Muna Essay Competition- 2018

“My identity as a Muslim American”

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**Introduction:**

My topic is about, my identity as a Muslim American. In this essay I will talk about the struggles of a Muslim in America, praying in school, praying when I pray outside, praying when I am at a shopping mall or supermarket, finding mosques in new cities, keeping my identity as a muslim, feeling good about being a muslim, and my identity as a Muslim American. In this essay I have talked about how we can use certain things like apps to know what time we have to pray or to find a masjid near us when we are in a different city. I have also talked about how I pray at school and how you can too.

**A brief history of my life:**

I was born in Bangladesh on January 15, 2004. I came to the United States of America on November 2007 with my mom and my brother. My dad came to the USA in 2006. I he was a student at the University of Nevada at Reno. He got a PhD in Mathematics and IT Education from that University, and a Masters in Computer Science from the University of Alabama. We are permanent Residents/green card holders but we will be citizens after 2 years. I am happy as a Muslim in America in 2018 because in this day and age our generation has many opportunities, according to the Pew Research center survey conducted in 2017, 62% said that they see islam as part of mainstream society. Also I believe that the muslim youth are the ones that will carry on the legacy of Islam in America so we have to teach them about Islam and make sure they don’t go toward the wrong path. Because if they do something wrong then everyone will think all Muslims are like that. There are still lots of challenges of being a muslim in America.

**Struggles of Muslims in America:**

As a Muslim American in the United States there are many challenges leading our everyday life. For example, figuring out a place to pray when you are at school, work, or just out and about at the park at the supermarket or for the ladies, the shopping mall, hanging out with your friends, buying that perfect hijab. Or something as simple as going grocery shopping using the halal scanner to figure out if the chips or cookies and cheese are halal or not. Yes, there is a app called Halal Scanner that lets you scan any food to check if its halal or not. I can imagine a kid scanning doritos to see if its halal. Actually, did you know Doritos and cheetos are haram because they contain beef or pig fat, even Pepsico has disclosed on there website that they do not use pig fat. But after doing some research I have found that they do use beef fat. So I’m sorry for disappointing all the kids who like Doritos and cheetos. There is a company called clancy's. They have doritos or their version but they don't use any beef or pork. It even tasted like the real thing. Another struggle is figuring out a way to spend time with friends and praying all the five daily prayers at the mosque which can be very difficult. A lot of times most people forget about prayer and spend most of their time with hanging out at the mall during prayer time or watching the world cup during prayer time. All these things the shaitan makes us do. He goes inside our brain and tells us “watch a little bit more, its ok you have time” and by the time you finish the game its 12 o'clock. So you missed maghrib and isha but you saw who won the world cup and to you that was more important than praying maghrib and isha. Which you will have to explain to allah on the day of judgment. Why you missed salah to watch television when the world cup was probably recorded on youtube. I admit, I have done this a few things and I really regret it because missing salah can really mess up your schedule. Suppose you miss your salah and you have to go somewhere or you have to go to sleep. You will feel very sleepy and not feel like praying that's why you have to pray when it's time to pray so you can sleep on time.

**Staying in touch with muslim community:**

When our family moved to a new state or city we tried to see where the nearest mosque is and try to see how the muslim community. We want to be near a muslim community so that we won't be lonely and feel like we are the only muslim in that town or city. Plus if we are not near a muslim community, we can't go for ramadan or eid we have to go 20 to 50 miles away just to pray.

**Praying in school:**

Usually at school the teachers or someone will let you pray at in an empty room. But if they don’t let you, which I don’t see why they won’t, you can just pray at home or on the bus or car ride home. Now I was fortunate that I had a nice principal in 8th grade. The funny thing is that I never asked him if I can pray somewhere. I usually just prayed in the library until one day he noticed me praying. Later that day I came was just sitting in English class when suddenly my teacher tells me to go the principal's office. Now in my mind i'm thinking, oh no this is bad, because I'm thinking what if he says I can't pray anymore. But to my surprise he gave me the conference room in the office to pray in during lunch. So don't be afraid to ask your teacher.

**Praying when I am outside:**

Suppose you are at a different city or traveling somewhere you have never been to and you can't find a mosque that you can pray Zuhr or Asr prayer. There are many apps on the App Store or the Google Play Store that show you any mosques that are near you. One very popular app is Muslim Pro but there are also many other apps you can use. Now suppose you are at a park and there is no mosque nearby, what do you do? Well then you could just pray on the grass or in your car, it's perfectly fine to do that.

**Praying at a Supermarket or Shopping Mall:**

So before I was talking about how us teens as muslims in america, we need to figure out how to spend time with our friends and pray the five daily prayers on time. So suppose you are at the mall with friends and it's Dhuhr or asr time but you are hanging out with friends and you know it's going to be dark by the time you get home so you need to pray. Well this has happened to me before, all you have to do is pick out a t-shirt that you like, go to the dressing room, ask if you can try it on, and they will open a dressing room for you so you go in, pray and put the t-shirt back where it belongs. That's another way you can also pray when you are outside.

**Some strange places that I have prayed:**

I remember one time we went to a qurbani and it was Friday. So when it was jummah time we got a few blankets sat down. Someone gave the khutbah and then we prayed jummah prayer right there at the farm next to all the cows being slaughtered. It was a different experience. Or you can just wait till you get home and pray but you might be tired by the time you get home. Another time we went to a canyon that was like 50 miles away from our home. By the time we were coming home it was isha time and if we prayed when we get home it would be like 12 in the morning. So we decided to pull over on the side of the interstate, did wudu and we prayed Isha prayer on the interstate while there were big rigs speeding past us. It was truly a strange experience. The purpose of me talking about these strange places that I have prayed before and the app that shows you any mosques nearby is to show that were ever you go you can't just forget about prayer. What if you die during prayer time but you weren't praying. You were doing something else like watching television or playing video games. But people will pray and pray asking for forgiveness when something bad happens to them.

**Finding mosques in new cities:**

When our family goes to new cities for vacation, we try to find mosques, if we are staying there for more than 2 hours. Plus you can meet new people at the mosque and you might even make a new friend and you can see what what mosques around the world look like. I remember in Bangladesh when we went on vacation in 2015 at my dad's house in Bangladesh we would go to different mosques everyday to see what every mosques looks alike. Another time when we went to visit Canada, we found a mosque and prayed Asr prayer there. We got to see how Canadian mosques look like. After doing a Google search we found a mosque that looked like a house. After waiting about 10 minutes we meet the muajin. He let us in and we prayed Maghrib prayer there. We got to meet some new people. Going to a new mosque is almost like an adventure. Because you get to explore different mosques and see how beautiful they are. Like the Al Farooq mosque in Atlanta, GA or the Diyanet center of America in Lanham, Maryland. There are very beautiful mosques. But there are even more some small mosques. They are all worth seeing. It's like visiting a museum. Did you know the first mosque in america was created in Cedar Rapids, Iowa called the The Mother Mosque probably since it was the first mosque in America.

**Keeping my identity as a Muslim American:**

Keeping my identity as a Muslim in America can be tough. There will always be people that want to make you do bad things in America and try to guide you away from Islam. They will tell you that there is nothing wrong with it. When something goes wrong no one wants to help them. They make them outcasts. Most of the time these individuals commit suicide which is really sad. I know a Youtuber by the name of FouseyTube or Yousef Saleh Erakat. He was going through depression and did some “bad” things like get a dog to help with his depression and the whole muslim community thought of him as a disgrace to society. Now he is on a tour around the world with another famous youtuber Adam Saleh. He is helping people who are going through the same thing he was going through before. The muslim communities never try to help these people with depression. They just tell them don't commit suicide and that they need to be happy. I mean think about it, have you ever heard the imam at the mosque talk about suicide or depression during khutbah or any other public speech? They try to think that it does not exist and these people end up going to another religion that will help them because if you see americans have many programs that help people with depression.

**Doing good deeds for being a Muslim:**

We have a Muslim identity and that means that we have to show the world that Muslims aren't bad, they aren't terrorists that they are nice kind caring people. One of my friends is Pakistani and when he told someone where he's from, the kids said, isn't that where there are terrorists. So he got really offended about that. We want to be remembered for good things that Muslim countries has done. For example how Bangladesh is helping Rohingyas and giving them shelter in a small country. It is one of the great things that Bangladeshi Muslim people have done.

We have to encourage our friends to go to the mosque and read quran and teach them about Islam. Otherwise we will be responsible if they don't know about Islam. We will be responsible for them on the day of judgement because they will say that their friends and parents did not teach them anything. You also have to keep your identity as a muslim, I have many friends that dont pray regularly or go to the mosque regularly. Some don't even celebrate or go to eid prayer.

**Feeling Happy about being a Muslim:**

A lot of times when something bad happens on the news and it's about muslims we feel scared. Like when Donald Trump was elected as the president of the United States, a lot of muslims felt scared for their lives because of what Trump said he is going to do with muslims. The funny thing is that when Trump was elected as president I've heard that apparently the Canadian immigration website was crashed due to heavy visitor load. I don't know though if this is true though. Another time the muslims felt scared for their lives was after the 9/11 attacks. A lot of women took their hijabs off because they were scared off what someone might do to them. People were getting death threats. They felt scared, they forgot about Allah. When Allah gives us these tests we can not forget about him. We have to remember Him because He is the only one who can protect us.

**Conclusion:**

I am a Muslim American in the United States of America. In America I cannot forget my religion of Islam. My identity as a Muslim American is that I want my faith to be strong, I want to spend time with my friends and also be able to pray all the five daily prayer at the mosque. This should be a goal for all of us, staying on the deen and still hanging out with friends.