

Where do you go if your son is rebelling or when your daughter wants to marry someone against your wishes? Marital problems...beware...don't go to the mosque...everyone will know your problems ...before the next Salah. If you have ever been faced with issues similar to these, then you have probably tried to get help in the one place where you would expect to get it: the Masjid. Perhaps you paid a visit to the Masjid office in the hopes of finding a sympathetic ear, or maybe you met with the Imam to discuss what's ailing your life. But if your experience is like most people, you wound up having to look elsewhere (non-Muslim) for assistance. You couldn't find the support you needed in your masjid. Maybe no one answered the phone; or your calls were never returned or, if you managed to get a meeting, perhaps the Imam used the opportunity to lecture you on irrelevant issues. Hardly a solution to real life problems! If we say the Masjid is the focal point of the community and open its doors five times a day for prayer, shouldn't the Masjid be open for other needs the believers have as well? Those who build & operate the Masjid have little expertise in organizing a life-giving institution. An untrained, uneducated person cannot run a spiritual & communal project!

Contrast the above scenario with the average church or synagogue. The institution is built to serve as a community center right from the start. Youth programs are a priority and are well-planned and fun. Women are represented on the board & on all committees. Volunteers are chosen for their trustworthiness & reliability. They are made to feel that their job means something & they are well-coordinated & friendly. The minister or rabbi speaks English fluently, and knows Greek/Hebrew on the side. In order to be the leader of the community, the minister or rabbi had to undergo extensive training which included, besides the religious subjects, counseling, administration, management, public speaking, research, culminating in the award of a D.D. (Doctorate of Divinity). Let's have such Imams. Well-qualified.

To establish Islam we have to build community Masjids which serve the community & are relevant to both Muslims & non-Muslims. We need trained staff, even if you have to pay them. We need Imams with professional training in many subjects related to human relations. We need a process of inclusion that would make women, the youth & the lukewarm Muslims feel a part of the over-all life of our Masjid. By its very nature & what it must mean for the community, it must be run professionally, and not like a "male club."

Reality Check: These houses of worship do not elevate or inspire us spiritually, emotionally, culturally or intellectually. A mosque is simply a place we go to offer

our obligatory Friday prayers & occasionally check out a speech. That's it. **It does nothing to elevate our souls.**

The Reality: "Houses of worship which Allah has permitted to be raised so in them His Name is glorified in the mornings & the evenings." (24:36) Let our mosques engage the mind in contemplation. Let every inscription within enhance the spirit of devotion. Let its sacred space be a garden of beauty & peace. The Masjid was never meant to be simply a place of worship with little or no participation by Muslims in it beyond that. The Masjid, in early Islamic times, was the locus of the community. Islam lays great emphasis on the social side of things. Every day, the rich and the poor, the great and the small living in a locality are brought five times in a day in the Mosque in the terms of perfect equality of mankind and thereby the foundation of a healthy social relationship is laid and established through prayer.

To men who **exclude** women from mosques. Sit down on your carpet. A woman, Zeynep Fadillioglu, has designed the Sakirin Mosque in Turkey. She said: "We wanted people to feel more left alone with God, rather than being distracted by **too much ornamentation**. I think that makes it more contemporary at the same time." Simple. And simply stunning. Like the Kaaba. A woman, Zaha Hadid, was commissioned by the Saudi gov't in 2009 to be a team of two to redesign the most important Mosque in Islam: The Grand Mosque of Mecca. **Now can women just enter the mosque to PRAY.** It's way better than wasting time at the mall. **Isn't it?** They have gone shopping for a new khimar...ohhh, ok!

However, we are warned that not all "mosques" are good!!!

(Quran 9:108) There are some who have built a "mosque" to hurt the faithful. To propagate infidelity. To foment division among the true believers. They swear, saying, 'Verily, we intended no other than to do the best.'

God is witness that they do certainly lie.

Do not stand to pray therein.

(110) Are those who establish a building on the basis of reverencing God & to gain His approval better, or those who have founded their building on the brink of a crumbling cliff, so that it falls with them into the fire of hell?

God directs not those that transgress.

(111) Their "mosque" will not cease to be an occasion of doubting in their hearts, until their hearts are stilled. God is Knowing, Wise.

The A Place of Prostration Masjid

A Place for the inculcation of reverence

In the masjid, different & separate people learn in physical & spiritual communion of their deepest sameness & indivisibility. The masjid makes Islam real, and it makes it work. Serving as a place of communal worship & a focus for cultural identity, the mosque is the outward & most visible symbol of Islam.

A mosque lends spiritual grace to any landscape. It bears witness in its own way to the presence of the One God.

The words of a Hindu woman Sarojni Naidu, the Nightingale of India: "It was the first religion that preached & practised democracy, for in the mosque when from the minaret the call to prayer is sounded & the worshippers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant & the king kneel side by side & proclaim, 'God alone is great.'"

The First Mosque of Abraham (p) & the First Mosque of the Prophet (p) were not opulent. No fine carpets or Arabesque architecture. God does not require his house to be grand; only for it to be built by people of conscience & pure faith.

A Sign of the Last Days: The Mosques would be like palaces. This is clearly the case, even though the Prophet (p) ordered simplicity in the Houses of Allah. The mosques have become more & more fantastic, with decorative domes, marbled floors, lavish carpets & chandeliers. Costing MILLION\$\$. **Playgrounds of the rich...**

There is a mosque
FOUNDED ON PIETY
 from the first day of its building. It is better that
 you pray there, for therein are people who love to
 be purified, for God loves the clean.

There is a place we go to pray to Allah. Our presence there is a mark of our reverence and our worship. There is a place we go to talk to Allah. Our presence there is a binding link pulling us to Him & our words & prayers resonate, clearer, purer. There is a place we go to bow to Allah, shoulder to shoulder with others. Our presence there is needed. And we know why. We can pray to Allah anywhere. We can talk to Allah at any time (and we do). But we can only really know our sameness with others under one sky & our One Allah, breathe the same thought in the same word as our brother & sister at the very shared moment, in one place only. The concrete sign of the Muslims' presence. The identical global symbol of a living Muslim community. This is why the masjid is the special place. This is why the masjid is the glue of Islam.

When the world was younger, & bigger, the masjid was at its centre. You could travel from the shores of the Atlantic to the slow, long crests of Pacific swells & still go home at every stop. Home is where the heart is, goes the familiar saying & the heart would always find its home in the masjid where the people of Islam, Muslims, gathered. The local language remained outside, left with the shoes, forgotten. All together, all in unison, the Muslims prayed. In the language of Revelation. In Arabic. It is one more paradox of the times we live in, that now that the world has aged/specialized/become smaller, it has unlearned much, & it has **not** become closer.

In the Muslim world today, the masjid is sometimes hijacked by the state, platformed for its needs, depersonalised by "professionals" toeing the official line, **abused by the uneducated**. When it aspires to business mode, it is also mired in shoddy management. The community's daily needs are relegated to irrelevance. Masjids are the main organizing unit of Muslims. They are not islands of isolation. The masjid laments.

Masjids are built (more than bricks) they should be edifices made of welcomes & of tomorrows. We should, by the laws of logic, build masjids on the exact principle by which it exists: the masjid is the living home

of the Muslim, every Muslim, any Muslim. But here, too often, its doors swing inwards. Locking out persons based on differences of thinking. If Allah were to leave persons on the earth for their righteousness there would be NONE, is warning enough to the erroneous belief that some are better than others. We have a chance to rebuild the home of Islam, turn it back into the central architect of the Muslim's life, a hundred times more central to living than when the world was too vast to hear or see the distant edges of the earth; but our "homes of Islam" often lack building plans; the chart for vibrant community-building & community-linking is missing.

The masjid, the mosque, is the capital of Islam. It is where the road begins and returns to. It is the worshippers' representative assembly. It is the worshippers' school, their training camp, their etiquette and behavioural academy, where the rules and regulations have been provided by Allah. It is the communal dwelling: a masjid is the focal point of relevance. Here, the early community of Islam reviewed its weekly course & week by week assessed its past endeavours and upcoming tasks; headquarters of decision-making and forger of decision-makers. The masjid is the resting place and the meeting place, the shelter for the homeless, the traveler, the weary. It is the recharger, **of life and of faith**. It is in the masjid that Islam lives beyond one's own heart and it is in the masjid that continuance is born.

Masjid: its root is that of sujud, the prostration to Allah. The place of prostration. Prophet Muhammad (p) told us that in prostration we are closest in connection to Allah. And we have been told: "We verily created man and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." 50:16. Allah is as close to us, always, as the vein we now know to be the one which carries our lifeblood from our brains back to our hearts. To the masjid we go to revere Allah by heeding His guidance...connect with the family of Islam, link yourself to the family of man. In Allah's masjid there is no exclusion, as there is no exclusion in His call. He invites **all** to the Shahadah in His masjid & it is in His masjid that we witness the witnessing time & time again. We are going to build & strengthen & expand the family.

Why then has the "family" become dysfunctional? Why are some masjids **not** Muslim-friendly & welcoming? The masjid is **not** a vibrant, lively place where you would love to spend your time. Rather, it is this physical structure, too often held hostage by board members who mistakenly treat it as a personal project (in the case of policies or renovations), as a propaganda machine (in the case of a

movement), or worse yet, as their personal property (in case they have donated some amount of money or resources).

So many female converts to Islam. Let's take them out! What about the Masjid? Surely we can take her there? Well, no... because many of the Masjids tend to be very **anti-female** places. The lasses get less of everything: **less space, less visibility, less air conditioning, and many times less respect**. The trays of kheer are treated with more respect. They are lasses, not "lesses." The brothers also make sure that these "lesses" wear "more" clothing... even down to black socks to hide their "sexy" toes. In some "Muslim" countries, women don't even go to the Masjid. Women behind barriers – concrete or curtains. Will they "jump" the brothers in sujud? In the Prophet's simple mosque, when he was alive, no such construction/barrier. No black socks, too.

Men manifest their deepest insecurities & fears within the confines of the mosque that they otherwise ignore or tolerate in greater society. They deal with women at work, at school, in civil society, yet when they enter the mosque it feels like an invisible, inorganic social-retarder is erected that perverts sensibilities when dealing with women.

Money should not talk...but it does: Time & time again you will see middle-aged, wealthy men who made big **illegal**-bucks in every haram way, filling the Masjids & talking about establishing Islam. Meanwhile, their kids are outside talking about music, girls/boys, dancing; their wives at home Facebooking with male strangers & their relatives lost to Islam long ago. All this happened right under their noses, by the way.

What if your Masjid were just a little different? What if it was set up for dawah (invitation) like churches are. What if it were clean...CLEAN...the dirtiest toilets/bathrooms are found in the "houses of God." **Shame**. What if it were well-maintained, staffed with a friendly secretary & set up as a full service center for the community? What if there were good, relevant programs for Muslims & non-Muslims alike...given by people who were inspiring, eloquent & aware of the issues we face in the modern world? Good khutbahs are rare...very much so. The speaker is a nice brother, but he does not speak good English and often puts audiences to sleep in record time. He never even speaks about anything relevant. Be truthful...you would **not** be at the masjid, equating it with a horrible punishment.

**THE MOSQUES OF GOD SHALL BE VISITED & MAINTAINED BY THOSE WHO
 BELIEVE IN GOD & THE LAST DAY & ESTABLISH REGULAR PRAYER
 PRACTICE REGULAR CHARITY & REVERENCE NONE EXCEPT GOD.**

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