

[0:00:00]

*Interviewer:* So \_\_\_\_\_, my name is Irem Khan, and today is July 12, and it's a Saturday. And we are conducting Brother Iqbal Kahn's interview. And we would, first of all, like to thank you on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College, Aspire 2014, and all of our other partners, for being here. So thank you so much.

*Iqbal Khan:* \_\_\_\_\_ salaam, and thanks for inviting me. And I'm happy to be here.

*Interviewer:* So, can we start off with just about yourself. So can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

*Iqbal Khan:* Sure. I came to United States long before you were born, in 1970. I was in Miami. And then, in '72, I came to Memphis. The reason was to – I completed my education

[0:01:00]

in Miami, and then I was looking for higher education so came to Memphis in my '65 Mustang. I drove all the way from Miami to here. Did not know anybody, absolutely nobody here in Memphis. All alone, just came – one more friend who drove with me – and stayed with an international student advisor's home for a few days before the university opened up. And then I lived for several years in the dorm. So, I can share something about Islam. I think this is what this whole thing is about. When I lived in Miami – I came in Miami August, 1970, and stayed until August, '72. I didn't see any Islam. There were quite a few students, quite a few students from Pakistan, and some other parts, also. But there was absolutely –

[0:02:00]

I did not see any Islam, anybody praying, or any need for prayer, let alone having \_\_\_\_\_. I do not remember if there was any \_\_\_\_\_. There was nothing. So we were drifting away. Emphasis was movies and music. Movies and music. That's what I saw the students, they renting a movie and they renting a hall in the university, and they brought a movie from Pakistan or India and all that, and then everybody flocked there. There the kind of \_\_\_\_\_ that was. Thank God I left that town. So, I, in the pursuit of my education, came to Memphis. And that's another separate story, why I picked Memphis over \_\_\_\_\_ admission several other universities, but I'm not gonna get into this thing. So, it was

basically was that I will get my education or my degree faster than other places. That was the only reason. So,

[0:03:00]

Well, in this – I don't know what I was going to – [Laughs]

*Interviewer:* So you came to – from Miami to Memphis.

*Iqbal Khan:* Yes, yeah. So here, when I was in here in Memphis, as I said, I did not know anybody. And there were absolutely – I didn't know any Muslim or anybody or anything like that. So, I think after within a one semester did find out and there was one Muslim family. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. They were the first family that I find out – a Muslim family. And, of course, there was another one, \_\_\_\_\_, who also passed away. So, after both of these passed away, both are from Pakistan, I am the most earliest Pakistani living I Memphis right now – Pakistani-American, living in Memphis. Once I gone, then somebody else take over my place. [Laughs] So, I can

[0:04:00]

say that from '70 to '72 I didn't see any Islam in Miami. When I came here in '72, of course there was nothing. And there were – In '72, '73, I don't recall anything that – well, anything that – we were the only ones praying. And I think – I come from a very Muslim family, very religious family. My grandfather build a – Okay. We actually share a common – Hmm?

*Interviewer:* Take your time.

*Iqbal Khan:* Yeah. We actually shared a common wall back in Pakistan. And even today the mosque is a small, mosque is overflows, and people put on our roof top. So, I came from that background, very religious family, but I was drifting away, because there was no establishment. There was nothing. No Islam. And here, I remember that in

[0:05:00]

'73, '74, I have two friends who also come join me from Miami. Our whole life is school or football. That's it. There was no Islam.

*Interviewer:* Did you play football or did you watch it?

*Iqbal Khan:* We watched a lot, and we play also, among ourselves. We play a lot of – I also learned how to play basketball, and then of course, the football \_\_\_\_\_ we played. Believe me, we just played. Whenever we get the chance we would play. So, But nobody was going for prayer or \_\_\_\_\_, we don't know that. I do not recall anything.

*Interviewer:* In Memphis?

*Iqbal Khan:* In Memphis. I do not recall that. I think I do recall there was a – probably was in '74 – we have an Eid prayer, and I believe there was in December time frame or something, Dr. **Ajadamat**, he no longer lives here. He was a professor, University of Memphis. And of course, at that time the university was called Memphis State University.

[0:06:00]

He lives now in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. You may want to talk to him, also. I believe we have an Eid prayer in his apartment. It was five or six of us. So, then I also remember a prayer having at University of Tennessee, in Memphis. We rented a space there, and I believe there was about ten people, but there was a whole family of Muslims there. And I know I'm taking a long answer, but I can share this Eid prayer that we had. It was very interesting in there one that during the prayer, you know that when we do the Eid prayer we have these what you call **takbir**.

[0:07:00]

Okay. Five or seven **takbir**. That's a part of the praying. This brother who was – I think it was one of our Egyptian brother who was leading the prayer. So he started the prayer, and he did not do the **takbir**. He went to **ruku** without saying the **takbir**. There was a brother praying with us. He was from – I know – I still remember his name, was Abdul **Rakman**. He was from Bangladesh. He couldn't resist. So while in the **ruku**, he asked, "What about the **takbirs**?" And the Imam, he couldn't resist. He responded back, "I forgot." \_\_\_\_\_. [Laughs] So that's the kind of prayer that we had. And Dr. **Ajadamat**, as well as I remember that he was with me, he can also share that story.

[0:08:00]

That's exactly what happened. So that's the kind of lifestyle we had. So that's between about '74, '75, something like this.

*Interviewer:* Well, how was it when you first of all just came to America, and then to Memphis, how was it interacting with all these different people from different cultures and backgrounds?

*Iqbal Khan:* Um-hmm. At that time, telling you that being a foreign student in the university was something strange. People walk up to you and say, "Oh, you're foreign students. Where you from?" "Pakistan." "Oh, where is Pakistan?" And one question they always ask, "Do you have trees?" I don't know why. *[Laughs]* "Do you have trees?" "Of course we have trees." But the other cultures and all that, how much they knew about Islam, let me tell you the story about this one minister. One day this minister walk up to me. And he wanted to know my religion.

*[0:09:00]*

So he asked me, "What is your religion?" I said, "I'm a Muslim." And he said, "No, no, no, no. What is our religion?" "My religion is Islam, and I'm a Muslim." He – it still didn't register in his mind. And this is a minister I'm talking about, clergy. He – It didn't register. So, he said, "No, no, no. I mean like Methodist, Catholic, Baptist, what are you?" I say, "Oh, this guy doesn't know anything other than this little narrow window of this thing." So since my – I just kind of in a humanist way, sense of humor just woke up. And I'm always like that. So I just \_\_\_\_\_, "I'm a Batholic."

*[0:10:00]*

And he said, "What's a Batholic?" "It's simple. My father is Baptist, my mother's a Catholic. I'm a Batholic." And I just made it up. So, he understood that. And he said, "Oh, oh." I remember that. Oh, that he understood that part and just walked away. Doesn't know what to do. So this is how much the people knew about Islam at that time. Nobody know what Islam is. Nobody know about Pakistan is. Everybody know about that. So Islam was not know at all. Very few people knew. \_\_\_\_\_ some people know. But it was not very well known.

*Interviewer:* So, two things. First of all, were you treated differently then? Do you think you were treated differently?

*Iqbal Khan:* I would say, if I was treated differently, I would actually feel better. Respected. Not the way, "Oh, Muslim. Watch out," and all that.

*Interviewer:* Just because after –

[0:11:00]

In the '60s was the civil rights era, and there was – segregation was –

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, Islam was not the focus. That's what I see that. Islam was not the focus at that time, and nobody knew about Islam. "So you're a Muslim, so you're Islam. Foreign student, wow. That's a foreign student." So you got looked at as something strange or something. So, yeah, actually life was good. They we looked at with respect and all that.

*Interviewer:* And you said that there was an Egyptian and a Bengali. So how was it – So you were in Pakistan, and I expect that there probably were mostly Pakistanis there. –

*Iqbal Khan:* No. I do not remember any Pakistani.

*Interviewer:* In Pakistan. So when you came here to America and you started seeing these Muslims from other countries, how –

*Iqbal Khan:* Oh, in Miami.

*Interviewer:* And Memphis. So how was it interacting with them?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, the one in Miami, I told you, yeah, there were a lot of Muslim from Pakistan. A lot of students. They were all students. And

[0:12:00]

there were some Muslim families also who were living there already, who were there. But I do not recall anybody – I think I remember probably one person who probably was clinging to the prayer, if I could recall that. But I do not remember anybody even hearing about prayer or Friday prayer, or Eid.

*Interviewer:* So not even in the house.

*Iqbal Khan:* Not even the house. I do not remember having any Eid in Miami. And only way we find out about Eid was through Eid college come from Pakistan. "Oh, week ago, two weeks ago, there was an Eid." So, –

*Interviewer:* Yeah. And how – Okay. Then you went to Memphis. So, and then there were some Muslims. And I guess there wasn't really an establishment, but they were – wanted to pray, and they wanted to –

*Iqbal Khan:* No. In the beginning, as I said, nobody cares. Even when I met the one or two families, there was not anything necessary about praying and anything like that. And

[0:13:00]

what really made the difference was, I would say, Dr. **Usmani**, who was living in Holly Spring, not here in Memphis. So, we got started interacting with him. And, in my opinion, he's the one who actually poured the foundation to build Islam here. \_\_\_\_\_. Anyway. So he's the one who eventually, I think in '75 or '76 he moved here in Memphis, and this is where we start looking for – I remember that renting a room in University of Memphis and praying every now and then. Still not very common. Sometime happen we did there. And I remember this one Eid in this Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ apartment, and one Eid at University of Memphis.

[0:14:00]

I don't recall any other Eid between the '72 and '77, '78 time frame until in 1978 the Muslim Society of Memphis was established. I vividly recall that meeting in University of Memphis. That room was – we rented a room. That's where everybody was. And there was about, in my opinion, about 10, 15, 20 Muslims, families. I was just young guy. I didn't care much about it, so I was there, too. And that's when the Muslim Society of Memphis was created. Okay? And then, of course, then in '78 we bought the land which is currently **Masjid As-Salam**. And that was the start of this thing, about the establishing Islam here, and establishing a mosque here. So that was the first mosque. And I wish we had a picture for this,

[0:15:00]

but as you enter the parking lot, drive into that, there was this house on the right side. It's a small house. It's a \_\_\_\_\_ a shack. Okay. It was on the raised floor. So when you step up to the house, the house shakes. And at that time, the – we bought that land. Believe me, it was Sunnis and Shia together.

*Interviewer:* And how many each?

*Iqbal Khan:* I would say, at that time, probably maybe about 15, 20 Sunnis, and maybe 5 or 6 Shias.

*Interviewer:* So there was no dispute or anything.

*Iqbal Khan:* Oh, no, no, no. We were so cordial to each other. We started – one other thing I still remember that we started a Sunday \_\_\_\_\_ session – Quranic \_\_\_\_\_ session. And that was every Sunday morning. And it's still going. I believe, yeah. The \_\_\_\_\_ session,

[0:16:00]

the way we do it, everybody takes a turn. One chooses one section of the Quran, and then it's that person's job to come and explain \_\_\_\_\_. So, in that, Shia \_\_\_\_\_. Shia did the \_\_\_\_\_. Sunni did the \_\_\_\_\_. There was no dispute. There was absolutely no dispute. And so we were all together. So the money was – the money that we spent on to buy the land and all that, it was a contributed on both sides.

*Interviewer:* So how did – how was the money allocated? And how was it – where did it come from?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, if the people who – the Muslim – the Shia and Sunni and all the other Muslims contributed the money. And I don't know how, but again, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ was actually involved at that time. I think Dr. **Kandakar** was here, yeah, Dr. Kandakar, \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ was leading the whole thing. So –

[0:17:00]

And I remember that then praying there for several years in that small house until – from nobody to now 2, 3, 4, 10, 15, 20, now all of a sudden this place started getting filled up. And when I say filled up, was 50 or 60 will fill up the place. You can't stand there anymore because it's just a house, and cockroaches everywhere.

*Interviewer:* Families, or just single men?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, no, there were families, married families, like Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ was married, and another family that had been here, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. And I find out about him way later, and also about Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ also. But I think I find out about him quite a bit later, about '74, something like that. I did not – Of course he was here, but I didn't

know him. The first one I find out about Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. So, that's the mosque that we –

[0:18:00]

When we outgrew that mosque, \_\_\_\_ 50 or 60, \_\_\_\_ start talking about, "Well, we need to build a real mosque, here." And, of course, the land was bought at the time. The reason the house was bought, because there was 1.1 acre land with it. That was the whole idea. And we thought, "Wow. That's a lot of land for us." And now, since we have the land, we said, "Let's build a mosque." So, the plan was drawn up. I know Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ took the lead on that one. And when the plan of the current masjid that you see was brought up I said, "Wow, that's too big. We won't even be able to pay the maintenance of this masjid." Of course, we are looking at very few people. And this mosque looked too big for us. And, of course, we're looking at right now, not the future. So. And there was a lot of discussion. And I think the cost, if I remember, was about \$150,000 to build that mosque.

[0:19:00]

And we said, "My God. Where we gonna get this money?" I mean, \$150,000, big money. And we have difficulty that, "Can we raise this money? How can build this mosque?" And that's why if you go look at Masjid As-Salam, you see it's built very cheaply, because we used every possible cheaper way to build it so we can have prayer. So that's how this masjid was built, and again Shia and Sunni were together – praying together. In fact, one of the Shia brother donated the oriental rug. He was in oriental rug business. It's a hug rug. Three rugs covered the whole thing. And that rug came from him. And that rug stayed in the mosque \_\_\_\_\_ all the way \_\_\_\_\_ late '80s, or something like that, all the way that time, until they then were replaced by the

[0:20:00]

current carpets. So that actually was donated by one of the Shia brothers.

*Interviewer:* The pink carpets?

*Iqbal Khan:* No, no, no, no, no. Pink carpet. No, no. This is the real oriental carpet, a lot bigger than the pink carpet that you're referring to. No, that was not –



*Interviewer:* And so, when the masjid was built, can you tell us a little bit about that, and a little bit about the activities in the Ramadan and first Eid there.

*Iqbal Khan:* Um-hmm. The Masjid As-Salam, as I said, I think '77 or '78, and that's when the Muslim Society of Memphis was created. And the the seventh year the land was bought, and we established the first masjid \_\_\_\_\_ that, and – which is a house. And so that was in '78. And then people started coming, and, as I said, started growing bigger and bigger. And then I believe in '82, or '83 is when we realized that we need to build a real mosque now. And so the current mosque

[0:21:00]

that you see is I think was built in '83. So. And activities at that time, again, they did start up some of the children classes. And Mona used to go, and sister \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. \_\_\_\_\_'s wife. She was a teacher. And some other people who lived here, their wives, they were the teachers. And so, Eid were also a few people, not that many. Masjid was big enough to do that. I remember for **thravi**, finding an Imam for thravi, \_\_\_\_\_ big deal. It was always a difficult time to find an Imam, or a **hafez** who could lead the prayer, up until Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ came. And I think Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ came in '90s, I believe. We had a difficulty

[0:22:00]

finding a hafez. And we always – we always have a difficulty and find people or bring the people from different cities. But it was always difficult time.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. So can you tell us a little bit about how – when the community did start growing, after the mosque was built? How was the masjid going to – or the \_\_\_\_\_ this – how were they going to accommodate all these people, and get them to come to the masjid?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well honestly, I don't know if there was any effort to bring the people to the masjid. People – Generally, when a Muslim family came, they always look for a masjid. And they found this Masjid As-Salam. So they automatically came to that. People who are real Muslim, they gonna look for the masjid. They will come for the mosque. And they – so they came. And, of course, I know the families –

[0:23:00]

I know the masjids played a huge role in my life, and – in my life, and I believe the – to the life of the \_\_\_\_\_ here, all the Muslims who live here. Because without that, I think you wouldn't be where you are. This mosque has played a major role in starting up Islam here, and then building all other – \_\_\_\_\_ came from this, from Masjid As-Salam. So, the people came to the masjid, and it starts slowly growing up, growing up, and growing up. I remember that going there for a short time. Again, I was not a regular prayer, honestly. My father, every now and then, when I make a telephone call back home, making a call was a big deal. So \_\_\_\_\_ one of the rare days, the first thing I always asked him, "Are you keeping up your prayers?" And of course I answered, "Yes," but I was not. Honestly, I was not a regular prayer. But – but I

[0:24:00]

do go to the mosque, and I remember one Sunday Quranic \_\_\_\_\_ that there were – we got \_\_\_\_\_ – since I was a big football fan – I was a Cowboy fan – their game is always on about the whole time. And when the Cowboys are playing I don't go to the masjid. And when sometime later on I go to the masjid, Dr. Samani always say, "You didn't come to the masjid, the \_\_\_\_\_ session." I said, "Well, what's important? Football or this?" [Laughs] So those were the – that's how I was. So, the – At that time – I \_\_\_\_\_ the question.

Interviewer:

It was just about the growth and how the masjid accommodated it.

Iqbal Khan:

Right. So slowly, when the people started coming into the masjid, of course, they also have children. So, we all started worrying about, "We need to teach some Islam." And that's when the school was established,

[0:25:00]

the Sunday school. Okay? Sunday school was established, and –

Interviewer:

At the masjid.

Iqbal Khan:

At the masjid, yeah, Masjid As-Salam. And where the sisters are praying now in Masjid As-Salam, there used to be two rooms. And they were the classrooms. Very, very small classrooms. So, that's where the –

*Interviewer:* And was it always – sorry to cut you off – was there always a women’s side?

*Iqbal Khan:* No. The current masjid as you see, where the curtains are, as I said, behind the curtain were the two rooms. They were the classrooms. Above the curtain, actually, was a divider, just like you see at Masjid – MIC right now. A divider was place in for the, okay, men’s and the women’s. That’s how it used to be.

*Interviewer:* And so was that divided the entire time, like since the beginning?

*Iqbal Khan:* Yeah. Once the masjid was established, we build the masjid at that time. Then they put a little divider in there. Okay. So this is the men’s, this is the women’s. And there

[0:26:00]

was also a lot of thing I have noticed, some people who are a little bit more religious, they say, “Oh, men can see the women.” So they put some curtain on it. \_\_\_\_\_ take the curtains out. So.

*Interviewer:* There wasn’t a curtain before?

*Iqbal Khan:* No. It’s just a – I think it’s a wooden fence, small fence, that was there. So that’s for the divider. And some people thought, “Well, there’d have to be a cover on it.” So they put a cover on it. Other come and then take the cover out. So \_\_\_\_\_. [Laughs] Typical.

*Interviewer:* We also know that, I believe, in the ‘60s and ‘70s there was another masjid here. Masjid \_\_\_\_\_. So was there any collaboration?

*Iqbal Khan:* I do not know. I do not know if \_\_\_\_\_ collaboration. In fact, don’t even remember that there was a masjid, which of course there was, but I do not know. And I wasn’t even – I don’t know whether \_\_\_\_\_ masjid, or it was

[0:27:00]

a Sunni masjid, I don’t know. So later on, of course they are right now, they’re a Sunni masjid.

*Interviewer:* And with Masjid As-Salam, how was the – was there any collaboration between the outside community – the non-Muslim community?

*Iqbal Khan:* Not really, not that much. In the early days we were just trying to establish ourselves. We wanted to have a place to pray. That's all we needed. And we got it. And I can tell you that some time like \_\_\_\_\_ prayer, every once in a while, when I go there, three or four people, five people, that's it. That was the \_\_\_\_\_ prayer. And sometime in the – in the further time, people come in and the person who had the key didn't come. So it's cold and you're praying outside, 'cause you cannot open the door. And it's a few people. So that's how it was. And I don't think that right in the beginning there was any collaboration or anything with –

[0:28:00]

we're just trying to establish our prayer, our mosque, so at least we can have a place to pray. And then that was it. It's later on that later stages then the Muslim community grew, and there are more Muslims, and slowly, and then other peoples are finding out about Islam, and then the interaction started. I think the majority of the interaction actually built after 9/11.

*Interviewer:* Speaking of 9/11 – is there anything else before we transition to 9/11? Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about Masjid As-Salam?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, Masjid As-Salam, I have said, really played very, very major role in establishing Islam here in Memphis. We all Muslim owe to the Masjid As-Salam. So, I don't know.

[0:29:00]

Hmm. I don't know what else to share with that other than it's a community just grow from zero to – from nothing to exponentially. So before you know it, become such a huge community.

*Interviewer:* All right. So, now we're gonna transition a little bit to 9/11.

*Iqbal Khan:* Okay.

*Interviewer:* So can you tell us, what was your reaction to 9/11?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, to me, I go the news. I was at home. I was getting ready to go to work. And \_\_\_\_\_, my brother, he called and say, "Do you see the news?" "What news?" He said, "Turn on the TV." And my brother, Farouk, who was also visiting from Pakistan. At that time he was in my home. So turn on the news and say – believe, it

did not dawn on me or

[0:30:00]

anything. I said, "Oh, some small plane or something that hit that." I went, "Oh, it's not a big deal." That's how I took it, 'cause they did not – it was not clear what really happened, it was such a chaos. So I thought that, yeah, some small plane, something hit the building in New York. So I went to work, just like that. And then slowly, when the news start unfolding, and that's when – it was a state of shock, and say, "What's going on?" So, to me, initially, it did not register what happened, what's going on, until after, when we saw the pictures and the movie and the news and all that. I said, "Wow." And that was shocking. And it was also very sad to know that the Muslim were involved. So. But, the impact of that, to me, at my work life

[0:31:00]

or outside, I honestly do not see any much impact. People maybe look at it differently doing that. I did not \_\_\_\_\_. My work or my life goes on as it was. But, now there were a lot more questions, a lot more interest about Islam. And now that definitely happened, and people started asking questions, wanting to know about our religion, and who are we, what are we? Wanted to come visit the masjid. So. And that's when we started establishing a relationship with the other community – or other churches and community member. And the we had open houses. I remember that. Try to bring in the people, "Come see our masjid," and an open dialog with them and tell them what had happened, it really had nothing to do with Islam. This is not what Islam says. So what they have done that, unfortunately they are Muslim, but that's not what Islam teaches. So.

*Interviewer:*

And do you remember any incidents with yourself or

[0:32:00]

with the community?

*Iqbal Khan:*

Yeah. As I said, my brother from Pakistan was visiting us. So, one week after the 9/11, we were – we already had – we have a brother in Miami. Of course, that's how I came to Miami, 'cause of my brother. So we were going to visit our brother in Miami. And we already had our reservation made, before 9/11. We had the reservation made and all that. We're supposed to fly one week

after 9/11 to Miami, and actually want to surprise our brother. That was the whole idea. He did not know that we were coming. So, when we go to the airport, my younger brother, as usual, he is fan of making movies. He is right at airport and he's making movies. He's actually making movies because his brother from Pakistan is now going with us to Miami. So he just wanted to

[0:33:00]

make a movie. So he made a movie. And now we are well known, now that these strange looking people from that part of the world who hit our buildings in New York, they need to be worried about – they need to take a caution on that. So, somebody complained that these three people, they are making movies of something. So, security came, police came, and they took us, said, "We need to talk to you guys." "Okay." Again, I still did not have any fear or anything because I thought, "We didn't do anything wrong." So, they took us to their interrogation room, now three of us, and asked us questions, and basically wanted to know who we are, what we're doing. And I told him, "I've been here –" I work for FedEx, and show them our IDs and all that.

[0:34:00]

And so after the initial interrogation they made us sit down in a room and told us that FBI is on the way, and they want to talk to you guys. So, okay. And, they put a guard outside the room, that you cannot move from that room. I remember that I wanted to go take a sip of water. They said, "No. You cannot go. You cannot go. Sit there." We were treated as if we are criminals. So, the FBI agent came. And by the time he came he already interrogated and figured out who we are with the guard information, he said, "Hey guys. I'm sorry. Everything's clear. You guys are fine. You can go to Miami. I'm sorry we have to help you," and all that. And I got so terrified with that and so angry with that thing I thought, "I don't want to go." He said, "We

[0:35:00]

can arrange you the next flight," and this and this, and he send a person with us to take care it. "No. I don't want to go." I just felt angry with that thing, "Why you did all this to me?" And also kind of felt like, "Well here, okay. They cleared us. What if over there in Miami we ran into similar situation? Then what?" So I said, "Probably not a good thing to fly at this time and situation," so we canceled the whole plan. So, in the afternoon I had a day off, I

went to work. And people say, “Why you come back?” And later on we find out we’re all over in the news that three guys were stopped and they were interrogated, and then I don’t know what the whole news was, but it was all in the news, also. That was the incident I remember, that.

*Interviewer:* All right. Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about 9/11 in that time? The Muslim community, or –

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, I think that opened the door for us, as Muslims,

[0:36:00]

to introduce Islam to the other community, the people of other faith. And they also started learning about what Islam is all about. To me, that was the most significant thing. In fact, there was a lot of footage, lot of TV interviews. I’ve been in several TV interviews. And the TV people came and also take the footage of the people praying at Masjid As-Salam. So there was also shown, so Islam was now being known. “Oh, there is another religion called Islam.” At that time, as I said, nobody knew that. And now, all of a sudden, Islam become introduced, in a bad way, unfortunately. So. But, \_\_\_\_\_ way, so hopefully this will turn around. I know right now there’s a lot of Islamophobia going on, and I think the biggest issue, in my opinion, that we Muslim face is the – we are letting the other people

[0:37:00]

define Islam for us. And that’s our problem. We are not in the print media. We are not in any TV media or anything. If we are, we are suppressed. And this is where I think we have to take charge. And it is our next generation, we are the immigrant, when we speak with the accent. And that immediately cut off the connection with the other people. But I think our new generations, they need to take charge. And when they speak fluently and they talk, that’s a different method. People listen. And I think this is where we have to take charge of instead of other people defining what Islam is, we need to define what Islam is, and let them know what Islam is.

*Interviewer:* So, now let’s move forward and talk about the Memphis Islamic Center. Can you tell us a little about the establishment of MIC, and your involvement in that establishment.

*Iqbal Khan:* Right. Well, I'll take you back, actually, to begin with, when we came here,

[0:38:00]

we, the immigrants, when we came here, our need was just to have a place to pray. There was nothing, then there was a small mosque. And when we have a mosque we were happy. That's all we needed, a place to pray. So, we established a mosque, and thank God, from that one mosque we have six or seven mosques right now. So, it's well established. So the need of the immigrant was to pray, have a place to pray, and we got that. We're happy with that. But the need of the next generation, and generation after that is not just a mosque. You can bring your young ones to the mosque and, yeah, they will come and you drag them there, they will come and stick with you because they are your children. Well, will they stick with Islam? Will they gonna stay with Islam? That was a challenge. And we realized that

[0:39:00]

it was becoming difficult, that just having a mosque will not be sufficient for the next generations, and generation after that. We can clearly see the people are more attracted to go to church. Go to church meaning that they can go play, because there are facilities available to play basketball or racquetball or nice beautiful facility. So sometime they go to the church. They take the friends – the other friends take the Muslims to the church and all. And this is they are taught, in order to keep our next generation, generation after that on Islam, we have to do better than the mosque. So we have to create something this. So this idea of MIC was all along in the mind back from 80 and 90 as a matter of fact. It was in the mind that we have to do something. But it just – it was just in the thought process.

[0:40:00]

It was just a dream that we need to do something about that. And then, of course, we grew to the point in late 2000, as we – the community grew, we realized that yes, the necessity is now more than ever. And this is where we start – three of us got together. Actually Brother **Bashar**, myself, and couple of other brothers – we got together and started looking for the land. And we scouted so many lands. And finally we end up with the one we bought, the land, that's the one we thought will be the good place to play.



*Interviewer:* And what year was this around?

*Iqbal Khan:* That was the – I think in

[0:41:00]

2007, yes. Okay. We bought that land in 2007. I'm recalling that \_\_\_\_\_. And the cost of the land was \$700,000. And the issue was now where are we gonna get this money? Well, believe me, we did not have any fund raising sessions, nothing. Just on the calls and contacting people. In three months we raised the funds. So we raised the fund and we bought the land. And now that's our land. So, that was a 31.4 acre land that we bought at the time. Okay? I remember that going through that land with myself and Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, and the agent, three of us, going, walking through the land in the – total primitive land.

[0:42:00]

And I used to pick up a stick with me – used to have a stick – because we are walking right directly into the land, having shoes – just a kind of shoes. What if I would step into something? And so I have walked many time in that land, all the inside, outside, and all that. And we're very excited about the land. And let me tell you just another story about that land. Initially we made the offer that was very low. And they didn't even respond to us. So. And then we heard the news that somebody has a contract on it. So somebody else is buying that land. And that made us really depressed, because we really like the land. I thought, "This is what we want." But one of the good thing about the land is that normally when you buy a big piece of land, the front is always – what? – 300 square feet, something like that. And then it's a rectangle,

[0:43:00]

deep. That's exactly what our masjid \_\_\_\_\_ on that we have our cemetery. 300 feet front with a 27 acre land. Was a deep, long. So not wide, but long. But this was perfect, like a square. It was really perfect that we wanted that. Anyway, that really made us depressed. And I think that was a ploy by the agent and other people to make us raise our offer. Two weeks later they called us back and said, "Hey, by the way, that contract fell through, if you're still interested." Well this time I said, "We're not gonna take chances, because we like the land. We're gonna –" So whatever the asking price was, which was the asking price, they

asking for \$700,000, we'll go with that. So, the contract was signed, and when the agreement occurred,

[0:44:00]

it was – occurred on the day after the basketball – final basketball game. The \_\_\_\_\_ heard the news Memphis lost in the final game, championship game. And, of course, \_\_\_\_\_ fan, and we lost to Kansas. I was so depressed. Went to work depressed. And we thought we had a very good chance. And then came the call from Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, “Hey. We have a contract.” Well, when he said that we had a contract, amen, all the sadness and all the – becomes – turn into happiness. So. Well, that's how the land was bought.

[0:45:00]

And I remember the – when we were – I'm sorry. [Laughs] I remember when we were raising the fund, people were questioning, “Why are you buying this jungle? Who's gonna come into this jungle? We already have four, five, six mosques. We don't need another mosque.” All kind of people, discouragement, we saw that. That happens. Well, we continue making calls, and asking people to contribute. There were a few brothers who were very supportive of that. And one brother who came to one of our meetings, Dr. Bashar was giving the presentation, he was so impressed he wrote a check of \$100,000 right there. So

[0:46:00]

we cannot thank enough, these people. So that's how the money was raised. There were a few people who were very supportive and there were plenty who were against it, and didn't wanted to have that. But now I can see, same old people who were against it, now they're the forefront of the masjid. [Laughs] So, the masjid is well established. And after that, once we bought the land then we started working our organization. We created the MIC and come up with the name of Memphis Islamic Center. Then we have a lawyer. We worked with the lawyer. We come up with the by-laws, and the – I don't want to put that in – and the first chairman of the board, people think of Dr. Bashar – it was me. That's in the lawyer's office, because we have to establish the process.

[0:47:00]

Just for a few minutes. [Laughs] They have to establish that. So I was the chairman of the board, and the lawyer was the secretary.

And that's how the organization was established. And after the organization established, then we picked Dr. Bashar as our chairman. So, that's the start of MIC.

*Interviewer:* And so, who all was involved? You already named a couple of people. Can you name a few more?

*Iqbal Khan:* Right. In the beginning, like I said, Dr. Bashar, myself, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, and brother Ali, **Wallen Wald**, because he was already – we have this \_\_\_\_\_ establish, \_\_\_\_\_ establish in the church, because people living in Germantown area and Collierville area, it was kind of difficult to go to Masjid As-Salam, so brother **Nadim** \_\_\_\_\_ set up his

[0:48:00]

home. So one of his rooms was being used, some of the brothers, to play. And then we rented a room at the church called Taylor Church, on \_\_\_\_\_. So we rented a room from them, and then that's where the prayer was established. And I was still more involved with the Masjid As-Salam, not with that at all, but then, from there, then it started out. Then we started looking for the land and all that. So we then – I think brother Ali was involved, become the \_\_\_\_\_ later on. And so him, myself, and brother Bashar, and I don't know if I could – that was the – Dr. Lamson, yes, Dr. Lamson there, too, that's true. That was the initial – those are the five board – initial board members, also. So.

*Interviewer:* And what was MIC's vision? Or what is MIC's vision?

[0:49:00]

*Iqbal Khan:* Yeah. As I said earlier, with our immigrants, our need was having a place of worship, have a mosque. And we got that. But that was not sufficient for – it's not good enough for our new generation, generation after that. So, we had to have something that will be more attractive to our new generations. And so the vision of MIC is to – it's for, actually – it's for our younger generation, generations after that, to establish Islam, and provide them the facility that will **Inshallah**, keep them on Islam. And the whole point on this thing is that if we just keep the masjid, I don't think so. I think we're gonna leave our next generation half Muslim,

[0:50:00]

and then, continue that with the generation after that will be quarter, and Islam is gone. But on the other hand, if we leave our next generations better than us Muslims – and hopefully they will leave their generation better than them – Islam will establish, Islam will stay. That's the idea of MIC. It's not just to pray. It's just to establish. And it's an organization, an institute where you just not go pray, but you can have education, you can do exercise, you can play soccer, you can play basketball, you can bring your other friends from other churches, or whatever, non-Muslim friends. You can do all that. And that's what the MIC's all about. That's why the bigger land. And, in fact, my vision of that land is that, the way I see that, is that maybe one day – The Catholic have their university. Methodists have their university.

[0:51:00]

Okay, Jews have their university. Baptists have their university. Why can't we Muslims have our university? And that's my dream, that one day, one day, Inshallah – I may not live – I may not live to see that – this is in your hands, and the next generation's, to take this. We have established for you guys, the base right now. It might be just a base for you guys. Take that and build on it, and make it bigger institution, and Inshallah, one day a university. So. I may not be around, but I hope that dream may come true.

*Interviewer:*

We're gonna pause here. We're gonna continue in just a second. We're just gonna let both –

We know that there's been a partnership between Heartsong Church and MIC. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

*Iqbal Khan:*

Sure. This is very interesting. Once we bought the land, then

[0:52:00]

we realized that there's a church right across us. And, in fact, I remember having a meeting with the few – few of us – that four, five of us that were leading the charge at the time – we need to contact them. So, Brother **Yousef Saleh** and I came, actually coming to our land, and this one evening – one afternoon, we saw there the big sign. And I think Brother Yousef saw that. What I thought the church did, they did not know who to contact. The realized that somebody, or the Muslim community, somebody bought the land. But they did not know who to contact. So their best way to contact us was they created this Welcome to the Neighborhood, which is the sign that's still there. It's a very

famous sign. I think it's all over in the news everywhere. So, they placed a sign. So one day Brother Yousef went there and we saw that, said, "Wow. We're

[0:53:00]

just talking about this morning, and they're ahead of us." And so we felt very encouraged. And at that time there was so much hostility and all that. We didn't know what to expect from our neighbors. Having a sign like that, a welcoming sign, was very, very encouraging. Then Brother Yousef and I, we contacted the Heartsong, we went there. In fact one of the guys from Heartsong, church attendee, worked with Brother Yousef – Yousef Saleh. So, he also find out that he go to Heartsong Church. So that's the start of our relationship. So Brother Yousef and I visited Heartsong Church. We met with Dr. Stone, and we felt very welcoming and very open, and that was very, very encouraging for us. And that was the start of the relationship with Heartsong. And you all know that when we started building the masjid, our MIC,

[0:54:00]

we couldn't finish it on time. And Ramadan came and then these people open up the door for us. And first Ramadan was – the \_\_\_\_\_ and all that was done at – whole 30 days were done at the Heartsong Church. So.

*Interviewer:*

And how did the community feel about that, about praying in the church?

*Iqbal Khan:*

[Laughs] There were some people who were skeptical or was not appreciative of that, that we should pray in a church. But they have their own opinions. Just don't build a thing just based on a few people's opinion. Sheik **Yasseh** was here, and I believe – yeah. So, it was okay. He said, "This is fine. We can pray wherever you want to." So, we just pressed forward with that, and those who were skeptical,

[0:55:00]

it was open for them to go to whatever masjid they wanted to go to. They don't have to come. So initially I remember that we had probably about 150, 200 people. Started with 75, 100, 150 people who show up for the prayer. And these people from Heartsong Church, they stand outside the door to welcome us. That was another very, very heartwarming thing, you know. Let me also

walk you through, because and sometime people question that why we spend money on this, why we didn't spend the money on the main project. Once we bought the land our – first thing in our mind was, we need to start up a place of worship for \_\_\_\_\_. We need to start with the name of Allah, so we can at least have small mosque, \_\_\_\_\_ Allah. Instead of praying at the church where we were, let's go there. Let's build something small so we can at least pray there.

[0:56:00]

Establish Allah name first in that jungle. That was the whole idea. And as we started working with that we had lots of meeting at University – at Germantown library. And there are pictures I have. I think I need to share that. The library closed at 9:00. We're working outside in the street lamp. So, the idea – As we talk and talk and talk. And then there came, "Well, are we gonna make some masjid? And then we're gonna spend money on it. Then it's not gonna be used, once we build the other masjid. From that – we also need a day care centers. So let's build a day care center and use that as a first prayer place. And then, once the masjid – when our main building is built, then we just move over there, and this building, the money is not wasted, what we did." So that's how this thing was started out. Okay?

Interviewer: Why

[0:57:00]

a day care center?

Iqbal Khan: Because for – again – for – again, the idea of MIC is not for you – not for the immigrant people, but for the next generations.

Interviewer: But why the Muslim \_\_\_\_\_ day care center?

Iqbal Khan: Why is the what?

Interviewer: But why putting – why start with a day care center, and start –

Iqbal Khan: Oh, the reason was because we will have – we were gonna go and build a day care center anyway, once we have the building. Okay? So let's start that, so we don't waste the money. That was the whole idea. So we don't waste the money. So money that we spend is not wasted \_\_\_\_\_ some people think, "Well, we did not waste the money." So, the money's not wasted, because this is

needed anyway, regardless. And we need a small place to pray. To begin with, we didn't think that many people were gonna show up. So, once we open up the mosque and when we start praying \_\_\_\_\_, Sheik Yasseh, or director said to me, "Now we need to fill up this place." There was only one line of

[0:58:00]

\_\_\_\_\_ short time. I – Inshallah we build. Within a month the whole place was filled. It didn't take that long. We start scrambling how to take care of the people coming in for the – Of course Sheik Yasseh is there now. And he's giving the \_\_\_\_\_ we have a heck of a time, pulling the people outside, and then next year we end up putting a tent out there, and then in the back area. It becomes very difficult. People start flocking. So, we were forced to extend our area just to accommodate the people. And that's how it happened. So from that small mosque, now we have to establish – then again, the way we did it is that when we have the new building built, this – all this area become automatically gonna become new rooms. So it's still well worth it. Nothing wasted. And we're gonna maintain a small **massala**, which is original massala. We'll maintain at a masjid while the other will become –

[0:59:00]

will be classrooms or day care classes or day care room, whatever now. But people just always take it the wrong way. They're thinking, "It's just – it just grew so fast." And look at that. The people are saying, "Who's gonna come to jungle?" And look at the jungle \_\_\_\_\_. After the \_\_\_\_\_ we just look outside, see what's going on there.

*Interviewer:*

So, can you tell us, what is the progress of MIC so far?

*Iqbal Khan:*

MIC's progress now – people always – they complain that how come it taking that long? We are not just building a masjid. We are building a community center. And, in \_\_\_\_\_ it takes a lot of time to think about because we – along with the masjid we also have the multipurpose hall. We have classrooms, and we are gonna have a gymnasium, and we have a soccer field. We're gonna have a cricket field and all that stuff. It's a huge building. I think about 65,000 square foot building that we are building. It

[1:00:00]

doesn't happen just like that. You have to put a lot of thought into all that. And that's what took the time, to think through that, come up with that. And I think in my opinion the progress is pretty good. People – I mean, you just cannot build a building like this in a year or so. So, I think the progress, in my opinion, is very nicely built. We established the mosque, and then the prayer is established, and now masjid is very much full and all that. And now, we are moving forward with the main building that we have in mind, Inshallah. It's already graded. And we are just about to pour the concrete on it. And we already have the building material that's gonna put up the skeleton out there for the whole building. So I think it's very, very exciting time, and this is the time for the Muslim community to stand up

[1:01:00]

and support their center. So.

*Interviewer:* And ultimately, what do you want MIC to be in 20 to 30 years?

*Iqbal Khan:* MIC, to me – We are immigrant. \_\_\_\_\_ see that. We – all we needed was a masjid. Now we got the masjid. Okay. MIC is not for me. MIC is for you and generation after that. So, that's where we are. Now what we got right now – so we, the immigrants, our legs are hanging in the grave right now. One push and we are in the grave. And some of us are already gone. Okay? You guys have to take the command. We have – we are build

[1:02:00]

your base. And this next generation has something to work with. So we are leaving something. Excuse me. So, we are leaving something for you guys to grow from there, to make it bigger, establish Islam, and Inshallah, produce better Muslims than us, better than you. And as we continue to do that, then we have done our job. And if we are successful in doing so, that you are able to take that command and continue to build from that, then in my opinion, then hopefully when we stand in front of the Lord

[1:03:00]

on day of judgment, we can say it with the head high, that we serve Islam, Inshallah. And that's \_\_\_\_\_ from me to the younger generation, to take the command, take this space that we just built, and go forward.



*Interviewer:* Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

*Iqbal Khan:* Well, I know I got emotional. This is just difficult for me to – MIC's always brought emotion. But, this is the message that I have for everyone, that to my younger generations, and the generations after that. And this message is actually for – even – not even the generation you guys are already watching, but to the one year old, two years old,

*[1:04:00]*

the one who even not even born yet, that take this dream that few of us has and establish Islam here. And, Inshallah, make Islam flourish. And as long as we leave the generations better Muslims than the previous generation, we've done our job. And that's the message I have for the people, to take the command and move forward with that, Inshallah.

*Interviewer:* Thank you so much.

*Iqbal Khan:* Thank you for having me.

*[1:05:00]*

*[End of Audio]*