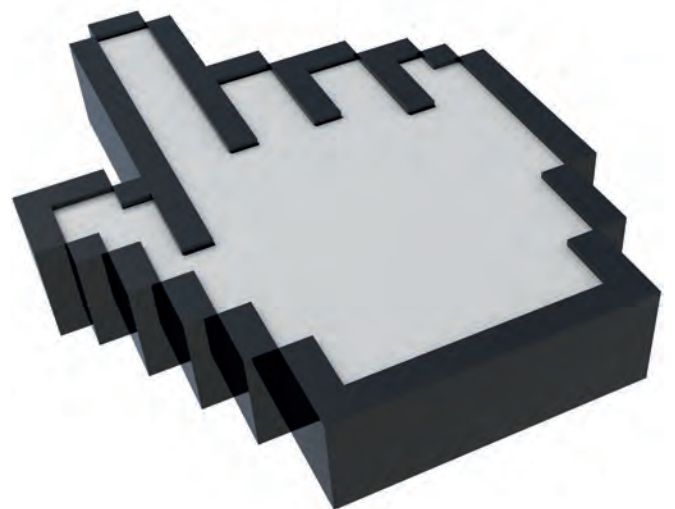
While Imām al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204 A.H) was sitting in a mosque, a man came to him and asked him to provide the proof for the legal doctrine of Ijmā' (consensus). If he was unable to do this, then the man suggested the imām refrain from issuing fatāwā. The humble person that he was, the imām sought respite. When after a few days later the imām provided the proof, the man asked if the imām would teach him. He then became one of the imām's leading students whom we know as al-Muzānī (d. 264 A.H.).

The importance of a real life teacher who is balanced and firmly grounded in knowledge is indispensable when it comes to learning. This is because when we learn from real people, we learn knowledge as well as learn manners (ādāb). The right



teacher may rebuke us if we raise our voices and discipline us if we act haughty and arrogant, which helps refine our character and ultimately become a better person - which is perhaps one of the most important goals of learning. And it is the absence of such a teacher when it comes to online learning, or when the Internet becomes our only source of learning, when we may become self-deluded into qualifying ourselves with attributes not befitting a student, ranging from adopting the attitude of a judge instead of a seeker, to always looking for evidences to back up our opinions and rejecting all others. This is reflected in the saying "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

In such instances we all acknowledge the usefulness of 'Sheikh Google' when used correctly, whilst recognising that 'Sheikh Google' should never replace the real balanced Sheikh.



SPIRITUAL

PITFALLS



for the *Muslim Blogger*

Blogs are gateways that grant us access into the interior worlds of other people. They offer us glimpses into people's experiences, thoughts and feelings, revealing their strongly held opinions and their innermost dreams. The relative ease of blogging, especially with free hosting and user-friendly services, has made it an extremely popular way for many of us to share pieces of our lives and personalities with others on a global scale. Blogs have given a voice to many whose realities would otherwise be unknown to the general public and we now find an ocean of Muslim writers contributing to the online blogosphere.

While there are many beautiful, beneficial and positive things we can share with others through our blogs, which can make blogging a spiritually uplifting experience, there are also certain types of writing that can actually be harmful to our spiritual state. Here are six blogging tendencies that may be spiritually detrimental for us and that we should seek to avoid when we write and post.

1. Cathartic Sharing

We should be wary of using our blogs as outlets for venting negative feelings and frustrations in our lives. Instead of channeling such feelings into positive avenues that would bring about benefit for ourselves and others, we may instead feel a false sense of relief or satisfaction in simply 'letting it all out'. It would be far better for us to make constructive changes in our lives and seek out the proper support, guidance and advice needed to help address the difficulties we may be experiencing.

Another harm of this type of blogging – especially when writing about situations in which we feel that we have been wronged – is the ease of falling into certain prohibited types of speech, such as speaking ill of others, making accusations and exposing people's faults to others' scrutiny. One may feel that they are simply telling their side or letting the truth be known, however, when one is emotional and feels that they have been

oppressed it is difficult to be cautious in one's speech and it is easy to trample on others' rights.

2. Arm-Chair Critiquing

Blogs are a means by which we can openly share our opinions on an array of issues and it is common to find Muslim bloggers discussing their communities, masjids, Islamic organisations and institutions and other Islamic projects they come into contact with. While it is easy to complain about the wrongs and negatives that one may see in different settings, it is much harder to actually become involved and invested, and work to make things better. We should be cautious of letting our blogs make us into arm-chair critics, who, while others are rolling up their sleeves and doing actual work, sit back as spectators, concerned more with commenting than constructing. We should be wary of becoming isolated from the community, relegating ourselves to the role of observer and pundit rather than actual participant.

3. Using Words as Weapons

We should also be wary of attacking others, individually or as groups, and using words as a way to humiliate and punish. There is nothing wrong with feeling passionate about an issue and respectfully disagreeing with others; however a passionate expression of ideas is very different from simple emotional ranting. We can find many examples of blog posts in which entire groups of people are targeted and charged with the actions of a few – "Muslim men these days are all irresponsible and immature" – or where complex ideas of Islamic law are emotionally debated and labels are tossed down on whoever disagrees – "That idea/scholar/group is Wahabi/Sufi/etc." We should use our words to inspire, enlighten and educate, and not to insult or denigrate. In engaging in this type of rhetoric we may feel a sense of satisfaction in one-upping the

other party. However, the evident harms of such speech – in hurting and discouraging others and engendering resentment and hatred between people’s hearts – makes it something extremely dangerous. Passion and strong feelings can exist but must be reigned in by composure, level-headedness and fear of Allah in the words we write and share.

4. Loving One’s Own Opinion

Another issue we should be aware of is a feeling of self-importance that may come from constantly sharing our opinions with others and latent feelings of arrogance, over-confidence and condescension that may arise from this. One may begin to write desiring or expecting the admiration of others, seeking to gain their approval or to be talked about and discussed. This is very harmful to the sincerity of one’s intention and leads one to a disproportionate perception of the importance of one’s opinions and writings.

In addition, we may begin to feel that we should have a fixed and strong opinion on everything, even those matters about which we are ill informed or unqualified to discuss. The grave



seriousness of discussing religious issues may be disregarded in our constant desire to philosophise, debate and have our opinions be heard. This is in complete contradiction to the tradition of our scholars, who were extremely hesitant to state their opinions on religious issues unless they were confident about their understanding of them. The great 14th century scholar Ibn Rajab al Hanbali describes them in the following way:

“The early imams were cautious about speaking about [the lawful and unlawful] because one who speaks about such matters is relating information from Allah, enunciating His commandments and prohibitions, and passing on His sacred law. It was said about Ibn Sirin, ‘If he was asked about something regarding the lawful or the unlawful, his colour would change. He would be transformed until he no longer seemed the same person.’ Ata’ ibn al-Saib said, ‘I met people who, when asked for a religious verdict, would tremble as they spoke.’ It is related that when Imam Malik was asked about a legal matter, it was as if he were suspended between Heaven and Hell. Imam Ahmad was extremely hesitant to speak on the lawful and unlawful, to claim that something was abrogated, or related matters which others would too readily expound. He frequently prefaced his answers with phrases such as, ‘I hope that...’ ‘I fear...’, or ‘It is more beloved to me...’ Imam Malik and others would frequently say, ‘I do not know.’ Imam Ahmad would often say on an issue with which righteous forbears had various opinions, ‘The most likely answer is, ‘I do not know.’”

5. Excessiveness in Speech

A wise person once said that the more one speaks, the more one is likely to fall into mistakes. Bloggers are often prolific writers, sharing their thoughts on a daily or weekly basis and producing volumes worth of material for others to read. We should make sure that we are not writing simply to fill the page but with the intention of bringing about some type of benefit. This is a very practical manifestation of the Prophetic tradition which says, “Speak khayr – that which is good and beneficial, or remain silent.” In the same vein, we should blog well or instead keep our thoughts and writings to ourselves.



6. Sharing that which has No Benefit

The Prophet (s) would pray for Allah’s refuge from “knowledge that does not benefit.” There are many types of knowledge that exist, the most noble being knowledge of Allah (swt). There are also types of knowledge or information that bring about harm or are meaningless and actually do nothing but waste one’s time. Becoming immersed in discussions about these types of knowledge is spiritually harmful, distracting one from more important matters and taking up important spiritual and psychological ‘space’ that should be filled with other, better things. We should avoid trivial or meaningless discussions and debates. We should also be wary of sharing personal matters that should be kept within the sanctity of one’s family and loved ones, or in some cases, solely between a person and their Lord.

Conclusion

An Arabic expression states that there are three things that cannot return; a spent arrow, a missed opportunity and a spoken word. May Allah (swt) make us conscious of every word we speak, write or blog. May He make our words something that we are rewarded for, that draw us closer to Paradise and to His pleasure, and that once expressed, do not become a source of regret. I ask Allah (swt) to make our writing and blogging a means of elevating our spiritual state and to protect us from falling into the prohibited, disliked and detrimental. Ameen.

AVOIDING A HARMFUL eDIET

NAIYERAH KOLKAILAH



Food is a necessity in life. But keep over-eating (irrespective of nutritional value) and you can become overweight and obese. Eat unhealthy, fatty foods and you get high cholesterol, high blood pressure and other nasty illnesses and diseases. The Internet can be compared to our relationship with food. It is a great tool that provides us innumerable benefits. But if we over-indulge or keep ingesting unwholesome pieces and quantities, it can ruin our physical, spiritual and mental health. With the plethora of content in cyberspace, it's difficult to maneuver without feeling overwhelmed and virtually claustrophobic. It's a challenge to be selective in what to read, who to talk to and what activities to engage in. It's a struggle to even turn off our electronic gadgets that constantly beep, flash and vibrate with new e-mails, updates and instant messages. Someone or some group always wants to show and tell us something—always wanting immediate attention. If we comply—all the time—we'll be hooked for good and always waiting for more.

The Internet will gladly consume our thoughts and time, if we let it. Our unhealthy online habits can detract from nourishing our real-life interactions, from excelling at work or in school, from reading beneficial books and publications and from spending quality time with friends and family. We can develop a horizontal approach, broadening our exposure to numerous people and information while developing little to no depth in any of our relationships or knowledge of certain subjects. Our incessant perusal through other people's pictures, videos and blogs can make us aimless consumers and distract us from leaving our own meaningful footprint in cyberspace. Worse, our online sins can develop into addictions that violate our moral code, eat away at our soul, translate into real-life sins and sever our relationships with spouses and loved ones. If we find ourselves developing any of these problems we might consider doing the following:

1. Unplug. Log-off. Disconnect

Give your eyes (and ears) a break. Go to a park or watch a sunset. Enjoy the solitude. Listen to the chirping birds, rustling leaves and the streaming rivers and creeks. Praise God for the beauty in His creation. Bond with your spouse, children or siblings. Talk about your hopes, dreams, fears and needs. Have a cup of coffee with real friends and connect in person. Catch up on all the unread messages in the Qur'an. Reflect on their meanings and on your purpose in life. Try making these daily or weekly habits. Be present with your heart, mind, body and soul.

2. Minimise

When you're back online, think small. Take bite-size portions you can chew. Be selective. Choose quality over quantity. Read only some posts, watch only some videos. Maybe read an e-book instead. Remember to leave room for breathing space and digestion. Try not to multi-task online. Don't toggle between so many tabs and conversations or jump from wall to wall and post to post. Focus, process, reflect. Ponder on how you can apply new lessons in your life. Then take time away to implement.

3. Refine

Think of your activities online. Evaluate your surfing, speaking and spamming. Is it useful, appropriate and modest? Is it impulsive or superfluous? Choose your words wisely, cautiously, courteously. If they're with the opposite gender make them kind but modest. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Try expressing thoughts and feelings in words rather than using emoticons. Use proper grammar. Take the time to infuse your communication with excellence. Don't abbreviate, abridge and shorten where length is valued. Don't expose, reveal and elongate where concealment is needed. Before you share, post and forward, check if you've benefited and reflected.



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ABDUL SATTAR AHMED

Our Culture Of Arrogance, Anger And Online Arguments

Dawud Wharnsby once wrote in one of his anasheeds:

We use so many words but have so little to relay as angels scribble down every letter that we say. All the viral attachments sent and passionate insults we vent. It's easy to be arrogant behind user passwords we invent. But on the day the scrolls are laid, with every word and deed displayed, when we read our accounts, I know, for one, I'll be afraid. That day I'll be so afraid to read. (Album: The Prophet's Hands, 2003)

One of the tragedies of the Internet is that it strips away much of the social contract we have put into place in order to make our interactions more pleasing and less confrontational. If someone upsets us online or gives an opinion we disagree with, there is no physical danger in refuting them, in calling them an idiot, a kaafir or any other host of names. If someone quotes a scholar we happen to believe is a “sellout,” or gives us a sport statistic about a player we don't particularly like – many of us have no problem publically labeling the elderly knowledgeable scholar as a sellout and making sure the world knows through vile vocabulary that we think the player sucks. Of course when we insult them, we do not acknowledge that we are neither knowledgeable scholars nor professional sports players.

We would not say these things in front of the people we're talking about; if these were our parents, we would adamantly make excuses and prevent gossip. So why do our fingers move fluidly to vent insults, accusations and even high-level political analysis about events that we

have merely done a few Google searches on?

A few months ago, a young brother from my community was killed in a train accident while walking. Readers on the local newspaper's website casually commented that it may have been his fault if he wasn't watching the train coming. This was on the day of his death. Would they have said this to the face of his crying mother? Would they have spread this thought outside the funeral, so everyone within listening distance could hear? We would hope none of them would have the cruelty to do this. But by typing their comments on the Internet, this is exactly what they have done.

What we must realise is that when we take part in this culture of debate, arguing and then arguing again, day after day after day, we are slowly devastating our own hearts.

Similarly, many young Muslims youth throw accusations against Muslim scholars, spend hours online insulting Sunnis, Shi'ites, Ikhwanis, Sufis, Salafis, Tableeghis and every other flavor of the Muslim spectrum one can imagine. Many actually dedicate a portion of their day updating their Facebook status, insulting so-and-so through a clever blog post, warning others and listing out their faults – all this with the conviction that they have “enjoined the good and forbidden the evil!” And don't deny it, many of us cannot resist commenting on websites or Facebook statuses where our Islamic political, social, economic, creedal and legal opinions – usually set in stone – are MORE sacred than the other because

“we learned it from a teacher.” Yet the majority of us did not have any formal, conclusive training in the Islamic sciences – which even if we had, would not justify the bitter tone and behavior. As I heard a brother say recently say, “We are like firemen arguing about what hose to use, while the house burns down.”

What we must realise is that when we take part in this culture of debate, arguing and then arguing again, day after day after day, we are slowly devastating our own hearts. On social networks we feel a rush of adrenaline waiting for the counter-argument or foreign person to respond. We create intellectual forums then wait like vultures to check another person’s clearly messed up thinking to respond back with a counter-proof: “That’ll show them!” That AWESOME feeling after a lengthy response is not enjoining good or even productive: we are simply letting OUR nufos (our souls and desires) tear apart the heart and run wild to see if they can prove dominance over someone else.

We all need to seriously evaluate our souls in this culture of online disputes and identify why we spend our time the way we do. A few details we must begin to change include:

Continuously leaving controversial and provoking messages in our online personalities, whether through networks, forum posts or blog comments. This is NOT “forbidding the evil”, this is opening a gate for evil. Any trained mental-health professional will point out that this is attention-seeking behaviour from a person who wants to feel like they are making a difference and are important. Ask yourself do I need to respond? What would Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) do?

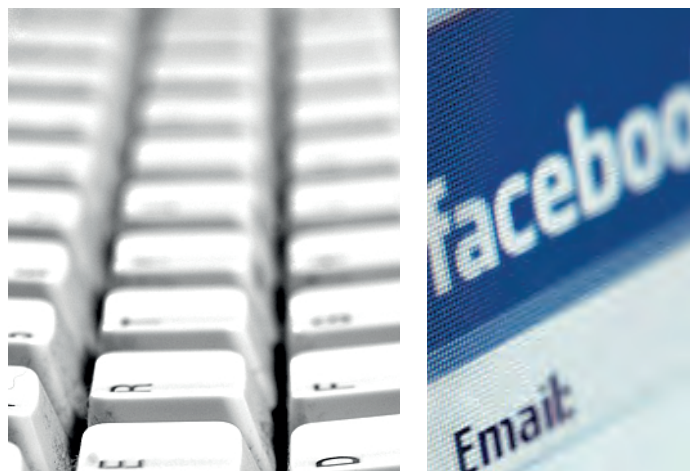
While the refined soul wants to do dhikr (remembrance) of Allah (swt), the diseased soul wants others to do dhikr of itself. It feels proud that it has stood against evil by posting YouTube links, by invoking walaawalbaraa (loving and hating for the sake of God) and by invoking credal differences we barely understand to excommunicate entire groups from being Ahl-As-Sunnah (people of the Prophetic



way). In all our interactions we must make Allah our focal point not ourselves.

The soul thinks it is making the world a better place, but it is simply trying to make itself feel useful through the use of the Internet and is involving itself further and further in argumentation. Al-Awza’i said: “When Allah desires ill for a people, He opens the door of argumentation for them and prevents them from doing good deeds.”

The threat of the nafs glorifying itself is an ever-present threat to every writer, speaker, and presenter who shares information about Islam.



The threat of the nafs glorifying itself is an ever-present threat to every writer, speaker, and presenter who shares information about Islam. All of us must consistently take caution, advice, and spend time with people who discourage argumentative behavior and know us well enough to remind us of our own weaknesses, so that we do not let such behaviours manifest themselves in our lives. Many of us are surprised that the internet remembers everything. But to a Muslim, we should already know that nothing we do, type or utter ever escapes the pen of the angels who write, or the sight of Allah (swt). As Dawud Wharnsby says, when we are handed our accounts, will we be afraid to read?





MyQuran

App Review: MyQuran



The “myQuran” app for the iPad or iPhone is not only a worthy purchase but quite frankly essential for any Muslim.

When I first purchased my iPad I thought it was going to be primarily used for work purposes (that is what I told the taxman anyway), however that all changed after discovering the aforementioned app! The “myQuran” app is feature rich with functions such as:

Makharij:

Serves as both a visual and audible aid in proper enunciation of the Arabic dialect required for correct Quran recitation .

Quran:

Including English transliteration and translation (Includes: Maulana, Yousuf Ali and Sahih International plus a selection multiple languages)

Tafseer from Maulana Maududi is also available for each Surah, including an introduction for each that provides a succinct summary of the themes contained within the Surah followed by details of historical events that occurred during the time of revelation.

In addition there is an option to download 10 different

reciter’s including As-Sudais, Abdul Basit and Mishary.

Word Roots:

A challenge that is prevalent for our Australian brothers and sisters is the lack of Arabic language prowess. Being similarly challenged (perhaps even more so) I found this particular feature extremely useful. This tool breaks down certain words in the Quran, provides a comprehensive definition combined with a linguistic origin.

I could continue to simply list features, however I think that wouldn’t do this app justice. What “myQuran” has managed to do for me is make the Quran more approachable, comprehensible and more enjoyable to read! Instead of being overwhelmed and confused, I now feel empowered with all the required tools and resources in order to understand the full meaning and context of the Surah’s that I am reading.

When I purchased myQuran it was priced at \$30 for the iPad version, the same version is now only \$14, it is well worth it! May Allah reward Magnicode for making this app and I hope you find it just as useful!

Your brother in Islam

Ronnie Mikati

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DINE-IN or TAKE-AWAY

**FATTEH :: FALAFEL :: HOMUS :: BABA GHANOUJ :: FOULE :: DONNER KEBAB
CHICKEN SHAWARMA :: GRILLED CHICKEN :: KEBBE :: RAW KEBBE :: MIXED PLATE
HOMOUS WITH MEAT :: TABBOULEH :: SALADE :: KAFTA :: SHISH KEBAB**

Want More from The Message?

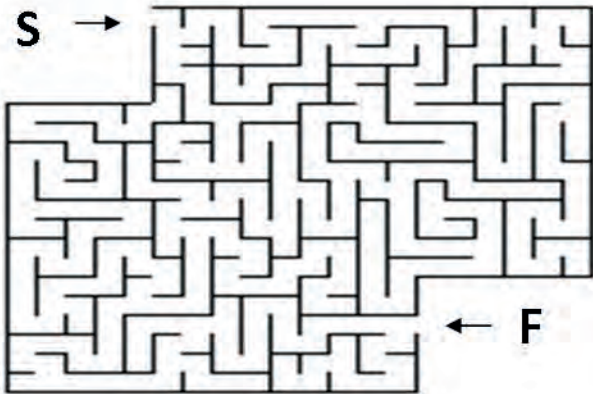
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- Much More...

The screenshot displays the website's layout. At the top, there are navigation links: Home, Articles, Past Issues, Advertise, Subscribe, and Letters. Below this is a section for 'TODAYS FEATURED ARTICLES' with a 'FAMILY' category tag. The featured article is 'Being the Middle Child: Jealousy and Rivalry Among Siblings' by moealra, dated September 3rd, 2011. To the right, there are two article teasers: 'This Life: A Prison or Paradise?' under the 'AFTERLIFE' category and 'Being Religious Without Being a Jerk' under the 'MANNERS' category. On the far right, there is a 'SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER' form with fields for Name and E-mail, and a 'POLLS' section with a poll titled 'What do you think of the new look "Message Magazine" website?' showing results for 'Excellent', 'Average', and 'Can Be Improved'. At the bottom right, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

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Amusements Page

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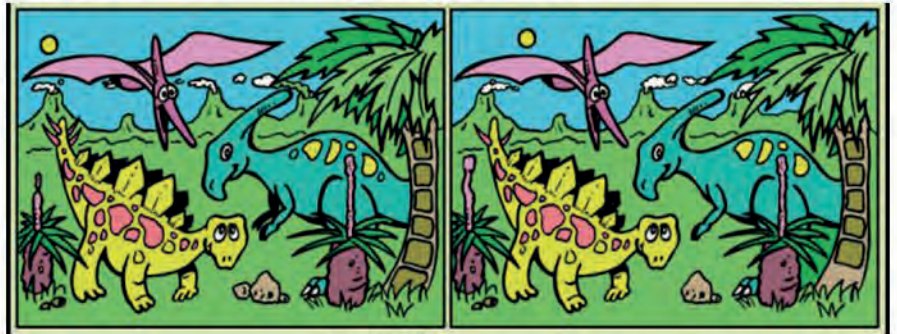
Picture of the month: Indonesian men take a rest as they wait for a prayer time at the Istiqlal mosque in Jakarta.

iFind.

Y R E B L R B H P K F B M Y N
 F E E G Z A A L O Y S N S Z E
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| Smartphones | Relationships | Social |
| Internet | Network | Media |
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| Blogger | Myquran | Tweeting |
| Knowledge | iphone | Study |

iSpot the 10 Differences



1. Left hand plant changed 2. Spikes in dinosaur's tail 3. Legs from flying dinosaur 4. Arm from other right dinosaur 5. Spot missing from right dinosaur
 6. Volcano smoke going other direction 7. Rock missing from ground 8. Segment missing from palm tree trunk 9. Leaf missing from palm tree 10. Sun moved in sky

iSudoku.

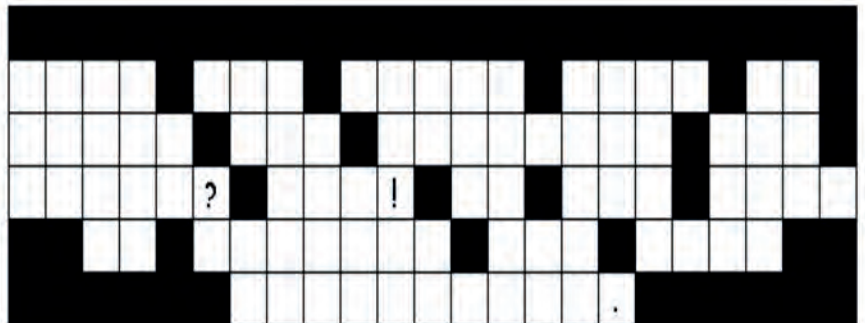
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SUDOKU

Fill in all the squares of the grid so that each row, each column and each 3x3 section contains all the numbers 1-9 inclusive.

Fallen Phrase:

Verse from the Quran



S K A
 T L E N E T E R S I B E Y
 S O A O N O N S H I T E P S H A A W L
 D H N S L R F Y T O R S W H M T R E E R B S
 B O E E S M A I T G A E N E I S L V T H I E E

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