

Challenges for this Imam

"It was narrated that Muhammad (May God send his peace and blessings to him) was once stopped by an elder who asked him to pray for her to be granted heavens or paradise. He, jokingly, said to her, "Don't you know that elders do not enter paradise?" The woman was shocked, but then the prophet explained to her that it was just a joke.

It was also narrated that Muhammad said:

"Smile, for the smile is a form of charity."

When I first became an Imam, I was faced with some challenges. One of these was how to bring people closer to their religion and tradition enough to lead a good life, but not to the point where they become fanatics and extremists. Everything is a subject to becoming extreme, and everyone is subject to becoming an extremist – if we don't follow the right approach to religion. Another challenge was how to bring the youth back to the congregation.

After a couple of trials and errors, the secret I discovered to overcome my challenges was laughter! I made it a point to tell a joke in all of my services and religious classes.

Mulla Nasrudin, an important but not very well-known Islamic figure, used humor to spread laughter and religious teachings. I would like to share with you one of his jokes/religious teachings:

A neighbor called on Nasrudin, "Mulla, I want to borrow your donkey." "I am sorry," said the Mulla, "but I have already lent it out." As soon as he had spoken, the donkey brayed. The sound came from Nasrudin's stable. "But Mulla, I can hear the donkey, there!" As he shut the door in the man's face, Nasrudin said, with dignity: "A man who believes the word of a donkey in preference to my word does not deserve to be lent anything."



Imam Hassan Selim