

A RAINBOW OF RELIGION

A vibrant, multi-colored rainbow arches across a blue sky with light clouds. Below the rainbow, a lush green valley is visible, featuring a winding river that flows through the center. The landscape includes rolling hills and some small buildings in the distance. The entire scene is presented as a page from a spiral-bound notebook, with the metal spiral binding visible on the left edge.

People of Faith in the Pioneer Valley

A collaboration of the Four Rivers Charter Public School 8th Grade
and the Family Diversity Project

A Rainbow of Religion

People of Faith in the Pioneer Valley

Preface by Isaiah

Afterward by Robin

Photographs by Gigi

Cover Art by Asia

Sketch of the Pioneer Valley by Kai

A Collaboration of
Four Rivers Charter Public School Eighth Grade
and
the Family Diversity Project

Preface

A Rainbow of Religion: People of Faith in the Pioneer Valley. What does this title mean, truly, in the context of this book? With a topic as big as religion, there are many names that the eighth grade class could have chosen for this book. The title indicates that there are many religions, and these monologues are some examples of people in the Pioneer Valley with different views on religion and religious topics.

Making these monologues broke our religious stereotypes and opened us to views of people different from ourselves. Interestingly enough, the interviewees had similar views on many of the religious topics covered in this book. With the ever-present feuds between religions, it's important to realize that many religious conflicts are spurred by differences that aren't even there, and that different religions have more in common than many sources tell us. Most important, the main difference between religions is how they approach, perceive, and live life! But after making this book we are suggesting that it's true, we have more in common than we think.

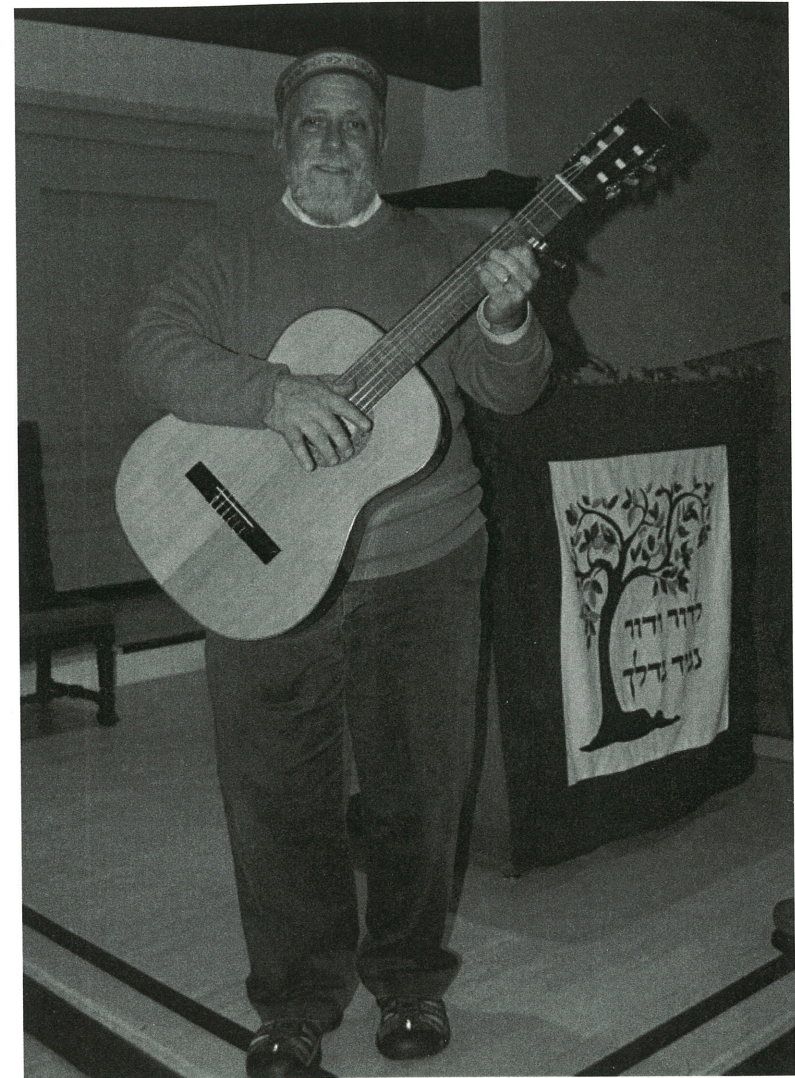
What we can never avoid is that we are truly one. Not just in the community of the Pioneer Valley, but also in the world. And it's this idea of unity that can guide the world to a peace that has possibly never existed. As my group's interviewee Imam Wissam Abdul Baki said, "People need examples, not speeches." What better example than a book of religion consisting of twelve individual examples of us, the people, to show the truth behind the misunderstandings and reveal wonderful perspectives of life? So read on, find the similarities, and take away something from this book that's more important than the monologues themselves. And remember that there isn't a rainbow of differences, but a rainbow of religion. Our different beliefs and religions are the different colors in the "rainbow," but in the end we are all just water droplets in the sky.

Efraim Eisen

Jewish Rabbi • Greenfield, Massachusetts

By Jake Finn and Jake

We were greeted with a smile as we were ushered into the office of Efraim Eisen, a Jewish Rabbi from the local Greenfield Synagogue. He became a Rabbi after being influenced by Schlomo Carlebach, his teacher and Rabbi. We were amazed by how hospitable he was to us, and he gladly showed us the synagogue after we finished talking to him. Not only did he talk, but he also sang for us, illustrating his points with a strum of a guitar and a line of a Hebrew song. He even sang a song about his belief in God to the tune of "Rockin' Robin!" Also, he comfortably answered all of our questions about the Jewish faith with more information than we could have asked for. Our meeting was a great experience and Rabbi Efraim is a really great person to meet, hear, and know.



Efraim Eisen

My favorite part about my religion is singing. I love to sing, I love to write music, I love to pray, and I love to dance, too. I give answers through stories - it's easier. We believe that if you sing and pray it's like praying twice, but if you sing, pray, and dance, it's like praying three times. So, the happier you can be when you pray, the better!

I was born in a Jewish family on Kol Nidray, the holiest night of the Jewish year, and continued to grow as a Jew all through the years of my life. When I was a little younger, I met a rabbi who was so cool. He wrote the best music of anybody I ever knew. I couldn't believe the music that he wrote. Not only did he write great music, but he told the best stories. I thought, "Wow, finally, somebody who knows how to do this right." He became my Rabbi. He'd get up to a thousand people all singing together. No words, just melodies. He had the ability to put everybody on a higher level, just by singing. When my rabbi died, I got the message: he said, "Hey, you need to do your part." I became a rabbi in my late forties, though I'd always been very in to my faith.

A Rabbi is really a teacher. We learn from our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and our friends, but to learn from a teacher who knows more than we do...that's good. Here's a song about God and what I believe about God: "God is not a person, God is not a thing, God is the spark behind everything! I really can't explain it, I'd really like to try, God is the sparkle in your eye! God is one, God is one, all I mean to say is that God is one!"

My belief is that when you die, you get to look at your life in review. You get to decide what you did well, what you didn't do so well, and what you need to learn the next time you're born, so that in each evolution, each person has an opportunity to rise higher and higher to become who they're supposed to be. Some Jews believe this and some don't.

There are many interpretations, and many perspectives in Judaism. There are books called the Talmud. The Talmud is an incredible collection of thinking that shows us that different perspectives are not just allowed, they're encouraged in Judaism. There are five books in our holy book, the Torah. The first book is Genesis, the story of how the world was created. The second book is Exodus, when we all went into slavery. We descended, got broken, and then we were released from slavery. When we got out of slavery, we wandered in the desert. Book three tells us how to live a holy life. In book four, we were still wandering in the desert. All kinds of things happened in the desert, some good and some not so good. The last book covers the last three speeches that Moses gave before he died. That's the Torah in a nutshell.

Jews have a very evolved calendar that is connected to nature; we're nature people. We worship at different times for different aspects of nature: for the first harvest and then the final

*"It's nice to be known
as the Rabbi, and people
respect that."
-Rabbi Efraim Eisen*

Efraim Eisen

harvest. We have mourning holidays, which means we cry together for bad times; we have remembering holidays to help us remember how things were long ago; we have holidays of great joy, and holidays of great sadness. We believe in celebrating all of it. We also celebrate the stages of life: the birth and the ritual of circumcision when a little boy is eight days old, and the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah that happens when a child is age thirteen. Basically, a Bar Mitzvah or a Bat Mitzvah is a rite of passage. It says that within the Jewish tradition, you are now counted as a part of the community, which is pretty cool. In the American culture, instead of celebrating a Bar Mitzvah, we celebrate a car mitzvah.

Many Jewish people are less interested in the Jewish religion and more interested in Jewish culture, such as the right Jewish music, the right Jewish theater, the right Jewish movies, and the right Jewish food. On Friday night, observant Jews light candles and welcome the holy presence of God into their houses. Most people don't know about it so they don't do it. Then we welcome angels from all directions.

In all my years as a Rabbi, I've never had anybody say anything rude to me about my faith or give me any kind of crack or insult. In fact, when I walk around this town I am honored. People say, "Hi Rabbi," even people who are not Jewish, and they just know me as "the Rabbi." It's nice to be known as "the Rabbi," and people respect that. There is a picture on my wall, which has candles in it. That picture is of the whole town of Greenfield, when they surrounded the synagogue after it was defaced with Nazi signs. Everybody in the town got together and said, "When you attack them, you attack us." We felt surrounded by the entire community. It makes me cry to think of that. For many years, nobody ever stood by Jews. In the world war, the whole world sat by while the holocaust took place. So for people like us who are raised in this tradition, and didn't grow up with that kind of support, it was deeply emotional to have the community support us. When I found out that the Christian people and Buddhist people all supported us, I realized that we are all in this together: I really got it.

*"When I found out that
the Christian people
and Buddhist people all
supported us, I realized
that we are all in this
together."*

-Rabbi Efraim Eisen

Tim Jones

Baptist Minister • Amherst, Massachusetts

By Leylee

Gabby

and Heather

Tim Jones is a Baptist minister who is one of the religious advisors at Amherst College, where he also helps with the worship series. He grew up in Virginia with a large family that was played a role in the church. When his grandfather passed away, Tim took after him and became a pastor. Now he has a family of his own, a wife, and a wonderful baby named Sophia. He enjoys basketball and watching movies with his family. He respects other religions, even though he might disagree with them sometimes. He's a very fun and interesting guy, and you'd be lucky to meet him.



Tim Jones

I grew up in a Christian household, where my parents were both leaders in the church. My grandfather was actually the pastor in the church where I grew up. At the end of each sermon, the pastor would give a call for those who wanted to be baptized, and they would walk down the aisle to the front of the church. In other traditions, baptism might happen at birth. In the Baptist tradition, baptism is a sign of something that has already happened, a symbol of an acceptance of Jesus. Baptism doesn't happen until we're able to express that. When I was seven, I decided to be baptized and give myself over to the Lord. About a month later, after some sessions with my grandfather, I had to go before the church and answer questions to show what I had learned and confess what I believed. Then I went to the baptism pool, the pastor asked me some final questions, dunked me, and back up I was!

As a child I memorized Ephesians 6:10: "Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might." That was my go-to verse when I was called on to recite. Over the years, this has become my favorite verse. It points to the need and the ability to be strong in the Lord. It means that in tough situations we don't have to rely only on our own power and strength. That is a great comfort to me.

In my youth, I was very competitive and basketball was my sport. Now I begin my day with a personal prayer time, although I still do enjoy basketball! In the morning I try to listen to sermons or gospel music. I also pray in my office all the time but sometimes those prayer turn into "extended prayers"- I have a habit of falling asleep during the day. That's why I like going to the sanctuary to kneel, not only because it's a sign of reverence, but also particularly because it keeps me more attentive.

I was recently ordained so I am officially a reverend now. I was ordained in the church where I grew up, in Virginia, my where grandfather was the pastor, but he passed away. If I had to tell my grandfather anything now, it would be to say thank you for building strong faith in the family and to thank him for making himself readily accessible as my model. I would also thank him, too, because I always felt like I truly had a grandfather. He had time for his family. This is a struggle now for pastors because we have to make sure we have time for family as well as caring for the needs of the congregation.

I've been the pastor of the First Central Baptist church in Chicopee, for about two years. Before that I was at Saint John's congregational church in Springfield. Congregation and Baptist denominations come from the same family, but I've always been a Baptist.

About sixteen years ago there were two African American students on the Amherst College campus, who went to the deans because they didn't think there was an avenue for them to worship at Amherst as they did at home. Now I am one of the two protestant religious advisors at Amherst College. I have office hours so students can stop by, and I also have a Bible study with some guys. I like to hang out with college students because it makes me feel young again, even though I graduated in '04.

In the situation of a human being who has not been exposed to God, I would say that God loves them anyway. It's different if they have a choice to worship and choose not to, but even then God knows how to forgive. He has made a way for us to be in partnership with Him, and go to heaven. Jesus is what you might

*"If I could share anything
about my religion is that God
loves us all, loves us so much
that he has made a way for us
to be in fellowship with him."*

-Tim Jones

call the bridge.

As a person of faith, I have a responsibility to God to be a witness of God's love, and to be a light in what can be a dark world. I have the responsibility to be a faithful and productive citizen. Also, and maybe most important, faith compels me to be an advocate for the oppressed. It was Dr. King's faith in Jesus that compelled him to do all that he did; that's an awesome and sometimes daunting model for me. Here's an example of that: Even though I may disagree with my Muslim brothers and sisters, I feel compelled as a Christian to stand beside them in their right to be able to believe what they believe. The controversy about building a mosque near Ground Zero says much more about the attitudes in our country then it does about what they wanted to do on that site. There was a mosque in the World Trade Center, and there were Muslims who died when the towers collapsed. It embarrassed me as a Christian to hear what other Christians said about that issue. Christians being prejudiced against other religions goes against everything we're taught.

As a preacher, one of the things I do is describe God. In the Old Testament, God said, "I am." So, when I think about God, that is a good way for me to begin to try and capture him: God is. God is love, God is father and mother, God is redeemer - He has redeemed us. When I preach, I try to use vivid language to describe God. For example, I might say God is the doctor who tends you when you're sick, or God is the way out of no way.

The black Baptist traditions are the ones I grew up with. I love the music, the gospel traditions, and I love the black style of preaching. It's very dramatic, and very much draws on the African traditions of story telling, as well as rhythms, tonality and voice. Sometimes preachers will get so worked up that their words come out like music, lots of ups and downs and even screams. I love that! The church where I pastor now is mostly white and my congregation hasn't had the experience of those traditions. It's sometimes a challenge when I preach because there is no call and response, so I'm not always sure if I'm reaching them or how they feel about what I'm saying.

I was the pastor at Saint Johns Congregational church and now I'm the pastor at the First Central Baptist church in Chicopee. There are some differences in beliefs and practices between the Congregational and Baptist denominations, but both are from the same family of church governance: they are self governing, led by the congregation, unlike other denominations that have an organizational hierarchy. Pastors are expected to do more now then they once were. In addition to preaching, pastors were expected to call on the sick and visit parishioners. That's changed over the years. Now the pastor does all that but is also expected to oversee several missionaries and to serve as a sort of CEO of the church. It's more than the care and the nurturing of souls.

If I could share anything about my religion it is that God loves us all, loves us so much that He has made a way for us to be in fellowship with Him. Jesus died for our sins and in that way paved the way for us. Jesus is the bridge between us and God.

"Jesus died for our sins and in that way paved the way for us. Jesus is the bridge between us and God."

-Tim Jones

Sister Claire

Practicing Buddhist • Leverett, Massachusetts

By Jack Gabby and Kai

Sister Claire was born a Christian, but in her early twenties she converted to Buddhism. She is now a monk. She is hardworking and very welcoming. She lives just a walk away from the Peace Pagoda in Leverett, Massachusetts. Her house is sustained by generous people's contributions. She welcomed us with a smile and led us up to her holiest room where she and others pray. Sister Claire is very peaceful and open about sharing her feelings and her life.



Sister Claire

Being raised as a Catholic was a very positive experience, and I felt like it nurtured me along, but when I became a young adult, I was searching quite a bit spiritually for something that would somehow bring my sense of the world and of myself together. I saw a lot of good things in Christianity, but it didn't seem to be what I needed at the deepest level. I felt that the deepest level of spirituality should be a deep anchor to my heart and soul.

In 1977, when I was twenty six, there was a peace vigil remembering Hiroshima day, on August 6th, and Nagasaki day on August 9th. At the very end of the vigil, a monk named Kato arrived, walking with his drum. I had never seen a Buddhist monk before. He walked into the vigil and I had this feeling of "yes." It wasn't an intellectual processing. It was a much deeper sense of connection that I couldn't explain. He chanted and prayed in Boston every morning and I prayed with him, and began to chant. I ended up being ordained as a Buddhist monk three and a half years later.

My father had already passed, but my mother respected my decision to become a nun because it was oriented for peace. It was definitely challenging for her to try to bring together the story of the daughter she had raised with the Buddhist nun that I became. She eventually sorted it out and reached her own peace, and she met our teacher when he was still alive. She thought he was a real saint.

Our daily life has structure, rhythm and discipline. If you become a monk, you need definite shape to the day. We can pray absolutely anywhere. A monk once said, "The whole world is like a temple or church. There doesn't need to be a building. The sky, the trees, the earth, and the water is all sacred."

We usually pray and chant one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. We try to time our walk around the pagoda with the rising of the sun. Then we come down to have breakfast and start the day. We go on walks from town to town marching as a group of monks and lay people while we drum and chant, "NA-MU-MYO-HO-REN-GE-KYO." One of the walks that I went on in Sri Lanka stimulated a lot of thinking for me. There was a war going on there that divided people along ethnic and religious lines. One of the monks organized a walk for all ethnic and religious groups to be together as one body. We would all go to the Hindu temple, the Jewish temple, and then the Christian churches. It was all knitted together.

We do have major ceremonies here twice a year at our temple. Most temples have formal ceremonies in the spring and autumn. Many monks come together, and it's quite beautiful. We have many decorations and we make it a gorgeous experience. We also include interfaith

"True religious teachers teach true love, and I think if there would be no competition between religions it would be great. If Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Sikhs really came from that place it would be just so joyful!"

-Sister Claire

prayer at that time for peace, and we have food and dance. We also fast at least once a year in December. We stop everything for a week. The way of fasting includes not eating or drinking even water. However, some of us are not as physically able to do such a demanding practice, but we do our best, even if we take water. The main focus is to chant from the early morning to the evening, from about 5:30am to 6:30pm. In our prayer, we don't say the meaning of it; it is completely beyond definition because it's so deep. We might chant our whole lives and just begin to understand the meaning of it. We do believe that our prayer is the expression of the reverence of the Divine existence in all of us. It comes to us from this long tradition that arose in Japan. It's not about one country or language or anything. It's about the humanity and the whole of life.

When we first came to this part of the country (western Mass) in 1983, people heard of this crew of monks that wanted to build something called a Peace Pagoda. Initially, there was a lot of fear, but it didn't last long. However, right before the Iraq war in 2003, we walked around Massachusetts telling people to not attack Iraq. People did throw things at us. It wasn't about the Buddhist religion, it was about the message we delivered, which wasn't terribly popular at that moment.

There's no salary as a Buddhist monk or nun. We just rely on people's generosity to keep us alive. The other side of that is that we have a big responsibility to practice the faith and the spiritual teachings. My life is about keeping the daily practice strong. It is a responsibility to the Buddha and a responsibility to the people in general. It doesn't mean converting people, we feel very much that we are interconnected no matter what our religion is. We're all in this together. If you commit to Buddhism, you may feel an empathetic connection with many spiritual traditions but you are devoting yourself completely to the path of Buddha.

The practice that we are taught by our teachers is about how to create a peaceful world at this time because it is a extremely un-peaceful world, and it's very insecure and sometimes frightening world, so how do we make this world peaceful and the circumstances good for humanity? We believe in this prayer we chant and we practice bowing to everybody. Buddha's nature draws out the pure nature in all of us. We believe our understanding is that the Buddha foresaw this time in history, which is very challenging for us all. Our understanding is this prayer "Na-Mu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo" was transmitted by the Buddha to Saint Nichiren seven hundred years ago. We feel that it was really meant for this time. This is a time that humanity needs to awaken to our spiritual nature and change from the blindness of materialism, which is causing so much distress and violence. We believe that every religion can be part of the solution.

Religiously influenced struggles are not fundamentally caused by the religion itself, but in the interpretations of the scripture by the religious leaders. Religious leadership should be more

“Religiously influenced struggles are not fundamentally caused by the religion itself, but in the interpretations of the scripture by the religious leaders.”

-Sister Claire

Sister Claire

responsible; they should honor what is in the scripture and care for the true welfare of the people. It is an agony to me that religious or spiritual leaders don't make themselves responsible to the people at a deep enough level or to the highest teachings. To use religious teachings to justify war, hatred, oppression, and division is really terrible. I don't see religion as the source of divisions, but I see how religion can be manipulated to exacerbate the problem. Creating emotional division and judgment is not okay. In every single tradition there are great lights living on the earth right now, but they're not given enough focus. In John Lennon's song "Imagine," he sings, "living life through peace with no religion." He has a point. Religion has been used historically, and still is used, to divide us. In that sense, "no religion", as John Lennon says, would be good so that we are not all in our own little groups. True religious teachers teach true love, and I think if there would be no competition between religions but rather a selfless commitment to live the teachings without fear, then it would be great. If Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs really came from that place it would be so joyful! In the true sense, I believe religion can be the greatest source of bringing people together because it touches the deepest and truest parts of our spirit, which is also the very place where we are all one.

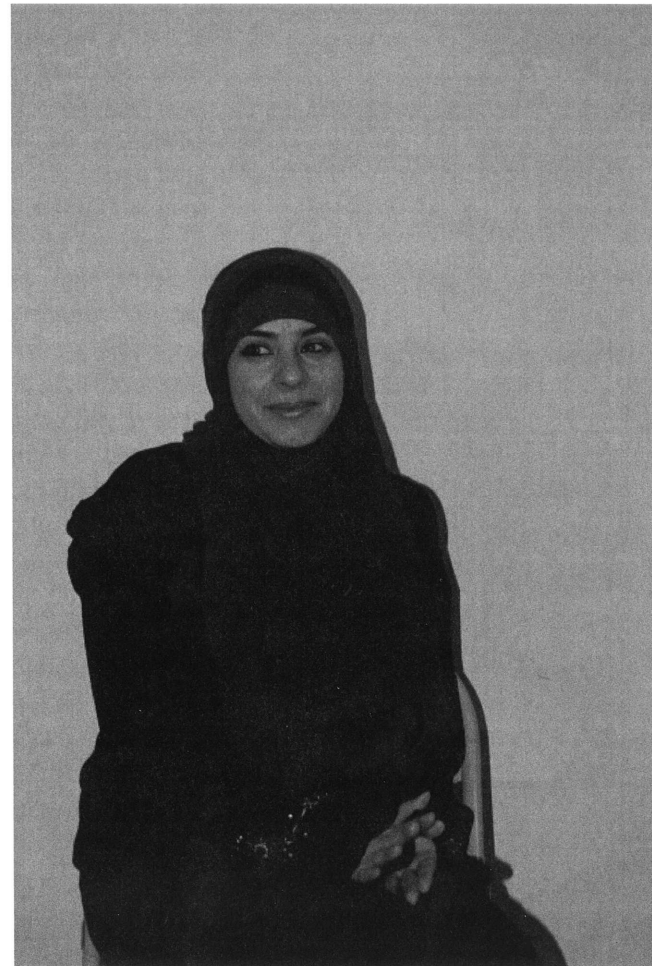


Bushra Muhammad

Practicing Muslim • Amherst, Massachusetts

By Maggie Sarah and Emma

Dressed in a black “Aabaya” and a black Hijab, Bushra Muhammad is a Senior Residential Counselor, a mother, and a practicing Muslim. She is on the Board of the Hampshire Mosque in Amherst, where she has lived for a number of years. She works with women in their thirties with different diagnoses and teaches them life skills. Bushra takes her religion very seriously. She prays five times a day and follows the Prophet Muhammad. Bushra is a strong believer in God.



Bushra Muhammad

I was born in Pittsfield into a Muslim family, but we soon moved to Denver, Colorado. There was a very big Muslim community there. There was a Muslim version of Sunday School that we went to every Sunday. We'd go there to learn more about our religion. By the age of seven, Muslims are expected to learn how to pray and should be able to memorize smaller suras, or chapters in the Qu'ran, to recite during prayer. All Muslims have to learn at least the first chapter of the Qu'ran in order to make their salah, or prayer.

I went to school in Lenox, Massachusetts and there I experienced prejudice. It was very hard to grow up as the 'other.' People would call me a "camel jockey," or they would say "your dad smokes camels!" And I'd be like, "Well, my dad doesn't smoke, and I've never even seen a camel." I was just so naïve; I didn't get that they were making fun of me. However, the worst thing was the teachers. In my sixth grade world history class, we only touched upon Islam. Our teacher took a quote from the Prophet Muhammad, read it, and then said "This is the only thing that Islam has contributed to the world." She went from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance without acknowledging the many mathematical and scientific contributions that Muslims have made to the world. After she read that, she slid her bifocals down her nose, stared right at me, and said, "You people are barbarians." I was so mortified that I just melted in my seat; I didn't know what to do. Other students were staring at me, wanting to see my reaction. I never told anyone, not even my parents, because I didn't know any better. My mom taught me to listen and respect my teachers, so I thought if I said anything I would be disrespecting them.

After 9/11, the prejudice just got worse. I stopped wearing my hijab, but my mom didn't. My sister and I told her to take it off because it seemed dangerous to wear it, but my mom wouldn't do it. I thought she was foolish, but looking back I think she was really brave. She would say, "I'm not going to give up my beliefs out of fear." She said, "There's nothing in this world that I fear. These are my beliefs and I have a right to keep them." I remember people looking at her with utter disgust. I got so frustrated that I yelled at one lady, "Where is your son? What's your son doing? This woman who you're looking at, her son is in the American Air Force. So what makes you more American than she is?" Muslims need to hide less and be more open. We need to be out there and interact with families and tell people about our religion. There's no reason to be ashamed, but after 9/11, I feel that Muslims started hiding in their homes.

As I grew up, life changed. I didn't wear the hijab through my young adulthood. My mother told me she wanted me to wear it, but I had my own personal issues and refused. A year and a half ago, I put on the hijab. I put it on because it is part of Islam, and the faith inside of my heart. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Whatever is in the heart is on the tongue; what is on the tongue is manifested in actions; whatever is manifested in actions will become habitual." I felt that I wanted to display what was in my heart. The material world stopped me from putting it on sooner. I was also afraid of the backlash, not just by non-Muslims, but by some Muslim women who are feminist and think that wearing a hijab is oppressive. The hijab symbolizes modesty, not just with the opposite sex but with the Creator. He has given a body to each person and we should appreciate it. We shouldn't flaunt it or exploit ourselves. We should thank Him for creating us in a beautiful image. The command was given for us to be modest and to show our appreciation for Him.

*"People will be at peace
when they realize their
greed and return to God,
and really rely on him and
do what their prophets
have told them to follow."*

-Bushra Muhammad

Bushra Muhammad

My responsibilities as a Muslim are to be kind and generous and to always be cognizant of the people around me. Muslims are all responsible for our neighbors, from the seventh neighbor down to the first. On the Day of Judgment we'll be asked about our neighbors who we were supposed to look after. If even one went hungry, we're going to be responsible for that. Muslims are very generous; we give as much as we can to help other people. Our responsibility is to be good people; to set an example through good actions.

There are five daily prayers in the Islamic tradition. One is at pre-dawn when we praise God before the birds get up, which is beautiful. The next is at noon, then in the afternoon, and then when the sun sets, and the last one is in the evening. To help us keep track of the times to pray, we have a lunar calendar that is based on the phases of the moon. Prayer gives me a systematical or methodical way of ordering my life. A Raka is a unit of prayer: we bow down, then prostrate ourselves and then stand up; that's one Raka. For the predawn prayer, we do two Raka; at noon and in the afternoon we do four, then three Raka at sunset and four in the evening. It's preferable that men pray in the mosque. Women can pray at the mosque, but some prefer to stay at home. Muslims pray facing northeast, toward Mecca, the city in Saudi Arabia where the prophet Muhammad was born. Northeast is the direction in which we always try to pray. I have a compass that I use; it's actually on my keychain because I use it all the time.

There are mandatory traditions and things we have to do, like the fasting during Ramadan. But in everyday life there is always opportunity to reap more rewards. Muslims get excited about doing good deeds and helping others. Muslims don't have a specific image of God. We tend to focus on His attributes. The Most Generous, the Most Merciful, the Most High. There are ninety nine attributes that He has revealed to us, and we study those attributes. God is what He says He is. If He says He's light upon light, He's light upon light. When He says "My Hand" we don't think of it as a human hand, and we don't try to elaborate or think further than that. When He says "I am NOT this," then we stay away from whatever He says He is not.

Muslims believe that everything happens for a reason. Of course people get angry sometimes; of course they start to ask why, but ultimately, people have to change the condition within themselves. Once that process starts, then we can see the change around us. I really try to reflect on my everyday life, which is what everyone needs to do, as well. My religion is about oneness. For me, tapping into that light and achieving peace through that light is what Islam is about. It starts in the heart. The Prophet set the example for us; he was the living Qu'ran. He clarified through his actions everything we didn't understand. Everything he did was worship. He said a smile is charity, therefore charity is worship.

The wars happening in the world right now are happening because of human greed. Humans have a dark side, and if we lean towards it, we forget to rely on the One who created us. It's just like simple childhood fights, or siblings quarreling about their things, food, parents and so much more.

*"My responsibilities as
a Muslim are to be kind
and generous and to
always be cognizant of
the people around me."*

-Bushra Muhammad