

the risk that matters of religious compliance will become nothing more than a mere business practice in the hands of those who do not read and who know nothing.

I've digressed. Recently a friend told me that he had never known a strong person who had had an easy past and I would agree. Although I don't necessarily think of myself as a strong person, I know my past was not easy. Becoming an orphan and carrying the responsibility of a family at the age of nine was a difficult struggle, but it was not impossible to overcome. My studies abroad in the United States were no picnic either. Though I endeavored to accept everyone, not everyone accepted me. During my last year of college I tended to isolate myself from the other Arab students, and my friendship was more confined to the groups of Indian students. There was less drama among them, they were more knowledgeable, and were far more serious in their studies. I didn't avoid other Arab students because of any major disagreements. As I said, if I had any disagreements they were never based on anything more than a difference of opinions.

From time to time, whenever an opportunity comes up or I'm reminded of a past experience, I document it in my weekly column. "Sheikh without a Turban" is one of these articles in which I deliver a eulogy for my friend Sheikh Humaid Ashkanani, or Bu Hussein as I called him. I also mention our mutual hobby in cinematography. I had been fond of cinematography since I was a child when films were 8 mm, colored but soundless, and Bu Hussein, may God have mercy on him, shared this passion with me. In my article "Christmas," I reminisce about a road trip we took as students; the streak of troubles we faced on the road from Carbondale, Illinois to