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Interviewer: _____.

Anmol Khan: _____.

Interviewer: I am Sharif Rashad with the Crossroads to Freedom program here at Rhodes. And on behalf of us and the Aspire program I would like to thank you for taking your time out of your schedule today to meet with us.

Anmol Khan: Thank you.

Interviewer: So tell us about yourself.

Anmol Khan: Okay. My name is Anmol Kahn, and I have lived in Memphis all of my life. I was born and raised here. I am 26 years old. I went to many Christian schools growing up, and I finally graduated at Hutchison, in 2006. And then I went to Christian Brothers University, and I majored in biomedical sciences. And then I graduated from CBU in 2010. Then I started a PA program, which I'm currently in, at CBU, and hopefully will be graduating in 2016.

Interviewer: Congrats.

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So we are aware that you went to Hutchison School. What was your experience there as a Muslim in your school environment? Was it – any difficulties?

Anmol Khan: At Pleasantview?

Interviewer: At Hutchison.

Anmol Khan: Oh, at Hutchison. At Hutchison, so it's a little bit different because, well, I've already been used to being in an environment where there's – being the only minority. That school is all girls school, and it – I've already am used to being a minority. But it wasn't a problem in my opinion, 'cause I still felt like I was respected for who I was. But it was a good opportunity for me to basically let other people learn about Islam and spread Islam – well, not really spread Islam, but I got to teach people about Islam. So what I used to do every year was I used to talk

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a little bit about Ramadan. And it just became a thing that I did every year. And it was – it became a little bit enlightening for some people, just a way for me to express Islam, I guess, ‘cause Ramadan is a month that everyone is used – knows that we fast, but I just wanted to give them a little bit more, and –

Interviewer: Understandable.

Anmol Khan: That was fun.

Interviewer: Well, is there any other issues like prior to Hutchison High School, like middle school, elementary school, et cetera?

Anmol Khan: So I went to Emmanuel Methodist in kindergarten. And then I went to St. George’s Episcopalian for lower school. And then I transitioned into Hutchison in middle school. So with these schools, it was mainly a Christian background. But it never bothered me. It never affected me in any way Islamically, because **ahand Allah**, I had a very good background

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with my parents. And my parents always made sure that I understood and respected the other religions, as well as maintaining my own, and understanding the differences, but also being tolerable. So it was never a problem. I got used to it. It wasn’t an issue. In fact, it was enlightening because I feel like I know a little bit more about other religions than I do – than other people know about my religion. So, I remember one time in college, I was taking a class. I was taking a religious studies class. And one of the first questions that was asked was, “Have you – Who here has read from the *Bible*?” And, being amongst college students, it was interesting. I was among the very few people who raised their hands. And they all looked at me. And most people – ‘cause it’s a small college, everyone knows everyone – most people looked at me and said, “How did – why – I thought you’re a Muslim. Why

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are you – why did you read the *Bible*? Why did you read the *Bible*?” I said, “I read the *Bible* ‘cause was in school, and I picked it up and I had to do an assignment. And I read all four gospels, and with the background – I’m very thankful for this background, that I’m able to understand some of the other religions. So I was

able – it enforced my own religion. It enforced me in Islam, and it enforced how true Islam is for me, but also just having the respect for other religions.

Interviewer: That's actually interesting, because in my previous schools we were not taught about religion often, 'cause public schools being kind of iffy on that subject.

Anmol Khan: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Interviewer: So, if there's one difference _____ between Christianity and Islam, what would you perceive it to be?

Anmol Khan: The difference between the two?

Interviewer: The major difference, yes.

Anmol Khan: Well, the major difference is the belief in trinity versus belief in one God.

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That's a major difference. There are also a lot of similarities, which is something I love to talk about, especially with a lot of my friends being Christian. My best friend that I have, she's also Christian. And we met in Hutchison. So – and we're still friends, now. It's never been a problem to have a friend who's not Muslim. In fact, sometime it's a good thing because the morals that we share are the same. Doesn't matter really what religion you are as long as you share the same morals and trust. But, the difference is the belief in the Trinity versus the belief in one God. But when I talk to my friends I try not to harp too much about that. But I try to mostly talk about, for example, I try to talk about how – we do believe in the same God, God of Abraham. And I try to bring up that similarity, and the same belief systems. We also believe in angels. We believe in hell and heaven. We believe in an afterlife.

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We believe in the other prophets, like Adam and Moses, and we respect them. And some of our stories are actually very similar. So, I've also, as I grew up at Hutchison – before Hutchison, when I was at St. George's, we read about the different prophets. And I remember going home to my parents and saying, "Well, we just read about Jonah and the whale. Is it true in Islam, too?" And my

parents would tell me – my dad would say, “Yes. Sit down and tell me about it.” And I’d tell them the story, and they said, “Yes. It’s what we believe, too. It’s the same story. There might be a few minor differences.” And I get it clarified with my parents, and they would show me from the *Quran* or from the *Hadith* and the *Sayings of the Prophet*. And once I got it clarified, then I had an understanding – at a very young age. Mind you, I was probably maybe nine – eight or nine years old – when this was happening. And it was a very cool experience because I thought, “Wow, we’re so similar.”

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And it was amazing. And also just having the respect for the other religion at such a young age. It was a very unique experience. I wish other people had that experience.

Interviewer:

As do I. So earlier you were talking about how involved with the community your family is. Can you share a little bit about those – about that with us?

Anmol Khan:

Sure. So, I’m very blessed to have both of my parents being extremely involved in the masajids of Memphis. It’s a long story, but with my parents being involved, I had the opportunity to also get involved. My mom is very, very – very people oriented. And she loves to help people however she can. And with her desire to help people – that good feeling you get – I try to help here wherever I can. That’s how it started. It just started with, “Okay. I’m just helping Mom.” [Laughs] But it ended up – it ended up just being

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something I like doing, as well. And she just basically did very minor things, nothing big. If somebody needed some food because somebody passed away, she cooks food for them. If somebody needed a rug – prayer rug – get that ready for their – anything somebody needed, she just provided for them. It was not any – it was never limited to one specific thing. She’d always help other people to the best of her capacity. And it was always selfless. And slowly my dad also got involved. He wasn’t involved in the beginning. But then, towards the end he started getting involved along with my parents – along with my mother. And so now, at MIC, I find that with my mom, she’s very good with people, and she’s very good with the unfortunate in Memphis. She helps a lot

of the unfortunate, quietly. And she

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also deals with catering, with food, with providing for people in the social services. My dad, on the other hand, he does a lot of the logistics of the masjid. He helps the – he helps with organizing, with finding out what – how best to organize and seat everyone so that everyone can maintain and enjoy the spiritual experiences that they have at the masjid. And for me, even though I love helping them out both ways – and it's great. I get both experiences. But for me, my passion is with the youth and the children. I love to help the children and the youth because I grew up here, and growing up here, of course it's not easy. We have – our parents are immigrants. They didn't – they weren't born and raised here. But we were. And we had to struggle. And so I can understand where the kids are coming from right now, and the struggles that they're going through. And some of these things are – you can't say it, you have to experience it.

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And having been – going through these experiences I would love to share what I know, and share my mistakes, and share my successes, and hope for the best for the children of the future and for the kids of the future – the youth of the future, 'cause it's all in their hands. And just to be a part of that molding process is a gift. So that's where I feel like I fit in with the community involvement.

Interviewer:

So how was it growing up in the community, as a Muslim?

Anmol Khan:

At times it was fun. It's different. I don't know. There's different – There's so many things I could tell you. *[Laughs]* Sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it can be really challenging. And sometimes you just don't know where you fit in, because for me, my parents were Pakistani. And growing up as an American, it's confusing,

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sometimes. Which one is my culture? Can I adapt both cultures? Do I have to choose just one culture? Do I need to create my own culture? It was difficult. Just that cultural part was hard. And then, on top of that, choosing to have a religion that was not the majority religion of the United States. And, for me, it was a choice. I'm gonna get into that in a second. But I want to talk a little bit about my culture experience which, in the beginning, was

hard, 'cause I wasn't sure who – what I – do I choose one? Do I do both? And I think the bottom line is, for me, you do both. You don't choose one or the other. You accept both. I am Pakistani, fully from my parents. And I am an American. And I'm proud of being both. And there is nothing that could deter me from being

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proud of an American, as well as being proud of being a Pakistani. Both cultures are amazing, and I'm very blessed to be a part of both of them. Growing up, of course you've got these things, for example, like on Halloween, or Fourth of July. You've got these holidays. Do you celebrate them or not? Of course you do. I celebrate them 'cause it's – Fourth of July is a national holiday, and it's part of my heritage, and it's part of my culture. At the same time I celebrate Eid, which is an Islamic holiday, but it's also – in Pakistan you celebrate Eid. And there's certain traditions that you have, and certain traditions, for example, we put henna on our hands. That's like a Pakistani thing, or I don't know exactly. But it's a cultural thing. It's not exactly a religious thing. But I still participate in that. So, it's important

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for me to maintain that struggle – and it is a struggle. It's not easy. And it's never going to be easy, because I'm not assimilating to one culture or another. But the struggle is part of the success. And that's what makes it beautiful. But going back to the religion part, if I may.

Interviewer: By all means.

Anmol Khan: Unfortunately – I don't know if this is fortunate or unfortunate – but this is how it turned out, for me. After 9/11 occurred, I was in eighth grade. And 9/11 was a very traumatic and huge event, globally, nationally, and personally. But, for me, in my life, it was a turning point. It wasn't necessarily a terrible – nothing terrible happened to me, personally. But I did start to get a lot of questions when I

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was just in eighth grade, which – I didn't know a lot about Islam. I only knew what my parents had taught me. And so, when I started getting questions about Islam, "What is this religion?" and being a minority, already being the only Muslim, or I was one of two

Muslims in my class, many people didn't know about Islam, and they didn't know what kind of religion it was. So I started getting questions. And sometimes I would get really hard questions. And I had to go research it, ask my parents, and sometimes it was so hard – and we didn't have a scholar I could just easily go and ask. I had to do a lot of my own research. The more I researched about Islam – and I did my own personal research. Even though I was born a Muslim, still, that was – my parents, whatever they had taught me. But I had to do my own research. Once I came to a conclusion that – I finally came to a conclusion that Islam is the religion for me. It is the truth. There is

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nothing – nothing – that would mean it otherwise. It is the ultimate truth. I fell in love with the religion, and after that, I wanted more. I wanted to learn more about my religion. And so for me, personally, it became a choice. I chose to be Muslim at the age of, I think, 13, when I was in eighth grade. And then after that, ah and Allah, it was amazing because I wanted more knowledge. Allah provided more knowledge for me in a way of providing classes. We started having classes called **AlMaghrib**, and AlMaghrib institutes started coming. And we basically have two consecutive weekends of classes of Islam. And it ranges from basic tenets of Islam to very individualized topics. And my first class that I took was mind blowing. It was

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with Sheik **Yasir Qadhi**, and I was so amazed, blown out of the water, and just was humbled by the experience, and humbled by how beautiful Islam was – Islam is. And it's – ah and Allah, it was something that had continued in my life all the way up till college. I was able to take classes – I was able to take AlMaghrib classes and other Islamic classes, whichever – whatever was available to me, I would just go and take it. And I slowly just fell in love with the religion. And, ah and Allah, I'm very proud to be a Muslim, and very happy. And it is definitely not something that I was born with. It was something – that's part of it, but it's really because of a choice and Allah just giving it to me as a gift.

Interviewer: Go into a little bit more detail about these classes, if you will.

Anmol Khan: The AlMaghrib classes?

Interviewer: Yes.

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Sure. Sheik Yasir Qadhi was the first person, our first teacher to teach us a class in basic _____, which is the basic tenets of Islam. And it's interesting, because coming – being raised as a Pakistani Muslim, from my Pakistani parents, there are a lot of cultural – there's a difference between culture and religion, and a lot of it was mixed up. There are some things that we're doing that were incorrect, or that were – it was like a change, or it was – I don't know how to explain this – but culture and religion were unfortunately mixed together, whereas I see it as two different things. When I took his class, a lot of these confusions that I had were clarified. For example – let's see if I can think of an example. The *Quran* itself is beautiful,

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and you can always strive to understand it. Even if you can't – it's beautiful to me that everyone can read – all Muslims learn to read the *Quran* even if they don't understand it. But then, when you take it one step further to go – That class made me want to learn more. It made me want to learn Arabic so that I can read and understand what the *Quran* is saying. It made me fall in love with the religion, and how Allah loves us, and loves and chooses you, and how he wants to take care of you. And it made me want to just learn more. That class – it was all about basic tenets, and what are the main, basic things that you need to know and you need to do in your life, and things I thought I knew, but I didn't know. And that class was so eye opening, and it made me – and oh, oh. The biggest thing with Sheik Yasir – I have to say this. Okay. The biggest thing with Sheik Yasir for me was,

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he was the very first scholar that I've learned of who was born an American, raised by Pakistanis – Pakistani immigrants – lived – born and raised in America, in Houston, Texas, and he went to college in Houston. And he also finished and completed a degree in America. And then he went and got more education in Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia, came back to Yale and got his doctorate. He's accomplished, ahand Allah. But my point is, he's just like me. He is a scholar that I can relate to. He doesn't speak with an accent. He speaks with an English American accent. He understands what Halloween is, or Fourth of July, or Memorial Day. He understands what Christmas is and when it happens, and

what happens here. It's not a foreign thing to him. He knows what Harry Potter is. And I love Harry Potter.

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He knows what Harry is, and I don't have to explain that to him. He understands because he was born and raised here. And for me, that's what I was looking for as a young adult, or as a young – as a youth before I was an adult. [Laughs] That's what I wanted, 'cause all the scholars that I had learned about _____ were not from here. They were from another land, which they were knowledgeable, ah and Allah, about Islam. They didn't understand American culture. They weren't me. So Sheik Yasir for me, that was the biggest thing. Sheik Yasir was just like me. And with his knowledge I could actually relate to him and understand and agree and learn and just become a better Muslim, and a better American Muslim.

Interviewer:

So I think what you're saying is that there wasn't a bridge between the fact that he was born and raised here, rather than some other country abroad. He understood the values, and our country, as well.

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Anmol Khan:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay. Well, we know that you went to the Masjid As-Salam quite often. How was it growing up there? Was there any difficulties?

Anmol Khan:

Okay. Yes, I grew up there. And I loved it, because I was just a little kid. And I used to run around the whole masjid. I know Masjid As-Salam backwards and forwards. When it became the masjid that I remember, I remember my Sunday school classes were – are in the current – currently where the sister section is, that's where my Sunday school classes were. And that's when I remember Dr. _____ was one of my teachers. Dr. Zaman was one of my teachers. Dr. Samani was one of my teachers. And it's interesting. I used to –

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It was a playground for me. It was fun. There used to be a playground there in the parking lot. And I used to love going on Sundays with my dad. My dad would go for the Sunday halaqahs. And I would just go with him. I would either go to Sunday school,

but I remember before I started Sunday school, I would go with him on Sundays. We'd listen to the halaqah. And I'd go outside and play on the playground. I'd go down the really big slide, 'cause, to me, it looked like a huge slide. It was the biggest slide in Memphis. It was the best slide ever. And I used to go down that slide. And then I used to go on the monkey bars. And I am telling you, I was the best at monkey bars. I know this because my dad, he's always tell me, "Look at her. She's on the monkey bars. She's just like a little monkey. She's awesome at monkey bars." And I used to love the monkey bars there, and the slide, and the jungle gym. It was my playground, figuratively as well as literally. I used to run around in the men's section. *[Laughs]* This is really funny, but, as a child,

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I used to run around in the men's section. The men were not praying there. It was not prayer time. And I remember the little strings that they had put there to show the line of where you're supposed to stand. And I used to run around to trip on them – quite often – but it was fun, 'cause it was funny, 'cause everyone did it. And there was no segregation between the men and the women. There was a small barrier, but it was not like a curtain or a wall or anything. So the men's area was actually the whole area. It was men and women. I just remember running around there and going up the _____ and the pulpit, and just going up there and pretending I'm giving a speech or something, and then going back down and running around, running on the outside and the inside. It was my playground. And then growing up with, ahand Allah, with the expansion, and the changes, and they had to take down – they had to take down the beloved playground. But, it's okay, ahand Allah, for more parking spots, because we had a lot more people. I had a lot of friends. I had a lot of friends,

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and a lot of them had moved away, but _____ was one of my friends, one of my older friends. **Ahsia** was one of my older friends I used to be around and we used to go to Sunday school together. And then, once our Sunday school was out of the masjid, we were in the parking lot in a trailer. And that's where our Sunday school was, and that's – that was also good times. It was a lot of fun. I used to go to Sunday school, not only just for the learning, but also 'cause of all the fun I had. And then, eventually, we went to – I went to PBS for Sunday school for maybe another

two or three years. And then I guess I went to college. I don't remember any more. [Laughs]

Interviewer: So what exactly did you learn about at Sunday school?

Anmol Khan: A lot of things. At Sunday school [Laughs] I remember one time – I remember we were talking. Oh, yeah. Brother Akram was my professor – our teacher – and

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we were talking about the Sahabas, the companions of the prophet, the prophets ah salaam. And I went home, and I asked Daddy, “Daddy, what’s a Sahaba?” [Laughs] And he explained it to me many times, and I didn’t get it. I didn’t understand, what’s a Sahaba? Who’s a Sahaba? What does Sahaba mean? And I just – it wouldn’t leave my mind. I wanted to understand, what was it meant by Sahaba? Who was Abu Bakar _____? Who was Omar? And so, ahand Allah, it’s just one of those funny stories. But we would learn about the Sahabas, the _____. So then we learned about his life. We had – I remember three sections. We had the Quranic section, so we would talk about suras of the *Quran*, and we would learn the *Quran*, and in most cases we’d have to memorize the *Quran* and then we would be tested on our memorization. Sometimes that was easy, and sometimes

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it wasn’t, ‘cause I wouldn’t be able to memorize the entire thing – entire sura. And then there would be a _____ section. And that’s when we would learn a little about the prophets of salaam, and his life, who he was. That’s basically just his history, who he was, where he grew up, his companions, his family. And then the third section would be about the hadith of the prophets of salaam, and that would be morals, values, and anything you basically would teach maybe an eight year old, like don’t lie, tell the truth, patience is a virtue, [Laughs] but through the prophetic teachings. That was fun. [Laughs] I had good times. And I also I made a lot of friends, a lot of friends. That was a lot of fun. I enjoyed having my Muslim friends at Sunday school, and then I’d have my non-Muslim friends in secular school. And I’d always felt like

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I was blessed with a large majority of different kinds of friends.

Interviewer: So, tell us how you were involved in the Muslim youth community. Did anything major happen?

Anmol Khan: MYM? Okay. Yeah. So, it all started – of course, I did not start this organization, Muslim Youth of Memphis. But I do remember being a part of this. You basically – during Sunday school you just joined the Muslim Youth of Memphis. And we held seminars. We had an annual seminar that we would always hold. We had elections. And we would do all kinds of programs throughout the year. And we met every Sunday. We had meetings. Elections. *[Laughs]* It was fun. But our main focus was the seminar. And it was basically something that we could give back to the community. We would hold

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seminars on – from religious topics to kind of secular topics, I guess. So we would hold religious topics, and we'd have speakers come in, 'cause obviously we can't really talk about anything, 'cause we don't know anything. But we'd hold speaker – we'd have speakers come, and then we'd invite the entire community. And we'd make a big event out of it. It's an all day event called – it was called The Seminar. Everybody knew about the seminar. And I got – I wasn't too involved in it too much until one year I decided I wanted to make it a little bit different. And I wanted to have a skit. It was the election year. I believe President – I think this was between President Bush and President Kerry, they were, I think, in candidacy. I'm not 100 percent sure. But I remember it was the

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election year. And I wanted to do a skit on sort of the elections, and some of the stereotypes that we have. And I ended up writing the skit, and I got a bunch of my friends to be involved in it. *[Laughs]* We ended up having this skit, which was really funny. And the – I guess my motivation for doing the skit was every year, when we had the seminar, I noticed that during the end – at the end of the seminar a lot of people left. It was always just our family members, our parents, and nobody else. Finally, this year, when we had that – the skit – when we had the skit, the first time we actually had a skit, we had a full house. Everyone stayed. The seminar was a success. It was a lot of fun. That, to me, was so awesome and amazing that I started thinking, "You know what? I could do more of those, and I can get more involved in the youth,

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and I can get more involved with just getting – just getting involved, I guess. I guess I started to find my forte. And I was still learning. I was still in high school. We had elections and stuff, and I never was elected president or anything like that. But I was still involved heavily, and I did a lot of things. I had a lot of connections from my parents, but I got involved. And we did a lot of community service projects. And that was a lot of fun. But then we – then, after college, I started – I wasn't too involved with the Muslim Youth of Memphis. I really don't know what happened. But when MIC came around, I noticed a lacking. And it wasn't just me who was involved. There was **Anika**, and there was – there was a number of people. I can't even tell you how many people there were. I can't even name everybody who was involved. But it was like a slow event where we kinda were like, "We don't have anything going on for the Muslim youth."

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And I remember Muslim Youth of Memphis, but all my friends that were in it are not here anymore, or very few of them actually stayed in Memphis. And so we decided we want to do something for the youth. That's lacking in the community. And **Masha'Allah**, we have so many youths in this generation. At my generation we had maybe about 25. Now it's like you can't even count them. Masha'Allah, there's so many youth. But there's no program. There's nothing going on for them. And, since I feel like I can connect to the youth, and I have sort of experiences that – similar experiences that they're having – I feel like I can connect to them. So we decided to hold a retreat, the winter retreat. That's when I started getting involved. There was other things going on in Masjid As-Salam that my cousin was doing. And I wasn't too involved in that during college. But I started getting more involved at MIC. And when we held the retreat – the winter retreat – it was just one retreat, one day – three days. It was a three day

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consecutive retreat. And we [*Laughs*] we held it, and it was such a success. We had so many youth, so happy, so excited, that that's when we started to realize, "You know, we could have more events." And I started to get involved. So it was fun.

Interviewer: So what year was that?

Anmol Khan: The winter retreat?

Interviewer: Yes.

Anmol Khan: Let's see. That was –

Interviewer: If you could remember.

Anmol Khan: *[Laughs]* It wasn't that long ago, but it was, I want to say, 2011? That sounds about right.

Interviewer: So it was fairly recently.

Anmol Khan: That was fairly recently. Yes. 'Cause before that – yeah, I think that – that sounds about right.

Interviewer: Were there any other major programs that you worked with?

Anmol Khan: Well, I helped my parent out wherever I could, with various fund raisers throughout the city. I wasn't limited – *[Laughs]* I was not limited to one masjid,

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or one organization. When my parents helped, we helped all the organizations. We helped Masjid Al-Noor. We helped **Majis Salaam**, PVS, MIC, Masjid **Ar-Rahman**, the cemetery – I think that's Masjid **Ar-Rahma**, and Masjid Ar-Rahman that is now built, the new masjid. And any way my parents – wherever they could help in the community, they helped. It didn't – it wasn't restricted to a particular masjid. It never was. And it wasn't ever particularly focused on one organization. It was all organizations, because it's one ummah. It's the same ummah. It's the same community. So I was always involved wherever my parents were involved. I helped them wherever I could. If they needed to make fliers, or they needed to call people, or organize, or

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wherever they needed me to be, I was trying to my best to be there. Sometimes I probably wasn't as good as I could have been, but I did whatever I could for my parents. And, while I had school. *[Laughs]* This is not limited to in the summer or when there was break. I was – unfortunately, my friends from school would be like, "Let's go hang out." And I couldn't hang out because I was always busy every weekend helping out with some community

event. But, ah and Allah, I'm not complaining. I'm actually very thankful that I was able to participate in some capacity in some of these events.

Interviewer: So you briefly talked about being a younger adult in this generation. Could you talk a bit more about trying to balance school with volunteer work and friends, as well? Was it difficult? Or was it fairly easy?

Anmol Khan: Yes. That is an ongoing struggle. It's never easy. It's never, "Oh, okay. That's

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the answer." [Laughs] It's very hard. It's very difficult. It is a struggle. Sometimes I feel like – I wish – I wish that I could just focus on one thing. I just don't want it to be focusing on – I wish I could just focus on school, or I wish I could just focus on my friends, or I wish I could just focus on the masjid, or the community. But it was never one thing. It was always everything. And that's how my life has always been, every weekend. It was like, Monday through Friday, go to school. Saturday, Sunday, help out with the community, and start all over again. There was never a break. Going on vacation was a family affair. It was always family reunions. That was the extent of our vacation. But ah and Allah. It was a struggle. And sometimes, unfortunately, my grades did suffer. But it wasn't anything that was terrible. I never failed a class, and I never cheated in class.

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So. And I'm one of those nerds. I love school. [Laughs] I'm still in school. [Laughs] I'm doing my masters right now. But it's fine, ah and Allah. It is a struggle. It is difficult, especially right now during Ramadan. It's a little hard. Ramadan – and during Ramadan my grades always dropped a little bit, 'cause of lack of sleep, I guess. I don't know.

Interviewer: Could be just hunger, fatigue.

Anmol Khan: Hunger. Fatigue. Sleep. All of the above. But, I never – I don't like missing out on the activities in Ramadan. Being – Ramadan is not limited to fasting. Ramadan is about the atmosphere, about breaking your fast, having **iftar** with the community, which is something that we always do. We started doing it only at home. And this is fun. I love talking about this. At Masjid As-Salam, we

used to break our fast at the masjid only on Saturdays. First it was just only one Saturday. Then it became every Saturday, with the community.

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It was just a pot luck. Everyone just bring your food. “Let’s break our fast together.” They we would pray **Maghrib**, and we would pray **Isha** and _____ together, at Masjid As-Salam. And then, from Saturday, it became Saturday and Sunday. Then Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And this is over years, couple of years – three or four years. Then it became Friday, Saturday, Sunday, “Let’s also do Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday.” Eventually, we’re breaking our fast every single day at the masjid, instead of at home. But it wasn’t a bad thing. It was fun, because you get to be with the community. You break your fast with the community. You pray with the community. So you eat together, you pray together. You play together. We also enjoyed – after Ramadan, after _____ prayers, we’d just hang out with friends. And I still do that, today. Still today, it’s the same thing. we’re breaking our fast together with the community and praying together, and also enjoying company with each other. The

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only difference is more people. Ahand Allah, it’s more people. And it’s a good thing. With regards to school, with regards to work, it is hard. It’s not easy.

Interviewer: I’m sure.

Anmol Khan: That part is definitely hard. But, with the struggle comes the reward, ‘cause for – I don’t know how it works. I don’t know how Allah does it, but Allah makes it easy. Allah gives you – Allah allows you to enjoy Ramadan, gives you – what? – three hours of sleep, but still be able to perform well throughout the day, whether at work or whether at school. So Allah gives you that energy. All you need is _____.

Interviewer: Exactly. So, we know that your dad is one of the founders of MIC. How did you feel about the idea of the Memphis Islamic Center when your dad – and the other founders, as well – started talking about it?

Anmol Khan: I’m glad you brought that up.

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Very interesting.

Interviewer: It is.

Anmol Khan: It all started at Masjid As-Salam when a group of them – my dad, Dr. Bashar, **Shala**, Brother Ali, Dr. **Ziman** – I feel like I'm missing someone – oh, Brother **Yousef Saleh**, – when they all – I guess they – I don't know exactly how all of these people got involved, but I know that they started talking about it at Masjid As-Salam. And it wasn't – it was never about building another masjid. It was always about building a community center. So, ahand Allah, we had a place to pray. Ahand Allah, we had a school. But, our community was growing. My parents – especially my dad and the others that were involved – recognized that we needed more. We need a community center, a place where we can have classes, a place where we can have swimming, basketball,

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a place where we can have banquets, a place that we can call home, a place that we can not only just pray in, but actually have a community center. There was a Jewish community center here, and it's pretty wonderful how they've been able to keep the community involved in all those activities, as well as prayer. And it's not limited to prayer. We didn't have that, yet. And so that was the dream. The dream – I remember my dad always talking about. And I remember often my dad not being home because he was out looking for land. And he'd come home and tell us, "Oh, we found some land. It's on sale." And, I kid you not, every day they would go and walk the entire perimeter of the land, all the land that they have inspected. They've – I don't know how many pieces of land that they went and searched for, but it was a good number.

[Laughs]

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It was a good number because I remember [Laughs] him not being home after work for a long time. And he'd come home, and he'd get so excited about telling us what had happened, and the land, "Oh, this land wasn't very good, but this land was really good." And then, when they found the land for MIC on Houston Levee, all the way over there. It was really, really far. Houston Levee, that's so far away. And when my dad started explaining it to me at home, and telling me about the land, he walked the perimeter, it

was more than two times. He walked the perimeter more than two times. I remember that. And he explained how it was really good – the leveling was good. It had a lake, and was very expansive, and it would be perfect. And I was like, “Dad, isn’t it too much? Is it too big?” He said, “It’s never too big, because you have to look to the future. It’s not for right now. You have to look at what’s

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gonna happen years down the line, not after my generation or your generation, after your grandkids. You have to look at what they’re gonna have to deal with. And the land is for them.” I started thinking. I said, “Okay. Well, this is starting to make sense.” And then, interesting story is, I remember it was on sale, and they didn’t go after it. They passed it over. They started looking at other pieces of land, for whatever reason. I don’t remember why. And then, somebody had put a contract on it. That’s what it was. Somebody had put a contract on it, and they were not sure what to do. But, by the blessings of Allah, the contract fell through. The price was \$700,000. And I think it was 32 acres. We had sort of talked to

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the community. They had already introduced the idea to the community about the land, and they decided to jump on it. The contract had fell through. This was their opportunity to get the land. \$700,000, and it’s now or never for 32 acres. So, that’s when they went to work – especially my mom. She made a lot of phone calls. She talked widely. She talked to everybody in the community. She knows so many people. *[Laughs]* Ahand Allah. She talked to so many people in the community, and ahand Allah, within I think three months is the time span – it’s a very relatively short time span. But within three months we were able to collect \$300,000 in cash and paid off the 32 acres. So that land became ours right there, right then, no loans. And that was amazing. We were able – So we bought the land. Now that we have 32 acres, then we started having events

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over there and letting people come and see the land that we bought. People were still skeptical about the idea. And I do remember that. Some people were saying, “Why do we need that much land?” Or, “What’s the purpose?” And I guess people were being – were

mistaken. They thought that we were buying land for another masjid. And that's not true. Again, Memphis Islamic Center. It was a center. It was supposed to – it's supposed to be the umbrella of the masajids, the center for not just worship, but the center for fun, activities, for youth, for adults, for children. It's supposed to be a center for everyone. Then, the ideas came for not just what it's supposed to look like, and people started having ideas, "Oh, we want a swimming pool," or "We want a basketball court. We want a gym." And the ideas started pouring, and people started really liking the idea.

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Then – I'm trying to think – That's the – Oh, yeah. The purchase of the land. And then, when we finally – Now, getting into the law of the land, I guess, finally actually getting the – I don't know if it's the permit. What was it? My dad talked about this. I'm sure he did. But, when we actually – Oh, yeah. When we became the official organization called the Memphis Islamic Center, that was on April 18, which is my mom's birthday. And I remember, because they had to have a meeting with the lawyer, and Dr. Bashar was unavailable that day. I think he was out of town or something. And he was going to be our chairman. He is currently our chairman, but at that time he was going to be our chairman. And so, my dad had to be the interim chairman, the standing chairman, for the meeting, so that we could become officially the Memphis Islamic Center.

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And I remember that because it was my mom's birthday. We were supposed to go out to eat for dinner. But, ahand Allah, something better happened, and my dad instead, went to the meeting with the lawyer, with Brother Ali, and I don't remember who else was at the meeting. But, that's when they signed the official contract, and that's when we officially became the Memphis Islamic Center.

Interviewer: So –

Anmol Khan: 2006? 2005? I think it was 2005.

Interviewer: So what year would that be when the community center actually came to be?

Anmol Khan: I think – and I'm not 100 percent sure – I think it was in 2009.

Interviewer: Okay. So, regarding MIC, what did it mean to you

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now? Like even though that we've built so much already?

Anmol Khan: What does MIC mean to me now?

Interviewer: Exactly.

Anmol Khan: I have to think about that. MIC is still the dream that I share with my father. It's a place – it's a community center. It's a place for me. It's a place for the future. It's not limited to a masjid. It is more than that. It's a place to make new friends. It's a place to dream. It's a place to worship Allah in your own peaceful sanctity. It's a place to hold events, like blood drives that I've had [Laughs] over there. It's a place to hold – it's a place for children.

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It's a place for summer camp. We have a lot of memories with the youth. And it's a place to play soccer outside, even though the girls don't get to play that much. [Laughter] They don't mention that. [Laughs] No, MIC is beautiful. I think we're very lucky that we actually have a pond in the back yard, as well, and the picnic shelters, because sometimes my friends and I would just like to have a picnic over there. So, the masjid is not just limited to, "Okay. I'm coming to pray at _____, or I'm coming to pray at _____ and I'm leaving." No, you get to stay. You can stay. You can enjoy your lunch. There's a playground. There's a basketball court. There's soccer goals over there. It's not limited. And that's what the beauty is. [Laughs] One thing I think is so funny – I have to say this – I love that they do not segregate the men from the

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women. We are only segregated during prayer. And that's the most important. And that's understandable because of the prostrations and the movements. But, during lecture, during the _____, the men and women – we have TV screens. We – the men are still behind the women – I mean, sorry. The women are still behind the men, but we're still part of the conversation. I can see Sheik Yasir when he's giving the _____ or the sermons on Fridays. I can see him. And I feel like he is talking to me and I am learning from him directly. It's not – And there's no wall that comes in between. I like being – I feel like I am part of this

masjid, and this masjid has accepted me, and understands me. And there's one entrance, not because we cannot handle – we can handle men and women coming from the same door. Because you have

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a father coming in with his little daughter, holding their hands, walking in together. He's not gonna drop off his daughter at a different entrance, and he's gonna go from a different entrance. No. They walk in together. You have families. You have a husband, a wife, and their baby, and another toddler, and another child walking in together through the same door into MIC, going in, not only to pray, – sorry – not only going in to pray, but also maybe go to break their fast or maybe to go and drop them off for a karate class, or maybe for a lecture, or a lecture on – for family, or anything, for a craft organization – a craft fair that they're doing for the kids, or a school for the children. They're walking in as a family together. So why do we have to have two separate entrances for women

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and men when it's a family organization? This organization is for family. And that's one of the best things that I love about it. I go in – I enter the masjid and I leave the masjid through the same doors. And that, to me, is really, really important. I think it's really funny that some people just don't understand that. But that's part of life. We live in America where – it's not about equality. It's about family. It's about, if I'm walking in with my son, I'm not going to walk in separately and make sure that – how do I know he got to the prayer hall? How do I know that – I don't know. That doesn't make any sense. But I think it's important, having one entrance for family, because that's what the organization is for. It's for your family.

Interviewer:

Well said. With that being said, actually, what is the major difference between MIC and other community centers around here?

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Anmol Khan:

Other masajids?

Interviewer:

Other community centers in America, actually.

Anmol Khan: Oh, in America.

Interviewer: Yes.

Anmol Khan: It's hard to say, 'cause I haven't traveled all over America, and I don't know other community centers. But from where I have traveled and what I do know, is that MIC is very accepting. Believe it or not, the board – I know it sounds crazy – but the board and people who have worked behind the scenes to make what MIC is today, are – they work very hard. They work without pay. They work without praise. They work for the sake of Allah. And they are very open to your opinions. If you have a suggestion, if you have a concern, if you have an issue, if you have a comment, if you have a positive comment or a negative comment, they're willing to listen. And they're – many, many times

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they have had town hall meetings, and many times they have asked the community, "What do you want? What more can we do for you?" What organization bends down – and mind you, all these people who are on the board, especially the five people who are the main founding members of the board of MIC, they all have professional jobs. They all work. They all have a life. They all have a family that they have to take care of. Dr. Bashar, who is our chairman, is a cardiologist. My dad works at FedEx, and he's been working there for the past 40 years, [Laughs] more than 30 years. Brother Yousef Saleh, he also has a job as a civil engineer. Brother Ali also works at FedEx. Dr. Ziman is a pulmonologist. They all have jobs. They currently are – they worked for MIC, not as a side job, but as a passion that they have, because this is something that they believe in.

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And they're doing it without pay, but only for the sole pleasure of Allah. So, to me, this organization is not about money. It's not about people. It's not about praise. It's about building a future for the next generation of Muslim Americans. And that's the vision that these people have on the board, and the people of MIC have. And that's how I feel – that's what I feel is different about this board. And this masjid, this center, MIC, Memphis Islamic Center is different from the others, because they're vision is not short term, it's long term. And it's not limited to my grandchildren, your grandchildren. It's far beyond that. And it's for a greater cause, a greater usage so that the kids can maintain their identity as

Muslim Americans in the future.

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Interviewer: Talking about younger Muslims in the community, do you have any advice you'd like to share with them for any aspiring people coming up?

Anmol Khan: So, advice for the young adults.

Interviewer: Yes.

Anmol Khan: Life is hard. It's not always gonna be easy. But that doesn't necessarily mean that it's wrong. Islam is the best thing that's ever gonna happen to you. I'm so emotional. This is so weird.
[Laughs]

Interviewer: With that being said, do you have any advice for young Muslims like ourselves?

Anmol Khan: Advice for the young kids, yeah. Advice for the youth. I would say life is struggle,

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and yes, it is hard. But you're blessed. You get to be a part of different cultures. But the best part is your best friend could be the same, from different cultures. But the main thing is you're Muslim, and Islam, whether you believe it or not, is a very beautiful religion. Whether you know that now or later, you will come to find that Islam gives you so much freedom, and wants you to learn. Allah cares for you. The prophet _____ cares for you. And with Islam on your side, you can practically do anything. You're not limited to anything. Anyone telling you otherwise doesn't know how beautiful Islam is. And if you're doubting yourself,

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all you gotta do – all you have to do is just stop and talk to God. That's it. It's not rocket science. It doesn't take a lot of energy, or it doesn't take a lot of time. But if you're confused, if you're not sure what to do just ask Allah. "I don't know what I'm doing with my life." He will guide you, and he will help you. I've seen that many, many times in my life, that Allah has always been there for me. And yes, it is hard, and no, life is not a bed of roses. In fact,

the roses have thorns. But, you do learn from it. Learn from those experiences. Learn from the people who are trying to tell you and give you advice. Learn from their experiences, because, believe it or not, they've been there. They've done it. They've felt it. They understand

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it. I can understand some of the struggles that you guys go through, that it's hard. Some of the struggles you go through in school, some of the struggles you go through with friends, parents. At the masjid, not wanting to be judged, parents not understanding you. School's so hard. Nobody knows. It's so difficult. But, believe it or not, I understand that, 'cause I was there, and I did that. And it wasn't too long ago. No, it's not easy. But talk to us. And let us talk to and tell you how we got through it. And don't be shy to ask. Don't be afraid to learn more about your religion. Don't be afraid to learn more about yourself. Don't be afraid to learn about other people. Sometimes you have to fall to get up. And I know that's a cliché. But,

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when life puts you on your knees, that's the best time to pray. And it really is. I know it's really cliché, but it really is. Sometimes you won't even know how your prayers are gonna be answered. Sometimes it's frustrating. Sometimes you just want to give up, but don't. That's my advice. Don't ever give up. Never give up the struggle. Never give up Islam. Hold it tightly. You're going to be tested. It's going to be hard. But trust yourself, trust in Allah, hold onto Islam. Believe me, the path is easy and clear. It appears – appearances are hard. It appears like a struggle. And you will go through a struggle. And it will be –

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it will be difficult. But if you maintain yourself as a Muslim, you do your bare minimum, even if it is just the bare minimum. But you do your best, and you hold onto Islam, _____, and that's it, you won't have a problem. After the struggle comes ease. After the waterfall there's a calm and peaceful stream. After the darkness, through the tunnel, there's always light. I know it's a cliché. But _____, it is so true. But don't rest, because after you've seen the light, after the calming waters, there are more waterfalls. There are more rocks in the way. But that doesn't mean that you can't get

through it. You just need to know how. Learn from the experiences of others. And

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try. Never give up. Always try. That's what I would say.

Interviewer:

Thank you for advice. It's – Thank you for advice. Is there anything else you would like to share with us before we wrap up here?

Anmol Khan:

Is there anything else I'd like to say? I – I would like to say that I am very thankful for you guys for having me here and allowing me to share my story. It's not much of a story, but ahand Allah, I am blessed to be in Memphis, born and raised in Memphis, which sometimes can be a drag. But, ahand Allah, I'm really glad to be a part of many organizations in Memphis, to grow up here, and to watch my teachers, the younger kids growing up – such as yourself – which is kind of neat to see.

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And just the flourish – the flourishing – Oh, yes. I'd like to say this. I'd like to say how awesome it is to see how Islam has flourished in Memphis, and how much it has spread over the years. I'm only 26. I haven't seen as much – I've seen half as much as what my parents have seen. But through the years that I've been here, all of my life, it's amazing to see how Islam has grown in Memphis. It's being recognized. In **Muslim in March**, you have converts coming all the time. People are turning to Islam constantly. You have a large generation. There's so many people in your generation now, compared to when I was around, and then compared to when my sister was growing up. *[Laughs]* Her generation was very small. Mine was a little bit larger. And yours is extremely large. You don't even – you get a choice, ahand Allah. And, the fact that the thirst for Islam is there. People are hungry for Islam. People want to learn

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more. I want to learn more. The knowledge is there. And with people wanting to learn more knowledge, Allah provides. Allah provides you. We, ahand Allah, are so blessed to have Sheik Yasir, so, so blessed. Sheik Yasir is one of those beacons of light that we have. And with him we also have other scholars here in Memphis. And it's amazing to me how when people ask for

knowledge, Allah just gives it to them. And that's what happened to Memphis, ahand Allah. Pretty cool. *[Laughs]*

Interviewer: I agree. On the behalf of our program here at Rhodes, I'd like to thank you for your time.

Anmol Khan: Thank you for having me.

[End of Audio]