

Islam in Memphis: Interview with Sheik Yasir Qadhi

July 17, 2014

Interviewer: [Speaking Arab]

Sheik: Sheik Yasir Qadhi

Interviewer: Thank you so much for being here on behalf of Rhodes College, Aspire 2014, and Crossroads to Freedom and all our other partners.

Sheik: Thank you for having me

Interviewer: So could tell us a little bit about yourself?

Sheik: I was born in Houston Texas, my father immigrated here in sixty-two; One of the first ---- immigrants for higher studies. I was born in the seventies and went to The University of Houston took chemical engineering degree and realized I wanted something more out of life than solving quadratic equations to the F degree, and I realized that I have a higher calling per say I just felt a spiritual emptiness. I wanted to study Islam so I went to The Islamic University of Maida spent ten years over there and immersed myself in

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seminary training if you like graduated with another bachelor's and then a master's and then came back and finished a Ph.D. from Yale in Religious studies and now I'm a professor here at ---, assistant professor at Rhodes, and also The residence of Memphis Islamic Center and also active in teaching and preaching.

Interviewer: So what made you pursue a career as a scholar?

Sheik: As I said I had felt that my life had more meaning and it's not to be dismissive of the other sciences, but people have different passion if you'd like right and not everybody is the same and that's a part of diversity of creation and personal I felt that my passion was in the Islamic sciences. I wanted to know how to worship my creator properly. I wanted to learned the message of the -----. I wanted to know what I'm doing here. What is the purpose of life I mean these are questions I felt very strongly about you know and

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I felt the Islamic training would get me that it wasn't my intention to become a scholar. It wasn't my intention to go and preach and teach when I went. My initial intention was to study for myself, but opportunities kept on presenting themselves and here I am. So it wasn't my initial to be a ----.

Interviewer: When did that all start happening?

Sheik: So obviously when you go and study Islam when you come back in the summers and what not you realize that well I can give a sermon here, I can give a lecture here, I can start a small class here. You want to feel useful and I as I started doing that I mean it's just peoples appreciation and acceptance increased I kinda fit more and more it wasn't something I charted for myself it just happened and yeah it was very organic, it wasn't something that was planned. Every summer I would come back from Maida and be here for three months in Houston and so

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I'd be giving sermon, giving talks/lectures; also I began writing books at that time and so ---- my books also increased if you like people's knowledge of who I was. So again it wasn't some type of plan when I was nineteen years old the plan it just happened I still don't have you know I don't know what's gonna happen after five years only all I know, but you just go with the flow and you know have some goals, have some vision and a light will just open up the door for you as you get there.

Interviewer: As part of that we know that you are the dean of academics of Fears of our ??? institute? So how did you get involved with ---?

Sheik: So ---- institute is the largest of its kind in North America, we teach Islamic science to primarily college students not just across North America, but across the global, but English and the English language and we have to thought over a thousand students and

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the founder of ----- M---- S---- P---- he was a good friend of mine from Maida. So I knew him even before he came to America and when he came back had this vision of basically translating Islamic knowledge in a medium of dispersion that is more suitable for the western youth. You can't have one location seminary where everyone comes and studies rather the teachers have to travel and go to the local cities, and you can't have a permeant seminary for the masses for the people who want to study Islam. You have to have weekend seminars so he had this idea of basically sending the teachers out to various cities just for the weekend. Have a course on the topic that would interest them and then the slowly but surely corium created. I was a part of the initial batch that created the very first syllabus of the institute and again slowly, but surely I was one of the first hires of the institute because M----- was a good

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friend of mine and he knew me from Maida so I was hired before I even came back from Maida and I was hired as an instructor and then slowly as again I increased in my teaching or what not. I feel that my rule is to be in charge of the academics and others agree as well. So I've been the dean of academics for around five to six years now.

Interviewer: In what year did the A----- start?

Sheik: A----- started unofficially started around two-thousand-two or so

Interviewer: Did you become an instructor?

Sheik: I became an instructor in two-thousand-four. So his first class was like early two-thousand-two, but at the time it was just like a class in local Virginia or where A----- was located there was no vision of having a global network it was just localized if you like city wide class with one instructor M---- S---- P-- -- and then slowly but surely things kept on going so the official start of A----- could really be early two-thousand-three.

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The unofficial two-thousand- two and I was hired at the end of two-thousand-four.

Interviewer: So were gonna transition a little bit now to your teaching at Rhodes. So what classes do you teach here and how long have you been teaching?

Sheik: So I was hired at Rhodes in July of two-thousand-ten so this basically now is my fourth year because it's now July two-thousand-fourteen finished four years I'm going to begin my fifth year and when I hired I was still a grad student I still hadn't finished my Ph.D. so I was hired basically you know ABD all but disrotation and that typically when you hire your assistant professor to be. So I was hired while I was still finishing my Ph.D. it took a while because of my extra activates and I'd just graduated one year ago from now basically so twenty thirteen is when I graduated from Rhodes and that's when I became an assistant professor from Yale excuse me

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teaching at Rhodes and that's became an assistant professor because you can't be an assistant professor until you have the Ph.D. What classes do I teach; I mean basically any courses on Islam and it's up to me the course that I teach. I have thought intro Islam, regular, Islamic Theology, modern M----- fundamental system, I will teaching a course about Islamic law so all different courses about Islam. I want to teach a course this year maybe not this year maybe next year Intro Islamic scriptures so H---- and B---- basically and yeah any course to do with Islam that's basically what I will be doing.

Interviewer: How were the Islamic cities before you came to Rhodes?

Sheik: So Professor John Caltner who is basically my boss he is the chair of Religious studies, so he also had an interest in Islam so he was doing the occasional Islamic course

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Sheik: And he still teaches a course about Christian, Muslim relations but obviously his forte is really Christianity but before I came he was doing the ??? course here and there since I've come, so that's really become my area of teaching

Interviewer: And so do you think that, especially with all the new classes you've been teaching about Islam, what impact do you think has had on the Rhodes community?

Sheik: Well I think it's pretty obvious that this is a very interesting sought after subject because every single course that I've taught a Rhodes without exception has always been not just pack to capacity but always had to add on a few more people and never once have I had a class where we barely met ????? Every single and I mean no exceptions, every single course I've taught at Rhodes, I've had a few students

who wanted to sign on. A number of times I had to turn them away, because of the physical capacity of the classroom. So it's very clear that people are interested

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in the subject. No matter what it is, it's a very hot topic in these days. And I mean, I'm reading these two reviews I think also, one can say that the topic has been well appreciated by them. They have been very inquisitive; very curious about what's going on about what's going on, why the Muslim world is the way it is, why is there so much ??? tribulation, anger. Call it what you will. What is going on? What is this religion about? There's a political side and there's a theological side, there's a social side and we do as much as we can, you know with my course, and so I can say that from the feedback, I've had student change their career options basically. A number of students have joined ??? A number of students have gone to summer programs in the Middle East and just wanted to learn more after taking a course so I'm very humbled to say I do believe overall it's had a necessary and positive impact upon the Rhodes community.

Interviewer: Moving on and taking just about

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everything that you do. How do you balance your work as a professor, traveling lecturer, president scholar, family man, and everything else that you do?

Sheik: I don't know if I balance it that well. I think when you try to spread out too thin, the fact of the matter is you cannot do justice to every single field. I try my best to only take on what I actually can do, so I've actually cut back on traveling in the last year, this last year. I always feel that my priority should be my family, my wife and children. I have four beautiful children. I always feel guilty when I travel and leave then and I've tried to minimize that and so I don't know. I don't think there's an easy answer. How do I balance between all of these? I think that there comes a point in everybody's live where they just have learn to say no I can't do that. I need to just concentrate on this. And what I've decided to do is basically, you know, take on only as much as and bite as

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only much as I can chew. That means cutting back on every one of these field. And so that, as for example, for a college professor, the first time you teach a class, It is obviously a lot of work, but once you've prepared a syllabus for the future semesters, you just have to find tuneage. You just have to tweak it here and there. It's not a massive overall. So redoing the same class of Islam, for example, I have it down to a science now, you know. I know which books I want to use, I know the material, I even have YouTube clips whether it not all down to a science for me. Of course, every year you add a few changes here and there, but the syllabus is there. So that really helps. Also, there are little things that you can do here and there. One of the simple things is make sure you have a very good calendar system to have your dates. So I have Google Calendar and I have like literally simultaneous calendars running in Google Calendar. There's a family calendar, there's (Arab), there's Rhodes College, and like all of these different calendars, you know there. And you

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just have a make sure there's no overlap. There's no clash. First thing I do in the day as soon as I wake up is go to calendars. Make sure what is there for the day, for the week, for the month in terms of overall idea so that things don't start piling up. And I mean, obviously apart from that, lots of prayer to ??????, to you know, make it easy and do what you can.

Interviewer: So you did mention that you teach intern Islam at Rhodes and as a part of that, we know you teach a little bit about the history of Islam in America, so could you maybe give us a brief history of Islam in America?

Sheik: Islam in America can be divided into number of phases. And there's some small phases that we don't have that much documentation for precolonial Islam in America there were probably a few handful of Muslims in precolonial times and we do have some named here and there, but there wasn't a massive impact. There was a group of Muslim immigrants that came most probably temporarily

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Postcolonial America. So, Thomas Jefferson and others interacted with a handful of Muslims, but were they living here permanently or did they come here as traders then go back to Morocco and others places? Most likely they again were not permanent. The first batch of permanent Muslims that came here in large numbers was that of the slaves and they didn't come at good circumstances as we realized. So a good percentage probably twenty to twenty-five percent of the Muslims that came to America were slaves and were talking the seventeen-forty's to the eighteen-fifty's so much that slaves were still important and those slaves we have plenty of documented evidence some of them try to preserve their Islam and some of them tried to pray and fast we have copies of the coran or portions of the coran, some slaves pretended to convert to Christianity, but they upheld their Islam. We know this because one of the famous quotes on converts when he was asked to write

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The Lord's Prayer in Arab he wrote S----- D---- S---- F----- so he knows SDSF is quote on and that's what he's saying this is the prayer I pray. So we have plenty of evidences, however Islam wasn't preserved by the slaves they were not able to pass it down to their descendants none the less some type of legacy, some type of history, some type of awareness of a religious was retained in the African American experience and this helped led to the next wave which began at the turn of the twentieth century nineteen-ten and nineteen-fifteen were we had a number of movements that I as an orthodox Muslim would say are S--- Islamic, but from their perspective there legitimate Islamic movements that these movements had ambulation if you like of number of ideas were this notion of the return to Africa of them was this notion of Africa people somehow being

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Poor than others. There was this notion of African were this decent of kings and princes and what not, and then you had this Islamic element so you had a number of interesting movements; you had the nation of Islam which is one of the most famous but you had a number of more movements as well this was also the time of Marcus Garvey and Marcus Garvey was preaching this type of message in Theology in Black liberation that also made its way to S----- Islamic movement you had the lost found nation of Islam, you had the temple of Islam you had a number of different movements in Islam, know again as a Muslim I

would say I don't agree with their Theology s---- p----- to Muslim, but from there prospective these were ligament manifestations of Islam. They didn't pray the way we pray, they didn't read the c----- in Arab, and they didn't fast in r-----, but they used the term Islam and they used the god in the name of alleluia and they considered the prophet from Mica. So they had these Islamic ideas

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Without having Islamic ideology if you like and these movements spread like wild fires for many reasons of them is because many people were searching for an alternative to the status quo; they realized that for example Christianity was brought to them by the very same people that were enslaving them and they felt the since that this can't be my religion you know so they were searching for alternative ideologies and there was a point in time when the nation of Islam became a powerful movement in the fifties and sixties especially when they attracted many high profile converts such as Malcom X became it's spokesperson, Malcom X converted to the nation of Islam and then Muhammad Ali converted as well and he was an atlases clad and he was one of the most converts to Islam, and a whole bunch of famous people converted. This coincided with the beginning of immigrant Islam if you like. There were small batches of immigrants before nineteen-ten – nineteen-twenty, but they really sustain invaluable communities. The largest batch of

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Immigrants that came were that of the late sixties and seventies. I mean my father came on the earlier side of that immigration your father's father is an example of that work, you've literally by the millions and that's the largest quantity of Muslims immigrants and also the group that actually maintained their identity; so American Islam has had a long history, but it's most prominent time really began in the sixties and seventies in terms of quantities that not to trivialize the experiences before, but it just wasn't that much of a quantity and also the nation by the way it den doled away and right there is hardly anything left, but from the flip side of the coin the son of the founder N----- S----- A----- decided to embrace orthodox Islam and so large quantities of the nation embraced mainstream Islam and still they are a part of now mainstream Islam and so with influx of the immigrants in the sixties and seventies

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We had a whole different set of dynamics Arabs, Focsani's, and Erroneous are coming in and there bring their understandings of Islam, There children now and we are basically that generation their children are now growing up and their going to be taken charge as well and were seeing and what we're seeing is basically very interesting dynamics we're seeing a lot of activities of our generation it's a very exciting time to live in because we're setting the stage of the foundations for Islam and North America.

Interviewer: And to transition a little bit to Memphis now. Do you know anything about the history of Islam in Memphis?

Sheik: So I'm aware that there has been an African American M----- here in Memphis for over forty-five years and it's been a dynamic community and that the first quote on quote immigrant M-----

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Was built in the early eighties even the Muslims had been here since the late sixties and you know and I'm aware of some of the names of the people who came in the sixties, but they are no longer with here, but I do know the first M----- S----- was built in eighty-one or so eighty-two was found and then M----- from that one and then now we have the M.I.C. coming here and so we've had a huge exponential burst of Muslim here in Memphis because is the hub of both FedEx and also the medical center. So we've large group of basically engineers and doctors basically coming in which is the standard I--- or the standard of Muslim immigrants so you had large communities of both doctors and engineers and technicians and computer programmer here in Memphis, and it's a very diverse communities. One of the things I like about Memphis is its diversity. The Muslim

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Community here is genuinely diverse; it's a very interesting mix many Muslims from Africa, from the Middle East, from India, F-----, from Serbia so you have a whole you know very healthy mix and this along with the African Americans that have been here for forty years or so the Muslim community of Memphis so it's a very interesting dynamics.

Interviewer: So now were going to transition to when you come to Memphis. When you came here in twenty-teen officially

Sheik: Yes!

Interviewer: So can you tell us first of all what brought you to Memphis?

Sheik: So I had thought a class in Memphis I believe it was two-thousand-seven I had thought a class from Mérida when I came here was it two-thousand-seven were you in that class?

Sheik: I think it was two-thousand-seven

Sheik: So I came to Memphis it couldn't have been before then it would have been two-thousand-seven, two-thousand-eight so I taught a class over here and quite ???

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By the way the very first ??? Of the ??? Was actually done here in Memphis believe it or not ??? ??? Myself and Muhammad ??? Who could come to work at the time all of the actually came to Memphis for some reason I forget now why all of us were here and we had a meeting here in Memphis in a hotel room we make the ??? So that is an interesting side fact as well but I had

Interviewer: Was that one year teaching your class or was it before then

Sheik: There were some event that we spoke at PVS at the pleasant view school numbers of us were there and we just decided ok we will fly in just have a meeting here for the because we need a place to meet all of us it just work out for some reason to be in Memphis and so ??? No idea that I would ever move to Memphis and then I taught another classes as well and it wasn't that class

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That must be two-thousand-eight, two-thousand-nine where at your uncle house basically you know we all sitting there and division of M.C. was basically you know said to me I was very impress and the first thing I told them look if you have this grandly vision of this twenty-eight acres of ??? all of this you going to be building you need to have some dynamic figures you need to have some people that are I mean I told them you need to investing people before you invest in buildings you know cause what brings the community to a place that's not the building its actually the people inside of it you know so I said whatever you guys do make sure that you so that was once said why want you come here you know cause you laugh like yea right you got to be kidding I didn't wanted to say this but Memphis come on why I go to Memphis that was the first thought that came in my mind and finishing up the ill and twenty-ten was when I needed to basically move away from new haven caused you supposed to stay ill for five years and then move away and get your first job

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And so in twenty-ten I was looking around where should I go and I wanted a community that I could also be half a foot in ??? In as well so I was looking for a job offering at the university and also a community in the same city that would be willing to help me out as well and frankly Memphis was not the primary target I was looking at other cities here and there you know closer to home cause I'm from Houston but there were no there were messages that's willing to help out but there was no academic position in those cities at the time so the only city that open up both academic position which was Rhodes College you know and Islamic center which is what I might see was Memphis so I moved to Memphis in twenty-ten and you know in ??? My wife was not that happy like Memphis why she never been to Memphis where we moving to I said you know if you remember we came down here you know

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Show the community to her and everything and we through ok maybe a temporary move for a little while you know because we could not see ourselves being here long term we just that it's we needed a larger city we need it to be closer to home but the ??? Would be move here it turn out to be a very beautiful place the people are great, the community is excellent I love to be at Rhodes College it's really an ideal because your kids are going to a good school here I mean everything is the pleasant view school is great, my eldest is in M.U.S which is a good school over here everything is working out well I mean the community, job, life everything is great and so we more and more are now seeing ourselves as full Memphian

Interviewer: So you mention that you like the first time heard about M.I.C my uncle saying ??? Was that the very first time you heard of that

Sheik: Oh yea he quite literally this is going down on history you pulled out a napkin and started

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Drawing the division of MIC of the back of a napkin this is what we have and this is ??? Road and this is this and that you know this is the line this is the ??? And I just be looking at it like this a very grandly project I even said to him like are you sure Memphis is ready for this like this is a big project this would make more sense than Houston and Chicago and Los Angles and these are you sure Memphis is ready for this and he was like it was like there were a very passionate spirit we are going to do this and this and

that ??? I never thought that I would be a part of this project and didn't even ??? To me when your uncle brought it up it was like I couldn't image myself coming to Memphis but here I am now it's a part of my life and it's my own vision that I'm caring and my ??? Vision is my vision now

Interviewer: And who else present at that table that May

Sheik: So Ali and Dr.??? And your uncle ??? I remember I think ??? was there as well yea and then myself these was the one I remember there were more as well but these was the ones I remember

Interviewer: And M.I.C had already brought the land

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Sheik: M.I.C had raise the funds they were raising the funds to buy ??? If I was mistaken they knew they would buy it but it wasn't yet purchase

Interviewer: And so they had they first fundraiser we believe in two thousand and nine

Sheik: Yea I came down from that one

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about the fundraiser

Sheik: Yes because it was the most amazing fundraiser we raised five million dollars like in pledges you know or three million was it yea three million right yea three million, three million in pledges but then I think ok three million dollars so it was an amazing fundraiser because we raise three million dollars in one night never been to a fundraiser where you know the community raises three million dollars in pledges and so I was very motivated to like that was one of the factors that really made me decide this is the community for me because if they really want they centered and they went to Memphis Islamic center and they went to vision like this than definitely that passion

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Is there to me

Interviewer: And so we know that you are the ??? Scholar I see what do you do as a ??? Scholar

Sheik: So my job primarily is to be the religious backbone of the community if there is any issue any questions and the fact if illegal verdict, my job is also to be the spiritual if you like that person here to give lectures, to give speeches to go to the Friday ??? When I'm here I have ??? Series of classes, I teach ??? Theater or the ??? Prophet Muhammad ??? And just to be a part of the community to give encouraging lectures every night and these days it's the mouth of ??? Every single night I'm giving a lecture between the prayer sessions so just to be basically the two goal person when it comes to the religion of Islam through of the religion Islam that's really my main job

Interviewer: You mentioned you do the one of the ??? Lectures what other specific program have we done

Sheik: I do

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A once a month ??? Session I would be trying to revive the youth but that's more of your department so it's like whatever you guys arrange something I'm here for you but I'm supposed to be helping on the youth as well and also just the way that I look at it just my presents has to be in the message, I'm there at least two or three times every day when I'm here in town you know from fragile and ??? Anytime someone need me for their Friday prayer the point is that the community should know that I'm here for them anything they need advice so every single day as you are witness to I cannot get from the message from my car in time it's always people coming up and that's the whole point you know it's that there's no formal office hours I just don't I wanted even want that honestly you know I'm there for the community that's what I'm here so whenever you need something just come and that's my ??? Arm ??? I'm supposed to be every time I'm in town I'm in the ??? I'm the love for the

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evening prayers so I used the other programs being the ??? It's just there the main point is that the community should know that they have a resource here that they can take advantage of I'm therefore ???

Interviewer: Early you mention that M.I.C. division is basically your division what is that division

Sheik: So M.I.C. division is really to have a dynamic family oriented center with an Islamic environment so we want to create you like a ??? Of spirituality Of health Islamic interaction for our children to grow up in we understand that obviously the place and the culture that we are living in it has its own values and we have our own values and have our own theology we have our you know vision of life so we want to provide our children an opportunity to get to know one another, to have a good time, to be safe as they play, as they grow up

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as they, you know, have their events and functions. We want them to literally play and fall in love on our campus. Quite literally get married and bring their children. And this is where we talk about generations to come, you know. We have fifty acer of land; we have a very massive project in building. We really do want to have a family oriented service. We're going to have cafes there. We're going to have restaurant. The point is that there should be this little bubble of security and safety. We understand that the world around us is going to be different. We understand that there's, but with that little bubble, we want our children to grow up and feel a sense of identity and belonging, you know. What does it mean to, you know, be a Muslim? What does it mean to hear the Quran being recited, to hear the ????? out loud, you know. To have, to ??? in the Islamic environment you know, demonstrated practically in that little area that we have. That's what we want the world to be. We want them to be excited to come to the ???, to listen

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To... Another version that we have is also to listen to Islam being taught in a manner that is acceptable and conducive to them. Because one of the issues we do have is Islam has evolved in different lands in different ways. And each one of us has come from a heritage that has its own understanding of Islam, but here we are now in America so there are certain understandings that need to be modified and others that

need to be you know, remain as they are. And that's a very delicate balance. What do you compromise for the sake of modernity, what do you compromise for the sake of changing values and what do you stick hard to? There's no easy answer to that and it's a very big responsibility that unfortunately been placed on my shoulders. Where do we draw the line and we say "no we're not going to change that value" and where do we say "Ok. Well, that we can tweak" and where do we say "Well this is in the value that's Islamic. It's cultural; we don't have any problems discarding it completely". So what do you throw out, what do you tweak and what do you stay firm with? That's not an easy discussion and the fact that

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M.I.C. is willing to engage in it is really the vision that I have, because most other communities want to have the Islam that is exactly found back home. And for me that's not going to flourish. It's not going to go further. We need to adapt with and conform to the culture that we're in as much as Islam allows us to that. That's the goal that I have with M.I.C. and that's the goal I have with my own life even. And so, M.I.C.'s vision fits in with my vision. Many communities would not want me because they think I'm too liberal. Other communities would think I'm conservative, right. That's the reality of the world that we live in. And the fact of the matter is, both communities would be right because there're elements here, there're elements there. And so, M.I.C. and ??? that's really the great thing the community wants basically the same vision in wavelength that I have which is their willing to engage in dialogue, willing to change where our religion allows for change but we're not going to compromise on our basic values.

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Interviewer: So going off of that how is M.I.C. different from other Muslim communities around the world that you've seen?

Sheik: So again, that's one of the main things I've said is that M.I.C.'s willingness to basically, the community knows what they're in for. If anybody wants to join M.I.C., they know exactly what M.I.C. is all about and that is that you know, as we said we are going to be a family like center with an Islamic heritage, but based in America, you know. So our values are going to be taken from our religion, from our people but also, from the culture around us. And another thing I like about M.I.C. is its cultural diversity. So the fact that, if you look at the people that are coming to pray at M.I.C, you quite literally see people from around the globe. And we all say that all Mosques are like that, and to some extent they are, but let's be honest here. Most Mosque have a predominate ethnicity. And the others are simply the salt that's added. Say look there're other people as well. The fact of the matter is M.I.C does not have one predominate ethnicity.

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Think about it. There's no one group that's taking over, you know. It not one, it's everybody, even our board. ??? There're men, there's women, that's another part. We're very women friendly, we encourage, there's no partitioning barrier between the men and women and I insist that I did not want a barrier between the men and the women. The board is composed of both men and women. There're also elders and also, you know, relatively young, you know, people in their thirties. I mean, that's very rare for a board to have young people up and coming and in fact, we're even thinking about having somebody even younger coming and be at least witnessing and attending . We also have different ethnicities. We have

Arabs, we have Africans, and we have ????,???? . It's a very healthy mix and I really like the diversity, the cultural diversity of M.I.C. and the vision of M.I.C everything is fitting in perfectly with what I have in mind.

Interviewer: And is it something new to America?

Sheik: It's, I, Well, it's not new,

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but it's rarely seen. Everybody wants this idea. Everybody's striving for this idea but it's rarely seen. And that's the good thing that in ????? we see this at M.I.C.

Interviewer: So, have you seen the Muslim community evolve since you've arrived here in 2010?

Sheik: Well' quite a lot. I mean, first they simply in terms of numbers. I mean I remember the first eight prayers that I prayed here, we had the convention center and it was almost packed but it wasn't overflowing. It was well. I was impressed. Now the convention center is going to be a fire hazard. Its people everywhere and I mean, I think we're going to have to get a larger center somehow even. And that's just for the eight prayers. We've had another ????? built as well. We've had a community that's growing. We've seen an influx of people. So in terms of quantity, we see it always on the rise. In terms of activity as well, since I've been here, there's been far more outreaches

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As well. We've had a good relationship with a number of churches, with the political leaders, with our mayors, with our congressmen, so I see that a lot of roads have been built as well. We've also had an impact on the broader community. We started soup kitchen and you took part in it as well doing great work over there helping out the broader community. So, I think that there's a lot more to be done, but I think that what we've done in these last four or five years, it really shows that M.I.C's vision is a very different vision. It's a vision that will shall I add appeal to most of the second generation, American Muslims. It is a vision that is in sync with their cultural and religious identity and I think that the future is very bright with the talent that all of you are doing over here as well, the up and coming generation. I'm very happy and I'm excited to see what the future will bring.

Interviewer: Well, off of that, how do you envision M.I.C's role for Memphis Muslims and the Memphis great community at large in the next twenty to

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thirty years?

Sheik: So I want M.I.C to really be the beacon of Islamic thought in Memphis. I want it to be the primary vehicle or media through which American Islam in Memphis is manifested. I'm very humbled to be a part of M.I.C and I feel that what M.I.C is doing, and this is with all respect to the other ??? as well, but there's a role, there's a niche that every ??? plays, right. And the niche that M.I.C is playing is really to be a conduit, a channel, a bridge builder with the other communities, with other social organizations, with other religious organizations, with other political offices. M.I.C is, and again one example of this is the

friendship park. We are going to have a park between the church and the Mosque. There's a group of, there's a land already been purchased. We're going to build a friendship park over there to demonstrate the community, the broader community that, "Hey! A mosque and a church can not only actually get along, we can actually have a community park where our children will play together or the broader community will come". So that is basically

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the vision of M.I.C. To be a beacon of Islam in America to show the greater community this is who we are were a part in partial of the fabric of this country, were you know just as American as a everybody else, and we have our own yes heritage and what not, but that doesn't mean our children play any differently or you know everything is still the same over there. So we want to be a deacon of life, we want to be a rule model institution for other centers across America as well as Islamic centers we want them to see what we're doing and all these different facet's and then you know maybe even you know help take help from us and we will help them out as well, but again this whole synthesis of Islam isn't just about worshipping and prayer it's also about building bridges it's about showing the community who you are, it's also about just having a good time. Having a park, having a gymnasium you know it's also about a socializing time so this inter complex that we're building it really is in my opinion you know emblematic if you like of the future of American Islam

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and that's why I'm really happy to be a part of it.

Interviewer: And what advice do you give to today's Muslim Americans?

Sheik: Be proud of who you are. Don't ever double guess your identity. You are an American, but you're also Muslim, and those identities are not just, you know, fully compatible with one another – they're quite unique and interesting blends. Yet there are some challenges no doubt about that there are some challenges, but that's what the excitement of life comes in I mean be proud of who you are, never be ashamed of your heritage and you know coop with daily problems as they come about; always find comfort in your faith and the belief of your god and you know always find comfort in your prayer and your rituals and always be a part of the community because your always weak cut off and your strong with your community you know your community are those who are going to have your back, they're going to take care of you especially that ---- will that, weren't going to be judgmental

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we will take you on, we'll help you we'll do whatever it needs to be done, but you are a part of our community and I would want our youth to be activate with M.I.C. even if it means just to show up to see what's going, and just realize this is there community and tell us what they need and be a part of the criticism as well because nobody's perfect. There's got to be areas of improvement. So unless we hear from them as well what we can do weren't going to improve so just show yourselves and be who you are.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Sheik: I'm really happy that your actually doing this really great project to document Islam in Memphis and I'm humbled to be a part of this even though I'm not born a Memphian, but I have adopted Memphis as my city now and --- Memphis is now home for me and I sincerely hope come twenty thirty years forty years down when I myself look at this video still in Memphis and have seen the vision

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of my city already furling and established and you know look back and say O my god I can't believe I did this interview and I had this vision and here we are having accomplished you know that is my goal ---- I'll honor that this that I see of Islam in America of really who we. I want to this established really within my lifetime and I'm very confident ----- that we can do this with the help of ilia and then with help of our community around us and ---- can be done.

Interviewer: And for the sake of looking at this in twenty to thirty years from now; we know that you love ice cream, what's your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Sheik: I hope I still will love ice cream as much as I do when I'm seventy as I do now. I don't have anyone flavor it depends on the mood and it also depends on the brand name as well right. So if you go to I mean you know believe it or not from the ice cream you get in the market in the supermarkets I think nothing beats Blue Bell's homemade vanilla I mean that's just it's just I know it's simple I know

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it's just but that is it. There's nothing else that needs to be done. So I love Blue Bell's homemade vanilla; If you go to Baskin Robbins then I like the strawberry cheese cake flavor right. You like that one as well right yeah ok that's a pretty good one too. I like Hogging dots as well their hazel nut I mean it depends on where you go, Brayer's ice cream as well is very good they have chocolate blueberry, blueberry chocolate which is a really nice flavor. Brayer's ice cream it's one of favorites, but again it depends on what one of the things I like to do in every city is to ask them which ice cream parlors are there and go to the local places that are. Some of the best ice creams I've ever had are non-named brands there made right then and there for that little shop in the corner, but I've lost the names of every, but I know what cities there in. So when I go to those cities like oh take me to that place you took me too you know so yeah I love my ice cream and I hope I never grow out of that love.

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Interviewer: Well you missed Angel food we used to have an Angel food factor by the airport and that was the best ice cream I think they know make ice cream for Baskin Robbins which is really good.

Sheik: Wow! Well

Interviewer: Alright thank you so much for being here with us and sitting down to do this interview.

Sheik: Thank you thank you for having me.