

# HUMA

Harvard University Muslim Alumni



o ISSUE 1

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o 2011

## President's Address

Salaam Alaikum,

I'm happy to present to you our very first HUMA newsletter. We are planning to send out a newsletter twice a year to keep you informed about the work we are doing and to share news about our membership.

As this is our first newsletter, it is especially important to share the board's vision for HUMA. Broadly speaking, HUMA is meant to serve the needs of all members of the Harvard Alumni community, providing opportunities to network socially and professionally. This year we have been focusing on building a backbone for the organization so that it can ultimately achieve this goal: consolidating membership lists, applying for nonprofit status, and reaching out to our members through the HUMA annual survey as well as through regular social events. Next year, we hope to expand our reach by revamping the website and establishing a more developed committee structure. As we mature internally, we also plan to branch out in various ways: providing resources for the on-campus community; sponsoring scholarships and providing support for those interested in applying to Harvard; and helping to raise funds for a chaplaincy and even a masjid on campus. As part of this longer-term planning we would like to develop a vision for 'HUMA 2015,' which documents our long-term aspirations for the organization, and we would value your input. We will be reaching out soon; expect to see information about a strategy session on campus this fall.

We have many dreams for HUMA and have put in a lot of time and energy towards realizing them. However, if we want to grow as an organization we will need the continued support of our membership. We will be developing a committee structure and will invite you to participate as these roles are further established. Right now, we are looking for HUMA city representatives — individuals who will help us coordinate events in their respective cities. If you are interested in becoming one, please reach out to myself ([kyasin@post.harvard.edu](mailto:kyasin@post.harvard.edu)) or Dilshoda Yergasheva ([dyergasheva@post.harvard.edu](mailto:dyergasheva@post.harvard.edu)). Once we have established our nonprofit status, we will also be looking to begin a modest \$1K fundraising campaign this year to cover basic expenses. If you're interested in donating please contact me or our Treasurer, Batool Ali, ([bzali@post.harvard.edu](mailto:bzali@post.harvard.edu)).

I'd like to thank you for your involvement in HUMA, and I pray that together we can develop this organization into something that can serve the needs of all members of the Harvard community. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or any member of the board if you have any questions or suggestions for improvement.

And Allah Knows Best,

Khalid Yasin  
President, HUMA

# Newsletter

## In this issue

**HUMA 2011  
Alumni Dinner**

**Ramadan Advice**  
**R. David Coolidge**

**Global Iftaars**

**HIS News**  
**Rashid Yasin**

**Meet the Board**

## Alumni Dinner

This year, Harvard Muslims had their first official reunion on the Harvard campus. After recognizing the tremendous demand for such an event, HUMA organized the first ever Annual HUMA Alumni Reunion Dinner. The event was held on Saturday, the 1st of April, in Harvard Law School's Pound Hall. The candle-lit banquet tables seated almost 70 guests — alumni and soon-to-be alumni from nearly all the Harvard schools: the College, HKS, HLS, HBS, HMS, HDS, HGSE, GSAS, SEAS, and HSPH. In attendance were members of recent classes, a representative from the Class of '91, as well as prospective students for the Class of '15 (insha'Allah).

The dinner started with a recitation of Surat Ibrahim by Na'eel Cajee (College '10) followed by



an address by the Vice President of HIS, Eftitan (Efi) Akam (College '12). Efi encouraged collaboration between HUMA and HIS and appealed to the alumni network to support HIS, both financially and in other ways, especially as it relates to the chaplaincy program. Later HUMA President Khalid Yasin (College '07) introduced the attendees to the new board and presented HUMA's vision for the organization. The speeches were followed by an ice cream social where current undergraduates were able to mingle with alumni and old friends. The atmosphere of the event was warm and welcoming as both graduates and their families attended.

The event was extremely well received, alhamdulillah. It raised HUMA's profile and presence on campus and among alumni. We are planning to host more Alumni Reunion dinners in future years to establish a long-lasting tradition that reunites old friends and fosters new connections within the Harvard Muslim community. We are confident that we can make the event even bigger in the future with the support and enthusiasm of our membership insha'Allah. See you next year!



"The first annual HUMA/HIS Alumni Dinner in Cambridge was a fantastic success! We got the opportunity to hear from this young and vibrant organization, as well as meet current HIS members. Furthermore, the chance to catch up with alums and old friends was absolutely wonderful, and really brought us together again as a community...Such events serve as the centerpieces of the HUMA calendar and are great opportunities to strengthen and give the organization a more human component. The HUMA Alumni Dinner was very well done, and I hope we continue this tradition in the future!"

-Hasan Siddiqi, College '08



"The event was fantastic — it was great reuniting with people I hadn't seen since our times together in Cambridge, enjoying a lovely dinner with amazing conversations, and meeting people I did not have the fortune of meeting while at Harvard. It can be difficult keeping in touch with so many people when we're no longer living in the same vicinity, but events like these allow us to remain connected. Thanks to the amazing folks who put it together — it was a well-organized, super-fun event!"

-Sarah Arshad, College '09

## Islamic Knowledge

### Ramadan Advice from Robert David Coolidge

In the Name of God, The All-Merciful,  
The Dispenser of Mercy

Perhaps the approach of Ramadan brings a sense of worry to our hearts. Each day, we are filled with so many responsibilities, challenges, and interactions, and the thought of fasting, praying in the mosque, and constantly watching over our thoughts and deeds seems like an added burden. But do not worry. That which we seek relying on our own power will never be reached easily, whereas that which we seek with God's grace will never entail any true difficulty. The One who is bringing this month close at hand will also be the One who allows us to benefit by it.

But just as diligent preparation and concerted effort are needed to be successful in school and work, so too must the Muslim prepare to succeed during the most blessed month of the year. The Prophet, may God's blessings and peace be upon him and his family, did not encourage his followers to seek mediocrity; rather, he called them to excellence (*ihsan*). Excellence during Ramadan entails fasting all of the obligatory fasts with due reverence and taking no shortcuts. Those excused from fasting for legally valid reasons must make up the missed fasts, preferably before next Ramadan. Let us not be embar-

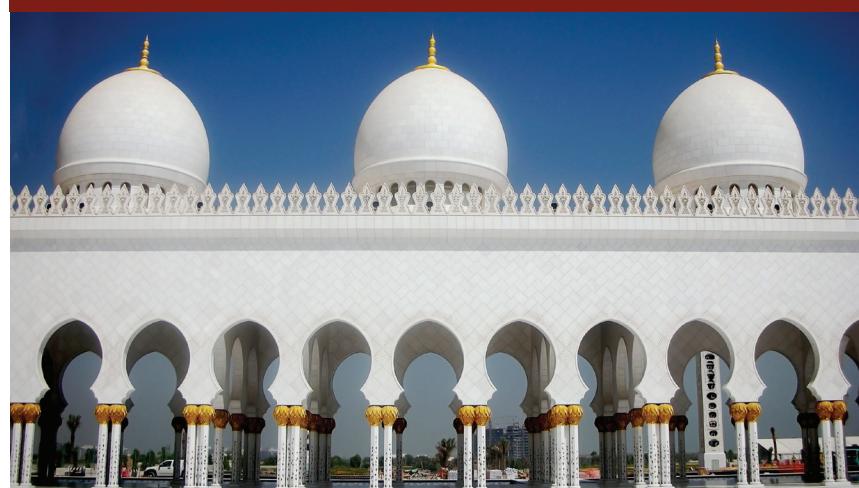
rassed by fasting, for we are taking part in the most robust and widespread public act of worship still remaining on the face of Earth. Simple laborers in Jakarta, heads of state in Riyadh, financial professionals in London, and hundreds of millions around the globe are also fasting!

Excellence also entails not saying anything about another human being that they would dislike. This applies to all human beings, whether Muslim or someone of a different worldview, whether pious or sinful, whether a family member, friend, colleague, or even a public figure. If a serious personal, professional, or religious matter necessitates disclosing someone else's faults or criticizing them, then one may do so only to the extent necessary to ward off impending harm. Ramadan is a time to honor

other human beings, even if we do not like them.

The command to fast and the prohibition of speaking ill highlight the need to implement even more if we hope to be counted amongst those with ambition. When it comes to our prayers, we should recommit to making them on time. A busy schedule is never a valid excuse to miss one's prayers. One's place of work or study should also be a place of prostration, for God's Beloved has said, "Between a person and [falling into] associating others with God and outright disbelief is abandoning the formal prayer." Everyone is motivated in different ways — love of praise, fear of failure, guilt, desire for the attributes of success. We should discover the motivations within us that will make us walk the walk, for everyone knows that Muslims are required to pray five times a day.

If one is blessed with consistently performing the aforementioned righteous deeds, then thankfulness to God and humility is also needed. Such a Muslim should strive to do

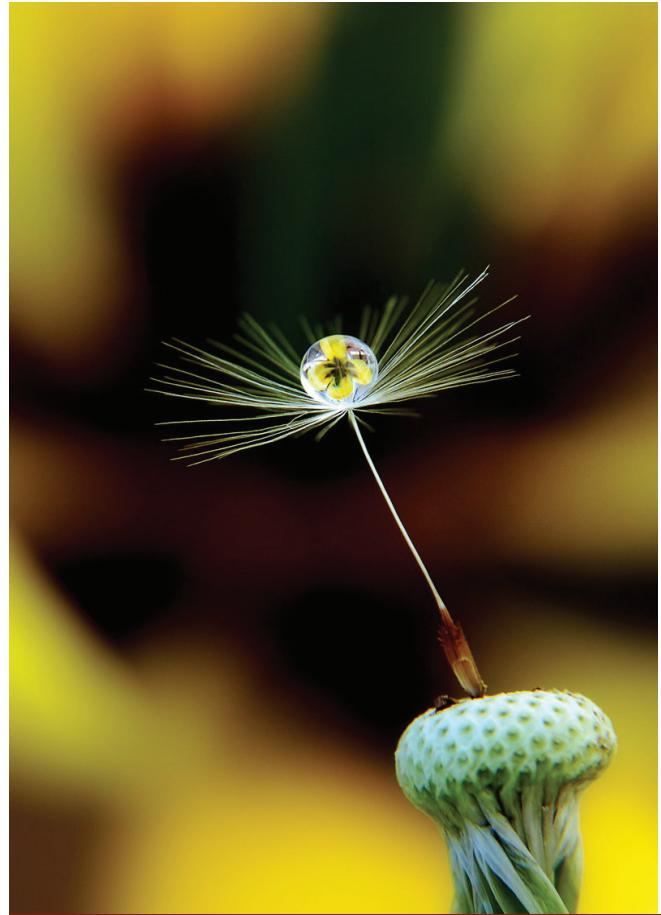


"That which we seek relying on our own power will never be reached easily, whereas that which we seek with God's grace will never entail any true difficulty."

even more, such as attending the mosque each night for extra prayers in congregation. On the other hand, if one is unable to even do the bare minimum, then one should sincerely reach out to God for help in becoming successful. A person in this state should refrain from mentioning their sins to others, for one does not broadcast one's failures, nor encourage others to weakness. If one does not fast, does not pray, speaks ill of other human beings, and openly broadcasts these sins to others, then one has abandoned Ramadan inwardly and outwardly, even if one celebrates its nights with the Muslims.

Ramadan, and all that is done during it, is essentially about turning sincerely to the One who has complete control over our success or failure. Our lives are all vacillating between Divine Mercy and Divine Justice, and there is only one Judge. So let us take advantage of our opportunities, and turn towards the Most Merciful of those who show mercy, with the best of our possessions, relationships, bodies, minds, and hearts. May the Remover of Obstacles (al-Fattah) grant us all abundant success this Ramadan, ameen.

Robert David Coolidge  
Associate University Chaplain, Brown University  
Honorable Member, HUMA  
July 2011



"Our lives are all vacillating between Divine Mercy and Divine Justice, and there is only one Judge."

## Global Iftaars

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the fundamental pillars of Islam, a tradition that binds us as one Ummah. The Muslim community is so ethnically diverse and geographically dispersed, yet we can be assured that during this holy month the majority of Muslims alive on this earth are following the example of our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and making the same sacrifice of fasting for the sake of Allah.

In the fall of 2008, in the spirit of community bonding, HUMA launched its first Global Iftaars program. Since then, a series of alumni iftaars have been held all around the world, including cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York, Ann Arbor, San Francisco, D.C., and Dubai. The program has been quite successful in bringing together Harvard's Muslim graduates, who are scattered in far corners of the world. For example, HUMA's New York iftaar this past year had almost 30 attendees representing classes from 1999 to 2010. These dinners are continually a great opportunity to reconnect with fellow graduates, reminisce, network in a casual setting, as well as learn about HUMA's latest initiatives.

For the upcoming year, members of HUMA have expressed interest in hosting iftaars in New York, Boston, San Francisco, Ann Arbor, Lahore, Amman, Providence, New Haven, Los

Angeles, Doha, Toronto, and Abu Dhabi. The board will do its best to make all of these happen. In cities where the number of Harvard alumni is relatively low, we are planning to co-host the event with Muslim alumni networks of other universities such as Brown, Stanford, MIT, University of Michigan, Princeton, Yale, Oxbridge, and others. If you'd like to participate in the program, please email Dilshoda Yergasheva (College '09) at dyergasheva@post.harvard.edu.

We urge you to remember that in this holy month, HUMA relies on the generous support of the community. Our organization is pending a tax-deductible status with the IRS so please consider donating a small amount in the upcoming weeks, whether it be for the Global Iftaars program or for HUMA's other activities. We have a goal for raising \$1,000 in 2011 for our website and other operating costs. The host for your local Global Iftaar will be happy to collect cash and check donations. For questions, a mailing address to send checks, or for electronic transfer methods, please email Batool Ali (College '10) at bzali@post.harvard.edu.

## Community News!

**Saima Bhatti** (HKS '10) got married on February 5 in Cambridge at the Harvard Faculty Club and recently moved to San Francisco.

**Na'eel Cajee** (College '10 & current HSDM '14) will wed Maariyah Syeda Lateef, an incoming Boston College undergrad, on July 22, 2011. He will be returning early to Boston before the honeymoon of Ramadan to lead

Taraweeh at ICB Wayland.

**Huma Farid** (College '06, HMS '11) got married in November 2010. She also graduated from Harvard Medical School in May 2011 and began her residency in obstetrics and gynecology at the integrated residency program in Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital. It has been a busy year for



Huma, but one that has been filled with much happiness and joy.

**Zayed Yasin** (College '02, MD/MBA '09) is currently living with his wife Uzma in New Haven and is an ER resident at Yale. They are currently enjoying their two-year-old Sumaya (pictured) and are looking forward

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# HIS News

Salaam Alaikum,

It is my pleasure to be able to address you as the current president of the Harvard Islamic Society. We have made some amazing progress in this past semester, and I am looking forward to an even more successful fall, insha'Allah.

We were able to continue nurturing community programs that have kept HIS as a close-knit community, a family of students away from home. As during years past, we still organize two weekly halal dinners at undergraduate house dining halls: one purely for undergraduates and one open to the whole community, both of which are always well attended. We have also been able to host beautiful Spring and Fall Dinners that not only attract a large portion of the Harvard Muslim community, but also draw Muslims and non-Muslims from other campuses. In addition, we had a number of other events such as an end-of-the-year barbecue and a graduate student dinner to help strengthen the community.

Alongside purely social activities, HIS has had a large degree of success in establishing a vibrant Islamic learning program this year. With the help of our two part-time chaplains, Nuri Friedlander and Faisal Matadar, we have been able to hold a number of classes covering broad topics. We have had a weekly hadith class that continued for the entire year as well as a class studying the Qur'an. Moreover, weekly tajweed lessons were taught by members of the HIS community.

As mentioned above, HIS has been blessed with the addition of two part-time chaplains for the previous school year. Insha'Allah we plan to retain at least one part-time position for the foreseeable future. This past year, they were an amazing source of support for our students — not only through their roles as keepers of Islamic knowledge, but also through the relationships they formed and the support structure they created for students. We are planning on only increasing their capacity in that respect as the position continues.

In addition to our endeavors to develop HIS internally, we have spent a lot of time and effort to engage with the greater Harvard community. For example, we held a successful Islam Awareness Month this past April as well as collaborated with other student groups on a number of individual events. In fact, we are

currently speaking with the Institute of Politics to see what initiatives can be created between the two of us, and we are also hoping to continue our strong level of participation in interfaith events.

Alhamdulillah, we have had a successful year, and we hope that we can receive HUMA's support as HIS grows as a community and as an institution at Harvard. It is through the kindness and donations of alumni that HIS has been able to function with the freedom that it has and is able to offer many of the programs that it does, so I hope that we can continue to receive your support.

Rashid Yasin  
President, Harvard Islamic Society  
July 2011

## Community News (continued)

to a new addition to the family in August.

**Omar Khan** (College '06) is off on three new adventures: he is moving to Houston, TX; he is starting a new job doing business development for a biofuels company; and the greatest adventure, he'll be getting married on New Year's Eve! Please keep him and his adventures in your prayers.

**Salma Pothiawala** (HSPH '10) is starting her dermatology residency at the University of South Florida in Tampa in July.

**Abdur-Rahman Syed** (College '99), his wife Anna Marie, and their baby daughter Isra are happily adjusting to life in Dubai, where he has joined the Islamic investment firm Fajr Capital (also home to fellow alumni Aamir Rehman, Mansoor Shakil and Maamar Benaissa-Tahar).

**Nafees Syed** (College '10) will be attending Yale Law in the fall. She also recently authored a book *I Speak for Myself*, edited by Maria M. Ebrahimji and Zahra T. Suratwala, and had a few media interviews and author panel appearances (including at 2011 ISNA) for it.

## The HUMA Board

**Fauzia Shaikh**, VP of External Affairs, graduated from the college in 2010. She is currently a medical student at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. She truly enjoyed her undergraduate experience with the support of the HIS family, and she looks forward to serving the extended Harvard Muslim community once again.

**Batool Ali**, Treasurer, College '10, studied Computer Science and Classical Arabic. She is currently a Software Engineer at Google. In her spare time, she likes attempting to translate poetry, watching comedy, and convincing people to donate to HUMA.

**Khalid Yasin**, President, is a Harvard Class of 2007 graduate, having studied Applied Math Economics. He is returning to do a joint MPA-ID/MBA at HKS and HBS after a number of years in strategy consulting. Having grown up in the Boston, despite his dislike for baseball, he is a loyal Red Sox fan.

**Dilshoda Yergasheva**, VP of Internal Affairs, is a Harvard Class of 2009 graduate, having studied Applied Mathematics and French. She will be back at Harvard in the fall to start her MBA. She is looking forward to spending her summer at home picking sour cherries with her grandmother in their backyard.

**Saba Zaidi**, Secretary, is a recent graduate from the college, originally class of 2010, with an S.B. in Engineering Sciences. She will be working for Inflection, a tech start up in Palo Alto starting this fall. She has served as Director External Relations and was the inaugural Publicity Chair for HIS. She enjoys creating art, cooking, and trying out new outdoor activities.