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Interviewee: Naseem Khan

Interviewer: Uzair Ahmed

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Notes:

Translator: Saad Khalid (Rhodes College, '18)

[0:00]

UA: Asalamoalaikum. My name is Uzair Ahmed. Today is Tuesday, July 15th, and on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Aspire 2014, Rhodes College, and all other partners, we would like to thank you for doing the interview. So please, can you tell us a bit about yourself.

Khan: Bismillahirrahman Niraheem [In the name of Allah, the beneficent and merciful]. Asalamoalaikum. My name is Naseem Khan, and I'm from Pakistan. I've been here 1977, and I have two girls, alhumdullilah, and I do my social work in Memphis. It been more than 20 years. I was Shura member Masjid Salam.

[1:00]

2003-2010 Ghalat he yeh. Mehne nou sal kiye [That isn't right, I did it for 9 years]. 2003, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Saath saal kiye [That's seven years]. Yeah

Someone else: Uzair ko daikhye janaab [Speak towards Uzair Miss].

Khan: I do social work for nine years.

Ahmed: Ah, okay. When did you come to Memphis and why?

Khan: I came from Pakistan. My husband live here and still come here.

Ahmed: Oh. What was Memphis like when you got here?

Khan: We don't have. Uh. It's very few people live here at that time, maybe 8 or 9 family, who don't have any halal food here,

[2:00]

and don't have any mosque here. Nobody knows- when Ramadan comes where we're going to go and pray, and then, *Alhamdulillah*, we have doctor's money, Dr. Moinuddin, brother *Akhbik*. They're all big people, they come here, and then, they make it happen. *To hear* for where we are going to pray, Namaz, and Ramadan. *Alhamdulillah*. That time was-- we don't have anything.

Ahmed: So what did you think of the Muslim Community here in Memphis when you came?

Khan: Very few people live here, and they're all busy on their own

[3:00]

so social thing is nothing here. No social life here. So, you don't feel like to where-- I come here from Pakistan, and very good environment for Muslims, and my parents, my in-laws, they're ready involved in the deen [religion]. So when I come here, is, don't feel like to stay here. So I decide, I told my husband, I don't want to stay here. Because nothing here. So Alhamdulillah* , slowly slowly, we're growing up here, *Masha'Allah*, and finally, we have *Masjid Salam*. Now we have MIC for us, and for our whole community, for our grandkids, and

[4:00]

Insha'Allah everybody's grandkids are going to be here. MIC is a big part for our community. And before *I was a Sura member* I was always having a big role in *Masjid Salam*

Ahmed: What do you remember about the founding of Memphis Islamic Center?

Khan: Dr. Usmani, Dr. Moinuddin,* Dr. Akhbik, Dr. Dalawari*, We were Shia and Sunni, all together, there's no difference. We *pray* together, and they put their self in there and found a very very old house to be a *Masjid*

[5:00]

Alhamdulillah and we start going to take kids over there. The children read the Quran. We have prayer over there. Five times we pray. And we don't have any Imam. *All the other people who come and who the Imam*, but we are all together and very happy. Finally, we have something to do our religion, pray together. Then, we have lots of picnics like 50-60 people, we have a picnic. And I have a picture, Dr. Usmani and Dr. Moinuddin, they're playing cricket, and brother Adel [UNSURE] also has a big role in Masjid Salam, yes.

Ahmed: So you said that you worked at, that you were a part of the Shura for the Masjid Salam*

[6:00]

What did you do when you were a part of it?

Khan: I was social secretary of woman. So, I tried to help with our ladies, with issues or with problems, and also, for one time, we, in the beginning of this Masjid Salam everyone have a party in their home. So Ramadan come, here's a party, and everybody go, and nobody go to *Masjid*. And Tarawi [prayer during Ramadan] would only have one or two lines so then decided...Ah *I remember in my home, I say* so let's do a potluck dinner. So we decided to have potluck dinner, bring one dish each. So we are about 35 people so we bring the food into *Masjid Salam*, and the Mashallah [thanks be to God] we have ladies praying, kids are there, and the men are there after then *read* the Quran

[7:00]

after the *iftar* we read the Quran, and then have *Tarawih* and then, go home. The last ten days, *and home.* The last ten days, we come to *masjid salam* stay late nights, reading Quran, *have some Nufil [prayer]*. Dr. Usmani lead, teach us, lead us very well. *Dr. Aqbiq*, Dr. Moinudd in, and Dr. Usmani *they will have a piece of Janna [heaven]*. So is a good leader and a good teacher for our life.

Ahmed: What were some of the specific programs you did when you were a part of the Shura? Like can you name any programs?

Khan: Yes, I have—That time some afghani family came, they are refugees.

[8:00]

They have a home to stay, but very poor place, and they have nothing else to do. And we heard about it, the church take them to the—church people and take them to church and yeah that was really sad so I talked to our Shura. So I took the lead and we have a brother of Abdul Rahman, and he have van so went with him, talked with them, and promised with them that he was going to pick up the kids, bring *them to masjid salam*, take them to Pleasant view school on Sunday. They learn about Islam and Quran, and the children were very *small*, and our community also helped a lot, *that is* our community talked with them. So they help me to *release them*

[9:00]

help them out. They need clothes, they need shoes, they need food. So we buy the food and give it to them. Deliver them.

Ahmed: So they had a Sunday School at Pleasant View School?

Khan: Yes

Ahmed: Oh Okay. Like, were there any other programs?

Khan: Yes, this is the afghani family. Then, we had refugees from Somalia also. Mukaram was here at that time. So I went to Mukaram.

Ahmed: Who is Mukaram?

Khan: Mukaram, he used to live in Memphis, and now, he moved to Chicago. He take me to *Usmani* family. They have one family. They have three girls. They are blind lady, girls, young girls. So, it is very sad, but I don't know their language. But I took other people, talked with them, they come to the *Masjid Salam*. So, I went to my

[10:00]

Friends, told them they should help, they help me so I release them, whatever they need, and they do it then.

Ahmed: So, were there any other programs, like not, like activities?

Khan: Activities? We have lots of times, picnics, like two times in a year. Whole community picnic. We're all together Alhamdulillah*, and I coordinate all the picnics and bring them. And I have garage sale. Yes. Anybody need help. Like Pleasant View School need help for their fundraiser, and picnic, any program, hundred *percent* with them and help them out whatever I could for sake

[11:00]

of Allah. Masjid Noor. And I have—I did couple hours of people for the wedding help and Malik Shah and Imam Musood and brother Ibrahim. When they get married, help them out. Anybody need any help, I am ready to help all the time. And I am very happy. What I do, I really do for sake of Allah and am very pleased to help the community.

Ahmed: So what was the garage sale like? Were you the only one who did it or was it like--?

Khan: I'm in charge for garage sale. I collect people's home clothes, and at *Masjid Salam* we have a garage, we fill the garage with the stuff. We have

[12:00]

two time garage sale. And *Masha'Allah*, we make pretty good money out of it.

Ahmed: How else were you involved in the Muslim Community?

Khan: Anybody need any help to... Masjid Taqwah. I help Masjid Taqwah too.

Ahmed: How though?

Khan: like *Masjid Salam* and they come here and talk to us, brothers of Zuman also at that time were there too, and talk to us and what to do and I take care that coordinator work. So they need money for the Masjid so that's what we help them out.

Ahmed: So why do you want to help the community?

Khan: Why I do the helping? Because I like to do that. I like to help the people for sake of Allah. This community is my family.

[13:00]

I can't live without them no matter what.

Ahmed: We are going to talk a little bit about MIC now. What was your reaction when your husband told you that they had the idea of making MIC?

Khan: In my home, on the dinner table, Dr. Yasir Qadhi was sitting and talking about [UNSURE]. Whenever Dr. Yasir Qadhi come for any class, *al maghrib* class, so I honor him to come to my home and then we sit down and talk about it. When he left, they all crying. *Doctor Usman*, brother Bashir Shala, brother Iqbal, brother *Ari*, they all crying. He gonna come. He gonna come here and stay. And *Inshala*, he say, yes I will come. And they all so excited and very happy.

[14:00]

So, we are lucky to have Yasir Qadhi to come in Memphis. Memphis is his home. And we are lucky. Since he come here. *Masha'Allah [LANGUAGE]. Our kids. Our youth. Our families. *Masha'Allah*. It's so different. When I come here, I didn't see nothing. And now, it is so much different *Masha'Allah*. Because of sake of Allah. What he did, we are lucky. May Allah help him. Because of him, we are growing at a good path, direction is so good.

Ahmed: So, what does MIC mean to you?

Khan: A lot. It's my home. I have dreams when they are talking about

[15:00]

MIC. I see Allah gave me a life. *This part's* life. I can bring my grandkids to walk with them to MIC. *Alhamdulillah* life. I see prayer over there. And Tarawi and [UNSURE]. My husband is a board member. And *Alhamdulillah*. And I do whatever can do, even have to clean, anything do anything, for sake of Allah. I will do it. I'm happy to do it. Nobody force me to do it. It's my heart. I want to do it.

Ahmed: What are some of the activities or programs you have done at MIC?

Khan: Every year we have *Masha'Allah*, Ramadan, Aftari dinners, so *Masha'Allah* we have so many good sponsor. I make a calendar

[16:00]

of Ramadan, *a calendar people sponsored by*, I do coordinator to make sure everybody have good food and nobody go hungry and I do my best to work. And I'm very happy, very happy, to do it.

Ahmed: So you started the iftar dinners over at *Masjid Salam*?

Khan: Uh huh. There were 35 people. I remember that.

Ahmed: So how many people come nowadays like?

Khan: Masha'Allah. Weekends I would say 300. Last sunday, we have about 450 *Masha'Allah*

Ahmed: *Masha'Allah*

Khan: Every day like 150-200 people, Monday through Thursday. Friday, Saturday, Masha'Allah, is pretty good group, Masha'Allah. Now Suhoor is coming, and last Suhoor, we have about 300 people.

[17:00]

Ahmed: So, [WHISPERS] we know you're a part of the philanthropy committee? What do you do as a part of that?

Khan: I've been doing long time, long time, for the needy family. There's, mashallah, so many Muslim people here, but they never come to you. You have to come to find them. They never ask anything. You have to find them. So I find about three years ago, one lady, her husband passed away, she had three small children. Find out they had no blankets. They're sleeping on the floor. Husband passed away,

[18:00]

he was sick. She sell her jewelry to buy medicine. In a couple of days, the children are very—they have no food in the house. They went some neighbor's door and asked them can I clean your garbage. So well, I shouldn't have said that, but when I find out, so I jump on it. I *reach her*, find her, meet her in the library. *When I'm in the library* talk to her, want to make sure is right person. And then, *test them* Alhumdullilah, they have a bed, blanket, they have a food in the house. Mash'Allah, the children are grown up, Alhamdulillah. And there are so many families. I find that this year. And it's broke heart. It's broken my heart to see that. And I try my best to help them out. I think more than, more than

[19:00]

about 30 families. I teach already a lot. And then I'm going to do this more. *Insha'Allah*.

Ahmed: How do you balance your community work with your family?

Khan: Say that again.

Ahmed: How do you balance your community work with your family?

Khan: How I balance it?

Ahmed: Does it like sort of ever, come into your family plans, like you were going to do something at MIC but you have to go somewhere with family before or does that ever happen?

Khan: I don't understand actually.

Ab upna sara jo community ke leyeh kam jo karthi hehn, abh upne family ke sath kese balance kurthi hehn. [How do you balance all the work you do for the community with your family?]

Khan: Okay, yes. I make time. I make time for my home.

[20:00]

I don't have small kids so I have time for my community. My community is my family. So no matter what, I make time. And *Allah will help me Insha'Allah*. As long I live, I will do kind things.

Ahmed: So where do you see MIC ten years from now?

Khan: *Insha'Allah, Insha'Allah I see Insha'Allah* we be in very good hands, Allah's hand, and it's gonna be beautiful. Because we are growing. We are growing a lot, Mash'Allah, and the people is good. Memphis people are very nice, nice, good, people. Big-hearted people. So

Insha'Allah, next ten years, if *I'm* alive and I will see. I will see good things, lots of good things, Insha'Allah.

Ahmed: [UNSURE]

Khan: MIC is a good hand

[21:00]

MIC is a good hand people, Insha'Allah, yes, and Allah help them.

Ahmed: Would you like to say anything else?

Ahmed: So what is that you are holding?

Khan: I have this plaque for--they gave me, *Masjid Salam*, for social work I did. *Masjid Salam* that time Brother Husain he honored me with this plaque.

Ahmed: So--

Other: Can you hold it up for just a second?

Ahmed: So what is that in your hand?

Khan: This is, small jar, and I was thinking about--about making money for the Masjid, for MIC. We used to pray *Germantown Center*.

[22:00]

So we don't have land yet. So I thought. I'm not a doctor, but I start little pennies so I buy jars and put MIC, *MIC* Mosque, and *MIC* Address. I give it to all my friends, people's homes, all that restaurant, stores. I give it to them empty, and whenever you have change, you put it in there. Everyday, put one dollar for your family, you go out, for sake of Allah, to come home safe, give to [Sadkah], one dollar. Whatever change you have, you fill it up. I collect the money. Everybody's home, it was this much pile up.

Ahmed: Wow

Khan: Take me, with the kids, all the kids I know at my home. Take

[23:00]

at least, month, to put *on* the coins on the paper. So we took that to bank, and then, make a dollar. And then, I have a garage sale, for Masjid Salam, for MIC. So all together I make 10,000 dollars

Ahmed: Wow

Khan: And I give it to MIC. This for the whole community, it's not for me. I just work. I just *worked hard* on my work *as to* the whole community help me to do this. So I can serve them, it's a small token from me.

Ahmed: So what advice would you give to future leaders doing social services in the community like you do?

Khan: You have to have a big heart. You have to have lots of patience.

[24:00]

And always *smile* your face. These the people—talk to them, talk to them, find out what they have inside, but don't let anybody interfere you about these things. Sit down, talk to them, how they feel about you, how they live, what they do. Help them out. You will see how you feel inside. Inside you feel so good. You help the people. They need your help. You are here, you have to go and *reach* them. Insha'Allah, you will be feel good. What you do. Insha'Allah.

Ahmed: So would you like to add anything else to that?

Khan: I think I say a lot.

Ahmed: Okay, thank you for making time to meet with us today.

Khan: Thank you for

[25:00]

inviting me. I'm really proud of you what you guy's doing it.

Ahmed: Thank you

Khan: You can do same thing *what* other people do. And, Insha'Allah, we will make MIC. Insha'Allah. Allah will make a MIC

Ahmed: [UNSURE]

Khan: We are just little soldier. *Insha'Allah* [Asalamoalaikum]

[25:24]

[END]