

# AL QALAM

M A G A Z I N E



Eid Mubarak!

Ramadan 1441  
May 2020

Volume 1

I N T H E N A M E O F G O D , T H E M O S T  
G R A C I O U S , T H E M O S T M E R C I F U L

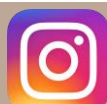


This is the first issue of Al Qalam (The Pen) magazine by Howard University's Office of the Dean of the Chapel Muslim Students' Association. We chose this name after the 68th Surah (chapter) in the Qur'an, Al Qalam, The Pen. For a beautiful explanation of some verses of the Qur'an, read Dr. Zainab Alwani's article. In this publication, Muslim students, faculty, and alumni offer their perspectives on religion, campus affairs, current events, culture, and politics, as well as share their artistic talent. We would like to thank Dr. Bernard L. Richardson, Howard University's Dean of the Chapel, for his guidance and support. Read Sultan Diego Sulayman's profile of Dean Richardson to learn more about him. We also thank Dean Richardson for chairing our Board of Advisors. We want to thank all the members of our Board of Advisors for their support and contributions. Dr. Hakim Rashid's (School of Education) article 'Blyden and Dubois on Islam' is a quick read you'll enjoy. We also want to thank Nisa Muhammad, Assistant Dean for Religious Life, for all her help in facilitating the creation of this magazine. Special thanks to our staff of writers, all our friends, and the Howard University Muslim Community. Without you, Al Qalam would not be able to exist. All praise belongs to Allah.

Ismail Allison  
Editor-in-Chief



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*Al Qalam is a student-run quarterly publication of the  
Howard University Office of the Dean of the Chapel  
Muslim Students Association.*

# The Meaning of Ramadan

by: Nur Shaina Ayers

**During the blessed month of Ramadan, the ninth month on the lunar calendar, the month when the Holy Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, Muslims all over the world commit to the total discipline of the body.**

They are called upon to re-evaluate their lives in light of Islamic guidance. As Muslims abstain from food, drink, and intimate relations between spouses from dawn till dusk during Ramadan, every part of the body observes a form of restraint. The tongue must be restrained from lies, backbiting, and gossip. The eyes must be restrained from looking at unlawful things. The hand must not touch or take anything that does not belong to it. The ears must refrain from listening to idle talk or obscene words. The feet must refrain from going to sinful places. Every part of the body observes the fast as it is a time to purify the soul, refocus attention on Allah (may He be glorified and exalted), and practice self-sacrifice.

Those who cannot fast for medical reasons, such as needing to take medication, being pregnant, or nursing a baby among others, can do other things like feeding the hungry or homeless during Ramadan. This is a joyful time for Muslims who look to reestablish and reaffirm their relationship with God.



A group of Sudanese men wait to break their fast

During this blessed month, Muslims should get into the habit of reciting and understanding the Qur'an. We are to make peace with those who have wronged us and those we have wronged, strengthen ties with family and friends, and do away with bad habits. This time given to us is to re-organize our lives in accordance with Islamic principles; from our actions to our thoughts and our feelings. There are multiple lessons we can learn and benefit from that help us during the month of Ramadan as well as throughout the entire year. We just have to take the time to reflect and understand the guidance Allah (may He be glorified and exalted) provides while we are fasting and praying. Patience, discipline, gratitude, time management, and awareness of overindulgence and excessiveness are some of the lessons to be learned.

*You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God. 2:183*





HU community celebrates Ramadan at Masjid Muhammad

**Fasting is far more than physical. It is the total commitment of the body and soul to the spirit of the fast. Ramadan should be a method of changing oneself and keeping it that way for every moment of life. May Allah bless the believers' fast.**

**Amin.**



# The Five Pillars of Islam

by: Ismail Allison

Five devotional acts, known as the Pillars of Islam, are the foundational basis of Muslim life. All prescribed within the Qur'an, the pillars provide a framework for worship and express a commitment to faith through their fulfillment. Starting with the shahâdah, the recognition of the oneness of God and Prophet Muhammad as his messenger, the next four pillars include salâh (prayer), sawm (fasting), zakât (charity), and hajj (pilgrimage). Considered obligatory for Muslims, each pillar serves a purpose in the believer's life.

The shahâdah, the testimony of faith, is to believe with certainty that there is no god nor anything worthy of worship besides Allah, Subhannahu wa Ta'ala (may He be glorified and exalted), the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all); and that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His servant and final messenger. It is the shahâdah that makes a Muslim. With this key, one can unlock the doors of an upright life and eternal bliss in the Hereafter.





Muslims performing salâh at Masjid Muhammad

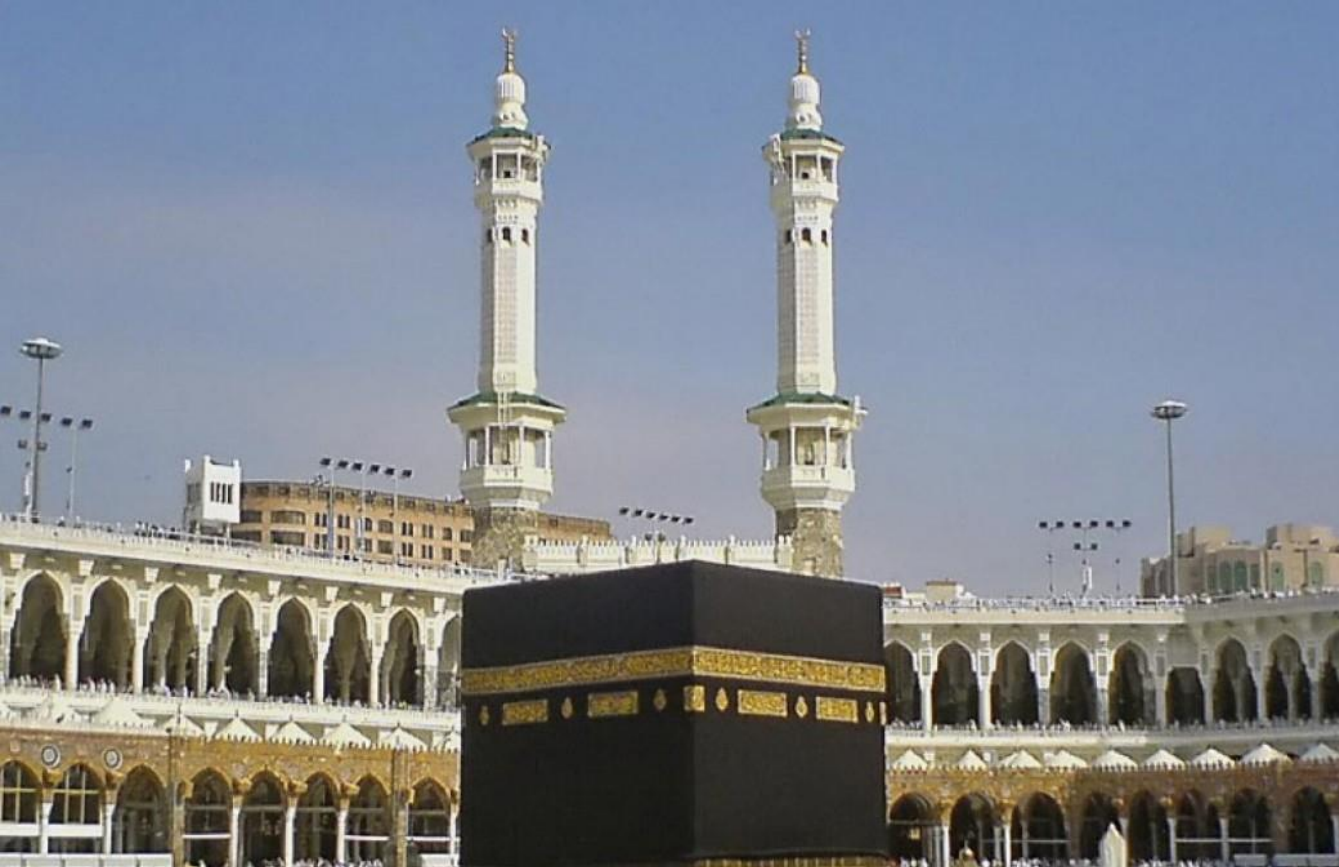
In the testimony's first part, man recognizes and submits to his Lord. He affirms that he has a Sustainer who offers him sustenance in this life and eternal bliss in the next. But what needs to be done to obtain this treasure?

The believer must recognize the final Prophet, Muhammad (upon whom be peace), love him with all his being, and follow his path; the second part of the testimony.

The second pillar is the salâh; the five daily prayers. This pillar is manifested the most in the outward daily life of the Muslim. The five prayers are at dawn, midday, afternoon, evening, and night. The prayer is a constant connection with the Lord, a refuge from the world that we take throughout the day. In this way the prayer calls us to maintain a connection with Allah, to offer thanks and supplicate Him in all states and in all phases of life, never forgetting Him

**In this way the prayer calls us to maintain a connection with Allah, to offer thanks and supplicate Him in all states and in all phases of life, never forgetting Him.**

The third pillar is the sawm, or fasting, in the month of Ramadân. This means that for the duration of this holy month, Muslims abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. In so doing, the Muslim is able to experience what it is like to be in need, and thereby humble himself, soften his heart, and offer thanks to his Lord for His blessings.



The Ka'ba in Mecca. This is the destination of hajj pilgrims.

As prayer does in a day, fasting takes time out of the year to remind Muslims of Allah and strengthen their connection with Him.

The fourth pillar is the zakât, or almsgiving. Muslims are required to pay a percentage of their wealth to the poor. Almsgiving provides necessary aid to those feeling the tightness of poverty and deprivation, as well as strengthens the sense of unity among Muslims.

The fifth pillar is the hajj, or pilgrimage to the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca. Once in their lifetime, provided they have the means to do so, Muslims are required to journey to the holiest shrine of Islam. Every year, millions enter into the lands of the Prophet and perform the same rites done since the time of Abraham (upon whom be peace). Undertaking this sacred journey, pilgrims shed all worldly rank and difference. All are clad in the traditional white sheets, united in their absolute submission to Allah

**The five pillars are what keeps the house of Islam within the believer standing. It is by adhering to them that mankind ascends from the lowest to the best of forms, as he was created by his Lord.**



# "Taught Humanity That Which They Knew Not"

by: Dr. Zainab Alwani



A calligraphic representation of the first verse of the surah

**“Read! In the name of your Lord who created: (1), He created man from a clinging form. (2) Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One (3) who taught by [means of] the pen, (4), who taught man what he did not know. (5) No! [But] indeed, man transgresses (6) when he thinks he is self-sufficient: (7) Indeed, to your Lord is the return. (96:8)**

The beginning of the first surah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) starts with the word “read.” This foundational concept is an invitation to all people, without exception, to have access to the Qur'an by reading, contemplating, searching, exploring and gaining knowledge through this divine revelation. It is not only a book of commandments, but a comprehensive guide to teach us how to learn with humility. These ayat, or verses, provide a framework for humanity on how to acquire, apply and evaluate knowledge. It contemplates the following questions: Who is the source of knowledge? Who is the reader? What should we read? How do we read? And how do we evaluate our reading and its impact on our reality?

This surah, or chapter, coherently defines the relationship between God as the Creator, humanity, and the universe. God is the source of the Ultimate Truth, and knowledge gained without His guidance is misguided and empty.



"Say, He is Allah, the One"  
- Qur'an 112:1

**The epistemological aspect of tawhid is the belief in the absolute and pure oneness of God Almighty as the Creator, Maker and Everlasting Sustainer. God has entrusted humanity as stewards on earth; and as a result, tazkiya, or purification, manifests itself in life as the incremental purification process for mankind.**

The goal of this process of constant purification is to build a well-balanced, "purified" personality that draws on thinking, action, and behavior to enhance harmonious relationships with the Creator, humanity, and the natural world. When a Muslim, by virtue of submission to tawhid, is committed to a lifetime of striving in the way of God to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong, then he/she fulfills the purpose of humankind's creation as a steward. The foremost quality of mind and character that flows from this commitment is a state of constant vigilance and awareness of the presence of God, which is known as taqwa.

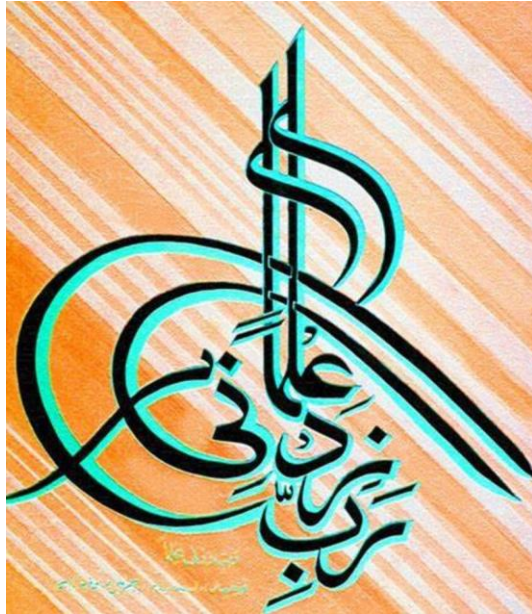
Tazkiya motivates us to gain knowledge and wisdom in order to become qualified to establish 'umran. Umran – another important concept in the Qur'an – is a human commitment to God, who has entrusted us to inhabit, cultivate, build and take care of our home, the earth. The Qur'an states, "He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon."

**Humanity is equipped to interact with the universe in a way that actualizes the duties of steward and establishes the feelings of closeness and harmony between the human and the universe.**

Therefore, we are responsible and will be held accountable for how we maintain this world's balance, peace, tranquility, fairness, justice, and sustainability. These values can be used as a measurement or criteria by which human behavior is judged. It teaches us how to evaluate our actions through religion and science, and obligates us to fulfill those rights as our duty as righteous stewards. These basic duties build up our moral character as both individuals and as a collective community. That is the meaning of 'ibada (devotion or worship), which begins by an active commitment to one's submission to the Creator and then transforms into a dynamic and ongoing act.

**“Read! In the name of your Lord who created**

God made it possible for human beings to expend their energies making sense of the physical world, harnessing its power for the common good, uncovering its laws, and developing methodologies for dealing with revelation.



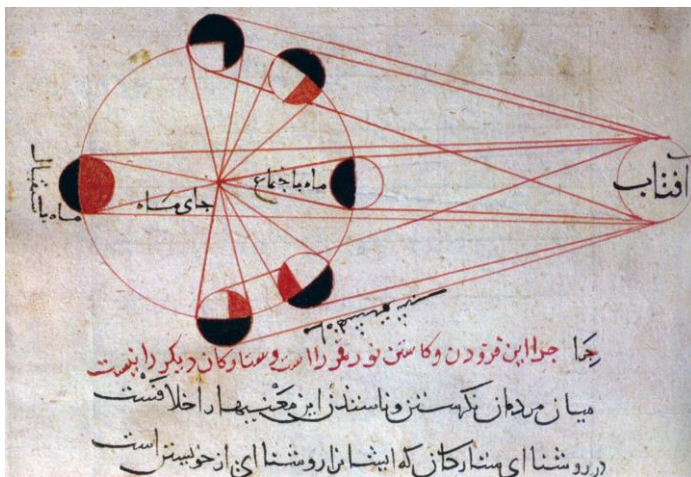
**"Lord, Increase me in knowledge!" - Qur'an 20:114**

**Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One (3),  
who taught by [means of] the pen (4), who taught man what  
he did not know. (96:5).**

The Qur'an guides us to the marvels and secrets of the physical world, while the mysteries of the world lead us back to understanding the Qur'an; a circular reference that perpetuates the contemplation of our Creator through His creation – including ourselves. We must appreciate how the two movements that signal the interaction contrast and complement each other. This methodology is called “the two combined readings.” The first reading refers to reading revelation – the Qur'an – for an understanding of the physical world, its laws and principles. The second reading is of the physical world to appreciate and recognize the value of revelation. The purpose of reading revelation is to apply general “key principles” to specific situations and link the absolute to the relative, as far as our capabilities allow. The reader in all cases is the human being, God’s trustee on earth, guided by strong faith and understanding of the revelation on one hand, and his/her appreciation of the laws and behavior of the cosmos on the other.

**When we think about the discoveries and innovations that came out of the Islamic Golden Age, we can say that many of them were inspired by the Qur'an, with Allah's guidance and wisdom.**





A diagram of the phases of the moon by 11th century Muslim polymath al-Biruni



Scholars conversing in an Abbasid library

The Muslims discovered Algebra by deconstructing the concept of inheritance as explained in Surah An-Nisaa, in ayahs 11, 12 and 176. The Muslims' innovations in astronomy were inspired by contemplating the concept of the qibla (direction of prayer) and the beginnings and ends of the lunar months, such as Ramadan and Dhul Hijjah. Concerning the moons, God states in Surah al-Baqara, ayah 189,

**“They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say, ‘They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage.’**

These discoveries created the revolutionary social movement that promoted the advancement of knowledge for humanity. Gaining knowledge and passing on knowledge is a primary investment source that has proven to build vibrant societies focused on holistic learning and education that discovers the world by seeking knowledge of its Creator. Knowledge of medicine, science, engineering, math, religion, social sciences, law and many other subjects is within itself knowledge of the Creator. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to invest in educating ourselves and our children by reading in the name of our Sustainer.

Mu’adh ibn Anas reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Whoever imparts knowledge will have the reward of whoever acted upon it, without detracting from the reward of one who acted.” (Sunan Ibn Mājah 240) Let us be those who impart knowledge and act upon it, perpetuating the contemplation of our Creator and striving to find our purest selves. As a result, we would gain the fulfillment of knowing that we are bringing humanity to cultivate wisdom and humility, rather than arrogance and selfishness.



A man of his time and a pioneer of Islamic and Qur'anic thought, Dr. Zainab Alwani's father Dr. Taha Jabir Al-Alwani lived his life serving humanity.

# The Final Words of Dr. Taha Jabir Al Alwani

**Before departing this world on March 4, 2016, my father wrote the piece “I Am Muslim.” It is essentially a mission statement for Muslims around the world — a message to uphold the true, untainted values of Islam.**

**He dreamt of a peaceful world where people lived together as one, undivided by the vile forces of conflict, greed, hate, bigotry, ignorance and selfishness..**

I sanctify justice, celebrate freedom, and honor humanity. While demonstrating gentleness with the weak, I remind the strong that there is always someone who is stronger than him. I advise the rich to fulfill the rights of the poor, while I remind the poor that the rich among them have been entrusted with God's wealth to fulfill the rights of the poor.

I love goodness and gentleness and reject evil. I invite to piety and reject violence. I cling to the rope of guidance and uphold the truth. I fight lies and deceit and forbid corruption. I seek reconciliation to the extent possible. I yearn for peace and despise war. I love humility and strive for a good life.



Salam - Peace

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**I stand in awe of death, yet I believe that this is a bridge I must cross, to cross from a fleeting life to one that is eternal. I desire the best ending and seek refuge in God from the contrary. I love heaven and detest hellfire. I seek security and hate instability. I abhor hatred. I am not profane, destructive or corrupt.**

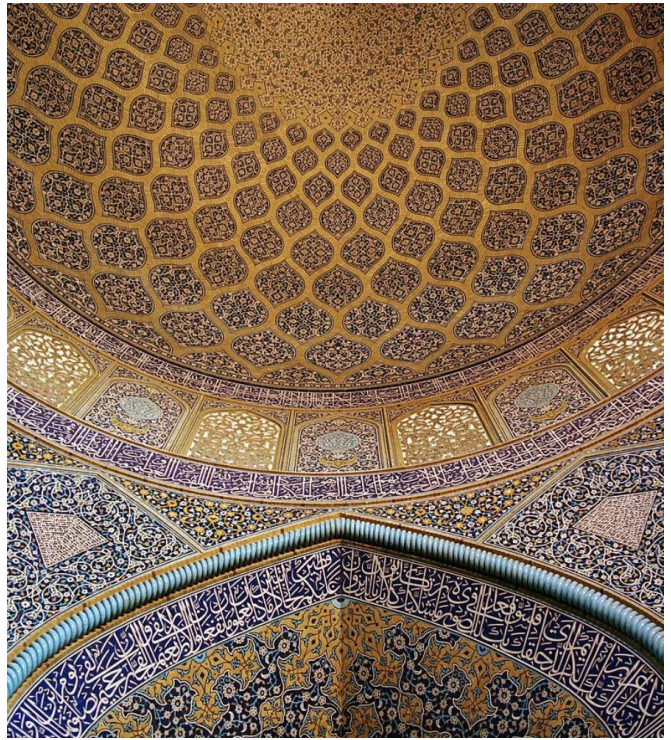




One of Allah's names is al-Wadud; the  
Loving

My lineage extends to Adam and Eve, for Adam is my father and Eve my mother. All of humanity are my sisters and brothers. I do not disdain, betray or humiliate a single human being. Rather, I strive to guide human beings, light their path and walk with them along the path to heaven. I seek to be a roadblock between them and falling into hellfire.

I love the universe and belong to it. I love all my neighbors in the universe, including its trees, plants, rocks, animals, mountains and rivers. God, most Majestic, has created me from this earth. To this earth, He will return me and from this earth, He will restore me once again. To this earth, I belong and for its cultivation, I call.



My desire is to elevate the truth; my goal is to spread peace and security in it. My means is to struggle with my own soul in order for peace to be realized and security to prevail. I invite to God, to Whom is my ultimate return. Peace is my objective. Security is my desire. Terrorism is my enemy. Conflict is my adversary. Inner peace is my pursuit. Do you recognize me? Do you know on this earth anyone who parallels this description?

# I am Muslim.

# COVID19: Its Impact on the Howard Community

by: Keith Brown

**In the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Howard University Muslim Students Association would like to pray for the individuals and families affected. We send our condolences to the families who have loved ones that have passed due to this virus and we pray that Allah forgives and accepts them. “Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un We belong to God, and to Him shall we return.)”- The Holy Qur’an-2:156.**

We would also like to thank the healthcare professionals and essential workers who have sacrificed for the betterment of society. Thank you to Howard University’s President Dr. Wayne A. I. Frederick, the administration, staff, and our own Dr. Bernard Richardson, Dean of the Chapel for your heroic efforts during this unique time; you are truly appreciated.



HU President Wayne Frederick speaking at a press conference

On March 23, 2020, Howard University made the transition to full online instruction, following the World Health Organization’s declaration of a global emergency, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. At the time, there were only 3,300 positive cases reported in the U.S.; an absolutely minuscule amount in comparison to the 840,625 cases reported by the CDC on April 22. Naturally, there were a lot of challenges that came as a result of abruptly shutting down a university with an enrollment of more than 10,000 students. Especially with a large number of Howard students away in different locations during the spring break. There was confusion, fear, anger, shock, and many other emotions felt in this situation. Some predicted that chaos would erupt and that things would become gravely worse. Alhamdulillah (praise belongs to God), that was not the case. We have the Bison Spirit! We did it. That’s good news.



The bad news is that unfortunately, there were more challenges that we would face. There were financial aid concerns, housing challenges, and registration issues. The Class of 2020 commencement was canceled, alternative spring break trips were canceled, and community gatherings and events were called off..

**It's a new day. Our ummah (community) must celebrate jummahs (friday congregational prayers) at home, practice Ramadan in isolation, and share what used to be communal iftars (fast-breaking dinners) with only our family. Although it has been tough times for us, the effects of social distancing have also been rewarding.**

Most of us are able to spend lots of time with our family and loved ones; we have more time to pray and be in the presence of Allah. We can use technology to stay connected, we can find new hobbies and talents, we can focus on self-reflection and we can slow down our everyday lives to take a look at the world around us.



The quad remains empty...



Signs of the pandemic's impact are everywhere...

This entire experience has been abundantly humbling and gratifying. If there is one thing that this pandemic has shown us, it is that we as a people know how to adapt greatly. It is in these times that we must band together and unite stronger than ever before. Let us show love, do what is possible to serve others, and be the light in this world that Allah has created us to be. May Allah protect us and help us! As-Salaam Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu - May Peace and the Blessings of God be upon you.



# Dean Richardson: A Friend of the Muslims

by: Sultan Diego Sulayman

The year is 1993. Bill Clinton is president, Nelson Mandela wins the Nobel Peace Prize, Dallas wins the Super Bowl and the male group Shai, students from Howard University, has another hit, Comforter. That's also the year Dr. Bernard Richardson, a Howard alum, becomes Howard University's Dean of the Chapel. He surprised many when he had a reading of the Qur'an during his installation.

Dean Richardson has always been a friend to the Muslims. In 1994 he appointed Imam Johari Abdul Malik, the first Muslim chaplain at any university or college. In Dean Richardson's mind, he was just following the path laid by the chapel's first dean, Dr. Howard Thurman, who saw the value of interfaith activities.

The Dean of the Chapel coordinates the wide array of ministries sought by students and their parents, faculty, staff, and the community-at-large: directs and participates in religious services and public programs, and serves as the liaison between the University and religious organizations, according to the HU Chapel website.



Dean Richardson does all of that and more. He is known for many things to many people. If you have a problem, he has the answer or will find someone who does. He started the Alternative Spring Break program that takes over a thousand students across the country and around the world to serve needy communities. His office organizes the Jummah prayer service every Friday that brings well-known imams, scholars, and sheikhs to the campus that change students' lives with their words of wisdom. He also makes sure students have a place to pray on campus. He is a phenomenal aid to the success of our Muslim Student Association. Under his leadership, Nisa Muhammad was hired as Assistant Dean of Religious Life. Since then, our organization has grown and we've done amazing programs. This once nearly lifeless organization even won the Bison Ball Religious Org of the Year Award (2019).

# **Dr. Fatimah Jackson becomes the first African American woman ever to receive the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award**

**by: Jamie Triplin and Imani Pope-Johns Share**



Fatimah Jackson, Ph.D., a professor of biology and the director of the W. Montague Cobb Research Laboratory at Howard University, is the recipient of the 2020 Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award. She is the first woman of African descent to receive this prestigious award from the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA)..

“It is a great privilege to receive the news about being awarded the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award,” said Dr. Jackson. Each year, AAPA presents the achievement award to a scholar who has demonstrated a lifetime of contributions and distinguished service to the field of Physical Anthropology. Jackson will receive the award in April at AAPA’s annual meeting in Los Angeles. Dr. Jackson received her bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate degrees with distinction in all subjects from Cornell University. She focuses her research on the study of African human genetics; human-plant coevolution, particularly the influence of phytochemicals on human metabolic effects and evolutionary processes; and in population biological substructures in peoples of African descent.



**“Scholars and scientists often work in semi-isolated environments and we are unaware of the impact our research can have on the public. I am extremely honored to have my lifelong dedication to the advancement of the African American community through anthropological and biological research receive profound recognition,” said Dr. Jackson.**

Grounded in emerging molecular anthropology, her earliest work focused on the ways in which molecular evidence can reveal and retrace complex patterns of ancestry, with a particular focus on African diasporic populations in which historical documentation is often absent.

Through this line of research, Dr. Jackson has provided a critical gaze on anthropology's own history of "race science" and classification. As Dr. Jackson's career continued to develop, she has brought her keen perspective on issues related to the co-variants of health and chronic disease.

She is recognized for developing ethnogenetic layering as a computational tool to identify human micro ethnic groups in complex heterogeneous populations and their differential expressions of health disparities. Trained as a human biologist, Dr. Jackson has published extensively in such journals as Human Biology, Biochemical Medicine and Metabolic Biology, the American Journal of Human Biology, and the Journal of the National Medical Association, among others.

Reprinted from Howard University Newsroom

*Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding. 39:9*



# From Under the Tyranny

by: A'isha Taha



The Sudanese flag flies at a demonstration

April 2019 represented the most hopeful moments in Sudan's uprising that began in December 2018. For the first time after 30 years of President Omar al-Bashir's oppressive rule, the Sudanese nation saw glimpses of a country in line with their true values and culture. What started as protests against rising fuel and bread prices turned into a powerful, unified revolution demanding Bashir's resignation. After months of persistence, protestors finally reached the military headquarters where the famous sit-in was staged. For the protestors, the sit-in represented the freedom that once seemed impossible under Bashir's rule.

Non-violent demonstrations broke out in the city of Atbara in December 2018, which quickly turned into an uprising against then-President Omar al-Bashir and his government. For months, demonstrators refused to let go of their demands and the anti-government protests began to spread rapidly across the country. On April 6, 2019, demonstrators reached the military headquarters after former President Bashir declared a national state of emergency and deployed security forces across the country. April 6th had great significance for the movement as it is the anniversary of the 1985 uprising that overthrew President Jaafar Nimeiri from his punitive rule,

More than 800,000 people gathered at the military headquarters, to voice their love for their country. The headquarters soon became the heart and soul of the demonstrations; for two months it was home to the protestors. The unity and solidarity were unparalleled; the sit-in was filled with kindness and altruism.



"Solidarity is stronger than bullets."



"Smile, you're at the sit-in"

In the eyes of the protestors, this was the Sudan they'd been deprived of for the past 30 years. It was also the "Sudan" that Malcolm X described in the Pittsburgh Courier. "Their hospitality is unmatched anywhere, I felt at heaven and home there." The newfound optimism brought an emergence of art and music from the sit-in; protestors were singing and cheering for the miracle they'd witnessed there. The inspiration that the sit-in offered was not confined to Sudan, the Sudanese diaspora around the world voiced their support with art and music.

There were many previous demonstrations in Sudan, but this by far remains the most powerful. Its tenacity stemmed from the values practiced during the sit-in, the same values that were repressed under Bashir's rule. There was no sense of isolation; people were sympathetic, supportive, and compassionate. This sit-in demonstrated many of the values that Sudan held as a country - strength, bravery, solidarity, community, and dedication to freedom, justice, and peace.

