

Subject: Sufi Service Committee of Boston April 2016 Brunch Update

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Brunch Update

Issue 81 - April 2016

Sufi Service Committee of Boston

Addressing the most pressing needs of our community



Michael masterfully plays the violin during brunch.

Who are we... without Altruism?

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

-Gandhi

As a child growing up in the Arabian Peninsula, I was taught that Islam was the best religion, and it would be good for humanity if everyone became Muslim. Yet when I came to America, I befriended people of beautiful character from all kinds of backgrounds. Some were adherents to a religion; others did not belong to any specific religion. Some were atheists, yet were more kind and fair to others than anyone I had met before. I came to see that good character and friendship exist at a level that transcends mere beliefs. In fact, all of the religions ultimately share the single main purpose of promoting good character and love.

Central to good character, I believe, is altruism. In Arabic, altruism translates best to *ithar* (ee-thar). *Ithar* means favoring others over oneself. It is a proud tradition in the Middle East that goes back to time

immemorial. Even today, most social conventions and etiquettes in the Middle East are built around it. For example, people will insist on letting others pass through a door first, or will compete for the honor of paying the bill at a restaurant.

I remember as a child seeing how important it was for my grandfather to give money or gifts to anyone who visited him and might have been poor. One day he was pacing around the house disturbed by the fact that he had no money to give one visitor. He finally came down stairs happy and laughing having stumbled upon some money in a spot where he didn't expect it. He considered it a godsend, and gave all the money to the visitor. It left me wondering how he would survive until the next paycheck!

In many areas, the main source of pride for the local people is their legacy of altruism. The city of Ha'il in northern Arabia is one such example. The city's claim to fame is its celebrated historic figure Hatem Al-Tai. Hatem Al-Tai lived in the 6th century CE, and was known for his endless generosity and altruism. He would often sacrifice whatever camels he owned to feed hungry visitors, who were frequently complete strangers. One day, having run out of camels, he resorted to sacrificing his only horse to feed a hungry stranger and her children. The people of Ha'il carry Hatem Al-Tai's legacy until today, and remain known for their generosity and hospitality. In fact, with the start of the month of Ramadhan this year, a picture was shared widely on twitter of a sign posted outside the house of a Ha'il family generously stating to all passers-by "Break your fast with us... O' dearest ones." The ending phrase "*Ya ba'ad Hayyi*" (O' dearest one(s)), is unique to the people of Ha'il, and is said to date back to the daughter of Hatem Al-Tai himself. Hatem Al-Tai's stories spread far beyond the city of Ha'il, however. The celebrated Persian Sufi poet Saadi writes in his *Gulistan* "Hatem Tai no longer exists but his exalted name will remain famous for virtue to eternity."

For many spiritual groups, such as the Sufis, altruism plays a central role. When asked about how many ways there are from creation to God, the 11th century Sufi master Abu Said Abel Khair said, "According to one account, there are a thousand ways, according to another, there are as many as there are particles in existence, but the shortest, the best, and the easiest way to God is to bring comfort to someone else." I have come to love the Sufis so much that I married one! My wife and I enjoy volunteering with the Sufi service committee every Sunday to lend an altruistic hand to those who are less fortunate. Indeed we have found that it has strengthened the bond between us as well as with the community at large.

When all is said and done, I have arrived at the conclusion that regardless of religious belief, or unbelief, altruism is indeed the best of practices, and perhaps it would be good for humanity if we all strove to practice more of it.

Pictures of the Month



Christine presents Appleton Cafe's weekly donation of bread and pastries.



A carrot and cauliflower salad was one dish we served this month.



Broccoli is a great side dish for any meal.



Healthy meals such as this one greet volunteers. Here we have a chicken salad with raisins, asparagus, apples, pasta, and other delights.



Just two examples of the plentiful varieties of pastries we serve- apple turnover and almond croissant.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED



Zaid and Bill are two regular volunteers at Brunch, often asked after by name during brunches they cannot attend.

Volunteers of all background are welcome to get involved in our charity activities:

Preparing and serving meals

Making food and clothes deliveries

Visiting hospitals

Administrative assistance

Financial contributions

Food and clothes donations

\$25 gift cards from food shops in the vicinity

Contact:

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