

Islam Sacred Texts 101

With Jihad Turk

2014

Gwynne: Good afternoon. That was Ben Yousef. You have probably seen Ben Yousef many, many times before if you've been to a Guibord Center event. Ben Yousef was part of the Abrahamic blessing that has now been seen by hundreds of thousands of people. So thank you so much, Ben Yousef. There's something about that sound that just cuts right through. I'm very happy that The Guibord Center is here at the Islamic Center of Southern California for the 101 Series, Sacred Texts in Sacred Places. This afternoon we're going to learn about the holy *Qur'an*. And I'm very pleased that Imam Jihad Turk is going to be leading us in that presentation, as well as with the question and answer. Jihad is a beloved friend and colleague. He is a member of the Advisory Council of The Guibord Center. And I have to tell you that every time I've gone to Jihad, and I've said: "Jihad, I'd like you to do this, or could you bring your kids to when we have the *Sukkah* at *Sukkot*?" Every time Jihad has made himself available and I am deeply grateful to you, Jihad. As a matter of fact I was in a group of some young people here one time and Jihad had just spoken, and one of the really young girls, one young girl said to the other "he's a rock star you know." So Jihad is not only an Advisor on the Advisory Council of The Guibord Center. Several years ago Jihad and I started and currently co-convene The Christian/Muslim Consultative Group. Jihad is Dean of Bayan Islamic Lincoln Center at Claremont Lincoln University. I kinda got that right. But he travels all over the world and has become an ardent and wonderful spokesperson for Islam and Muslim faith and practice. So it is my pleasure and my joy to introduce Jihad Turk to all of you. Thank you Jihad.

JT: I'm going to use this microphone if you don't mind. We have a packed program today, so I'm going to invite all of you to come to experience not only our sacred text but our sacred space, and a little bit of our sacred ritual, which is a prayer. Now Islamic prayer can be done in a fashion that is from the heart and extemporaneous. But it also can be performed in congregation, following certain rituals that have significance of standing in stillness, bowing, prostrating, and standing in silence, sitting in silence, but also saying words of praise and gratitude. So it is in that spirit that we are going to be moving our presentation today from this lecture space into the prayer space, or the *masjid*, the place of prostration.

In English we say mosque, but the Arabic word for mosque is *masjid*, a place of prostration, a place of bowing down before God. So everyone is welcome to join. I do ask that as we transition into the carpeted area, that you remove your shoes. If you are female in gender, that if you would cover your hair, and I appreciate that everyone out of consideration, came prepared for that, and I know that Gwynne

had sent out some information about that. And then I am going to lead a prayer that is both traditional and untraditional, non-traditional. It's going to be traditional in the sense that everything that is said in the prayer is normally said in a prayer that Muslims would perform. What is unusual about it is that it will be said out loud. Everything in the prayer I will say out loud and I will translate because in the Muslim community, we haven't yet experienced the Second Vatican Council so everything is still in Latin, I mean Arabic. So the prayer is done in Arabic. Now Arabic is spoken by about 15%, 15% of Muslims, so 85% of Muslims don't know what they're saying necessarily in prayer, although they probably have a pretty good sense of it over the many years because certain things are repeated over and over. Like those that experienced Catholic prayer in Latin: it still is very meaningful because you give it meaning. But in this context I'll be translating into English, as well as Arabic. So any questions before we begin that prayer? Following the prayer I'm going to have our local *imam* recite the prayer. A *khatib* is an Islamic version of a cantor if you will. He's going to recite verses from the *Qur'an* rather, selected verses. And then I will discuss the content of those verses, as well as some general themes about the *Qur'an* overall, and then we'll have a question and answer session. So any questions before we begin?

Q: *Do men need to be in the front and women in the back?*

So as we line up for prayer, keeping with Islamic tradition, we're going to form a couple of rows because we're not that many and the rows are pretty long. So we'll ask the men to stand in the front row and the women one row behind.

Q: *For those of us that need to sit on something?*

You may bring a chair, or ask this strapping young man Ben Yousef to bring a chair in there for you and you may sit on the chair in row, in rank. So Ben Yosef actually came and whispered in my ear. He said "maybe we can do it like we do in Mecca," which is the most sacred place in Islam. Where it's not necessarily the women behind the men, but they can be next to the men. We can divide the rows up that way, we'll have the women to one side and the men on the other. So I'll give some instruction on that once we get inside the prayer space. We'll see you inside.

We're going to do the small call to prayer, which is really the standing for prayer. At that time we'll ask you to stand up in rows and we'll begin the prayer. Ben Yosef who gave a call to prayer will now give a shortened version called the "Standing for Prayer" call.

"Standing for Prayer" call

JT: All right, go ahead and stand close to one another, keeping the tips of your toes on the front of the line there. And you can use the lines here as lines for where the rows would be. So you'll probably want to step back, leave an empty

space in front of you so you can bow and prostrate onto that empty space in front of you. All right so I'm going to begin the prayer. Once I'm in prayer, I'm not going to be talking. It's in a sacred mindset if you will. And although there's nothing in front of us that we're praying to, there's no imagery even, the idea is that we don't picture God, but we picture that God is seeing us. And it's a very solemn standing. We are standing before God in this world, He is perceiving us, but we're also preparing ourselves for the standing before God on the day of judgment. And there's a symbolism in just the standing. And then in the bowing and the prostration, it's a humbling of our ego before God Almighty. You will hear the words that I will say in each of those positions, but each of the steps involved in prayer is highly symbolic. So with no further adieu, and you can just follow my movements as well.

Prayer begins:

*God is the greatest. In the name of God. The most compassionate,
the most merciful, all praise is due to God, Lord of the Worlds.
The most compassionate, the most merciful, Master
of the Day of Judgment, it is you alone that we worship
and your help alone that we seek. Guide us along this great path.
The path of those upon whom you have bestowed your blessings,
not the path of those upon whom is anger.
Nor the path of those who have gone astray. Amen.*

*In the name of God, the most compassionate, the most merciful.
By the early morning light, and the night when it is still.
Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor is he displeased with you.
And surely the life to come will be better for you than this life.
And your Lord will give you and you will be pleased.
Did he not find you an orphan and give you support?
And find you astray and give you guidance?
And find you destitute and give you aid? So, as for the orphan,
do not turn him away. And as for the one who is seeking help,
help him. And as to the many blessings of your Lord,
speak about them. God is the greatest.*

*Glory belongs to my Lord, the most exalted.
Glory is for my Lord, the most exalted.
Glory be to my Lord the most exalted.
God hears those who praise him. God is the greatest.
Glory be to my Lord the most exalted.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
God is the greatest. God is the greatest.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.*

Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime. God is the greatest.

*In the name of God, the most compassionate, the most merciful.
All praise is due to God, Lord of the worlds. The most compassionate,
the most merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment,
it is you alone that we worship and your help alone that we seek.
Guide us along this great path. The path of upon those
whom you have bestowed you blessings,
not the path of those with anger, nor the path
of those who have gone astray. Amen.*

*In the name of God the most compassionate, the most merciful.
Have you seen the one who denies religion?
For that person is the one who turns away the orphan,
and doesn't encourage the feeding of the poor.
Woe to those who pray, but only to be seen by others
and all the while neglect the needs of their neighbors.
God is the greatest.*

*Glory belongs to my Lord the most exalted.
Glory be to my Lord the most exalted.
Glory is for my Lord the most exalted.
God hears those who praise Him.
God is the greatest. Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
God is the greatest. God is the greatest.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime.
Glory be to my Lord, the most sublime. God is the greatest.*

*Salutations, prayers, and all good things belong to God.
My God's peace, blessing and mercy be upon you
O prophet Muhammad. And may His peace and blessings
be upon us and all His righteous servants.
I declare that there is no deity worthy of worship
except for God almighty. And I declare that Muhammad is his prophet
and servant. May God's peace, may God's honor
be bestowed upon Muhammad and his family,
just as it was bestowed upon prophet Abraham and his family.
And may God's blessings be upon Mohammed and his family
just as His blessings were bestowed upon Abraham and his family.
In all of the world dear Lord, you are the most glorified and praised.*

*May God's peace and blessings be upon you.
And may God's peace and blessings be upon you.*

And may God's peace and blessings be upon all of you.

You can give greetings to those sitting on either side and a hug if you feel so inclined. We have some of the verses I recited, but some additional verses recited by our resident scholar and *imam*. These verses that he's reciting are recited in a beautified fashion. We have, sometimes, very little artistic expression without the icons and what not, so we rely on the beautification of scripture through calligraphy. And these are some scriptures from the *Qur'an* that you see along the wall. And beautification of scripture through recitation.

And so for those who are privileged to know the Arabic language, they have a double resonance with what's being recited, both the beauty of the sound, but also the beauty of the meaning to the heart. So what I'm going to do for you is I'm going to track what he's doing by displaying it on the screen here so you'll be able to follow along. And he's going to start with chapter 20, chapter *Ta-Ha*, which as you will see, gets into the story of Moses.

***Qur'an* recitation**

This is the *Qur'an* recited. This is the *Qur'an* in prayer. And now I would like to share with you the *Qur'an* in content. I have a few remarks that will touch on the major themes of the *Qur'an* and one of the things I wanted to do instead of talking about the *Qur'an* first was to have you experience the *Qur'an* and and to read the *Qur'an* directly. And then I can highlight some of the verses that we read, as well as talk about some of the verses we did not touch upon. And then really open it up to questions and answers because I suspect that some of you might have a few.

The *Qur'an* as a text, as a scripture, Muslims believe was revealed to the prophet Muhammad, who was born some 571 C.E., as we would say, common era, or A.D. He began preaching at the age of 40 around the year 610, and he preached for 23 years. He preached for 23 years, and over the course of those 23 years he would receive revelation that would address the human predicament, the human condition. He lived in a society that saw themselves as the descendants of Abraham, through the oldest son, Ishmael and the Arabs. And although they recognized Abraham and the God of Abraham, who in Arabic is referred to as *Allah*, simply God. However, they also worshiped idols, they were pagans. They worshiped other idols.

And Muhammad came with what he says, and it's mentioned in the *Qur'an*, with the same message of Abraham, and to renew the message of Abraham. And so Abraham's essential message if you boil it down to two lines is believe in God, only one God, and be good to others: your parents and etc., etc. So God and good. Two words even. So that in essence is what Muhammad was preaching to the people at the time. And they had practices that were less than that. In terms of the way they treated one another, the way that women were treated at the time, orphans, the indigent, etc. And so the *Qur'anic* message is one of primarily a

message of monotheism, believe in one God. Don't associate any partners with God. Don't engage in acts of polytheism. It's delusionary, it's a polemic, really in the *Qur'an*, that there's only one true God. The creator is one. This is the main theme of the *Qur'an*. And then second to that is how to treat one another. Be good to one another.

Despite the way that some Muslims might mistreat women around the world, the *Qur'an* was actually empowering to women at the time, in that it took the societal norms at that time and turned them on their head. Women at that time were not allowed to have any say as to who they married. They weren't allowed to divorce, they didn't inherit any possessions upon the death of their family. And Islam said women have to have the permission sought before they enter a marriage. In other words, they have to approve of who they marry. They have the right to divorce, they have the right to inherit. They can own property. And it was also a common pre-Islamic practice to bury women alive. It was kind of like *The Good Earth*, the novel where it was preferable to have male offspring. And you see there's some male issues going on in India and other places where there are gender selection, abortion, and things like this. So in certain societies, it's considered preferable to have a male offspring as the first born at least. And so they would bury their female children alive, hoping that they would come back as the next-born as a son.

And so the *Qur'an* said "this is prohibited, this is an egregious crime. For what sin is this innocent soul being buried?" And in fact turned the message on the head and said, "any one of you who has three daughters and raises them well is guaranteed paradise." So it's redefining what is honorable. And so his message was a moral one, but, and this gets to my third theme in the *Qur'an*, the people in the time of Muhammad did not believe in a heaven and hell and a Day of Judgment and accountability. And so all that they believed that lived on after you was your reputation. And as long as you did what everyone else thought was good to do, you're good to keep doing it. And the *Qur'an* came with a totally different message and it says "it doesn't matter what other people think. It matters what God thinks because there's a Day of Judgment. And you will be held to account." So it doesn't matter if everyone else thinks it's okay to mistreat slaves, to own slaves and mistreat them, to mistreat women or to kill innocent children. God doesn't accept that and God's opinion matters because guess what?

There's a heaven and hell there's a hereafter, there's this bode of eternity in heaven or hell. And so this is a place that you want to prepare yourself for. This Day is a Day you want to prepare yourself for. So there is much in the *Qur'an*, much more than. . . I mean, in the Hebrew Bible there's one reference to *Jahannam*, ok, *Gehenna*, often translated as hell. And there are references in the New Testament. But in the *Qur'an* it is a major, major theme because Muhammad was, in his lifetime, in those 23 years of preaching, successful in changing the society in which he lived. Completely changing it. And it's a pretty incredible

story, but the message of the *Qur'an* was his miracle. And it did help transform the minds and hearts of the people at his time.

Another theme in the *Qur'an* that you saw referenced here is that there are references to biblical prophets. You heard my prayer reference to Abraham as well as Muhammad. Here you saw in chapter 20, the beginning of the story of Moses. His story's told. He's mentioned over 40 times in the *Qur'an*. So he's an oft-referenced biblical figure, prophetic figure. As is Abraham. As is Jesus. And in fact the *Qur'an* not only references Jesus as Christ, a term not used for anyone but Jesus in the *Qur'an*, but also having been inspired with the Holy Spirit, and that he is a Word from God. Muslims believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus. And although we have disagreements between Muslims and Christians as to the symbolism of Jesus, and the crucifixion and the resurrection and all of that, Muslims, we consider ourselves followers of Jesus and of his message, that he was sent to the Israelites to bring back the spirit of the message. They were following the Law, the letter of the Law, but at that time were not following the spirit of the Law. And Jesus was sent to re-emphasize the spirit of the message, and love and compassion and these other things. And so as Muslims we aspire to that and we look to Jesus in that way.

Not only is Jesus mentioned in the *Qur'an*, but there is more mention in the *Qur'an* about Mary than there is in the New Testament. There's an entire chapter entitled Mary. It's one of the longer chapters in the *Qur'an*. I was recently at the Catholic Conference. They had forty thousand people there by the way. They're not a small denomination. I was giving a general presentation on Islam in America and someone asked me a question about Mary. So I happened to have on my computer a presentation I had given recently about Mary. And all I did was I just pulled up the verses and I just read straight from the *Qur'an* the verses on Mary. And this room was packed. And at the end of just reading those verses, people were euphoric, and were applauding, because of how Mother Mary was held up in the *Qur'an* with reverence, even in fact referred to as being "esteemed above all the women of the world."

So there are references to the biblical prophets and the stories are retold not to retell the story, the content of the story is probably 95% as the same. But they're retold because the nature of the *Qur'an* is that it is used in prayer and whenever you read the *Qur'an* and listen to it, and hear it and reflect upon it, it's supposed to remind you of the major themes and one of them is that all of these previous prophets came essentially with the same message: believe in God and be good to your fellow human being. And don't engage in oppression. And so the story of Moses is told, because one of the things that's emphasized in there is the role that he played in fighting for justice against oppression, the oppression of the Pharaoh. This is one of the themes in the *Qur'an* as well which is justice, which is fighting for the rights of the marginalized in society, and dignity for all human beings, and freedom. In fact the *Qur'an* states that you cannot compel someone in matters of

faith. In chapter 2 verse 256 I believe, the verse reads “let there be no compulsion in matters of faith.” So it’s one of the major themes of the *Qur’an*.

There’s also much description in the *Qur’an* about the attributes of God, that God is, the Muslim God is, yes, loving, not necessarily the first attribute you think of when you think of the way that Muslims perceive God – the Muslim God, the way that we perceive God – loving, compassionate, merciful. That He is all powerful, all knowing, but that He says about Himself that His mercy outrips all of His other qualities. That it encompasses His other qualities, for although we want justice in this world on the Day of Judgment, we’re not demanding justice, we’re demanding God’s mercy. And so we’re asking for God’s mercy, rather.

So these are some of the themes in the *Qur’an* and I didn’t shy away from putting in the verses that have a little hellfire and brimstone for that reason that I talked about – it’s a major theme in the *Qur’an*, it’s very palpable. There’s this real sense to try and shake the people out of this notion that all that matters is what other people think. Even in the musicality of the *Qur’an*, the earliest verses are really a lot of hellfire and brimstone even in their tone, their structure, their rhythm. He recited it beautifully, but if you were to recite it with a slightly different emphasis, some of those verses, it’s really abrasive and harsh and shocking. And it’s supposed to shock the audience into saying – this big sound, what is that big kind of bang?

It’s the Day that people are gonna scatter like moths. It’s going to be this Day of great turmoil, the End of Days. And then the Day of Judgment. So it really is meant to shock people into a sense that this is a major event. And there are many, many, many verses that talk about that. For the purpose mentioned: it really was successful in helping people transform their lens by which they saw morality. It was no longer through the lens of their fellow human beings, but through the lens of God, hopefully in elevating their sense of morality and good and bad.

Lastly, I’ll mention in terms of the themes of the *Qur’an*, that there are laws in the *Qur’an*, there are a few very special details and rules about not just ritual, but about how to deal with one another. There are laws about marriage and divorce, about writing contracts and having witnesses. There are laws about inheritance, and yes, women are identified as receiving a portion of the inheritance along with the other members of the family. That there are laws of war and peace. That there are laws pertaining to all aspects of human conduct, but generally in speaking of the *Qur’an*, most of the laws are principles: crime and punishment, for example, but some of them are specific in detail. So I’ll stop there and open it up for some questions and answers. Gwynne did you want to say something?

Gwynne: *As we begin Jihad, would you be willing to share the ritual of men and women washing of hands and feet before prayer time?*

JT: Sure. One of the things that we did not do for time's sake that would traditionally be done in preparation for Muslim prayer is the ritual of washing, called *Wudhu*, or ablution. So in preparation for prayer, it's a ritual cleansing that we perform in which we wash our hands, we rinse out our mouth, and our nose, we wash our face, wipe our arms up to the elbows with water, wipe water once over our hair and wash our feet as well. And especially on a hot day like today, which I did just before coming to the mosque, it's very refreshing. It's extremely refreshing, it's cooling, and it helps you get in a certain state of mind, and state of being, in preparation for the prayer. So thank you for reminding me of that Gwynne. If you do have a question, raise your hand and someone will bring you the non-amplifying microphone. Please state your name.

Q: *My name's Paul Foreman. Can you tell us why there's so much tension between the Sunnis and the Shiates? And how the practices of religion are different? And do the mosques in the United States, do they establish whether they are Sunni or Shiate?*

JT: I'll repeat the question for those who didn't hear. The question is, why is Islam so awesome? (Laughter) No, the question is why is there so much tension between Shiates and Sunnis, and is it based on something in the *Qur'an*? And do mosques in the United States identify themselves as Sunni or Shiate? You had another aspect of that question that I forgot to mention? And what are some of the differences in ritual? So I have had the opportunity to study Islam both at the Islamic university in Medina, Saudi Arabia, one of the places of study of Sunni Islam, and in Iran, sort of the headquarters of Shiate Islam. And although I don't identify as a Shiate, I had the opportunity to really understand both traditions and it's my observation that, with regards to the theology, there's a 99% overlap, the one percent difference has to do with political authority.

And really what caused the schism, if you will, was a politically charged conflict as to who should lead the early Muslim community after the death of the prophet of Muhammad. There was some successors, and there was a debate over who should succeed whom over both the religious authority as well as mundane authority over the expanding Muslim community which became ultimately a civilization. So that political schism then turned into a sectarian schism that had to do with lines of authority, who could speak with authority about what Islam is. And ultimately, there were periods of time during which there wasn't conflict, and periods of time in which the conflict would intensify, and usually had to do with who had political authority, and there's usually a political vacuum like what you see going on in Iraq today, or even in Syria, where you see political tensions over who's going to have political authority.

The theological differences are very minor. Pray 5 times a day, everything. It comes down to this: a Sunni would pray by putting his or her hands here, and a Shiate would pray by putting the hands here. So you can see how they can't really get along. It's really minor. I mean the differences between Lutherans and

Episcopals, both high church, is more than between Sunni and Shiates, quite frankly. In some ways, however, culturally speaking, Shiates can be analogized to Catholics in the sense that there are a lot of saints, figures that are revered that then become holidays of their birth and death, plus there are some symbolic historical events that are commemorated in some ways very similar to the passion of the Christ in Christianity. There was an unjust slaying of one of the imams, the Shiate imams, and the grandson of the prophet Muhammad, someone beloved by both Sunnis and Shiates, but because he represents something significant in the Shiate tradition, moreso than in the Sunni tradition, his death, the commemoration of his death, that becomes a major ritual celebration of this notion of martyrdom, this notion of injustice, this notion of things that need to be combatted. So there's a different semantic universe, a different spiritual reference point between Shiasm and Sunni Islam that culturally manifests through these different holidays that then become points of tension. So it's a wonderful question, and it deserves a longer answer, but I do want to get to some other questions. I hope that this was somewhat helpful. There really isn't any basis in the *Qur'an* for the difference, by the way. Both Sunni and Shiates read the same *Qur'an*, then go kill each other.

Q: *Lo Sprague. In Judaism and Christianity, there is a liturgical calendar that the sacred texts follow. Is there something similar for the holy Qur'an?*

JT: So is there a liturgical calendar for the *Qur'an* as there is in Christianity? The answer is no. The entire *Qur'an* is recited, in its entirety, in *Ramadan*, in prayer, in that thirty-day period, which is coming up, starting June 28. Outside of that, every prayer, the imam can select any selection of verses that he or she wants. And yes, I did say she, women can lead prayer too, usually only over other women, but nonetheless, even in the time of the prophet Muhammad, his wives led prayer. And so the imam could lead prayer, selecting whatever verses he or she felt like reciting. And for some people that don't know much *Qur'an*, they just recite the same verses over and over again.

Q: *Rabbi Sabinne Myer. I am interested in the critical study of the Qur'an. If it's recited during prayer, and you mentioned early that a lot of people don't speak Arabic, so they recite it by rote, is there at any point in the religious schools is there any study that takes place where the text is actually taught?*

JT: Yes. So the question is relating to the critical study of the *Qur'an*, given that it's recited in prayer as a ritual, is it ever studied and engaged in and really looked upon in a way that's more in depth to the content? The simple answer is yes. One of the most voluminous topics upon which there are many writings is the exegesis of the *Qur'an*, which took me a long time to learn that it has nothing to do with Jesus, but the exegetical study of the text. They're called *Tafsirs*. They're *Qur'anic* commentaries. They're voluminous, I have probably 30 *Tafsirs* that fill that shoe rack over there in terms of space, just the study of the *Qur'an*. It is the major focus. It is the primary focus of study, kind of like in Judaism, the study of the *Tanakh*, but also the study of the *Talmud*. In an Islamic context you would

study the *Qur'an*, but you would also study the commentary of the *Qur'an*. And there are individuals that are particularly revered in terms of their commentary. It's seen as authoritative. However, there are different approaches as well. Some approaches have a spiritual bent to it. Others have more of a legal bent to it. Others have more to do with history and linguistics. Some are sectarian. So there are different emphases for the different commentaries. It's definitely the subject of much study.

Q: *Karen McDonald. And my question is about the text as well. Is there room for debate about how literal you must take every verse? Or is that not part of the discussion, whether it's literal or figurative of everything that's written?*

JT: So the question is about the literalness of the interpretation of the *Qur'an*. Is there debate about that? Debate is encouraged. You're allowed to have whatever opinion you want about the *Qur'an* as long as it agrees with mine. Just kidding. The good thing about that I feel, about the Islamic tradition, is that there is no hierarchy. There is no church. There's a mosque, but a mosque is just a place where you pray. Who runs the mosque? Well, this mosque happens to be run by people who filed articles of a corporation, and then they had membership, and they followed the bylaws, and they're elected, and this and that. Are they connected to any other mosque in the world? No.

This mosque is an independent entity. And single every other mosque is the same. Maybe one community has a satellite mosque, or a few different communities connected together, but there's no denominational, or this mosque belongs to a certain denomination. Even though this mosque is primarily Sunni, there are Shiates that come, and so to answer your question, most mosques do identify with either Sunni or Shiate. And so we're kind of both. We're sushi, Sunni and Shiate. But most mosques do identify as such but that doesn't mean that they are card carrying members of this or that sect. In Shiasm sometimes there is a hierarchy, but there are many different hierarchies, it's very diverse and splintered, but in the Sunni world it's every mosque is for itself.

Now within Muslim countries, many of the Muslim-majority countries will have a Ministry of Religious Affairs, and they control everything. They sometimes give out the sermons and say, "you're gonna preach this sermon," which we feel is an affront to religion, because religion should be expressed organically, based on the teachings and not imposed by the government.

So we feel very fortunate to be Muslims in the United States and we actually feel that the best place in the world to be Muslim is here in the United States, because we have that freedom to study the *Qur'an* and present the religion to our own community in a way that we feel is most authentic. So with regard to the literalism, you will find some people who are literalists in their approach to the *Qur'an*. Muslims generally believe that the *Qur'an* is literally the Word of God, but that doesn't mean you interpret it literally. So although it's a tenet of our faith

that Muslims believe the *Qur'an* was revealed by God to Muhammad in these words, how you look at those words literally or metaphorically is something that is much discussed and there's a whole spectrum in terms of how people, but there's no authority that says "here's how it has to be interpreted, and if you don't interpret it that way somehow you're excommunicated." We can't excommunicate anyone because there is no body to officiate such an excommunication.

Q: My name is Michael. A few years ago I was at St. Andrews Abbey and they had given some of their space to an Eastern rite monastery. They were demonstrating their worship practices and the way that the Eastern rite Christians prostrated themselves was very similar to what you do here. And someone asked a question about it and they said that since they preceded Islam by several hundred years, that actually the Muslims learned the practice from the Christians. Is that true?

JT: So the question is about prostration and Islam and whether in the St. Andrews Abbey, there were some monks from an Eastern Orthodox Christian religion that prostrated in a similar way. And they said, "well, we've been doing this before Islam came around, so they borrowed it from us." What a Muslim would say is that we believe that the source of religion is generally God, who is sort of above and beyond history if you will and there are some references in, it's not my field of study, but in the Scriptures, Christian and Jewish Scriptures, that reference prayer that involves bowing and prostrating. So we feel that bowing and prostrating is not an innovation or is not the exclusive realm of Muhammad. Some Jews also prostrate, once a year usually, on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*. So bowing, that even goes back farther. Sorry to steal the thunder there. So bowing and prostrating is just an expression of humility before God, so the more people that do it the better, but we feel ultimately that the source of religion in general, and maybe some of the ritual, including bowing, is also from that source.

Q: You said there is no excommunication in the Muslim religion. My understanding was what they call a fatwa was a form of excommunication?

JT: So is a *fatwa* a form of excommunication? A *fatwa* is often times translated as *responsa*. There's a similar practice in Judaism, in the *halakha*, in which there are *responsa* that are issued and legal opinions from various scholars. There are scholars that have opinions. And they will issue their opinions, their edicts, *responsa*, a proclamation, different things like that. They can have an opinion, but they don't represent anyone but their own individual self. And so is that an excommunication? I wouldn't say it's an excommunication because they don't officially represent anybody, they have an opinion, and if they don't think that someone else is a Muslim, well, that makes one of them. Maybe some other people agree with them, but again there is no formalized body, etc. I mean some people wanted to excommunicate some terrorists, excommunicate Bin Laden, but there's no mechanism.

We could say if what we feel that a terrorist does is a crime, then we say that's a crime. That's against our religion. Whether they're a Muslim or not, that's in God's hands and God is ultimately a just God and will deal with everyone individually. So it's not really our role to excommunicate or really to comment on other peoples' religion. I'll go one step further, and I'm going to pull up a verse, so bear with me for one second. So this verse here in chapter 2 verse 62 reads:

Indeed, those who believed, in other words, Muslims,
and those who are Jews or Christians or Sabians
(the parenthetical insertion is again, an interpretation
that I don't necessarily agree with, but he's trying
to make a point with his interpretation. I'm going to translate it
in my own way here) Verily, those who believe,
whosoever believes in God and the last Day,
and does righteousness will have their reward with the Lord,
they shall not fear nor shall they grieve for their soul.

In other words, they can attain salvation. So although Islam has exclusive truth claims, it is also open to this notion that salvation is not the exclusive domain of a Muslim, capitol "M," but whoever believes in God and does good, God will judge everyone individually. How He is going to judge whomever is up to him. I can't guarantee my own fate, there's no golden expression that I can state that will get me into paradise. It's going to be combination of my belief and my actions, my faith and deeds, as we would say. I know that there's been some discussion in Christianity on that subject if I'm not mistaken historically. It's resolved in Islam that it's a combination of the two. Some people are eager to say but Islam is the truth and it's the only one, etc. Every Muslim believes that, but it doesn't mean that God doesn't have the bigger picture, and can say, well, "that was a pretty awesome person and they get in." So it's not really for us to say, although some people are, for whatever tribal reason eager to say that.

Q: *My name is Mary. Can you describe what happens and a little bit about the prayer ritual when someone dies? What the practice is?*

JT: So the question is around the ritual surrounding death and the prayer at that time. So there is something called a *Janaza* prayer, when someone passes away and the *Janaza* prayer is exactly what we just did right now, a portion of it, except there is no bowing or prostrating, because what we normally do is bring the body at the gravesite. And before putting the body into the grave, we will pray to God. We will pray for guidance, as in that chapter one in the *Qur'an*, we'll recite chapter one. We'll pray for blessings on Muhammad and his family and Abraham and his family. And then we will pray for the soul of the deceased. Then we will pray for everyone else who's passed, and for our own fate and our own soul. So there is no bowing or prostrating. We do say "God is the greatest" for each of those four different sections of the prayer, and then we conclude with "Peace be

upon you” on either side. Everyone is lined up in rows, but the rows can be close together because there’s no bowing or prostrating. It’s that simple.

That’s the ritual around death and after someone passes. We do have a mortuary facility, funeral services here on the mosque. We have six refrigerator-storage units in a separate building here, where we ritually wash the body and prepare the body, in fact we wrap the body in a word that’s come to use in English, we wrap the body in *kafan*, which is where we get the English word “coffin.” It comes from the original Arabic. And *kafan* actually refers to the cloth, not the box. But now in common parlance English it refers to the box. The preparing of the body, the washing of the body, and then the wrapping of the body is something that we do here on site.

Q: *What is the relationship of the holy Qur’an to Sharia law?*

JT: What is the relationship between the holy *Qur’an* to Sharia law? Sharia is Islamic law. The *Qur’an* is one of three sources for Islamic law. Sometimes people say four sources, but really three sources for Islamic law. The sources are the *Qur’an*, the teachings of the prophet Muhammad, which were collected in separate books. It was an oral tradition for about 300 years, and then they were finally written down and collected. So there’s some debate about the authenticity of many of those traditions and some collections are considered to be more authentic than other traditions. Nonetheless, that’s a very voluminous body of sayings, and statements attributed to the prophet Muhammad.

Then there’s the *Sunna*, that’s the second source. The *Qur’an* is the primary source, *Sunna* is a second source. The third source is the consensus of the community. So if the *Qur’an* and the *Sunna* were silent on something, but everyone agreed, that’s not a good idea, and there are only eleven things that people all agreed on, so it’s not really a major source, but it’s referenced nonetheless, that *Ijma* is the third source. Some people say *Qiyas* is a fourth source, which means “analogy,” but analogy is more of a methodology, not really a source. Those are the sources of *Sharia*. And *Sharia* aims to categorize every human action into one of five categories: it’s either obligatory or prohibited on the extremes, recommended, or discouraged, or neutral. And so one of the principles that most Islamic legal scholars agreed early on was this phrase that I’m going to share with you an Arabic. It’s an axiomatic expression: “the original state of all affairs, all actions, all issues for discussion about *Sharia*, the original, the default is that they are neutral.” In other words, it’s all okay, unless there’s something specific that makes it obligatory or preferred or prohibited or discouraged.

Q: *Hi, my name is Laurie Margaret, and I have a question about the “declaration of faith” for youth. Like in Christianity we have the first Communion, in Judaism the bar/bat mitzvah. And so in Islam when is it determined, at what age, that children will declare their faith?*

JT: The question is about what age children declare their faith. At age two. No, I'm just kidding. So in the Islamic tradition, there is no coming of age. You're eternally a young person. There's no formal coming of age moment in which you make your declaration, or have a confirmation or anything like that. The rule of thumb is you're expected that you're going to continue the religion of your parents. You're going to continue on in that faith. Now, once you reach the age of maturity, the age of puberty, in Islam, you are considered an adult. You have the obligations of an adult, you have the responsibility, you have the culpability, if you commit a crime, etc. Once you hit puberty, you're an adult, Islamically speaking. It's kind of like a *bar-mitzah* right? Once you hit that age, you're a fully-fledged member of the community. So that's the age in which you are responsible. There's no pomp and circumstance surrounding that. Maybe it's to the benefit of the child so they're not embarrassed, but it just is. You just transition, and it's kind of an uncelebrated moment of transition. Now that being said, as I indicated, there is a freedom of religion. There have been incidents in which a child decide not to practice Islam or to go to a different religion. And sometimes it distresses the parents because they really feel like this is the way, and what are you doing? But ultimately speaking it's their choice, they have that freedom. I hope that answers your question.

Q: *The question I have is, does Islam have the belief of guiding angels or guiding spirits that help people? Also what do you think of Jinns?*

JT: So the question is about angels that might guide or protect human beings, and also about the *Jinn*. In Islamic cosmology, if you will, God is the source of everything. Everything is animated by God's command. There are worlds that are referenced in the *Qur'an*. There's the world of the *Jinn*, the world of the angels. There are other realms that are referenced that we don't really know about but there are other sort of beings if you will. In Islamic theology, angels are created from the light and God's spirit and are only good.

There's no such thing as a fallen angel in Islam. Satan is not considered to be or ever been a member of the Communist Party (laughter), I mean to be or have been an angel. He was a third category which is the *Jinn*. So angels don't have free will, they're all obedient. Even the angels of hell, they're great angels: obeying God, overseeing the functioning of hell. But they're good angels, they're not evil angels, they're good angels, they just have a tough job. The *Jinn* on the other hand are created from fire and God's spirit and they do have free will like human beings. But what differentiates *Jinn* from human beings are a number of things, but primarily human beings have inherited the earth.

We are responsible for taking care of the earth. In fact, in chapter 2 in the *Qur'an*, earlier on in this, let me pull up those verses, because those are good ones:

and remember when your Lord said to the angels,
'indeed I will make upon earth one who shall inherit it,

a viceroy, a caretaker.

The word is *khalifa*. All of you should know this word because it's where we get the word *caliph* and where we get the name California. I'm not joking. You think I'm joking, don't you? Spain was a Muslim country Andalusia. We have a Spanish speaker in the back nodding her head, ruled by Muslims between the years of 711 to the year 1492. And that's why so many Muslims work in 7-11. No (laughter). So for those years, those centuries, there was an intermingling between Arabic and Spanish cultures in Andalusia, that Jews, Muslims, and Christians, Maimonides, there was a lot going on there. That's where a lot of the sailing comes from. Some say there were Muslim sailors even on the ships that explored, with Columbus, and even Muslims, for example, are reported to have gone to what's now Brazil and the Americas, back and forth from North Africa and from Spain in the centuries before Columbus. The point being that the word *caliph*, and there are three theories about where the word "California" came from, that to me seems the most probable, given that heritage.

Caliph, California means like the authoritative person. But what it really means in the Arabic is "someone who is inheriting a responsibility for something and taking care of it." And so that's what God is telling the angels "I'm about to establish on earth a *caliph*: the human being." He's foreshadowing the creating of the human being to the angels. Now I'm gonna skip forward a little bit in the story because then it gets into the story of the *Jinn*:

And remember when we said to the angels: 'prostrate yourself before Adam.' And so they all prostrated except for *Iblees*, except for Satan. *Iblees* is the Arabic word for Satan. He refused, and was arrogant, and became of the disbelievers."

Now, some of you might say "Oh look he was one of the angels. He was instructed to bow before Adam and here he didn't, etc." But in another verse, because the story is told twice in the book of Genesis, but it's also told twice in the *Qur'an* as well, in the other narrative of the *Qur'an* it says:

and he was one of the *jinn*, who happened to be hanging out with the angels, who didn't bow.

Because he had that free will, because he had that choice. He also, some suggest, not all *jinn* are bad, but *jinn* have free will, he was jealous of Adam. He was envious of Adam and Eve. So when here He is putting him in charge of the earth or making him responsible for the earth, He's telling the angels that's what he was going to do, He was still in the garden at this point, but that it was destined to be from before. He was jealous, he was angry. He said "well I have free will, I have special abilities too. Why should I bow?" And so because of that he was arrogant, and he became one of the disbelievers, he turned bad at that point. There's an entire chapter in the *Qur'an* on the *Jinn* and it says clearly, the *jinn* are in this

other world, this other realm, this realm that we don't generally interact with, although there might be some ghostly spirits, or some demons that are good and bad. If you have a certain kind of lamp that you rub, no that's the Disney movie.

There might be moments of interaction, historically Solomon was supposed to have had control over the jinn and help them in creation and building and things like that. Nonetheless, there's little interaction between humans and *jinn*. They're kind of ghostly demon spirit etc, but it says in the *Qur'an* very clearly, some are good, some are bad, some are believers, some are disbelievers. It's the subject of much discussion and interest and there are many books written about it. It's kind of like what you read at camp over a campfire and young people really eat it up. But for all intents and purposes it's part of the cosmology. We believe in angels, and some could be protecting and other things. Some Jinn, we don't really have too much interaction with them, but they're there. We believe in them, but it's not really a major part of our practice of the religion.

Q: *Given this part of the discussion Jihad, would you share why Muslims do pray shoulder to shoulder?*

JT: Sure, and so one of the projects that Gwynne and I embarked on together is to establish a study guide that pairs up mosques and churches, and we call it "Standing Together" because one day Gwynne and I had gone on an Interfaith pilgrimage to the Holy Land and in preparation for our trip we had sessions in which we learned about Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in a similar setting. We talked about Muslim prayer and I said "when you line up, you stand shoulder to shoulder," I didn't emphasize it here today, but every prayer before the imam will begin with, he'll say "stand straight and close together." And what we say is that the reason that you stand so close together is so you feel the brotherhood or the sisterhood and you don't leave any distance, any room, between so that Satan doesn't squeeze his way in and create division amongst you. So there's this idea of unity, and some of you might have felt this in the prayer, you're all unified and you're bowing and prostrating and standing, but you're also very individual in your communication to God. There's this aspect of we're individual in our worship, but we're together and collective and we don't want Satan to whisper and create jealousy and hatred and animosity amongst us.

Q: *My name is Nicola. I have two questions. One is obviously you don't like this translation of the Qur'an . . .*

JT: I do not. Actually there's a new one by Haleem that is fantastic. There's a Rabbi who converted to Islam in the 1920s named Leopold Weiss, he changed his name to Muhammad Asad, travelled to Arabia, became a scholar of Islam and of the Arabic language, and did a fantastic, phenomenal translation. He passed away in the 1990s in Spain actually. But Muhammad Asad's translation, called *The Message of the Qur'an* . . .

Q: *Is it like the message, like the Bible, there's The Message?*

JT: Yeah, so it's just called *The message of the Qur'an*. In other words, the translation of the message of the *Qur'an*. The reason why they sometimes just don't call it "the *Qur'an* in English" is because the *Qur'an* refers to the Arabic, and anything else is a translation of, the meaning of, the message of, etc. Almost all translations will say "a translation of the *Qur'an*" or "the meaning of the *Qur'an*," "the message of the *Qur'an*." So his is simply called *The Message* and it's an excellent translation.

Q: *And the second question is if you wanted to learn about Islam 101 here in Los Angeles, is there a place to do it? Geographically, this is more on the west side.*

JT: So there are a number of opportunities to learn about Islam in Los Angeles. We started a group in 2005 called "Coffee and Converts." And we meet in different locations monthly throughout Southern California. So sometimes we're on the Westside. We meet at someone's private home. It's usually a place where converts go, it's kind of a support group for new Muslims or people who are interested in Islam. So it was something that the new Muslims had requested, some support group so we created this group and they named it "Coffee and Converts." It's actually run by a couple who converted some fifteen years ago and they're leading that study circle. If you go to our website, meccasocal.org, you can sign up for the "Coffee and Converts" list and they'll send you information about when the next meetings are. Even if you're not a convert. It's a place where you can inquire and learn more about Islam and many people who go are not Muslims. Maybe they're dating someone who's a Muslim or they just want to learn more about the religion.

Q: *Nicholas. Generally speaking, if someone is not familiar with Islam, and wanted to attend a service at a mosque, is not familiar with the rituals of Islam, what would you recommend?*

JT: So if you're not a Muslim and you're interested in attending a service, you're welcome to. This mosque, if you see here, this is the prayer space for men and women. Often times there's these poles here, they have the ribbon set out to make sure there's a protected space for women to do their prayer. So that the men don't dominate which sometimes those guys tend to do that. Oh wait, I'm one of them. So this is generally the prayer space for both men and women. However, because there are so many people that come for our Friday service here, about upwards of a thousand, this is filled, we put chairs in the foyer, those are filled. We roll out carpets in that prayer space, we move out the chairs and put down carpets, that's filled. We have a cafeteria with rugs and chairs, that's filled. And we have a tent outside and that sometimes gets filled as well. And even on some occasions we have an upstairs room, but its been a while since we've had to resort to that because now there's one hundred and twenty mosques in Southern California.

We used to be the only thing, the only mosque in town. In any case, this foyer is reserved for people who are wanting to observe. So if you come and even if they tell you “go around to the back,” just let them know that you’re here to observe, and they’ll let you right in. You can sit in these chairs and observe. There’s a good thing and a bad thing about the hustle and bustle here, so many people coming and going, you won’t be hassled, but you might also not be greeted either. If you just want to come, sit, observe, it’s normal. We have visitors every Friday, Our service is on Friday and it’s at 1-130pm. It’s very short, it’s all in English, except for the prayer which is 5 minutes in Arabic. You don’t have to participate, you can just observe. If you have off on a Friday, that’s the time to come. Other than that, you can just show up at any time. There will be a prayer in Arabic, there won’t be any done in English and no translation, if you wanted to just join rank in that. There are classes. There are “Introduction to Islam” courses, Islam 101, but they are also teaching kids how to recite *Qur’an* and there are a number of other courses. We do have a Sunday program, every Sunday, it’s a general lecture from 12-1pm, you’re welcome to attend that here as well. And there are other mosques, their policies about receiving visitors vary from mosque to mosque. Some have the capacity, many don’t. This one does, so it’s a safe bet. You’re welcome to venture in. If you go in asking questions: “hi I’m new, I have questions, want to learn, you’ll be welcomed.” If you come wearing a dark suit with sunglasses and you look like you’re from the government, you might be seen with an eye of suspicion, but other than that you can dress in a suit but just you know, if you ask questions, people will be more than happy to receive you no matter where you go.

Q: *I have three questions in general. Is this where the imam sits here?*

JT: So this chair here. . . on a Friday sermon, what will happen is the *imam* stands in this, what’s called a *minbar*. In some mosques, it’s a huge staircase and the *imam* will walk up, maybe three-quarters of the way and stand and be perceived by everyone in this large mosque of ten thousand people or so. We have closed-circuit television cameras here that display in the various other locations so we go up a grand total of one step and then the *imam* would sit as a portion of the prayer, when the call to prayer is being made. And at some portion of the middle of the homily, or the sermon, the *imam* would sit down, ask people to reflect, and supplicate, and then stand up and complete the sermon and then the prayer would be done here in this prayer niche.

Now historically the prayer niche would be curved, kind of a dome and it would be curved like this because before there were these things called microphones, the person wouldn’t be facing and reciting to the audience, he would be facing and praying to God, facing the direction of the sanctuary built by Abraham in Mecca, called the *Ka’ba*. So the voice would then be projected backwards this way and people would be able to hear. Now not everyone could hear, but when he’d say “*Allahu Akbar*,” someone maybe twenty rows back would say “*Allahu Akbar*,” then another fifty rows back someone would say and it might take a while before everyone bows, but they would eventually get there.

Q: *Is this facing Mecca, because I think that's north east?*

JT: Yeah, and so in the Jewish tradition when they face Jerusalem, they go east. Because if you look on a map that's flat, east is Jerusalem. But Muslim scholars decided to look at the globe in a spherical way and say well, "as the crow flies, the shortest distance between here and Mecca is actually north, northeast of California." From the east coast it's northeast, but from California it's north/northeast. And if you're in Jerusalem, it's south. Muslims don't always face east in prayer, they face Mecca. You use a compass and you use the calculations and you use the table. There are apps. I use *IQur'an* and *IPray*. I'm not joking, those are the names of the apps. They have a compass and it tells you exactly, you type in your city, and it calculates how many degrees off of magnetic north is Mecca based on your location. It's all very precise.

In the olden days, actually, and this is an interesting civilizational question, Muslims were so focused on trying to know the direction of prayer that they developed the sciences of astronomy to another level because that not only had to get where they were going with the navigation of the seas, but they had to know what direction Mecca was. So they developed all kinds of mathematical formulae to anticipate the curvature of the earth. One guy, six hundred years before Galileo, calculated the circumference of the earth, and he was only fifty km off from today's measurement. And he used the geodesic equation and the shadow of a mountain on a plane. So it was pretty phenomenal stuff.

Q: *What is the significance of the cord hanging down from the arch?*

JT: That's a microphone. The chord is a microphone.

Q: *My name is Bryan and I was wondering if in cosmology or tradition, if there's a unique significance pertaining to the wife of the prophet Muhammad?*

JT: So is the wife of the prophet Muhammad, does she have a particular significance in things? In theology and cosmology, etc. Not in cosmology and not in theology does Muhammad. Well, Muhammad has a significance only in that he is a prophet. He's not part of the Godhead. He's not part of the divine. Muhammad is a person, that's why there's no representations of him anywhere, there's this sense that well, he's a human being. Yes, he was divinely inspired. But the *Qur'an* says, this is important so I'm gonna pull this one up:

The message has believed in what was revealed to him
from his Lord. And so have the believers.
All of them have believed in Allah and His angels
and His books, and his messengers
(the prophets in other words) saying,
'we make no distinction between any of His messengers –

Abraham Moses, Jesus they're all considered in Islam
messengers or prophets and they say we hear, we obey,
and we seek your forgiveness our Lord
and to you is the final destination.'

So Muhammad, I just want to say as a pre-amble to that question, is simply a human being who received divine revelation. He's generally perceived to have great character and have infallibility from a major sin. He still was a human being and had his idiosyncrasies, prayed, slept, and ate, and asked for forgiveness, etc, etc, and got married, had children and etc. His love of his life, Khadija, who he married when he was twenty five years old, she was forty – she was the one to propose to him by the way – the two of them were married until she passed away in a monogamous relationship. She died, it was a very sad year before he migrated from Mecca to Medina. After that he went on to marry several other women, for political purposes primarily. Khadija is held in very high esteem in Islamic history, and also his one of his wives Aisha has a special place as well, because she was younger than him, and when he passed away would pass on statements and teachings that she heard directly from the prophet Muhammad. She became a teacher, she became a scholar of Islam and one of the first teachers of Islam.

Some suggest that a good portion, up to or greater than fifteen to twenty percent of the tradition related to Muhammad came from Aisha. She played such a significant role of passing on knowledge and information about the teachings of Islam and the teachings of Muhammad. She has a special place in Islamic scholarship, she is referenced everywhere. She had men come and sit and study with her. So she does have that special position as well. She even led a military campaign. It's not something that Muslims are proud of because it was a military campaign that was a civil war, and she ended up losing, but not dying, but she was put under house arrest. It was sort of an unfortunate end to her life, but then she focused on her scholarship after that. There's a number of books written about her. Denise Spellberg, who's a professor at the university of Texas at Austin wrote a biography of Aisha. That's worth reading if you're looking to get some more information about her. There's also a friend of mine, he's a writer in Hollywood, he wrote a historic novel called *Mother of the Believers*, also about Aisha, his name is Kamran Pasha. It's a dramatized historical novel, but it's also very well written and very accessible. So maybe if you read the two of them, you'll get a good sense of Aisha and her role and her biography. And her personality. She was kind of a whipper-snapper.

Gwynne: *I have a concluding question, because I'm trying to figure it out. I've been here many times as you know. When the holy Qur'an is being recited by chant, how does the person who's reciting know when to change tonality, when to sustain a word? How does that happen?*

JT: Okay. So there is a science and an art to the recitation of the *Qur'an* and there are people that go and spend years not only memorizing, but learning how to

recite it properly according to the rules. Kind of like a cantor does with the Hebrew Bible. There are certain symbols that are vowels within the Arabic language, so the major letters that you see written in, for lack of a better word, in cursive where they're attached, you see above and below them floating vowel markings. The I, E, and U primarily. Then you see a few other symbols that, you see the symbol here which is the letter "g" in Arabic which means it's okay, it's permissible to either pause, and take a breath, or to keep breathing through it. This one means that it's preferable to stop and take a breath before you keep reading, but you don't have to. Then there's other ones. This one means it's preferable to not pause and take a breath and to keep on reading through, but if you have to you can. And then there's one that's not on this page, it's a small symbol with a loop with a tail, it means you have to stop, because the meaning, if you read straight through it, it changes the meaning. It's like a full stop, period, you have to stop there. There's a few other symbols that dictate. What that means is, aside from those places, you're supposed to keep reading in one breath. And if you do run out of breath, now Ben Yousef, you heard the length of that.

That's how we're going to conclude, everyone is going to match that as your final exercise before you leave today. So he has this incredible set of lungs that he can sustain that. But there are some verses that are very long and they don't have any of these symbol for several lines. You're just supposed to keep going. Now if you have to stop there, you just don't have the lung capacity, what you do is when you pause, you back up a couple words and when you resume you go from there. So there is an art. Now with regards to the tonality, they are different tonalities, if you will, that represent different emotion, different, whatever. And there are different approaches to the recitation of the *Qur'an* based on these. It gets very complicated. Not only that, there are seven different recitations of the *Qur'an*. It doesn't change any of the skeletal structure, the continental skeleton, but some of the vowel markings might be altered and there are seven different recorded ways in which Muhammad is reportedly to have recited with the same meaning in essence, but slightly different emphasis here and there. That's also a part of the repertoire of a reciter. He will memorize the *Qur'an* seven different times in seven different ways. Even some say ten, some say fourteen different ways. It becomes very complicated and that's why I'm not one of those guys. Plus I don't have the voice of Ben Yousef, who's been gifted significantly by God.

So I want to thank you all for your interest. We feel like we're the misunderstood religion in today's world. And for you to come with this openness and with this spirit, it's so beautiful, into this space, this sacred space of ours, and to engage with us, it really means a lot. And you'll see some of the members of the Muslim community will be like, "wow we have visitors that are interested to know about our faith." It's reassuring and it makes us as a community feel the love. So thank you very much and for Gwynne, for the great programming that you put on through The Guibord Center. The Guibord Center is a pillar in the Greater Los Angeles region and we are so honored to have this jewel of a woman in our midst. Thank you very much Gwynne for all that you do.