



Assalamu Alaykum

Dear Students,

I hope this letter reaches you with the best of health and Iman. Just sending a reflection.

After a semester full of weekly letters, we recall that we ended our semester on a tragic note. After that, I needed time off. As you know, I'm also deeply involved in major community matters that have consumed my thinking to such a point that outside of work, community, and family, there was little time for me. A friend forced me to go watch a movie last Saturday, and I slept through most of it. Some of the sleep was not because of the movie.

While those challenges are still ongoing, it is unfortunate that of all the events that have motivated the final re-launching of these letters, it is another murder. This time, the murder of three Muslim kids -- kids, as far as I am concerned -- in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I am not one for symbols (in contrast to substance), but in their memory, I'm wearing my UNC sweater today, incidentally given to me by a student who knew them really well. May God's forgiveness and mercy be upon them and their family. I did not know them personally, though I know some of you were connected to them. I do know many people from UNC and Duke who did know them, and as is to be expected, they are devastated. As always, my prayers are also with you. Please stop by my office to chat whenever you'd like.


I'm commenting in this letter on something related: that despondency that seems to be consuming our community as though things seem to keep getting worse. My lens might be jaded a bit, but I feel that undergrads have far less hope in them than my generation did at that age. The environment is different. You are raised in a decade of war. I was raised in the "me generation" of the 1980s and 90s. Perhaps today's wars are directly related to our conduct back then.

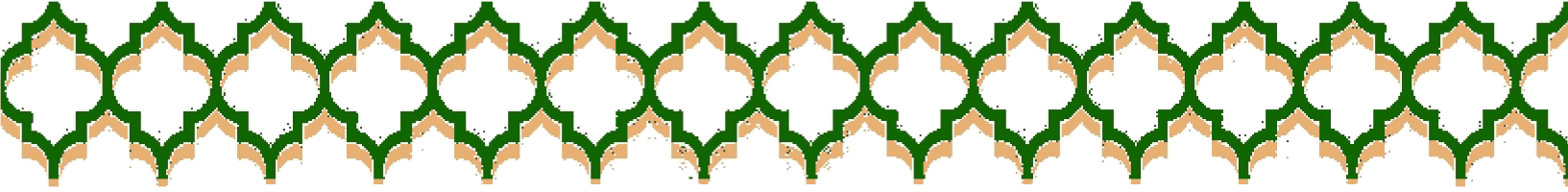
But, when I look at my beloved Muslim students, that despondency seems deeper. In the 1990s, we were convinced that Islam in America was growing as this vibrant eagle or falcon, ready to lead America and the world. It was a period of tremendous optimism and excitement.

Now, however, after a long list of atrocities and tragedies, I've witnessed this decline among so many of you. I've watched the Syrian students seem to lose the spring in their step, so much so that they even seem to slow down as they walk. I've watched the Palestinian students feel abandoned. I've watched the Shias across ethnicities feel disregarded. I know from conversations with so many of you, that you each are carrying very heavy weights within your hearts.

I am definitely exhausted by these worldly struggles, but I feel that so many of you are as well. Not physically, but emotionally. It is an exhaustion that is even generating conflict. Most of all, however, I feel among so many of you, resignation.

That resignation seems to take the form of "why care?" about anything, whether it is religion, academics, career, or even life. I don't need to tell you that it is not healthy, but I can tell you that in the 20-some years since my undergrad days, a few things are very true. First, life gets worse and life gets better, because that is how life works. Second, as many of you have heard from me many times, I love my 40s far more than my 30s, which I loved far more than my 20s. Life is far more complicated in my 40s than it was in my 20s, but it is also far more relaxed. Most of all, however, looking back at the past 40+ years, if I had to choose between apathy or vested





immersion in life, I can say that apathy would be easy but depressing. Vested immersion in life is full of pains and joys, but it is full of life itself. Life might sometimes be bittersweet, sometimes, bitter, but gosh is it sweet, Alhamdulillah. The sweetness supercedes everything, even when we cannot seem to taste it.

So, in essence, I'm saying that if all you can do sometimes is breathe, then breathe, and enjoy the taste and smell of the air (even if you're on the train).

While I would like to give you good advice on how to replace the resignation with hope and optimism, instead, I will give you three pieces of straightforward input, not listed in order of priority.

1- Stop by. Let's chat. Some visit with theological questions. Some visit with campus questions. Some visit with personal challenges. Some of you like to chat just to take a break. Some like to joke around. Work on your relationship with the Divine. And, I can work with you on that also. I'll meet you where you are at, spiritually. Let's chat.

2- Visit the Wellness Center. I had a wonderful meeting with the staff of the Wellness Center at the beginning of the semester. They already had my support, but now even more so. I was happy when they told me that they have plenty of Muslim students visiting. Mental health, social health, are real things. They are professionals eager to serve you.

3- Cultivate your relationships. Many of you have heard my comments about the shallow relationships many have been keeping, allowing for factions and fights. We'll talk about some of that later, if Allah wills. For now, cultivate your friendships, if at the very least because each of you is carrying heavy burdens within yourselves, and the more people you can share these weights with, the lighter the load feels.

And God knows best.

May Allah bless you.

Omer Mozaffar
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