

URBAN MUSLIMS

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Urban Muslims is a newsletter created by MSA Northwest with the aim of becoming a resource and outlet for Muslim youth across the Northwest to reflect upon relevant issues that are affecting the Muslim society today. This newsletter serves to unify, educate and enlighten its readership. We hope you find this first issue and future newsletters to be both enjoyable and beneficial.

- The *Urban Muslims* Editorial Team

Get Results by Being Politically Active by Jamal Khan

I would like to thank all of you who are reading my article, and this newsletter, right now, because the simple act of reading this newsletter shows that you are politically active—an interest that is essential for forging a better future for us, and for our future generations in this country. I would like to devote this article to advance just that goal; creating a politically active American Muslim community.

Why is this so important? Well, let's take a look at the stories covering American Muslims in the news today. Former House speaker, Newt Gingrich, is calling for a federal law to establish that sharia may not be recognized by any court. As of right now, Oklahoma has passed such a law with Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah also proposing the banning of sharia law (this preemptive measure clearly implies that Muslims in America are planning to force sharia on American society—a ridiculous claim that evokes unwarranted fear). The big story last year, 70% of Americans oppose the building of Park51, the Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan, because they believe it is insensitive to build a mosque that close to ground zero. And finally, the ongoing accusation by conservatives that President Obama is a "secret



Muslims meet their local congressman in Olympia at Muslims Day at the Capitol 2010
Photo: © Faisal Aminy, 2010

Muslim," without them having to explain why being a Muslim is a crime in itself.

Our "unpopularity" reminds me of another group who went through the same discrimination not too long ago; Jewish Americans. Just before WWII, private schools, camps, colleges, resorts, and places of employment all imposed restrictions and quotas against Jews. In major cities, attacks on young Jews were commonplace. Islamophobia today seems to be on track to reach the kind of acceptance Anti-Semitic

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Success at UW Islamic House Fundraising Dinner by Fereshta Noman

Last month, MSA UW (Muslim Student Association at the UW) held a fundraising dinner at the Old Redmond Schoolhouse to raise money for the UW Islamic House, a center of worship and religious events for Muslim students in the area. Tickets for the dinner were \$15 for adults. The goal of the dinner was to raise enough money to stabilize and restore the Islamic House to better serve the community.

"We needed a fundraiser because we needed to finish off some repairs and make necessary renovations so that the house serves the Muslim students and the

general community to the highest of its potential," said Ahsen Nadeem, Islamic House Director. "The Islamic House is really a place by the students, for the students," said Siraj Ul Haq, MSA Treasurer.

The Islamic House fundraising dinner included speaker Sheikh Al-Bakri who gave an eloquent speech about the importance of giving in Islam as well as other topics. He also helped auction fundraising efforts for the Islamic House. By the end of the night, the program raised a generous amount of money, exceeding their goal.

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Get Results by Being Politically Active (continued)

beliefs held just a few decades ago. Luckily, we can combat Islamophobia just like American Jews fought Anti-Semitism 70 years ago.

Soon after WWII, the American Jewry successfully created a voting bloc; one that would vote for the most pro-Israel candidate. This led to a sort of arms race between the Democrats and the Republicans; with both of them offering successively more pro-Israel policies. Eventually, this resulted in President Truman recognizing the establishment of the State of Israel. One of the ways in which Jews in

America achieved all of this, was by creating and working through multiple organizations to lobby their case. In order for us to fight discrimination, we must also do the same. We must join organizations like Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). We must support them by registering to vote, registering with the organization, and donating generously. Only then can they demand changes in domestic as well as U.S. foreign policy. If we can make this minimal effort, our children's future will be that much more secure.

(Citations) http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-12-09-shariaban09_ST_N.htm
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexp.htm>

Smith, Charles D. Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Success at IH Fundraising Dinner (continued)



Islamic House Directors Naima Idris and Ahsen Nadeem present during the fundraiser.
 Photo: Gaya Rakhim

"Our goal was to \$101,000 and Alhumdulillah we raised \$110,000 (in pledges)...we still need to collect the money," said Nadeem.

The Islamic House has been running at UW for more than 30 years but has always been in need of renovation since the contractor had discontinued working on it. Since 2000, the building has been slowly improving with the little fund it has received from the community. Nonetheless, a lot of reconstruction is still needed, according to volunteers and students who use the facility.

"Ten years ago the building was in shambles, but over the years, MSA members have organized fundraisers and, with the help of the community, transformed it into the beautiful MashAllah that it is today," said Ul Haq. "Our hope is to put the finishing touches on this process of revitalization and finally realize the true potential of the Islamic House as a community center for Muslim students here at the UW."

Volunteers of all backgrounds and ages came together to help organize the event. Mosaab Zaki, a third-year student from Shoreline Community College, volunteered to usher and set up at the event.

"For as long as I can remember, helping people out has been a passion of mine," said Zaki. "I seek out opportunities where I can especially help out my fellow Muslim brothers and sisters."



Left: Attendees enjoying the IH fundraiser dinner. over 150 people attended the dinner, with \$110,000 raised in pledges.
 Photo: Gaya Rakhim



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The Pilgrimage by Maryam Soomro



Masjid al-Haram during Hajj

Photo: © 2007-2011 ~VeeSquared

We all know why hajj is important, and why it is necessary for every Muslim. However, many of us don't know what actually transpires during the performing of hajj.

This year about 3 million people are expected to make the pilgrimage.

We should all keep in mind that the basic purpose of Hajj is to establish the remembrance of Allah. To perform hajj means that we have to leave all our worldly things behind and focus on Allah. The actual hajj is three days long, but the overall process takes much longer.

To perform the hajj, most hajjis arrive a few days before the actual hajj begins. The first part is called *ihram*. This is a state that hajjis enter by cleansing themselves and donning the *ihram* garments. Before arriving at the holy city, Muslims remove all their worldly clothes and dress in this humble attire for hajj. Men wear two seamless white sheets, while women wear a simple white dress with a hijab. These white garments symbolize human equality and unity before Allah. After wearing the *ihram*, the hajjis are not allowed to wash or bathe, have sexual relations, kill insects or

animals, or remove any hair from the body until the hajj is completed.

After arriving in Mecca, all Muslims performing hajj are required to perform the Umrah which is on the 7 of Dhul-Hijjah, also an essential part of hajj. During this stage, the hajjis circumambulate the Kabah in a process called *tawaf*. All this time the people are stating "Labbayka Allahu Labbayk," which means, "Here I am at your service, O God, Here I am!" *Tawaf* is meant to awaken each Muslim's consciousness that Allah is the most important thing in this world – He is the one who gave us life, and He is the one we all will answer to in the end.

The 8 day of Dhul-Hijjah is the first official day of hajj. On this day all the people travel a few miles to Mina and stay there for the night. There was a time when the hajjis would ascend the Rahma Mountain, but in the modern days only a small amount of people actually get to do that.

The next morning, the pilgrims travel from Mina to the plain of Arafat where they spend the entire day praying. This is the day when the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received the verse from the Quran that said, "Today I have perfected your religion for you, and completed My grace upon you, and approved Islam as your religion." (Quran 5:3)

In Islam it is believed that any dua they make on this day will be answered. It is also said that when Allah forgives the sin of one servant at Arafat, He forgives everyone else there who is guilty of it as well. The same evening, the pilgrims move and camp at Muzdalifa, which is a place between Mina and Arafat. Several people walk the distance instead of taking the

bus. The hajjis stay there overnight and perform different prayers.

The morning of the 10 of Dhul-Hijjah begins with a khutba in Muzdalifa after which all the hajjis return to Mina again. When in Mina, the hajjis throw the seven stones – gathered the day before – at the jamra. This symbolizes how Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) threw stones at Satan when Satan tried to convince the prophet (pbuh) not to sacrifice his son for Allah. After the seven stones are thrown, the chanting of "Labbayka" is ended. This is the time when all the *Ihram* restrictions are lifted; everyone is allowed to wash, bathe etc. At this time, the men shave or trim the hair on their head, and everyone takes off their *Ihram* garments. This is when an animal is sacrificed by financially able Muslims. The meat is generally shared with the needy.

After the sacrifice, the pilgrims return to Mecca where they perform a final *Tawaf*, also known as *Tawaf-al-Ifada*. This is the time when hajj formally comes to an end.

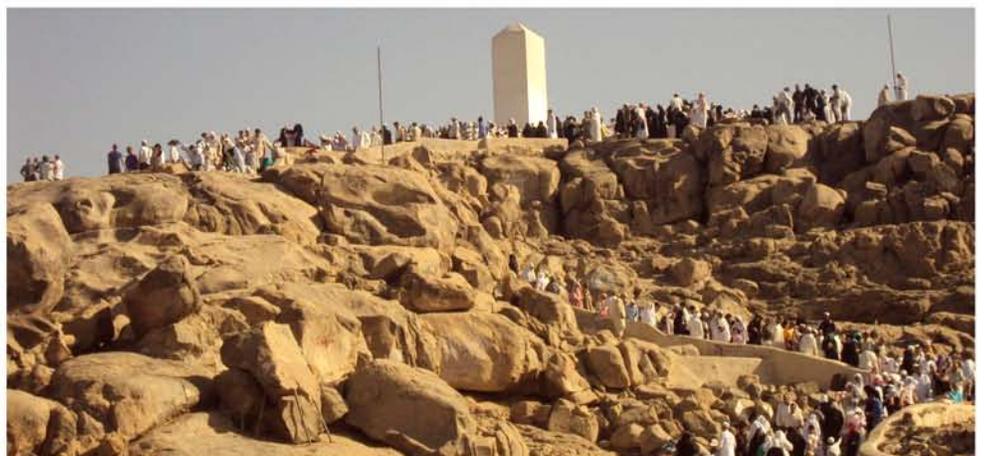
While the Muslims are there, many of them drink from the water of ZamZam, and perform two rakat prayer at Maqam Ibrahim. This is where Ibrahim (pbuh) and Ismael (pbuh) stood and prayed after building the Kabah.

The purpose of hajj is to become more devout and conscientious in one's practice of Islam. It is also an opportunity to seek forgiveness and start anew. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had said that a person who performs Hajj properly "will return as a newly born baby (free of all sins)." Performing the hajj is also a good way for Muslims all around the world to come together as one to worship Allah.

“ Hajj is an opportunity to seek forgiveness and start anew.”

Right: Pilgrims make their way up Mount Arafat. The level area surrounding the hill is called the Plain of Arafat. The term Mount Arafat is sometimes applied to this entire area. It is an important place in Islam because during the Hajj, pilgrims spend the afternoon there on the ninth day of Dhu al-Hijjah. Failure to be present in the plain of Arafat on the required day invalidates the pilgrimage. Many pilgrims stay here all night in vigil.

Photo: © Jamal Kaka



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Ayaan Hirsi Ali Visits Seattle by Fereshta Noman



(L to R): Mohja Kahf
(Photo: University of Arkansas),
Marie Fortune
(Photo: The Fig Tree),
Samia El-Moslimany
(Photo: Fouad Dehlawi)

A few hundred people gathered at The World Affairs Council's event in Seattle held September 29, titled "From Infidel to Nomad: A Conversation with Ayaan Hirsi Ali." Ali is an author, a feminist and a former Dutch Parliamentarian well known for her anti-Islamic rhetoric. One of her most controversial works, a short film entitled "Submission" included content that was considered highly offensive to many Muslims. Ali's controversial books, "Nomad" and its sequel, "Infidel" were discussed at the event. One explanation for the books' controversy is seen in an article by Andrew Anthony in *The Observer*. "In voicing her opinion in the style she does, she risks lumping together over a billion people from different nations, cultures and traditions as a single 'problem.'"

There was also a protest outside the City Hall organized by some local Muslims who were concerned about the World Affairs Council giving a platform to someone who is considered hateful and intolerant by many groups. The protest included many immigrants from East Africa as well as Muslim students and non-Muslims who were concerned about the issue of an academic organization giving a platform to what is argued by some to be hate speech.

Members of the Seattle Muslim community, in order to include a more objective and fair

approach to the Ayaan Hirsi Ali event, included the platform of Muslim and Non-Muslim speakers who were concerned about the structure of the event. The three speakers included Samia El-Moslimany, a local photographer and vice chair of Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Mohja Kahf, a Professor of Comparative Literature as well as a poet and author, and Marie Fortune, a Reverend at the local United Church of Christ. All three women discussed several topics including the meaning of Islam, encouraging coexistence between faiths, and they also talked about the history of religion and its evolution within different societies. After the lecture, the speakers dedicated some time to answering questions from the remaining audience that chose to stay and listen to both sides of the topic. Some members of the audience asked questions about the common misconceptions in Islam such as apostasy and violence in the Quran. The speakers addressed the questions well, although there was very little time given to elaborate on each topic. Nonetheless the event was able to hold a balanced platform after much criticism was given from the Islamic community in Seattle who were disappointed in the World Affairs Council for giving platform to an arguably Islamophobic speaker who – at the event – encouraged the conversion of Muslims to Christianity or Judaism.

Wisdom from the Qur'an and Hadith

Compiled by Amina Ramadan

'The true servants of the Most Merciful are those who behave gently and with humility on earth, and whenever the foolish quarrel with them, they reply with [words of] peace.'
(al-Furqan 25: 63)

'The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain, out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains.'
(al-Baqarah 2: 261)

Allah's Apostle said, "The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger."

(Narrated Abu Huraira; Volume 8, Book 73, Number 135)



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How do you think American Muslims are perceived in today's society?

Compiled by Kinza Zavary

"I don't know now, I mean it's been a while since something of a well since 9/11 and the big freak out with Muslims, but i still feel like they aren't accepted as much as other groups. Other religious groups have more of a set place here in America where Muslims are completely new to us which of course doesnt make sense because they have been here for so long" (Andrew Sophomore - UW)

"I don't care for Bin Laden or Al Qaidah or anyone that supports them" (Betsy - Senior - Seattle University)

"I think they're very friendly, the ones that I know, I think they're very friendly, very nice, warm, inviting, In the general community I think there's a bad perception, just for a simple fact that their views are being set by the media, and if there's a group of people that are not part of your own group you're more likely to not question the media and believe whatever they're throwing at you" (Tyrell - UW - Junior)

"I consider myself an American, Identity was never a big deal for me, but after 9/11, I felt like I was singled out like I was Muslim first and an American second. My American Identity is that Im an American Muslim. (Ahsen - Sophomore - UW)

"As American's we are a Melting Pot which suggests that we're all the same kind of cheese which is delicious but it's a blob, you know wherease a salad bowl is all these different things combined sort of like all these cultures and religions, and we as American Muslims want to be part of that salad bowl, also salad bowls are delicious" (Naima - UW Sophomore) and (Nisha - UW Freshman)

"America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings." (Pres. Barack Obama)

Photo: Time Magazine



MSAnw calendar of events

Newsletter submission Deadline:
Monday, Feb 7th

MsaNw Video Competition:
submission deadline:
Monday, Feb 14th
video competition:
Saturday, Feb 26th

MsaNw Conference:
Sat. and Sun., April 16th and 17th

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MSAnw Video Competition

Saturday, February 26 -
5:00pm - 9:00pm
Location Bellevue College

Submissions due
February 14th!

Two Different Paths

a poem by Dawood Ayub

Life is a gift from Allah.

Some learn to be thankful, some don't.

Some stop being appreciative, but you know I won't.

Some have never faced the struggles of life.

That's before, during and after you are married to your wife.

Some have faced the struggles and remain standing on both feet.

And others get a small taste of the struggles and give up.

There are those who were given everything from the start.

Never had to work hard for anything, and have the shallowest heart.

They have never felt how it is not to have anything,

So they are blind to the fact that nothing is guaranteed.

They are quick to judge others who work hard once they meet.

Then there are those who struggle and work hard for what they got,

Thankful to be alive another day, whether it's their last or not.

No one can relate to what they have been through,

Because no one has felt the same pain, some just pretend to.

I'm not a preacher, just writing what I see.

The truth hurts sometimes, so you can't judge me.

We arrived at the same destination,

But have taken two different routes.

Don't hate me because I have been through what I've been through,

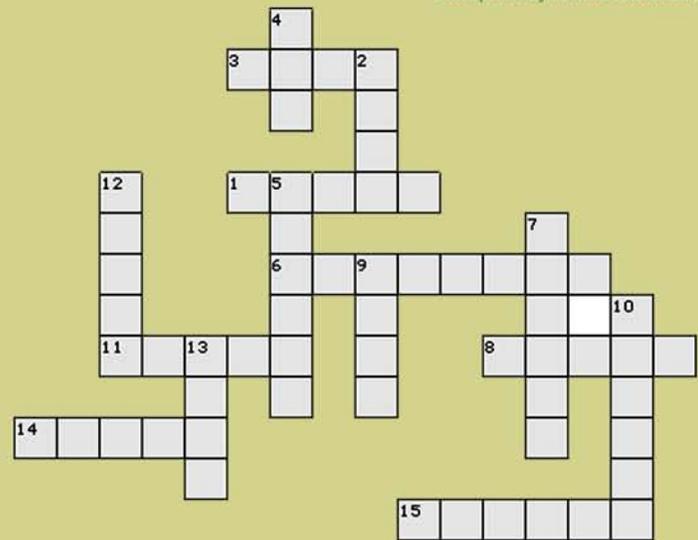
I write about my life, so there isn't anything you can relate to.

You can feel sympathetic and feel sad.

But I lived the life you have never had.

pilgrimage crossword puzzle

Compiled by Amina Ramadan



Across:

- Pilgrimage "threads", but no sewing involved.
- Shortened prayers, offered when on a journey.
- There's 3! Throw stones at them!
- The lower part of the threads.
- The stretch of land between Safa and Marwah.
- 7 times, in a circle.
- The start of every act of worship, including Hajj.

Down:

- The upper part of the threads.
- The act of going back and forth between Safa and Marwah.
- Plural pilgrims.
- A refreshing libation in the desert.
- Go 3 miles East of Makkah and you will end up here.
- The other tall twin sister.
- You go around the Kabah, so does this structure!
- She has a twin sister, and they are both very tall.

An Open Letter to That One Costco Lady by Haris Ahmad

Dear old wrinkly Costco lady (Bertha? I think...),

You are one of the sweetest, cutest ladies I have ever had the pleasure of receiving a free sample of cheese from. I mean, sure you mumble things even when no one is listening, and that's kind of creepy. But I don't mind. And yeah, you're super slow at putting toothpicks in all the samples...like RIDICULOUSLY slow, but it's all good; like Tupac said, "I ain't mad at ya." And sure you give me a glare that is OH, so cold, when I come back for seconds, but what gives me the right?

But dear Costco lady, if I may oblige, please take the time to think about the really really REALLY stupid things you say. If I recall, you were baking a pizza, and as per usual, having quite a hard time cutting out the slices. It was a thin crust pizza, but that's neither here, nor there. We engaged in our usual banter of you not acknowledging me when I said, "Thank you," but I understood. I was clearly a hooligan, bent on showing society that I knew better. I asked you if there was any pork in the pizza, and you shook your leathery (leathery in a good way) head, 'No.' As I took a big fat rebel hooligan bite, I could not help but taste something...different. I came back to you and asked, "Are you sure there's no pork in this? Because I taste some sort of meat."

Your reply: "Oh, that's just the bacon."

Was this some sick joke, or were you just ignorant? I'm sorry I've tried to be nice and respectful, but I'm kind of cheesed (pizza pun, ftw). Let it be known that: Pork = Pig, Bacon = Pig, ERGO: BACON = PORK!!! To add insult to injury, you started scolding me, that I should have asked about bacon, specifically. Well, now that I know you and all your old, leathery, Costco-sample-serving-ladies are out to get me, I will be more careful next time.

Signed,

The really paranoid guy who can never again carelessly enjoy Costco samples, because now he thinks everything might have pork in it. ❤️

Muslimah Contribution to Fashion by Nora Hayati

From Michael Kors to Yves Saint Laurent, the runways of many designers this past year featured a rather anachronistic piece in their spring and summer collections. Models were swathed substantially in pants that featured cinched bottoms and drooping crotches. Known commonly as the harem pant, they were hitherto rarely seen publicly (aside from MC Hammer and the occasional shalwar-wearer at Eid prayer of course). It is clear that the audacity of these designers is cunning; but for hijab and modest-wear adorners everywhere, this meant something else and had me shuffling through my closet for my very special flashy green tunbans that had awaited years to make a public appearance.

More importantly, however, is the choice of European fashion moguls to incorporate these Eastern pieces into both high culture and everyday wear. Harem pants are hardly the first instance, most everyone can remember the boom of keffiyeh-patterned scarves; tunics as well as caftans (also, chapan) have also made their place permanently in the shelves of western department stores. Gypsy skirts and maxi dresses make their way in and out of vogue periodically as well.

Peculiar as they may be, eastern clothing and design have erupted in popularity in the western world. This brings me to the larger point of the fashion industry's Oriental fixations. Even if this is manifestations of a fetish relating to the "mysterious" east, they have certainly led to more "modest" wear.

Echoes of historical events can be felt; women of the lower classes and women of European descent would don concealing clothing as imitations of elite women and practice purdah in the early centuries after the rise of Islam. Today, harem pants and the like may not be linked to social status as before, but certainly serve as a source of inspiration for trendsetters.

The obvious perpetrator of these trends is Paris, the fashion nucleus of the world; the same Paris that has banned the hijab in schools since 2004 and the niqab (face-veil) in public spaces since 2009. Coincidentally this is the same Paris that doesn't consider an outfit complete without a neck scarf. These repeated instances of Muslimah attire appearing as haute couture are signs of influence. Despite political occurrences that suggest the contrary, components of the hijab have seeped their way onto the runways and have made an unalterable impact.

“Despite political occurrences that suggest the contrary, components of the hijab have seeped their way onto the runways and have made an unalterable impact.”



The harem pant

Photo: © Grease & Glamour

The Thin Place by Amina Al-Sadi



Gbenga Akinngbe in *The Thin Place*

Photo: © Chris Bennion

The lights went down over the stage Friday night, May 21st 2010, as an eerie, low music began to reverberate through the Intiman Theater in downtown Seattle. Soon the sound of boards creaking and heavy, slow footsteps filled the room, as Gbenga Akinngbe, the play's main and only actor, walked down the large wooden planks that filled center stage. So begins the play "The Thin Place", a play

that takes the audience through the emotional journey of Isaac, a young boy, who is struggling to understand God, faith, and meaning in life. Along the way he meets 10 different characters who share their stories with him, stories of pain, suffering, love, confusion, weakness, strength, crisis and transformation as they themselves talk about the moments when they searched for and found faith.

The play is set in Seattle, and all the characters were based off of the real stories of real Seattle natives. Marcie Sillman, a Seattle reporter with KUOW radio (94.9 FM) conducted the interviews and Sonya Schneider, a local playwright, weaved them together into a script that was then directed by Andrew Russell, Intiman's new Associate Producer. Russell conceived the idea for the play after hearing Dan Savage (Seattle writer for *The Stranger*) discuss his struggles with faith on "This American Life". The idea to set it in Seattle

came from the reputation Seattle has garnered for being "Godless". A reputation that is challenged as Isaac discovers the "undercurrent of spirituality" cursing through Seattle's veins with each person he meets.

The stage is set minimally; it is barren with only dust, gravel and boulders. Akinngbe's only props are a bible, a backpack and wooden plank. Lighting and sound transform the stage into a Vietnamese prison cell, bus, club, hospital, army base and more as Akinngbe transforms himself into each character he meets. He travels from California to Seattle and along the way he struggles to understand God in terms of something other than the Episcopal Church he grew up in. At one point during the play he states "it's not good enough to just believe something [in Seattle]...it needs to be substantiated, it needs to be proven", which is what makes this

(Continued on page 8)

The Thin Place *(continued from page 7)*

play even more "Seattle" as each character finds their faith tested and ends up proving to that life is more meaningful when they have it. The characters experiences varied, from a 60 year old Vietnamese man who found God in an isolation cell to a 19 year old Muslim girl struggling to explain her faith in a post 9/11 world. Even the religious denominations each character identifies with diverge, from a man who converts to Buddhism to a woman who reconnects with her Native American roots and finds faith in her community and land. Each person had varying levels of social and emotional trauma, and each person had a different way of understanding God, but regardless of their practices, their belief in God and humanity united each character within the play and the audience watching it.

One particularly telling story comes when Isaac is at his darkest moment, he has just found out his mother in California has died and



Gbenga Akinnagbe in *The Thin Place*

Photo: © Chris Bennion

he doesn't know what to believe in any more. Just as he drops to his knees the sound of the Adhan resonates through the room. Isaac meets "Margaret" a woman who identifies herself as being both Muslim and Christian, a belief that gets her defrocked as a priest. "Margaret" embodies the heart of this play. In her story she 'tried on' many different faiths, saying she had always been "goofy about God". It was when her own mother had died though that she came to realize she wanted to "surrender [her] life to the oneness of God". Islam being the faith of surrender she found it had called out to her. Christianity however continued to be a shared part of her identity. Faith and love of God had always been the constant factor in the beliefs she explored, and ended up being the uniting force later in life as she looked at her own identity.

While inspirational and emotional during the running of the show, it was after the play that truly made the experience meaningful. The Intiman Theater hosted a series of "talk backs" featuring the plays actor, screenwriter, director, local religious leaders and even sometimes the real people featured in the play. The talk backs were an opportunity for the community to engage in discussion beyond the play. To share their beliefs, differing and varied, as well as further the conversation about commonalities among belief systems brought up by the play. It gave a chance for everyone to put a face to the belief systems that guide and influence political and social issues today, while sharing their own guiding principles. As tensions between faiths and about faith rise in our broader community the need for more interactive discussion is increasing.

Intiman Theater plans to continue this tradition of community engagement and discussion that stretches our thinking and moves us to action. The stage has been set for more play's that challenge the "normal" way of thinking, and encourage us to step into someone else's shoes.

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NORTHWEST *at a glance*



a photo presentation by Mosaab Zaki

