

What if your Masjid were just a little different? What if it was set up for dawah like nearly every church is. 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 and set up as a full service center for the community? What if there were good, relevant programs for Muslims and non-Muslims alike...given by people who were inspiring, eloquent and 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.

Where do you go if your son is rebelling? What do you do when your daughter wants to marry someone against your wishes? Your uncle is feeling depressed lately. Who can help him recover? Your spouse is too materialistic and is neglecting the spiritual life of your family? Who can help? 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 called or paid a visit to the Masjid office in the hopes of finding a sympathetic ear, or maybe you met with the Imam or director to discuss what's ailing your life.

But if your experience is like most people in most places, you wound up having to look elsewhere (non-Muslim) for assistance. You just couldn't find the support you needed in your local house of worship. Maybe no one answered the phone; maybe your calls were never returned or, if you managed to get a personal meeting, perhaps the Imam or director merely used the opportunity to lecture you on fiqh 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 and operate the Masjid have little expertise in organizing a life-giving institution. An untrained, uneducated person cannot run a spiritual and

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 and on all committees. Volunteers are chosen for their trustworthiness and reliability. They are made to feel that their job means something and they are well-coordinated and 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). We have I.I. (Imams of Idiocy).

If we truly want to establish Islam then we have to build community Masjids which serve the community and are relevant to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Let's not be those people who built a Masjid in this life but then made it a dead structure by our own hands. We need trained staff, even if you have to pay them. We need Imams with professional training in many subjects related to human relations and we need a process of inclusion that would make women, the youth and the lukewarm Muslims feel a part of the over-all life of our Masjid. The Masjid is not just a place of prayer that we can build to heal our guilty feelings of doing haram business dealings – it's a place for Muslims and their lives. By its very nature and what it must mean for the community, it must be run professionally, and not like a “male club.”

“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.

**Is your mosque a House of Mercy
(The fear of God)
or a place of Controversy?
(God directs not the ungodly)**

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A Place of Prostration *The* Masjid

A Place for the inculcation of reverence

(108) There are some who have built a “mosque” to hurt the faithful, and to propagate infidelity, and to foment division among the true believers...and they swear, saying, Verily, we intended no other than to do the best; but God is witness that they do certainly lie. (109)

Do not stand to pray therein.

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. (110) Is he better who has founded his building on the fear of God and his good-will, or he who has founded his building on the brink of a bank of earth which is washed away by waters, so that it falls with him into the fire of hell? God directs **not** the ungodly people. (111) Their “mosque” will **not** cease to be an occasion of doubting in their hearts, until their hearts be cut into pieces; and God is Knowing, Wise.

Surah Tauba

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 and our words and 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 and our One Allah, breathe the same thought in the same word as our brother and 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.

In the masjid, different and separate people learn in physical and spiritual communion of their deepest sameness and indivisibility. The masjid makes Islam real, and it makes it work.

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 being built (more than bricks and stones they should be buildings made of welcomes and 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, some have noted. 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 (peace) 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 and time again. We are going to build & strengthen and expand the family.

Why then has the "family" become dysfunctional? Why are some masjids **not** Muslim-friendly? Do you feel welcomed at your masjid? 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).

It's a "Her"...: So many female converts to Islam. And then many revert back to whatever they were. Why? Let's take them out! What about the Masjid? Surely we can take her there? Well, not if it's a *her*, because many of the Masjids tend to be very **anti-female** places where sisters are shoved into back closets, stuffy rooms or tiny places far away from anything important. In some "Muslim" countries, women don't even go to the Masjid anyway. Women behind barriers – concrete or curtains. Will they "jump" the brothers in sujud? In the Prophet's simple mosque, when the Prophet (p) was alive, no such construction/barrier.

Money Should not talk...but it does: Time and time again you will see middle-aged, wealthy men who made big illegal-bucks in every haram way, filling the Masjids and talking about establishing Islam. Meanwhile, their kids are outside talking about music, girls/boys, dancing, their wives at home watching godless TV programs and their relatives lost to Islam long ago. All this happened right under their noses, by the way. Say what? What are you trying to establish? Oh, ohh....Is-slump...thought you said Islam...whew!!!

The Mosques of God shall be visited & maintained by those who

believe in God & the Last Day & establish regular prayer

practice regular charity & fear none except God.