



Islamic Foundation of South Florida Community Newsletter

5457 NW 108th Avenue, Sunrise Florida 33351

(954) 741-8130

www.IFSF.net

April 2009

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Slumdogs of Suburbia*****

By Anam Majeed courtesy of—www.suhaibwebb.com/blog

IFSF Events

Annual Fundraising Dinner

Saturday, May 2nd 2009

Location : IFSF Center

Securing a Muslim identity for you children.

Come and listen to the plans of IFSF to develop your center for the next generations.

We invite you to the abundant rewards of charity that will continue until the Day of Judgment. (Sadaqah al-Jariyah)

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The new high quality website is up and running!

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Great resource for IFSF Events

Jumma Khutbas also available online**

Compendium of Islamic Sciences and Wisdom with Imam Yahya

Mon. and Thurs. after Isha
Saturday at 8:30pm

Most people are aware of the giant hullabaloo being made over a recent film called 'Slumdog Millionaire'. Although, generally, television can be regarded as a mind-numbing exercise and movie-going a pointless pastime, I thought that this particular movie and its resulting success has a special significance for Muslims living in the First World, if not all people living in the First World.

The Western reaction to Slumdog, from what I have gathered, seems to be one of mixed shock and delight. Shock at the terrible poverty the 'slumdogs' have lived through, and delight at the lovely Warner Brothers way the story ended before the credits rolled. Many people were horrified at the conditions depicted in this movie, the terrible poverty and violence young children must face from the time they take their first steps. Some people in India were resentful that a Western movie brought all this to light, winning awards for exploiting the poverty of the third world.

Apart from the razzle-dazzle buzz of movie stars and the many gatherings where they like to pat themselves on the back and broadcast it for the world to see, I thought this movie and its success was important for Muslims all over the world was to consider. Not merely because the main character in the movie was a Muslim, but because there are millions and millions of Muslims living in abject poverty around the world. Many of the Muslims who have migrated to Western nations can tell you a little something or two about it. Perhaps this is why many people in the third world, and many of those people who have migrated to the first world, did not find themselves as moved by this movie as the Western audience was. They've seen it first hand, while walking on the street or peering at it from within tinted, air conditioned vehicles. Many people who have lived in Mumbai will tell you that the poverty they see in their daily lives is much worse than what was shown in Slumdog. Indeed, if one was to watch a movie about poverty in India, Mira Nair's 'Salaam Bombay!' is a more accurate and sobering depiction of slum life and the desperation it entails. However, paying attention to the current fascination with Slumdog Millionaire, this movie can prove to be more useful than just providing us with the spectacle of the rampant poverty of the third world. It can also serve as a mirror. This mirror, if we choose to allow it, can reflect our own dismal state of poverty back to us.

Most of us, by the Grace of God, have never had to live in flimsy shacks that expose us to the drenching monsoons or the sordid heat of the Eastern summer months. Most of us, by the Grace of God, never really have to worry about where our next meal is coming from or if we have enough clothes to wear. Most of us, by the Grace of God, have the gift of relatively free schooling that we can choose to extend based upon our own merit, septic tanks and water drainage facilities, hot showers or showers at all, transportation, and space, among the millions of other small things we couldn't account for if we spent our entire lives trying. The general lack of these amenities is what is known as 'extreme poverty', a material poverty that is so intense, that the sheer numbers of people living in the middle of it is a disgraceful slap in the face to humanity on our planet today.—Continued on Page 2

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IFSF OFFERS:

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Beginner's Arabic Sun. 12-Thuhr

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Youth Halaqah, every Sunday after
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After-school program, Mon thru Fri-
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But poverty has existed since the beginning of man, since the dawn of his cities and his sense of economic distribution, since the start of his having and his not having. There have always been the rich and poor, and even the very, very rich, and the very, very poor. Most religions and societies have, for the most part, accommodated for this age old divide in the form of alms, taxes, and a basic social compulsion to look after the weakest of the flock. The essential point of religion, in my opinion, is to keep us from descending into a form of poverty that is much, much worse than the kind of poverty depicted in Slumdog Millionaire. This is spiritual poverty.

This is not to belittle the dreadful poverty of street children, or an attempt to diminish it in some abstract, metaphorical way. Nor is this trying to say that poverty exists only in the third world. There are populations of homeless people living in all areas of the world, in various conditions of insufficient provision, but the fact remains that there are sheer millions, if not billions, of people who live in states of poverty that the average North American would never dream of seeing on his or her street corner.

There are many versions of poverty. The balance of the Universe dictates that while little Ali the slum urchin can exist in the streets of Mumbai mired in squalor and material poverty, I too, can exist in middle class North American suburbia, in the midst of slumber and spiritual poverty. My transient needs in this transient world are, by the Grace of God, being fulfilled, but it is through my own laziness and forgetfulness that I remain spiritually destitute. Perhaps little Ali is richer than me; so thoroughly occupied in the savage business of survival he will not have acquired the massive debt of time I have - largely misspent, waiting to be accounted for. Perhaps because every day is such a feat of survival, he wakes up thanking God that he is alive to see another one.

There is intellectual poverty. Take, for example, the following passage from the New York Times bestseller and Pulitzer Prize winning book 'Guns, Germs, and Steel', by Jared Diamond:

'Besides [the] genetic reason, there is also a second reason why new Guineans may have come to be smarter than Westerners. Modern Europeans and American children spend much of their time being passively entertained by television, radio, and movies. In the average American household, the TV set is on for seven hours per day. In contrast, traditional New Guinea children have virtually no such opportunities for passive entertainment and instead spend almost all their waking hours actively doing something, such as talking or playing with other children or adults. Almost all studies of child development emphasize the role of childhood stimulation and activity in promoting mental development, and stress the irreversible mental stunning associated with reduced childhood stimulation. This effect surely contributes a non-genetic component to the superior average mental function displayed by New Guineans. That is, in mental ability New Guineans are probably genetically superior to Westerners, and they are surely superior in escaping the devastating developmental disadvantages under which most children in industrialized societies now grow up.'

Given the daily battle most of the world must undertake to merely live another day, I can say with some confidence that we would have a strenuously difficult time trying to survive under the conditions they live in, compared to the ease in which they could perform the daily functions present in our own lives. Consider the 2001 experiment in the slums of New Delhi undertaken by Sugata Mitra, involved in research and development at NIIT, a software and training company. Continued—Page 3

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He placed a computer on the wall of his office, opposite a slum, and took note of what happened: completely unsupervised and without assistance, children who had perhaps never seen a computer before in their lives learned how to surf the Internet in eight minutes. Browsing, cut, paste, copy, dragging and dropping, and creating folders were all learned in the space of a few days.

Technically, having been required by the government to attend school until the end of high school, one could say that we are vastly more educated than the poor children in third world countries who must forgo the luxury of education in order to provide for their families. Sitting in a classroom room from the age of five to the age of eighteen, however, doesn't really mean that we are more intelligent. Sure, we learn to read, do arithmetic, are presented with history, and learn poems. But what does all of this mean when people would rather watch television than read books, when mental math has become almost obsolete, and when people may have history book upon history book at their disposal, but not the mental capacity to integrate it with current affairs and politics? What's the point of thirteen years of formal schooling when we get everything we need to live day to day from the holy trinity of television broadcasting: ESPN, MTV, and CNN? There is no need to burn or ban books in such a culture, when the vast majority of young people would prefer not to read them anyway? We can store the facts and notions of several encyclopedias within ourselves, but how does that make us any different from an inanimate object, a book, if we lack the intellectual spark and fire for real action?

Then there is the poverty of emotion. Capitalist societies are built on the essential premise of every individual for himself: in the individual's triumph lies the benefit of society. However, most indigenous cultures throughout the world, putting emphasis on traditional Eastern cultures, believe in a way of life in which the general health of society reflects the health of the individual. Extended family structures, joint homes, a shared means of living, all of these contribute to a lifestyle which emphasizes cooperation, compromise, and putting the needs of others above the needs of one's own self. In Slumdog Millionaire itself, the various throngs of street children learn to survive with the help of each other, living and carving out a means of existence collectively, all embroiled in a shared war against the barbarities of daily life in the third world. These children may become hardened and tough, but they have very good reason to be.

There are so many toys with which to preoccupy and amuse ourselves in our privileged suburbia and thriving metropolitan centers, we extend our childhoods well into our twenties and thirties, and sometimes, sadly, even into our forties. Primed with so much self-care and attention, and an attitude that places our personal welfare above all, it is only natural that birth rates amongst Europeans and Americans would fall. Who has time to take care of children when it's so much more fun to take care of ourselves? In a culture where personal satisfaction is so pervasive, we become hardened and unresponsive to the needs and feelings of other people. Isn't it a little weird how we can be like this, in spite of the fact that our own material needs are so robustly met? This is the poverty of emotion.

People are being brought to their knees by the plummeting economy: itself a result of individual greed and overreach. Billionaires commit suicide over the stock exchange, but starving children scramble resolutely over garbage dumps with their scrawny legs, in their eyes is a steely determination to claw out an existence. They are alive, and perhaps it is a mercy upon them that they don't have the time or the quiet to ask why. Because even if they couldn't point it out and tell you in academic language, they value the gift that is their lives. They know survival with the keenness of original instinct, untainted by manufactured wants and superficial desires. They have this feeling, this idea, that Whoever put them on this earth had a reason to, and they may not be able to tell you why they fight every day, but they do. The biology behind such an instinct is a miracle in and of itself. They are alive.

We can and should give our money, our time, and our resources to alleviate the poverty of our brothers and sisters, whoever they are and wherever they are. There is not a doubt that if all of us were to extend such an effort, we could reasonably eliminate it off the face of the earth. However, this will take time and mobilization, there is really no practical, immediate way to lift the eleven million street children of Bombay out of the poverty they live in. The immediate action we can take, however, is with ourselves. We cannot take our material gifts for granted and succumb to a perfectly voluntary state of spiritual poverty. We do not have the luxury of fighting for our everyday survival as an excuse for our spiritual lassitude. We have no excuse at all.

We must accept the charity our brothers and sisters living in poverty give to us, when they give us a mirror to look into ourselves. We are in no place to deny this priceless gift. Perhaps, if we can effectively use this mirror, we can raise ourselves out of our stupor and be able to return the favor in whatever puny ways we can. Continued—Page 4



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There are many different kinds of poverty. The poverty of the intellect and emotion are just two examples, but two major ones that I see contributing to the worst poverty of all: spiritual poverty. And I know, as I am sure we all know, how acutely one can feel the poverty of spirituality. It is in the name of this poverty that pharmaceuticals make billions of dollars in anti-depressants, self help gurus rake in the big bucks, and empty New Age movements are all the rage. It is an attempt to alleviate this poverty, that people attempt to identify with this hip hop rapper, that punk rock band, this lifestyle guru, that brand of clothing and accessories. All of these things are more than just the luxuries of the First World, they are active indicators of an epic spiritual poverty.

There are people who live in the filthy mental slums of their own making, reveling in the squalor of stupidity and sloth. There are people who live in the putrid slums of their egos, encased in a world where their intellect has been amputated by the machinations of their own arrogance. There are people obsessed with perpetual fun and reverie, people who live entombed in slums dedicated to their desires.

The vast majority of these people do not live in the slums depicted in *Slumdog Millionaire*.



The Guantanamo Guard who Embraced Islam

By Nauman Abbasi

It seems today that we only hear about the bad things that happen at Guantanamo Bay, but even there Allah SWT shows his light. I recently came across this Newsweek Article and wanted to share it with the community.

Army specialist Terry Holdbrooks had been a guard at Guantanamo for about six months till he had a life changing conversion one night with Detainee 590, a Moroccan National known as "the general" in early 2004. Holdbrooks developed a very strong friendship with "the general" whose real name is Ahmed Errachidi.

Their late-night conversations led Holdbrooks to be more skeptical about the prison, he says, and made him think harder about his own life. Soon, Holdbrooks was ordering books on Arabic and Islam. During an evening talk with Errachidi in early 2004, the conversation turned to the *shahada*, the one-line statement of faith that marks the single requirement for converting to Islam ("There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet"). Holdbrooks pushed a pen and an index card through the mesh, and asked Errachidi to write out the shahada in English and transliterated Arabic. He then uttered the words aloud and, there on the floor of Guantánamo's Camp Delta, became a Muslim.

Source - By [Dan Ephron](#) | NEWSWEEK

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