

equating our faith.

e eleven

magazine

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President's & ELEVEN's Note

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.,
May peace be upon you.

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praises to Allah SWT for blessing us with multiple privileges and abilities, one of which is the blessing to read and write. May peace and salutations be upon His Messenger, Muhammad SAW, who taught us, amongst so many things, the value of reading.

ELEVEN Magazine has served, for 12 editions, the NTU Muslim Society by creating a safe platform for artists and content creators of various backgrounds to contribute their creative works. This set of pieces, once upon a time only consisting of prose and poetry, has evolved to include illustrations, interviews, articles, nonfiction, and so much more. ELEVEN Magazine has developed across the years to uphold and manifest the value of inclusivity, and I am extremely excited to see how it will grow to be more.

This year, the team chose the theme *Phases* to encompass the overarching values of each contribution. *Phases* seems apt and profound this particular year, and yet it has always been a timeless aspect of all our lives. We live in different stages, both big and small, and in each stage there is a multitudinous amount of ways in which we experience change. All these changes, no matter how pleasant or otherwise, culminate to bring us to where we are, at this moment.

Early 2020 has been a difficult phase for all of us. Like many hardships, we long for this phase to pass. We long for its end, for its resolution, for an answer. Yet, in the midst of this longing, there is value to remembering that there is good, and there is benefit, in all of our difficult phases. And in the midst of realising that, there is also comfort in knowing that we can turn to writing and art as companions to this sense of longing.

Writing and reading have always been wonderful antidotes for various situations. May the reader of this magazine be blessed. May each piece of every contributing artist also be felt in its own unique and impactful way. A hearty congratulations to each and every one of them for conveying their thoughts, experiences, pains, pleasures, and much more in between, into a piece of art to translate into the enjoyment of another.

Finally, warmest congratulations to the 12th ELEVEN committee, for their efforts, passion and hard work in bringing together pieces for the benefit of its readers and perusers. May Allah SWT bless all of them for what they have brought us, and may the benefit and value that come from it become a witness to their good deeds in the Hereafter.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.,
Izza Haziqah Binte Abdul Rahman
President of 33rd NTUMS Executive Committee

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb. to our Readers,

All praises be to Allah SWT for granting us the opportunity to achieve another milestone. This year marks our 12th year and we are immensely grateful for your support thus far. In this edition, our team delved into the theme, *Phases*. We gave our Contributors a safe space for them to engage in introspection and what *Phases* means to them. We focused on our "self", acknowledging that life is filled with different stages, with varying levels of faith. Nonetheless, embracing the inevitable highs and lows of faith is what brings us to ultimately gain maturity and find ourselves as individuals.

In keeping with the theme *Phases*, this edition runs through the different episodes of life chronologically — beginning with the celebration of life ("Growing Up"), followed by pieces reflecting its adversities ("Fluctuation" and "Uncertainties") and thought processes as one traverses through these hurdles ("Ruminations" and "Through My Lens"), before concluding the edition with reminders and advice that encapsulate the message of all the pieces ("A Letter to You"). We hope that the arrangement of the pieces will provide you with a sense of clarity as you ponder upon the importance of focusing on the eternal over the transient phases of life.


The process of creating this magazine has been a journey of self-discovery for our team. Our path was beset with difficulties, but as individuals and as a team, we fought to surpass our limits. We challenged ourselves to seek strength and resolve within ourselves. While the curtains have fallen on our ad-hoc term, we are excited and humbled to present you with the 12th edition of our ELEVEN magazine.


To our dear Readers, we hope that these pages take you on your own journey of introspection and self-discovery. On each page lies a friend waiting to embark on this journey with you, a strong voice offering courage and a kind pat on the shoulder to remind you that the emotions you feel make you human. May these stories remind us of our greater purpose. As we continue to discover our identities, may we always remember our role in this world.


May this magazine be of benefit to you and the community. May it bring us closer to Allah SWT and enhance our connection with Him and Rasulullah SAW. All the good is from Allah SWT and we apologise for any shortcomings on our part.

With love and prayers,
Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.,
12th ELEVEN Committee

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CONTENTS

Phases

Growing Up

- 08 **BREATHE**
Bani Muhamad Iyad
- 10 **RIDING THROUGH LIFE
WITH A DOPPELGÄNGER**
Sakinah Mohsen
- 12 **BROKEN**
Natasha Razak
- 14 **WEARING GREEN**
Ahmad Zaid
- 15 **FALLING IN AND FALLING OUT
N**
- 17 **FOR ANOTHER TOMORROW**
Fadhli Fadzil
- 18 **KEEP FINDING STRENGTH
FROM WITHIN
W**

Fluctuations

- 20 **FACES**
Elia Hamarian
- 21 **LET ME TELL YOU A STORY**
Ikhmah Roslie
- 23 **CHANGE OF MIND**
Nadia Natasha
- 24 **JOURNEYING THROUGH
YOUR ASPIRATIONS**
Nurliyana Rahmat

Uncertainties

- 28 **BETWEEN BREATHS:
IN AND OUT**
Syarah Ali Imran
- 29 **GOING P(H)A(S)ES IN
THE TWENTIES**
Nana Z
- 30 **PRICK OF A THORN**
Naithaha
- 32 **READ**
Ahmad Mudaafi'

Ruminations

- 34 **I DON'T BELIEVE IN RELIGION,
BUT I DO BELIEVE IN RELIGION**
Wong Jun Hao
- 35 **AM I MUSLIM ENOUGH?**
Siti Amirah
- 37 **A REVERT'S LIFE.**
Khair
- 39 **WHAT I THINK ABOUT WHEN
I THINK ABOUT RUNNING**
Siti Munirah
- 41 **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 24?**
Hafiz Azman
- 42 **MAMA'S HANDS**
Diyanah Yusoff
- 44 **TOWARDS THE PATH OF
OUR AMBITIONS**
Ustazah Nur Hidayah Binte Azman
- 46 **AND HE FOUND YOU LOST
AND GUIDED [YOU]**
Nur Laili

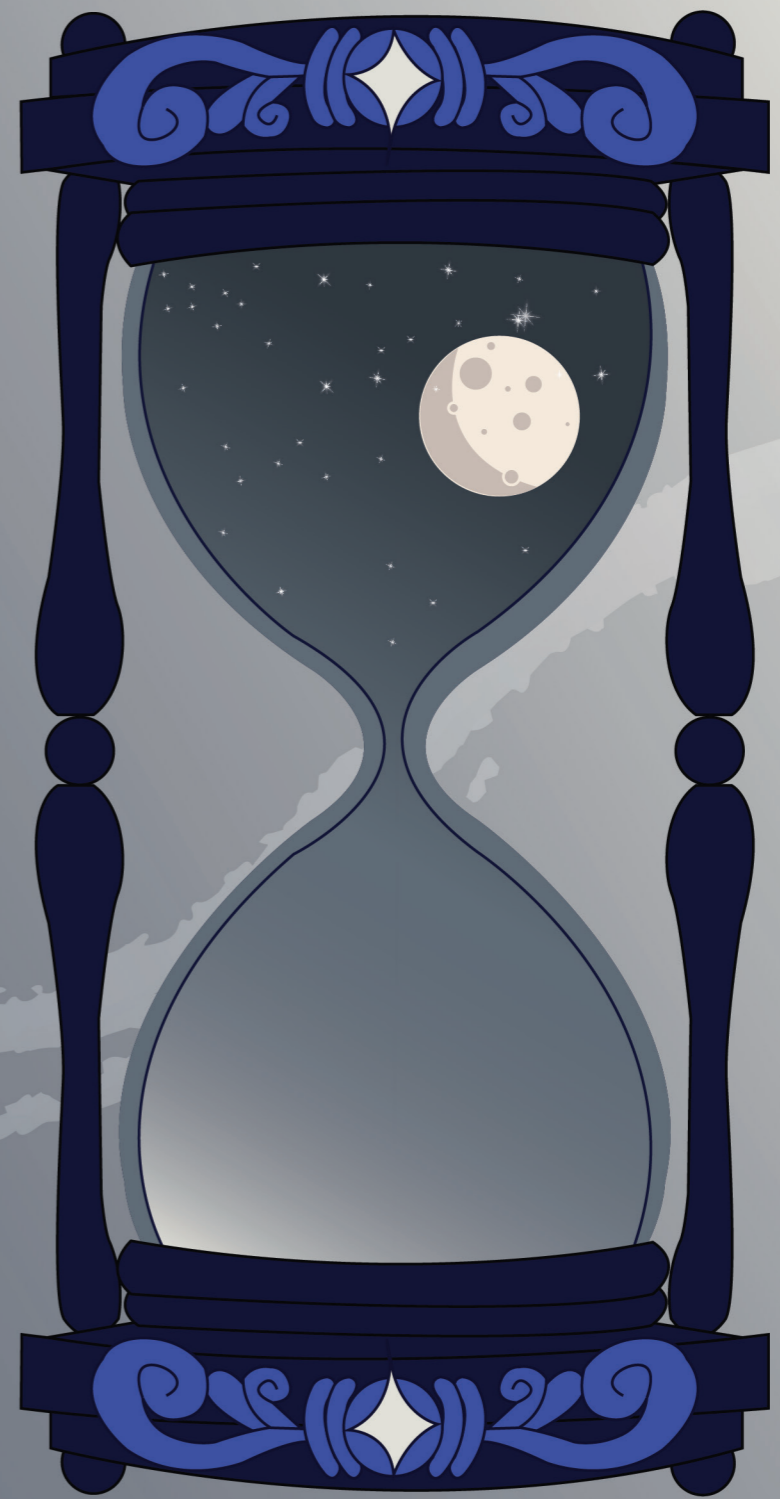
Through My Lens

- 49 **A HUNDRED VISIONS
AND REVISIONS**
Nursarah Safari
- 51 **BLOOMING ALONG THE
CITIES I VISIT**
Izza Haziqah
- 54 **SEASONS OF LOVE**
Siti Sarah Binte Nassir Teng
- 56 **A WALK WITH GOD**
Julian JP Lee
- 57 **MOONLIGHT**
Vanessa Ong

A Letter To You

- 59 **PRAYERS FOR YOU**
Syazwan Bin Zainal Shah
- 60 **THE 21ST CENTURY SCHOLAR**
Ahmad Ubaidillah
- 62 **PERMANENCE
OVER TRANSIENCE**
Siti Maryam
- 64 **FOCUS TO INFINITY**
Mohammad Aashiq Anshad
- 67 **YOU WOULDN'T TELL
A BUTTERFLY**
Farid Yusuf

Growing Up



Breathe



By Bani Muhamad Iyad



Photograph by Sakinah Mohsen

Day 1, the first breath,
then I was wailing out loud
craving attention

The first words I hear
are from *Bapak* whispering
the blessed *Adhaan*

Heard on my right ear
is Allah is the Greatest
then, the *Shahadah*

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

I bear witness that
there is no God except Allah SWT,
and I bear witness that
Muhammad SAW is the Messenger of Allah SWT

I'm at Ground Zero
from young till now, I fill in
the gap of wisdom

Through *madrasah* school,
for 12 years since young, learning
about my belief

Fiqh;
Islamic jurisprudence

Akhlaq;
Morals

Tawhid;
Monotheism

Sirah;
Prophetic biography

Al Quran;
The Holy Book

But I don't think it's
enough to cover, so I'm
still learning Islam

Roving classes
by Safinah Institute
Al Qudwah Academy
along Pahang Street
Darul Arqam
at the heart of Geylang Serai.
Mosques within my hometown of Eunos
like Al-Abdul Razak Mosque or Darul Aman Mosque
or other mosques wherever I am, whenever

Till this very day,
I'm still learning
I can never stop learning
I can never stop breathing
breathing in knowledge
breathing out doubts

Who is Allah SWT?
Who is Prophet Muhammad SAW?
Who are the 25 prophets?
Who are the angels?
What are the Holy books?
What is life after death?
What is the Divine Decree?

Information so
overloading, that I took
deep breaths and take in

Bits and pieces of
wisdom into my brain with
space ballooning out

Having a mind that
is willing to be opened, like
a sponge swelling up

Learning is one thing
what's next is practising what
I have learnt so far

How to believe in my faith?
How to pray?
How to read the Quran?
How to fast?
How to give charity?
How to visit the House of Allah SWT?
How beautiful is the *Kaaba*?

Masya Allah
God has willed it
for such beauty
at al-Masjid al-Harām;
made of granite
covered under
the beautiful *kiswah*
with Quranic text
embroidered in gold

I still have questions
growing up on Planet Earth
to stay relevant

We all live with doubts
while living our own lives with faith
seeking improvement;
different beliefs
yet we live on the same ground
breathing the same air

After practising,
I'll do my best to spread wisdom
to my good peers

So that we can breathe the same air
in harmony
in unity

I'm thankful being
born as a Muslim, and have
learnt my life purpose

I can breathe the air with ease



RIDING THROUGH LIFE WITH A Doppelgänger

By Sakinah Mohsen



"How does it feel to have a twin sister?"

I get asked this question a lot, and I honestly cannot keep track of the variation of answers I have shared with people. But what remained consistent is the sentiment that both of us share; we are thankful for being each other's constants.

Constants is such a cliché term but it holds a significant amount of truth in our context. We have constantly been by each other's side from sharing the same womb, to living under the same roof up till today. Fun fact: we have telepathy and can sometimes read each other's mind. That is probably some sort of special connection or bond that some twins are blessed with, I guess.

But this doesn't happen all the time, of course. Please don't ask me how telepathy works; even I myself find it weird but amusing up till today.

Needless to say, growing up with a twin sister is a mix between a cool and weird experience. Imagine going through the different phases of life with your doppelgänger. How cool, but how weird too.

Being twins, people tend to view the two of us as one entity. But of course, we are two different individuals, with our own unique sets of feelings, thoughts, and views on the world. Growing up, we realised there are a lot of personality differences between us. We also have different interests and react very differently to situations. Not to mention, we have our own social circles. But the best part about being twins is growing through life together.

In primary school, we shared the same set of friends and teachers. Unfortunately, we made life difficult for everyone back then because we dressed up in similar styles, carried the same school bags, talked the same way, all that, on top of looking the same. Jokes aside, being in the same class for six years made it easier for us in terms of academics. We did our school work together, went on learning journeys and overseas school trips together, and eventually sat for our first national exam together. We witnessed each other's growth in terms of academic performance, our shared interest in the Malay performing arts, and growing passion for the Mother Tongue language.

Moving on to secondary school, we parted ways and developed our own circle of friends. Despite studying in different schools, we still shared learning resources and told each other cool stuff that we both learnt in school. We celebrated each other's milestones; there was once we collected the Edusave Bursary Award together on stage. It was a moment of double happiness for our parents. We took up different CCAs; so, it was interesting that we explored many different things altogether in secondary school. There was a time when I would attend her dance performances, and she would attend my orchestra performances and we would be super proud of each other.

We studied common subjects together for the GCE O-Level and saw each other through the very challenging period of memorising tons of content while simultaneously doing set after set of practice papers. But it was comforting to know that the seat next to me on the study table was occupied by my own sister.

Thinking back, I think it was quite memorable studying until the wee hours, while taking naps and snack breaks in between. We would be each other's alarm clock if any of us dozed off. But thinking back again, wow, we were that hardworking back then. If only the motivation lasted till today. *I'm joking.*



We continued hustling together in JC, and studied together for the GCE A-Level. As we grew older, we made this significant discovery that our interest lies in the same field. Since our primary school days, we adored our Malay language teachers. It was probably the way they taught the subject, their passion, their enthusiasm and their charisma, that made us grow to love that particular subject. People say if you love a particular subject, you will try your best to do well in it. True enough, we enjoyed writing compositions, we loved reading books, and we also enjoyed studying for the subject. Our parents were our main supporters. Our mother, particularly, reads a lot of Malay books, spends her free time writing poems and short stories, sings along to Malay songs played from the radio, watches Malay movies (both classical and modern-day movies). Because of her, we gained the confidence to start writing short stories and thereafter sending them over to be published in a student-based newspaper (called *i3 & GenG* under the management of *Berita Harian*).

In secondary school and JC, we were once again inspired by our dedicated teachers. What stood out the most was their sincerity; they don't just teach for the sake of it, but they put their heart and soul into it. They know that teaching the subject is a form of *amanah* and, because they do it so passionately, they touched our hearts. We were inspired to be just like them. So that was how our passion grew, from the same source of inspiration.

Fast-forward, we got into our dream institution and are currently pursuing our Bachelor of Arts (in Education) together! The process to secure a place in the National Institute of Education (NIE) was rather tedious; we had to go through different stages of applications and had to sit through various interviews. But once again, my heart is thankful to have gone through all these with her.

We prepared for the interviews together, gave each other feedback, spurred each other on and prayed for each other. Both of us yearned for that spot; and both of us got it, by the mercy of Allah SWT. It is truly our *rizq*, and I am forever grateful for this opportunity. The blessing lies in the opportunity to pursue our dreams together. What lies ahead remains a mystery to us but, once again, I'm comforted to know that I'm going and growing through this new phase of life with her.

Thank you Allah SWT for this gift — a human, a sister, a best friend, a constant in life.



Illustration by Nur Sorfina Ibrahim



When the sky turned pomegranate pink, I lay on the cold hard ground. Exhausted. Tired. Worn out. As I slowly shut my eyes, *splat!* A drop of rain fell onto one of the purple welts on my right arm and I grimaced in pain. Without warning, it started pouring and all the soldiers lying outside rushed towards a nearby shelter.

Standing under the shelter, the emotional pain within me was so overwhelming that I was insouciant towards the stinging sensation on my arm. White flashes of the chaos back at home whenever it rained kept appearing in my mind.

Clitter clatter clitter clatter, the sound of the raindrops hitting the roof. The small hut I lived in together with my family had wooden planks and its roof was made of zinc. My family was too poor to afford a thatched roof. A proper shelter was a privilege both my brother and I had never been able to enjoy.

I let my thoughts wander off for a transient moment before my chain of thoughts was disrupted. I tilted my head to the right and saw a cake in the middle of the shelter with lighted candles. I sunk into an abyss of misery as my thoughts flew back to the last birthday celebration I had with my family.

My paternal uncle, Ali, was the last to present me with a gift on my birthday three years ago. He came with two masked men standing on each side behind him.

"Ahmed, we're all suffering. This is the 'best' present that I'm going to be giving you and this entire family," Uncle Ali said in a convincing and confident tone.

My mother bawled her heart out and ran towards me to sweep me up in her tight embrace. The two masked men stepped forward with their long rifles hanging from their necks in front of them and forcefully dragged me away from my mother's warmth.

"Congratulations!" my chain of thoughts was broken once again by the crowd that gathered around the bed and cheered for the birthday boy, accompanied by the melodious singing. The luminous orange flames on each of the candles were slowly blown out, one by one, by the birthday boy just like the hope that was left within me to ever escape from this living hell.

Our camp was situated at the base of ochre-coloured mountains and child soldiers, like me, were strewn everywhere undergoing combat training.

At every break of dawn when nothing breathes during the hour of silence, I would pray. Raising both my hands towards the Almighty, I pleaded, "oh dear God, please bring me back to my family. This physical, mental and emotional suffering is too much for me to bear. Although they provide us with proper housing and food here, it feels like a living hell. Please God, get me out of here."

I worked on planning an escape route with my close friends, Akbar and Mikael, who I'd gone through combat training with. The three of us snuck out at nights to discreetly trace the footsteps of those who had tried to escape previously, in attempts to devise our own escape route.

The constant wailing of a child could be heard from afar. However, no one went to his rescue as he was helplessly being kicked around by a group of older soldiers.

I mustered enough courage to walk over when the soldiers left the child and to my horror, it was Akbar

lying down with blood oozing from his forehead and the side of his lips!

"I...I...I saw a boy trying to escape and...I didn't report him..." Akbar tried uttering those words with much difficulty while wheezing. It was a rule for us to report to the older soldiers if we saw traitors trying to escape. However, Akbar's gentle nature always stood in the way of him following the procedures.

Soon, the sky turned dark. Pitch black, just like the darkness that currently fills my life.

One night when the older soldiers had gone to train, Akbar was left in charge of guarding our campsite. He had to be on the lookout for any child soldiers attempting to escape. I figured it was the perfect night for us to execute the escape plan.

As Mikael and I were busy packing our essentials, I felt a soft touch on my right shoulder.

"I'm sorry guys, I don't think I'll go with you tonight. I'm too afraid. And...I don't think you guys should be doing this either," Akbar decided to pull out from the escape plan.

We spent time arguing and convincing him to follow the plan but nothing we said could change his mind. Ultimately, Mikael and I embarked on our escape route together leaving Akbar behind.

We ran as fast and as far as our legs could bring us. Beads of perspiration trickled down our foreheads and down our spines. Soon, we were both drenched in sweat.

Just as we decided to take a break before climbing over the last wall left to escape from the campsite, the sound of the heavy boots stomping on the ground was getting louder and louder. Many heads could be seen running in the horizon with the mirage of the reddish-orange sky and egg yolk-like sun setting in the sky behind them.

The black silhouettes were getting closer and closer and every step they took was like a ticking time bomb. A gaggle of goose pimples laminated on my frigid, naked skin when it finally hit me that the older soldiers were in the know about our plans!

"Ahmed, go!"

"No, you go first."

"No, Ahmed go!"

"But—"

"Just go, climb and run. You've got a family waiting for you back there while I have no one. Go Ahmed there's no time to waste! I promise I'll catch up."

Like an obedient child, I climbed onto Mikael's back and jumped over the wall. As soon as I landed, I sprinted for my life.

I waited and waited.

Bang!

I never saw Mikael ever again.

It was nothing but a broken promise.

BROKEN



By Natasha Razak



Photograph by Mohammad Aashiq Anshad

WEARING GREEN

Twenty in twenty seventeen
I was called to wear green
A rite of passage in the Lion City
As Simba was in The Lion King
A destiny set by The Divine
To take lead of the pride
From a part of the millions of lives
To their lives in the hands of mine

Wow, from just fun and games
Now, I'm being told my place
I've yet to learn to pay my bills
But today I've been trained to kill
Paradigm shift in a land of peace
The world is not what it seems
Everyday I've been pushed off cliffs
So I can learn about maturity

I am a Malay-Muslim Soldier
Took an oath to defend our honour
But just across the borders
Are my fellow Muslim brothers
We're supposed to love one another
And to fight off the oppressors
But when I'm faced with a believer,
Who will be the first to shout "Fire!"?

I was only just twenty and had not seen the world
But I hold this responsibility, don't you think it's cruel?
To breach my duty is to plan my funeral
But where lies loyalty in a place that's rural?

Life's not a straight line planned by The Divine
Sending a thousand signs to guide and untwine
With passing time the sun will shine
Across the night sky the stars will soon align
Then I'll find the meaning of life
The way He outlined for all mankind

By Ahmad Zaid



Illustration by Muhammad Mustaghfir



By N



It begins like this:

absolutely nothing.
It begins with absolutely nothing, as most things do.

And then you start to see little things — the way his smile seems to lighten up his face, the crinkle of his brow when he's upset, the softening of his tone when he talks about things (people) he loves.

And then you start to *feel* little things — the jump of your heart when he says your name, the warmth right down to your toes from just his laugh, the worry in your bones when you sense his unease.

This is when you begin to notice that his name frequents your prayers — almost on instinct, you pray that he's healthy, pray that he's happy, pray that he's well, always.

And by the time you've sobered up to realise it, it's far too late.

A little like wading into the sea, you don't really know how far you've gone until you look back and find the shore to be nothing but a line in the horizon (*my life before you, nothing but a whisper of the past*).

I tried to fight it — how *hard* I fought. Alas, as much as we would like to think so, sometimes our feelings are not our own. We only contain them in our beings but to control them is beyond us.

Because just like that, I fell. I had fallen.

It's really a funny thing: love. No one told me that when you were in it, you wouldn't even realise it for the first few weeks. That you would think you were still safe and unfettered by heavy, *real* emotions, merely relishing in the way he makes you smile and the way he makes your heart speed up. That it would strike you only one day when you are saying his name and it will suddenly flutter out of your mouth, like a habit — *I love him*.

Falling In and Falling Out

The books and movies show you how beautiful it is to be in love. And truly, it is. It brings you to the top of the world, making you feel a whole new depth of emotion that you perhaps didn't even know you had the capacity for.

But all highs are bound to have their lows, and oh, how low those days in love could get.

Those days stretch on, till weeks can feel like months and months like years. It's difficult to imagine that love only lasted a short while (165 days, to be exact) because, in those moments, it felt like a lifetime.

And often at this point, many nights are spent pleading for clarity, hoping that He grants you ease. Once again, you realise, his name appears in your prayers; sometimes alone, but often alongside yours. It begins to weigh on you, I found, constantly juggling between praying that He turns *his* heart to yours, or turns *yours* away from his.

It became almost automatic, the words I spoke to myself, and to Him, during the last *sujood* of each prayer, meaning it with every fibre of my being.

I won't sugarcoat it — being in love is *tiring*.

However, before we get to the point *after* love, comes first the time in between. During this time, you might find that your love seems to flit in and out of your consciousness — when some days the affection you feel is refreshed, as strong and as clear as the day the words tumbled out of your mouth. Other days, you might find yourself feeling the way you were before him, like he was nothing but a hazy fever dream.

And perhaps, you will come to realise, this is what it feels to be in the middle of love and falling out of it.

This may be the most confusing part of all, when at times you miss the feeling of love, while other times can bring you waves of it, so much that you might find yourself drowning.

It might be liberating, finding pockets of ease and relief where you feel like you can finally breathe. Or it might be scary, thinking of falling out of love, wondering if you will ever fall into it again, if you even can (I'll give you a hint on this one: you can, and *Insya Allah*, you will).

On these days, you might find that your forehead seems to linger on the prayer mat a little longer. Because after some point, you'll understand that finding solace in Him brings a catharsis like no other. Even if temporary, wavering, it renewed itself with every prayer.

Then slowly, the feeling of heaviness, the exasperation of being stuck in this limbo — it passes.

So finally, comes the end. Just like the beginning, it's difficult to pinpoint the day you fall out of love. It is not so much a feeling as it is the absence of one — a day when you will look at him, and he will look at you and you will no longer feel the weight of love pressing against your chest. And then you'll know.

Perhaps, as with all ends, there is a certain sadness to it. Bittersweet. Because as exhausting as love was, it was also exhilarating. So quickly, love had escalated and so surely, I had dived in — foolish, reckless, *young*. Every smile you sent my way reinvigorated the love I had for you. I had clung so tightly to all these frayed strands of hope, so firmly held to the belief that if I kept consistent in my prayers, He would eventually see how much I wanted it.

It took some time, but I did see. I saw that my prayers to Him never went unheard, nor unanswered. I had just pictured in my mind so vividly the answer I wanted, disregarding the answer that I actually needed.

By far, that was my biggest takeaway. Through it all, through all the love and the heartbreak and everything in between, I learnt so much of myself, and I learnt much more about Him. As my love for this boy grew, my love for Him grew ten-fold.

If being in love, and falling out of love was how He brought me back (when I didn't even know I had been drifting further); if in that pain and heartbreak, I found myself crawling back to Him, broken and in tears, with nothing else to offer but the shards of my heart — a puzzle that I have yet to piece back together then.

Then I'd gladly go through it over and over because, at the end of the day, my love for Him was all that mattered.

But here's another funny thing about love: it's different for all. Our love stories might be worlds apart — the unbridled love of teenagers, the hesitant love between broken hearts. Not one is like the other.

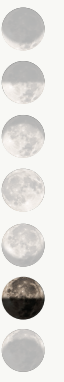
Mine was a story of unreciprocated love, of friendship to love and then to friendship again. And it might be just that — a story. But what else is love if not a story? Days and moments intertwined; all with a beginning,

And an end.

FOR ANOTHER TOMORROW



By Fadhli Fadzil



They come in waves
crashing and receding;
glistening but deceiving,
once a deafening heartache
but soon the tides hit release.

Of late,
I muttered to the sky
at the sight of the setting sun;
whimpering yet whispering
for another tomorrow
(one without sorrow),
and the fleeting wind
calmly caressing my dried-up tears
as I walked down the shore,
feet soaked in sand
fists hard and clenched.

Embracing myself,
I confront the crisp cold of dusk
at the sight of the settling moon;
relishing in the music of the waves,
rejoicing in moments of His grace.

Like the wind,
the future unseen yet foreseen;
like the wind,
the hardships chilling yet serene;
like the wind,
my heart returns to where it has been;
like the transient wind,
this episode will meet its end
"not today but one day."

I am still walking,
and will continue walking,
into the endless darkness,
hoping to greet the break of day
in a better, enlightened way.

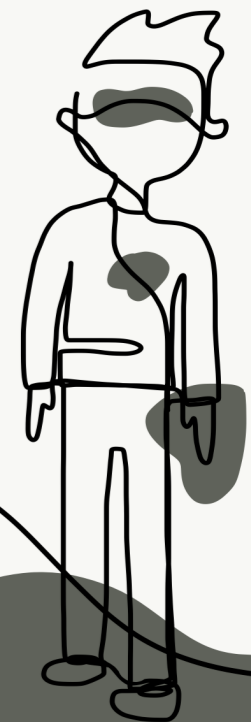
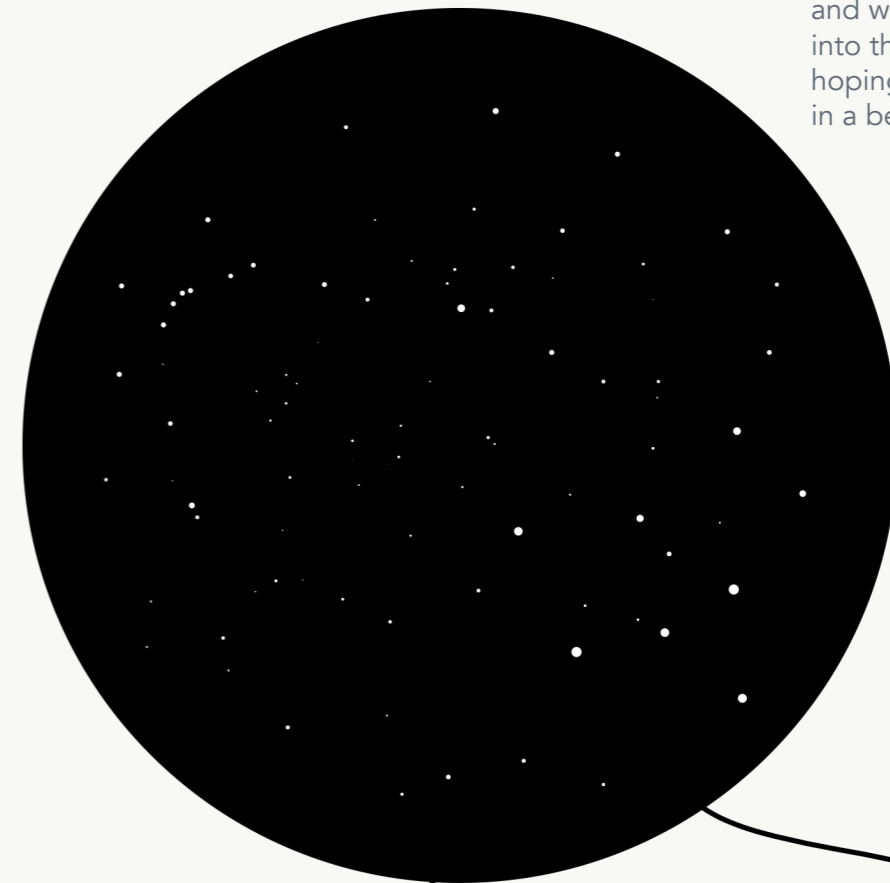


Illustration by Siti Rezkiah



I sat there — staring,
Pondering, questioning myself why.
My heart feels so empty,
And that all I know is to cry.

Exhausted, weary and drained,
My body waves the white flag in surrender
Threading carefully between sane and insane,
My mind manages to remember.

How I indulged my every whim, impulse and desire,
I let my feeble heart lead the way
But all I was was a liar,
Desperately justifying that my actions were okay.

Okay to talk about others, or
Fill my stomach to its brim,
Okay to look a little longer, and
Somewhat okay to flirt with him.

This act of justifying was in fact
The devil's clever play¹,
Masking my actions with excuses
Darkening my heart², then leaving it to decay.

Now I sit here — staring,
My conscience consuming me alive
Trying to see the positives,
But I can't even think of five.

الصَّبْرُ عِنْدَ الصَّدْمَةِ الْأُولَى
Patience is at the first stroke of calamity³ —
If I dared to do all of that, then I'm sure
Being patient is in my capacity.

Keep Finding Strength From Within

So I prayed even more and made time for *zikir*
I struggled against myself⁴ — reflected,
re-examined, resolved,
Checked my intentions, kept good company,
Hoping — praying — that my sins were absolved.

Then, though slowly, things changed,
Allah SWT became a part of my thoughts and actions.
This peace and connection was incomparable
It cannot be achieved through human transactions.

This won't be the last time — I know.
Verily, Allah SWT did not create us without sin.
But Allah SWT provided us with *al-Aql*⁵ — so
Put the excuses aside and find strength from within.

Even our *Iman*⁶ goes through phases,
But as believers, the following should remain —
Recognise our mistakes, make sincere and
conscious repentance,
And *Insyallah*, His Mercy we will attain.

**On the authority of Anas bin Malik RA, may Allah
SWT be pleased with him, who said:**

I heard the Messenger of Allah SAW say: Allah the
Almighty said: O son of Adam, so long as you call
upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what
you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam,
were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were
you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive
you. O son of Adam, were you to come to Me with
sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to
face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you
forgiveness nearly as great as it. (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)



By W



Photograph by Natasha Kasim

¹ And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me (with Allah) before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment." (Quran 14:22)

² It was narrated from Abu Hurairah RA that the Messenger of Allah SAW said: When the believer commits sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents and gives up that sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished. But if (the sin) increases, (the black spot) increases. That is the *Ran* that Allah mentions in His Book: "No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning." (Quran 83:14) (Sunan Ibn Majah)

³ It was narrated from Anas bin Malik RA that the Messenger of Allah SAW said:
"The real patience is at the first stroke of a calamity." (Sahih Bukhari)

⁴ *Jihad an-nafs* is the struggle against evil ideas, desires and powers of lust, anger, and insatiable imagination, placing all of them under the dictates of reason and faith in obedience to God's commands.

⁵ The term *al-Aql* is derived from the verb, *عقل يعقل* meaning reason, rationality, intellect or intelligence.

⁶ *Ahl As-Sunnah* view that *iman* can be increased or decreased. It increases by doing good deeds, acts of worship and contemplating on the Quran, rulings of Islam, *hadiths* and the creation of Allah SWT, and decreases by misdeeds, following evil desires and Satan and negligence of reciting the Quran.

Fluctuations





By Elia Hamarian

Testing — what does that even mean? I stare at the rounded letters meant to make the text “more reader-friendly”, “more inviting”, they say. The graphics are really what make me scoff. Five cartoon faces spread horizontally across the screen, each the symbol of a phase.

The first: two wide u-shaped curves resembling closed eyes are accompanied by a tiny cross at the mouth and the universal symbol for a teardrop at the top left — a drop of sweat at the temple. This is what they come up with. This is the face of *denial*. Was this how I looked when I held his large, cold hands? Did I close my eyes? No, I couldn't, though not for the lack of trying. I tried, how hard I tried but somehow they would not keep shut. They were glued to his face. His eyes, once reflecting only the brightest of days, once curving slightly when he bellowed in laughter, were now shut. His face resembled someone sleeping peacefully. As I sat there beside him, his hand in mine, I was convinced he was.

Next was a graphic of someone at the *anger* phase. Despite being a cartoon, it was uncharacteristically ugly. Two enclosed arc-like shapes almost joining together in a v-formation symbolised the eyes. The slits in each arc reminded me of snakes. I wondered if people thought that of me as I sat in his chair, letting the phone ring away, not even attempting to pick it up. The mouth was a horizontal rectangle with jagged edges on the top and bottom, facing each other — fangs. As I looked at this monster I could not help recalling the day my sister came over to pack his clothes. I threw her out of the house not five minutes later. *Huh, maybe I had turned into a monster*, I thought to myself.

The *bargaining* phase was right in the middle of the page, right in the middle of completing the grieving process. It should have made me feel balanced, it should have given me some sort of stability. This was the halfway mark; I was getting

FACES

There are five phases of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. Some sources state seven. “Shock” comes before denial, and “testing” comes before acceptance...

there, wasn't I? So why was there a face with two oversized downward-facing bean-like shapes as eyes and a squiggly line as the lips? Why were there two dots at the top of those beans? Why was this the midway point of grieving? Why did you have to take him away? Why didn't I tell him I loved him more? Please, please bring him back to me. Just for a second, let me hold him again in my arms, let me tell him everything I never got to tell him. Please, God.

Depression. The same two wide u-shaped curves marked the eyes. Now, instead of a small cross as the lips as in the denial face, this face had a small slightly curved-at-the-ends line as the lips. Two pairs of lines, each pair starting from the middle of the eyes, ran all the way down, past the lips, right at the bottom of the face. It was odd looking at it, like a peculiar-looking waterfall. The urge to laugh was there but I just could not bring myself to, not when I heard the slight pitter-patter of droplets staining the page of the brochure. I watched as the big, full blobs, maybe containing every bit of sorrow in my soul, burst abruptly as they landed on the page — disintegrating in a split second.

Coming to the end of the row, I stared at the last face. Two circles, with a slanted edge cut off and dots in the middle. An upturned handle-like arc as the mouth. What does it mean to have *acceptance*? The eyes seemed sad but the mouth indicated happiness. Wasn't it contradictory? Did the sadness stem from losing a loved one, from knowing he would never come back, that he was gone forever? Did the happiness stem from knowing he was with Allah SWT, that there was no better place to be than by His side? Or was it suggesting that at some points of time you'd be happy and at others you'd be sad?

I wouldn't know.



Let Me Tell You a Story



By Ikhmah Roslie

Let me tell you a story of how I've died a thousand deaths for love,
First slain by my father to whom I was martyred in the name of lost affection,
Then struck by an arrow that left the bow of a lover. Is this what love is worth?
Of festering wounds, of trauma hidden in bandages, the neglect is blurring my vision.
Perhaps it's time, shrouded in white, my body lowered seven feet deep into this earth,
The wailing of my mother, then the first cry of my nieces, a bundle of beauty & perfection.
Resuscitated by God's blessings, another attempt at living, I shall continue to serve.
Love who you want, love what you want, just know that you'll be tried with affliction
Of the love you've received, of the love that you've lost, be reminded of the love from above.
To love is to die repeatedly but I've survived to tell you this story — this is my resurrection.

Let me tell you a story of how I've shed a thousand tears for friendship,
The highs & the lows, the ebb & the flow, stories of all sorts I could tell.
The departure of a friend, a reminder to do good while we can before we embark on a trip
Where the journey is long & the provisions are little, a verdict between Heaven & Hell.
The separation from my best friend — he's heaven-sent — his name never estranged from my lips.
I understand her doubts & anxiety, the need for stability — I'm a woman & I know it all too well.
We met for His sake, let's part for His too. To Him, the both of you I'll leave (& your kids).
The betrayal from three friends, misplaced loyalty & lies that never seemed to end, alas I...fell.
I've seen past the toxicity; with His will, I've gained clarity. I've had enough, it's time to get a grip.
To befriend is to shed tears, blood, sweat — all of that, to be reunited in the best of places to dwell.

Let me tell you a story of how I've walked a thousand miles for knowledge,
A university degree, is that what it really means to be successful, to have made it
In this fleeting life of subjective measurements, of KPIs, of numbers & percentage?
Did I work this hard; did I sacrifice sleep to become obsessed? To wrongly worship
The NTU sign? Have I crossed the line & become distracted out of the fear of being average?
What does it mean to be knowledgeable? Ya Allah, bestow upon me Your grace & Your grit
Even if a fraction for me to be able to seek the truth, my purpose, the ultimate message.
In bits & pieces, in various rhymes & reasons, He led me to a path less travelled to commit
Towards understanding this life & thyself, the grander scheme written in His language.
To seek knowledge is to seek light — an illumination to be worthy of His sight unlike the hypocrites.

Let me tell you a story of how I've searched a thousand nights for You,
In the silence of the night, as sinful thoughts are circling my mind, I ask from You in a whisper.
In the stillness of dawn, as poison is dripping from my thoughts, I wait for the morning hue
To lift it all up to You, conversations between me & You — Ya Allah, please don't let me falter.
Don't let me go astray, please show me the way of the righteous because I want in on that too.
Sometimes, I don't understand. This world is making me mad. I'm doubting Your wisdom & power
To be certain, you must first deal with uncertainty & so breakdowns happen before breakthroughs,
All in the name of trying to teach you to hold on & trust in Him, the Ultimate Protector.
With that, I pray that you break through whatever's trying to break you, the way He did for me too.
To search for You is to find myself too, for within me I see You & to meet You is to die a believer.

Will you let me tell you a story that you'll tell your children in my riddles & rhymes,
Of a thousand losses, of a thousand lovers, of a thousand tears & of a thousand prayers,
Of the thousand times I've fallen yet His mercy prevails tirelessly a thousand & one times.
To learn from the past is to better the future, with the ideals of the young & the wisdom of the elders
To emulate the Prophet, oh blessed is he, the best being to ever grace this earth, just one of His signs
Of the guidelines He has given, of the stories He has written to turn our hearts & move us to tears.
Stories unfold & yet the ending is unknown. So, let's say a little prayer & please straighten your lines.
Today we lift our hands in prayer to be reunited with beloved & familiar faces, in the best of places
Where we'll forget all heartbreak & struggle, smelling heaven's fragrance & hearing heavenly chimes.
With beautiful patience & prayer, waiting for the best of phases in the presence of the Most Gracious.



Change of mind



By Nadia Natasha

Photograph by Siti Sarah
Binte Nassir Teng



It's scary to confront the idea that what you worked towards this whole time was never the right choice. For the longest time, I believed that such doubts and fears about myself were inherently bad for me. I would actively brush them aside.

Why attack yourself with negativity?

Why put yourself through your anxieties?

Is this really a debate you want to have with yourself?

...

Yes, you must, NO, you need to repress this negativity if you want to achieve your goals.

There is enough negativity going around and you don't need to do that to yourself too.

The idea I was scared to confront was if reading Psychology in university was for me. What made the conversation with myself hard was the fact that I was also reading another major — History. I knew I loved studying History and I enjoyed the modules I had taken. It did not help that I was facing difficulties to *perspective-take* the work of clinical psychologists — a profession I hope to be a part of. What does it mean to *empathise* and have *unconditional self-regard* for one's clients? I remembered wondering if it was truly possible to practise these values. And on a personal note, did the value systems in the profession I hoped to enter resonate with mine? Also, would my passion for Psychology ever match up to what I have for History?

Ultimately, was this a sign for me to switch to History as my first major?

In a Trauma Psychology module, I learnt that one of the theories for why someone re-experiences their traumatic event to a point that is debilitating for them is because they keep avoiding and repressing their emotions and/or thoughts. Avoidance gave temporary (and usually immediate) relief but often had the effect of heightening the difficult emotions and thoughts when they re-emerged. While I closed myself from what I perceived was negativity, I neither gave myself the chance to properly face my fears nor did I get to refine or reaffirm my purpose for choosing the path I did.

To be fair, I was trying to be kind to myself. Criticism for me — and perhaps for a lot of us — is easily the slippery slope on which I am very much capable of being my harshest critic. It would get very hard to brush myself off, pick myself up and regain motivation and momentum to carry on.

While my self-doubts and questions could not be equated to the experience of re-experiencing trauma, I learnt a valuable lesson. This phase highlighted to me how having difficult discussions with myself does not need to be an attack. Things are rarely so dichotomous.

Looking back, I'm glad I asked myself to confront these questions. I don't think I could have had the level of admiration for the field and motivation to carry on in my pursuit of Psychology had it not been for some of the questions I asked myself then.

I learnt in a separate Psychology class that sometimes we avoid things because we fear the potential heartbreak that comes with it. In that video, the psychologist asked the client what she hoped out of relationships.

Love...

Well, love is the flipside of heartbreak in relationships for you. When you avoid relationships because of potential heartbreak, you close yourself from love too. The question you have to ask yourself is, is it worth it? To throw away love because you are afraid of heartbreak?

What I thought would be treating myself unkindly turned out to be a moment of gentleness with myself. The truth is: *You can be kind to yourself even as you confront your anxieties.* Balance is key. Self-care can also be about having difficult conversations with yourself. It is okay to like multiple things. Different phases of our lives require us to learn to adopt a different perspective. In such times, show, cultivate and hold on for love even if you have to learn how to deal with heartbreak.



Journeying Through Your Aspirations

clear direction will empower you because you know the purpose behind your education.

Buoyed by the notion of fulfilling my father's aspirations, I chose a course in Engineering with a Diploma in Civil Aviation. I enjoyed the course and graduated with a satisfactory GPA. However, it wasn't enough for me to enrol in a university. I'd always wanted to embark on my career path as soon as I graduated because I believe experience is far more valuable than qualifications. And I wanted to save money to further my studies. But that dream of pursuing a degree was abandoned once I took the bait of having a constant monthly paycheck, thinking that I had achieved what I was meant to — successfully landing a job in my field of study. By then, I thought my dream was to work in the aviation industry.

You are not meant to live other people's dreams for them. You are not supposed to be what society wants you to be. Find your own passion and work towards it.

I was in the SIA Engineering Company for four years. It felt like my life was settled. However, even though I was working in a reputable company that paid me well, I still felt empty. It was as though I was living paycheck to paycheck, convincing myself to stay in the company over the years without any form of advancement. There wasn't any progression. It was as though I was being held captive from my true capabilities and the one standing in the way was myself. I was driven by financial stability and security. It was comfortable to stay put in the company because of the benefits it offered.

Sixteen is too young of an age to decide on what we want to do for the rest of our lives especially with the lack of exposure to the ambitions out there. We are not given the opportunity to explore the working industries. This is coming from someone who, at the age of sixteen, did not possess any working experience prior to choosing the career path she wanted to pursue. For most of us, we settled for a course mainly because either we know we can score and land ourselves a high GPA and an entrance to university, or it was a decision influenced by our parents, our relatives, our friends or society.

Expose yourself to the different ambitions available for you and explore your options while you are still young. Once you have set your mind on an ambition, it will become a goal that will also give you clarity as you strive to do well in your studies. A

Stagnancy plagued my career path. The road didn't seem to lead me anywhere. The longer I stayed, the longer I felt unhappy because there was no sense of fulfillment. I even started a small baking business with my mum and sister to fill that void.

Stagnancy is not a place for you to stay in. Always strive for growth. Find meaning in the things that you do. It's not all about money. Life is too short to do things that you are not passionate about.

In the fourth year of employment, I decided to leave the company after making *istikharah* prayers. At that moment, it felt like it was the right thing to

compared to when I was in my previous job, my passion for educating young minds has inspired me to go beyond my job scope and instil value in it because deep down I know that this is what I love to do. Teaching toddlers can be challenging and it really can drain one's energy but it never fails to make me feel content. I am happily tired. I found meaning in being an educator and I get to learn a lot more from the children than they do from me. I am deeply invested in them. I see my students as my own children and I want to be a part of their inward and outward growth. As I was seeking Allah SWT, I found myself.

If you are clueless as to what you want to do or what your passion is, your answer lies with Allah SWT. Seek Allah SWT because He knows you better than yourself.

On top of that, I run From Heart to Hearts, where I organise events to empower women through skills, and cultivate sisterhood through the sharing of Hijrah stories and struggles to be on the path of Allah SWT, a place where I hope to be able to contribute from my years of volunteering and participating in soulful and knowledge-based events. My passion for writing has pushed me to broaden my experience by writing weekly letters through email subscription called LoveLiy Letters, posting write-ups on Medium and working on a blog to share the topics I have covered from my weekly sharings on Instagram Live. I have finally found my true calling and roam free in it.

It's more important to not compare your timeline with someone else's and to live a meaningful and fulfilling life than to tie your worth to anything fleeting like your job. When you love what you do, you will give wholeheartedly into it driven by deep intention and internal need for growth. You will expand inwardly and outwardly.



do even though I hadn't secured myself a job. So I took the opportunity to work on my book, "Healing Carefully".

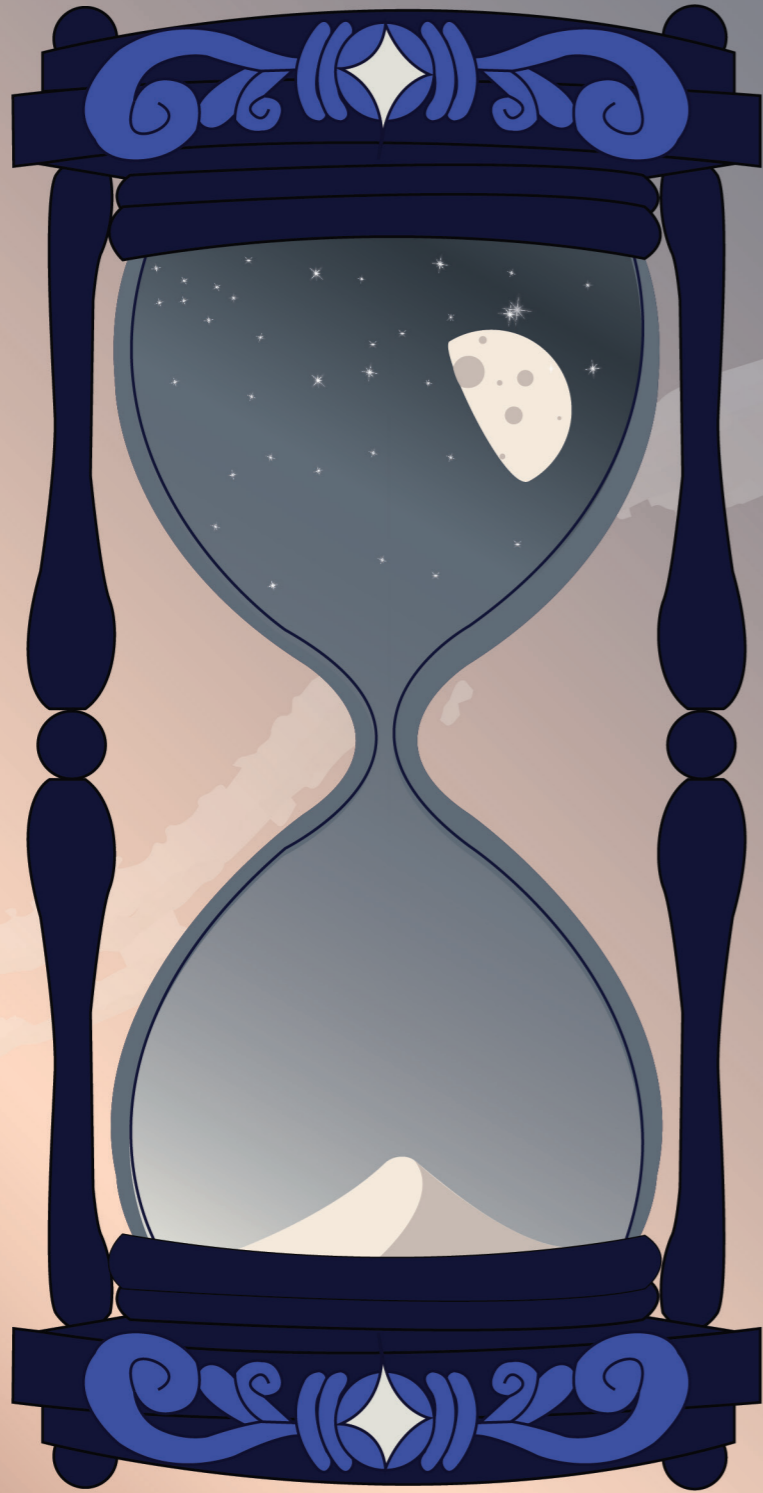
Being unemployed meant spending my days writing and focusing on my part-time studies in PERGAS. I was also on my journey of seeking Allah SWT. After six months of unemployment, I realised my passion for teaching when Allah SWT opened an opportunity for me to be a relief teacher. I started working in a preschool and was later offered a better opportunity to deepen my understanding of the Quran and teaching it. Although I earn less now



By Nurliyana Rahmat

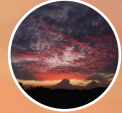


Typography & illustration
by Nur Azizah Binte Azhar



Uncertainties

Between Breaths: In and Out



By Syarah Ali Imran

In my mind, I think of when it'll all end; thoughts of despair and disappointment float by, past my peripheral vision, leaving me breathless and helpless as to how I'll last throughout.

Inside me, different emotions flow in and out of my heart. Anxiety leaves me doubtful of the future; melancholy holds me back from moving on; and depression threatens yet another burnout.

Instead of being stuck in turbulence, oh how much I'd rather break free and move on. Oh how much I'd rather take things slowly and unwind, and to pause and collect myself. Jumping over life's high hurdles, one after the other, only leaves me gasping for air. Oh how much I wish I could catch my breath, without my body giving out.

Inward I reflect, am I ready to expire? I think about how I've survived so many breaths and so many tests. It's so easy to hold back and leave things in suspension, but will that bring me relief? One day solace will come, with His Will, and surely only then will things work out.

In me, I know that despite the cuts and the creases, I'll grow stronger and better, nevertheless. As my tears dry up and my heart wells up, I know: it'll all end. For the breaths I take only propel me forward and one day, even hardship will show itself out.

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease." (Quran 94:5-6)

Illustration by Nur Azila Azman



This piece can be read in the following manners:

- (i) left column only - from top to bottom & bottom to top
- (ii) right column only - from top to bottom & bottom to top
- (iii) left to right column - from top to bottom (by stanzas)
- (iv) left to right column - from bottom to top (by stanzas)

Finally, a new chapter...

...الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ...
For new beginnings!

Bigger adventures and more freedom

Or so I thought...

"Congratulations on your engagement!"

Tears of envy lingered on my left eye

"بَارَكَ اللهُ لَكَ، وَبَارَكَ عَلَيْكَ، وَجَمَعَ بَيْنَكُمَا فِي خَيْرٍ!"

Tears of admiration brim over my right eye

Rocky waves filled the mortarboard on my head while uncertainty and anxiety hid under the prestigious gown

With the slightest glint of hope, I know I am where He wants me to be
الله أكبر

"May the little ones bring joy to your home, my friends!"

Terrors of fear pierced, no...Stab my heart... again and again, as I cried in silence

Exploring, un-learning, re-learning... re-discovering myself

The Hooded Change on the Horse of Time charged at me, engulfed me whole

When will it be my turn?

Breathe...Remember your loved ones, remember Him,
أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللهَ الْعَظِيمَ

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Hands cupped, eyes desperately looking up

So...What's next?

"Oh Allah SWT, please guide me..."

Going P(h)a(s)es in the *twenties*

The title 'Going P(h)a(s)es in the twenties' is a wordplay on the phrase 'Going Places'. It's the period of their lives where youths transit from being teenagers to young adults. The phases that youths, especially those who are in their twenties, go through can be confusing and overwhelming. Nevertheless, whichever phase that they are in, may it be beneficial for their own personal growth and spiritual well-being, *Insya Allah*.



By Nana Z



Photograph by Sakinah Mohsen

PRICK OF A Thorn

Cancer. I'd read about it online, heard heartbreaking stories here and there and even lost a classmate to it years back.

Even so, it still feels like something very much disconnected from my life. With no family history of cancer, I strongly believed that this disease would never make its way into my list of worries. Yet, here I am, writing about it the night before an important procedure. By stringing together my messy thoughts and emotions, I hope to calm myself and offer solace to anyone who might relate to my pain.

Health is wealth. Growing up, my beloved father used to constantly repeat this phrase. I never truly internalised the meaning behind it because I grew up healthy, not needing to worry about illnesses. You only realise the value of something once it starts to slip between your fingers. After a series of sudden fainting spells early last year, I found myself entering a new phase in this *temporary world* — a phrase which made me realise how valuable my health truly is. My entire universe turned upside down when my doctor disclosed the results of my

full body test — my CA19-9 tumour marker was positive.

Upon receiving the results, I honestly wasn't upset. While those dearest to me started shedding tears, I didn't. I was just truly bewildered and no matter how hard I tried to connect the dots, nothing around me seemed to make sense. I spent the first few days questioning Allah SWT and wondering where exactly I went wrong as a practising Muslim to be punished in such a way. It didn't take long for the tears to finally start pouring out. First like a drizzle, then like a storm.

Why me?

It's funny how day in day out, Allah SWT blesses us with health, sustenance, family and so many other things — some of which we didn't even pray for. Yet, when these blessings are suddenly withheld from us, we become entitled and start to question Him, demanding an explanation. If only we knew,

how trials are actually a sign of love from Allah SWT, and a means of guiding back the hearts which have wandered.

If we were to reflect on the cycle of day and night, we see that Allah SWT substitutes darkness with light, night with day, without fail. There is a lesson to be learnt here. Just like the cycle of day and night, in His infinite power and mercy, Allah SWT can replace despair with relief just as easily. This realisation was the answer to the 'why's' I cried out to Allah SWT. By agonising over the future and its uncertainties, it was as though I didn't believe that my life had already been perfectly planned by Allah SWT and as though I doubt His ability to grant me relief and the best this life can ever offer. So as difficult as it was, I began to leave my health in the hands of my God, Allah SWT. The same God who split the Red Sea apart for Prophet Musa AS, who saved Prophet Yunus AS from the belly of the whale and who protected Prophet Ibrahim AS from the blazing fire. This same God can bring me back to my phase of health.

As I write this piece, it has been seven months since I received the news. In these seven months, I've made numerous trips to the hospital — it's a miracle I haven't decided to just camp there. I've had needles inserted in my annoyingly tiny veins, leaving marks on my arms and wrists. I've gone through procedures that left me so drained and caused me to miss lectures. I still get teary-eyed when I recall the events which have unfolded over the past seven months but here is a special

something which always consoles my heart. Every time I cried, every time I winced from pain, every time I felt stressed trying to keep up with my studies, I comforted my aching heart with my favourite *hadith*.

It was narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri RA and Abu Hurairah RA: Prophet Muhammad SAW said, **"No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah SWT expiates some of his sins for that."** (Sahih Al-Bukhari)

No matter what phase I am in — life, death (when it comes) and everything in between — everything I do will always be for You. Thank You. For lending me this beautiful life with the best parents ever, Ma and Dada. For surrounding me with supportive (albeit clingy at times) loved ones. For a comfortable life and a job that I love beyond words. But most importantly, thank You for blessing me with Islam.

By Naithaha



READ

You speak of depression,
like it's your confession,
"it will all be okay,"
says the girl, not okay,
"just stop", I don't say,
just smiling again,
just smiling again,
as I comfort you instead.

You speak of addiction with so much conviction,
"just deny the temptation, remember the religion",
or so you say, still hooked on that repetition,
and I mutedly agree, though not with your aggression,
but what can I say, "you're right, I'm the idiot"?
"Omg I'm a Muslim, man I should've remembered."

So when I speak of depression,
I don't because it doesn't
make sense to be reminded,
how my pain is so infectious,
how in the end, I have to wonder,
how can I make you feel better?

And when I speak of addiction,
big surprise, I never,
want to try to describe the religiously disobedient,
or try to convey how much I beg for forgiveness,
or try, in general, because God knows how much it hurts,
to feel so close,
and then betray,
EVERYTHING,
that He so mercifully gave.

Because can you really understand what you do not understand,
and can I really be so selfish and share what might make you despair,
and how much of this is my ego,
and how much of this is true,
because what we all speak is the truth.
It's just that sometimes,
the truth,
doesn't benefit you.

Read, it says in the Quran,
so will you not read me too?

By Ahmad Mudaafi'



Ruminations



Synopsis:

"The passer-by view of an outsider scurrying through a busy city life, window shopping through various religions and finding solace in a possibly eternal quest for truth — a truth that he accepts may never come."

By Wong Jun Hao



I DON'T BELIEVE IN RELIGION, but I DO BELIEVE IN RELIGION.

I was born a Buddhist, although I never knew exactly what that meant. What I do know is that a core teaching of Buddhism informs that religious labels are not sacrosanct, and cooperation and mutual understanding among religions are encouraged virtues to practise. Perhaps the reason for my curiosity and journey could be attributed to my Buddhist roots or perhaps it was my thirst for the truth and to understand one of the greatest mysteries of the world — religion. I began from secondary school to try to learn and understand, both from my friends and their teachers, the teachings of other religions.

While I would not consider myself a learned expert on any religion, I do have some thoughts and understandings of each of them through my brief interactions thus far. And I would say that I have come to a fairly satisfactory conclusion for myself.

I have sat through sermons, observed prayers, read scriptures and listened to personal anecdotes, but nothing has ever rung a clear chord of reverberance through my being, not even my own religion. Perhaps trying to understand it was a futile endeavour and a fatal mistake. Perhaps a leap of faith is truly required. In any case, proving the existence of an omnipotent being is just as impossible as disproving it. Hence, in reality, it is as irrational and rational to believe in religion as it is to not believe. So, the question then is, what is the truth beneath it all? According to the teachings

of some religions, not all religions can coexist in the realm of truth, so what then is the "true" religion?

I first looked at how some of my friends integrate religion in their lives. It was particularly interesting how religion guides people's life philosophies. An example is how people handle hardships. A Catholic friend of mine would always attribute all her hardships and successes to God's tests and tribulations. She has absolute belief that she can trust God to be with her and to give her strength to overcome all the obstacles in her life. In that sense, her religion has become a comfortable safety net to help her cope with all the stresses in life and to give her strength to keep walking no matter how tough life can get. On the other hand, another friend who is also Catholic approaches life in a drastically different manner. She is not exactly a fervent believer who attributes everything in life to God. Instead, she is a very self-determined person, but, because of her different approach to religion ends up having a much harder time coping with hardships. Catholicism does guide her moral compass and sets limits to what she can and cannot do, but she does not let it become the overriding factor to explain why things happened the way they did. In both cases,

religion has a significant part to play in the betterment of their lives, but in their own different ways. In other religions, I've also seen different interpretations and integrations that affect individual life philosophies in different ways, such as forming an emotional support system, a healthy and supportive community, and even a life purpose.

Perhaps what is true does not matter that much. Perhaps it does, only to the extent of whether we want to know because the matter of fact is that religion, in general, has indeed made the world a better place. I still haven't found anything I personally resonate with or have any conviction to, but I have attained a newfound appreciation for religion in general.

To the age-old question of what exactly religion is and what is true, I may never know. Just as many others before me with far greater intelligence have come and gone without finding an answer, perhaps, so will I. But for now, I have found an answer, or perhaps just solace.

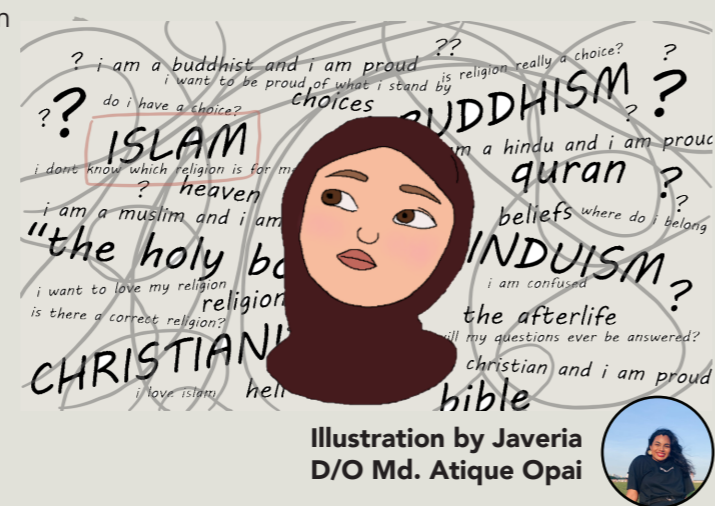
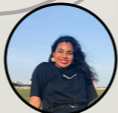


Illustration by Javeria D/O Md. Atique Opai



By Siti Amirah

The strong wind chills me to my bones as I got off the airport bus. Homes were of gothic style architecture. Pavements were made from cobblestone, making it uneven and frankly uncomfortable to walk on. A castle casually found in the middle of the city centre. A completely different but endearing accent of English. All these differences and changes are part and parcel of moving abroad to the unfamiliar. This whole process evokes many emotions. It is a new phase of life — leaving the comforts of home for an elsewhere that promises new adventures. It was the first time that I ever had a room, let alone a studio flat, to myself. The first time that I had complete freedom with no house rules and curfew. More than anything, it's an opportunity to completely reinvent yourself because it seems as if moving abroad gives you a blank slate. Nobody knows who you are, and it seems like the opportunity to curate the person you want to be.

"What even is a 'good' Muslim?"

Except, somehow, that doesn't seem completely true for me. We are far from the blank slate that we wish to be. The hijab feels like a clear neon sign of my faith. In this political climate, I can't help but also be hyperaware of this realisation. Soon enough, it felt as if I was trying to show the people around me that I was a 'good' Muslim. The problem is, what even is a 'good' Muslim?

Back home, this question seemed easier to answer. It's easy for us to place ourselves in a social bubble where many express religion in the same way that we do. Even in the wider Singaporean community, people have some semblance of an understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices.

Despite Edinburgh being a relatively diverse place as compared to the rest of Scotland, I do often find myself being the only hijabi or the only person with tan skin in the room. People were often curious about me and my beliefs and would ask me questions to satisfy their curiosity. Because of that, I felt that there was some responsibility on me to represent Islam well, as I became the first Muslim friend for many. In hindsight, it seems ambitious that I placed so much pressure on myself to try and present this idealised image of a 'good' Muslim. This perhaps was partially driven by fear of losing strength in my faith as I left the

AM I MUSLIM ENOUGH?



comfort and familiarity of the Muslim community in Singapore. I prayed daily that I constantly experience the high of my faith. I negotiated with myself that I wanted to be good enough but also not too Muslim as I feared judgement either way. I questioned myself: Am I Muslim enough?

An interaction with a close friend made me ponder my internal struggle. One of the weekends, I found myself at a school social event that was held at the school bar, which doubled as a small theatre for movie screenings. One of my close friends had planned for a free movie screening. As I went through the crowd of people holding their beers, I thought to myself, "Astaghfirullah, why am I at a bar? I am being such a terrible Muslim." A hijabi at a bar? My mind went crazy thinking about what others would think of this odd sight. It did feel as if I was tarnishing the reputation of Islam by being there, until my friend came up to me and said, "I know that you don't drink, but I'm really happy to see that you're here to support me!" This then made me question: was I really a bad Muslim?

I never drank, and I was there to support a friend, which is an inherently good trait in a person. Is this not what my faith has taught me? To be kind and to maintain good relations with others? This interaction has made me come to a realisation about my struggles of portraying the 'right' kind of Muslim, where I struggled with the external portrayal of, rather than my personal journey with, my faith.

I realised that my struggles with my religious image and identity were more a result of the fear of judgement from others when I should have been focusing on my love for my faith. I love my faith, but at that moment I feared judgement from others more. I feared judgement from people back home if I became seemingly 'less Muslim' while I'm here. I also feared judgement here if I were 'too Muslim' for being 'too conservative'. Does this not defeat the purpose of faith when it should be an internal journey of self-betterment rather than an external manifestation of it? I am certain that my internal battle came from a place of love for my faith, but I let my fear of judgement from others get the better of me. What I failed to remember was that only Allah SWT is worthy of judging us. Our faith will fluctuate throughout our lifetime, and that is the reality. He has written that we will face challenges and tribulations in our lives, testing our faith. We simply need to catch ourselves and put in the work to move closer to Him. We should not be too caught up on only the physical manifestations of our faith, as our intentions and heart matter as much. May we suspend our judgement of others and focus on our relationship with Allah SWT, as He is the All-Seeing amongst other things.

"Our faith will fluctuate throughout our lifetime, and that is the reality."

A Revert's Life.

"Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge?" (Quran 93:6)

A powerful verse that I hold dear to my heart. Although it's a blessing, it isn't easy being a revert. I reverted sometime in 2016 when I was pursuing my diploma. I learnt the ways of Islam through the amazing practising Muslims in my polytechnic. My best friends were Muslims and they opened my heart to Islam not through preaching but rather through their actions. It was the first time I witnessed Muslims praying regularly, being positive, kind and welcoming. Since young, due to the media and partly my family, I always had a negative impression of Muslims. *Alhamdulillah*, it was during my polytechnic days that my view changed. In Year 3 Semester 1, I took my *shahadah* in front of one of my many Muslim friends.

However, I must emphasise that being a Muslim is more than taking an oath, it's facing the tests by Allah SWT and doing everything in our capacity to please Him.

My life was indeed full of tests immediately after my reversion. I always believed Allah SWT was testing me to determine if I was true to my oath. The first challenge was my family. I'm from a polytheistic family, which is the exact opposite of monotheistic Islam. My family became extremely hostile and started isolating me. It's never easy when your family, those who raised you and knew you from birth, starts despising you. They started asking me difficult questions, some of which I still struggle finding

the answers to. What's so special about Islam? Why are you betraying your Gods? Are you joining the terrorists?

Finding the answers to such (stereotypical) questions was not the challenge, but rather it was making them listen to my explanation which proved to

**"Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge?"
(Quran 93:6)**

be difficult. Yes, I started resenting my family for they showed a side I have never seen; such hostility would surely upset anyone. However, being a Muslim now, I understand that I have to be respectful and loving to my family. Prophet Muhammad SAW said, "The best of you are the best to their



families". Hence, I started being tolerant, soft-spoken and kind. I figured the best way to show my family the greatness of Islam is through actions and words. It took a couple of years but *alhamdulillah* my relationship with my family has improved. It isn't ideal, they are still disapproving of my reversion but at least it has settled down. Nowadays we have "deals". For example, if I were to go to the *masjid* for prayers, I would have to follow them to their temple — but as a form of respect and nothing more.

My test of faith not only came from my family but also my friends. During the first few months of reversion, my friends were extremely supportive of me but as the situation began to settle, many of them started abandoning me as it was too much to handle. My family approached my friends and requested them to leave me alone. My family believed that if they were to isolate me from my

**"And those who strive for Us — We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good."
(Quran 29:69)**

Muslim community, I would be cut off and return to their ways. In the process, my closest friend, my role model in Islam, also left. Suddenly, I found myself alone. I didn't have anyone to turn to for comfort or advice.

Except — of course, in *salah*. In hindsight, I'm glad I was isolated, for that increased my faith in Allah SWT. My relationship with the Creator became much stronger and firmer. I believe that being a Muslim is a state of mind — trusting that your life is in the hands of Allah SWT. Allah SWT never abandons anyone. My faith increased when my *dua* was answered in mysterious ways. Since then, I never stopped making *duas*. *Dua* is powerful as it gives hope to the soul. *Dua* is a gift from Allah SWT in which we can directly talk to Him. *Dua* doesn't need to be loud, at times, it doesn't even need to be said; Allah SWT listens as the heart speaks.

"And those who strive for Us — We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good." (Quran 29:69)

Before I conclude my story, I would like to remind every Muslim about an inconvenient truth. The world is watching all of us. When we claim that Islam is the perfect religion and is a religion of peace, it gives people high expectations. More often than not, the expectations can't be met. Sadly but truly, people hold on stronger to our mistakes rather than our achievements. My family often asks me why, a revert like me, must be so "religious" when those born Muslims aren't. Why I must be pious when those born Muslims proudly commit sins publicly. Unfortunately, we don't live in a perfect world. Yes, Islam is mainly about the individual and his relationship with the Creator but we cannot deny watchful eyes from the people around us. Our actions have great implications, hence we must be conscious of how we represent ourselves and Islam. Non-believers will only know the essence of Islam through our actions. Willingly or unwillingly, we are the representatives of this religion.

By Khair



Photograph by Siti Sarah Binte Nassir Teng



WHAT I THINK ABOUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT RUNNING

"Just because you are not good at something does not mean that there is no good in still trying to do it."

By Siti Munirah



It began with a bad taste in my mouth, the kind that happens when you push yourself too hard on the track and made worse because you were told that you just had to do it. The truth is, I am terrible at running. I often lag behind others, chasing after them even though it always feels like they had already run past me, successfully completing their rounds while I falter at the back trying to finish just one of mine. Trust me, it is not for the lack of trying, for I have learnt to accept that this is one of those things other people are going to be better at than I am. But, just because I am not good at running does not mean that I should never go for a run.

The thing is — what I think about when I think about running is actually nothing. I used to dread running and the only way I would distract myself was by talking to myself about how much I detested it, why I was so bad at it which would

spiral out of control into other things I thought I should be better at but was not. I ran with an expectation to excel at it, and so I was the most unforgiving to myself. I scrutinised the tiniest mistake down to its most trivial details and with every piece that was taken apart, so was I. Then, I tried running outside of training without thinking about all of that: for the first time, I focused on breathing and the fact that I was still alive. I felt heavy on my feet, but I kept moving because I knew I still could. I discarded who I was before or who I wanted to become and concentrated all of my energy on the conscious actions that I was making now. I emptied my mind of all frustrations and through that transparency, I found clarity.

I found it in faith, too. I used to pray because I was told to and it went unquestioned for most of my life until I realised I had made no meaning

for myself about why I do it. I often prayed with everything else on my mind, except the prayer itself. I would think about what I was doing before and what I could be doing after, mindlessly going through the motions without any purpose greater than the fact that I just had to. I did not feel guilty whenever I missed it and shamelessly lied that I had done it because it meant so little to me at the time. I figured that if I was bad at it, then I should not even bother.

But, I soon reached an age where I was no longer a child anymore and had no excuses to give when I was watching everybody else strengthening their faith and I was not. I would put myself up against other people and then immediately bring myself down again because I felt like I was always going to be small and would never amount to anything bigger. Then, I started trying to devote more attention to my prayers, disregarding what others were doing with their lives and focusing only on being present in front of Allah SWT. I thought of nothing else except what my relationship to Him meant to me, listening to what I was saying even if I did not understand all of it yet and lingering in those quiet moments that I had only with Him.

What I am trying to say is that just because you are not good at something does not mean that there is no good in still trying to do it. Ironically,

running and returning back to Him which had both overwhelmed me before became the exact answers I needed to find healing once I let myself just slow down. I recognise that there is no perfection that we can possibly reach, but when we are mindful of the things that we do without the noise that often distorts them, there are purposes for us to find for doing these things regardless.

It takes time and consistent effort, but it is also about persistence in having faith in yourselves to overcome hurdles that are holding you back. Forgive yourself when you feel like you have let yourself down and when there is no strength at all left in you, I hope you have just enough to run towards Him, the One who has made it happen and the only One who can make it better, *Insha Allah*.

"Forgive yourself when you feel like you have let yourself down and when there is no strength at all left in you, I hope you have just enough to run towards Him"

WHAT DOES IT *mean* TO BE

24?

I remember on the first day of my final year, I went to school feeling void. I spent the entire day living in my thoughts, thinking that this was it. The final year. I thought I would have it all (or mostly) figured out, but I felt the same as when I was in Year 1. The feeling of taking the plunge into the deep unknown, uncertain and nervous for what was to come next.

I thought that after four difficult but amazing years, I would be somewhere at least. Or better yet, succeeding. That was what I had envisioned in my first year. But the truth is, I'm struggling. Really struggling. Struggling to find my path in life.

I have never imagined feeling so lost despite my efforts. Maybe I asked for too much. Visualised success too much. I was merely a dreamer, yet not a doer of dreams. I reflected on the past few years in my university life and thought to myself, "Is this the best that I could do?"

That year, I was approaching the age of 24, which is close to 25, where the so-called quarter-life crisis happens. I used to say it as a joke that I would be meeting my quarter-life crisis soon, but deep down, the joke never felt so real before. The joke was on

me. I have never felt so much fear struck into my heart.

I asked myself, "Is this normal? To be scared and lost?" Or maybe it's just excuses. I didn't work hard enough. Didn't sacrifice enough. Didn't give my all every step of the way. Maybe I should just force my way into positivity, no matter how insincere it may feel. Conflicting thoughts and justifications of them made me all the more confused.

It seems very cliché when people say that the twenties are the best years of your life, and you can never get them back. I guess I held that as a benchmark and when I am far from it, I felt dejected that it did not happen the way it was supposed to be.

So what does it truly mean to be 24? They say it's called the present because it is a gift. However, it was a gift that I was unwilling to unwrap. Uncertainty had clouded my mind, my judgement and most importantly, my heart. I realised that I felt insecure and uncertain about how my future would look when it seemed that there is nothing right now that would make it feel otherwise.

It was also at this time that I felt my *iman* was at a low. Do I not trust Him? The sixth pillar of *iman* mentions having a strong belief in *qada'* and *qadr* — the good and the bad. It is very easy to accept the former, but the latter is the one we have to struggle through. I confided in a friend who had graduated a few years ago in the early part of this painful phase.

She told me that she had felt the same way. "It is okay to sob and indulge in the pain for a while. It is okay to not feel okay, but you have to move forward and don't stop to look back. Only once you've passed it, you will look back and laugh — thinking how all of this had me worried so much."

Rumi once said, "these pains you feel are messengers." Perhaps these pains are the ones to propel us forward to the next chapter of our story. We all know that our stories are already written by the Greatest of writers, but I realised that we need to believe in that statement wholeheartedly. We need to trust that the words in the next few chapters of our lives, will be the ones that are truly the best for us. Maybe our responsibility is not to know what lies ahead or to dwell on what happened in the past, but to just turn to the next page. And the next. And the next. Until our story inevitably ends. I would like to end with a quote that I found, which struck me profoundly.

*"Let everything happen to you
Beauty and terror
Just keep going
No feeling is final"*

- Rainer Maria Rilke

By Hafiz Azman



Photograph by
Natasha Kasim



O my dear child

Why the glistening tears in your eyes
This life I brought upon you with joy
But your soul falls back to me hollow

O my dear child

Don't dwell on your sorrows
I will always carry you forth
And you shall learn as you grow

O my dear child

God's beloved and deeply trusted
I put my faith in your heart
Go on and put hope in your art

O my dear child

Your world is a blank canvas
I taught you 7 colours of the rainbow
So why is black the only colour you know?

O my dear child

Your time is not up yet
Venture deeper into the realms of your life
And love as much as you possibly can

O my dear child

Forget me not
For my love is eternal
And blessed you shall be.

Thank you, Mama

For relieving my sorrows
With your faith in me
I live better tomorrows

Thank you, Mama

For showing me my greater worth
With your affection and hope
I nurture a steady growth

Thank you, Mama

For believing in me at my most empty
Now the stars and art in my life align
All because of you

Thank you, Mama

For allowing me to fill my canvas
With a diaspora of colours
Apart from the black I used to know

Thank you, Mama

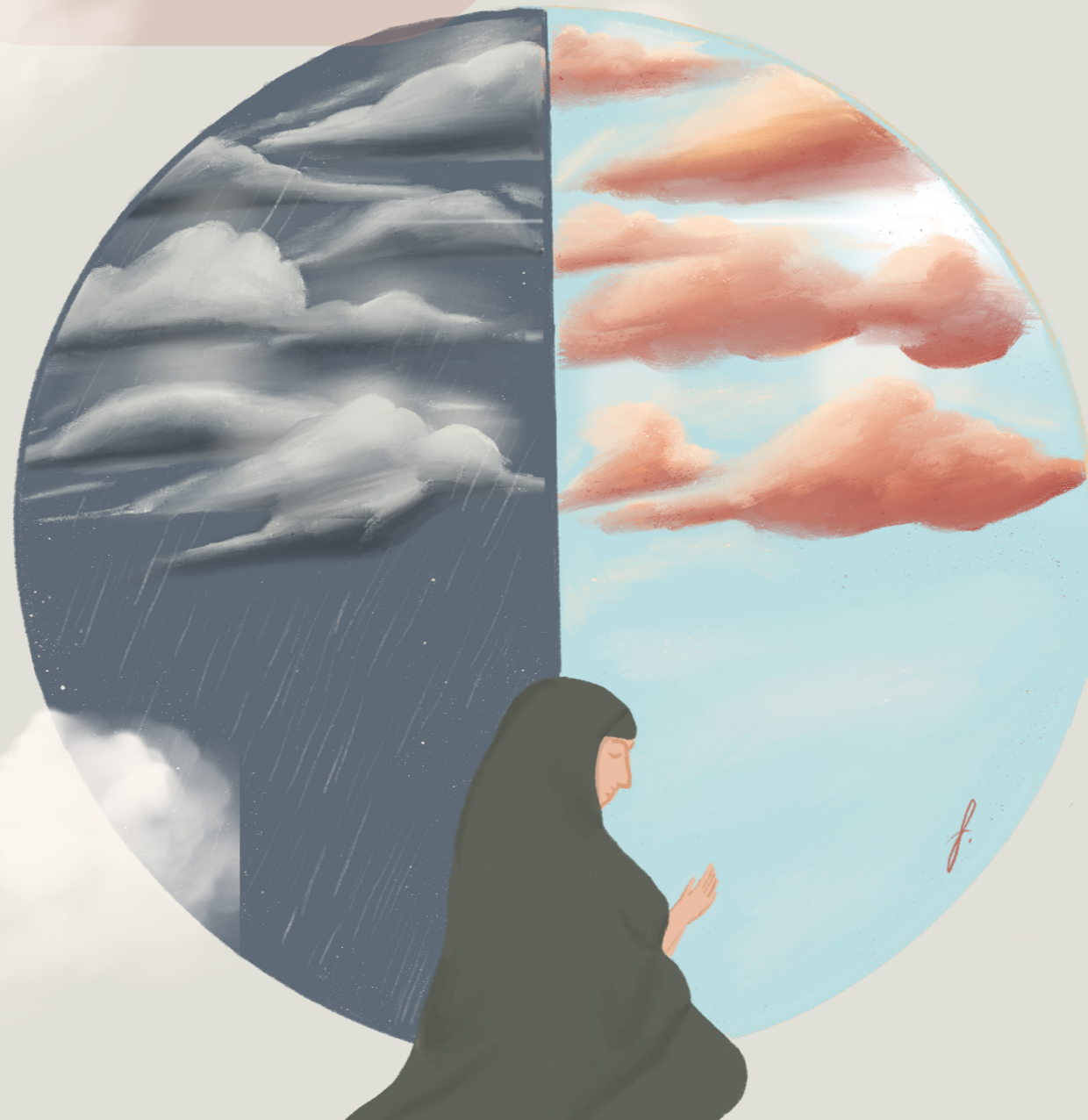
For presenting me with a new clock
A fresh breath of time
For me to run on the life I rebuilt

Thank you, Mama

For embedding yourself in my heart
Your endless love and blessings
Be my strength from within.

Mama's Hands

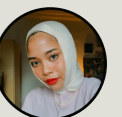
*In the life of a young girl
Who hides in the cold shadows of demise
She seeks the warmth of her mother
The one that gave her life*



By Diyanah Yusoff

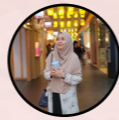


Illustration by Nur Farihath
Binte Samsulbahri



Towards the Path of our Ambitions

By Ustazah Nur Hidayah Binte Azman



One of the greatest life transitions I've experienced thus far was ending my university years and bringing myself into the working world. Some might call it 'adulthood'. With adulthood itself, comes a lot of things — going out of our comfort zones, moving on from the past and heading towards the path of our ambitions.

First, comfort zones.

As we live our lives as Singaporeans, we spend at least 10 years of education from Primary school up till O-Level. If we pursue tertiary education, that's an additional two foundation years and four years of University. Add them all up and we find ourselves in a whole 16 years of full-time student life. And that's the thing about comfort zones. We become accustomed to attending class, learning every single weekday, being busy finishing up our homework and assignments. And when the phase of transitioning to adulthood reaches us, we might struggle to leave our comfort zone and adapt to a whole new routine, a different way of living life.

Personally, I knew that as I was transitioning through different phases of life, particularly into adulthood, I tried my very best to be mentally prepared. I tried to stay away from the mindset of "I am not ready". I still remember a valuable piece of advice from my mother on this matter, "you will never be truly ready until you finally face what needs you to be ready". And if you ask me whether the shift in zones was out of my own will or otherwise, I'd say that it constitutes a mix of both. I was willing because I wanted to give myself a chance at growth and I was pushed to accept such chal-

lenges because that is how life is designed. We all need some level of challenge to add colours to our life — and these colours are none other than our experiences.

If we focus on all the reasons why we should just stay in our own bubble and only continue doing what feels familiar, then we'll never have the opportunity to grow into the person we're meant to be. To make it happen, it's good that we mix with the right people — those who encourage us to strongly believe in such positive changes in our lives. Even Prophet Muhammad SAW made many attempts to leave what he was comfortable with, which includes making the *hijrah* from Makkah, a place he grew up in, to Madinah, an entirely new city alongside righteous companions. Do know that when we get uncomfortable, growth then becomes comfortable.

Second, moving on.

Through different phases of our lives, we've accomplished many things, met many people, endured countless challenges, celebrated many wins and experienced countless memorable moments that we can never possibly enumerate. And part of moving on as we transition is to not just move from one phase to another but to move on from the fact that such moments will not last forever. Truly, it is a struggle for most of us. But there is one thing that could help us: patience. At the same time, we need so much more patience, even before we embark on a new phase, to push us forward and to assure ourselves that Allah SWT is with us through it all.

In the Noble Quran, Allah SWT mentions in

Surah al-Baqarah verse 153,

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا اسْتَعِيْنُوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلٰوةِ
 اِنَّ اللّٰهَ مَعَ الصّٰبِرِيْنَ

"O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient." (Quran 2:153)

We are bound to be blessed with many more meaningful moments: ones that encourage our growth and maturity. And in order to achieve that, we need to patiently create space for these new moments to engulf in this next phase of growth. At some point, when we start to realise the need to move on from the past instead of grasping onto the moments tightly through our days, we will slowly take steps forward to move on. We take the first step to make space for the fresh moments, with hope to create new memories; then, we move on with the memories instead of the moments.

Third, ambitions.

Now let's face it. Ambitions, occupations, aspirations, missions — you name it. It will always be the number one worry as we tread our way towards adulthood, once our pre-adolescent years are over. What do I want to be? Where should I go? What job can I land? All these queries, coupled with countless spikes of anxiety and concerns. We might dream to get accepted by our first job interview and sign on with the company till our last breath. But that is not the case — for most of us.

In reality, along the way, we might switch lines, we might look for better prospects somewhere else or even create and lay out our own path; who knows. But that's where the worry comes in. We have no idea what is bound to happen and therefore we begin to panic and get overwhelmed just by the thought of this transition. But let me tell you now, don't worry your pretty little head about it.

In the Noble Quran, Allah SWT the Most High mentions in Surah Ali 'Imran verse 159,

فَاِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللّٰهِ
 اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِيْنَ

"And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]." (Quran 3:159)

Having reliance upon Allah SWT is the way to go. As much as we plan an entire timeline for our dreams and ambitions, Allah SWT decides which ones are the best for us. And it is with this component of reliance that we can curb and overcome the toughest of times and the biggest of leaps. The phrase is, after all, "taking a leap of faith". As we embark on our leap, having faith is essential. It's time to transition to our first most important ambition, from a worrier to a warrior.

Many of the decisions we make in every phase of our lives, including our life ambitions as we transition to adulthood, is not just a matter of 'right' or 'wrong', as they will result in giving us different outcomes. It is how we embrace such phases by opening our hearts and minds to take that leap of faith with a little more bravery, a little more patience, a little less regret and a little less reluctance.

In the Book of Sahih Muslim, Abu Yahya Suhaib bin Sinan RA reported that Prophet Muhammad SAW said,

عَجَبًا لِأَمْرِ الْمُؤْمِنِ اِنَّ أَمْرَهُ كُلَّهُ لَهُ خَيْرٌ، وَلَيْسَ
 ذَلِكَ لِأَحَدٍ اِلَّا لِلْمُؤْمِنِ: اِنْ اَصَابَتْهُ سَرَّاءٌ شَكَرَ،
 فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ، وَاِنْ اَصَابَتْهُ ضَرَّاءٌ،
 صَبَرَ فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ

"Strange are the ways of a believer for there is good in every affair of his and this is not the case with anyone else except in the case of a believer for if he has an occasion to feel delight, he thanks [God], thus there is a good for him in it, and if he gets into trouble and shows resignation [and endures it patiently], there is a good for him in it." (Sahih Muslim)

and He
found
you



and
guided
[you]

By Nur Laili



The title is from Surah Ad-Duhaa, verse seven. (Quran 93:7)

وَأَلْضَحَىٰ
وَأَلَّيْلٍ إِذَا سَجَىٰ

Standing there in Masjid Sultan, I can't remember which year. I remember tasting the humidity on the 27th night of Ramadan. I remember performing *terawih* prayers. I remember the *imam* reciting Surah Ar-Rahman.

The beauty of Surah Ar-Rahman is always eulogised. I remember my dad once tearing upon listening to its recitation. Videos of non-Muslims on Youtube reacting as if, even without context, they could hear the tune of His mercy from those verses. They could hear how Arabic softened the edges of the coarse English translations.

Yet, even as my ears captured every *huruf* and every *ayat*, I didn't feel anything. I didn't feel that famous fascination. That inherent and intimate shift in the heart as it grasped something locked away in the *tajweed*. I heard every 'alif and yā'. I could distinguish between the *hā'* and *khā'*. But still, nothing.

I remember mourning the loss of my *iman* that day.

I remember, in those few moments making a silent *dua*:

"Ya Allah SWT, please open my heart. Please. Help me listen to this *surah* with my heart. Let me hear Your mercy and beneficence."

I remember my eyes relinquishing grief. But I also remember tears gushing from a fear that perhaps the ears of my heart had been sewn shut.

"Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]."
(Quran 93:3)

And with my head bowed down
my mind in a half-slumber,
I wondered whether this peace,
this resolute love for Him
is merely the intoxicants of insomnia
or if, briefly,
I did grasp true love for my Creator.

And I remembered those sublime days
where my soul brimmed with love,
where my eyes twinkled with understanding.
But much like Prophet Muhammad SAW's time here in the *dunya*,
those moments were ethereal and ephemeral,
gone but not lost.

The permanence of these moments escaped me
as I rose from a *sujood* that I wished to stay in for eternity
and every step away from the *sejadah* felt like a step away from You.

I miss You.

Ya Allah SWT, I can feel myself drifting.
I can feel the crevice inching apart as my foot

misses a step.

The burst of wind edges me off and I'm left
desperately digging my nails into the rocks.

Ya Allah SWT, the harrowing winds from the abyss
are whispering taunts in my ears
saying, "You've gone too far to return now".

Ya Allah SWT, please help
I cannot bundle myself up in a cloak again and pretend
that those winds are cooling.

Actually, I could
and that's what scares me.

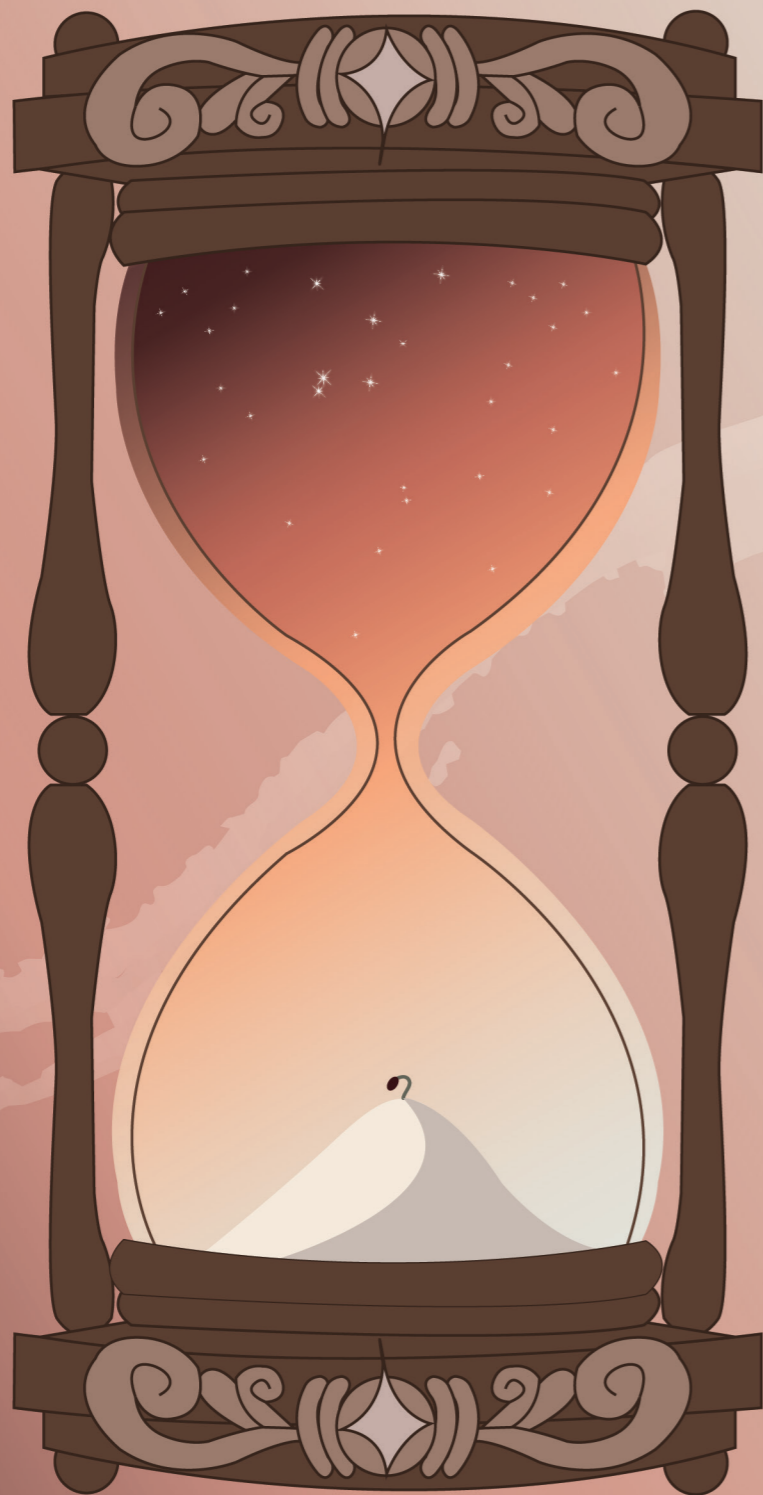
After showering in liquid sunshine, after inhaling warmth,
I can't go back.
I don't want to forget that calming sun.
For what are those winds but a chilly breeze whisking me towards treacherous flames?

Please Ya Allah SWT, I beg of You:
keep me close to You,
I need You now, tomorrow and forever.

"And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied." (Quran 93:5)

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ

Through My Lens



A HUNDRED VISIONS & REALIZATIONS



By Nursarah Safari

I'm about to tell you the things that I think I remember from my bus trip to the MRT station one night. Nothing special happened. It didn't lead to a big moral conclusion. There wasn't a call to adventure or a call to action.

Any other day or night, I would've taken the seat upstairs, near the back of the double-decker. But that night, the 179 was a single-decker. I can't tell you how many students were at the bus stop with me or what day it was, except that it surely wasn't a Monday.

They got on first. Were it not for the warm streetlights streaming into the windows, it probably would have been impossible to see anything. The driver's silhouette, his steering wheel, the walls and fuzzy seats in the bus were all cast with a sharp orange glow. I thought I'd caught a faint musty smell inside the bus, but when I turned to walk further in, I knew for certain that it smelled musty.

In the front half of the bus, there were seats facing each other like in an MRT. I can't ever tell you why anyone would've thought that was a good idea, but I was more optimistic that night. The driver'd already slammed his foot on the throttle. Those seats were a saving grace.

I sat down. Laptop, bag, bottle. Shuffle.

The slightest breeze of a melody began serenading me. Huff.

At the seats across me were two people. One of them was a Chinese worker. At least, I thought she was Chinese. How was I to know? Sometimes, I need 20 guesses before I get my friends' races right. You'd think that living in a multi-racial country, I'd have this algorithm figured out by now, but I don't. In fact — how was I to know if she was a she?

Anyway, she was in an orange uniform. The streetlights shone on her hair, which was tied back into a straight ponytail. Her legs were crossed and her back was hunched. She made me think of worker dormitories, and family members toiling in some faraway country. But she also had her earpieces on, she was scrolling on her phone and she was as engrossed as any other commuter you could imagine on their phone, and that made me think that maybe she wasn't as lonely and depressed as I'd, for some reason, thought.

Next to her was an Indian man. Maybe. The streetlights shone on his thick hair. He didn't have a phone. Instead, he had his elbow hung on the back of his seat so that he was facing the front of the bus, looking out the driver's window.

Near the door, there was, plausibly, a white student with his earpieces on. The wires were swaying sharply to and fro. His hands were in his pocket. Daring. Macho. Who was he trying to prove?

I wish I could tell you more about the people, but I only gave myself half a second to stare.

I looked away. The pole nearest to me came into manual focus. The pole had diamond-shaped grooves on it. The orange (or was it purple?) paint was chipped. It was reflective like a mirror under where the paint should've been. Why that captivated me, I can't tell you. I don't know.

Or maybe I did. I remember wondering that the pole must've been as old as, or older than, I was.

It was probably 16 bars into the song that I realised it was playing, fewer bars when I saw myself laughing with my colleagues

in that white-lit office over summer break, and even fewer that nostalgia crashed onto my heart. But my colleagues — ex-colleagues — were not in the bus, and the only thing lighting up the seats across from me were the streetlights coming and going, empty.

When did they get off the bus?

The student clambered to the seats. Only now did he grip the handles. All the wiser.

The student sat directly in front of me. The light outside blinked green on his hair, then red. Blonde. He wasn't looking at his phone. He definitely wasn't looking at the seats across from him either. He wasn't wide-eyeing the driver's window or each passing bus stop. His fingers drummed one rhythm. His foot tapped another. But I still couldn't hear the song he was listening to.

So. He knew his way around.

And I'd missed the last two songs, at least. Where did they go?

In my hips, I could feel the bus taking the first bend before entering the interchange. Did he notice, above our heads, how frayed the bus advisories had gotten? The bus bent again.

No — in fact, where did Monday go?

blooming along the cities I visit

By Izza Haziqah



Hanoi, Vietnam

The cold was unexpected. When we exited the airport, none of our efforts to keep ourselves warm worked. I did my best to squeeze my hands together and hug myself with my thin layer of clothes, but the cold was relentless. My nails turned blue. It hit me — my ignorance about the rest of Southeast Asia. I thought all of Vietnam shared the weather of Malaysia and Singapore. As I stood shivering outside the airport gates, in addition to the weight of the cold, I also felt the weight of my mistake.

I spent the following fourteen days exploring the tiny and enriching streets of Hanoi with my new jacket. That chilling feeling upon first arriving in Vietnam struck me then, and the impression still remains now. The world is incredibly vast; my Southeast Asian neighbours contained so much beauty to explore and learn from.

As I walked along the Old Quarter with my new jacket, I reflected on the visual and interruptive force of the French against Vietnamese architecture. The sight called my attention to the impact of a traveller's ignorance upon arrival in a different land. My first visit to Vietnam marked the last time I would ever want to visit a place with ignorant presumptions. As I hugged myself against the wind, I made a promise: to always be open-minded as I travel.





Fez, Morocco

The sight of Old Medina blew me away. The chaotic walkways grasped my sight with its vivid warm colours. The cacophony of voices in the market — sellers calling for buyers, friends in conversation, children and teenagers playing along the narrow streets — was foreign yet welcoming. The shop owners smiled at us, embracing us with *salam* and greeting us with *marhaban*. I took a deep breath, and the amalgamation of oud, spices, dust, and sand created a scent I never want to forget. The entire atmosphere begged for my attention and my appeal. Omar, our host, walked us through his hometown with the familiar aptitude only a local would carry. My friends and I looked around ourselves in awe. The browns and oranges of the walls, the wooden musk in the air, the sand in the light — I vividly remember how utterly timeless the city felt. Fez had a personality of its own, and the streets in the Old Medina was one of the veins that allowed the heart of Fez to continue beating. I was so fascinated by every corner that this city had to offer.

That first night, our hosts served us dinner in the intimate space of their home. As we took in the marble floors and the delicious Moroccan *khobz*, I also made sure to take in our hosts' conversations. I knew I would learn best about the city from its dwellers. Listening, I brimmed with excitement to begin our adventure.

Reykjavik, Iceland

Streetlights. An uncommon feature in the country even in the city area. There were no lamps to accompany us in the dark, only reflective markers to guide us. Yet, though our path was shrouded in darkness, the drive back to our accommodation was nothing short of stunning. Above us, the sky boasted a natural depiction of what it would be like to live away from light pollution, away from city skyscrapers, away from tall buildings and architecture. In the dark, the sky glowed. The stars served what the absent streetlights were not able to. Constellations, stars, galaxies, possibly even planets and other universes; they

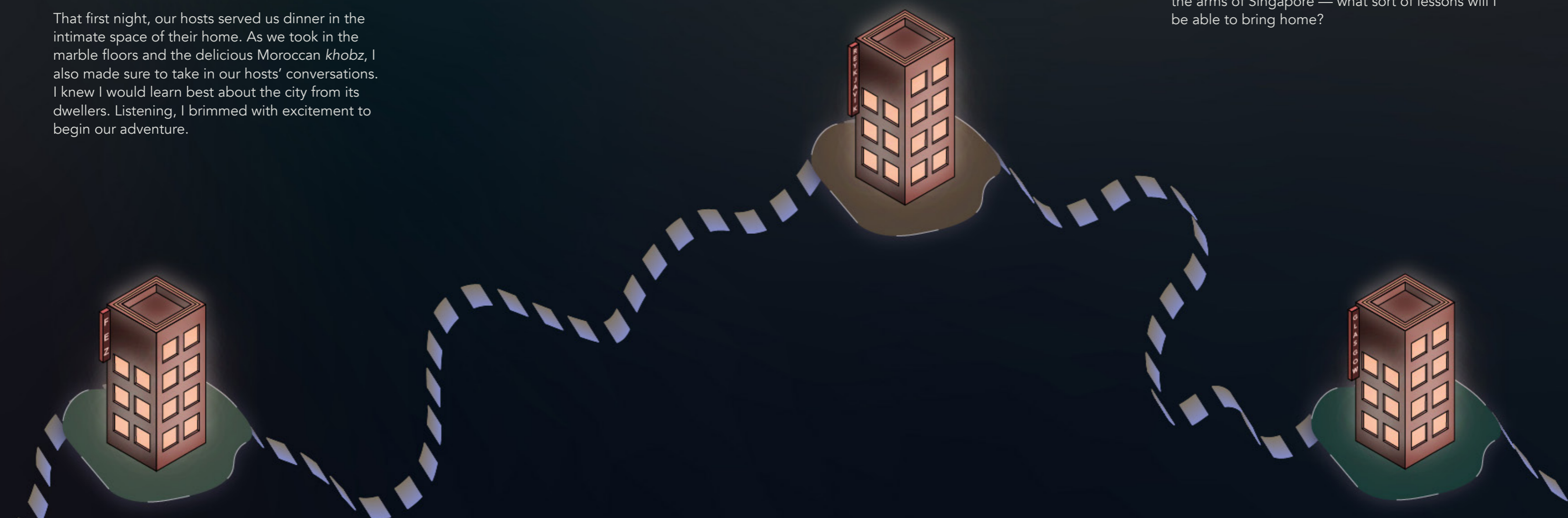
were all scattered across the black canvas of the night sky. They dotted, glittered, spread themselves as wide as the empty horizon could be seen, as far as my limited sight could experience.

The drive back under this wondrous view made the darkness around me feel like nothing. It made me forget that I was on an island thousands of miles away from home, from the warm comforts of familiarity, from the assuring protection of those around me. It made me forget the terror that came with my first time driving overseas. Though the journey lasted a mere few minutes, it gave me a memory of a breathtaking sky that will last a lifetime.

Glasgow, Scotland

It was hard to tell when exactly spring began. It was gradual. The air felt less cold, the paths were less slippery, the skies bluer than grey. And the flowers — their petals accompanied the light flakes of snow that didn't manage to fall during winter. The soft blend of pinks, whites, and yellows bloomed alongside the greens on trees that, only weeks ago, were mere brown branches. Seeing the flowers in full bloom, it dawned upon me how quickly the previous three months had passed.


By then, each of the streets carried their own significance; Hillhead was an area of interaction and friendship, Queen Street was a space of intermission and brief transit, whereas Garrowhill is the place of return, the place I call my home. Under the blossoming trees of the University Avenue, I beheld the beautiful midst of spring, the season of rebirth. As I lay comfortably on the ground, I closed my eyes and inhaled the scent of the grass, my surroundings buzzing with faint sounds of conversation. Within two months, I'll be embracing the arms of Singapore — what sort of lessons will I be able to bring home?




in spring,
 the tree's buds open and 'pop!' flowers bloom
 hummingbirds, bees, butterflies, bugs all come
 enchanted by the scent
 to fill their bellies up with sweet nectar
 surely, Allah SWT is The Best of Planners and The Most Loving
 in summer,
 the tree provides much-needed shade from the heat
 and water in the form of fresh fruit
 surely, Allah SWT is The Best of Planners and The Most Loving
 in autumn,
 the tree begins to shed
 its leaves change colours to
 yellows
 oranges
 browns
 reds
 what a spectacle to behold!
 in winter,
 the tree now naked
 has no
 signs of life
 its branches
 thin and crooked
 reach out as much
 as they can
 to the space
 above it
 grasping
 for air
 no leaves to
 soften these
 hard edges
 (surely, Allah SWT is The Best of Planners and The Most Loving)
 but even here
 the tree provides a resting place for birds — their wings aching from the many
 miles they fly looking for food
 surely, Allah SWT is The Best of Planners and The Most Loving
 in spring,
 the tree again blooms
 all colours
 greens
 pinks
 whites
 purples
 yellows
 burst out of the earth altogether all at once

SEASONS OF

Love

By Siti Sarah Binte Nassir Teng 

 Typography by Nashrah Alwi

and the cycle continues

each season, there is purpose

to be here

present

in each moment

submerged

in

sweetness

surely, Allah SWT is The Best of Planners and The Most Loving

Photograph by Siti Sarah Binte Nassir Teng 



A WALK WITH GOD

By Julian JP Lee



Silence.
All I hear.
The rustling of the leaves as
the wind blows through
the trees. I listen
for God.
All I hear
is
silence.

Winter.
Snow falls like
ash from the altar
of my dreams.
Ice traps hope
underneath
the surface.
Suffocating.
Winter.

Desert.
The sun pierces my
parched body. The heat
of doubt
drains me of strength
I wander through
an infinity
of godless country.
Eternity burns.
Desert.

Spring.
A symphony of a stream.
A song of a bud.
Echo through my
being.
The mystery of how
God is there even
when He is absent.
Fresh faith.
Spring.

Silence.
All I hear.
The rustling of the leaves as
the wind blows through
the trees. I listen
to God.
All I hear,
His
Silence.

Illustration by Norulhijriah



Moonlight

By Vanessa Ong



I break and bend
and shine and gleam
until the stars above
recognise me as their own flame
that I am worthy of love
and forgiving of the shame
that I hold on to for years
when you left me wounded;
crying with tears

as I thought to myself that I was never an option to begin with.

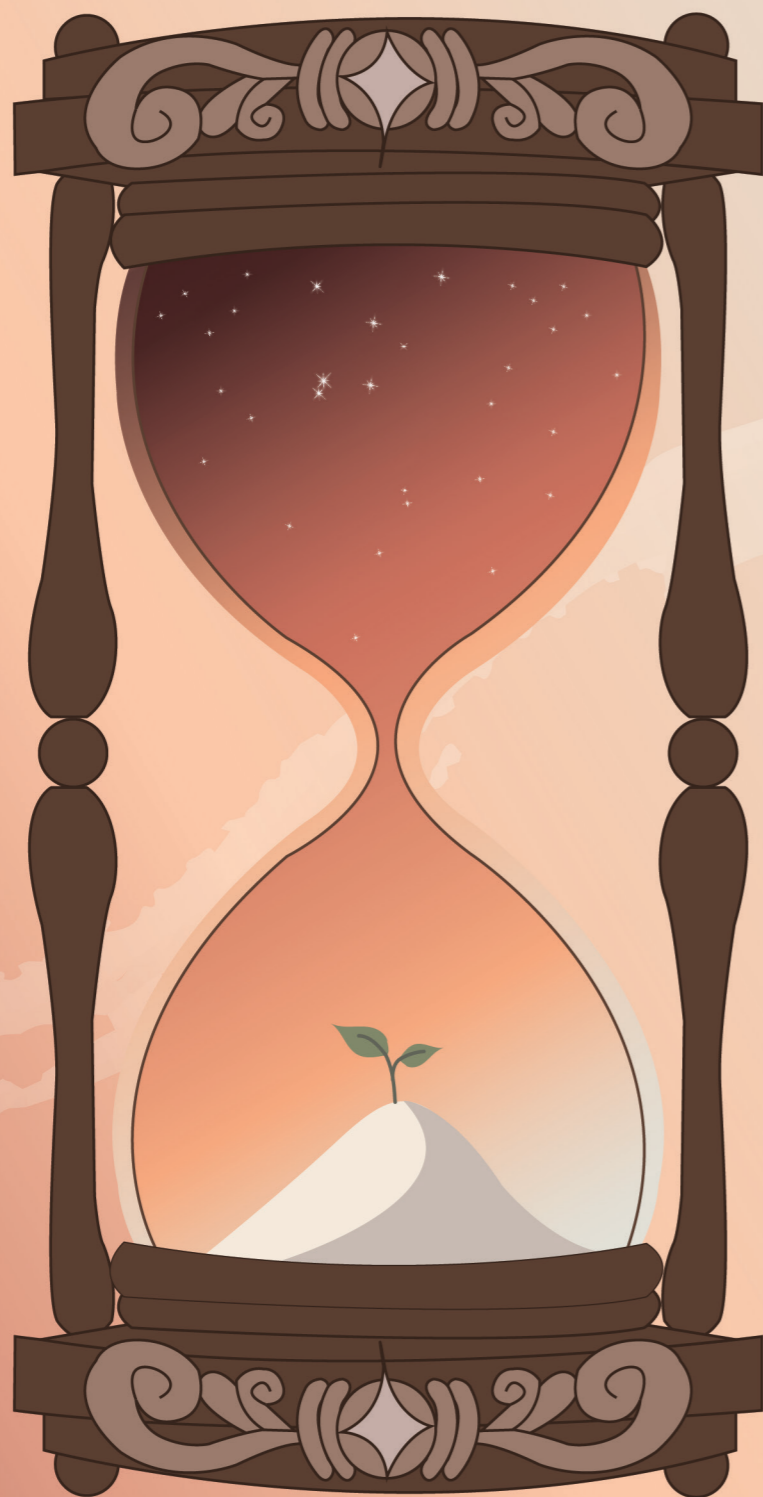
But I forgot that worthiness comes from within
and if the Moon has the ability
to take it on the chin
to bring light to our night sky even when she grieves
over the absence of the Sun
every night,

I could be Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, to
share her sorrows and lift her pain,
for stars make their own light
but only the Moon has no light of her own.

I break and bend
and shine and gleam
until the Moon above
recognises me as her own flame
that she is worthy of love
and forgiving of the shame
that she has held on to for years;
when all she thought she could do was reflect light from the Sun
but little did she know that
her moonlight had taught me that I could be her brightest star in the night sky.

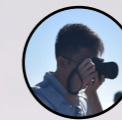


A Letter to You



Prayers for *you*

By Syazwan Bin Zainal Shah



I hope God makes you smile
even for a short while;
for all the times you wince
from the discomfort of trials
and the tears that drown
even the river Nile.

And when you are ready,
I hope God grants you
a soul that doesn't beguile
nor leaves the turnstile
when everything's
gloomy and dull.

Someone with morals
and principles who reconciles
before anything goes south;
A heart who knows no vile
to leave you in the wild;
alone and reviled.

And who knows,
maybe someday we'll meet again
and we can joke about the pain
or laugh at our teenage brains
where there was nothing to lose
and everything to gain.

Until then,
I hope and pray to God
you live a life worth living,
a dream worth chasing;
and fight the battles worth winning
in light of a past worth regretting.

May these words be a whisper;
of muted cries and whimpers;
of dried up wounds and blisters;
a silent yet loud prayer;
heard only by the angels.
And You, the Creator.

Amen.

The 21st Century Scholar

By Ahmad Ubaidillah



The importance of seeking knowledge has always been central in Islamic culture and emphasised since the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW in the sixth century. This is encapsulated in the fact that the first Quranic verse sent down by Allah SWT is, **"Read!"** (Quran 96:1). Prophet Muhammad SAW thereafter advocated the importance of seeking knowledge. Anas bin Malik RA reported: Prophet Muhammad SAW said, **"Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim."** (Sunan Ibn Majah) It is also mentioned in the Quran about the value of possessing knowledge: **"Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees."** (Quran 58:11)

In Islam, all branches of knowledge are a sign of the beauty of Allah SWT's creation. To seek knowledge in any of the countless areas is to acknowledge the magnitude of His greatness. However, in this article, I will be touching upon seeking a specific branch of knowledge — religious knowledge.

The act of seeking religious knowledge is an integral part of Islam and should be ingrained into the identity of Muslims. The earliest followers of Prophet Muhammad SAW, the Prophet's Companions, were seekers of knowledge first and foremost, always listening to and consulting Prophet Muhammad SAW. Several *ahadith* and Quranic verses stemmed from the questions that were asked by the Companions, and the answers they were given have

contributed to the collection of knowledge amassed in Islam. One renowned and important verse sent down as a result of a Companion's question (Zayd Al-Khayr RA) is from Surah Al-Maidah regarding game caught by hunting dogs. Another verse sent down because of a Companion's question (Abu Dahdah RA) is from Surah Al-Baqarah regarding menstruating women. In these instances, a Companion's question has benefitted generations of Muslims as it resulted in a clear clarification on an issue. Without knowledge of the religion, a person is kept in a state of ignorance and has no knowledge to act upon. It would be as if a person is on a path at midnight without the moon in the sky to light his way, blind to the pitfalls that await him. Imam Al-Ghazali *Rahimahullah* stated in his renowned book 'Letter to a Disciple', **"O Child, knowledge without practising it is insane, and practising without knowledge is impossible."**

The foundation of religious knowledge is best instilled when young so that when children are starting to mingle in society, be it in schools or their neighbourhoods, they have a strong identity and are not easily swayed by negative influences. It is during this period of their lives that they should be introduced to Islam as a moral compass. Therefore, it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children receive ample religious education, be it by teaching them personally or sending them to weekend religious classes. However, often the case is that a person's religious education is halted when they grow older. It is vital to remind ourselves that the responsibility of seeking religious knowledge doesn't end when we become older. Our paths as adults are more challenging for us and thus we should pursue beneficial religious knowledge to help us overcome our challenges.



Illustration by @fizz_itup

In our current time and age, acquiring religious knowledge has never been easier, especially in Singapore, where religious classes and programmes in our mosques and institutions are affordable and accessible. We can also benefit from the knowledge available online. However, when doing so, remember to always check the sources and practise restraint in consuming online content; it is always better to ask and learn from accredited *asatizah*. Islamic knowledge is vast and complex, thus not everything can be taken at face value.

While it is important to put in the effort to acquire religious knowledge, it is also imperative that we remember the responsibility that comes with it — to practise the knowledge acquired. Jundub Ibn Abdullah RA reported: Prophet Muhammad SAW said, **"The parable of the scholar who teaches people virtue but forgets himself, is that of a lamp giving people light while it burns itself."** (Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir) Lest we forget, the reason we seek knowledge is to protect ourselves from ignorance and to practise deeds that will grant us goodness in this life and the hereafter.

Another responsibility attached to the possessors of knowledge is to share it with others. Knowledge in its true essence shouldn't just benefit those who own it, but others around them too. Sharing knowledge enables a society to flourish and will benefit us, even long after we

have passed on from this world. Abu Hurairah RA reported: The Prophet SAW said, **"When the human being dies, his deeds end except**

for three: ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge or a righteous child who prays for him." (Sahih Muslim)

With the existence of social media today, we have platforms to spread the knowledge we acquire. We are given a voice to make a difference and it is

up to us how we utilise it. Instead of mindlessly tweeting and liking pictures, it is time we use these platforms to spread nuggets of content for others' benefit. Perhaps it can be an inspirational quote from a scholar, or a *hadith* about the rewards of praying and being dutiful children, or a reminder to fast and donate to the needy.

Remember: Days we have aren't stretched out in front of us forever. It's important for us to make the most out of the time we have by following in the footsteps of scholars, which is to seek knowledge to make a positive difference in the world. Only then, by being a 21st-century scholar who has maximised the modern resources readily available at hand, can we benefit from the knowledge we have gained, be it by sharing with others or practising it in our daily lives.

"Knowledge without practising it is insane, and practising without knowledge is impossible."

-Imam Al-Ghazali *Rahimahullah*

change is the only constant

the only constant in this life is change; changes that equate to different phases in life. living in between those phases, then, can be likened to going through constant transitions. and in these transitions, one will be searching for their identity. as a result of the lack of a fully-formed self-concept, we succumb to temporal desires that give immediate gratification. but what i seek to achieve is permanence of the Hereafter over the transient desires in this life.

going through these constant transitions in between phases makes it simple to slip away into the unfavourable. it is easy to fall into the trap of the ignorant, the unlawful or the disobedient. just a small misstep could lead to a downward spiral of negative, unwanted emotions and actions. and that's when the broken cracks of my faith call for You; the All-Listening, the All-Knowing. the depths of my despair cannot bear to face You in the state of my imperfect self. but You know how imperfect we are, as You are the All-Knowing. and as Your Slave, i am trying my hardest to live this life in accordance with Your Pleasure. but i am struggling, and in that struggle, i am also learning.

the millennial's progress

figuring life out in the stage of emerging adulthood can be daunting. with the high expectations that i place on myself, this constant desire to always be the best that i can be for myself and for the people around me. and as any human would, i make comparisons with societal standards to assess the current state of my own life. coupled with the normalcy of social media, i am always connected to the outside world. with the increase of this connectivity, i can learn about anything, anywhere and anytime. on one hand, i could use this facet of social media in order to improve myself by seeking content that nourishes my soul. on the other, it could be detrimental to my psycho-social need to always be relevant and in the loop. and that's why it is vital to know the boundary that i set for myself as i embark on this journey called life. to know and achieve the balance

between what's going on in my chaotic mind, with my ever-growing to-do list, and doing what's good for my soul, like taking time in my day to be with Him. i am trying to figure out this balance, as have others before me. and i may not succeed in the here and now, and that's okay. but i will keep trying. to seek Your Felicity. to seek Your Guidance. towards You. to You, for You.

the how and why

in the search of meaning in this life and for the next, i'd always question the how and why. how did i end up here? why was i deserving of this opportunity? how would it be if things turned out differently? why me, not them? and in trying to answer the questions, i always end up with even more curiosity. i find that the more i try to get the answers, the more there is that i don't know. and that can be quite frustrating particularly when this heart needs the closure that it craves.

You are the Best of Planners

and when the search for meaning arrives at a mind block and we have nowhere else to turn to, we surrender to You. we submit to You, because You are the All-Mighty, and the Best of Planners. and our hearts will only ever be content when You give us Your Decree. and this heart will only be at peace after placing my forehead on the prayer mat, begging for Your Guidance and Forgiveness. only You can guide us to the right path, only You can grant us the closure of peace that this heart craves.

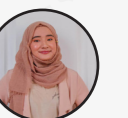
calling for You. always

this soul is on a never-ending search for peace and serenity. even when i have accomplished a milestone, there is always "what's next?", something that is lacking, an emotion that makes me feel that i am not quite there yet. that feeling of being whole, being complete, of reaching the destination that makes me feel just right. and as much as i know that feeling would only exist in the Hereafter, my heart still continues to yearn for that feeling, despite knowing of its unattainable nature in the here and now. and perhaps that emotion drives me closer to You, calling for You when my heart is lost and broken. and perhaps i will keep calling for you over and over again, till i meet You.

with love, M.

// Permanence over Transience //

By Siti Maryam



Focus to Infinity



By Mohammad Aashiq Anshad

Photography is, by definition, if we are to examine the etymology at play here, the representation, *graphé*, of light, *phōs*. As a field, and as a means of expression, a means of art, photography has been in existence for over two hundred years, a longstanding tradition, an institution.

The two hundred years in question have been rife with all sorts of development, advancement, research, and absolute magic that have resulted in the things that we can create these days being so monumentally, unfathomably removed from the first rudimentary images that we as humankind were able to capture on film.

I typically carry with me at least two cameras.

First, the one we all carry — the smartphone. Mine is equipped with three lenses on the back and two more on the front, apparently using this odd mosaic of circles and sensors to bolster image quality.

I also carry with me my Sony a6000 — a micro marvel of modern machinery, lightweight, and equipped with an equally compact 35mm lens, ideal for quick snaps documenting daily life, daily light.

Neither of these can hold a candle, though, to what is admittedly my pride and joy — my Sony A7R Mark II, a little heavier than her cousin, the a6000, a little larger, and a little more unwieldy, not pocketable at all, typically accompanied by my favourite zoom lens and my signature Pika-chu-themed accessories. This one doesn't come with me everywhere, no, she's more serious than that. Crucially, she boasts a massive, massive, 42

megapixels of resolution, a back-side-illuminated sensor for improved performance in low-light, in-built image stabilization, and, crucially, over four hundred autofocus points.

Improved low-light performance. Image stabilization. Autofocus.

All of which I appreciate greatly, all of which are undeniably useful, all of which take away, frankly, from the need, the duty, of the photographer to do all this himself.

Autofocus, in particular, has been revolutionary, and has continued to be revolutionary.

Leica started the race back in the sixties, quickly followed by Nikon, Canon, Pentax, and the rest, each of which did their level best to one-up its competitors by making the process more accurate, more consistent, *faster*.

Of course, today we measure autofocus quality first and foremost by the speed of it all. Focuses in less than a second? Beautiful. A half-press is all it takes as the camera hunts for the 'optimal' focal point, and snap, click, done.

Photography, eh?

Manual focus was once the only option, and was, by default, King. The photographer would have to himself adjust the optics, sliding metal rings and rubberised grips over one another to tweak the movement of multiple aspherical pieces of glass until the specific object that *he wanted in focus* was *as in focus as he wanted it to be*.

Naturally, though, we sought solutions to the natural condition.

Active Autofocus

This one came first. Measure distance. The closest one. That's it. That's the subject. Snap, click, done.

I suppose I'm guilty of this, far too often. It's easy, tempting, seductive, to simply think about tomorrow. To think about the here and now. To think about the next deadline, the closest hurdle. This article is due at 2359 tonight — so here I am, autofocused, tapping away in near darkness at ten to eleven.

Contrast Detection

This one came next. This one was progress. Look for contrast. Search for differences. Search for something different. Search for the unique option. Search for color, search for borders. Search for the

one that stands out. That's it. That's the subject. Snap, click, done.

I do this all the time. Do you? I'm sure I'm not the only one. I thought hard about what to write, you know. I thought carefully about what I could contribute to this issue of ELEVEN. I wrote for the 9th — a piece about Baraka Blue. I wrote for the 10th — this time about the craft of a poet, and the Divine as the quintessential subject. I wrote for the 11th — about Christ-church (spare a moment here, if you can, dear reader, to recite Al-Fatihah for the victims, for their families).

And as the theme, Phases, flitted about in my mind, I couldn't help but think about how I could find something...something different. Something that would stand out from the things I'd written in the past. Something that would stand out from the pieces on the pages adjacent to this one.

And so I arrived at the idea to write about photography — not entirely as a personal reflection, but with a solid component of the technicalities of the craft. I'm new to the field, but I'm learning. And here I found my contrast.

So, this was the subject. Snap, click, done.

Phase Detection

This one is everywhere. This one is today.

Beams of light fire out of the camera, through the lens, all over the scene — and the sensor, through a combination of math and science that honestly *has* to be magic, figures out which beams took how long to get how close. The sensor and the processor, then, figure out which bit of the frame is most important. The shot is composed for you, you just have to press the button. Snap, click, done.

I do this, too. All the time, in fact. It's natural, or at least it feels like it. We figure out what is supposed to come next. We look for the answers, we look for the way. We look for guidance, we look for opinions of others, we look for, crucially, instructions.

Save me, protect me, help me, defend me, from the need, the terrifying, harrowing, frightening, overwhelmingly nebulous need to pinpoint for myself what might be most important.

What should I write about?

What am I supposed to write about?

What should I focus on?

What am I supposed to focus on?

Do you think this is a good idea?

Do you like it?

What am I supposed to like?

You think it's good? Perfect. The shot is composed for me. I just have to press the button.

Snap, click, done.

Manual Focus

Vintage lenses bring me such joy. I affix them to my cameras, screw them on (they don't have fancy button-clicks or quick-releases), and work them out, by hand.

They are far, far slower. A child runs by — I miss the shot, I'm too busy twisting the focus ring.

They are far heavier, too, constructed of metal and glass. No plastic here, no carefully, arbitrarily, precisely, machine-cut edges. They feel like they mean business. They do.

No motors inside, no whirring of autofocus engines. Optical elements slide silently, folding, unfolding, reflecting, refracting. Images get sharper as I tell them to. Images blur themselves under my direction.

I decide what to focus on.

The sharpest results on manual lenses, though, occur when we focus to infinity. The pieces of glass align in such a way that they lock on as far a point on the horizon as they can reach. Everything there, everything beyond, is perfectly in focus. My hand wobbles and nothing changes — sharp is sharp. I step forward, I step back — sharp is sharp. Something comes closer and it blurs — but sharp is sharp, and infinity remains infinite.

Focusing to infinity brings clarity. Focusing to infinity is unshakeable — infinity does not change. The world may change, the sun may rise and fall, the sky may crumble into sand and smoke and the ground may tear itself asunder but infinity does not change.

But focusing to infinity reliably depends, dear reader, on manual focus.

Here we are every day confusing ourselves and distracting ourselves with things that we think to be important. Moving subjects. Standing out. Social expectations, pressure, rules, desires, direction, conformity. Contrast. Phases. Here we are distracting ourselves and focusing on whatever our sensors, our motors, our predispositions tune us most naturally toward. Here we are autofocusing on the *dunya*.

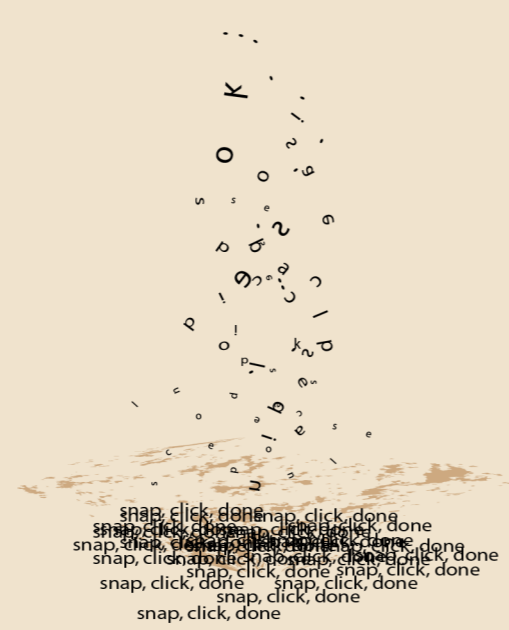
The *dunya*. The transient *dunya*. Can we reclaim control, then? Can we rise above our autofocus technology, our sensors and our motors to insist on utilising manual lenses instead?

What does it mean to focus to infinity?

We know for a fact, blessed as we are with our faith, that only Allah SWT Himself is, in fact, infinite in any way at all. We know for a fact that our terrestrial abode is temporary, and that it pales in comparison to our final home.


I remind myself first and foremost to twist the focus rings and transcend the ease that autofocus brings. To focus on death, not life, on *akhirah*, not *dunya*, on Allah SWT, not *insan*.

I remind myself to focus to infinity, to look beyond here and now, today and tomorrow, and to look forward to the moment where, with a click and snap of His fingers, I'll finally be done.



you wouldn't tell a butterfly



By Farid Yusuf 

You wouldn't tell a butterfly to stay a caterpillar
A beautiful flower to remain a little bloomer
Or ridicule a child for growing a little bigger
So why is it that when he stares in the mirror
With hopes of becoming a little greater
You put him down like he's a little beggar
You pass judgment on him, a little quicker
You bring up his past like he's the worst of all the sinners
You make him feel like a failed mister
So truth be told, who's the real monster?
Is it he, the dream-killer
Or you, the real murderer?
The same is true for our beloved sisters
You put them down in the name of honour
When the hijab was revealed to make them only stronger
As the western world is already telling our girls to look hotter
And you are only adding oil to the fire by telling them they are goners
Think, through all these psychological stresses, do you really want them to prosper?
Love, not hate, is what we need to foster
If only we don't give up on others for a little longer
With a bit of motivation, there's nothing they can't conquer
So serve the love on the saucer
And slay the hate with a slaughter
You wouldn't have changed for the better
If everyone pushed you down and called you an imposter
For every son of Adam is a sinner
And the best of sinners are the Repenters
So, open your doors to welcome the Repenters
May Allah SWT guide us and make us of the Embracers.



PROGRESSING WITH M³

M³ is a collaborative effort between **Muis**, **MENDAKI** and **MESRA**. It aims to build a Community of Success by:

1. Supporting citizen-centric and last-mile help for social and educational programmes, reaching families in need
2. Serving the needs and aspirations of the Malay/Muslim community
3. Encouraging individuals to step forward to help and promote impactful community programmes
4. Bringing together professionals and community leaders to contribute in local neighbourhoods, strengthening families and our next generation

THREE FOCUS AREAS

Marriage, Parenthood and Early Childhood Development by laying foundations for strong families early, through marriage preparation and support, nutrition, cognitive development, and numeracy skills for P1 preparedness

Vulnerable Individuals and Families by strengthening outreach to inmates' families and children at point of incarceration, and post-release follow-ups

Empowering and Mentoring our Youth by building a culture of excellence through connecting youths with mentors and role-models in the community

ABOUT M³@WGS

This office at Wisma Geylang Serai (Level 2) serves as a one-stop centre for integrated last-mile service delivery. In partnership with 8 Malay/Muslim organisations at KURNIA@WGS, the office also serves as an information and referral centre for the community.

ABOUT M³@TOWN

M³@Town is an informal platform for volunteers and professionals to work together to serve the needs of residents in the last-mile. This also creates opportunities for people to volunteer in their neighbourhoods, regardless of background and abilities.



WHERE ARE THE M³@TOWNS?

8 M³@Towns:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Tampines | 5 Jurong |
| 2 Pasir Ris-Punggol | 6 Marsiling-Yew Tee |
| 3 Bedok | 7 Nee Soon |
| 4 Chua Chu Kang | 8 Woodlands |



VOLUNTEER WITH US

First M³ initiative – KelasMateMatika@CC (KMM@CC)

This 10-week educational programme aims to strengthen pre-schoolers' numeracy skills and parents' confidence in preparing their children for Primary 1. Since its inception in September 2018, KMM@CC has benefitted more than 300 parents and children. In 2019, M³ plans to scale up KMM@CC to benefit 1,500 parents and children.



ELEVEN'S greatest

appreciation to



@loveformodesty started in late Sept '18 by a girl who aims to provide affordable muslimah essentials for all after she had a hard time looking for them for herself. She started small in the midst of her A levels prelims to distract herself from the depression she had. This platform was where she met kind souls and it helped her a lot in her healing journey.

If you know of anyone who need basic muslimah essentials, let her know and she'll be happy to gift them!

Yayasan MENDAKI (Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community) is the pioneer Self-Help Group in Singapore. Its programmes aim to assist students and individuals towards excellence as part of efforts to uplift the Malay/Muslim community's educational performance as well as enhancing its resilience and adaptability. We also advocate volunteerism as an avenue for personal and professional growth for passionate individuals.

Looking to acquire skills in youth mentoring? Have a passion for engaging young children with early numeracy concepts? Interested to coach students for PSLE Math exams? Volunteer@MENDAKI provides various opportunities for you.



Join the Volunteer@MENDAKI family where you get to meet like-minded volunteers who strive to make a difference in our Malay/Muslim community.

Scan the QR code or follow us online to explore various volunteering opportunities.



@volunteerMENDAKI



bit.ly/volunteerym



volunteer@mendaki.org.sg



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spa Jelita

Unveiling the beauty in you.

SpaJelita, a name synonymous with grandeur and luxury, is the essential destination to experience a Spa Journey that is a cradle of traditional Arabian customs and modern practices of Aromatherapy and first-class technologically advanced facial treatments. Relive the legend of Cleopatra and tales of the Velvet Nights with our selection of therapies.

Built in grandeur and sheer luxury, SpaJelita offer the opulence of ancient Arabia with up-to-the minute therapies enabling clients to taste, touch and feel the difference. From classic cures with indigenous ingredients such as henna, honey and dates, to more sophisticated rituals based on modern technology, SpaJelita demystifies the legends and demonstrates how these ancient rituals have become intricately linked with the modern Arabic spa experience.

Uniting the love for Islamic Arts, Arabic calligraphies and paintings, Mawaddah Design merges all of them into an artwork forming a harmonious amalgamations to soothe your eyes and make you smile. Artworks ranging from personalized Arabic names to your favourite quotes and verses, Mawaddah Design hopes to bring meaning to her art; to spread reminders, to self remind and to paint with His remembrance, *insya'Allah*. All artworks are hand-painted by yours truly, I hope Mawaddah Design would be a good friend for all in moving along the journey of life with spiritual motivations in fulfilling the purpose of life. May Allah accepts it from us.



Sarahanna Quran was established in 2017, by a mother-daughter duo. We are committed to serving the Muslim communities worldwide by providing the daily necessities of every Muslim, especially the Quran – a Divine Guidance to all.

With the intention to better understand, contemplate and remind ourselves of the beautiful verses of the Quran, we started our Quran Tagging Journey in 2018. With overwhelming support and love, we created our Quran Tagging Kit for the Ummah who all desire to be close to Allah through His words. May we go beyond just reciting the Quran, but to feed our souls and heal our hearts with the Quran.

SARAHANNA
— Q U R A N —

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY MUSLIM SOCIETY



ISLAMIC AWARENESS PROGRAMME



ALTERISK



SEEKERS' GARDEN



YUSRA



ELEVEN MAGAZINE



OVERSEAS EXPEDITION



PULSE



ORIENTATION PROGRAMME



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Please handle this magazine with care and, if need be, dispose it off properly either by burning or super-fine shredding as it contains Quranic verses.

Thank you.

