

ILS DIGEST

A Quarterly Dive into Books, Publishing, and Literary Treasures

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Portrait: Sheikh Abd al-Hamid al-Kishk

Featuring contributions from:

Abdul Hai Zaiti Athirah Hannaan Fuad Wan Athilah Shaykh Ali Ihsan Hammuda



“BismiLlāhi al-Raḥmāni al-Raḥīm”

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

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Umm Al-Dunya

Reflections from My Recent Visit to Cairo: From Glory to Ruin

By Abdul Hai

Egypt is frequently referred to as the “Umm al-Dunya,” (mother of the World) a land many regard as the cradle of civilisation. Egyptians of all faiths appear to take great pride in this designation. There exists an unspoken, almost palpable longing in the very atmosphere of Egypt to return to its former glory. I, too, share in that longing, even for me, and for many Muslims.

Egypt is indeed the Mother of the World, but with one essential qualification: Egypt can only truly claim this title because of its Islamic civilisation.

Although I have visited Egypt several times, I had never before felt compelled to write about it. To me, Egypt has always been beyond verbal expression, its wonders defying the limitations of

language. However, this visit proved to be different, and it is this very difference that I hope these pages will succeed in conveying to the reader.

The sun seemed to blaze with pure fury, and the ground upon which the Egyptians walked appeared to weep in silence. What, then, has happened to this Mother of the World?

Before I proceed with her story, one point must be made clear: the righteous individuals of Egypt, past and present remain outside the scope of these observations. It is they, through their solitary prayers and supplications, who continue to keep her afloat.

Despite its immense historical legacy and captivating past, contemporary Egypt has become, in many ways, a soulless entity. It is as if the Firawn has returned, observing every socio-political movement with suspicion. There remains little space to breathe freely or to call upon a saviour. Today, Egypt appears to long for the West, while actively neglecting the favour bestowed upon it by Allah. Islam, for many, has been reduced to a cultural garment, something to be worn outwardly while its teachings are regarded as an unfortunate obligation rather than a guiding force.

The mosques cry out for worshippers, yet the marketplaces resonate with songs of heedlessness and distraction. When one asks a wandering Egyptian about Islam and his relationship to it, he may respond with a mix of pity and thunderous rhetoric. Yet, deep down, he

knows all too well that Islam has become, for him and many, more of a social burden than a spiritual belonging. I have observed with concern how, from the highest levels to the everyday experience, Egypt's religious identities and symbolism are increasingly being replaced by a focus on cultural and touristic significance. These sacred sites have become mere moments to be captured, while their profound meanings and symbolic

identities are gradually being forgotten.

When Amr ibn al-As conquered Egypt, his mission was to ignite the light of faith, *īmān*, in the hearts of its people. The places he first established, so that the glory of Allah might be proclaimed, now hear only the footsteps of a half-dressed, olive-skinned tourist, who pauses to wonder why this site bears the name of the Mosque of Amr ibn al-As.



The author sitting by the Faiyum Oasis.



The front gate of the 'Amr ibn Al-As Mosque, Old Cairo, Egypt, photographed by the author.

One of the most significant works in Islamic jurisprudence, “Kitāb al-Umm,” was written by the esteemed Imam Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī. He taught this monumental text within the very walls of that mosque, leaning against one of its pillars. Today, that same spot is where European couples pose for their idealised oriental photographs, unaware of the scholarly legacy upon which they tread. And still, it is as though the cry of Amr ibn al-As echoes from every corner, lamenting the loss of the mosque’s spiritual essence.

There is no doubt that Egypt has been, and will continue to be, a land deeply rooted in

Islam. Its history is profoundly intertwined with Islamic scholarship and intellectual contributions of such magnitude that few other nations can rival them. However, the trajectory of its people appears to have taken a different turn in recent times.

There seems to be a conscious acceptance of the orientalist narrative concerning the Muslim world and its historical background. This narrative has been internalised wholeheartedly and is clearly reflected in the everyday discourse of Egyptians across all social strata. Islam is now often associated with the poor and the marginalised, and it

appears that these communities increasingly practise Islam as a marker of lower social identity.

As a consequence of this perceived class-based association, Islamic historical figures and their resting places receive little to no attention or preservation. In stark contrast, the monuments associated with Pharaohs receive the highest levels of national care and promotion.

During my visit to the graves of esteemed scholars such as Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, and Imām Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī al-Shāfi‘ī, I found their burial sites neglected and poorly maintained. I am not

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suggesting that graves should receive attention beyond what the noble Sharī'ah permits. Rather, I am highlighting the disparity in reverence: the significant contributions of these great scholars are scarcely acknowledged, whereas the monuments of the Pharaohs are revered and preserved as national treasures.

This blessed ummah is indebted to Imām al-Bukhārī for his monumental work, and it was Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī who fulfilled this debt on behalf of the ummah through his commentary on al-Bukhārī's compilation. Yet, the resting place of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī has now become a site where people discard unwanted items, an unfortunate reflection of misplaced priorities.

Egypt is, without doubt, a secular state, despite its occasional claims to adherence to the Sharī'ah, claims which must be taken with a degree of scepticism. The nation's celebrated figures and national heroes are predominantly those who have openly and proudly championed secularism as the framework for governance. Public figures such as the influential intellectual Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and the renowned literary figure Najīb Maḥfūz are prominently displayed in the public sphere, serving as indicators of the country's ideological orientation and future trajectory.



(Above) The pillar Imam As-Shafi'i leaned on as he taught Al-'Umm. (Below) The burial sites of esteemed Islamic scholars.

However, this secularism is not a product of indigenous Egyptian culture or identity; rather, it is largely a replication of Western models. There is a noticeable intellectual lethargy in the uncritical adoption of these foreign paradigms, prompting serious questions regarding the intellectual autonomy and self-determination of the Egyptian elite.

I have met many Egyptians and formed several friendships, some of whom may read this and question the sincerity of my affection for Egypt and its people. However, I assure them that my love for Egypt and its people is both genuine and sincere, and it is rooted in the teachings of Islam. The relationship of our Master Muḥammad, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, with Māriyah al-Qibṭiyyah, an Egyptian Coptic Christian woman who was gifted to the Prophet, necessitates that we honour and love the people and land of Egypt.

My criticisms, and the observations I have expressed, are made within the framework of that love and should be understood as such.

I began this reflection by referring to Egypt as the "Mother of the World," and I continue to uphold this belief. However, as her children, it is incumbent upon us to reconsider our conduct and our role in relation to her. This role must be guided by Islam and its principles, and we must earnestly seek ways to overcome the obstacles that hinder our efforts to re-establish Egypt as the true "Mother of the World."

As Muslims, our first task is to free ourselves from the artificial identities imposed upon our consciousness by the West. Secondly, we must re-examine Egypt's history through an Islamic lens. Thirdly, we must regard one another as a unified body. Finally, our collective identity must be firmly rooted in Islam. Only then can Egypt truly fulfil her role as the "Mother of the World."



About the Author

Abdul Hai is a book lover, bookbinder., book restorer, and leisure writer. His other interests include book collecting, woodwork, gardening, and fishing. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Social Science and a Certificate of Higher Education, both from Birkbeck, University of London. also holds a Master's degree from the University of Wolverhampton. He is very passionate about sharing his reading experiences, especially on topics related to Islam.

The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists: A Personal Reflection of a Student

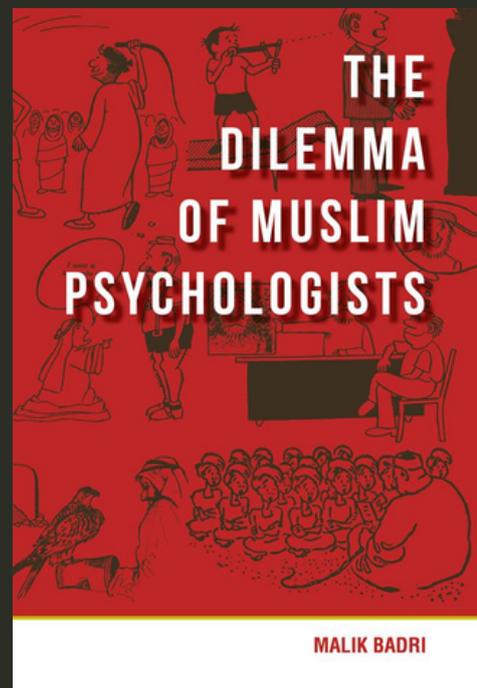
By Hannaan Fuad

When I finished my high school and was about to apply for university, I was told to take a psychometry test to better see which field of study I lean towards more. This is so because I took Science Stream in high school, but was determined to further my study in the field of humanities or art. After taking the test, the test administrator was rather surprised to see that my score in the humanities/art field was relatively low compared to other people's test score, seeing as how determined I was to change my field of study. Granted, my score for the scientific field was lower, yet the fact still stands that compared to how sure I was about my decision, the test results seem inadequate to back my decision.

The fact of the matter is that I could not answer truthfully to the questions in the test. I kept choosing the lower number on the scale to answer the questions rather than the higher number. To illustrate, the questions on the test would be to assess your aptitude or inclination towards something, and you would have to choose a number on a scale of one to five to show how inclined you are to it.

Now the reason that I couldn't choose the higher number to indicate my strong aptitude to questions related to the art/humanities field is because it often contradicts with my belief. For example, one of the questions that I had was asking me if I would rather become a singer and inspire people with my music than become a doctor and help save lives. Naturally, my answer leaned more towards becoming a doctor even though I have no desire to become one. But faced with the choice between the two, of course becoming a doctor was preferable than a singer which is an occupation that does not align with my faith and religion.

Psychology—which psychometry falls under—according to Malik Badri has taken over the position of religion in the West. They might say that they have no religion, but seeing as how much they revere and rely on the science of the mind to understand mankind, it is not absurd to say that they have subconsciously subscribed to a new belief system that dictates the way of thinking for many people in the West.



In Malik Badri's book "The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists", he posed many such questions that require us to think critically of where we stand as Muslims who seek to understand the human mind via the lens of modern psychology. The question of utilising an unadapted psychometry test that was originally created by a non-Muslim for non-Muslims as a measurement tool to measure out students' aptitude was one of them. Badri said, "for such Western psychological tests to be of any help in Muslim countries, a good deal of adaptation and standardization must be carried out."

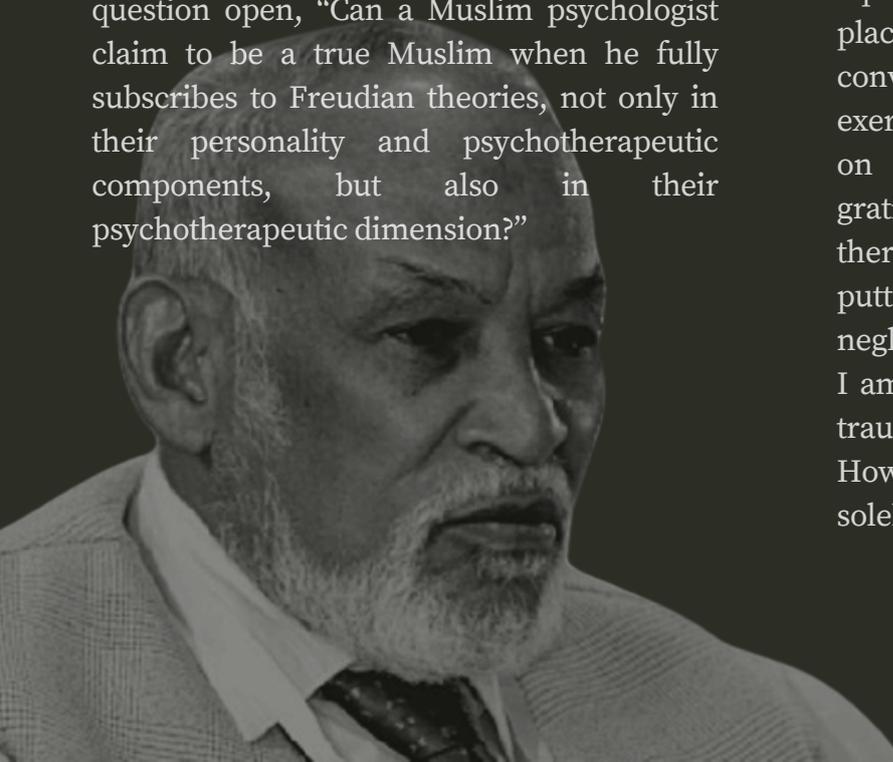
Another question that he raised was regarding the Freudian psychoanalysis and how it has pervaded the scene of modern psychology to such a degree that some Muslim psychologists have now wholly subscribed to it. Though Freud may have lost some of his popularity today, he is still quite influential in a lot of humanities field, notwithstanding literary studies, in which I personally see that his point of view is still a treasured view in which students view from to understand literary texts. Badri left this question open, "Can a Muslim psychologist claim to be a true Muslim when he fully subscribes to Freudian theories, not only in their personality and psychotherapeutic components, but also in their psychotherapeutic dimension?"

Surely, the views of a man who reduced religion to "neurotic symptoms of the individual" and gave much importance to sex in the personal development of an individual should be in contrast with a Muslim's instinct regarding the true nature of Islam, in which Islam is not merely "neurotic symptoms" but is a way of life that encompasses all aspects of reality, seen or unseen, and holds man's soul as the most precious?

Here, I would like to quote another line from the book written by Dr Muhyiddin Abd al-Shakoor in the preface of the first edition of the book:

"ONE BEGINS TO SEE THAT ANY VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH DOES NOT ASSIST THE INDIVIDUAL IN UNDERSTANDING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS CREATOR, IN THE ABSOLUTE SENSE CANNOT BE TRULY THERAPEUTIC."

A framework that does not recognize the place of the soul and its relationship with its Creator in its equation is surely a faulty equation that simply satisfies the part in place of the whole. In a similar vein, conventional therapy has also become an exercise of modern psychology that operates on satisfaction of the parts rather than gratification of the whole. Conventional therapy now focuses on validating feelings by putting trauma at the centre stage and neglecting us as active agents in our own life. I am not denying the tragic effects that real traumatic events can have on people. However, the trend nowadays is to focus solely on "what was done to me."



Mehmudah Rahman accurately writes about it in her [blog](#) titled “Why Conventional Therapy May Fail” written for the International Students of Islamic Psychology, “Conventional therapy sees the mind as the problem and the mind as the solution. But we are more than minds. We are souls. And no therapy can truly heal what aches deep within unless it brings us closer to the One who created that soul in the first place.”

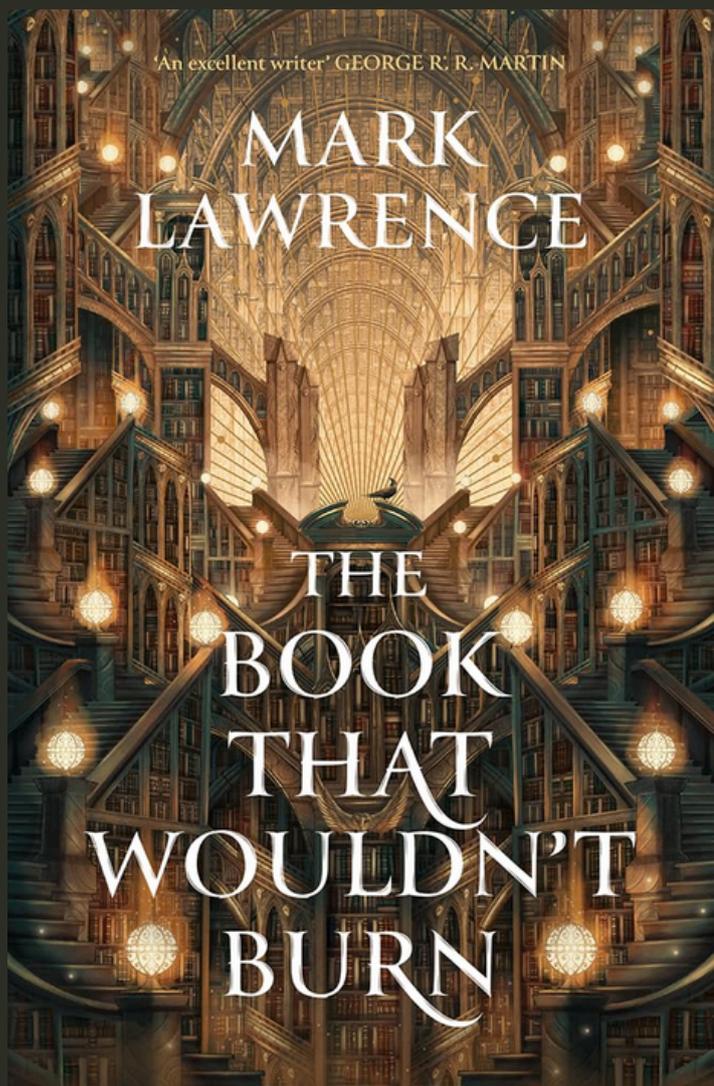
Therefore, “The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists” aptly points out the way in which modern psychology sets aside the role of the soul in the well-being of an individual, and thus it is on the Muslims to think critically before subscribing to beliefs and practices that contradict what Islam teaches. The most important take away reminder from the book is when Badri stresses on the importance of Muslim psychologists rejecting the secularisation of modern psychology by creating our own practical framework that fully aligns with our faith.

Hannaan Fuad is an English Language and Literature undergraduate at IIUM. Her main interest is speculative fiction and its exploration of socio-political issues, especially themes of tragedy, spectacle, nationalism, and resistance. She seeks to understand how Islamization of Knowledge can enhance literary studies beyond simple classification.



Muslim child psychologists who, uncritically, follow a Western model of child rearing can cause parents to feel guilty and children to develop an un-Islamic attitude to parenthood.





-out history, censorship has been a tool wielded by empires, governments, and ideologies to control narratives and shape collective memory. Nowhere is this more evident than in the historical erasure of Muslim contributions to global knowledge, particularly through acts like the burning of the Library of Alexandria—a symbolic and literal loss of intellectual heritage. Lawrence’s novel echoes this loss, portraying a dystopian world where truth is hidden, access to books is controlled, and dangerous ideas are buried beneath the illusion of order.

This essay argues that “The Book That Wouldn’t Burn” offers a fictional but powerful commentary on the censorship of knowledge, one that resonates with real-world Western suppression and distortion of Islamic intellectual history.

In “The Book That Wouldn’t Burn”, Mark Lawrence envisions a vast, ancient library governed by a system that restricts access to

Ink of the Scholars, Fire of the Censors: An Islamic Critique of The Book That Wouldn't Burn

By Wan Athilah

In “The Book That Wouldn’t Burn”, Mark Lawrence crafts a haunting narrative about the power and peril of knowledge, set within an infinite library where truth is both preserved and manipulated. At its core, the novel interrogates who gets to decide what knowledge survives and what is silenced — a question with deep historical roots. Through-

knowledge and curates historical memory. The library, seemingly infinite and intelligent, is not a neutral archive—it actively participates in the selection, omission, and suppression of information. This is most clearly illustrated through the existence of “The Mechanism”, an unseen force that controls who may enter the library’s levels

and which books they are allowed to read. Characters like Livira and Evar discover that many books are either inaccessible or have been altered, and that knowledge of past events—especially wars and societal shifts—has been fragmented or deliberately hidden. Livira's gradual realization that her education in the Dust was full of gaps and distortions reflects the theme that history, when controlled, becomes propaganda.

Lawrence's depiction of censorship extends beyond book bans to a broader critique of systems that determine what people are allowed to remember. The novel suggests that such control over knowledge leads to a society where the truth is not only buried, but also replaced with manufactured narratives designed to maintain power. As Livira herself observes, the danger lies not just in what is burned, but in what is allowed to survive.

The destruction of the Library of Alexandria remains one of history's most enduring symbols of lost knowledge.

Though mythologized and debated by historians, the event represents a deeper truth: that the erasure of knowledge—whether by fire, neglect, or conquest—has lasting consequences on civilization. The library once housed texts from various cultures, including early Islamic, Persian, Indian, and Greek sources, many of which informed later advancements in science, philosophy, and literature. Its loss reflects not just the physical disappearance of scrolls and books, but the strategic dismantling of intellectual diversity. This parallels the selective preservation of knowledge in “The Book That Wouldn't Burn”, where the library, despite appearing eternal, becomes a tool of forgetting.



Illustration of the fire that destroyed parts of the Library of Alexandria during the war between Cleopatra and her brother in 47 BC. Source: Historia National Geographic

About the Author

Wan Athilah is an undergraduate English Language and Literature student at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She is interested in creative writing, literary analysis, and thematic patterns. In her free time, she enjoys reading, researching literary themes, writing, attending workshops, and exploring creative expression.



Just as Lawrence’s characters question who decides which truths are accessible, the destruction of Alexandria’s library forces us to ask what histories have been excluded from modern narratives. Notably, much of what Western civilization credits as its own—mathematics, astronomy, medicine—owes significant debts to Muslim scholars such as Al-Khwarizmi, Avicenna, and Alhazen, whose contributions were often suppressed, mistranslated, or claimed without attribution during the European Enlightenment. Lawrence’s fictional library, in this sense, mirrors the real-world marginalization of Muslim intellectual heritage through the control, distortion, or annihilation of sources.

Mark Lawrence’s “The Book That Wouldn’t Burn” serves as a powerful allegory for the politics of knowledge—how it is preserved, distorted, or erased to serve those in power. Through its depiction of a controlled library where access is restricted and truth is manipulated, the novel reveals the dangers of censorship not only in fiction but in history itself. This theme finds clear resonance in the real-world loss of the Library of Alexandria and the broader historical suppression of Muslim intellectual contributions by Western powers.

Just as Livira and Evar question the reliability of the narratives they have inherited, readers are urged to reexamine whose voices have been silenced in our own history books. In a time where misinformation and cultural erasure persist, Lawrence’s novel reminds us that while books can be burned, truth—if fought for—will find a way to survive. Reclaiming that truth, especially for marginalized communities like the Muslim world, is both a literary and historical responsibility.

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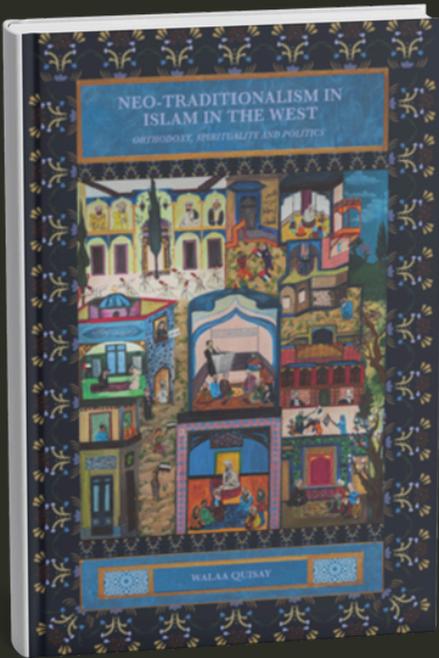
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Neo-Traditionalism in Islam in the West: Orthodoxy, Spirituality and Politics by Walaa Quisay

The book critically examines the rise of neo-traditionalist Islamic movements in the United States and the United Kingdom. Drawing on immersive fieldwork and ethnography, Quisay theorizes neo-traditionalist Islam as “an orientation that emphasizes the primacy of a notion of ‘tradition’ and sees a moral and political imperative in its resurrection.” She traces how religious authority is produced and disseminated by prominent white American and British shuyukh such as Hamza Yusuf, Abdal Hakim Murad, and Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, and the mostly brown and Black student

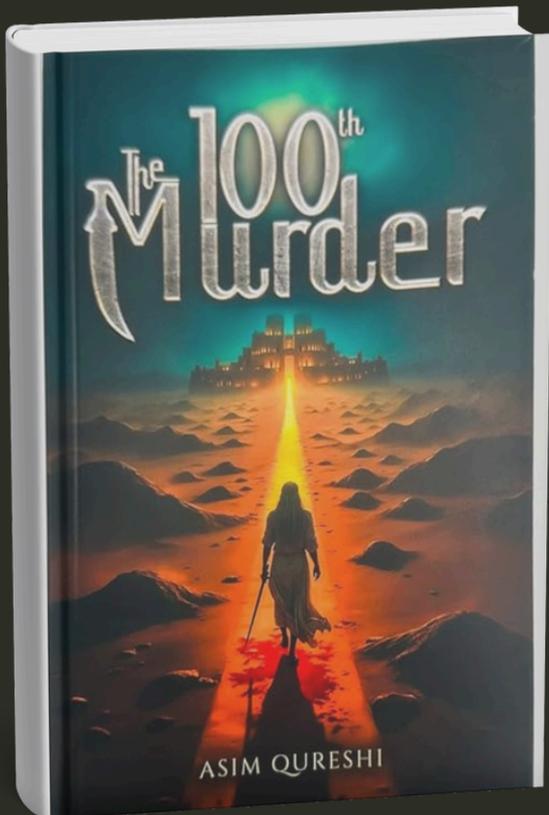
“seekers” who gravitate toward them. In so doing, she presents a layered portrait of neo-traditionalist discourses that advocate for spiritual return and a revival of the sacred while entangled within the racial, gendered, and geopolitical dynamics of a post-9/11 world.

Shadows of Strangers by Osman Latiff

She was always this way—a quiet strength beneath a storm of fear and uncertainty. *Shadows of Strangers* tells the gripping tale of a family of Muslims pushed to the edge of survival, living in secret under the ever-watchful eye of the Spanish Inquisition. Within the Fernandez household, cryptic messages and secret codes whisper through the walls, safeguarding a faith they must hide at all costs. Fernandez, his wife Maria, and their children, Nicolas and Elvira, rely on courage, intelligence, and unwavering faith to navigate a world that seems determined to crush them. Amidst suspicion and danger, they cling to a hidden book—a



lifeline that may also bring new perils. This is a story of survival, trust, and quiet heroism. *Shadows of Strangers* illuminates the hidden lives of Moriscos in Al-Andalus, a world darkened by fear and persecution, where every decision can mean life or death. Together, the Fernandez family must bond, adapt, and endure, discovering the strength it takes to survive in an unforgiving age.



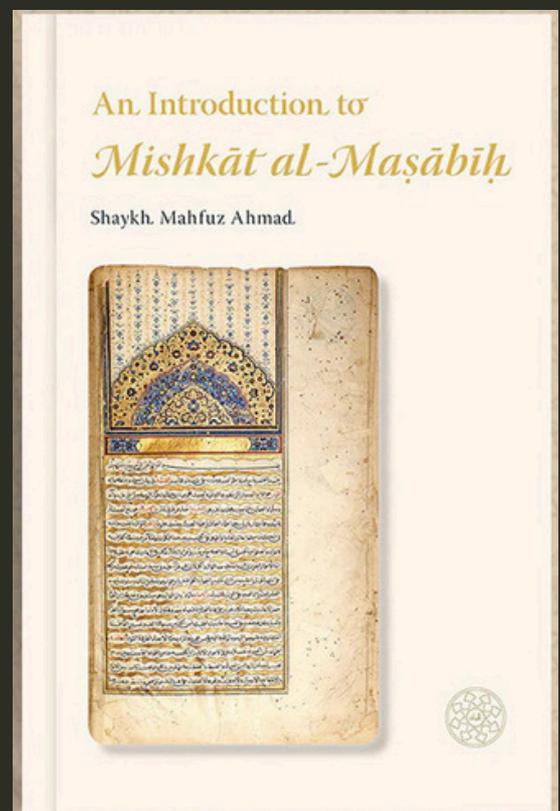
The 100th Murder by Asim Qureshi

“The 100th Murder” by Asim Qureshi is a compelling novella that delves into themes of violence, redemption, and the transformative power of faith. Inspired by the profound ḥadīth of a man who killed 100 people yet found the mercy of Allah, the story follows a man shaped by injustice, oppression, and the crushing weight of his choices. As tyranny silences a faithful group of believers, their unwavering courage offers a glimmer of hope in a world consumed by despair. The narrative explores the darkest depths of violence and the soaring heights of redemption, serving as a timeless reminder of the enduring possibility of a second chance.

This novella is particularly suited for mature readers aged 16 and above due to its themes of violence, injustice, and spiritual reckoning. It is ideal for readers interested in thought-provoking fiction that examines the human condition through an Islamic lens.

An Introduction to Mishkat al-Masabih by Shaykh Mahfuz Ahmad (author) Shoaib Shah (editor) Publisher: Turath Publishing

Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ is a comprehensive collection of hadiths that covers almost all aspects of Islamic belief, Jurisprudence (fiqh) and virtues. It is taught around the world to students of Hadith, particularly in the madrasahs of the Indian subcontinent, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the USA. Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ is often taught as a prelude to al-Kutub as-Sittah (the six books).



Palestine, thank you!

By
Shaykh Ali Hammuda

There is a lot of talk about what we can do for Gaza, and indeed most speakers will taper off their talk by giving you a list of things to do for the people of Gaza, and this is no doubt essential. There is, I think, another dimension of the discussion we need to share, and that is: what have the people of Gaza done for us, and how we should be grateful to them. That is why the Messenger ﷺ said:

“The most grateful of people to Allah are those who show the most gratitude to the people.”

So let us trigger and activate this act of worship for a moment.

We say to the children of Gaza before anyone else: thank you.

We salute you. We have seen how your six-year-olds are standing over the dying bodies of their blood brothers, saying to them, “Brother, say La ilaha illa Allah, you’re dying, say it.” Six years old how did he pull that one out?

We saw the young boy, wrapped from head to toe because of burns, saying to his father, whose injuries are less than his, “Father, be strong, don’t despair. This is our land.” Who taught him that? Those children of Gaza have shown us that many of us who think that we are men are in fact still children — and they’ve shown us how children can, in fact, be men. Thank you, children of Gaza.



We say to the mothers of Gaza: thank you.

May Allah Almighty bless those wombs of yours that have delivered the miracle of the 21st century that we are witnessing today.

We say thank you may Allah Almighty bless your nurturing and your upbringing.

This is, in fact, what they are producing in Gaza it is the spirit that you have fostered in the hearts of the Muslims. We say thank you.

To the elders of Gaza, we say thank you.

You have shown us how beautiful it is when belief in Allah is transferred from the ink on the pages of books to the blood that flows through veins and arteries. Thank you.

And we say to the doctors, physicians, and paramedics of Gaza: thank you.

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As you work long hours, you now live in your hospitals, and you have seen with your eyes in the last six weeks that which no mountain could bear, let alone a human being. And when you thought it couldn't get any worse, your children come to visit you in the wards — but not as living children. They come to you in body bags. You hug the body bag and you cry. Then you stand up, you bury your pain, you wipe away your tears, and you continue your duty to the Muslims there in Palestine.

We say thank you to the doctors and physicians.

To the journalists who know that they are now on the IDF hit list because of the crime of exposing the crimes of the occupier — fifty of them killed to date we say thank you to them and their likes. Those whose families were killed live on air, who go down to the hospital, weep over their wife and children, and the very next day are back on TV saying, “I have a duty towards Palestine.” How did you pull that one off? We say thank you.

To the women of Gaza, we say thank you.

We saw you burying your children, then raising your hands rather than complaining to Allah saying, “O Allah, continue taking from our blood until You are pleased.”

To the men of Gaza, we say thank you for showing us that a people who believe that death is not the end can never be defeated. Thank you for helping us understand verses of the Qur'an that we previously did not understand until we saw you.

Thank you for removing from the hearts of two to three billion Muslims around the world the fear of any human being but Allah.

Thank you for reminding us at a time when we thought that the Ummah of Islam had died that you have shown us the Ummah has a pulse. Not just that the Ummah is brimming with life.

And from all of the generations of Muslims to walk this Earth in recent times, by Allah, this is the greatest and finest of all Muslim generations and time will show that this prediction and this assessment are true.

About the Author

Shaykh Ali Ihsan Hammuda is a UK national of Palestinian origin. He holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Architecture & Planning from the University of the West of England, a BA in Sharī'ah from al-Azhar University (Egypt), and a Master's in Islamic Leadership Theory from Swansea University. Author of *The Daily Revivals*, *The Ten Lanterns*, and *The Friday Reminder*, he delivers sermons, lectures, and regular classes across the UK. Based in Wales, he serves as visiting Imām at al-Manar Centre in Cardiff and as a senior researcher and lecturer for the Muslim Research & Development Foundation in London.



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