Muslim Teenagers

By **Nauman Ali Khan**

This project started towards the end of 2004 when I still in new York, and the idea was to facilitate Arabic education for Muslims across the country and the philosophy really I had was that one of the obligations and real responsibilities of Muslims is to be educated in their Deen, and one of the biggest obstacles of us being properly educated in Islam is really the Arabic language. Because the primary sources of this religion are in Arabic. At the same time as it’s the responsibility collectively. I also believe that Muslims have a right not just responsibility they have the right to quality education that is accessible to every Muslim man, woman and child, and they should have a quality education at least in Arabic language which opens the doors to other areas of learning meet Quran , Sunna and other areas. When I first started learning Arabic for myself it was a very difficult journey from one teacher to another, to another and I didn’t have the luxury to be able to travel abroad or to spend a lot of money to go to a university to do a degree in Arabic and etc. I was very much hand to mouth as a student. So when I went through whatever journey I went through to get to a certain level in Arabic I felt well if I really wanted to learn it this bad and I had to go jump through all of these hoops I am sure there are people that are far more passionate about learning this stuff than I am and they don’t have these opportunities. So something has to be there that creates opportunity, so when I started this project in new York , ALHAMDULILLAH I started it in a masjid I used to live in, in long island at Bay Shore the response was just incredible , and word of mouth spread and requests started coming can you do that, a short Arabic class for the Muslim community in new Jersey , can you do one in Connecticut city, can you do one in Maryland. No advertising, no radio no flyers no nothing, barely a website at that time and just word of mouth kind of started spreading to the point where it got out of control. So Alhamdulillah , that’s where we started and now Alhamdulillah I have a fantastic team of colleagues that are just increasing by the day and I am constantly looking for new talent as well. Myself and my colleagues included must have visited over at least 180 Masajids all over the country, Alhamdulillah all over the US.

(then Ustadh Nauman Ali Khan started talking about Arvin as this lecture was delivered at Mosque Arvin)

I came here in 2007, some of you might heard of it , I came here with my brother in law , we are both from new York, and when we came here and we were teaching a class upstairs , we had about 80 to 90 students and there was a volleyball tournament going on between the Arvin brothers and between the brothers of, I think, ISAT or central masjid or something. The guys from Arvin(mosque) were getting clobbered, they were getting destroyed, I don’t know, I was just enjoying the fact that there were bleachers back there and people watching the game and my brother in law and I (because we are from new York) we don’t see that kind of activity, we were like what did we miss, is this Eid, what is the party about, so we kind of decided to move. Long story short after all these years of travelling, the idea, the virus, that got planted in my head was, we need to create a serious program , not just something that introduces people to Arabic, but actual proper alternative to travelling abroad to study Arabic over here in the US and by Allah’s grace and really miraculous help from ALLAH and completely unexpected over whelming support from all over the country we were able to set up our own mini campus across what used to be the nokia headquarters . so we have taken up to fifth floor and have started are program Alhamdulillah, and so far so good IA.

**Question from audience**: I have heard some news about next year’s planning, so what is that?

**Answer by Ustadh Nauman Ali Khan**: yeah we have started our registration for next year, and those of you who want to know more about it IA may be towards the end of this program I can talk to you folks about it. What I am looking for is high school graduates and older that are brave enough to spare a year of their academic life, it’s ten months long and the next batch starts at 2011 September, 20th or so IA. And already it’s been a couple of weeks since we have opened up registrations. I don’t have any Dulce applicant yet but we have several applicants from outside the Dulce area Alhamdulillah. I am hoping to see some more local participation here IA.

**Question from audience**: what role does a Muslim team play in today’s high school and college?

**Answer by Ustadh Nauman Ali Khan**: I have kind of a weird perspective on this, to be totally frank with everyone here I feel less in a position to tell you how should be in high school because I was pretty messed up in high school myself, but I can tell you of some things that I have seen work. And I want to start with a recognition that there are two ways that you can look at Islam. There are really two ways you can look at this Deen in your life , and one of those ways is, well what’s the bare minimum this religion wants from me and after that it can leave me alone and I can do what I want. In other words just tell me what I cannot do , the absolutely bad stuff that is going to land me straight to hell, tell me that stuff, I won’t do that stuff and everything else I will do that’s how I want to live my life. I want to be free from the shackles of religion basically, and this is the way mostly young people look at any religion . most young people look at the religion as a way that it just tells me not to do things, it stops me from living my life, we strict our conservative Christianity or Judaism or even conservative aspects of Islam or whatever. Whatever it may be is it is keeping me back from living it up. And high school is being pushed and it’s been pushed for ever as the golden years of your life when you really should be partying . How many high school movies do they make about how you should be going and doing whatever you could possibly can in high school, after that real life sets in or whatever.

On the other end there is another way of looking at Islam , and the other way of looking at Islam is that we were brought , we were given this gifts of Islam not chains , it’s not chains that are shackling us , we are given this gift, and this gift gives us this really high purpose. I wasn’t sent on this earth to party, I was sent on this earth to do some amazing task and there is a huge population on the earth who Allah decided he will not give the gift of Islam , they didn’t deserve it like I did. Allah gifted me with Islam and the best years of my life that I can serve Islam with are these years , my early years. The youth of my life is the best part of my life that I can spread Islam with.

Now these two very different point of views, one point of view asks what’s the least I can do and get by , and the other point of view asks what more can I do , I want to do more , I want to help other people see how awesome this Deen is, and you know what I have come to realize is if I use sports terminology for a second, you know what do we mean by defense and offense . If ur team is on defense what’s already the case, when u r playing football or basketball or whatever, if u r on the defense what seems to be the case; you don’t have possession , the other side does, right? and if you are on defense in most of the cases what does it say you are winning or losing the game? You are losing, because you are constantly on the defense. This idea of holding back and saying we just have to at least take care and defend a few of the things that Islam wants us to and the rest of it we can let go. What you are asking for is an eventual failure. Eventually you are going to start making the list of things the no no’s and you are going to make that list shorter and shorter until there is nothing left.

On the other hand the winning attitude is really offensive, what more can I do. I have given this example in a khutba here before, I want to share that example with you, I will keep my friend’s name anonymous. He went to high school, before he went to high school he was at a Hifz program, where you memorize Quran and of course you are sitting in a masjid with other kids and you are memorizing Quran and you are with the hafiz sahib most of the times, then you go home and you review Quran and you are just surrounded by the really pure gathering all the time. And when he is done now he is going to high school and he tells his parents that I want to go to public school, and his parent are like,, what you want to go to public school? You are hafiz, u can’t go to that terrible environment . you r going to go all a messed up. And do u know what he says, he says I have just learned Allah’s book and the people who need to hear about Allah’s book the most are the people in high school. They have to know what this is. I feel responsible, why should I hide what I have. I feel responsibility to share it, I feel bad for those people. So they put him in public high school. By the time he graduated high school 16 kids had taken shahada. What I am talking about here is an attitude not defense but of what, of offense, you see yourself as having something superior. Specially young people now a days I feel like, I am putting you guys on the spot, I don’t know for sure, but a lot of you are not proud of Islam, you are not proud of it like this is it man, everything else . I feel sorry for these people, instead of what’s happening to our girls, our daughters is, when they see a girl dressed in a certain way they wish ahhh I wish I could dress like that, too bad it’s haram. We see other kids, boys , they can do all kind of things and we say, yeah my parents won’t let me do that or its parentally not allowed or something. You know but the right attitude would be, I feel bad for that girl, look at how she has to dress herself, how she has to put herself on display, she is looking for attention like that. While Allah has already giver me attention by my Islam. All the dignity I need, all the recognition I need, Allah has already given me. Why do people do kind of ignorant things they do, you know what they are looking for, it’s attention and respect. If you really have Islam you are not looking for it anywhere else you already got it. And when you find other people pathetically searching for these things, you actually looks down and say I feel bad for you, let me show you something better that you aspire to. So that’s the kind of attitude that is really important in high school life.

When you are talking about college, I will take two minutes more. At least In my opinion and experience, college is the time where you think, it’s the world of ideas. You can expose to so much more and you can go in so many different directions. College is really the formulating part of your life where you decide what the rest of your life is going to look like. Really it’s college, because true independence is in college. That’s where you truly decide what direction of life you are going to take. Not just professionally but what kind of person you are going to be, how you are going to carry yourself, what kind of priorities are you going to have in life. All of that comes from what you are going to do in college and huge part of that is who you are around in college. If you are around a bunch of losers in college all the time then guess what, you are going to be one. If you are going to be around a bunch of go getters in college you are going to turn into one. That’s what college is like. The thing to do in college in my opinion is to take care of your academics of course and on the other side be heavily involved in something like MSA(Muslim student association), use your spare time to do some productive stuff. Whether it be putting programs together or you are doing food drives , whatever it is you are doing, whether its study circles or something, but the MSA to me is like a life line in college, and if you are not a part of it, you are really missing out on something that’s going to hurt you way down the line. The role that the masjid is supposed to play in the life of a Muslim during college, the reality of that, that’s what the MSA plays. I know MSA have problems and drama and all this stuff but nonetheless the Muslim students association at least some students associations at least for me were a life saver. I would have never met anybody who would make me want to commit myself to pray regularly, I wouldn’t have met somebody like that through MSA. But some of the great scholars we have are going around now a days are x-MSA people. They came out of the MSA. Don’t trivialize it, don’t think little of it, make it a big part of your college life and if your college doesn’t have one then make one. You should be the one to make it. You should be the one to create it. Nowadays , so many high schools, I am so proud of them, are starting to make MSAs. I went to the MSA UHS the other day , I was shocked , there were like 80 kids there. I was like where did you people come from. It’s a thing of pride when Muslims come together to trying to do something like that. So that would be my advice to collegians and last thing again when you become zombies and you get into the work force, I will just speak frankly Muslims In this country for a long time we haven’t been creative. We have not been creative. Our idea of good career is limited to four and five things and if your children are not graduating into these four to five fields then they have failed in life, the parents are like what are you doing with your life. If your son decides to for example get a bachelor’s in history , you say what are you doing, is that why I brought you to America to study history?? No forget about history and worry about your future. Go for engineering if you can’t do that go for computer science, if you can’t do CS be a programmer at least do IT,, no? okay fine be an accountant, that is the bottom of education. So we are like these are the careers that are successful and we push those onto our kids. Listen, this is not the British empire leaving Pakistan and India behind ,and the only careers left are the ones the British left for us. This is not that anymore. This is, I don’t want to be cliché but it is, the land of our opportunity and there is so many creative fields that we could use Muslims in, and it not just that it would be a great service to community but they can really be lucrative careers.

So my first bit of advice would be to identify yourself, college is the time to do that and high school is the early time to do that. Identify for yourself what are the subjects and what are the areas of study and specialization that you find interesting, that you really like, genuinely like. And then in college speak to professionals, councilors, advisors and then find out what kind of career pads are available in that field that you personally like, and not just like that you are good at. These are the two things that are important. Because you could really like something but you are not good at it. Don’t do that because you won’t get anywhere. And sometimes you are really good at something but you don’t like it at all, you are really great at it, you hate it though, and you go and do it anyway because you are good at it. You know what happens, you are miserable your entire life because you hate going to work every day as you can’t stand your job. It would be an effort on your part to find something you really like doing and be that you are good at and then pursue a career in that field IA. That’s the ideal case but even if it doesn’t happen have a career in which your life is not your career. I used to be in IT , and you know what happened, technology was constantly changing. So to keep up in your career what did you have to do, when you are at work you are work, and you are at work even when you are at home. You can stay at work the next day to keep up with your career. So your career and your work basically consumes you and you have no time and energy left to do anything else in your life. That’s all you are. Have you ever seen the people who work so hard, every time you talk to them all they can talk about is work. They can’t think to talk about anything else. Why?? Because that is all their lives have become unfortunately. They are just a means to make a multi-million dollar company some more money. That’s all they have become. You have to have a career in which you have time left for yourself, for your family, for your community for other things. A lot of people I know were amazing in their MSA years and these people work awesome. But the moment their career started they disappeared. We don’t see them at Masajids, we don’t see them in programs, we don’t see them pursuing their study of Deen . We don’t see them , and in some time it is understandable that you are busy with your family and things but don't lose who you were. If your children see you not having any activity outside of your career and doing the groceries, they don’t see you actively participating and wanting to learn the Deen itself and wanting to gain a better understanding, doing something for Islam, whether it be the work of Dawah or humanitarian work or whatever it may be; if they don’t see that, how are they going to get inspired. So these would be a few tits bits about the high school college and career.

**Question from audience**: Coming back to the professional life, what do you think about money making , as a lot of guys get over whelmed when money starts coming, how do you control that and decide about saving and spending and controlling it. Because most of the times parents don’t give this kind of independence to their kids in early age and they have no idea how to manage money.

**Answer by Ustadh Nauman Ali Khan**: At this part of the discussion I am very grateful that my high school years were in new York city where most families live hand to mouth. So we don’t have disposable income like we do on the south, like here life is very cheap so generally people are better off. If you think they are not well off go to new York and see, you will know what I mean. Where the entire family is working and they are working forty hours even if they are in high school. Like I worked forty hours through our high school and my siblings worked too. I was just a norm. but one of the benefits of that was it made us responsible with and appreciate hard earned money. It makes you responsible. A lot of our youth, they haven’t ever actually felt the “need” to take responsibility. They think even if I screw up I have got mom and dad. They will take care of you, they will support you or whatever. My dad did the biggest favour he could do to me, he said that you are going to pay your college tuition, get it into your head. I said okay. One should take it like a man and say I will do it. So from high school on I was thinking like an adult. Like this is my budget , so this is the college I can afford to go to , that’s how I am going to manage my time, and you know this aspect of life we are not giving our children, and we have to. If your kids are teens, the healthy things for them to do is to get a job, it’s healthy. It’s not about the money, it’s not. You have to make them responsible about the chores of house and things like that. This goes both for brothers and for sisters. Get a job at the library, get a job at the local hospital. If you don’t want to get a job, volunteer. Be a part of the community centre locally. But you have to involved in something like that. It builds responsibility. So when you do run into money, you respect it, that it doesn’t just come out of trees. A lot of people have their careers but they don’t take those careers seriously , because in the back of their mind they think if it doesn’t work I can move back with my mom and dad. In the back of their head, they are still on vacation. You have to become independent, you have to think like that , you have to think responsibly. As far as the money coming in is concerned , Muslims should have, in my opinion, the idea that we should ward duniya away and we should be the people of akhirah is true. At the same time, Muslims, we shouldn’t have the love of duniya but I tell you we should be the highest paid people in the country. Muslims should have the highest salaries. We should have the most successful businesses. Not because we want money, we pour that money in Islamic work. We can build infrastructure for the future generations, we can’t do that if we have nothing to work with. Do u follow what I am saying? The real strength of our times, the real power in our times is economic power. That is what the real power is. You can have military power or you can have economic power, and let me tell you most of the times economic forces even drive military forces. Economics is the currency of power now. We have to be empowered like that. But we have to maintain the balance that even if we are making loads of money that are goal in life is not the money. The purpose is not that we make the money. The income we are generating is for a higher purpose. It does something more with life. For this reason we have to balance the idea of good entrepreneurial careers and businesses with this giving spirit.

------------------------