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# Rocket Science

November 2020

Rabi ul-Awal / Rabi ul-Thani 1442



In the name of Allah,  
most Gracious, most Merciful

## Gratitude in Islam

This article was written by a member of the Rocket Park congregation who recently gave birth.

Having recently been pregnant and having a baby, my heart and soul are filled with gratitude and love. It is also a time that I am reminded of how thankful we should be on a daily basis for what my husband and I have, seeing other women struggle with infertility, miscarriages, still births or death of their babies. While I get to enjoy seeing my child being healthy and growing up, others have to go through huge, painful, and at times very difficult, tests.

In essence, gratitude means being thankful. Quite often though, people mistakenly think that it is simply a matter of saying "Thank

you" to whoever did something good to us, of making them feel appreciated, and saying "Alhamdu lillah" as this is what we were taught to do. Even though this is partially the case, being grateful is actually most important for the health of our own soul. It gives us a sense of peace, satisfaction and contentment in what we are given in this life, and it helps us go through our daily lives.

Being thankful seems like a simple concept with a simple definition. However, how many of us truly understand and practise it?

### Envy

People often get caught up looking at others, their fortune and possessions, and comparing them to their own. This can cause depression and sadness for some, as they focus on keeping track of what others have rather than of what they have been blessed with. It is the clichéd concept of "The grass is always greener on the other side." This is the path that leads a person to a toxic, jealous and unhealthy way of thinking, where their mind is taken over by negativity. This is against what we should be as Muslims.



One may look at their neighbour and think:

“Why do they have such a big fancy house and a new car, and I don’t? I work equally hard, maybe even harder [or so they think] but I only have an old car and small apartment that I live in with my family.”

“Why is she married and I am not? I’m equally pretty and successful.”

“Why did he get the job and not me? I’ve been working for it for so long.”

It becomes a negative cycle, which also makes us overlook the things we receive and leaves us always wanting more. If we make dua for a new job with a better salary, and we eventually get it, we can quickly become sad again, as we now wish to have a new car. But once we get a new car, we’ll quickly forget it and be sad again, as we’d like to have a child. And so on.

If we start thinking this way, can we ever truly be happy with anything we are given?

**Be grateful instead**

To understand this, we should look at the very first chapter of the Quran, which starts with “Alhamdu lillah, all praise is to Allah (swt)”. As the first verse of the Quran, this ayat has great significance. What it says to us is that, before we are told to do anything else by our Creator, we are first of all told to be grateful.

We often say “Alhamdu lillah” when something good happens to us, when we get a new job, a new car, we have a great meal, or a day off work. This is what we are taught as Muslims. However, we quite often say it automatically as a reaction, without pondering what we are actually saying, and who we should actually be grateful to. In reality, being grateful and the essence of “Alhamdulillah” is an entire attitude and a lifestyle we have to adopt in our daily lives. We have to realise that everything we are given is given to us as a gift from Allah (swt) and that it is given to us for a reason, whether it is a blessing, or a test.

**The environment around us**

We are living in an era where social media dominates our lives and observing others on a daily basis is just a click of a button away. This definitely does not make it easier to be content with, and grateful for, what we have, as we are constantly shown and reminded of what others have, or what we think they have based on pictures they post on Facebook, Instagram or other social media.



### The need to be grateful

Considering all of the above, let's go back to the statement mentioned at the beginning, that gratitude is important for the health of our soul. Why is that? Simply put, if we appreciate what we are given, we will be happy and content, and therefore our base instinct (nafs) will not be constantly challenged with a feeling of jealousy towards others. This is poisonous and causes a lot of damage as it may spiral into other issues like backbiting or gossiping, among many others.

However, as we know, this is all easier said than done, as often we naturally want more than we have or we want things that others have, and we forget about everything that we have been given.

### So how can we learn to be grateful?

1. We need to understand that what we are given in this life is in fact a gift from Allah (swt) and we should see it as such and act accordingly. This requires a change of mindset.
2. We have to learn to acknowledge more than the superficial meaning of the phrase "Alhamdu lillah". We need to sincerely believe it. We should repeat it in sickness or health, in happiness or sorrow, in fear or safety; in short, in any scenario – good or bad – that Allah (swt) puts you through. And we should do this not at the end of it, but right at the beginning when the pain is unbearable. This takes a lot of practice and often involves an inner battle, as we are naturally weak and our minds can quickly be taken

over by negative thoughts and feelings.

3. We have to accept the fact that being truly grateful and positive about your life is going to be an active process. We need to start working on that process in easy steps, and not expect to suddenly be the most grateful Muslim alive, overnight. We should avoid feeling horrible about ourselves when negative thoughts about our life make their way into our head. Instead, we need to give ourselves room to breathe and start practising gratitude.

At the end of the day, we should always remember what we are promised in the Quran: "And whoever desires the reward of this world – We will give him thereof, and whoever desires the reward of the Hereafter – We will give him thereof. And We will reward the grateful" (Surah Ali Imran, 3:145).

This should serve us as a reminder and keep us motivated to always be grateful for everything that we are given.



## Restoring the true meaning of *Islam* and *jihad*

1  
www.rt.com/uk/495336-uk-police-islamist-terror-terminology

2  
alfarooqcentre.com/en/islam/definition-of-islam

3  
go.gale.com/ps/anonymous?id=GALE%7CA99233029&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=00311723&p=AONE&sw=w#:~:text=The%20word%20%22jihad%22%20means%20%22,harb%20and%20holy%20is%20muadassa).&text=Muslims%20themselves%20have%20disagreed%20throughout,meaning%20of%20the%20term%20jihad

4  
www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/07/08/jihad-is-not-a-dirty-word

A recent report<sup>1</sup> relates to the UK National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP), which has over 3,000 members. An online conference in June addressed by the London Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, head of counterterrorism policing, discussed the use of terms like *Islamist terror* and *jihadi*, regularly used by UK media.

The NAMP complained that the use of terms like *Islamist terror* that “have a direct link to Islam and jihad ... do not help community relations and public confidence,” arguing they instead contribute to discrimination, Islamophobia, and negative perceptions of Muslims. Instead, they want attackers motivated by religious ideology to be described with the Arabic word *irhabi*, used in the Middle East to describe extremist views – or, if a substitute English term is desired, as *faith-claimed terrorism*.

Predictably, the proposal was met with mockery from UK Islamophobes brought up on western media terminology.

Metropolitan Police Chief Superintendent Nik Adams said that, while the police force had no immediate plans to adopt the NAMP’s recommendations for relabeling these offenders, it was “vital” that they settle upon the best terminology to “define the threat accurately and succinctly but also to avoid alienating communities crucial to our efforts.”

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“*Islam* is a word with multiple connotations. It is derived from an Arabic stem that carries the meanings of ‘peace’ and ‘submission’ (to Allah the Exalted and Almighty).”<sup>2</sup>

“The word *jihad* means ‘struggle’ or ‘striving’ (in the way of God) or to work for a noble cause with determination; it does not mean ‘holy war’ (war in Arabic is *harb* and *holy* is *muqadassa*).”<sup>3</sup>

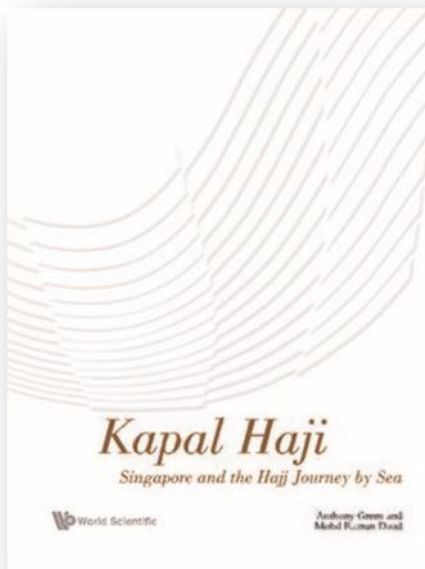
“Contrary to what extremists and anti-Muslim personalities claim, the word *jihad* does not mean ‘to wage holy war,’ or ‘to kill the infidel,’ or ‘to commit terrorism’. The word *jihad* means ‘to struggle’. The prophet Muhammad said the best jihad was to speak words of truth ‘in front of a tyrannical leader.’”<sup>4</sup>



## Going on hajj ... by ship

As we all know, the hajj pilgrimage to Makkah is one of the pillars of Islam, an obligation on every Muslim, provided they are physically and financially able. Nowadays, it typically involves registering with a hajj company, who will arrange the flights, transport for the 70-kilometre trip from Jeddah to Makkah, accommodation and meals in Makkah (and Arafat, Mina), perhaps the same arrangements for a trip to Madinah, 450 kilometres away (not a required part of the hajj), etc.

Nowadays, it is a glorious, once-in-a-lifetime life-changing experience for most Muslims. However, these modern arrangements have only been in place for a few decades. How much more difficult was it for pilgrims before the advent of affordable air travel?



The trials and tribulations of travel on hajj by sea have been recorded in a book entitled *Kapal Haji*<sup>1</sup>, by Anthony Green and Mohd Raman Daud. *Kapal* is the Malay word for "ship". Green, a convert, lived for many years in Singapore, and is now a resident of Christchurch NZ.

The amount of research in this book is impressive. Green spent some years interviewing hajjis and hajjahs who performed the pilgrimage by ship. Needless to say, they are all old, and this is a valuable body of information that will soon be lost. Some has already been lost, because, as some respondents lamented, "Saya tak ingat" (Malay for "I can't remember") (p. 260), as it was several decades ago and, as Shakespeare wrote, old men (and women) forget.

The research does not end with personal recollections, though. A lot of material comes from official bodies in Singapore (the National Library, the National Archives), and from searches through digitised nineteenth century newspapers. Further afield, information and photographs came from the National Maritime Museum, London, and the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, as well as from individuals around the world, who were formerly involved in the maritime trade.

Here we look at a few episodes that give a flavour of what it meant to perform hajj by sea in days gone by.

### Generosity

Hajj is obligatory for Muslims who can afford it. For many Muslims, this is impossible, as they cannot afford it. For others, a lifetime's savings are spent on it. Back then, as nowadays, friends of Muslims who are performing hajj often gave donations to help with the expenses.

An amusing story concerns two ladies in their 20s, both named after Prophet Muhammad's young wife (but variously spelt Aisha and Aisah). Both of them were handicapped, having had polio earlier. Whilst in the Masjid Al-Haram, when Aisha was performing hajj rituals, Aisah dozed off after prayers, with unexpected consequences.

"I have two crutches; I lie down; I would wait in one corner for my friend to come out from the

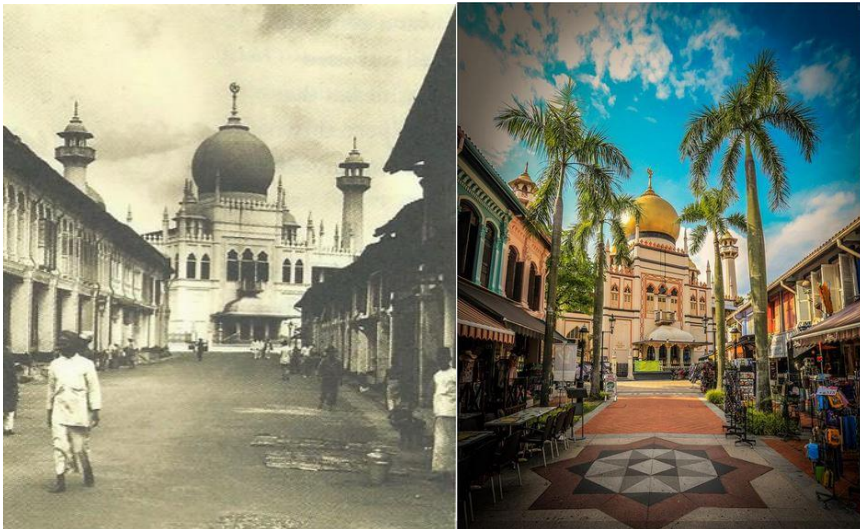
mosque but when I wake up, there's a lot of money. And I asked the Shaykh, Mat Top, what I should do with this. He said, 'Never mind. If you don't want, just give it to other people.'" The legendary generosity of Muslims, giving money even when people are asleep and not begging.

### Singapore

Then, as now, Singapore was a hub for many activities, and has always been a major port in southeast Asia. The kapal haji business was centred around the Kampung Glam (Sultan Mosque, Arab Street) district.

Naturally, the kapal haji business did not rely solely on Muslim travellers from Singapore itself, a small market. Pilgrims came from surrounding countries, and this led to restrictions. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indonesia was a Dutch colony under the Dutch/Netherlands East Indies administration. The authorities were suspicious of the hajj, as an opportunity for the expression and fomenting of anti-colonial sentiment. "The disincentives put in place by the Dutch to control the hajj served in turn as powerful incentives for the development of a hajj trade under its British-ruled neighbour [Singapore]" (p.52).

Chapter 5 describes Singapore at that time, as a metropolis for the Malay world, which would include Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. Importantly, it was a centre for printing, much of it in Malay, as well as entertainment, food, etc. The bustling city of Singapore would have been a strange environment for many pilgrims from other places.



Sultan Mosque, Singapore, late 1920 or early 1930s (l), and today (r)

### Overcrowding

Were pilgrims treated well? Certainly not, in some instances. Overcrowding was one problem that went unresolved over many years. The story is told of a sailing ship, the *Day Dream*, licensed to carry 216 passengers, which left Singapore in 1868. When it left Singapore, it had about 150 passengers. However, it stopped at several ports in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, picking up extra pilgrims (and extra fares) on the way. When it eventually left Bandar Aceh, two months later, it had 613 passengers.

### Illness

This overcrowding led to many pilgrims living and sleeping on deck. Toilet facilities were rudimentary, a "long drop" over the side. Those in the lower decks had to suffer dark and stuffy conditions, described by one writer as "hellish".

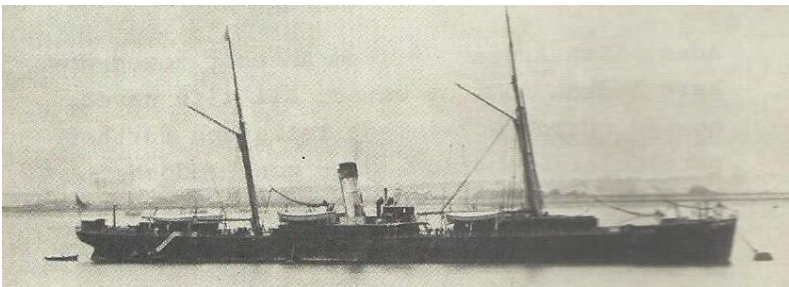
The route of the hajj ships was across the Indian Ocean, and the hot and humid conditions led to many diseases (including cholera) and deaths, even before pilgrims reached Arabia.

Another problem with being many days at sea was the provision of clean and fresh food and water. In the days of sailing ships, if the weather was windless and the ship was becalmed and could not travel, it might be at sea far longer than originally expected.

### SS *Jeddah*

The shabby, second-class treatment of pilgrims is evident from an episode concerning the SS (Steamship) *Jeddah*. In 1880, on its way to Jeddah, it encountered very bad weather, took on water, and one of its boilers broke down. Despite the maritime tradition that "the captain goes down with the ship", the *Jeddah's* Captain Clark "climbed into the lifeboat, leaving his passengers behind" (p. 164). He was rescued by another steamship, and sent a telegram from Aden to the ship's owners in Singapore: "Jeddah foundered. Self, wife, Syed Omar [the ship owner's nephew], 18 others saved." The Singapore *Straits Times* reported "the total loss by foundering of the Company's steamer, *Jeddah*, which left here with planks and about 950 pilgrims for Mecca on the 9<sup>th</sup> July." Note that the cargo of wood (planks) is mentioned before (and perhaps considered more valuable than) the human passengers.

Alhamdu lillah, in fact, the pilgrims did not die. Shortly after being abandoned by the captain, another hajj ship, *SS Anterior*, responded to the distress signals, and towed the limping *Jeddah* into Aden. The Chief Officer, Campbell, wrote, "I called the headmen amongst the pilgrims together and organised gangs amongst the pilgrims to pump and bale the vessel. This was done, the men constantly relieving one another."



*SS Anterior*, a hajj ship, that rescued those on board the *SS Jeddah*

### Financial woes

Some of the pilgrims left Singapore without enough money for the return part of the journey. Others had enough money in cash and valuables, but were robbed at some stage. They therefore needed to work in order to raise the funds for the return journey, sometimes in the printing business in Singapore, or for the hajj company.

### No news is good news?

Nowadays, we can travel to Makkah with our smartphones, take selfies, photos and videos, and send them to our loved ones back home immediately. In the past, communication with home was much more difficult, and expensive. The only time relatives knew how someone had fared on hajj, was often when their ship

docked in Singapore. Many pilgrims are old people, and the weather, both on the voyage and in Arabia, can be harsh. As a result, many people die on hajj. In 1927, the maximum temperature was 51°C, resulting in 1,429 deaths, 12% of the pilgrims.

At the other extreme, some women had given birth while on hajj. The parents might even give the child the name of the ship on which the baby was born. Records include a Mohammed Tyndareus and Abdullah Anshun, named after the ships, with their place of birth recorded as the ship's coordinates at the time.

### Conclusion

This book is a timely record of days gone by. It is timely, as many of the people who travelled on hajj by ship are old, or have passed away.

The Arabic word *hajj* means "to go somewhere with a purpose". This book is also a reminder to us how easy it is for us to fulfil that purpose nowadays, with air-conditioned planes and coaches, catered food, etc. This compares with the discomfort of over two weeks at sea in cramped conditions, travel by camel or on foot from Jeddah to Makkah, and all the other trials of hajj in those days.

May we all complete a hajj that is accepted by Allah (swt)(*hajj mabrur*) in our lifetime.

1 Green, A. & Mohd Raman Daud (2019). *Kapal haji: Singapore and the hajj journey by sea*. Singapore: World Scientific. ISBN: 9789811212536.



Nurses help an elderly Malay pilgrim onto the hajj ship, 1953



## Voice of Islam

VOI delivers the message of Islam based on the teachings of the Noble Quran and the Sunnah (practices) of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). VOI television is broadcast on APNA TV (Freeview channel 36)(10.30 am Sun). In order to save costs, it now only broadcasts on APNA TV. However, Voice of Islam programmes are available on YouTube.

### 1 Nov

Quran: 4:135: Standing firm for justice.  
 Animation clip 11: Lack of confidence.  
 Out of context 10: Is there persecution of Arab Christians?  
 Clip 06: The sad reality of this life.  
 Mental Health Issues: Loneliness the silent killer.  
 Lecture: Dealing with difficulties. Abdur Raheem McCarthy

### 8 Nov

Quran: 4:135: Standing firm for justice.  
 Animation clip 12: Never give up hope.  
 Out of context 12: What is martyrdom?  
 Clip 03: 8 deadly sins you should stop doing.  
 Issues related to Muslim women 02: Hijab, women's attire. Safiyah Ally.  
 Lecture: Empowering the youth. Abdur Raheem McCarthy

### 15 Nov

Quran: 4:135: Standing firm for justice.  
 Animation clip 11: Lack of confidence.  
 Out of context 14: Do Muslims support Isis?  
 Clip 11: What are rights of Muslim women in Islam?  
 Issues related to Muslim women 03: Is Islamic marriage unfair for women? Safiyah Ally.  
 Behind the revelation 01: Those who fled plague and disease. Abdur Raheem McCarthy  
 My path to Islam story.  
 Belief is rational 01: Proofs of existence.

### 22 Nov

Quran: 4:135: Standing firm for justice.  
 Animation clip 13: Predictions in the Quran.  
 Lecture: Give glad tidings of Jannah. Abdur Raheem McCarthy.  
 Issues related to Muslim women 04: Are Islamic divorce rules unfair for women? Safiyah Ally.  
 People of Quran series 01: Al-Fatihah - the cure.  
 Clip 06: The sad reality of this world.

### 29 Nov

Quran: 4:135: Standing firm for justice.  
 Animation clip 11: Lack of confidence.  
 Issues related to Muslim women 05: Inheritance. Safiyah Ally.  
 Lecture: Between the lines. Nouman Ali Khan.

Watch VOI online, or order a free copy of the Quran: [www.voitv.org](http://www.voitv.org)



Abdur Raheem  
McCarthy



Safiyah Ally

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## Why attend Rocket Park jumuah?

Prayers are held at the **Senior Citizens' Association building, Rocket Park, New North Road, Mount Albert.**

- ✓ Central location
- ✓ Plenty of free parking
- ✓ Facilities for ladies
- ✓ Heating and air-conditioning
- ✓ Bayan (religious talk) before jumuah prayers
- ✓ All bayans and khutbahs in English

NB We are only open for Friday prayers – not for the five daily prayers.

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## Back issues of *Rocket Science*

Missed an issue of *Rocket Science*? All our monthly issues are available online at the Mount Albert Islamic Trust website: www.mtalbertislamiccentre.org

## ***SwT, saw, as, ra***

**SwT:** subhanahu wa ta'ala "Glory to Him, the Exalted" (when mentioning Allah)

**saw:** salallahu alaihi wassalam "May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him" (when mentioning Muhammad)

**as:** alaihis salam "Peace be on him" (when mentioning other prophets)

**ra:** radi allahu anhu/ha/hum "May Allah be pleased with him/her/them" (when mentioning members of Muhammad's family, companions, etc)