

*The Weight of Tradition:
Pakistani Culture in Older & Younger Generations
Across New York & Pakistan*



July 6, 2025 - Shia men mourn during a religious procession on the 6th of Muharram in Skardu, Pakistan

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July 6, 2025 - Shia men move together on this religious day to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, grandson of Prophet Muhammad, and his family.

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July 6, 2025 - Pakistani men gather in the streets to beat their chests in rhythm with the music being broadcast over loudspeakers throughout the city. Some even stab themselves in mourning.

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July 6, 2025 - In the crush of bodies, individual pain becomes communal. The ritual demands everything.

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July 6, 2025 - Thousands of men march in the streets during the 6th of Muharram in Skardu, Pakistan in a tradition that has lasted for 1400 years.

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July 6, 2025 - Young boys wait atop a tractor during the protest. The Muharram tradition in Pakistan passes from father to son, generation to generation, unchanged.

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In Pakistan, I watched men perform grief. They beat their chests in rhythm, mourning Imam Hussain's death from 680 CE as though it happened yesterday. The ritual was precise, as everyone knew the movements, the timing, their role. This is tradition at its most powerful: a practice so deeply embedded it anchors identity across centuries and continents.



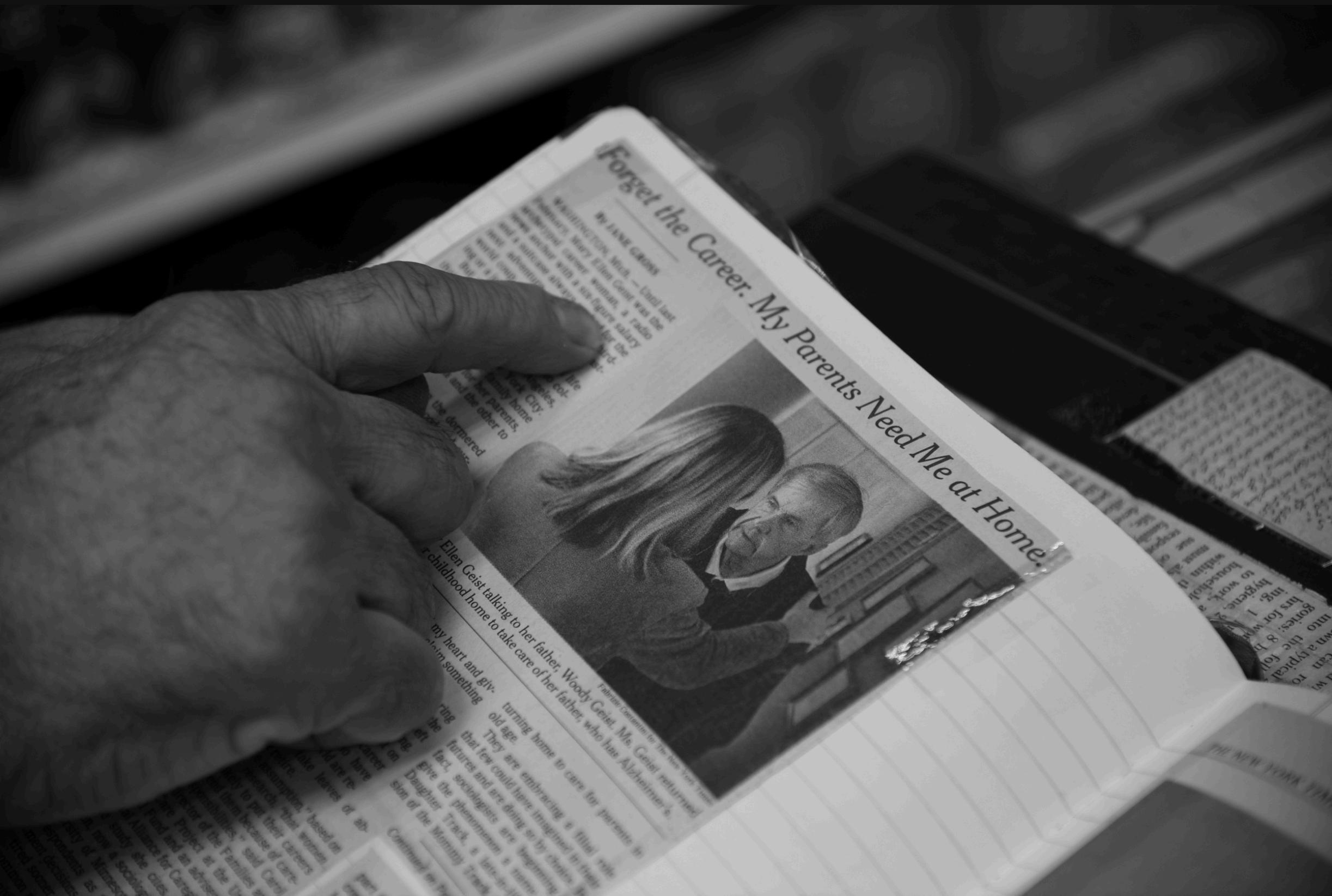
10/27/2025 - Little Pakistan, Brooklyn. Signs in Urdu, familiar storefronts. The neighborhood recreates the traditions left behind.

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10/27/2025 - Muhammad Aslam shows me decades of carefully annotated books hidden behind the counter of his halal grocery. Tradition preserved, knowledge maintained, passed down. When discussing his family, he said, "I hope you understand what I say when I say treat a wife like a suicide bomber. If she not treated right, she can hurt the children, the family, everyone around her."

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10/27/2025 - Muhammad Aslam explains why women shouldn't work outside the home. "In Christianity, it is when the woman went away from home that the religion had problem. Now, this is happening in our Islam. It will change things, hurt our religion."

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In Little Pakistan, tradition has traveled over 11,000 kilometers. The same traditions and hospitality I experienced in Pakistan exists here too. The older generation holds tight to what they brought with them. When building a community in a new country, tradition becomes the blueprint, telling people how to organize a wedding, raise children, run a business, maintain dignity. Tradition tells people who they are when everything else is unfamiliar.



10/27/2025 - Ayan Khan, my longtime close friend, and Abdul Aziz Butt were served free food at Rehmat Restaurant. No matter how much we tried to pay, they refused. Hospitality is non-negotiable, and it would have been a dishonor to them to allow a guest, especially a female one, to pay.

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July 11, 2025 - Hospitality culture is, and will likely remain to be, at the forefront of Pakistani way of life. Even with changing traditions, it seems unlikely that this foundation will change. In Brooklyn or Gilgit, the principle holds: feed the guest, protect the stranger, make room.

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June 29, 2025 - Aalyan Raza and Ahmed Bin Asim are growing up in a new era, where Pakistani men and women are intermingling more outside of families. Their lives are very different from their parents.' Aalyan told me, "We go clubbing, we go out. We date too. But we hide it."

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10/27/2025 - Yaseen Akram lectures me about the importance of finding a husband. He said to me, "Money will draw you to me. All women want is the money. I will give to you, you will be happy in your life." He was certain of his perspective, shaped by decades of experience.

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10/24/2025 - Maryam agreed to be photographed after dozens of women nervously declined. When asked why she agreed, she said, "I'm trying to say yes more. It's a new goal; I don't want to be afraid of new things."

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10/27/2025 - Farhana Afghan works at a bridal photography studio. "Normal, yes, for women to work with other women. But restaurants or other places are not very normal for us. But maybe it will become different now."

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10/27/2025 - Women ordering at a restaurant in Little Pakistan. Photographing women was difficult. Privacy is incredibly important in Islamic culture, and Pakistani men generally work to protect and preserve the privacy of women as much as possible.

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10/27/2025 - A female shopkeeper refused to be photographed but encouraged me to photograph her shop. The mannequin stands in symbolically.

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10/27/2025 - Kashif and Yaseen have been living in “Little Pakistan” for over 20 years and are well known in the community. The camaraderie between the older men in the neighborhood is apparent, and they are well respected. In the hour I spent in the restaurant, at least 10 people came to speak with them about something in Urdu or Pashto.

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10/27/2025 - Family and food are everything in Pakistani culture. Food is connection, obligation, and everyone's way of expressing love.

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10/27/2025 - *Hands rolling dough for traditional sweets. The work is painstaking, passed down through apprenticeship.*

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10/27/2025 - A political poster in Little Pakistan. The next generation is voting, organizing, claiming American political space while maintaining Pakistani identity. As Pakistani culture adapts, so does politics in New York City.

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*10/27/2025 - Ayan Khan, NYU student from KPK, Pakistan. His mother is a lawyer. He navigates both worlds carefully.
“I have Pakistani friends and international friends. They don’t usually mix.”*

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10/24/2025 - Sumaira, from Gujrat, Pakistan, is an NYU student who volunteered at The Islamic Center of New York City on 6th Avenue. "Many Muslims in younger generations, especially those born in America, are much more open than our parents."

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10/27/2025 - Zargam after Friday prayer. American-born, raised between two sets of expectations.

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10/27/2025 - From left to right: Malik, Zarqam, & Omar outside the mosque ran up, asked for a photo, and asked me questions about my life. They grew up in Little Pakistan and also expressed feeling different from their parents.

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Photographing in Little Pakistan meant constantly negotiating access. Men welcomed me into restaurants, mosques, and kitchens, but only after the right introductions. Women were more hesitant. They've learned that cameras can misrepresent, that Muslim women are often reduced to symbols rather than seen as individuals.

Privacy becomes a form of control when you can't control how others see you. I understood the refusals, respected them even. They were protecting something. The weight of tradition holds some people in place and crushes others. But weight can shift. The next generation is already deciding what to carry forward and what to finally set down. The boys who asked for my Instagram are growing up between two worlds. They'll pray on

Friday and play basketball on Saturday. They'll speak Urdu with their grandparents and English with their friends. They'll keep some traditions, like the hospitality, the food, the communal bonds, and renegotiate others.

Tradition sustains identity, gives people roots, tells them where they come from. But the second generation, especially in America, gets to decide how much weight to carry and how to carry it.



*10/27/2025 - This is the new generation. Tradition sustains identity but also constrains.
The second generation is renegotiating which parts to keep.*

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