

Vive La Paix

Original and Translation by Amal Javed Abdullah

The boy placed his small hand in his father's large and sturdy one as they joined the crowd of men and women in kaleidoscopic colours walking from all directions across the parking lot to the entrance of the masjid. They moved side by side, smiling at one another and bidding each other the *salam*, the greeting of peace, tanned crinkles radiating in the corners of their eyes. Behind them, the sky steadily dimmed to a deep Egyptian blue and the sun blazed like a dull orange ember as it smouldered and prepared to die down for another night.

The boy stepped inside the *masjid* away from Quebec's bitter January cold, and, instantaneously, a spark of warmth filled him from the top of his head to the tips of his feet as if he had just gulped down a sweet steaming slug of hot chocolate. He inhaled deeply, and the fresh scent of lilac air freshener wafted into his nose. The soft incandescent light bulbs which flooded the vast and open hall, made the boy feel at home. The hall was filled with hustle and bustle as people flowed in to congregate for the evening prayer.

The boy slipped off his shoes, placed them on the racks, and treaded softly on the carpeted ground in his father's wake to the men's washroom to make *wudu*, ablution. The boy whispered, Bismillah, in the name of Allah, and slowly, mindfully, he washed his hands, rinsed his mouth, flushed his nose, wiped his face and both arms and over his head, cleaned his ears and washed his feet. As he finished, the boy recalled the saying of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, "When a believer washes his face (in the course of *wudu*), every sin which he committed with his eyes, will be washed away from his face with water, or with the last drop of water; when he washes his hands, every sin which is committed by his hands will be effaced from his hands with the water, or with the last drop of water; and when he washes his feet, every sin his feet committed will be washed away with the water, or with the last drop of water; until he finally emerges cleansed of all his sins."

The boy and his father towelled themselves dry, and left the washroom to join the busy prayer space which bustled with conversation and laughter in waiting for the prayer to begin. A tall man in a navy blue sweatshirt with the name of Maurice Richard in stylized letters strode to the boy's father and called his name.

"Jamal, how are you doing?"

"*Alhumdulillah*," his father replied. All praises are due to Allah.

His father and the man engaged in a lively discussion about an oppressive new political policy. From

what the boy understood, it was somewhere close by, but far enough to not affect them.

"It's alright; everything will be fine, insha'Allah. Whatever Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala has willed, will come to pass," His father assured the man. "Remember what His Messenger said: 'Know that if the entire nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, they would not be able to benefit you except with what Allah had already decreed for you. And if they were to gather together to harm you with anything, they would not harm you except with what Allah had already decreed against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.'"

The boy listened as the conversation quickly changed to the subject of hockey, then of how difficult it is to raise children in an age of social media, then what the man should get his wife for their anniversary on Wednesday.

Suddenly, a holy hush fell over the room as the deep voice of the *muaddhin* emanated from the front of the room and he began to recite the *adhan*, the call to prayer.

"*Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar.*" Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest.

"*Ash-hadu Allah ilaha illAllah.*" I bear witness that there is no God worthy of worship except Allah.

"*Ash-hadu anna Muhammad ar rasoolullah.*" I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

"*Hayy 'alas salah, hayy 'alal falah.*" Come to prayer, come to success.

"*Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar.*" Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest.

"*La ilaha illAllah*" There is no God but Allah.

The boy, along with the men and women in the masjid, quietly repeated each phrase after the *muaddhin*. The rich, honey-smooth recitation left the already peaceful room with a feeling of tranquility and serenity. The boy knew how calming the effect of the call to prayer could be: it was custom to recite it into the ear of a newborn baby, and his mother often made him listen to it on YouTube when he felt anxious or hyper.

Calmly, the boy joined the congregation as it lined up in neat rows, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder. They stood before God humbly, putting the day's woes and worries to the back of their head as they surrendered their minds to pray. The Imam began the prayer, and in unison, the worshippers folded their arms. They listened intently as, in a voice just as beautiful as that of the *muaddhin*, the Imam recited verses from the Quran. Then they bowed, prostrated, and rose again, moving together as one body.

Without warning, there was a loud, deafening crack at the back of the room and the Imam abruptly

stopped his recitation. For a second, the room stood still. Then, a cacophonous chaos erupted, and the peace of the room shattered with shrill shouts and the same ear-splitting cracks. The congregation broke as the people began to scatter and blindly run in haphazard directions.

The boy could not move. Every inch of the boy's body prickled fear like he was stuffed in a congested coffin of cactuses, a fear unlike any other he had never felt before. He tried to find feeling in his body, and realized that his father had clasped his hand in his own again, but he wasn't moving either. Suddenly, he felt a forceful push on his back and a strong pull on the arm attached to his father's as someone shoved the two of them to the ground. It was the man his father had been talking to before the prayer.

"Say the *shahadah*," he yelled hoarsely above the clamour.

Down below, scenes of red and fallen bodies filled the boy's eyes. Loud shrieks and screeches rang in his ears until they were all that he could hear. A numb pain spread in his hand as someone heavily trampled it. The stench of sweat, blood, and his father's musk filled his nose. But however intense these sensations, his unclear brain didn't register them as it normally would. It felt cumbersome and bulky, as if it was a hefty load in his head, and he would only be able to think if he put it down. The boy closed his eyes and vaguely wondered if he would be able to get an idea from what the newspapers would write the next day.

"And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, 'They are dead.' Rather, they are alive, but you perceive it not. And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient. Who, when disaster strikes them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the guided." (2:154-157)

01/29/2017