

# IKHLAAS

*The OUISoc Magazine*

## BRIDGES

BRIDGING **THE**  
**GENERATIONAL** GAP

**THE WORST KIND OF**  
**BRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE**

PERMANENCE &  
**FRAGILITY: A**  
**SARJEVO TRAVEL**  
**DIARY**



OXFORD UNIVERSITY  
ISLAMIC SOCIETY



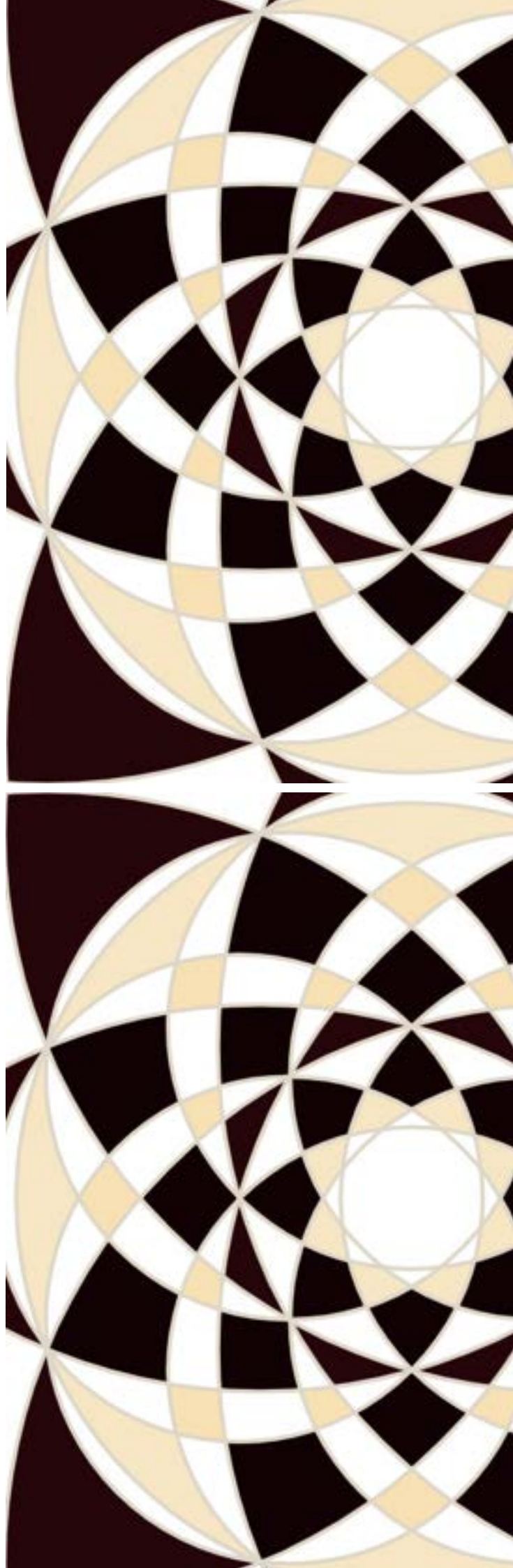
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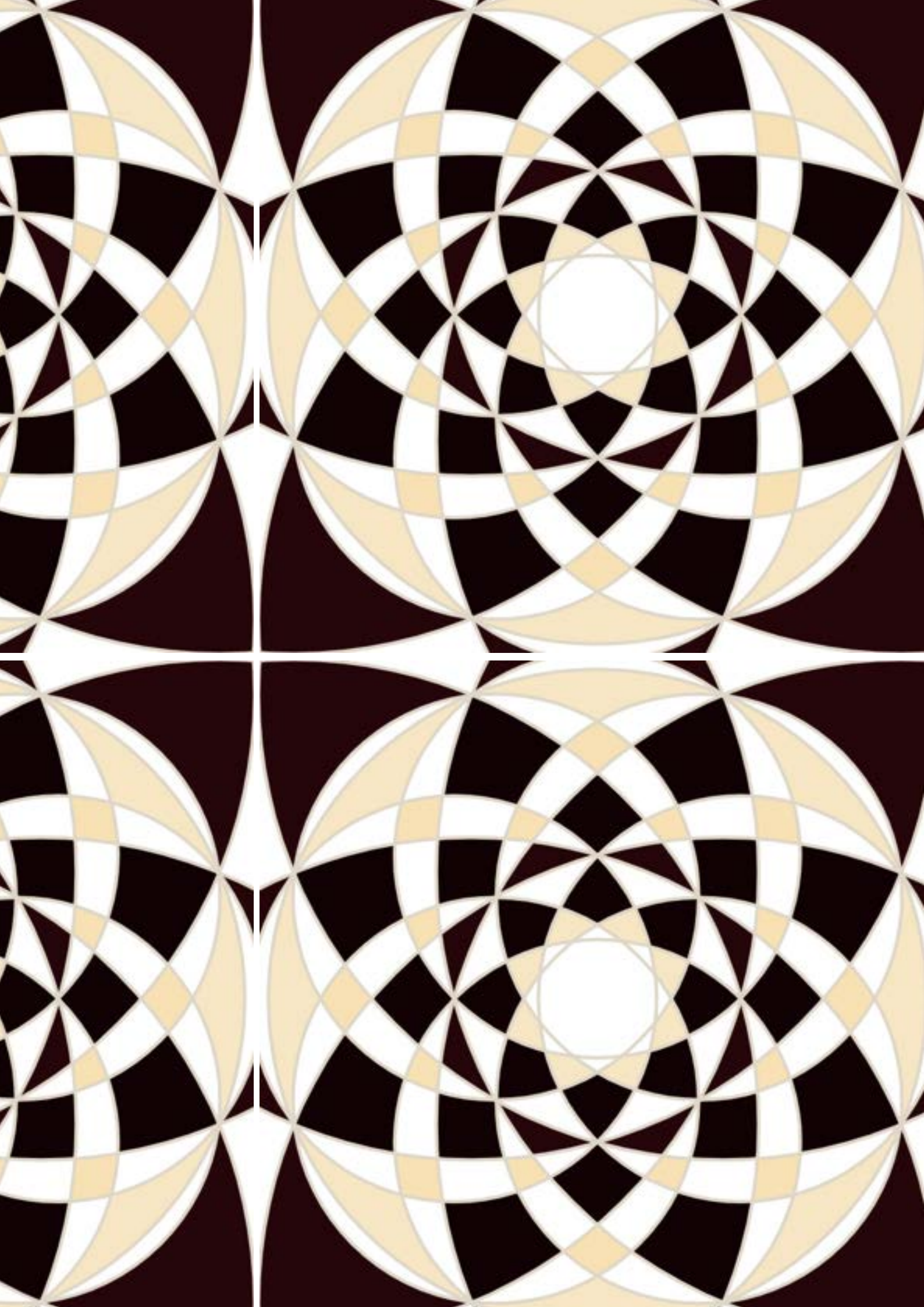
*Ikhlaas*

[Noun] Sincerity

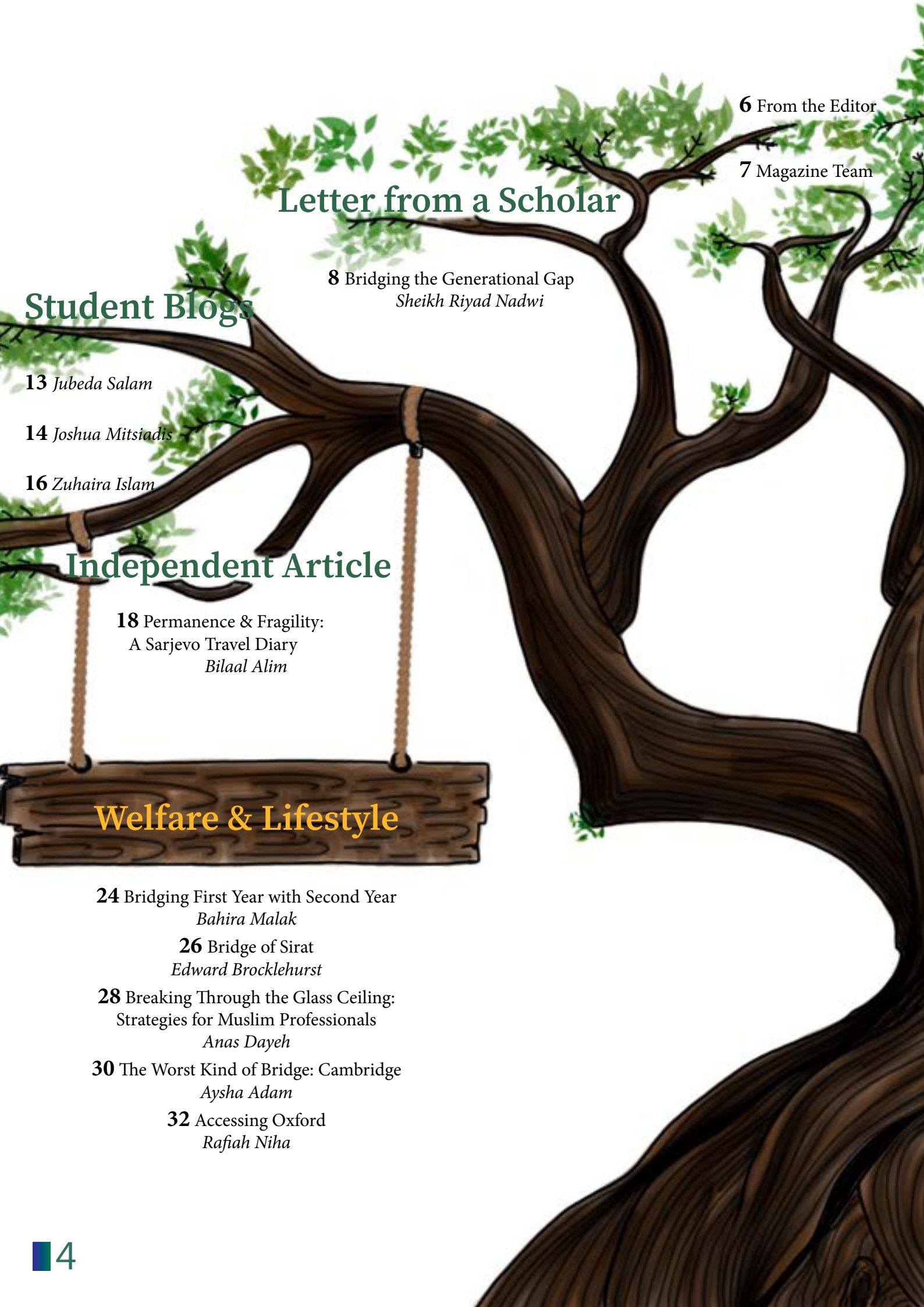
Issue 8

*Bridges*









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Artwork by AbdoAllah  
Mohammad



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

## From the Editor

Assalaamu alaikum, *Ikhlaas* readers.

Alhamdulillah, my mind is once again blown by the range and depth of wisdom that the OUISoc community has to offer. The ability of *Ikhlaas* to dig up hidden nuggets of knowledge and ideas fascinates me every time. This is my final *Ikhlaas* as the Editor, and I am very happy to be signing off the year with another vibrant and diverse magazine. There is so much to explore within these pages and I hope you find the articles as inspiring and enlightening as I have.

We chose the theme 'Bridges' for this magazine because we imagined writers taking it in many different directions, and they did! Bilaal visits the physical bridge Stari Most in his Bosnian travel diary, Edward explains how we can cross the spiritual Bridge of Sirat, and in this issue's Special Feature, psychotherapists Momotaj Islam and Maya Salam elaborate on the mental bridges Muslim psychotherapy can reconstruct. Whilst this issue's theme may seem simpler than previous ones, it has been explored in all kinds of different dimensions and perspectives.

You will notice that many have written about the bridges we cross between different stages of our lives, whether that is getting into university (Jubeda), from year to year at university (Bahira), or from university to graduate life (Daniya). The passage of time is something none of us will ever evade, so it's important and relieving to hear others' stories, how they crossed these metaphorical bridges, and what they might be able to tell us about what is on the other side.

Some of my favourite articles in this magazine include Yasmin describing the impacts Malcolm X had on the spaces around him, Aysha alienating the lesser University of Cambridge, and ISoc veteran Zuhaira reflecting on her past three years here at Oxford. OUISoc staple Sheikh Riyad Nadwi explains the gaps we may feel between generations and how we might act to reconcile ourselves with our parents in a positive way, and Rafiah exposes the details of access events and just how helpful they can be for prospective students.

Safe to say, there is something for every reader in this magazine. It really is packed with everything you could want. Whether it's finding out about what OUISoc members have been researching (Yaseen) or reading (Aman), or admiring their artistic talents in the Community Works section, we have once again collated an excellent *Ikhlaas*, and I look forward to seeing the next Editor take the magazine in their own direction soon, insha'Allah.

Wa alaikum assalaam,  
Siddiq Islam



# Magazine Team



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# Bridging the Generational Gap

**Sheikh Riyadh Nadwi**

Dying man: (Pointing at the hotel's entrance) The door, the door!





**G**enerational gaps are the differences in opinion, values, tastes, vocabulary between generations born into temporally and socioeconomically dissimilar worlds. Whether you're a 'millennial' (born 1981-96) or 'zoomer' (born 1997-2012) living in a technologically advanced society the likes of which has never been seen before, your view of the world and the way you view your place in it will differ from that of your parents and grandparents.

For Muslims in the diaspora, this phenomenon is intensified by differences in language and the stark divergent cultural contexts between generations. Second- and third-generation Muslims seldom use the language of their parents for day-to-day communication and they are, by and large, oblivious to the cultural references of their parents.

Much of this is natural and inevitable given the speed of change in today's world, especially for communities that have migrated westward relatively recently. However, there are certain aggravating factors that can turn these gaps into chasms of distance and detachment where we begin to see our parents not only as retrograde and irrelevant but as malevolent and toxic to our mental health.

Among the most virulent of factors fostering these chasms between the generations

is the trap of *su' al-zann* (assumption of wrongdoing). This can manifest as the assumptions, 'my parents were harsh to me in my childhood and that has damaged me for life,' 'they do not know me nor understand me,' and 'they do not love me nor care for me.' Indeed, some parents do discard their babies in shoeboxes at the side of the road and some do sadistically mistreat their children, but these are the exceptions, not the rule. It is extremely rare to find parents who wilfully harm their children.

*“// Indeed, We blessed Luqmân with wisdom, 'saying', 'Be grateful to Allah, for whoever is grateful, it is only for their own good. And whoever is ungrateful, then surely Allah is Self-Sufficient, Praise-worthy.' //”*

(31:12)

Yet, in our world today, there is a pervasive narrative that turns this fact on its head by suggesting that this is the rule rather than the exception, that everyone is damaged and mentally scarred by their parents even when there is no evidence or memories of these imaginary crimes. This, of course, is rooted in the despicable and comprehensively disproven<sup>1</sup> – and yet still ubiquitous – Freudian

psychoanalytic theories on parent-child relationships. Muslims are not immune to the influence of this evil, especially when Muslim psychologists cherry-pick from the sunnah and twist it to conform to Freudian notions.

That your therapist suspects your parents caused you irreparable mental harm when they shouted at you, perhaps for running into a busy and dangerous road or some other reason, has no basis in truth whatsoever.



ever. It is your own perception in adulthood of the parenting you received that will have the greatest effect on the kind of parent you become. Children flourish with clear boundaries and it is the role of parents to set those boundaries even when the child pushes against them. The duty of a parent is to push back stronger until the child learns to recognise the danger in the proverbial road. Them shouting at you to prevent you from running into the road was to protect you from harm. Anyone who tries to convince you otherwise is, in the verdict of the Quran, caught in the trap of Shaytaan.

When Shaytaan failed to prove his case of superiority over the first human being Adam (upon whom be peace), he declared war against his progeny, and one of the main goals of his plan of attack was to make us ungrateful:

ثُمَّ لَا يَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ مِّنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

*'Then I will attack them from in front of them and from behind them and on their right and on their left, and You will not find most of them to be grateful.'* [7:17]

*Ingratitude is at the heart of his plan and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has warned us: 'He who does not thank people cannot thank God.'* (Tirmidhi)

There is no way to be more ungrateful to your parents than to accuse them of doing the opposite of what they did for you as a child. To accuse them of harming you when in fact they were willing, from the day you were born, to sacrifice their own lives for yours, is the ultimate ingratitude.

If this does not make sense to you then contemplate what I like to call the 'lifeboat challenge'. Ask yourself the question, 'If there was only one empty seat on a lifeboat and you as a child were with your parents in a sinking ship on icy waters, who do you think would get the seat in the lifeboat, you or one of your parents?' Certainly, it would have been you, and the secret behind that is a special love and affection (*rahma*) that Allah

the Most High plants in the hearts of parents for their children that is so powerful that it causes parents to devalue their own lives in favour of their children's lives.

Not every parent will be able to articulate how they feel in words but this powerful mercy, love and compassion they feel in their hearts is indeed one the most profound and captivating forces they will experience in this world. To have that all shattered by accusations of abuse and blame from one's own child is painful beyond description.

Your parents did not damage your mental health, nor blacken your heart when they reprimanded or shouted at you and they do not owe you an apology. It is you who owe them an unpayable debt of gratitude and compassion.

Bridging the generational gap with your parents and avoiding chasms of *su al-dann* from opening in the relationship is not only necessary but for a Muslim it is compulsory as it is a clear command from Allah (the Most High) and the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Allah says:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۚ إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أَفٍ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ۚ وَخُفِّضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذَّلِيلِ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

*'And your Lord has decreed that you worship none except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], "uff," and do not repel them but speak to them a kind word. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them just as they cared for me in my infancy"'* [17:23-24]

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ

*'O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption...'* [49:12]

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالظَّنَّ ، فَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ أَكْذَبُ الْحَدِيثِ (متفق عليه)

*'Beware of zann (assumption or suspicion), for verily zann amounts to the worst form of lying' (Bukhari and Muslim)*



For a more detailed discussion on Parent-Child Relations in Islam please visit:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nn\\_IZjuQSbY&list=PLUxS\\_jTNI5sQQgysIC81OXzK8YDmdi5I2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nn_IZjuQSbY&list=PLUxS_jTNI5sQQgysIC81OXzK8YDmdi5I2)

- (1) See for example: Jurjevich, R. M. (1974) *The Hoax of Freudism: A Study of Brainwashing the American Professionals and Laymen*.  
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Shaikh Riyadh Nadwi is a scholar in Oxford who hails from the world-renowned tradition of esteemed Islamic scholarship Nadwatul Ulama. He is a polymath in the mould of scholars of the Islamic Golden Age. A distinguished Alim with a doctorate in cognitive science, his writings beautifully emphasise the intersection between Islam and science. He is also an accomplished artist and fluent in half a dozen languages.

The Muslim community and students in Oxford and beyond have benefitted from Sheikh Riyadh's intellectual and spiritual guidance for almost three decades.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcWPlZ4m0qjp36cOjAusC8w>



*Narrator: You find a brick wall behind the door that says 'Welcome to the room'.*



# Student Blogs

It is always delightful to hear about your peers' experiences, and here we have three different stories from three different year groups. Jubeda, like many of us, finds herself in the very unusual world of Oxford, while Joshua explores new aspects of his faith. Meanwhile, ISoc president and veteran Zuhaira reflects on the memories the OUISoc has given her.

Journalist named Aman... heard that there is a serial killer on the loose.



# Jubeda Salam

1st year

History

Jesus College

**M**y first term at Oxford has been a rollercoaster of emotions to say the least. Coming from a family where no one had gone to university before, it was a shock to my family who had no idea that I even applied to Oxford in the first place! It still feels unreal being here and I am very blessed, Alhamdulillah, that my duas were accepted to secure this place.

My Oxford journey began when I was in year 11. I remember so clearly my Maths teacher telling me about an Oxford Muslim Access Conference in 2019, and while hesitant at first, I agreed to go. I did not expect much but it ended up being a significant factor in motivating me to apply to Oxford. The people I met there were so friendly and very transparent about their experiences; engaging with discussions surrounding faith and fitting in while also debunking myths surrounding Oxford. This term I was also lucky enough to volunteer at OMAC which was a privilege for me as I was able to give back to an event that helped build my courage to apply here. It was like a full circle moment!

Following OMAC I took part in numerous projects and programmes, from college-specific access programmes to UNIQ and Opportunity Oxford. I was blessed to have been accepted into these programmes which helped bridge the gap between state schools and private schools. Having such a solid start almost guaranteed that my experience at Oxford would be one of the best out there, but I genuinely believe that nothing can prepare you until you have actually started your degree.

I say this because I have always considered myself as extroverted and outgoing, but I



really felt out of my depths when first arriving here which was a solemn feeling. One of my biggest struggles I would say was fitting in. Despite having done these numerous access programmes, I still did not feel like I 'belonged' at Oxford. Much of these feelings came from fresher's week where things were centred around alcohol and partying and no matter how hard I tried, I struggled to make friends. However, I truly consider that period as a blessing in disguise, Allhamdulillah. Despite feeling out of place and drowning in work, I felt myself become closer to the deen and felt that my relationship with Allah had strengthened. I often found myself reflecting on the hadith: 'HasbunAllah Wa Ni Mal Wa-keel; Sufficient for us is Allah, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs.'

However, while I was overwhelmed with this feeling of imposter syndrome, I was and still am so thankful for the Isoc community here. From social to spiritual events, the closeness of the Muslim community made me feel at home. Much of the time, I was able to go out with sisters and talk through my struggles with them and get advice.

For now, I look forward to what next term will bring and Insha'Allah it will be an amazing experience!

# Joshua Mitsiadis

2nd year

Law

Oriel College



University develops you Perhaps (and hopefully) academically, but certainly personally. I reverted in Trinity of my first year, so this is nowhere more true (and maybe nowhere more dramatic) than in my experience. I won't talk about the 'how and why' here. I would rather like to discuss my journey within, not to, the fold of Islam.

The term 'Muslim' has many connotations in today's world. Some are good, some are, unfortunately, bad. Yet, following my reversion, they all seemed foreign to

me. Being a Muslim was like wearing my friend's best clothes. It felt nice, sure, but it felt borrowed. I was concerned by how unfamiliar I felt in my religion.

Bridging my identity to my faith therefore became the task for my first-year summer vacation. I spent time learning about Islam and the grace of its cultures and worldviews. I read books and spoke to imams. I was learning the basics, really, but my knowledge increased and with it my imaan. I'm sure we can all agree that learning about this religion is an educational process like



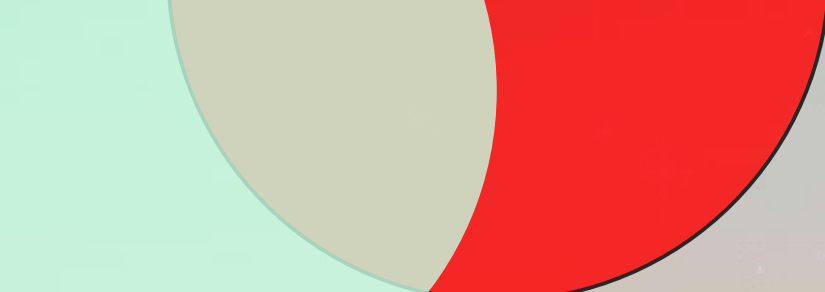


no other. The spiritual nourishing that comes with it is unique. Yet, I could not help but shake the feeling that I was simply becoming a learned man of Islam, not a Muslim.

What best helped to harmonise my Islam and my identity through this tumultuous period was not knowledge, but practice. It was simply the doing that which a Muslim does that helped me most. My personal favourite sunnah is smiling, and Insha'Allah whenever you see or greet me, I have a smile on my face. It may seem insignificant, but my conscious practice of this sunnah made me realise the universality of the Muslim title. The more I tried to align my actions with those of the Prophet's ﷺ, the more confident I felt in my identity as a Muslim. In retrospect, it is unsurprising that it was my actions that acclimated me. After all, the term 'Muslim' describes a person in action: one who submits to Allah سبحانه وتعالى.

Joining Isoc in Michaelmas of this academic year accelerated the bridging of my faith and my identity. I had not known the meaning of brotherhood until I was embraced by those at ISoc. The sense of belonging I felt was as if I had known everyone there all my life. This social aspect of Islam is one of the most beautiful things that I have ever experienced, alhamdulillah.

Spending time with those who share my religious priorities allows my Islam, through defining my routine, to better define me. I do not have to negotiate plans so as to make time for salah, for instance, as I do with my non-Muslim friends and family. Though merely an issue of logistics, having to negotiate my Islam in that way makes my faith feel compartmentalised. This community has thus been invaluable to the harmony of my faith and identity. I am thankful to Allah for His guidance, and I am grateful to ISoc and those within it for their help along the way.



Life is a series of stages, each one with different experiences, people and events. Every stage, though, has a single thread of commonality, and that is its purpose: to strive for closeness to Allah ﷻ. What follows is a reflection on a stage of my life that is almost at its close and how the past three years in Oxford have served to enhance my spiritual connection to our blessed religion.

I remember vividly the first ISoc event I turned up to, a somewhat lost and disoriented fresher in the midst of the pandemic. As I sat in the restaurant in my small group of six, I didn't know that day that I'd meet the people who are now my closest friends, people whom I call my sisters and love for the sake of Allah ﷻ. They made me feel comfortable and at ease and brought with them a sense of home that I had felt lacking in Oxford since the day of my arrival.

Upon reflection, there is no better example than Ramadan to exhibit how this sisterhood grew over our first year. Summer nights get cold extremely quickly, but we'd brave the cold to sit and eat iftar together on the steps just outside the Weston Library, unable to gather indoors. Signing up for Tarawih the second the form opened because spots were limited and competing to see who could fill it out the quickest. Walking back from the

Prayer Room in the dead of the night, exhausted but with a sense of immense satisfaction. These everyday occurrences came together to create an unforgettable month.

After a smooth-sailing first year, my second year came with a set of trials, tests from Allah ﷻ to strengthen my Emaan and ensure my reliance was placed solely in Him. I remember during a particularly difficult time, in Hilary of second year, I broke down in tears just outside of Pembroke college. My friends were there immediately, offering a reminder to always hold firm to the rope of Allah ﷻ, a principle that would guide me





through every difficulty and make any burden lighter.

Moments that are the most defining are often the simplest ones. Going to Kaspas after almost every single ISoc event, late night climbs up the mound, early morning treks through Port Meadows, sleepovers where none of us have slept. I remember one time for a bake sale, we decided to begin baking at midnight and ended up finishing at dawn. A few times, we've stayed up in the Prayer Room from Isha till Fajr simply talking and reflecting on life.

Allah ﷻ says, 'My love is a right upon those who befriend each other for my sake'.<sup>1</sup> We learn from this that keeping good company is a gateway to Jannah and having people you can grow with and through is fundamental to progressing in life. This is what I have found in the ISoc in the last three years, a source of comfort, support, and constant companionship. People who have helped me build

# Zuhaira Islam

3rd year

History and Politics  
St Peter's College



that bridge one step further toward improving my Deen, renewing my intention, and always striving to remain on Sirat al Mustaqim.

(1) Al Mu'jam Al-Saghir, 1092 (Sahih)

*Narrator: No fingerprints  
or weapons are found.*

# Permanence & Fragility: A Sarjevo Travel Diary

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

As my plane descends from thick banks of cloud and I catch my first glimpse of Sarajevo, the first thing I notice was not the city itself but the thousands of white spots scattered in the hills around it. From the window of the plane, I think that they were flowers, until my eyes achieve a sense of depth and scale and I realise that they were gravestones. Thousands of gravestones, the same shade of white, dully reflecting the last rays of the setting sun in green fields above the city.

These are the graves of the 11,000 who were killed in the four-year siege of the city at the hands of Serb nationalists. It is a heartbreakingly fitting image of Bosnia – a country of great beauty, renowned for its cultural and historical riches that are now overshadowed by the traumas of its recent past. Fragments of Bosnia's history are found around street corners, under carpets of moss on the mountaintops, in crumbling forts, derelict urban fringes, and monuments both new and old.

In coming to visit it, I wish to explore the splendour of Bosnia and its tragedy, to witness, if not to understand, what remains of both.

Bosnia has withstood many upheavals in the last hundred and fifty years; the fall of two empires, the imposition and collapse of communism, and, most recently, the outbreak of a genocidal war.

For most of its history, Bosnia was a relatively unimportant country, one among several Slavic kingdoms that was rarely considered important beyond the Balkan peninsula. That changed with the Ottoman conquest in the mid-fifteenth century.

Bosnia was a prized possession of the Ottomans. Its governors – most of them Bosnians raised and educated in Constantinople – embarked on ambitious programmes of construction, building bridges, caravanserais, public baths, schools, and masjids. The Ottoman policies of religious toleration and the enthusiastic promotion of trade connected Bosnia to the rest of the world and developed the ethnically and religiously pluralistic society for which it was to be famed. Nowhere is that legacy more visible than in Bascarsija, the old town of Sarajevo.



*Narrator: Everyone gathers in a room to discuss what happened.*

My hotel in Sarajevo is just outside and above Bascarsija, the historic 'old town' of Sarajevo that forms the heart of the city originally built by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century. The heart of the Bascarsija is the waqf of Gazi Husrev Beg, containing a masjid, a madrassa, a library, a public hamam, a han (roadside inn), a market in a covered arcade, and the famous Sarajevo clocktower. Surrounding these buildings is a district of narrow cobbled streets flanked by shops, restaurants, and cafés, overhung by wooden latticed window-boxes. Generous red-tiled awnings keep the night-time drizzle off young families sipping coffee and chai and tucking into generous portions of pite and Bosnian burek. The district also houses an Orthodox church and a synagogue, built for the community of Sephardic Jews who had found refuge in Sarajevo following their expulsion from Spain. This religious diversity won Sarajevo the moniker of 'the Jerusalem of Europe', a rare bastion of religious and cultural plurality deep in Christendom, which outlasted so many others.

The first masjid I pray in, the Musli-

hudinova Čekrekčije  
stands on the edge  
Built in 1526  
official estab-  
city itself,  
domed

Like  
in Bos-

the Musli-  
Masjid,  
of Bascarsija.

before the  
lishment of the  
it is the oldest  
masjid in Sarajevo.  
many of the masjids  
nia, old and new, it is  
recognisably Ottoman  
in the style of its con-  
struction – a low dome  
upon an octagonal base, with  
a single pencil-shaped minar –  
yet distinctly Bosnian in its decoration.

Its interior is plain, its white-plastered walls and plainly carved mimbar are modestly accented with hand-painted motifs – teardrop flowers, lamps, round trees, and simple calligraphy, all knit together by flowering vines. There is little carving or moulding – the arch of the mihrab is decorated with a simple version of a muqarnas (honeycomb vault) and is flanked by moulded floral reliefs, but by and large the walls and window-alcoves under the dome are smooth. This masjid shows its age; the brightly coloured paintwork is noticeably faded, and the floor-boards and richly varnished latticework of the women's balcony creak and groan with every footstep. Yet it wears its age with dignity; as old as it is, this masjid has been painstakingly cared for.

Across the river from the Muslihudinova Čekrekčijemasjid is the Hadzijska Masjid, so named as it was where Sarajevo pilgrims would pray before embarking on their Hajj. Constructed in the mid-sixteenth century, it is even plainer than those in Bascarsija; its minar, without which it would be difficult to distinguish it as a masjid, rises not from a dome but the square sloped roof typical of Bosnian houses. In these small, humble masjids, all the beauty and form of Ottoman architecture is artfully rendered in its simplest expression, layered with a distinctively utilitarian and angular European essence.

These masjids are not awe-inspiring in their design; they do not draw the eye to soaring heights or beguile it with complex geometry as do the famed arches and domes elsewhere in Islamic Europe; Granada, Sevilla, Istanbul. Yet, simple and unassuming as they are, they inspire awe by their very presence. The adhaan is still called from their minars, and the heads of worshippers still brush against their carpets.



After my first prayer in Bosnia, I meet a Sarajevan who insists on giving me a tour of the nearby historic sites and cafés. He takes me around Bascarsija, relating anecdotes about the history of its landmarks. As we walk west, the unmistakably Oriental market district of Bascarsija melds into what could be a square in Vienna or Paris. It is as though, by walking a few minutes, we have crossed a hundred years and a thousand miles. Such is the diversity of Sarajevo's architecture.

Further still is the main boulevard, an endless series of juxtapositions; glass and steel high-rises, small parks, the nineteenth-century Austrian-built Faculty of Law and brutalist communist-era hulks of naked concrete stand around another small Ottoman-era masjid. As I walk past the entrance of Sarajevo City Centre, a gleaming shopping and business complex, I turn down a side street to take a phone call away from the rush of traffic. In the side streets a stone's throw from the new shopping complex, the tired apartment buildings are still pockmarked with shrapnel scars, nearly 30 years after the war ended.

Of all the landmarks in Bosnia, the most emblematic of the enduring legacy of Ottoman rule are the bridges. There are at least a dozen major stone bridges that were built under Ottoman rule, many of which survive to this day, from the Klep-ci Capljina (built in 1517) to the Stone Bridge in Konjic (built in 1682). It is only fitting, then, that after Sarajevo my next destination will be the most famous of all the Ottoman bridges, not only in Bosnia, but the entire world: the Stari Most.

The bridge itself is a wonder of early modern engineering; its design was considered impossible. It was built without foundations; a graceful flying arch stretching from one cliff-spur to another over the banks of the river Neretva, held together by the force of gravity. It was described by the Ottoman geographer Celebi as 'like a rainbow arch soaring up to the skies'. The town that grew up around it flourished from the development of a vital artery of trade, and it became a regional capital. For more than 400 years, this bridge connected the east and west banks of the Neretva, an enduring symbol of the legacy of Islam in Bosnia.

During the war, Croat HVO forces attacked Mostar and seized its larger western half, but were halted at the river. A prolonged siege of east Mostar ensued,

which destroyed over two-thirds of all its buildings, while the HVO systematically demolished every masjid in west Mostar and expelled its Muslim population. After destroying the mosques, Croat tanks set their sights on the Stari Most. The bridge which had survived the fall of two empires and the course of two world wars was toppled.

The destruction of the Stari Most was not a wanton act of destruction, but a targeted and deliberate act of rupture and erasure. Across the country, nationalist Serb and Croat forces engaged in cultural genocide, torching libraries and archives and demolishing a thousand mosques in an attempt to erase Islam, and Muslims, from the country.

The Stari Most was reconstructed five years after it was destroyed. An international effort led by Mostar architect Amir Pasic and then-mayor Orucevic drew in funds and technical support from dozens of organisations and national governments. The bridge was faithfully reconstructed using traditional methods, and once more a rainbow arch soars over the crystal blue waters of the Neretva. Yet look towards the west, and the beauty of the Stari Most is dimmed; on the opposite bank of the river, there is not a single minar to be seen.



And yet, before I leave Mostar, I stop to pray Asr in a small stone masjid. Here, the sense of quiet awe I felt in Sarajevo is multiplied tenfold. For all the upheavals and trials that Bosnia has faced in its history, and no matter how scarred its Islamic heritage might be, the simple, incontrovertible fact is this: Islam has yet endured here.

This masjid still stands. The adhaan is called from its minar, and as my forehead brushes against its carpets, I am reminded that history has an author; and His decree is the most perfect of decrees.

## Bilaal Alim

Alumnus

Geography

St Hilda's College

Amirul Islam, a man convicted of blackmail: I didn't kill him – come on, you guys, you know I wouldn't do such a thing!





Aman: I swear it wasn't me!





# Welfare

# &

# Lifestyle

This issue's W&L section spans from the serious to the outright outrageous. Anas and Rafiah discuss how Muslims can cross social bridges, while Edward describes the more literal Bridge of Sirat. Bahira provides some useful tips for anyone making their way through Oxford education, and Aysha delivers a damning report of our encounter with the other side...



# Bridging First Year with Second Year

For most people, first year at Oxford is an exhilarating experience. They are thrown into this fairytale world of dreaming spires. But even if the workload seems to drag them under, by Hilary they've survived the depths and now they float. The intense pressure is counteracted by the newfound independence, the incredible moments and the budding friendships and possibilities that lie on the horizon.

Unfortunately, not everyone is lucky enough to have such an experience. For some, it is a time of isolation, loneliness, and crippling lack of self-esteem. Thrown into the alien environment of this ancient city, they simply cannot float. The workload becomes too much, leading to frequent all-nighters, no breaks and non-stop studying. This may be exacerbated by the lack of support from tutors that we are all used to pre-uni; not all of them are cut out to be teachers, and others never seem to be satisfied with your work. It may be that your lectures are basically non-existent and you're only here for one tutorial a week, or you're on the other end of the spectrum and are drowning in classes, left, right and centre. It may be that you don't really click with anyone in your cohort. It may be that you are by no means introverted, but are still hesitant to put yourself out there and meet people.

Finally, it just may be that being a Muslim in such an environment is challenging.

My first-year experience was not the dream that everyone around me seemed to be having. At times, it was a nightmare. I did not know how to manage my time, centering it around my never-ending reading list. Even after my Mods in Hilary, I fell back into the same cycle of continuously working in Trinity. I barely had the time to breathe despite the fact I had finished my exams for that year and so did not need to stress. First year went by in a blink of homesickness, fatigue, and frequent loneliness. I was left with the awful feeling that I had wasted a precious year at Oxford, being miserable half the time. Don't get me wrong, if you had or are having a great first year, that is amazing! But everyone hits rock bottom at some point during their degree, and for me, it was in first year.

I spent the summer vacation reevaluating the expectations I set for myself, and set out to plan how I would spend my second year in Oxford. It was a way of preparing myself for what was to come, to think of how I would bridge this gap between the two years and the type of person I wanted to be in Michaelmas.

So, here is a list of tips to help you thrive at Oxford!

1) Realise where your limits are and stick to them. If you are tired of studying and you do not understand what you are reading, you are not being lazy, your brain has had enough! This is not school or A-Levels where your parents made you study all day. Take breaks, and limit the hours you study. Sometimes it is best to hand in an essay late than to have a breakdown trying to finish it on time.

2) Learn to work smart – this is so important. Find shortcuts in your work and don't feel guilty about it! If you have a set of amazing notes from someone and they are working perfectly for you, don't bother trying to make a new set. If there is a website that summarises all the articles and cases, use it! Don't slog through the articles, because no one is checking.

3) Get involved in activities – a society, committee or a regular sport in your college. It is essential for your physical and mental health. Even if you are not a sporty person, having a sport or some other activity will teach you to carve your studies around your activities, rather than the other way around.

4) Have meals in hall, it is a great way for you to meet people in your college!

5) Take the weekends off – have at least one day where you do not open your laptop at all.

6) Go home at least once a term if you can. Don't spend it doing work, but use it to recuperate and spend time with your family. It is a way to refresh, reset your priorities, and

reconnect with your faith, the latter being absolutely essential. Being home gets your head out of the Oxford cloud and brings you back to reality.

7) Don't think you are not good enough for your cohort. Don't try to catch up with that person who keeps getting high 2:1s or firsts on everything. If you are not able to, that is not a problem and you are not the odd one out. Again, recognise your limits and realise that half of Oxford are naturally brilliant and accept that you cannot be like them. Do your best and Allah will take care of the rest.

8) Get help. Don't feel ashamed to ask people for their notes. ISoc can be your first point of call for any issues you are having.

University is for studies, so do not neglect them. But realise that your time is precious and going to uni is a way for you to gain valuable experiences and grow as a person, which is not going to happen through drowning in your work. Learn to carve your time and give value to that which is important to you. And don't believe the people who say they are having a great time and you are the oddity – everyone is in the same boat on this ocean that is Oxford. If you are not having as great a time as everyone else, it's fine. You are not wasting your time, it is just a learning process. Everyone has been flung into the deep end, and at some point, everyone will have some crisis or the other. You just have to learn to swim in your own way and find the oysters hidden below.

**Bahira Malak**

**2nd year**

**Law**

**Queen's College**



# Bridge of Sirat

For many of us, there is a continual urge to be 'better'.

We have a feeling that we are not doing the 'right thing'. Often though, the very vagueness of this feeling increases our sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. What exactly is the right thing, and are we doing enough to be good and devoted to God?

On the Day of Judgement, the horn will be sounded and we will all die, and then we will all be raised up. Ahead of us will be the bridge of sirat. Across it lies the court of God and paradise. Beneath it lies hell, which comes spurting up with rage, but also trembling with fear before God. We must all walk across the bridge. Across the bridge will be many thorns. For some of us, we will walk across unharmed. These will be the ones who were truly devoted to God and served Him, and they will receive paradise. Others of us will walk across but will be scratched by the thorns. These will be the ones who fulfilled their obligations to God, and they will receive paradise, but they were not as fully devoted to God as those who travelled across unharmed. Some of us will try to

walk across, but for these, they will find the bridge has become thinner than a human hair and sharper than a blade. They will fall off into hell and not receive paradise. These have not loved God and have not fulfilled their obligations to Him, and their sins have outweighed their virtues. This story is an evocative description of something that we should all be mindful of in our daily lives, the fate that all of us, poor or rich, pious or ambivalent, popular or solitary, will ultimately face. These groups are not absolute groups, but form a spectrum. It is very unlikely that any of us will completely fail in our devotion or be perfectly virtuous, but what matters is the balance.

If what matters is the balance, how can we ensure that we are doing the right thing? While in many situations what is good and bad seems very difficult to discern, there is always one clear distinction

Acting student named Muhsin:  
Why am I even a suspect?

which makes something good. This is whether something is or is not done for God alone. Throughout the last term in our lectures with Sheikh Riyad Nadwi, we learnt about ikhlaas, or the importance of being sincere and devoted to God in our actions and thoughts. This is a very significant idea, because we must not merely practise good actions, but want to perform them for God and God alone. This is not to say that every action that we do should be for God. While this would be wonderful, it is also incredibly difficult for most of us. What I am rather suggesting is that we should regularly try to remember God and try to do at least something every day for Him apart from prayer, whether it may be a kind word, an act of charity or saying du'a.

Why should this need to be said, given we probably know this already? Because it is sometimes difficult for us to keep our actions in perspective. We can say that it will be fine for us to do this thing now and this other thing later, and end up not really achieving what we would like to. We end up putting prayer off and missing it because we have the intention but are missing the incentive and commitment.

It is also important for us to remember where we are going. Ultimately, we are all going to end up on that bridge, and it is our actions and beliefs that will determine how we will find the journey. The Prophet ﷺ many times took great pains to remind us that we should never expect to travel uninterrupted through the world. As al-Bukhari reported, 'Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveller.' Every act of devotion we perform could be one of the last things we do. How much better would it be to end our lives in praise and thankfulness for God?

We do not have to do something grand; a sincerely meant 'Alhamdulillah' can mean as much as praying all the sunnah raka'ahs for a prayer. What is important is the meaning: to remember Allah often and to praise him sincerely, without fear or hope but out of love. Therefore let us take out of this story of the bridge of sirat not a reminder of the fear of hell or the wonders of heaven but a reminder that we are all equal, that we will all pass over the bridge of sirat, and we will be differentiated on our journey solely by our piety and sincerity in devotion to God.

**Edward Brocklehurst**  
1st year  
Arabic  
Pembroke College



# Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Strategies for Muslim Professionals to Achieve Social Mobility

**B**reaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Strategies for Muslim Professionals to Achieve Social Mobility

Networking and building professional connections is important for anyone looking to advance their career, but it can be especially challenging for Muslims and individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds due to cultural and societal barriers. A report by the Social Mobility Commission found that Muslims in the UK are less likely to succeed in the labour market than any other faith group and often feel that they have to work ten times as hard to get the same opportunities. The report also found that only 19.8% of Muslims in England and Wales are in full-time work, compared to one-third of the overall population, and that Muslim women in the UK are three times more likely to be economically inactive. This is why it is all the more important for Muslims to showcase their abilities, to not second-guess themselves and to strive to overcome any extra barriers they may face.

Cultural differences can present challenges for effective networking and professional relationships. These differences manifest themselves in various ways, such as different work habits, body language, and approaches to communication. This could result in overt clashes or discrimination based on stereotypes, as well as more subtle behaviours like favouritism in opportunities offered by employers.

By building a strong network, you can end with more job opportunities, advice and guidance, and recommendations or introductions to potential employers. Building a strong network can also help

you stay current on industry trends, gain valuable insights and knowledge from others in your field, and open doors to new experiences.

For the cultural differences, which can sometimes act as a barrier in networking, here are a few tips from experience which may help. It requires embracing your identity and stepping out of your comfort zone. Though it may require some effort, you can trust me when I say that the benefits of networking are definitely worth it.

## Use your skills and unique background to your advantage!

If you speak a second language or have even a limited knowledge of Arabic from reading the Qur'an, use it to stand out when approaching an employer. For example, if you're interested in working as an analyst, propose targeting a specific region or market that would require your language skills, something many other candidates might not be able to offer.

## If the opportunity doesn't exist, create it!

Many people end up with unique opportunities using one simple tool, email. If you find a company that you're interested in, but they don't offer internships, reach out to them, and explain how you can contribute to their team. Many companies might not advertise these opportunities, but they might consider offering them if someone shows interest.

As an example, I was always interested in interning at a policy consulting firm, but they didn't advertise any internship opportunities. However, after reaching out to individual employees and expressing my interest, I was offered a two-week work experience opportunity. So don't be afraid to reach out and ask for what you want – you won't lose anything by trying.

After all, the Qur'an acknowledges that the human experience is marked by difficulties and challenges, but it also suggests that these challenges can be overcome through perseverance and self-improvement. As it says, **لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ**

*('And We have certainly created man into hardship.')* [90:4]

**Don't be afraid to engage with different people!**

It can be intimidating to engage with people who have different views or backgrounds than you, but it's really important to step out of your comfort zone and experience new things.

Go out and attend new events and societies that expose you to people with different cultures, experiences, and interests. Not only will this help you become more comfortable and adaptable in diverse settings, but it can also lead to new opportunities and even advancement in your career. Keep in mind that in the workplace, you will inevitably interact with people who are different from you, so it's important to get used to it.

Plus, being able to effectively communicate and work with people from different cultures can make you a valuable asset to any organisation.

Muscab: What were you doing at the time of murder?

## *A Note for the Future*

It is important to focus on the future and strive to create a better world for future generations. As a Muslim, you can play a role in this by being a positive influence and working to address the challenges that Muslims may face. By being a role model and offering support to those in need, you can work towards creating a brighter future for all. Remember to always look ahead and strive to make a positive impact on the world. Offer support to those who ask for it, and those who're struggling in silence. Remember that according to the teachings of Allah, those who do good and give generously in His cause will be rewarded: **وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَتْلُوا بآيَاتِهِمْ إِلَى الذَّهْلِكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ**

*('And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good.')* [2:195]

To be successful in your career, it's important to actively network and build professional relationships. This can help you discover new opportunities and advance in your career. Don't let stereotypes or limited access hold you back. Instead, seek out networking opportunities, provide value to your network, and be a role model for others in your community. Building professional bridges requires time and effort, but it is worth it in the end. Remember to keep an open mind, be proactive, and never underestimate your own abilities, even if cultural or societal barriers may seem to stand in your way. By building strong connections and showcasing your skills, you can reach your full potential.

**Anas Dayeh**

2nd year

PPE

St John's College



Amirul: I was walking up and down the corridors for two days for charity.

# The Worst Kind of Bridge: Cambridge

19th November, 2021. The dreaded day the enemy were set to arrive. And they did so extremely early, with no shame whatsoever. They infiltrated our museums and prayer room, peering around – we could see the judgement in their eyes. Surely it was much better than that cupboard of theirs that they like to lovingly call a prayer room. When some of us did finally turn up and see the awe on their faces as they admired our prayer room, we truly felt sorry for them and thought it was only right that we give our fellow Muslim brothers and sisters an adequate tour of the ‘city of dreaming spires’. After all, a lot of planning went into it. And I mean a lot.

As the alumni officer, I was taken aback when I was given this task, especially because it meant strategising with the enemy on such a large scale! However, after forming a good group and a key plan on where to go and how to maximise the day but minimise the walking, we actually started to look forward to the day. For those unlucky sods who could not be there, let me give

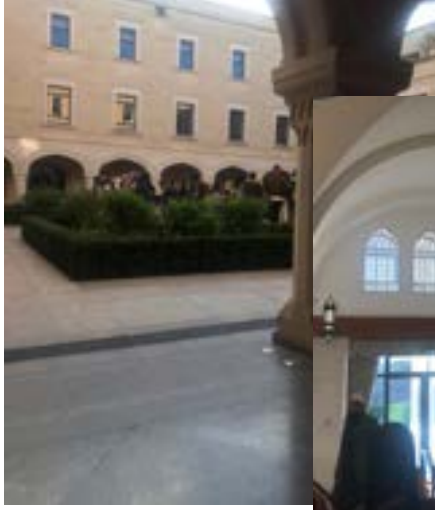
you a brief overview of how the day went.

We started off with Zuhr in the prayer room and then went for a walk through Magdalen, some of us being tourists ourselves while admiring the cute deer. After this, we went to OCIS just to show them that we have something better than their only asset, the Cambridge Eco-Mosque. Alhumdiullah, we were lucky enough to secure Sheikh Ibrahim after chasing him down multiple times, to provide us with a tour and a talk. We also had the privilege to pray Asr in jamaat too.

By this point, the enemy started complaining about how hungry they were since they did so much walking – quite pathetic, but understandable since they live in a village. They were clearly not used to walking in the city, so we rallied the troops and divided them to conquer Cowley Road. We dominated several restaurants like Shiraz, Antep, Bodrum and Nef Istanbul. Thanks to short winter days, we took another prayer break for Maghreb, this time at the Manzil Way Mosque. It was one of the only places big enough to carry the crowd we had accumulated at this point.

The enemy troops and the Oxford students began to blend. We chatted and found that we surprisingly did have quite a lot in common. If they





Ideally, we'd love to persuade a few finalists to come over and be Oxford post-grads. The perks are endless, as they have already seen, and I believe some of them are tempted already! We've got the Rad Cam, the Bridge of Sighs, Cowley and

significantly, so with the hope that they will give us extra duas we handed them over to prevent their starving stomachs on that two-hour journey back.

As the day came to an end, we waved them off onto their coach. All the planning and efforts of the people around me paid off. We too were exhausted after such a long day but felt it was worth it; we managed to fraternise with the enemy cohort but not completely give ourselves away. We received messages of positive feedback and even an invite from the enemy themselves to see the dark side. We'll probably accept their offer, but we can't give them any upper ground. However, until then, we build our forces and wait in anticipation in preparation to take over.

hadn't chosen C\*\*\*\*\*ge, we may have been good friends in another life, but alas, the enmity is too strong. The two sides were getting on a little too well, and we could not let that happen. We were getting soft and lowering our defences, so we had to launch our final attack...

of course, a whole termly magazine, which you have had the lucky chance of getting your hands on!

Just in case they had any more slander to say, we stuffed them with pizza to drown it out. A bit too much pizza, but Oxford's generosity knows no bounds, and we forced them to take the remaining boxes. The lack of Ex-prizza over there will affect them

The natural thing to do for the final part of the day was to drag everyone over to Cohen. We could not let them get too comfortable, so we decided in advance we would have to humble them before they leave; make sure they know we are not on good terms with them, however welcoming we may appear. We prepared a presentation in advance with reasons confirming why Oxford is superior, supported with video evidence. Most notably, Harry Potter was filmed at this prestigious institute and not at C\*\*\*\*\*ge.



# Aysha Adam

2nd year

Biology

St Hilda's College

You thought it was a hint xD they said not use a trick more than once





# Accessing Oxford

**Rafiah Niha**

3rd year  
Medicine  
Magdalen College

When the OU-ISoc was first informally founded in 1958, there were only a handful Muslim students in Oxford. In 2023, we have hundreds, Alhamdulillah. The ISoc has gone from an informal collection of students visiting different colleges, looking for vaguely Muslim-sounding names, to now hosting events which regularly attract many students.

Such an increase in the size of our community is something to be proud of. However, at the same time, it should leave us puzzled as to why that number is not greater than it is. After all, academia and scholarship aren't novel concepts in Islam. In fact, the oldest existing university in the world was founded by a Muslim woman (Fatima al-Fihri, founder of the University Al-Qarawiyyin).

Access is a vital component to aid our community in its continued growth. Our network of alumni includes a range of graduates working in many different fields, from law to engineering. We must continue to drive this progress further, creating greater Muslim representation at the top of the most

competitive and world-changing fields. Given the current challenging socio-political environment, it is vital that as Muslims, we continue to grow our community and support our brothers and sisters, enabling each other to flourish.

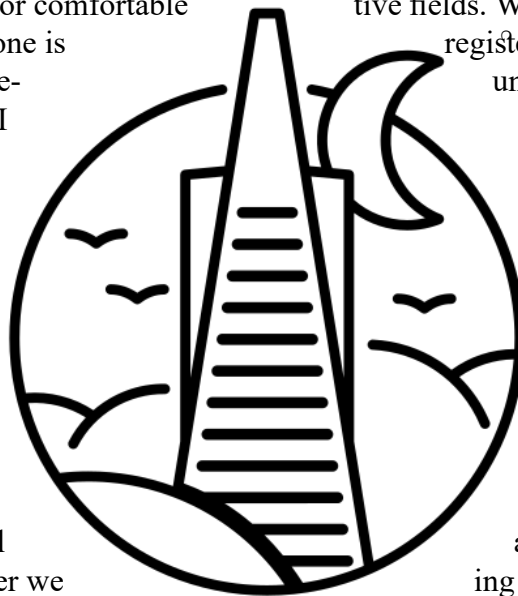
There are many challenges that lie ahead of us. The first thing that springs to mind is the need to encourage students to apply in the first place. The application process can be very daunting, especially to those who are unfamiliar with the process. Many people wrongly assume that the first barrier is submitting an application, forgetting all of the factors which influence whether or not a student even decides to apply in the first place. Aside from the fear of rejection or 'imposter syndrome', pupils often think that somewhere like Oxford wouldn't be an environment that they would feel at home or comfortable in. What do I do when everyone is out partying? Will I find someone like me there? How will I survive on my own without my family? The cultural barriers some can face are immense too, the concept of moving out of home for university is often something that is not taken lightly.

It is our collective and individual responsibility to dispel such misconceptions wherever we can. This often starts at home, for example, going to speak to pupils at your old school or college, or even speaking to a family friend who has asked for advice. Alhamdulillah, as an ISoc we have created and run many initiatives to bridge the barriers that students face when applying to somewhere like Oxford.

The first Oxford Muslim Access Conference (OMAC) was run by the ISoc in 2018. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength and has become an annual event in our calendar. The conference utilises the expertise of current undergraduate Muslim students in the full range of academic subjects offered by Oxford.

This year we were fortunate enough to be hosted by Clifford Chance in Canary Wharf, East London. Throughout the day our students delivered subject workshops and breakout sessions with small groups of Muslim pupils from underrepresented educational backgrounds. This gave pupils an insight into the academic life and rigour of Oxford whilst also giving them the chance to have their questions answered. It is pleasing that so many of our current undergraduate students' first exposure to Oxford was via OMAC when they were in sixth form or college. This is a testament to the individual impact that programmes like this can have.

Finally, moving beyond the educational setting, it is our responsibility as Muslim students to bridge the gaps faced by Muslims in our respective fields. Whilst the OUISoc was officially registered in 1982, it took all the way until 2012 for the OUISoc to be granted a dedicated prayer space. The opening of such a space was the result of the dedication and trailblazing work of many Muslim students. We must remember that without the hard work of our predecessors in the OUISoc, we would not have the prayer room today, a sanctuary and a place of comfort and belonging for many of us.



It is easy to take for granted the fact that, due to the prayer room, we can all pray together, socialise, and stay connected with brothers and sisters who we would not otherwise be in contact with. As Muslims, it's important for us to be creating these safe environments in places where they've not already been created. Often, we fear going into places where we feel like there aren't enough Muslim provisions and so avoid them, but this isn't the mentality we should have. We should use it as an opportunity to be able to create something for Muslims as this is an amanah placed on us and make it easier for the next generation insha'Allah.

Aman: I was cooking my famous cheesecake in the kitchen.





Imad: I was doing five minutes  
of concentrated revision.



# Current Affairs

ISoc students highlight important topical issues in these articles. This time, they range from Malcolm X and the condition of modern Islam to the state of current climate change activism. Please remember that the opinions stated in the following articles are of the authors and do not represent the ISoc as a whole.



# Malcolm X's Legacy

**T**he fundamental quality of an effective leader is their ability to align with their people and to work for the many, not the few. The needs of the leader's people should triumph over anything else.

Malcolm X did not possess legitimate political power, but his actions were even more impactful. Through consistent calls for the abolishment of imperialism, racism and white supremacy, conveyed through protests, diplomatic visits and candidness in confronting America in their creation of black shame and white superiority, X demanded rapid change. His speeches were coated in black suffering that had been blatantly ignored for centuries. Change had to come immediately and 'by any means necessary.'

Articles often restrict Malcolm X's legacy to his Hajj pilgrimage, which led him to unsubscribe from the condemnation of the entire white race to specifically condemn white supremacy. But X bore Islam at the forefront of his actions, and he did not alter them to please the West – the same cannot be argued for current politically powerful leaders of Muslim countries. Malcolm X's achievements were driven by the Oneness of Allah (tawhid), spiritual exertion (jihad), emigration for the beneficial sake of developing oneself (hijrah) and a constant pursuit of knowledge, an act regarded as obligatory upon mankind by Muhammad (SAW). The amalgamation of Islamic practices and beliefs set the foundations for X to awaken African American consciousness from its slumber of submitting to Western ideals of white superiority and ignited the movement of black pride and excellence.

X's legacy still thrives in the current day because whilst being unapologetically Muslim, he was also unapologetically black. Through forging international relations in Africa and the Middle East via visits to countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Ghana, Senegal and bearing himself to the western, academic world in delivering speeches at Harvard and the Oxford Union, Malcolm not only stood as a Muslim but faced the world stage as an African American leader, globalising the struggle of civil and human rights. The trajectory of race relations

across the world shifted due to the efforts of Malcolm X.

For too long have leaders of 'Muslim' countries abandoned Islam's principles in lieu of being accepted by the West and material gain. The Arab Spring was instigated by the self-immolation of a poverty-stricken vendor Bouazizi, in Tunisia, who felt that he had no other option due to the extent of the government's oppression. There is ongoing degradation of South Asian workers in the Middle East, whose lives hold little significance and who survive solely to attend to their employers' needs. Numerous Muslim countries signed a letter in support of the Uyghur concentration camps for the sake of Western relations, alongside wilfully ignoring the Palestinian genocide.

X set the precedent for how actions against injustice should be carried out – without fear and with urgency. The embodiment of Islam in his work, such as tawhid and the belief that humankind is connected by our descension from Adam and Eve, strengthened his desire for African Americans to view themselves as equal to their white counterparts and to find pride in their history and roots.

'The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception.' Allah's words resonated through Malcolm X's actions. The hardship he faced in the name of justice for mankind was ultimately for the Hereafter. Muslim leaders of the current day may be Muslim by name but not necessarily Muslim by nature; it seems as if they are stuck in this delusion, overcome with enjoyment and validation from the world.

**Yasmin  
Rahman**

1st year

Religion, Asian and Middle  
Eastern Studies  
Regent's Park College

# A Bridge to Baghdad

**O**n a rainy Michaelmas evening, sat before the OCIS mimbar, a power socket caught my eye. 'Behold the water faucet of today's Hagia Sophia – electricity is our time's water,' I exclaimed to a brother on my right. Though Aman simply frowned without further enquiry, I would have offered him the following explanation:

Muslims today are faced with melancholy nostalgia and despair upon seeing the ummah's current state of affairs. It seems as though we are collectively decaying as the political and economic conditions of our homelands deteriorate. The Mali that Mansa Musa once called home is afflicted with terrorism, Hindutva fascism devours mosques in the Mughal heartland, and meanwhile, Earth's first degree-giving university abandons fiqh and tasawwuf. We've all heard of Baghdad's House of Wisdom and the 'Islamic golden age'. Once upon a time, we stood at the forefront of intellectual advancement, from mathematics and medicine to architecture and philosophy, or so the fairy tale goes. But what changed? Modern Muslims are quick to celebrate old victories yet apprehensive to conceive new ones. In the West, an aspiring Ahmadou Bamba or Fatima Fihri expressing desire for revolution is met with eye rolls, though their progenitors would be granted full attention.. Such an attitude is not only cognitive dissonance but also sinful to its core. To venerate great figures or times to the degree that your self-belief is diminished, is to deny your Lord's favour.

Today we find pride in secular recognition, not Allah's. We know of Neoplatonist Muslims, but not of Wahdat ul Wujud or Ihya ul Ulum. We all recognise the grandeur of the Taj Mahal but are oblivious to its bejewelled Quranic inscriptions. We have not lost enlightenment, just awareness.

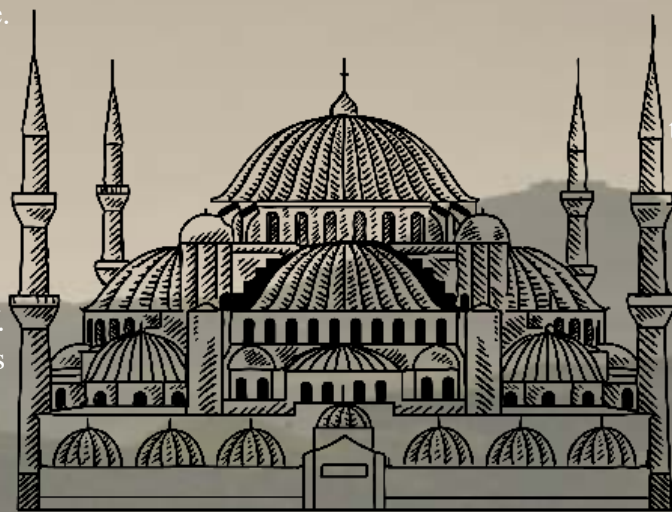
Islam today is arguably the last-standing religion on Earth. All others have been enveloped by a homogenising plume of modernity. While secular paradigms frantically tear down century-old

principles like civic responsibility, Qatar's firm stance against liberal detractors and 14-year-olds making Instagram accounts to counter atheism are both signs of the ummah remembering its identity – one of intellectual independence. Thinking and acting as 'Muslim' over 'conservative', 'Arab', or 'Keynesian' is becoming the norm once more. This can be seen in Pew studies of increased advocacy for Sharia rulings by Muslim nations, the shamelessly Islamic rhetoric of Imran Khan, Anwar Ibrahim and Erdogan (however sincere or insincere) on the international stage, and Islam remaining the fastest growing religion by far.

Simply put, the Golden age is still here. From creation to Qiyamah, 'Lailahahilallah MuhammadurRasulallah' alone is the pinnacle of intellectual advancement.

It is reported in a Hadith Qudsi that Allah says, 'When I love him [the believer], I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks.'

Upholding this divine love entails not just thought pertaining to Islam, but action. Many of us strive to be the presidents, scientists, CEOs and academics of tomorrow's ummah, but the onus is upon us as privileged Oxford students to improve the ISoc, the university, and our Islam however we can today. The water faucets in the Hagia Sophia embody the simple act of maintaining Islam: if a 16th century man could drink water in the mosque, he could pray there more often. If a modern student can charge his phone in the world's greatest university mosque; he can pray there longer. And that is a beautiful thing.



**Ibrahim  
Chaudry**  
1st year  
PPE  
Trinity College



# Scaling a Bridge to Nowhere

**I**slam, like all religions, promotes stewardship of this Earth. *'He is the One Who has placed you as deputies on Earth ... so that He may test you with what He has given you.'* [6:165] We have been privileged with this vessel, so naturally, it is our God-demanded duty to ensure we don't burn up into a ball of flames.

You Oxford people are smart and so should be aware of our planet-wide acceleration into climate hell. Droughts, floods and wildfires are abundant, even in parts of the world we never before thought of as endangered – even Britain, the ivory-tower centre of the world, now experiences such disasters (e.g. the European drought of 2022).

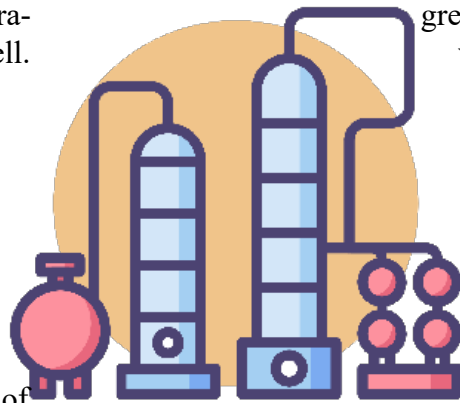
Why is no one paying attention? No matter how hard environmental activists try, their wild, physical statements can never sustain the attention of the right people. Just Stop Oil participants who throw soup on Van Gogh paintings and shut down Queen Elizabeth II bridges often come with a powerful prepared speech, which evokes heartfelt in-

spiration for the few famous minutes they last before they get kicked under the fridge once more. They are scaling a bridge to nowhere (and the soup didn't even damage the painting, in the end).

Climate activists are hitting the wrong nails and not in the heads. In the same way that mixed-household parties were held in 2020 despite the global pandemic, people will not change their lifestyles for a greater cause. Humans always prioritise individual pleasure and ease over the greater good, so it cannot be expected of communities to consume less energy. The only way to reduce carbon emissions is to transition to non-polluting energy.

Next time you are choosing a job – at an investment bank or energy provider – look at how much money they pour into polluting the world. Hint: it's billions. (Your bank is doing it too.<sup>1</sup>) Meanwhile, sustainable energy is given relatively nothing.

This is how you are guilty. It's not forgetting to switch off the lights, it's investing your life into these corporations that kills the planet. We do



# Siddiq Islam

3rd year

Mathematics and  
Statistics

Oriel College

Muscab: *(Stabs a surgeon's knife into the table.)*  
Tell us where you were!

Muhsin: I was headed to the prayer room to  
continue my sleep because one of the waiters  
came to clean my room.

not need you to become full-time fume-propagators, we need you to become corporate lawyers and policy-makers in order to put restrictions on the gas giants. And we need more sympathy from those in charge, that they might place human and environmental health over increasing profits that are already astronomical. Carbon emissions must be tackled from the inside.

Gas and oil companies raise their prices beyond what is payable by customers (e.g. 2021-present United Kingdom cost of living crisis), even though their profits are already at an all time high and they have 'more cash than [they] know what to do with'.<sup>2</sup> It's disgusting that energy companies can get away with causing mass human suffering while dismissing any make up any excuse they like to avoid having to look in the eye the consequences of their actions. Proposed taxes on their profits are shouldered off and dismissed.

So, where does your bridge end up? If you want to cross one into somewhere meaningful, a land without regret, you must reevaluate what you held highest. Monotonous jobs for monetary gain don't usually end up in riveting ecstasy. Value is found in carrying out work that fulfils you spiritually and emotionally. May Allah guide us all to the right place for us.

(1) <https://bank.green/>

(2) <https://www.fool.com/earnings/call-transcripts/2022/02/08/bp-bp-q4-2021-earnings-call-transcript/>





## Research Showcase

# A Legitimate Claim to Authority and Renewal: The Challenge of Researching the Islamic Tradition with a Traditional Mentality in the Modern Era

Zuhaira, owner of the hotel: It's a trick of strings. The key was inside the victim's clothes. The murderer killed them, took the key, and locked the door from outside. They used the string to return the key to the pocket from under the door, then cut the string and got rid of it.

A good scholar is like a good potter. Both must know the limitations of the material, tools, and human capacity while striving to respond to their communities' needs. Unlike the potter, whose handiwork is tangible and typically has self-evident function and value, the fruits of a scholar's work are sometimes susceptible to misunderstanding and misuse due to the inadequacies of the recipients. To really understand the contributions of a scholar requires an understanding of the principles which inform their work, whilst appreciating that their response to contemporary challenges is ultimately grounded by their participation in a living tradition. Islamic scholarship has never been a simple line of transmission of the foundations of Islam, the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet ﷺ. Whilst accurate transmission of the foundations of the religion is of paramount importance,

scholars have always accompanied this with an active engagement with these foundations in order to respond to the unique challenges which are encountered by each generation.

There are two illnesses that make studying the scholars difficult today. The first is chronological snobbery, in which people of the past are considered intellectually or

morally deficient compared to the people of today who believe they know what the people in the past did not. The second is the neglect of scholars who have inherited and conveyed the foundational texts of our religion and

the appropriate parameters of their interpretation for generations after the earliest community of Islam. Perhaps this second issue is due in part to the lack of trust in the pure intentions of (at least some) scholars in each generation to renew the spiritual foundation of

“فَصَبِّرْ جَمِيلٌ”

*so patience  
(is) beautiful  
(12:18)*

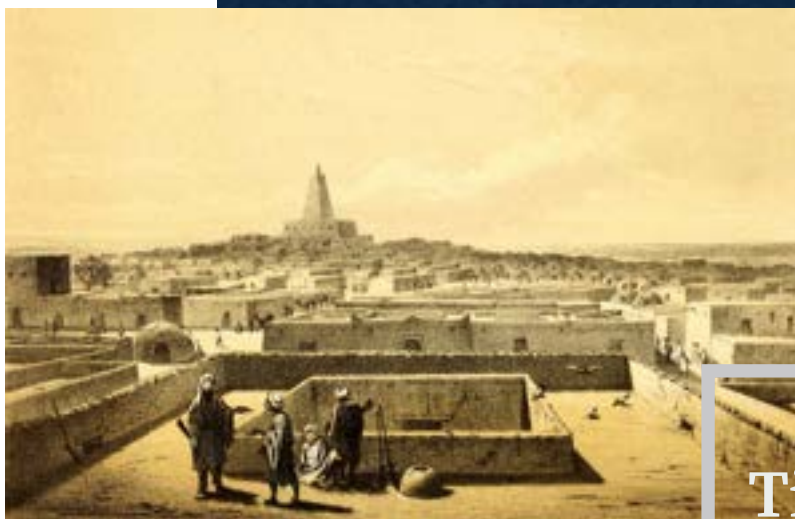
A must read  
surah- Desginer

Barth,  
Timbuktu  
1858





their community, locally and globally. My DPhil research focuses on just one example of such a renewing scholar, whose work can provide us with a better understanding of the important work of renewal carried out by the luminaries of Islamic scholarship.



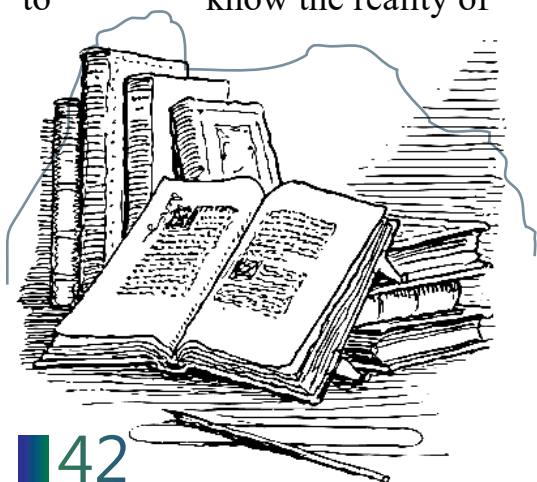
## Barth, Timbuktu 1858

The figure central to my DPhil research is al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1226 A.H.) who lived in and around what is today the nation-state of Mali in a transitional moment in the history of Islamic thought. Considered by himself and many subsequent scholars to be a mujaddid (renewer) of Islam, he left a lasting impact on the principled practice of Islam in West Africa. As with all scholars with a concern beyond themselves, al-Mukhtār sought to stabilise people's hearts in knowledge and faith.

One of the matters that Al-Mukhtār particularly wanted to reinforce in his time was the place of God's providence in our very ability to learn. To truly know the reality of the world is to know the reality of

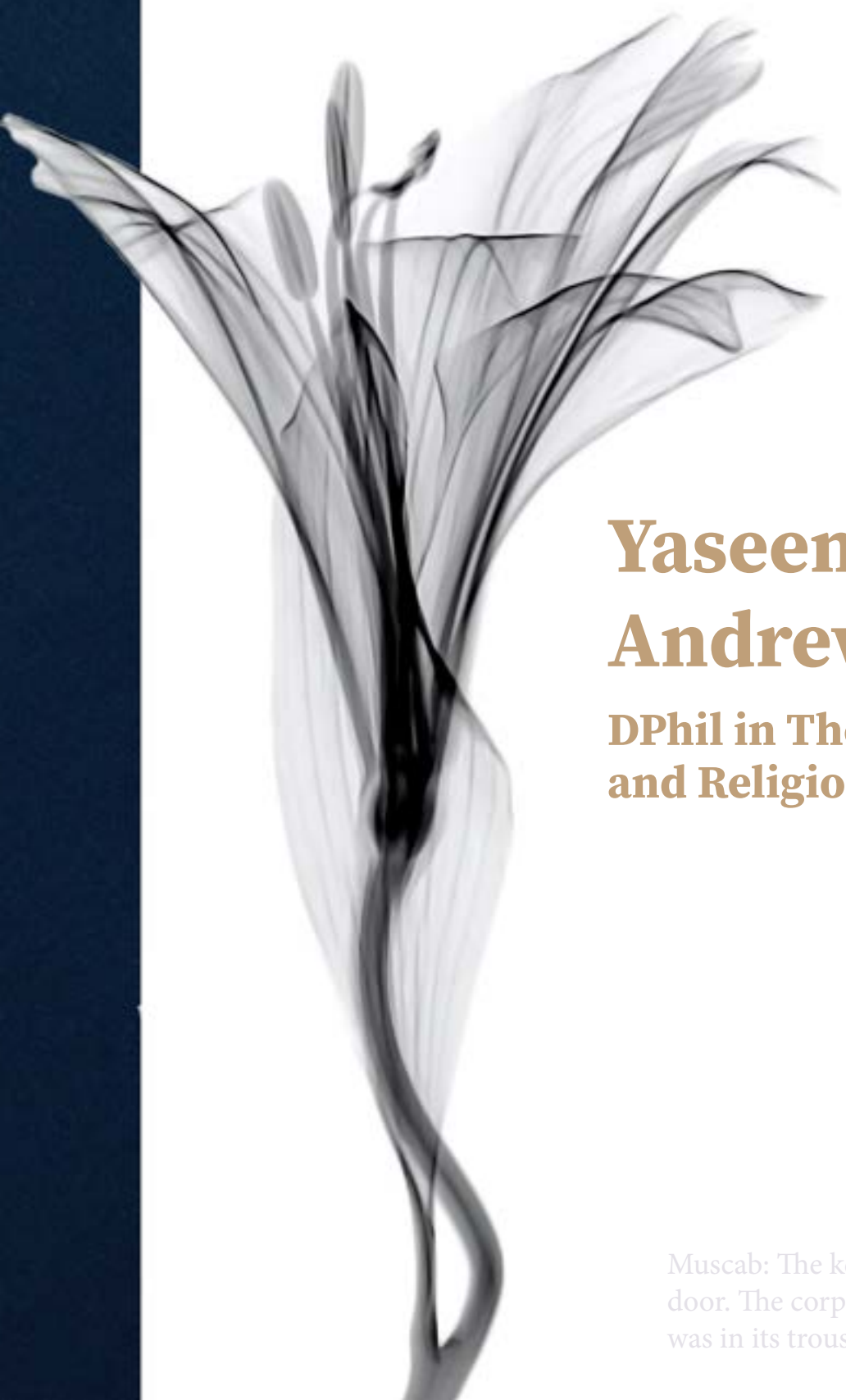
tawhīd, or divine unity. To truly acquire this knowledge is not something we can ascertain by rational thought alone, but rather it is a 'directly experienced (dhawq – literally, "tasted") and gifted knowledge, not a researched or taught knowledge.'

(al-Minna fī i'tiqād ahl al-sunna, ms.) In this way, al-Mukhtār was deeply concerned, as all scholarly renewers have been throughout Islamic history, that the Muslim will not be stable in religion until he or she has truly experienced what was spoken on the tongue. As my teachers have said, we can explain chocolate to you for days but until it's on your tongue, you will not truly comprehend. In this way, faith is something that can be articulated at length in books, and indeed, al-Mukhtār and thousands of others have written volumes dedicated to right belief, but for us to truly comprehend it, it must be something we experience, and no knowledge of facts will surpass the knowledge of experience verified by hundreds of years of those who have similarly experienced faith. Studying the works of scholars like al-Mukhtār, to whom we are indebted for their preservation and constant revival (ihyā'), renewal (tajdīd), and realisation (taḥqīq) of Islamic knowledge is a challenge to those of us who live in a social paradigm which restricts our objects of analysis and perception to the material world and distorts terms such



as 'logic' to indicate nothing of the metaphysical. Al-Mukhtār was a scholar of the highest calibre, who was trained in all requisite disciplines and sought to instil in the people of his era and thereafter the importance of knowledge founded and confirmed in experiencing the highest truth of tawḥīd.

To be a modern person who truly experiences this faith is to be a stranger. Every era has had its strangers, but perhaps more than ever we find ourselves struggling to convey the most basic principles of faith, as the language and concepts necessary to do so erode in society around us. To hold on to the true, conduit scholars throughout every generation is our lifeline to the paradigm that has been always grounded and experienced in the metaphysical reality expressed in God's Book and by His Messenger ﷺ.



# Yaseen Christian Andrewsen

DPhil in Theology  
and Religion

Muscab: The key is too thick to fit under the door. The corpse was on its back and the key was in its trousers pocket.





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Special Feature

# Building Bridges: Psychotherapy from an Islamic Perspective



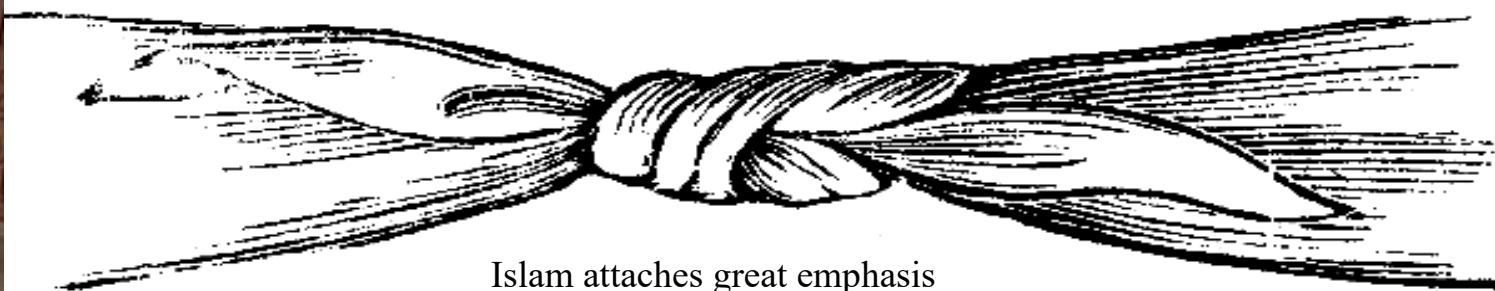
# ‘What brings YOU here today?’

## Building Bridges: Psychotherapy from an Islamic Perspective

‘What brings you here today?’ That’s one of the first questions we ask someone when they come to see us for therapy. Often, they will say they don’t really know, or find it hard to articulate what is really bothering them. Something is not right, things are not going as they ‘should’. They feel they are failing in some way. They may be struggling at work, in their studies, or with relationships with friends, family or colleagues. This can cause anxiety, loneliness, sleep problems, and neglect of self-care.

In order to understand what makes us unhappy, we first need to look at what makes us happy, or rather we prefer the terms ‘content’, ‘fulfilled’ or ‘at peace’. We need to be understood, to be loved, to have a sense of belonging, to feel valued, to feel connected, and to feel a sense of control over our lives.

Research has consistently shown that one thing which makes us happy, more than money or status, is close relationships and that social ties act as a shield for people from life challenges whilst improving physical and mental health.<sup>1</sup> We are social animals – we have a natural desire to connect. As Robert Waldinger, professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School says, ‘Loneliness kills, it’s as powerful as smoking or alcoholism.’<sup>2</sup>



Islam attaches great emphasis on the conservation of family ties. Allah talks about Silat Al-Rahm (literally, ties of the womb), the importance of maintaining family ties in the following verse: ‘... *Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights and heed the ties of kinship ...*’ [4:1] It is narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘The word ‘ar-rahm [womb] derives its name from Ar-Rahman [one of the names of Allah], and Allah said, “I will keep good relation with the one who will keep good relation with you, and sever the relation with him who will sever the relation with you.”’ (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Zuhaira: Then they must have left by removing the metal bars and jumped out the window. They must have put them back on using some tools.



We can all experience broken relationships to varying degrees at some point in our lives. If left unremedied for prolonged periods, it can lead to significant impacts on our emotional and mental health, such as feelings of isolation and disconnectedness and a sense of loss. Therapy is about enabling the healing process of reconnecting with what's missing, like a bridge from the problems to the solutions. It can play a fundamental role in building bridges and connecting things that were previously disconnected or uncomfortable.

In Islam, we have the concept of disconnection from our fitrah. The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Every child is born upon the fitrah, but it is the parents who make it a Christian, Jew or Magian.' (Bukhari 1292) The fitrah refers to the human being's natural moral compass, which helps us understand good and evil. Allah created us with this as a means to guide us towards submitting to Him. The fitrah operates such that when we do something good, we feel a natural happiness inside. When we do something wrong, there is a sense of guilt and shame. This is our fitrah sending us a warning sign that we are straying from the straight path. We need to use this to navigate and motivate change. We explore our beliefs and thoughts in order to better understand our difficulties to resolve any psycho-spiritual conflict. This is the process of purification of the heart (*tazkiyah*).

Psychotherapy can help overcome obstacles to connection and psychospiritual conflicts. The process for doing this starts with honest reflection about ourselves, our nature (*fitrah*), and our actions in order to develop self-awareness. We have to 'find' ourselves, then accept ourselves. Honest self-reflection is not an easy process, but this process of discovery is a powerful tool for growth. We keep what is good and working well, and we look at what is causing conflicts and think about how we might make changes to enable a peaceful life. Therapy helps people connect and be more self-aware of their relationships with parents, spouses, families, friends, cultures, and most importantly with Allah. When we are in the state of submission to the will of Allah, we are in our optimal state of functioning and more aligned with our fitrah.

Aman: It's freezing cold, and you can hardly see where you're going outside. Plus, it wasn't wet near the window where the snow would have melted or got in.



We build bridges during therapy through the processes of:

1. Knowing ourselves better,
2. Developing a more complete understanding of past and present psychological issues,
3. Establishing more effective coping mechanisms,
4. Changing unhelpful behaviours,
5. Alleviating emotional pain and confusion,
6. Establishing and maintaining relationships.

The therapist and client are collaborators; they can use teachings from the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ as well as dynamic psychological tools to explore thoughts, beliefs, images, memories, and patterns played out from past experiences to identify and address unresolved issues. As the therapy progresses, the client finds ease and relief within themselves. And when all the puzzles become resolved, they can see clearer paths, and ultimately reconnect with their fitrah.

For the client it feels like 'coming home'. Muslim clients' response to Islamic psychotherapy is an inclusive and largely positive experience. As a result, they are enthusiastic to work harder in establishing and maintaining connections with themselves, their families, societies, and their Creator, Allah A'zza wa Jal.

Dr Momotaj Islam, Clinical Psychologist ([www.drmpsychology.co.uk](http://www.drmpsychology.co.uk))

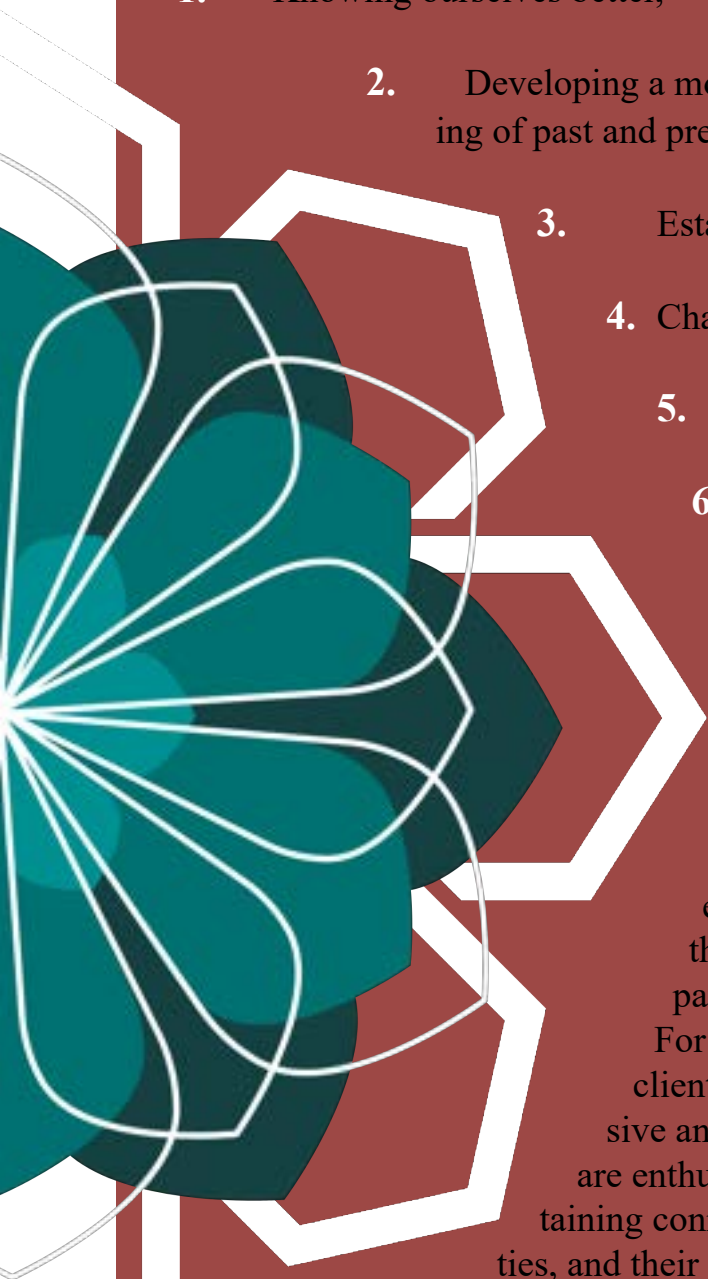
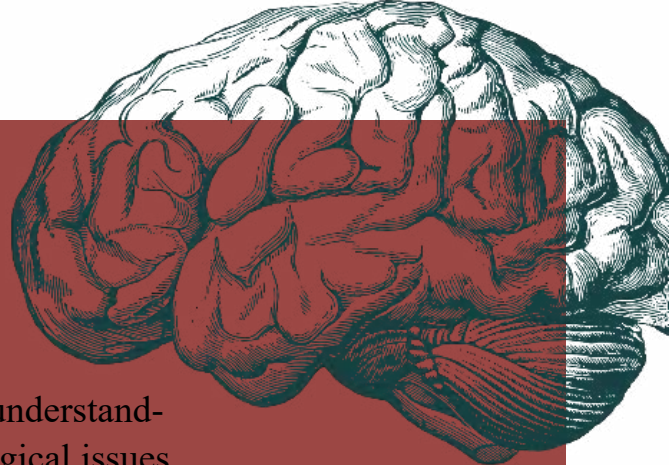
Maya Salam, Psychodynamic Psychotherapist ([www.linkedin.com/in/maya-salam-60129b3a](http://www.linkedin.com/in/maya-salam-60129b3a))

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#### References:

(1) Harvard University Grant study –

(2) Robert Waldinger, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School





A hand holding a crystal ball that reflects a landscape with trees and water. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with trees and a body of water under a blue sky.

# *The Productive Muslim* by Mohammed Faris

## Book Review

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

E

ver wondered how you can leverage Islamic traditions and principles to lead a productive lifestyle? I had this exact question at the start of 2022. Well, not exactly, but I turned to reading half a dozen self-development books regarding productivity in order to learn how to make the most of my time. Yet, I never achieved the transformational change I was looking for. It wasn't until I came across *The Productive Muslim*, the book that would finally guide me in developing a more productive lifestyle ever since. Mohammed Faris tackles the productivity

## Focus, Energy and Time

Faris begins by defining productivity as: **Productivity = Focus × Energy × Time**. Productivity is a function of focus, energy and time. If you have focus and time, but lack energy, you'll be too tired to tackle your tasks. This is unfortunately something I related to strongly, thinking of the many days I skipped a healthy breakfast and relied on coffee to get me through an all-day library stint.

If you have lots of energy and time, but lack focus, you'll be constantly distracted and unable to complete your tasks at hand. I'm sure almost everyone is guilty of sparing a minute (which becomes an hour) to scroll through TikTok or Instagram whilst working. Addressing challenges to do with focus is an integral part of the book.

If you have both energy and focus but lack time, you simply can't be productive. Only having a strong balance of the three factors can lead to great productivity.

This definition allows us to diagnose our lack of productivity at any point in time. Utilising Islamic tradition

# Aman Sultan

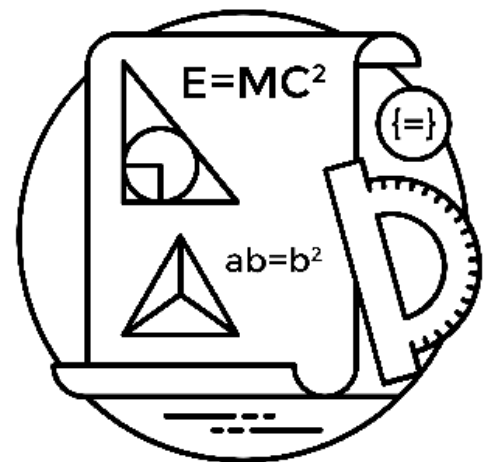
1st year

Economics and Management  
Balliol College

'Owner "than they left by removing the metal bars and jumped out the window and put them back on using some tools" problem by creating a detailed handbook, outlining how spirituality can boost productivity, and how we can manage our time to invest in the hereafter.

Faris initially describes the complex challenges we face as an ummah today, encouraging Muslims to rise to the challenge of improving society at large, by ensuring Islam stays relevant in the post-modern era. The starting point of tackling this challenge is leading productive lives. Boosting productivity is critical to reaching our potential. Allah SWT says in the Quran, *'Allah does not change the condition of a people [for the worse] unless they change what is in themselves.'* [13:11]

In this book review, I have summarised a small portion of the book to provide an insight into some of the ideas presented, and if the ideas are of interest to you, you can explore the many other concepts and explanations in the author's book.





and principles will allow us to boost these three factors.

A complete definition of productivity is as follows: *Productivity is about making smart choices (continuously) with your energy, focus and time to maximise your potential and achieve beneficial results.*

## Productivity Myths

### 1) Productivity is being busy and stressed.

Faris argues that someone productive should be less busy and look less stressed. Before reading this book (on my 'productive' days), I always found a way to ensure I was 'busy' at pretty much every minute. Recently, I have found much more tranquillity in taking regular breaks, whether it's going to Pret for a caramel latte or walking to the prayer room for salah, or not doing any academic work after Isha each day.

### 2) Productivity is an event.

Productivity is not an event, but instead, it is making smart choices daily until it becomes a lifestyle. Taking breaks and time off work or studies is in fact productive.

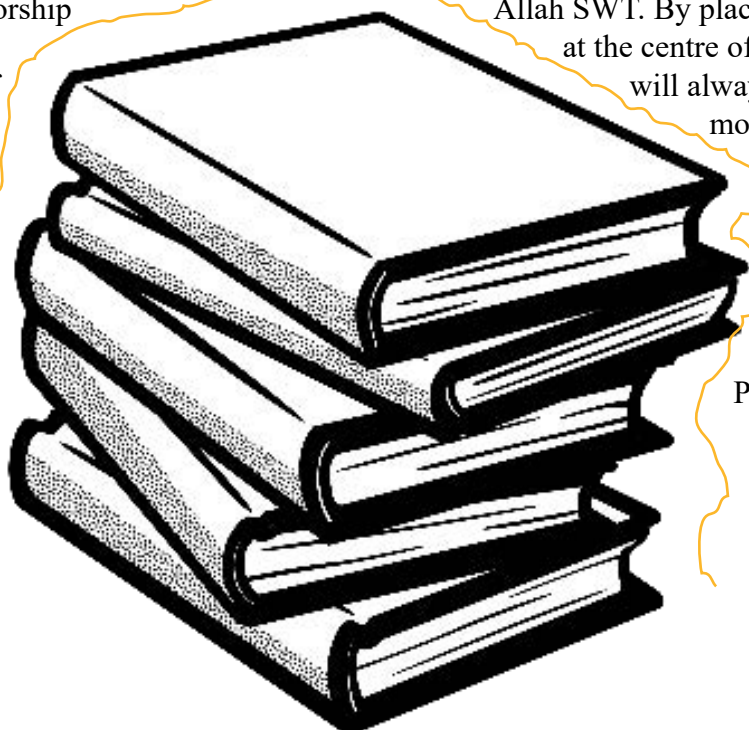
### 3) Productivity is boring.

You can still enjoy yourself and be productive, but it's about knowing when to have fun and when to work hard, when to relax and when to be serious.

### The Islamic Paradigm of Productivity

Finding purpose and meaning is one of the three basic pillars of human motivation according to modern psychology. Unfortunately, in today's consumerist society, often purpose is unclear or unworthy – purpose is intimately connected with the finite world. Islam brings forward a clear and succinct purpose that drives our every action. Allah SWT outlines our purpose in this world when he says in the Quran, *'I created the jinn and mankind only to worship Me.'* [51:56]

Faris reminds us that worship isn't a specific act or event, such as the act of praying salah, instead, worship is permanent. This changes the purpose of our productivity from chasing the spoils of this world to instead making choices that please our Lord,



Allah SWT. By placing this purpose at the centre of our hearts, we will always be intrinsically motivated to live according to the values in the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed PBUH.



## Purpose-led Productivity

How can you apply the ideas presented in the book to your life? One of the most beneficial ideas in the book for me was the idea of purpose-led productivity. By reminding ourselves that our purpose in this world is to solely please Allah SWT, I have been able to boost my productivity. In times when I am struggling to make a start on my essays, I remind myself that my opportunity to study is a blessing from Allah SWT. Time itself is also a blessing, and it is ungrateful of me not to make the most of the opportunities and time Allah SWT provides me. Centering your day around salah and maintaining wudhu throughout the day to seek the blessing of Allah SWT in all our actions, are amongst the habits discussed in the book which I have found the utmost value in adopting.

I hope you have found this book review useful, and that it has encouraged you to pursue reading this short book in order to increase your productivity for the sake of Allah SWT. May Allah grant us the strength and intention to become more productive and make us of those who are successful in this life and the next.

Is this another hint? Answer: No

Narrator: Everyone starts to go  
back to their rooms, except for you  
and Muscab, who stay for a little  
longer.





In this section, we hear from students who used to attend Oxford and the ISoc. Both relatively recent alumni, Daniya describes the pressures new graduates face while Nabeela relates her experiences managing a new charity shop with her father.



*Muscab: (Leaves, taking an axe used to cut firewood with him. Locks himself inside his room.) I will stay in a locked room. If the killer comes to kill me, then so be it...*

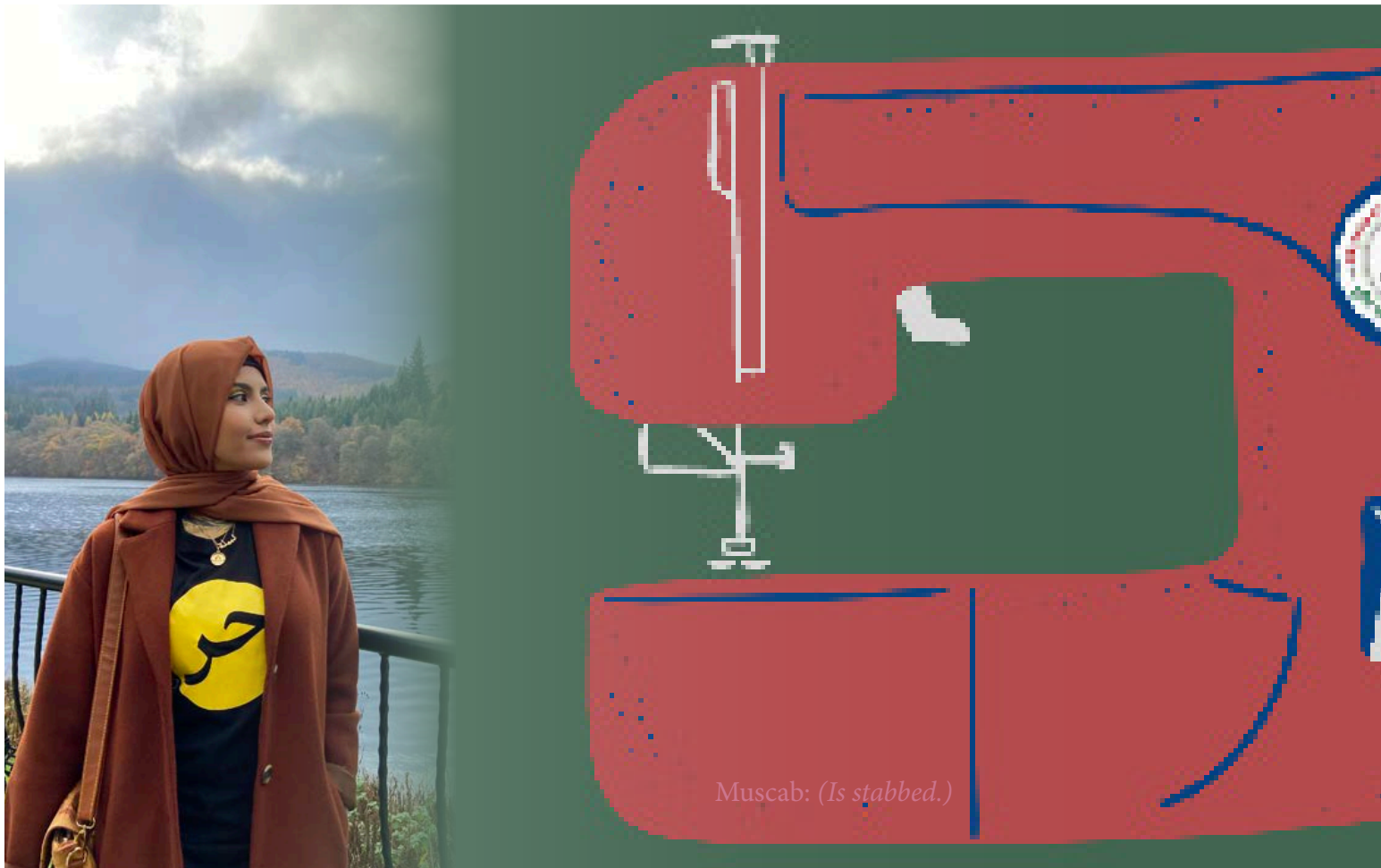


# The British Bangla Welfare Trust

My dad would tell me it was his dream to open a charity shop, and I didn't believe him till he handed me the keys to the building.

I have always known that my ✨passion✨ is tied to creativity. My degree was fairly niche and did not leave me with a specific career path, so I decided to keep my options open. I explored opportunities whilst always maintaining personal creative projects and through the Qadr of Allah, I joined the corporate space. Outside of my 9-5, I manage an independent charity called the British Bangla Welfare Trust. We are a registered charity that my dad started in 2006 and I got involved with in 2020 to help ease his load. As with many things, I found it hard to know what I was getting into, but it has made me constantly learn new things. My dad and I have established a good dynamic in terms of dividing responsibilities and a large portion of my role involves tasks that I would carry out as Communications Chair when I was in the OUISoc.

We opened our shop in East London during the height of the pandemic which made it tricky to navigate everchanging lock-



down rules. Although shop layouts are frequently refreshed, things in the shop itself are better established now. Over the past few years, I have had many reflections on the nature of giving, especially with regards to charity shops since being so closely involved in one. One observation is how people are willing to spend more for a certain item depending on the location or branding of a shop. For example, our closest competing store is a small British Heart Foundation which marks items at prices that are out of budget for the location yet makes sales due to being a well-established brand. Similarly, items sold in vintage shops in gentrified areas such as Brick Lane are often sourced from overspill items at charity shops but are sold at a much higher price than shops like ours. A positive takeaway is that closely handling clothing items has taught me to better appreciate slow fashion, which is something worth reflecting on in our current times.

The most striking experiences the shop has led to are the people we get to meet. We have a mix of regular customers and others who wander in by chance. One of my most mem-

orable customers was a retired man who wanted to buy almost everything in the shop. I do mean everything. Halfway through shopping he took a break to buy the team and customers refreshments, and on top of that he offered to buy me tech equipment to develop my content, which I kindly declined. We ultimately discouraged him from overspending, but nevertheless he left with a humble haul.



Our customers leave an impression because we take note of their personalities, as well as taking the time to speak to them when they show they want to engage in conversation. I have discovered that our shop is not only a place to buy items, but oftentimes it is also a hub for developing relationships. Many of our visitors open up to us about personal struggles, upcoming plans they may be shopping for and anything else that may be on their mind. It allows us to bridge the gaps between people of different cultures, ages, religions, etc. and has given me the chance to learn more about what makes us human. Sometimes customers bring us gifts and come in to say hello to particular volunteers, which equally goes a long way. In that sense, I am thankful that we can offer company in a small space where people feel like they belong after readjusting to being closed off from society. Alhumdulillah, I am grateful for the global work we are able to carry out with the funds from our shop, and I invite you to visit our social media if you wish to support us.

## Nabeela Zaman

Nabeela Zaman graduated with a BA in Chinese Studies from University College (2019) and was OUISoc Communications Chair (2018-19). She is now a Project Manager, Content Creator and Managing Director of British Bangla Welfare Trust.



# The Graduate: a Candid Account after Graduating

University does not prepare you for what we call ‘adulting’. Nearing my graduation ceremony in the summer last year, I was filled with excitement and anticipation. ‘What would my life look like 6 months from now?’ After three years in the Oxford bubble, most of it being spent in the pandemic, I had become so used to my weekly routine of: read, write an essay (or three, depending how bad my week was), go to the tutorial, and repeat. While essay crises were consistent and there were many sleepless nights, everything seemed doable. There were of course, being a Pakistani who was living by herself for the first time in a foreign country, many moments in Oxford of feeling like a fish out of water. Despite these hurdles and certain difficult situations, I never felt out of my depth. That is, until after I graduated and flew back home.

I realised a month into my new grad life back home that my social life had disappeared overnight. My closest friends whose doors I could knock on at ungodly hours for nighttime walks or to go on spontaneous trips to the vending machine in the Catz laundry room were no longer just a door away. Nobody tells you about the loneliness that hits you after you graduate, especially as an international student. As fresh graduates, we also occupy this liminal space where we still have the mindset of a uni student but since we’ve graduated we’re technically adults now, and it makes it difficult to make new friends.

Don’t even get me started on the existential crises that hit you in the months that follow graduating. With a degree in the History of Art, I thought it was only natural that I should pursue a career in arts and culture, and surely I should be able to find a position soon enough. I was sorely mistaken,



Narrator:  
Everyone  
gathers and  
sees Muscab  
with the axe in  
his chest. You  
are the last to  
arrive.

having only secured a traineeship after being unemployed for 6 months. Those months passed by like a blur; I did a lot of soul-searching while questioning everything I believed in. 'Do I want a job in the arts? Do I even like art history?'

These were the questions I asked to comfort myself and minimise that feeling of failure, having been rejected from countless art institutions.

Perhaps I wasn't cut out for a job in the arts... It still hurt, and if there's one thing I wish Oxford taught me better was how to deal with failure – that is, failure as per societal norms, of being unemployed and not being able to get what you think you deserve.

I still remember a very candid conversation I had with one of my tutors in the depths of the pandemic. She told me that there's a type of Oxford student who is used to being the best in their class and exceptional in their school.

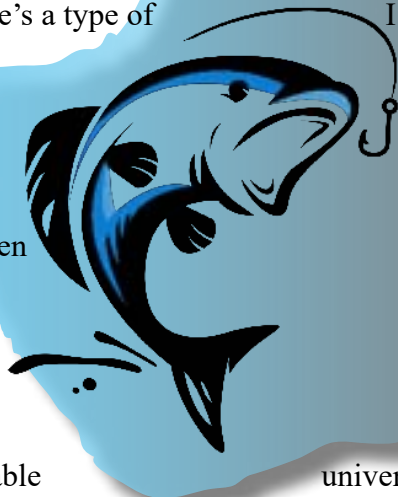
When they get to Oxford and are surrounded by equally or even more exceptional people, they get overwhelmed with a sense of mediocrity and feel like absolute failures. Rather than accepting that everybody has their own pace, which is a valuable lesson for life, they get stuck in a rat race of trying to get a First, a Distinction and so on. They do not accept failure nor the fact that they are just human because they refuse to believe perfection is not attainable. This mentality spilled on into real-life post graduation for me, it was

so frustrating for me to not be able to secure an internship that I became paralysed. I wasn't able to apply for anything because the fear of failure was overpowering.

What pulled me out of this defeating cycle was deliberately pushing myself out of my comfort zone. I decided to look into jobs with no connection to arts and culture, and while I managed to pass the first screening of a finance job, I absolutely botched my interview. While I was upset about it for a while, knowing very well that I wasn't getting the position, I knew that I didn't have that much knowledge about the job that I had applied for, and that was okay. I wasn't holding myself up to insane standards because I wasn't familiar with this field, and that's when

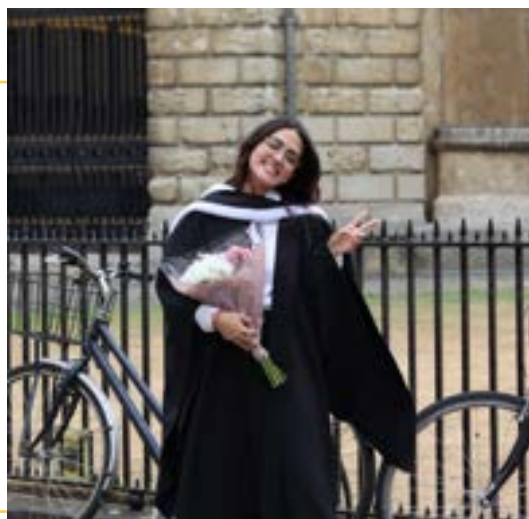
I had an epiphany: I don't need to be amazing.

While graduating with an Oxford degree definitely opens many doors and comes with certain privileges, it can also add a burden and create high expectations from others and yourself. From a graduate who is only now being kind to herself, I would say that the bridge between university and post-university life is not a clear, sturdy one. Rather, it is rickety and filled with holes. There are moments when you lose confidence in yourself and your situation seems dire, but when you believe in yourself and are a little brave, you can cross that hole-ridden bridge and make it to the other end.



## Daniya Jawwad

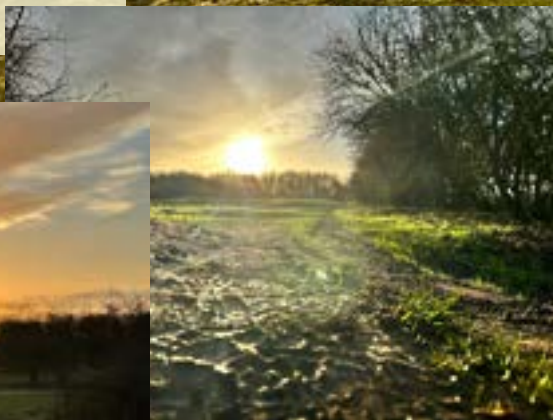
Daniya studied History of Art at St Catherine's College from 2019 to 2022, and is currently doing a traineeship at an art fair in Dubai. She wasn't the most active member of ISoc but one of her best friends, who is very active, encouraged her to come along to events in her last year, and thanks to that, she met amazing people and made wonderful memories.





# COMM WORKS

This section is dedicated to the art, photography, poetry and craftwork of the ISoc community. Whether it's stunning prints or photos from a memorable location, the members of this ISoc always have new works to show.



Miscab: (Dying) Sorry, I couldn't  
see the murderer's face... (Dies)



# UNITY



All photos taken during  
Port Meadow walks



*Bilal Qureshi*  
**Bridge of Sighs**



*Taslima Sheikh*  
**No bridges in sight**



*Aflea Begum*  
**Lighthouses, bridges  
and lino printing 2**

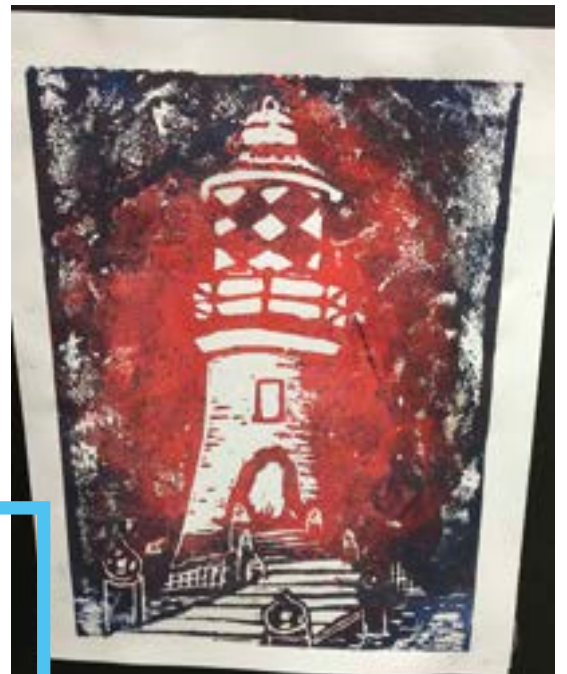


*Coral Benfield*  
**Cornish Bridge**



*Coral Benfield*  
**Cornish Bridges**

*Aflea Begum*  
**Lighthouse  
lino print**





*Taslima Sheikh*  
**No bridges in sight**



*Aflea Begum*  
**Lighthouse lino print**



*Mohammad Arij  
Shahzad*  
**Hussaini suspension  
bridge**



*Coral Benfield*  
**Cornish Bridge**



*Coral Benfield*  
**Cornish lack  
of bridge**



x 1 Hanging Up  
 x 2 by Siddiq Islam  
 3  
 x 4 The beep-beep of 'Calling...' His name and the anti-  
 x 5 cipation. My breath in my eardrum. More ringing.  
 x 6 I mean when I say this that there was not nothing  
 x 7 before he picked up, there was something.  
 8  
 x 9 I called just to loan a quick question, but he, free  
 x 10 of charge, gave a whole conversation. The rich flesh  
 x 11 of story was tender to taste. All his words were  
 x 12 like fire - they burned - and he laughed without hardship  
 13  
 x 14 through harsh bars of signal. This boy defined manhood  
 x 15 without all the bricks or the dust or pretences.  
 x 16 So graceful. I should have been nicer, spoke louder  
 x 17 and smiled on this side of the screen, to myself,  
 18  
 x 19 but I didn't. The red was inviting, and I've grown  
 x 20 accustomed to clicking things quicker than thinking.  
 x 21 The button is pressed now. The silence is brutal.  
 x 22 Even before he picked up, there was something.

# CRYPTOGRAM

Aaliyah Natha

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

11 17 24 19 16 23 11 13 20 5 19 7 7 20 2 7 17 17 5 19 16  
 11 13 20 9 19 2 2 17 2

# MURDER MYSTERY

## AbdoAllah Mohammad

Welcome to the *Ikhlaas* murder mystery. The rules are very simple. There are clues hidden throughout the magazine which you can find as you read through it. They can be hard to find; look for anything that seems out of place or hidden in the images. There is a hint on every two-page spread starting from pages 8/9 and ending on pages 59/60.

Narrator: *Let me bring you up to speed. Here's what happened. It's cold, so you decide to enter a small hotel. You are given the key to your room. You see a waiter with a knife in his chest on the floor. You realise the windows have metal window grills, so no one could have entered or left the room. People rush to the room, even without you calling for help. One of the people is a doctor named Muscab who goes to examine the murdered man.*

Dying man: ...

Narrator: *Whoops. He cannot tell us anything now. This looks like a mystery you need to solve using the clues in the magazine...*

Here are some of the hints to help you out:

Narrator: *You find a brick wall behind the door that says 'Welcome to the room'.*

Narrator: *No fingerprints or weapons are found.*

Narrator: *Everyone starts to go back to their rooms, except for you and Muscab, who stay for a little longer.*

Who is the murderer?

The answer: The murderer is... YOU. The first murder took place when you opened the door. Only you could have entered. As for where you were after the doctor left and that detail was left out. Furthermore, since YOU change depending on who is reading, having a fingerprint is useless.



# PLACE FOR NOTES

I WOULD RECOMMEND YOU WRITE EVERYTHING YOU FIND.



FOR THE STUDENTS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTOGRAPHY





















OXFORD UNIVERSITY  
**ISLAMIC SOCIETY**  
Committee 2022/23

Everyone on committee is always eager to talk to you and help you with any questions or concerns you may have, so please don't hesitate to contact us.



**Imad Ahmed**  
Brothers' Vice President



**Zuhaira Islam**  
President



**Aaliyah Natha**  
Sisters' Vice President



**Zainab Bhamji**  
Secretary



**Kaamil Kaba**  
Treasurer



**Muhsin Ahmed**  
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**Danyal Khan**  
Graduate Chair



**Abdul Lateef**  
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**Anicka Ahmed**  
Sisters' W.O.S.



**Shoriful Haque**  
Brothers' W.O.S.



**Saqlain Choudhary**  
Graduate W.O.S.



**Riazul Rahman**  
RE Officer



**Zakaria Najjar**  
Islamic Awareness Officer



**Bahira Malak**  
Politics Officer



**Iza Basharat**  
Student Affairs Officer



**Rafiah Niha**  
Access Director



**Aysha Adam**  
Alumni Officer



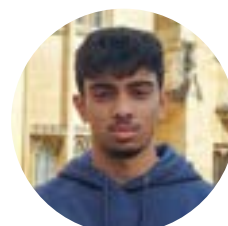
**Beheshta Harghandiwal**  
Community Officer



**Hibah Hassan**  
Graduate Academic  
Officer



**Mahirah Rahman**  
Tech & Comms Officer



**Kamrul Ahsan**  
Media & Design Officer



A close-up photograph of an elephant's head, focusing on its eye and the deeply wrinkled texture of its skin. The skin is a mix of grey and brown tones, with the wrinkles creating a complex, organic pattern. The elephant's eye is visible, looking slightly to the side. Overlaid on the lower right portion of the image is the Arabic text 'وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا' in a white, elegant, serif font.

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

*'My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.'*

[20:11]





# IKHLAAS

*The OUISoc Magazine*



OXFORD UNIVERSITY  
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