

Kindness Stories

THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

ZEYNEP AKNAR



TURKIYE DIYANET FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL

Benevolence Awards





**TURKIYE
DIYANET FOUNDATION**

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PREFACE



Prof. Dr. Mehmet Görmez
President of Religious Affairs
TDV Chairman of The Board of Trustee

Every man is born with a natural disposition, and kindness is at the core of it. Natural disposition of human beings are inclined toward kindness. According to Islamic faith every child is born innocent and pure due to the existence of this core of kindness in creation. The urge to do acts of kindness will remain in every man as long as this core is kept intact. Hence, the more human beings do acts of kindness the closer they come to the Creator since it is in fact *raison d'être* of Muslims. Therefore hearts find peace and solitude in doing acts of kindness.

The awareness about practising kindness derives from the faith in Islamic civilization. In societies that are built on this foundation enjoining good and forbidding wrong was strongly encouraged and to keep it up as a lifestyle was highlighted. However, a gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil and the visibility of kindness. The wars are growing in number and the cries of the



suffering are coming from every corner of the world. In order to make this world a better place and to cultivate kindness in new generations we need the values of charity and compassion prevail. Only then we can promote solidarity and brotherhood that will let the world become a more liveable place.

Islamic civilization that established foundations (waqf) to systematically facilitate charity had engrained kindness in the lands where it has flourished. This was how our ancestors had rejuvenated societies with solidarity, peace and compassion. The stories of their efforts spread through the word of mouth still keep the culture of kindness alive in our societies.

The motto of Türkiye Diyanet Foundation at the service of humanity across seven continents is “Kindness Will Change the World” and its goal is to promote kindness while engaging with charity to let kindness prevail on earth. To this end our foundation is publicizing unheard stories of kindness by people from far-flung corners of the world.

This book collects the selected stories of heroes from among the winners of 2015 and 2016 Türkiye Diyanet Foundation International Kindness Awards. Their stories give us the reason to hope that kindness will prevail in the world.

Have no doubt that kindness will change the world.

FORWARD



This book tells the story of thirteen people whose lives revolve around kindness... A father who speaks only the truth and wisdom even when he is burying his own child thus becoming a fine example of firmness; a couple who has been delivering free loaves of bread to the needy and poor every morning for the past thirty years; a cyclist young man who makes disabled children meet the nature and distributes soup to the homeless on the streets every night; two parents who moved from city to city in order to make sure their blind children become useful members of the society; producers of a reality TV show who awakens viewers' conscience by putting human emotions to test; an imam who won children's hearts through a giant fish tank that he installed in the mosque; a sociologist who turns every offensive tweet to a donation for children while fighting Islamophobia; a prime minister with a kind and brave heart who dedicated his life to doing charity for Sudan and held the hands reaching out for help in wars, floods and disasters; a Norwegian doctor who cares



deeply about the suffering of civilians bombed in Palestine-Gaza; doctor-to-bes who run around for fulfilling the wishes of child patients hospitalized for malignant diseases; a soldier who puts his friend's life before his own to make sure that his friend's children do not lose their father; and an extremely charitable man who turns wherever he is to a centre of charity and unites different people in kindness.

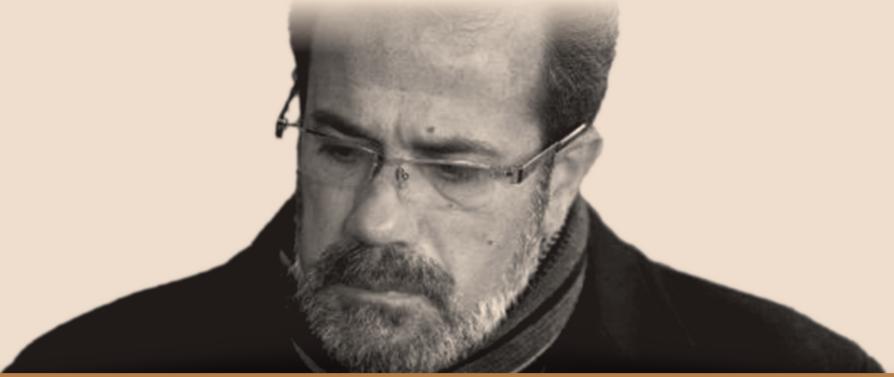
The book you are holding in your hand collects the stories of kind-hearted heroes, the winners of 2015 and 2016 Türkiye Diyanet Foundation International Kindness Awards.

Kindness Stories
THAT CHANGED THE WORLD



2015
INTERNATIONAL BENEVOLENCE
AWARDS KINDNESS STORIES





Mehmet Aslan





Mehmet Aslan



Sometimes the words will fail you when you want to tell about a certain incident. They will fall short. When you try describing it your words will stick in your throat. Then you will close your eyes and think in solitary. As you place your palm on your heart to listen to your heartbeats you will ask yourself why.

This is the story of Özgecan whose life was cut short by tragedy ...

And the story of Mehmet Aslan who spoke with much wisdom and truth even when his heart was pierced with pain due to the loss of his daughter...

Özgecan was a 19-year old college student. She was a hardworking and intelligent freshman who was admitted to college on scholarship and thrilled to study psychology. Learning and studying was getting her closer to her goal that was to become



a psychologist who would help others. “I am going to help everyone. I am going to cheer up the sick and depressed people. I will however start from my relatives first” she would tell her mum who would share her daughter`s dreams. She even found a job and started working to make extra money to make sure that money matters at school did not restrain her daughter. But Özgecan`s dreams were never realized.

Don` t Worry About Me

Travelling on minibuses alone is hard. It is even harder if you are a young woman and it is dark. You get anxious and stare at your phone worried while keeping your family`s or close friend`s number handy in case of emergency. That is what Özgecan wanted to do too but she could not as her phone battery died before she got on the minibus. So she just messaged her mum from her friend`s phone which read “Do not worry about me, I am on the way home.”

Hours passed. It was over midnight. Özgecan was still not home. That cold February night her mum waited by the window for her daughter. She kept staring at her last message and called the number from where it came which belonged to Özgecan`s friend. Alas there were no news about her daughter.



After a few hours the worried parents go to the police station to report that their daughter is missing. Starting from 11th February 2015 gendermarie search for her in every corner of Tarsus. As they continue the search, their suspicions point to a minibus driver who asked for directions from gendermarie a while ago and the dots start to connect. When the gendermarie searches the minibus they find bloodstains. In the following days it becomes clear that Özgecan was brutally killed in the minibus that she took to get home. The family who was hoping to get good news about their daughter is distraught. The body of their daughter whom they will never see again is found in the riverbed two days later. The words become hollow; no word can describe what has happened.

The flower of his father is brutally plucked. Özgecan sets off on a journey to eternity on the minibus she got on. But she takes a piece from us too. The fire of pain that her family faces with her death engulfs whole Turkey.

No More Angels Lost

Mehmet Aslan, Özgecan's father. He is the one who affected whole Turkey with the words of wisdom he uttered whilst he was suffering the loss of his



child. We got to know him with his perseverance in this tragic event. When he was interviewed he did not bawl out nor did he bang himself on the floor. With his countenance and articulate words he reminded us about endurance and patience. With Mehmet Aslan we have once again remembered the word patience that we pay much lip service but not put in action.

Mehmet Aslan could not look at the camera straight when he was giving interview. His head was always bent down out of humility. His griefstruck face was telling us how great his pain was. With welled up eyes he would say, “No more angels lost to this kind of crimes”. “I pray to Allah to help the family of the person who did this mischief to my daughter. I am a sinner of all sinners, I am a faqir or all faqirs, I am a poor, powerless man. I wish that we had no more dishotomy in our country. The perpetrator should face justice. May Allah help the perpetrator`s parents too,” he added.

These words are not words that anyone could say offhandedly. Mehmet Aslan responded to the horror done to her daughter with kidness. It took lots of guts to do that and Mehmet Aslan did it. Leaving his ego aside he was able to show the world with his deep patience that he had a benevolent heart.



Mehmet Aslan responded to all the questions with such perseverance. He chose his words with utmost care, as he did not want to offend or hurt anyone. Witnessing his perseverance against such calamity people were glued to the screens to hear the words he uttered. As he talked all the knotted feelings we had were disentangled. His words would touch the hearts and his dignified demeanour gathered millions around him.

Petitions

Public was inspired by Mehmet Aslan's calm statements. Hence, they stood up for him and for all of our girls and women who were killed before they could even realize what was happening to them. Everyone united on this front creating a big chain of awareness. Because as Mehmet Aslan said "The mischief done to one person is like done to whole people." The calm attitude of the victim's family, which was out of ordinary, moved everyone. Each wanted to do something for the, on behalf of them. Nationwide demonstrations were held after the murder case was solved. Thousands of people took to the streets urging deterrent action in violence against women. Petitions via social media were carried out and millions gathered around the family. Random parents and girls identified with Özgecan's pain so much that they wanted to do



something as much as they can. Some with their prayers some with their signatures while others with their tears shared the family`s feelings.

A New Beginning for Humanity

Parents do not discriminate between their children. However it is true that fathers are fond of their daughters more than they are of their sons. Özgecan was such for Mehmet Aslan. She used to light up his world. The light in her eyes would shine over the whole family. Everyone adored her as she had a merry heart and joyful spirit. “When my daughter died everything lost its colour and faded away,” Mehmet Aslan said. He still tries to find a meaning in her death and regards this calamity as a chance for a new beginning for humanity. His way of thinking shows what a sensitive and thoughtful person he is. Each precious sentence that he strings together is loaded with meaning. They almost have some mystery only available to those who want to solve it.

Mehmet Aslan regarded his daughter`s death as a chance of rebirth of humanity in people`s hearts and said in response to the questions put to him, “This should be a milestone. We should make a new beginning as whole humanity. Everyone should fulfil his own task. We are not of this or



that faction. We are the children of this country.” The person who said these was a father whose child was brutally murdered. He was a father, who gave the chance for a new beginning to everyone whilst his heart was pierced with the pain of the loss of his beloved child. “It is hard to find the right path and keep walking on it,” he said in one of his statements. “Whatever befalls on us is due to our egos. The ego is the rootcause of all the mischief and wrongdoings. Therefore our egos must be tamed,” he concluded. This grieving man, which had such noble heart, was not losing his calm and saying anything bad even when his heart was on fire.

Mehmet Aslan did not have the heart to touch his daughter`s burial robe. The father, who was afraid of hurting his daughter even the tiniest bit, has lost his angel now. As he was praying before her grave “God created you for Himself” he whispered with absolute submission to God’s will.

Death is a hard one in every form of it. But when the deceased is one’s child it leaves a scar that will never heal. It creates a hollow in the heart. Everything becomes incomplete. Nothing can turn back to what it used to be. The colours fade. The world loses its joyfulness. The life on this earth turns into a stop where you wait to eventually reunite with your child.



Mehmet Aslan considered this death as a new beginning, for other parents not to face a similar fate. He suggested Özgecan's death as the birth of a new sentiment where people treat each other with love, and do their best to create a more educated society. He emphasized that perpetrators of these crimes did not become criminals all by themselves but the society also had a role in it. His pointed out that "a child who is abused by his father becomes prone to commit violence as well; it is the parents who write the software of a child; their behaviours will reflect on the child. So in a crime not only the perpetrator but the whole society and humanity are prosecuted."

Search Thy Heart First for the Fault

Man gives in to temptation for a second and makes something wrong for which he will later say, "It's devil's work." Mehmet Aslan elaborates on it quite beautifully so much so that one wants to return to it again and again. "When someone says that it is devil's work after he commits mischief then the devil is done with him and moves on to someone else to sneak into his mind at the right moment and to lure him into temptation. Therefore every ego should reform him, because all evil originates in there. So every ego should be tamed."



Each one of Mehmet Aslan's sentences is a gem. His wise behaviour affected everyone. His perseverance and patience was not easy for a family who goes through such pain. Another gem-like quotation from Mehmet Aslan which will be etched to the minds of millions is as follows: Some men in this land force the fate, which is the result of their own wilful actions and choices, upon women, because they are ignorant. They shamelessly follow their lust. They become slaves to the devil and choose the path leading to hell. That is why this country is in tears and pain. We should never forget that every man shall pay the price if he did wrong and receive a reward if he did good no matter how small its is. Just like everyone has a fate, nations, states, the world, even the planet has a fate. The doom`s day will happen at the end of this fate written by the volition of God. Along the history of civilization mankind went through spiritual depression and decline in certain periods which was followed by rack and ruin.”

Mehmet Aslan is one of these people who wished that happiness prevailed in this world. Hence he tries to spread love and happiness. He reminds us with his words and action that the thing stronger than even the strongest of the armies is love and



we have no other way out as we should love the creation out of love for the Creator.

All of Mehmet Aslan's words are valuable but especially this one should be etched in our hearts forever. One could even frame it and hang it on the wall. "What am I doing right now? What can I do today to help people so that kindness, truth and beauty spread? How can I make people happy? If we become preoccupied with these ideas no unbappy person would be left on the planet." He is someone deep with a huge heart who united everyone through his message. He goes with his business quietly and speaks his words gently while emphasizing that all roads can open with peace and solidarity. If people were willing to change something they could achieve that by peace, solidarity, and trust, he repeats.

"Everyone listen to your heart. I went after the worldly things for years. Of course we will work and earn money to make our living. Yet we should stop and ponder upon time to time." Mehmet Aslan advises like a philosopher. He never raises his voice nor he utters any offensive word. All of his words have a deep Sufi meaning to them. He did his best to keep the unity and solidarity of the country while burying his pain in his heart.



In a few of his interviews Mehmet Aslan advised everyone to read verse 103 in Chapter Âl-i Imrân and Chapter Maun in the Quran. What did these verses say and what did they mean? In Âl-i Imrân verse 103 Allah says: “You shall hold fast to the rope of Allah, all of you, and do not be divided. Recall Allah’s blessings upon you – you used to be enemies and He reconciled your hearts. By his grace you became brethren. You were at the brink of a pit of fire, and He saved you therefrom. God thus explains His revelations for you, that you may be guided. Let there be a community of you who invite to what is good, advocate righteousness, and forbid evil. Such are they who are winners. Do not be like those who became divided and disputed despite the clear proofs that were given to them. For these have incurred a terrible retribution. The day will come when some faces will be brightened (with joy), while other faces will be darkened (with misery). As for those whose faces are darkened they will be asked, “Did you not disbelieve after believing? Therefore suffer the retribution for your disbelief.” As for those whose faces are brightened they will rejoice in Allah’s mercy; they abide therein forever. These are Allah’s revelations; we recite them to you truthfully. Allah does not wish any hardship for (His) creatures.”



Such is Mehmet Aslan, who embodies all kinds of beauty through his actions, knowledge, and demeanour. Despite the brutal murder of his daughter, and that heartbreaking void in his heart, he tries to invite people to what is good and beautiful. He is someone who loves his country and people so much so that in the worst of the situations he united all sections of the society with his calm attitude.

His following words sum up all of his statements: “May our country prevail. Our nation is a noble and beautiful nation. There are some who has beautiful hearts. I am a sinner of all sinners, I am a faqir or all faqirs, I am a poor, powerless man. My Lord has created her with such grace and beauty. He loved her and took her to His side. I wish that we had no more dishotomy in our country. The perpetrator should face justice. May Allah help his parents too.”

After a little more than a year following his daughter`s death Mehmet Aslan received the news that her murderer was killed in jail. His reaction to this incident testifies what a valuable person he is to this country. “I would be lying if I said that I rejoice or I grieve” he said. An average person would condemn his child`s murderer and fill with rage to take revenge. On the contrary Mehmet



Aslan was neither condemning nor was resentful against the perpetrators. He has accepted Allah's will.

With Özgecan's death everyone was united. The whole nation was moved by Mehmet Aslan's speeches so that everyone stopped for a moment and pondered just like he advised. "What am I doing?" He did something no one else could do. He conveyed his message despite his tremendous pain. He spoke to the hearts and created awareness.

When you ask any random person be it man or woman, old or young everyone would know Özgecan and how his father invited everyone to be compassionate and united regardless of that tragedy.



Fatma & Necat Bilezikçi





Fatma & Necat Bilezikçi



What can we do today for the people?

How can we be useful for them?

There is this family who lives by these principles in Ankara. They are the kind of people, who cannot sit down to eat, if their neighbour goes hungry; who cannot go to sleep if an orphan does not have a pair of shoes; who cooks food and brings to the door of the elderly people in their neighbourhood.

Doing charity is central to their life, which they built around good deeds and kindness. These two people are Fatma and Necat Bilezikçi.

Indeed kindness is their heritage. Before we introduce them to you we should better tell you about Haji Raşit Ünal, from whom they have inherited kindness.



A Heritage of Kindness

Fatma Bilezikçi's father, Hacı Raşit Ünal or Haji Father as his son-in-law called him was the father of not only his own offspring but also of orphans, homeless, in other words of all who are in need. When he died he willed that his daughter and son-in-law keep this family tradition so that those whom he used to look out for would not be left unprotected.

Haji Raşit Ünal started doing charity by distributing potable water in front of Hacı Bayram-ı Veli Mosque in Ankara. He knew that giving away water was a valuable charity indeed. So he used to pack his car with water barrels and go fill in the sabeels lining up before the mosque.

One day when Haji Raşit Ünal is at the bakery buying baguettes he notices stale loaves of bread stocked up at the back. "How about I buy them all and hand out to the needy," he thinks. He acts on this idea and buys them all before putting them in his car and starting off. From that day onwards Haji Raşit Ünal would warm up stale bread he bought off the bakery at home and distribute them one by one on the streets or even deliver them to homes. He further rents the flat across his house and hires a tutor to make sure that the children in his



neighbourhood are educated in religious matters. He also makes sure that his daughter Fatma

Bilezikçi is involved in charity work from an early age.

Fatma initially found it hard to get up early in the morning and go door to door to deliver free bread. Sometimes she even wished that his father would not show up that day. But once she was immersed in it she started to feel the joy of sharing and encouraged her husband to get involved as well. So this is how their life is shaped by their charity work now. It started helping their father and has turned to a lifestyle, a lifestyle of sharing and caring.

Starting off the Day with Kindness

Fatma Bilezikçi and her spouse Necat Bilezikçi continue the charity work their father passed down to them by adding new things everyday. The family members support each other in this work, which requires a lot of sacrifice. They start off the day very early. After getting 4-hour sleep they are up and headed to the bakery. This does not disturb Necat Bilezikçi at all. To his friends, who tell he is working too much, “If I could I would never sleep. I just go to bed to let my body rest” he responds.



Necat Bilezikçi goes to bed at 12 and gets up at 4 a.m. everyday. In pitch dark of the night he hits the road to hand out free bread in winter and snow, be it hot or cold. While the entire city is asleep he is headed to the bakery to pick up bagels and buns. Afterwards he is headed to the bakeries to pick up baguettes. Once he puts the baguettes in his car he gets back home. Necat Bilezikçi builds a bridge between the needy and the food, which would go to waste otherwise. In an interview Necat Bilezikçi says that he does his best to get to the bagel shops and bakeries on time as even half an hour delay would result in all that food ending up in the trash and this is something he never wants to let happen.

Fatma Bilezikçi says that even though they really wish to go to visit Mecca for umrah they cannot, as they cannot entrust this duty to anyone else. Her husband makes a simple calculation: “If I stay in Mecca for umrah one week from a minimum of 500 baguettes a day thousands of bread would end up in trash bin. And what shall all the people, who await my deliveries, would do for one week?”

A gentleman with such thoughtfulness, Necat’s day that starts off with charity does not end after he brings the baguettes home. After he brings buns, bagels and baguettes at 6:30 am he leaves home this time to serve as school bus for the children aged



4-6 in his neighbourhood. Bilezikçi family rented downstairs of their apartment just like their father Haji Raşit Ünal did years ago; in order to create a place where young children can receive religious education. While Necat picks up the kids to attend class from their homes, at home his wife Fatma warms up the baguettes and buns to be distributed to the needy.

As the kids enter the apartment building the scene changes immediately, their laughter and joy cheer up the entire building. The teacher tutoring the kids is Bilezikçi family`s daughter as well. She also is a part of this charitable team. She pays attention to every kinds of needs of the children and imparts knowledge in them with a mum`s compassion.

Long Awaited Moment

After Necat Bilezikçi brings the kids to the place of their classroom, he drives off to distribute the baguettes and buns warmed up and loaded back in his car. Around 10:30 am he is headed to the neighbourhoods anticipating his arrival.

The siren of Bilezikçi family`s car has a unique sound to it. It is the sound of love, kindness, and joy. After he enters the neighbourhood Necat turns on the siren, then all women, children and



the needy gather around his car. It is a real sight to see. Once everyone is gathered Bilezikçi family starts giving away the baguettes with care and great enthusiasm. After bags are filled with baguettes and bagels everyone returns home with smiling faces and grateful hearts.

Necat reports that he delivers baguettes to the doors of some families by himself. The reason behind this is so moving: “Some families are crowded and they need more baguettes than an average family would need. Yet they are embarrassed to come and pick it up. Some are elderly... They are unable to go out everyday. Therefore every other day I would go to their door to deliver baguettes.”

After getting to know Necat and witnessing his kindness some bakers, who wanted to become a part of this charity work, offered to donate freshly baked baguettes. Every night after they bake their batch of baguettes they would call Necat to come and pick it up. Then he delivers them to the families who are overjoyed by the sight of fresh baguettes as if that is the most beautiful food on earth. Fatma Bilezikçi tells that the recipients would even say that “Now my household has become the richest in the world” to express their happiness.



Bilezikçi couple becomes happy when they make another person happy and they cannot get rest when someone is in need until they meet his need. The only thing they think day and night is adding more to their list of good deeds and pass down this tradition that they have inherited from their father to their children when the time comes. Necat Bilezikçi advises not to wait to do an act of kindness. “You should just say Bismillah and start off at what you can and what is within your means to do good.” “God loves those who do good” he adds.

Meeting the Orphans

Necat Bilezikçi has a soft spot for orphans. He is ready to make any sacrifice if it is about an orphan. The Prophetic tradition, “Who among the Muslims takes care of an orphan Allah will reward him with paradise” has affected him deeply. He mentions time and again that taking care of an orphan has a different place in his life. They are a charitable couple that works to make sure that they have the means to continue helping out orphans and they receive what they need.

Fatma and Necat visit houses and neighbourhoods one by one after they make up their mind to care for orphans. They would seek out the orphans in their



town and reach out to them. They still continue their search. They both are very careful about this matter and even compete with each other in a good way.

While caring for orphans, they do not only support them financially or physically but also emotionally. Necat Bilezikçi says “Sometimes patting their shoulder is far more important than giving money, food, or clothes. A smile, a kind word is what they need most.”

The couple regards the orphans as their own offspring. Inspired by his keen attention to orphan children Fatma calls her husband “father of orphans.” Sometimes even their own children would jokingly say “Dad I wish I were an orphan so that you would pay so much more attention to me,” his wife Fatma reports with a smile. The orphan children in return love their uncle Necat and aunty Fatma, which they sometimes express with words or write down in a letter.

Bilezikçi couple is so truly, sincerely and passionately invested in orphans so much so that they do not refrain from using up all their resources to meet all their needs. Not just for a couple of years but from the moment they meet until well into their adulthood, they cover all their living and



education expenses and even prepare the trousseau of those of marriagable age.

Another beautiful thing the charitable couple does is to take the orphans on a holiday every summer. After arranging a holiday house for this purpose Fatma and Necat Bilezikçi drives the orphan and his family there with everything that they might need is provided. While the orphan's family has fun Bilezikçi family drives back home with contented hearts. A week later they would make the same journey to pick up the family from their holiday abode and bring them home. The couple will not trade anything to the smile that the orphan children have in their eyes after the holiday. "When they become happy we get even happier" comments Bilezikçi family and adds that this boosts their *joie de vivre* more than any holiday possibly can.

They started their orphan-care work years ago. Some have graduated from college; some even got married from among the orphans they used to care for since their childhood.

Fatma's Soup Kitchen

One night in Ramadan, Fatma says "I wish we could throw an iftar dinner for the needy in our neighbourhood" as they are sitting down with her



husband Necat and father, Haji Raşit Ünal who immediately likes the idea and takes out all the money in his pocket to hand it over to his daughter for this purpose. Fatma right away goes and buys the cooking pots to cook for a big number of people. Next day they serve a big iftar dinner in front of their house. While she is recalling those days “Our first cooking pots were small” she says. “But the food would just not finish even though a significant number of poor and needy ate from it.”

Bilezikçi family does not remain alone in this journey of good that they set off. Those who witness their charity efforts come knock on their door to join in. So it keeps getting bigger and bigger. They start setting a long table in the apartment building’s backyard and all the neighbours are delighted by this situation. They work together to be a part of it and help each other out to put the food on the table. Some sets the tables, some slices the baguettes, some serves the meal. Fatma’s soupkitchen thus serves to unite the neighbours in doing good as well as serving food to the needy and poor.

Fatma serves the dishes she cooks for charity iftar in chinaware to entertain her guests in the best way. There is a section especially reserved for refugees



in iftar. Everyday she serves the best food to the guests visiting this section and says that one feels much happier making people eat than eating. She comments that everyone should try and see how it feels to share. “Previously we would invite over our relatives and friends for iftar. But the real thing is to serve iftar to those in need. We should be aware of that,” she explains.

Mrs. Bilezikçi, who believes that “Doing good knows no colour, gender or race,” argues that doing good motivates people to do more good and keeps the doer livelier, healthier and more passionate about life.

The dinners served to the needy that helped the neighbours bond with each other while doing good are not confined to the month of Ramadan. Fatma Bilezikçi and her neighbours keep working for the needy outside Ramadan as well. On Mondays and Thursdays the pots keep boiling the broth for the needy. Those who need come and pick the food to take home or Mr. Bilezikçi delivers them in person going door to door. Because some of the needy people are bedridden or too old and weak to cook their food. Mrs. Bilezikçi comments, “We used to believe that everyone was well off in this neighbourhood. Nevertheless there are so many people who are in need. So this is how we found



out” and regards this as an opportunity to get to know their own hood.

Mr. Bilezikçi is moved to tears as he tells how he used to bring food to an Alzheimer patient in his neighbourhood. The neighbour is too sick that he turns and asks him “What is the purpose of your visit sir?” after he just took the food from him.

The neighbours, who come together for doing good, distribute the food that they cooked together to the needy. “That is how we learned to sacrifice, to be kind, to think the next person before we think of ourselves. We have tested and proved that being neighbours means helping out each other” Mrs. Bilezikçi says.

Mr. Bilezikçi tells that it felt like one of his own blood died when he found out an elderly person, to whom he used to bring food passed away. Then he finds consolation in the fact that he had not left him alone in the last stage of his life. “People come into your life and people leave it. Not everyone is able to hold their hands and get their blessings. We should approach everyone with kindness. And acts of kindness do not happen when you sit and wait but when you set off without putting it off anymore.”



Bilezikçi family added their list of charity work the purchase of house for the needy. Fatma Bilezikçi and her husband, who started off buying houses for them one by one, say that their line of charity is just expanding. As a way of financial support they would pay the electric bill or water bill of the families for whom they have not managed to buy a house. Bilezikçi couple that never thinks of quitting their charity work feel rewarded by the words of

“You put a smile on our face once we got to know you.”

Mrs. Bilezikçi is now raising funds to go to umrah with the mothers of the orphans whose biggest dream is to visit Mecca. To share the joy of seeing the House of Allah with them, setting foot on holy lands with them... She keeps dreaming and planning about this big event these days.

Bilezikçi family leads their lives by adding a new item to their line of charity everyday. They are being there for hundreds of families and being in their hearts and prayers in return. Their only concern is the answers of “What good shall I do today, with whom shall I share what I have that the other does not?”



Samet Aksuođlu

Pedalling Without Obstacles – Soup Without Obstacles





Samet Aksuođlu

Pedalling Without Obstacles – Soup Without Obstacles



Pedal away and call it adventure

Pedal a way and call it freedom

Pedal away and call it kindness

You do not believe that cycling can be an act of kindness? A group of college students have been actually doing that and generating a wave of kindness that involves some fun, some joy and lots of action.

As the initiators of this movement, Samet Aksuođlu and his friends have created something, which is exhausting but joyful just as well. Regardless of their young age, their selfless endeavour elated everyone.



Actually it all starts with a cup of tea. One summer night Samet and his friends hit the road to go make a camp. With an unexpected downpour they make a stop in a tea garden. Penniless students they are they cannot afford to have some tea and start to negotiate the price with the owner. A fellow customer eavesdropping offers to pay for them. “Your teas are on me guys, I will treat you. Come have a seat” he says kindly. Initially embarrassed by a total stranger`s kindness they cannot, however, turn down the offer and settle in one of the tables. Soon their kind sponsor walks up to their table and strikes up a conversation. Samet and his friends tell about their college life and that they came here to camp. The gentleman, who treated them to tea and was impressed by their energy and cheerful attitude after they had a chat, was Uğur Küçükşahin. During their conversation it came up that Küçükşahin had a 12-year-old daughter named Ceyda, who was not able to walk as she was suffering from spina bifida. Hence Küçükşahin asks a favour from Samet and his friends that is to meet his daughter. They gladly agree and exchange phone numbers promising to meet again. So although they do not know it yet this tea garden serves as the first place where the seeds of kindness were sown.



Before long these young men go to meet Ceyda who tells them about her difficulties when she goes out like all other children with special needs. She tells them about the inefficient design of the roads, the obstacles, and passer-by's blank stares.

Indeed Ceyda and her peers ask one simple favour: to share the same sky with the rest of the people. That is the only thing they ask for and Samet does exactly that by creating this movement of kindness.

Samet also is a passionate cyclist. Cycling is the biggest thing in his life. Living in Istanbul, he goes to college, market, or cafe by bicycle. Just around the time he meets young Ceyda he is preparing for the BicycleFilm Festival Istanbul. For this purpose festival committee gives him a customized bicycle with Dutch style body. One day as he is handing out the festival's leaflets Uğur Küçükşahin's small daughter Ceyda crosses his mind and he thinks, "Why do I not take her on a ride with my bike." To realize this idea he takes along a friend of his and they set off. He tells his mind to Ceyda's father. Küçükşahin works as the driver of a bank manager. "Brother Uğur, just like you are someone else's private chauffeur, we want to become Ceyda's chauffeur." Ceyda's parents are hesitant initially.



But they finally give in to these kind young men who came all the way just to make their daughter happy. They place a cushion on bicycle's carrier and seat Ceyda on top. Then they take Ceyda on a splendid tour of Istanbul. She enjoys riding freely on winding alleys passing through the people and between the cars. So this one bicycle removes all the obstacles before her. Perhaps getting on a bicycle was something she could not even dream of but now that someone makes it real for her she hangs onto life even stronger. Hence Samet becomes Ceyda`s private chauffeur as he puts it.

So Samet`s rides with Ceyda spreads through the word of mouth and families get in touch with Samet asking him to take their disabled children on a ride too. So Samet becomes private chauffeur of many children all at once. As much as he can make time from his classes in college he takes children with disabilities, with leukaemia, with autism on a tour by bicycle. After a while he figures out he needs more volunteers and more bikes to make more children happy. With that idea in mind he and his friends set out to establish an organization. Although they face some difficulties at first this movement of kindness catches on many other people and number of volunteers rise to hundreds.



The organization's name is as special as its founders: Organization of Pedalling Without Obstacles.

The number of volunteers grows day by day thanks to the organization's stellar activities. So they first identify the volunteer cyclists. Samet calls them private chauffeurs. Once a volunteer decides to become one the organization gives them training which consists of ten steps supervised by psychologists and teachers. The first lesson is on how to address children. The volunteers are educated on how to treat children before professional cyclists train them on traffic; technical aspects and emergency aid. The volunteers who complete the training sit for an exam. Only those who pass the exam qualify to become a 'private chauffeur'. The tours are done by two private chauffeurs. While one of them checks on the traffic the other takes the child on a tour on the bike. The volunteers also bring toys, chocolates and similar gifts to the child.

The bicycles used by Organization of Pedalling Without Obstacles in these trips are custom made. Therefore they are very costly. Nonetheless with



the help of volunteers and fundraising events like charity festivals, charity concerts, kermesse and live cycling performances they keep pedalling away for disabled children. They do it for children whom they never met before and with no benefits in return. They work toward creating that joyful smile on the faces of more disabled children and reaching more volunteer cyclists.

This project initiated by Samet Aksuoğlu became a huge voluntary organization, which has been organizing and facilitating bike tours for sight-impaired children since 2011. And they have expanded it to orthopedically impaired children in 2013. Their efforts helped disabled children who cannot go out due to their physical impairments mix in the society and meet the outside world. So they serve as a window for these children to see the outside world.

They work toward involving whole Turkey in this movement of kindness, which spreads over rapidly. The children who go out on a bike tour with them catch the breeze, meet the sun and watch the raindrops falling from the sky.



Got Fellow Travellers Everywhere

Another charity project realized by Samet and the volunteers is My Fellow Traveller which is also organized by Pedals without Disabilities. The project involves volunteers taking physically impaired children on a camping trip to enjoy the birds chirping in the forest, or on a fishing trip by the lake. They pitch their tents in the camp, build a fire and cook their food and enjoy sleeping under the open sky together. So these people, who would never have the chance to meet outside, come together for a long journey. Sometimes they travel from one city to another; sometimes they climb the mountains; sometimes they breathe the fresh air in the highlands together. By doing all these what they are trying to do is show that if the means are provided these wonderful people called disabled are able to do anything. Indeed it is true. One day Samet asks his sight-impaired friend who is studying in Bosphorus University, “How about we take a trip to Van Lake?” They make their minds quickly and load their bicycles on a bus headed to Van thus set off. In January and in -10 C degrees they cycle around Lake Van. It proves to be a great experience for these two buddies. They ride a tandem bicycle for two, which is brought in



from Netherlands, thanks to the help of donors. Tandems have pedals for two. So they pedal away to life together. Samet shows that the distinction we make between disabled and abled is a matter of mindset. The only thing to do is to get rid of these thoughts.

Soup without Obstacles

The charity work these kind and voluntary people do is not limited to that. They also distribute soup to the homeless on the streets at night, which they call Soup Without Obstacles Campaign. They fill soup made by volunteers in the flasks and ride through Istanbul streets in the heat and in the breeze be it summer or winter. While Istanbulites sleep in their beds they enjoy the indescribable pleasure of sharing.

“We cannot turn a blind eye to the people in trouble” is their motto, which triggered this campaign. The only thing they want to achieve is to raise awareness about thousands of people sleeping rough on the streets and the refugees who are trying to survive in squalor miles away from their home.



Now they have the support of their disabled friends who are beyond happy to be no longer in the receiving end but helping out others as well. Participating in charity work boosts the disabled young people's confidence as they share the joy of giving that make them hold onto life with more passion as an individual.

Every Thursday is Thursday Without Obstacles where they exchange experience with the disabled people about how to communicate with homeless and refugees and what to avoid while doing that.

Samet Aksuoğlu and his friends changed the definition of bicycle with their charity efforts. It went from being a means of sports, fun and transportation to being a means of communication and sharing. It connected abled and disabled persons and their bond became stronger and grew into a strong friendship through that bicycle.

The flame of kindness burned by Samet and the volunteers has already grown into a big fire of endless rings. Through their amazing ideas and acts of kindness they showed us that everybody can coexist regardless of their physical disposition.



Necla & Hüseyin Başığit





Necla & Hüseyin Başığit



Necla and Hüseyin Başığit's three children are all from heaven

Muhammed Mustafa, Pembe Şeyma and Recep...

They are three siblings who are examples to everyone regardless of their sight impairment.

Başığits chose to tackle the obstacles on their way instead of resorting to excuses. Their inspiring story testifies to the strength of a united family and makes their loved ones proud.

Children are the Joy of the Family

It is the year 1987... Başığit family's much anticipated first child Muhammet Mustafa is born. The child brings joy to the family and their happiness gets bigger everyday with the arrival of Muhammet Mustafa. However happiness makes way to sadness after a short while as Muhammet Mustafa is blind by birth. The family realizes that much later when he was six months old.



His mum Necla Başığit describes the first moment they found out Muhammet was blind: “We went to visit a family friend. Our hostess noticed that baby Muhammet kept looking at the lamp there. “The baby might have a problem in his eyes as he kept looking at the lamp all night” she said. When we took him to the doctor thereafter we found out that our child was sight impaired. It felt like the whole world collapsed on us. Only God would know what I went through by the side of my baby that night. We cried for days. We were so distressed. Yet we realized tears will not solve anything.”

While Başığit family takes Muhammet Mustafa from doctor to doctor in the hope to find treatment their second child Pembe Şeyma is born. The first thing the couple checks as soon as she is born is her eye. Now that they are not inexperienced like their first child they find out right away that she does not see either. After a few years the fifth member of the family, Recep is born. He too is sight impaired.

The father Hüseyin Başığit describes that day when his third child, Recep is born: “In 1992 when Recep was born I immediately went home and looked in his eyes. He was not able to open his eyes yet but I knew he too was sight impaired like his elder sister and brother. Somehow we were not shocked. We thanked God for His blessings. This situation no longer made a difference or put a barrier in front of us.”



Hüseyin and Necla embraced their child with tender love and cherished him. They supported each other and left the misery and sadness aside before focusing all their attention on their children. Necla Başıyigit recalls that when her children were babies her husband would not ever let her cry in front of them. He would warn her this would affect them negatively regardless of how little they are after consoling her. When Hüseyin was upset she would console him in return, “Let’s calm down, They are entrusted to us by God, Let’s do what we can and God would take care of the rest as He is their Creator.”

They worked toward making sure their children grew up as healthy persons. They would pray day and night that no harm would come their children’s way which is their biggest fear. Hüseyin and Necla Başıyigit got upset about their children just like other parents. After a while they stopped and pondered only to realize that this was a task given to them. So instead of asking “Why did this happen?” they started asking “What can we do for our children” which led them to search far and wide.

Hospital Journey

In the search for a cure for their children the family visits various hospitals. The mother Necla Başıyigit recalls those days in hospitals: “We went from one hospital to the other for a long while. Finally we started going to Hacettepe Hospital in Ankara. The



doctors vaguely suggested making operation on the children. We were supposed to make regular hospital visits thus travel from Aydın to Ankara every month.

After a while it became really difficult for us, as we did not want to burden relatives and friends. To this end my husband requested transfer from Aydın to Afyon, which is closer to Ankara. We kept commuting to Hacettepe hospital in Ankara for five years. We would first go to the hospital then visit the private practice of the same doctors. However there was no progress.”

As they were going from one hospital to the next with their three kids Başıyğits started their special education as well within their capacity. Looking back Hüseyin Başıyğit thinks the best thing they did for them was to have started their education at a very young age. Instead of lamenting their fate the couple started to teach their children about their surroundings and people. While the siblings were trying to learn through touch and sound, they had also the opportunity to socialize and mix within the society before they even started school.

“We started Muhammet Mustafa`’s education when he was 2 years old. They were special children therefore we had to find out or improvise special methods of teaching. I sat down with my wife and discussed what our strategy should be. We did it all alone by ourselves. We did not see a psychologist



and ask for consultation. Seeing a psychologist was not popular back then anyway. With our God-given power and strength we managed to overcome every obstacle that came our way.” This is how Hüseyin Başıyigit describes the years toiling for his children. Elated by his children’s success his voice raises when he is talking about their achievements.

Başıyigit family never lost faith despite all the unfortunate things that happened. On the contrary they grew stronger everyday and trained their children for the hardship that they will face in the outside world. Until school age the siblings played and had fun with their peers without any discrimination. In an interview Muhammet Mustafa recalls those years: “I cannot remember when I realized that I was sight-impaired. When I was small we used to go to the hospital. I might have realized back then. We were living in a village where we could play as we wished. Back then I did not know what being blind meant. Among children there was no discrimination between those who can see and cannot see. Yet at some point you realize that you are not like everyone else. You cannot react to visual matters like the others do and realize that you have a deficiency. For instance when you play hide and seek you cannot find the person who hid.”

Search for a School

Back then it was hard to find special schools for blind children. Only major cities had them. Moreover



the family did not have any information about the curriculum of these schools. Therefore starting from Istanbul Hüseyin Başığit visited each and every special school for blind children in Turkey. Meanwhile Muhammet Mustafa came of school age and the family sent him to a school in Ankara. Muhammet Mustafa spent the first semestr away from home in this special school for sight impaired children located in Ankara. Hüseyin Başığit says that it is very hard for any family to send away their child at that age and even harder to do so when the child is sight impaired. Yet Muhammet Mustafa insisted to go to school although the idea of boarding school upset him so much that he kept silent for a long while before being sent there.

Muhammet Mustafa recalls those days that he struggled a lot: “You are a seven-year old small child. Your family is in Afyon. They leave you at a boarding school in Ankara and return home. If you ask any random mother on the street of her opinion about it she would strongly refuse. No one would be willing to send a child at that age to a boarding school in another city. So it testifies to how hard my struggle has been. This is what we got to do. I cried at school. My parents cried at home. Yet we had to give that struggle to reach this point. They put up with it. My parents could have refused to let me go to school out of the fear of the pain of separation or like some other parents did they could have behaved the opposite way. I have seen those parents.



They would come to school to drop their kids at the start of the school year and they would ever never call again from September until the winter break. They saw the school as a way to get rid of him/her or as a last resort. I on the other hand always felt the support of my family. My mum would fill the pocket of my suitcase with coins for public phone. I could call my family whenever I felt like it.”

Instead of isolating their children from outside Başyığıt family took the first step to allow them to go out to the real world. Although the separation was bitter they endured it for the benefit of their children.

Meanwhile their search for the best school for their children is finalized and they made up their mind about Aşık Veysel School for Sight Impaired Children located in Izmir. This is how the family’s story in Izmir started.

Great Sacrifices

The family moves from Afyon to Izmir for the sake of their children’s education and Muhammet Mustafa is transferred to the school in Izmir. When Pembe Şeyma and Recep reach school age they attend to the same school which is a boarding a school. So the sibilings stay at the school during weekdays and return home on the weekends. The school is found but the difficulties have not come to an end. Hüseyin Başyığıt describes the hardship



he had to endure, as he picked them up and take them back to school. “Our children are blind and they are in boarding school. I would pick them up from school and take them home in the weekends. I would carry these three bags, which are very heavy as the textbooks for blind children are quite bulky. And I have to hold their hands because they cannot see. On top of that we had to transfer three times to get home while everyone else’s children would leave home and walk to the nearby school. So that part was pretty hard for me.”

The days are filled with hardship although this does not keep them from walking on their path. They go on working hard and pushing through. Hüseyin Başıyğit keeps going to the school, which is a long commute with three transfers, to pick up his children and bring them home until they complete their elementary school. The family, which endured much hardship through those difficult years continued to support their children with all their efforts to excell at school. As a result their children passed their exams with flying colours.

When finished elementary school another hardship was awaiting the children: to find a suitable high school as there is no high school specially designed for blind students. Hence the children have to continue their education at a regular high school. So the family starts searching for the most suitable high school this time. Majority of the schools refuse to admit Başıyğit siblings, as they are blind. But their



parents do not give up and keep visiting schools and talking to their administrators. Their efforts bring home good results as they finally succeed to register their children at Mustafa Kemal High School in Izmir.

The first to go to high school among the siblings is Muhammet Mustafa as he is the eldest of three. First day his dad Hüseyin Başığit takes him to school while describing the environment in detail. "Listen carefully Mustafa I will not take you to school again. So you have to learn the way well to go to school by yourself from then onwards" he says encouraging his son to travel alone.

According to Hüseyin Başığit Muhammet Mustafa has trouble at school in the beginning. He finds it very difficult to be a sight-impaired student at a big regular high school. He grows silent day by day. He loses interest in studies and comes to a point to quit school. In one of those troubled days Muhammet Mustafa comes home cheerful. When his parents ask, "I am very happy today" he replies. Before long Hüseyin Başığit finds out the reason of this sudden change in Muhammet Mustafa. The school counselor, who has noticed Mustafa's difficulties, talked to him and listened to his problems. So Muhammet Mustafa was very happy about getting special attention and started getting used to school. Muhammet Mustafa builds greater inner strength with the help of school counselor. It becomes a turning point in their lives as his family puts it.



Başığit siblings who excel at school thanks to the psychological support of the school counselor get their names written among the top students at school's success chart.

When Muhammet Mustafa, eldest of the siblings comes to final grade at high school he wants to sit for the university placement test. However there is no material to prepare blind students to university placement test in the market. They rack their brains about what to do and his dad Hüseyin Başığit decides to read university placement test preparation books to turn them into audio books. The problem is that electronic gadgets to record voice and save audio files are not widely available at the time. He first reads out the test questions to a camera with batteries. The problem with this method is that batteries die out unexpectedly. So they search for another solution. They ask an mp3 player from a family friend traveling abroad. Since mp3 player is not widely available in those days it costs the family a considerable amount. But the family does not refrain from going to great lengths for the education of their children and to make sure that they do not miss anything. Hüseyin Başığit starts reading out the university placement test prep questions loud and record it day and night on to the mp3 player that is brought from abroad. Muhammet Mustafa listens to these audio files saved by his dad after he comes back from school. Hüseyin Başığit admits that he thought reading test questions out loud was



not a very hard thing to do when he started it. But as he kept reading the questions, which is around seventy thousand, he realized the magnitude of the work he set out to do. Sometimes he falls asleep while reading them, sometimes he gets a hoarse as his body is overexhausted. Nevertheless he does not give up and turns dozens of question banks into audio books. And his tremendous efforts for his son pay off and Muhammed Mustafa gets admission to university in the highest rank.

Muhammet Mustafa wins a place in Turkish Philology BA programme in Ankara Gazi University. Başıyigit couple is elated with the good news.

After Muhammet Mustafa it is Pembe Şeyma`'s turn to prepare for the university placement test. She too listens to the audio files that her dad has prepared by reading out the test questions. Nonetheless she also goes to a cram school to prepare better. Hüseyin Başıyigit tears up and his voice shakes when he recalls the first day she took his daughter to cram school: "I took Şeyma to cram school and told her like I did to my other children that she will have to go there alone next day and that I will not accompany her. I have described everything along the way, where to get on the bus where to get off, where to turn right, and where to turn left. After I explained everything to my daughter she went to cram school alone next day. Are you sure you will be able to do this, if you will not be able to go there alone let`s call it quits here and now, I said. I can, she replied. "How shall I



go all by myself” I overheard her saying to herself at home that night. I knew that she was terrified by the prospect. Yet I also knew that if I did not push them they would never muster up the courage to travel alone by themselves. So the next day my daughter left home. Of course I left right after to follow her. They always believed that they were going alone but whenever they were supposed to go to a new place by themselves I would follow them for ten to fifteen days. Of course they never knew about it at that time. Only much later they learned it. When my daughter came to the bus stop to take the bus she tried to feel the smells around with her nose and turned to the direction where I was standing. I had goosebumps at the point. My daughter was unable to see me but it seemed like she felt that I was in the same place with her.”

Hüseyin Başıyğit gets on the bus with his daughter without her realizing it and they get off together at the stop where she needs to get off. His daughter ahead of him he walks together until the school. But at a street corner close to school she bumps her head to a tree on the sidewalk. Hüseyin Başıyğit feels the urge to hold his daughter. But he refrains himself from doing so. “If I held her at that moment we would just return to the point where we started. They should be able to live by themselves.” The way he speaks about this long past incident shows that he behaved as he did with a heavy heart.



The life goes on with its bitter and sweet moments and lots of struggle. When they feel down they hug and find consolation in each other. Şeyma sits for the university exams and gets admission to Marmara University Turkish Philology in Istanbul.

Their happiness knows no bound as their youngest Recep also is admitted to university following in the steps of his brother and sister.

All three siblings graduate from university with their extraordinary efforts and their parents' endless support. They all get a job.

Hüseyin Başığit advises families with disabled children not to feel upset and that God never gives a burden that one cannot bear. "If I were born again I would still want to be the mother of Mustafa, Şeyma ve Recep" his wife adds. She thinks the love that a parent has for his or her child is never affected by the disability the child might have. Başığit couple sent their children to college as a result of their great struggle for years and the children's success made them forget about the hardship they had endured.

Başığit family knew that the greatest act of kindness for humanbeings is investing in them. So they sent thir children to college to help them become a part of society as educated individuals with high qualifications. Hüseyin and Necla Başığit are now enjoying their lives cherishing their grandchildren.



Işıl Baştuğ & Mahmut Avcı

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?





İşıl Baştuğ & Mahmut Avcı

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?



You are in the cashier line in a supermarket. There is mother in front of you who wants to buy baby formula for her baby. But she is flustered... You eavesdrop to find out what is wrong. Then you realize that she does not have enough money to pay for what she got. Not knowing what to do she stares at her basket and checks her purse in vain. But her money falls short to buy them.

You are in a pharmacy. As you make your way to the door after you bought some medicine a man walks in to buy poison. You first think of it as a usual request. But then you realize he wants to get poison to kill the dog he brought in with him.

It is easy to come across at least one of dozens of similar incidents. Then what would you do if you run into an incident like that? Would you stop and get involved or just walk off ignoring it?



“What Would You Do” TV reality show on TRT 1 produced by Mahmut Avcı and Işıl Baştuğ wants to see the reaction of people in similar events. The show aims at moving people’s conscious by questioning their feelings. The show is screened with the motto of “We are there when you think no one is watching.”

The show highlights human feelings and sentiment and shows that despite changing circumstances Turkish people’s age-old custom of offering a helping hand to a person in need did not disappear yet. By posing the question, “What Would You Do?” the show calls out to the conscience of the people and brings a light of hope to those who keep complaining about what the world has come to.

Kindness is a Matter of Conscience

“What Would You Do?” team writes a plot and asks the professional actors to play it out in places where they have previously installed the cameras. In addition to the actors there are also collaborators involved. The setting is always a public place frequented by many people on daily basis. The theme is always something pertaining to the cultural and moral values of the society. Once the crew is



ready they start waiting until any random person who is totally unaware of the set-up involves in the situation. The events unfold as random people who is oblivious to the show's presence interfere in. The show continues with random people's reaction against heart-breaking situations and finale is done with the presenter Altan Erkekli's entrance to the place with cameramen. Erkekli walks up to these charitable people and interviews them after introducing himself. Sometimes the set up is so real and the situation is so sickening that the kind person is relieved after he learns from Erkekli that it was fictional.

The statistics regarding the the episode's chosen theme are given in the subtitles during the show's runtime. For instance if the theme is about children running away from home the statistics regarding the children who run away from home every year come up on the screen. Or if the set up is about mobbing in the workplace the statistics concerning that run in the subtitles during that episode.

When the persons, who interfered in an unjust, unfair or abusive situation enacted by the show's actors are interviewed later almost on all occasions these people's common trait is the ability to



empathize. “I put myself into his shoes” they say when asked why they reacted the way they did. If there is a child involved in the fiction abusive situation “I just thought what if it was my child” they respond.

The show’s popular themes that hit on the high spots move both the show’s viewers and those who got involved in the situation unaware of that it is a set-up. On more than one occasion even the crew was brought to tears.

One of its producers, Mahmut Avcı who articulated their goal as raising awareness regarding the importance of moral values education said, “We are trying to put on the show the human stories about the situations life throws at us and how we can do the right thing in that situation in line with our values. This show is teamwork and we all believe in the power of kindness. Kindness is about noticing and acting with virtue in a given situation. Because kindness is a matter of conscience.”

The most significant aspect of the show is that it inspires people to ask the question “What would I do if I ran into the same situation?” to themselves.



What Would You Do?

The show was a big hit when it was aired due to the sincerity of the kind people featured as guests in the show and the rich content it offers. Each episode started with a public commentary. For instance if the theme was car crashes the show would start with a short clip about the traffic rules for pedestrians and drivers and emergency aid in case of an accident. Or else if it was about lying there would be a short clip about the faults led by lies.

In one of the episodes, which always have a different plotline, the moment of an accident and the events that followed was screened. According to the set-up a driver would hit a young woman and there would be collaborators among the passers-by. After everyone gets ready the camera starts rolling. The car hits the young woman in her early twenties as she is crossing the street. The passers-by notice that the girl has collapsed after the car hit her. They run to help the victim. After the first shock passes more cool-headed ones try to do the first aid. Some object to the removal of the victim fearing that she might have broken limbs while others insist that she should be removed to the shady part of the road. Some also asks the victim`s name trying to figure out if she lost conscious or not.



There is one doctor and one nurse among those who first arrive in the scene thus they show what should be done in a similar situation by example to the show's viewers as it is previously mentioned in the show. While one of the show's inside-men insists to carry the victim lying on the ground to the shade the doctor time and again tells them not to move her. Likewise in the next set-up an unaware passer-by woman checks the victim's heartbeat first. After she says there is no problem in the heartbeat she suggests to others ready to help out not to move the victim, as she fears that there might be some broken limbs. There are all sorts of people who rush to the side of the victim. While some panic and call doctor friends and relatives others call 991 to report the accident. The story does not end there. According to the plotline the person acting as the offender driver is supposed to get on his car and flee. In order to make an excuse he says "Let me park my car to the rear of the road" which people surrounding the victim strongly oppose. "Let the police arrive first then you can park your car" they say. When the offender driver finds the right moment and runs these kind people are enraged. Yet they do not give up. They repeat to each other the car place number of the car in order to memorize it. Some even run chasing the car. The



more seasoned ones take a picture of the scene in order to document it and report it to the traffic police. There is one smart guy though who walks to the car and takes the car keys to make sure that the offender driver can ever never flee the scene. He refuses to give it back to the driver even though he keeps pleading.

When all are angry and upset the show's presenter Altan Erkekli swiftly walks up to them. Then the tension disappears and the people smile with a big relief.

Another plotline is even more heart breaking. In this episode an actress who plays a homeless woman in rags approaches the cashier in the market. Another actor from the show is on the line playing a random customer. He acts disturbed by the presence of a homeless. While the homeless girl walks to the cashier to pay for two pieces of food items she picked up the so-called random customer in the other cashier makes a rude remark about her. While he pays for his own items he says that he is disgusted to be in the same shop with a homeless. The homeless girl looks at her food and the money she is holding to pay before she starts crying. The actor disguised as an abusive customer goes to the



extent of scolding the cashier girl. “Why do you allow in such people into this market” he exclaims.

The cameras previously installed in convenient places are rolling. The abusive customer keeps insulting the homeless girl who turns to another customer approaching the cash register. “Sister I want to buy these but he won’t let me” she says pleadingly. The customer stops and tries to grasp the situation for a moment. Then she turns to the abusive customer and asks “Do you know her?” The actor playing the abusive customer answers “No! She is sleeping on the streets or something. Just look at her clothes. She is up to no good.” He just turns away with a huff and puff. The actress disguised as the homeless girl shows her money and says “I got money, sister. ”

“Right now I am going to report you. Just get out of here. Go do shopping somewhere else. You will leave contagious diseases” the abusive customer continues. The lady tries to keep the homeless girl away from him and tries to prevent the argument from getting out of hand. Just at that moment the abusive customer takes back his credit card from the cashier and says, “I just don’t want to buy from here,” he says before leaving the supermarket



in protest. The camera focuses on the kind and caring lady customer. She approaches the homeless girl with compassion. “You should better go to a shelter. Do not sleep rough on the streets. Look how people are treating you. Let`s call the police and they will show you a place” she says kindly trying to help. In the meantime she buys a cardigan from the women`s clothes aisle and puts on the homeless girl. Some of the other customers who have been shopping while these were happening walk up to the homeless girl to give her money. “I got money,” she protests refusing the money. As they walk up to the exit together with the kind lady she turns around and gives a hug to the lady. Just at that moment Erkekli approaches them with the cameras. The lady breaks down in tears after she sees the cameras and realizes that it was fiction. It is such a heart breaking moment that even the crew is moved to tears.

It is a commendable act for total strangers to come together to help out a person in need and watching random people doing an act of kindness renews one`s faith and hope in humanity. This reality TV show aims at raising awareness of kindness and helping people to empathize with others.



Naci Sengün





Naci Şengün



It is every child`s dream to have a fish tank, to talk to the fish, and to be responsible from them.

What if the fish tank moves in to the mosque? How would children react to that?

It sounds impossible at first. However such a fish tank was placed in the mosque. It even inspired other mosques to follow suit. Yûsuf Dede Mosque in Scutari has an imam and preacher, Naci Şengün who believes that merry spirit and voices of children should fill in the mosque. Without further ado he took the initiative and developed “Fish Tank in the Mosque Project.”

Fish Tank in the Mall

Naci Şengün`s children would look forward to the weekends, as all family would go to the mall and spend time there together on Sundays. There was



this fish tank in the mall which was the children`s favourite. They would watch the fish in the tank for hours without ever getting bored. This repeated for weeks on end. In yet another weekend his children dragged Şengün to the mall as usual and then rushed to the fish tank as they got there without leaving its side for hours. His children`s excitement and love for the fish tank inspired Naci Şengün and before long he started to think “how about we have a fish tank in the mosque.”

Naci Şengün describes from where the idea of a fish tank came to him: “The starting point was my own children. They would want to go to the mall every Sunday and pay all their attention to this one fish tank there. Then I asked them “if a fish tank were in the mosque would you always drag me to go there as well,” to which they replied “yes.”

Upon his children`s wish he started to work on a project with this concept. He says that he follows the example of the Prophet (PBUH), who used to win people`s hearts.. “In our Prophet`s practice of Islam we see that he puts more emphasis on winning people`s hearts than building places for Islam. Inspired from that we wanted to win our children`s hearts by helping them enjoy the mosque while learning about our religion.”



Fish Tank In the Mosque

During the renovation of Yûsuf Dede Mosque in 2009 Naci Şengün, the imam made sure that a giant fish tank was installed in the mosque. In his opinion renovating the walls and replacing the chandeliers made the mosque beautiful but children coming into the mosque would make it a much nicer place and it was only possible if there was something in it for them. Naci Şengün achieved that goal by installing a fish tank full of colourful fish in the mosque thus won the neighbourhood children's hearts. Hence the mosque became an interesting and exciting place for the young mosque goers.

Children Belong in the Mosque

When neighbourhood children first saw the fish tank in the mosque they got so excited and the news spread through the word of mouth. Soon the mosque was full of children who visited to see the fish tank. The whole air in the mosque changed with the children who would come in alone or with their friends to watch the fish.

Naci Şengün appointed a child to each fish in the tank. They named their fish as they liked; Star, Teeny, Pinkie, Cutie are some of those names... The kids took great care of the fish to which they



were appointed to; they would feed it regularly and looked into it if the fish got sick. Naci Şengün believes this scheme improves their sense of responsibility and instils awareness about the environment and love for nature as well as feelings of compassion and caring for others.

The children were happy to have the chance to see dozens of fish in the nearby mosque that they would otherwise not easily get to see. They would watch over their fish and make sure to feed them on time as they have embraced their responsibility. They would drop by the mosque everyday as a result. So Naci Şengün made children come to the mosque not just in the summer vacation but during the school year as well. He advocates that mosques are not for some people of age and maturity but a refuge for people of all ages. The children would come to the mosque after getting back from school and changing into casual wear. The first thing they would do in the mosque was feeding the fish. Then they would join the congregation for daily prayers and attend various Islamic classes after which they would return home.

This project taught the children to love and care for animals. They started to approach the animals on the streets or in their houses with more compassion



and care and began to regard them as individuals. Hence the fish turned to a friend for each of them.

Mosque Retains Its Identity

Naci Şengün's initiative helped the mosque become a part of social fabric of society. Thanks to his project Yûsuf Dede Mosque turned into a place not only for prayers scheduled for certain times but a place where locals stay over after prayers to have conversation or drop by anytime during the day.

Meanwhile children made new friends and began to have one-to-one conversations with the mosque goer uncles thanks to the fish tank. Naci Şengün describes this beautiful evolution as follows: "Thanks to the fish tank the children came in to the mosque. They got to know the mosque and mosque goers and the blessing of prayers."

Naci Şengün points out that despite social media's advantages the new generation grows up seeing life through the screens of smart phones and computers and develops apathy to their surroundings as virtual life takes over social life these days. So he tries to pull in youngsters particularly children into the social life instead of virtual life.



Naci Şengün took the first step and succeeded in winning the hearts of children by installing a fish tank in the mosque. As the number of children grew during the prayers the mind-set of the mosque goers began to change too. They have come to realize that a mosque without the voices of children was a cranky place indeed.

Now Yûsuf Dede Mosque is happier and merrier with children who daily come in to the mosque and listen to Naci khodja with their eyes shining bright as they learn compassion, respect and care for each other.

Yûsuf Dede Mosque thus became the most popular place for children in Acıbadem. Those children, who got connected with the mosque through a fish tank in 2009, passed down their responsibility of taking care of the fish to their juniors. However they did not ever grow distant to the mosque with the passing years. On the contrary they have realized the importance of this place of worship and made their bond with the mosque even stronger.

Naci Şengün reports that the first generation of children who used to come in to the mosque for the fish tank in 2009 are now senior high schoolers but their bond with the mosque did not falter. He proudly says that they would take active role in



celebrations for Mawleed (the Prophet's Nativity) at school and carry out their tasks with a deeper understanding.

Naci Şengün won the hearts of children by respectfully listening in to what they have got to say and approaching them with love. Once the intention is purely for Allah the efforts paid off and the mosque earned a place in the children's hearts, he says.

Garden of Martyrs

Naci Şengün did not only install a fish tank in the mosque for children. He came up with new activities to instil certain sensibilities in them. "What else can I do?" he asked himself and started off to clean the abandoned and pebbled land next to the mosque. He turned it into a pretty garden together with the children and started to grow tomatoes, cucumbers, onions and roquette there.

They named it Garden of Martyrs as they started to arrange it on 18th of March, the anniversary of Gallipoli Battle. The children would give away the vegetables they grow in the garden to the residents in the neighbourhood provided that the recipients recite Fatiha chapter once and Ikhlas chapter three times from the Quran for the souls of the



martyrs. While children began communicating more with the neighbours their relationship with the soil grew stronger. The way they looked at their surroundings changed. They have developed a sense of belonging...

Naci Şengün explains the reason as to why they named the garden that they have made with children on 18th March 2014 after the martyrs: “We wanted to make sure that we remember our martyrs not only once a week or once a year but every day of the year. We wanted to make sure that we remember the souls of our fallen ones for this country. The garden was a vessel to create awareness and responsibility in the children and in all of us.”

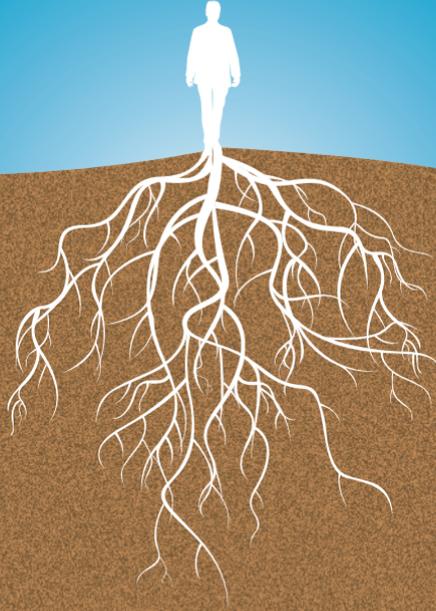
It all started with an idea and the doors leading to the good opened one after the other... With these ideas Naci Şengün started to walk on this road with confident steps and tried to realize all the good ideas in his mind and heart to teach new things to the children everyday. He did all this by engaging the children with the actual life and let them learn by experience.



TÜRKİYE DİYANET VAKFI
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İyilik Ödülleri

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وقف الدمانة التركية
الجائزة العالمية للتبر





2016
INTERNATIONAL BENEVOLENCE
AWARDS KINDNESS STORIES



***“Repel [evil] by that [deed]
which is better”***

(Quran 41:34)

*She had tried blocking, muting, ignoring
or engaging them. But none of them
felt like she was embodying the Quranic
injunction of driving off darkness with
light. After putting in some thought she
finally came up with an idea to fight the
racism and hate directed toward her as
a Muslim while promoting that Muslims
are kind and generous people despite
assumptions to the contrary. She was
going to respond them in line with the
fundamental values of her own faith.*



Suzan Carland





Suzan Carland



Responding to evil by better deeds...

Approaching the hate filled minds with love...

Starting a kindness revolution spanning across the world inspired by faith

Susan Carland...

Susan Carland was born in Melbourne, Australia to a New Zealander mother and Australian father. She is 37 years old and mother of two children age 14 and 10.

After her Bachelor's degree she completed her PhD in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University in 2015. Her research and teaching specialties focus on gender, sociology, contemporary Australia, terrorism, and Islam in the modern world. Currently she teaches in Sociology Department at Monash University. Her research scope is the Muslim women's problems



stemming from the particular regions where they live.

Carland hosted the “Assumptions” series on ABC’s Radio National, and in 2012 she was named on the 20 Most Influential Australian Female Voices list by *The Age*. She has also been listed on the 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World list, and as a “Muslim Leader of Tomorrow” by the UN Alliance of Civilizations. She is a regular paper reviewer on ABC TV’s *News Breakfast*, and has appeared on the *Agony* series, *Q&A*, *Studio Ten*, *The Circle*, *Sunrise*, *The Einstein Factor*, and *Compass*, as well as on numerous occasions on commercial and public radio.

Her writing has appeared in local and international newspapers, academic journals, websites, and anthologies.

Susan Carland’s first book of essays “*Fighting Hislam*” is published by Melbourne University Publishing in 2016. The acclaimed sociologist, who continues her academic work, focuses on social research.

In her teens when she was occupied with the questions about understanding and making sense of this life she told her mother that her new year



resolution was to find out about other religions. “What does to live mean? Where am I heading to?” Such questions led her to question her faith. Moving in the direction of these questions she started researching about the faiths around the world. However Islam was not among the religions she was planning to research yet. Because she originally thought that Islam was “a barbaric, out-dated, violent and sexist religion.” But the books that she read led her on to Islam. Then some of the things started to change. After detailed research her negative opinions have disappeared one by one as she realized Islam was based on human values.

Fighting Islamophobia

As soon as Susan Carland chose Islam she also started to fight Islamophobia. In one of her speeches she commented that acts such as honour killings, lack of autonomy of women and lack of education contravene Islamic teachings and yet are practised in some Muslim communities often firmly based in culture. This picture results in Islamophobia at the end of the day although authentic Islam does not encourage nor permit these practices. Carland tried to explain it as much as she could. Her research at the university was about Muslim women and racism, two topics she was passionate about.



She put her best efforts to explain Muslims and Muslim women. She was trying to explain those, who believe Muslims are terrorists and prone to violence and murder, that they are mistaken. In order to break down the prejudices in people's minds she would time and again express that Islam is a religion of kindness and compassion.

Meanwhile Susan Carland had, one of the most famous Australian media presenters, her husband Weleed Aly's full support. Along with her husband she challenged stereotypes about Muslims and tried to change negative perception of Islam in Australia. They have been trying very hard to build a bridge between Australia and the religion of Islam by breaking down the prejudices.

What they have been doing is an effort to help Australia try and learn coexistence with different races, religions and languages. In the country that they live Muslims are identified as "other" and negative discourse about the visible signs of difference are predominant. The prejudices would go to the extent of creating tension and breaking down the social peace while Muslims are regarded as potential threats. Susan Carland has been fighting in civil society in order to help create strong bonds between different societies and to remove the potential trouble areas.



Post September 11

The terrorist attacks in September 11, 2001 in the USA marked a turning point in dissemination of Islamophobia in USA, Europe, Australia and many other regions. With these attacks the relationship between state and religion came under scrutiny. The prejudices against Islam and Muslims began with the advent of Islam in history, which by establishing a new civilization challenged the Western hegemony. Anti-Muslim sentiment which increased with the Crusades grew bigger with Muslims' arrival in Spain, Istanbul and to the Western world's heart, Europe through the Balkans. This sentiment in the subconscious became alive after September 11 and resulted in restraints on Muslims' civil rights.

One thousand two hundred Muslims were detained in the USA with the allegations that they were involved in the terrorist attacks although almost all were released before being taken to the court. Only two out of four hundred Muslims detained in the UK were imprisoned. Extensive powers were given to policemen in the USA and Europe. Even if you had the citizenship as long as you were a Muslim you were the other. The public opinion was manipulated in a way to project Muslims as potential threats. All kinds of social,



cultural, economic, legal and political context were dismissed when Muslims were concerned.

Muslims in Australia came under intense scrutiny after September 11. They were treated with suspicion as racism became rampant. Susan Carland recalls, “We went through a real period of feeling quite under attack.” Then she started to think about the best way to respond in these kind of situations because the world was going in a very bad direction and she wanted to leave something good and kind in this world.

Susan Carland knew how to deal with the assaults targeting her. But when she was with her children it was more difficult to do that. She experienced Islamophobic attacks in the malls and while walking down the street with her kids. She was so upset that her children had to witness these heart-breaking incidents.

When speaking about her faith Susan Carland points out that we are living in a time when we say Islam the first things that come to mind are intolerance, fear, war, terrorism and poverty. These things are associated with Islam because what is happening in countries that are defined as Muslim feed into the negative perception of Islam. “Those who would like to seek out the truth should look



into the Quran and the Prophetic tradition,” she adds.

Shuts Down Haters with Kindness

Susan Carland and her husband are among the celebrities in Australia. Therefore they receive hate-filled messages and insults more than any other Muslim couple would do. Yet they never give up their polite manners. However, the hateful discourse toward them just grew bigger and more annoying.

On the top of verbal insults, online hate messages started to stream in. Susan Carland initially tried to ignore the hate-filled messages that she received whenever she went on the internet. It was the best to dismiss them altogether. However she could not just remain silent. She was trying to respond to all of messages from haters and giving descriptive explanations in order to prevent misunderstanding. But the situation did not change. The hate-filled messages were not decreasing but growing bigger as she responded to them. She had to find a solution to this as a Muslim. The verse “And not equal are the good deed and the bad” was on her mind these days. She was thinking about the implications of “Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better” while trying to find the most edifyingly Islamic response



she could give. She had tried blocking, muting, ignoring or engaging them. But none of them felt like she was embodying the Quranic injunction of driving off darkness with light. After putting in some thought she finally found a way to fight the racism and hate directed toward her. She was going to respond them in line with the fundamental values of her own faith. This is how the idea of donating \$1 to UNICEF for every hate-filled tweet she received was born. It proved to be the best way to take hatred and make something good out of it. Making donation after hate-filled tweets made her feel good. And one day she tweeted back:

"I donate \$1 to @UNICEF for each hate-filled tweet I get from trolls.

Nearly at \$1000 in donations. The needy children thank you, haters!"

While announcing her philanthropic mission she dealt the haters a sarcastic blow. Until she tweeted it people did not know about the donations she has been making. Upon her tweet the public came to know about her new concept and others followed suit. Another day she received a totally different tweet. Someone was tweeting to ask if they could sponsor the donations of the next fifty hate messages as a way of supporting her mission.



So the kindness was multiplying in each hateful message. Carland has achieved her goal and showed the world that it was wrong for a human being to pressure another human being because of her or his faith. While doing so she took her inspiration from her faith. Moreover her novel concept raised public awareness about needy children and more donations started to come in. Some, inspired by Carland, even launched campaigns for poor children around the world. Susan no longer felt upset about the hate-filled messages. Every hateful message was turning into something good and kind. What else could be more beautiful than that? Only in 2016 Carland's donations amounted to 4000 \$.

Susan Carland managed to transform hate into kindness. Muslims in Western countries were unable to exercise their rights as citizens, to be represented in political and public arena in proportion to their population. They were demonized and targeted by racist groups due to their different cultural identities. With her behaviour Susan Carland has demonstrated to the world that what is important is the human being. Inspired by her faith she turned hateful messages into something good for the benefit of children and future generations.



Abdurrahman Swar Al-Dahab





Abdurrahman Swar Al-Dahab



In 1956 Sudan became independent from the United Kingdom. However it quickly found itself in an ethnic and religious conflict supported by Western countries which was the cost of getting that freedom. For around thirty years it had to fight rebel forces.

Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab was a Sudanese who was born into Sudan's civil war. He used to witness thousands of people die everyday. The number of casualties was increasing daily. Millions of people died during the revolts and conflict while thousands had to flee their homes. As the years passed by African continent was pulled into harder times.

According to Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab Africa and Sudan in particular had rich oil reserves so much so that there were oil deposits in almost every corner of the country. 70% of the global



gold reserves are located in Africa. Nile, which feeds the world's fertile lands, flows through many African countries as well. However colonial policies disguised as modernization prevented the use of national resources in countries like Sudan. Therefore despair and poverty were growing bigger daily in Africa.

People's lives became unbearable as Western colonizers' seized the country's resources. People were hungry and thirsty. Nile was running through their country but they were living deprived of water. Although it had fertile soil, Sudan was unable to cultivate it due to colonization. They were living in adversity. Innocent civilians were driven hungry and thirsty. Happy smiles have long disappeared. Rich African soil was colonized and innocent civilians were paying the cost.

With the colonization policies in force resources in Africa were taken to West and the locals were forced to work as slaves and labourers in humiliation.

The country would receive aid from foreign countries time to time. However Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab thought that one swallow does not a summer make. His conscience would not let him accept this situation as it is. Hence he racked his brains to find a solution to this terrible injustice.



Munazzamah al-Dawah al-Islamiyyah

It is a charity organization established in 1980 in Khartoum in Sudan. In 1987 Abdurrahman Swar al-Zahab resigned from his office as the prime minister and became the chairman of the organization. From that time onwards the face of Sudan started to change. The country had its own charity organization giving support to the destitute. Munazzama al-Dawah al-Islamiyyah became an organization run by local Sudanese people. They were opening water wells and building orphanages.

The organization's mission was as follows: promoting tolerance and understanding among Muslims and believers of other faiths in Africa, giving support to Muslim African tribes in education, healthcare and social services and contributing to their economic and social development, helping young generations to be able to comprehend and explain the fundamental concept of tawheed according to the principles of Quran, and Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) while applying it to their own personal and social lives. And this goal was achieved step by step.

Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab did not remain indifferent to the troubles of the continent he has been living. He was fully aware of everything. Although there were water resources people were suffering water deprivation due to lack of wells to make it available. The equipment and technological



means required to dig up a well were not in place. Therefore opening a well even today takes six to twelve months.

Drought, despair and pollution made sources of potable water unavailable to the people. Lack of water means a rise in diseases. Contagious diseases were threatening the lives of locals. First potable water was needed.

One in ten people in the world had no access to water and majority of these people lived in Africa. Africa was rich in natural resources. If cultivated its fertile lands were able to feed all the hungry people in the world. However thanks to the colonizer countries its soil was empty and arid. Due to the colonization systems, which turned African countries to needy recipients of external aid, the local people were unable to enjoy the beauty and benefits of their countries. On the contrary they were fighting with hunger, thirst and diseases in order to survive.

Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab started off working toward making Munazzamah al-Dawah al-Islamiyyah a place that serves its country and Africa at large in order to turn the clock for his country, which has become needy of even water. And in thirty years the organization has undertaken charity activities in primarily Sudan and in other African countries.



The organization has seventy members from Sudan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Libya, Nigeria, Uganda and Malaysia. It has 17 branch offices in Sudan.

Munazzama al-Dawah al-Islamiyya has four branches outside Sudan; Qatar branch which opened in 1987 and has been very active ever since; Yemen branch which opened in 1988 and currently has multiple offices; Bahrain branch and UAE branch. Munazzamah al-Dawah al-Islamiyya did not remain exclusive to Sudan. Through those international branches it became a more systematic organization that caters to all Africa.

In over forty countries the organization opened 55 high schools, 150 elementary and secondary schools, 2000 masjids, 1000 water wells, 10 water tank filling facilities, 14 hospitals, 800 health clinics, 120 maternity and infant care centres, 6 hostels for orphans. Over 3000 preachers and imams work within the organization. In the last four years 35.000 people embraced Islam through their efforts. It has taken active role in caring and providing education to over 30.000 orphans and homeless children and contributed immensely to the future of Sudan through radio broadcasts and publication of books.

The organization also focuses on staying current and using tech savvy methods while distributing



radios and books. Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab, who thought for the best of his country, lighted the torch of kindness and set off the road. To this day he is the chairman of the foundation.

His dream was to end the predominant colonization and the resulting despair that has been going on in African countries for years; to be able to put the abundant natural resources, which they were prevented from exploring, to the use of his own people; to stop foreign countries exploiting his country's natural resources while employing the locals as hard labourers.

Contrary to the popular belief even a small development in African countries was not received well by the colonizer countries. The bombing of a medicine factory, which is built in Sudan in 1998, is a fine example of it. Having a factory in Sudan that produces medicine for treatment of illnesses and contagious diseases was going to create hope for Africa. Medicine was not going to be purchased from Western and foreign countries at a high price, as people would have access to locally produced medicine at a lower price. This factory that opened in Sudan had the goal to cure its people. However USA bombed it with the pretext that it was producing chemical weapons.



When the factory located off of the capital Khartoum was destroyed vulnerable people were left without means for treatment. Medicine was especially needed in big floods. When the waters of Nile ebbed after it surged malaria would appear. And that is exactly what happened following the bombardment of the medicine factory. Nile surged and swallowed houses leaving many homeless as the locals' mud brick houses just melted away in the water. This would lead to fast spread diseases. Before the factory was bombed all kinds of medicines were being produced there, as it was meeting majority of Sudan's need in medicine. So its destruction affected everyone old and young because it was the biggest medicine factory in Africa.

Nonetheless good things have been happening too. Munazzamah al-Dawah was growing daily. Abdel Rahman Swar al-Dahab made Sudan able to heal itself with his superhuman efforts.

There are times when a single man can change the life of millions. To be able to muster the courage to take that first step is all it takes. Abdurrahman Swar al-Dahab lighted a torch to enable Africa stand on its own feet. Regardless of his old age 82-year old man continues to expand the network of kindness in his country and across Africa.



Dr. Jemilah Mahmood





Dr. Jemilah Mahmood



She is a mother...

A wife...

A doctor curing people in the hospital...

A goodwill ambassador running to help out the people in disaster struck areas

Dr. Jemilah Mahmood...

Jemilah Mahmood's journey to kindness started early on when she was quite young. Growing up in an inter-racial family with a Malaysian father and a Chinese mother she has a culturally diverse background. Her father's charity work left a permanent mark in her mind and always guided her like a compass of kindness in the future. Jemilah Mahmood, who she says was inspired by her father, describes him as a quiet and thoughtful man, and also an avid book reader.



Jemilah Mahmood used to see strangers every morning in their house when she woke up in the morning. Her dad would always host the needy and the poor in his house. He would try to meet their needs and they would try their best together as a family to solve their problems. When she would inquire about who these people are her dad would reply, “This one is looking for a job and the other does not have a home.”

Since she was a curious child Jemilah Mahmood would always strike up a conversation with these stranger guests at home. She believes that this experience helped her develop the ability to empathize and have sympathy for others. According to her “You should see what they are doing before you can understand people’s situations.” So Jemilah would have conversations with every homeless who came in to their house. Regardless of her young age she would try to understand their situations and feel the hardship they go through in the places where they come from.

“I grew up in a family who loved caring for others. We lived together with the needy families. My family never shied away from helping out others. They always treated others with much generosity” Jemilah Mahmood describes her family. Thanks to



her parents' generosity and kindness to others she learned sharing and helping others at a young age.

As a child Jemilah Mahmood used to spend much of her time with her dad thus learned how to help others, to be concerned their troubles. She picked up this sentiment from her dad, who always had a special place in her life. Jemilah Mahmood's dad is her role model and her hero, who would always protect her against evil.

Jemilah lost her dad, who was so important to her, to cancer when she was nine. Jemilah, who used to hang out with her dad all the time, says that she had a hard time getting used to his absence as her world was turned upside down with his death.

After that nine-years old Jemilah continued her education with her mum's support. When she was fourteen she went to Singapore in order to support her family members. She says that it was a big responsibility for a teenager in her age and she never forgets those times.

The educators who crossed paths with Jemilah Mahmood also left their mark on her. Their emphasis on education; teachings about the importance of giving back to society and humanity at large, and encouragements to do charity kept



her on the path of kindness. In her choice for a profession although her family advised her to choose journalism she opted for medicine, as she loved to fight hardship.

Born in 1959 Jemilah Mahmood graduated from medicine in University Malaya in 1986 and earned her doctorate in gynaecological diseases in 1992. After further training in Switzerland and the UK she started treating patients. She has achieved her goal but she had the urge to do something different to help everybody, as there were millions of people in need of help around the world. She had the desire to reach out and offer a helping hand to them. Jemilah Mahmood used to watch destitute people struggling with disasters or caught up in wars on TV with great sorrow. Yet something kept her from taking the initiative to do something for them.

She learned sharing and helping others from her family and made up her mind to live a life in the same way. Because she knew how random acts of kindness felt as she experienced it as a child. Once doing good was engraved in someone's soul she would return to that definitely. However she could not manage to take the first step for doing charity as her career and family life kept her busy for a while. One day as she was watching tv with her son she



got upset when she saw desperate people in need. “You are a doctor, you can help them” her five-year-old son advised. Her urge to do something good was getting stronger everyday. One day she woke up and thought that she loved her patients, she loved her job but she still could not get where she wanted to be. At first she intended to join Médecins Sans Frontières. She could reach out to the countries struck by wars and disasters through this organization. She could treat the patients in that region and develop projects to meet their needs. However she thought that it would be difficult for Western organizations to get in touch with people in those areas. A surge of love and an urge to create a network of kindness to fill the gap came over her. Yes Dr. Jemilah Mahmood should do that she believed. She has been restless for months, as she did not do anything to help out people in disaster struck areas. Because she wanted to go back to her childhood and offer a helping hand to the destitute like her parents used to do. Her failure to do so has been eating her up and keeping her awake at night. She decided to start a charity organization without further ado. With the help of her family and husband she began working toward establishing a humanitarian relief organization that would meet the needs in this field.



MERCY Charity Organization

Dr. Jemilah Mahmood received the greatest support on her journey to help others from her husband Ashar Abdullah who is a doctor just like herself. Together they established a medical charity organization in Malaysia. Jemilah Mahmood, who tells that the original idea belongs to her husband Dr. Ashar Abdullallah, established the organization in 1999.

In fact everything started with the violent conflict that started in Kosovo in 1999 that took thousands of lives. Dr. Jemilah Mahmood volunteered to offer a helping hand to the women and children caught up in war in Kosovo.

After she was unable to find an organization that would facilitate the relief efforts in disasters and wars she got together with likeminded friends and established Medical Relief Society Malaysia aka MERCY. The organization's one of the objectives was to involve Malaysians in humanitarian efforts and provide a platform to facilitate humanitarian activities. MERCY is established to help out vulnerable people regardless of their faith, race, culture or frontiers thus its only goal is kindness... Humanitarian activists volunteering for MERCY teams come from all sorts of backgrounds.



This network of goodwill and charity based on voluntary involvement and personal sacrifices spread out and grew bigger everyday managing to put a smile on faces of millions of people to whom it delivered aid.

Jemilah Mahmood served as the organizer of this network of charity from 1999 up to 2010, for 11 years. She brought together Malaysians and non-Malaysians around kindness.

In Ache, Indonesia

The earthquake that happened in Indian Ocean in 2004 resulted in tsunamis reaching as high as 30 metres at times, which cost over two hundred thousand lives. Hence it became the tsunami that took the highest number of lives in history. Jemilah Mahmood went to Ache, Indonesia as a humanitarian and managed the team of volunteers in delivering food, clothes, medical aid and other basic human needs to the victims. Her greatest asset is her ability to organize the local people quickly and efficiently in disaster-struck places.

Jemilah Mahmood managed to involve local people take role in relief efforts by successfully and effectively communicating with them. Her work in Ache was not limited to this only. She helped



local people who lost their homes to build new homes. In addition to providing aid in case of emergencies in disaster area she initiated efforts to improve their healthcare system. To this end, she helped open a nursing school in Ache, Indonesia. Through her efforts educated and qualified people were able to speedily spread to the area. She also made sure that volunteers received comprehensive training in disaster risk reduction, preparation and rescue operations before disasters.

Apart from Indonesia she also helped people, who lost their homes in disasters, rebuild their houses in disaster-struck countries like Sudan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Myanmar. She took active role in rebuilding hospitals and schools. This champion of social change and innovation asked for the place of the school in an disaster-struck area she has just arrived. And when the locals pointed to the place where it used to stand to the surprise of everyone around she responded “Then let’s start building it right away.” Hence they started building the school and completed it very quickly together with the locals.

Escaped Death in Bagdad

Jemilah Mahmood is a brave humanitarian as much as she is generous. When the war started



in Bagdad she volunteered without a moment's hesitation to try help the patients under the drones and buzzing bullets.

This one incident that happened to her when she went to Bagdad as a humanitarian proves her passion for doing good to everyone. Dr. Jemilah Mahmood came under fire on the way to go get medicine and relief supplies in Iraq due to a mistake. They confused the ambulance team with the vehicle of those bombing the city. It was a tragic incident as Dr. Jemilah Mahmood was shot in the hip and other two doctors were heavily wounded.

Her response in the hospital to where she was taken after the accident showcased her love for humanity. When the doctors in the hospital wanted to remove the bullet in her body she refused and reasoned that others in the hospital need medical attention more than she does at the moment. Her dad taught her as a child that one should not bypass someone who is more needy than oneself. She stayed with the bullet in her body for five days even attended to the patients in that state. "They need treatment more than I do" she explained ignoring her pain.

After a while the man, who gunned down their ambulance, walked up to Dr. Jemilah Mahmood and apologized. He said he did it by mistake and



asked for forgiveness. Regardless of all the trouble she had suffered Dr. Jemilah Mahmood forgave him without a moment's hesitation. She did not have the slightest grudge against that man. Jemilah was so affected by her time in Iraq where she used to see people whom she met a short while ago brought to the hospital as an injured person drenched in blood or worse as a dead body. "Wars are waged against the people and people no longer know whom to trust" says Dr. Jemilah Mahmood as she experienced people's fear for losing loved ones and families during the war.

Goodwill Ambassador Dr. Jemilah Mahmood

The wind under my wings...

This is how Dr. Jemilah Mahmood describes her husband who is her biggest supporter. She also is grateful to her family who instilled in her the passion for doing good as she was growing up.

Jemilah Mahmood's life is full of acts of kindness. She put great efforts for risk reduction, relief aid, education and elimination of poverty and orchestrated humanitarian relief campaigns.

In one of her speeches she complained about how people developed apathy against wars and how



their minds regarded it as an ordinary thing. With great sorrow she told how people wanted to keep distance with tragedies and did not want to get involved and turned into insensitive individuals. She sees that people are growing apart from sympathy and empathy in their daily lives.

When a surge for love for humanity and the urge to do good came over Dr. Jemilah Mahmood she could no longer stay at home and set off to reach out to the needy and vulnerable people wherever they might be. Sometimes she held the hand of a child caught up in war; sometimes she carried bricks to build a house for the victims who lost their homes. She changed the fate of so many with her efforts.

With her track record Dr. Jemilah Mahmood proves that kindness can change the world.



Mads Gilbert





Mads Gilbert



Mads Gilbert is a Norwegian doctor. He stood by the Palestinian people throughout his over 30-year career. He ran to help Palestinians each and everytime Israel bombed them, and lived his life in such a way that shows to the world every human life is valuable and that kindness knows no religion, race or language.

Meeting Palestinians

MD Mads Gilbert met Palestinians for the first time in 1981 when Israel laid siege on West Beirut and bombed it relentlessly. At the time he was in his twenties. He recalls those days: “Israel first cut the water and power before laying siege on the city. So it made sure no food and medicine is delivered to the city. Then it bombed the city day and night indiscriminately. So the targets were not only military bases but also schools, residential areas,



hospitals, ambulances even humanitarians trying to rescue the injured civilians. It was a dreadful scene.”

After witnessing the plight of Palestinians during West Beirut siege of 1981 MD Mads Gilbert made up his mind to dedicate his life to the Palestinian cause. Since then he has advocated that every man or woman of conscience should tell the world about the occupation of Palestine. He has been the voice telling the West about the Palestinians’ suffering and used every opportunity to raise awareness about this cause so far.

Mads Gilbert who did not want to remain apathetic to the military assaults against civilians in Palestine went to Gaza right after the occupation started in 2008 and was surprised to find no journalists in the scene. Palestinians were alone. In his book where his experiences in the year 2008 and 2009 are chronicled he described the situation with the following words: “Israel had systematically banned Western journalists and medics from entering Gaza. A friend of mine and I managed to enter Gaza via Egypt in the fifth day of the occupation right before the New Year’s eve in 2008. No one was willing to show resistance and talk about Israel’s assault on Gaza or they just couldnot do it. In addition to our medical service in Shifa hospital, my friend and I



took it upon ourselves to show the world what was happening in Gaza as we witnessed it.”

Mads Gilbert started running news stories about what he has been witnessing while trying to treat the patients in order to let the world know about the horrific situation.

Mads Gilbert who was witness to the suffering of the civilians in Gaza tried to chronicle the things he saw by taking photos and writing them down. When shelling paused and his colleagues took a brief break he emailed primarily Norwegian and also other Western media outlets about the horror that is happening on the ground. His personal emails proved to be a great help to raise awareness about the Israel`s assault.

In 2008 to 2009 in Gaza

In 2008 Mads Gilbert was on Christmas holiday with his children when he learned that Israel started bombing Gaza. He said his farewell to his kids there and then before he headed to Palestine. His children on the other hand were very supportive of his decision and encouraged him. “We will stand by you if you wish to go” they said to their father who taught them that “you should fight for it if you believe in something.” Gilbert replied that he would



continue his struggle for the needy and oppressed till the end.

Mads Gilbert traveled from Norway to Gaza with a friend of his who is also an MD. They first flied into Cairo, Egypt and then drove to Gaza. But the route to Gaza proved to be quite troublesome as Egypt shut down the border. They have barely managed to cross the border after the Norwegian authorities got involved and pressed Egyptian authorities to grant them passage to Gaza.

Gilbert has decided to dedicate his life to the people struggling for their lives and made helping them out a part of his life. In 2007 Israel started to impose a heavy embargo on Gaza as its citizens elected Hamas to the government. As a result the delivery of humanitarian relief supplies was banned. Public offices, hospitals, schools and residential areas were bombed and the assault was still going on. Two million people were living in five-kilometre square Gaza strip out of which over 1-million was living in camps. So life already was quite hard. Jabalya, Gaza, Beyt Lahya, Beyt Hanun, Dir el-Belah, Hanyunus, Refah and Abasan Kebir are littered with refugee camps for internally displaced people due to Israel`s heavy bombardment.

Israel had put restrictions on goods and items coming in and out of Gaza. People had been



suffering an illegitimate embargo. Hence Israel had turned Gaza into an open-air prison where education and health facilities no longer functioned while economy and security collapsed. There was no means of communication with the outside world.

In spite of all these, Gilbert left his home and headed to Palestine in every bombardment regardless of the life threatening situation in order to treat the patients hospitalized and worked to cure thousands. In the regular time when there is no bombardment he would visit Palestine at least once a year to carry out aid campaigns in healthcare.

Mads Gilbert, who calls all of that has happened “a man-made catastrophe,” has tried to raise awareness in the international community about Israelis’ horrific endgoal that is to push Palestinians to leave their homeland altogether through relentless bombardments, deprivation of food and medical supplies.

In an interview Mads Gilbert reports that Israel has used white phosphoric bomb as he treated the patients during Israel’s 2008-2009 Gaza bombardment and observed heavy burn injuries in the patients that is the result of exposure of phosphoric bomb. The burn injuries of some patients were so terrifying that their flesh was burned out until the bones. MD Gilbert could not



remain silent against what he had been witnessing. While he was active in treating victims of war at Shifa Hospital he also gave numerous interviews to the international media outlets. He highlighted the despair of Palestinians against Israel's relentless bombardment.

Gilbert who has risked his life for people that he never met before nor did he speak their language became the voice of Palestinians through his efforts. He voiced out their suffering in places where they were unable to have access to. He demonstrated an example of courage in interviews that he gave while bombs were falling down. He tried to convey his message to everybody around the world: "World does not know the things we know. We can't let the things run as they do now. This, THIS cannot continue. Can nobody stop it?"

Gilbert was one of the founding members of NORWAC (Norwegian Aid Committee). He was able to easily get his message heard through NORWAC and to mobilize them for humanitarian relief supplies when needed. However during the assault in 2009 Israel did not allow the supplies, which included anesthesia machines, respiratory devices, and medications, to enter Gaza.

On the 3rd day of January 2009 what Gilbert went through testifies to what a hard struggle he put



up in Gaza. News of another one of those mass death arrived at Shifa Hospital. A marketplace was bombed and scores of injured were being taken to the hospital. Gilbert rested himself on the wall not to collapse down. He hardly kept himself together and then rushed to the window to look out. When he saw the smoke still coming out of the marketplace he was enraged. He picked up his phone and texted these lines: “.. Land of the dead! Death, blood and torn limbs surround us. So many children, a pregnant woman. I have ever never lived such horror in my life. Right now we can hear the tanks. Please share this message with others, cry it out!” He swiftly sent it to various media outlets, to his children and friends.

Gilbert attended to the injured children who arrived in the hospital at that moment like they were his own. When he despaired he caressed through the heads of injured children. He put a superhuman effort for the children and placed a kiss on the foreheads of those who died, as he could not just let them go. The bombardment was so intensified in 2009 that the gun report was heard very close. Shifa Hospital was also running the risk of being bombed like Palestinians.



In his return from Gaza a huge crowd welcomed the charitable doctor. The people embraced him and started aid campaigns on his behalf for Palestine.

In Israel's assault on Gaza during July and August 2014 regardless of his old age he returned to Gaza and started attending to the patients in Shifa Hospital. Just like he did previously he simultaneously became the voice of Palestinians. In his report to the United Nations he explained that Palestine healthcare system has totally collapsed. He noted that all kinds of medical supplies needed in a hospital were blocked entry to Gaza. In his emails and tv interviews he described how number of patients who needed treatment increased every moment during the war and that hospitals simply had no capacity to deliver them health service and stressed that if the situation continued like this Palestinian people would suffer a catastrophe. Gilbert expressed that he as a Westerner felt ashamed by this situation. "We should not pity but support them," he cried out about the unjustified suffering Palestinians had to go through with no food and drink under bombardment.

In Lancet, a medical journal published by Palestinian doctors he wrote that this tragedy must stop. "We, as scientists and doctors cannot remain silent against this horror done to humanity. We are calling out



to our readers to not remain silent too. People in besieged Gaza city are systematically killed by the largest and best equipped armies in the world.”

Israeli assault in 2014 lasted 51 days. During this period Gilbert treated over thousand injured civilians. He said the things even media outlets failed to report in this horrific situation where 95% of the hospitalized civilians were women and children. “In the assault called Operation Protective Edge by Israel, according to UN` s report Israel used five times more bombs than it did in 2009 assault. Three thousand five hundred children were injured in the assault. Normally they are supposed to be protected by organizations like UN and Red Cross. However they failed to do anything. Israel enjoys a horrible immunity.” His statements enraged Israeli government. He got angry reaction from Israel for bearing witness to the events and asserting that Israel is shelling the city on purpose. Yet Mads did not mind about it. His only concern was to draw international community` s attention to the assault on Gaza city thus help stop it.

Mads Gilbert kept communicating with the outside world to tell what is happening in Palestine. Following the terrifying assault launched in the middle of the night in 2014 he decided to pen a



letter to get his message heard. He described the horror faced by Palestinians in his letter:

Dearest Friends,

The last night was extreme. The “ground invasion” of Gaza resulted in scores and carloads with maimed, torn apart, bleeding, shivering, dying – all sorts of injured Palestinians, all ages, all civilians, all innocent.

The heroes in the ambulances and in all of Gaza’s hospitals are working 12-24 hour shifts, grey from fatigue and inhuman workloads (without payment all in Shifa for the last 4 months), they care, triage, try to understand the incromprehensible chaos of bodies, sizes, limbs, walking and not walking, breathing, not breathing, bleeding, not bleeding humans. HUMANS!

Later in his letter Mads Gilbert says that he is writing his letter while his tears are flowing, they are warm but useless tears of pain. Gilbert who wrote that Israeli artillery, ammunition and arms were mostly made in and paid by US, calls out to former US President Barack Obama:

Mr. Obama – do you have a heart?



I invite you – spend one night- just one night – with us in Shifa. Disguised as a cleaner maybe.

I am convinced, 100%, it would change history.

Nobody with a heart AND power could ever walk away from a night in Shifa without being determined to end the slaughter of the Palestinian people. But the heartless and merciless have done their calculations and planned another “dahyia” onslaught in Gaza. The rivers of blood will keep running the coming night. I can hear they have tuned their instruments of death.

Please. Do what you can. This, THIS cannot continue.

Mads Gilbert’s letter earned him greater fame in international platforms. In 2014 around forty organizations led by Palestine Committee of Norway held a protest to condemn Israeli assaults on Gaza city. To the protesters gathered in front of the Norwegian parliament Mads Gilbert’s letter from Gaza was read out. After greeting everyone who turned out in the demonstration Mads said in his letter written under sickening drones: “I cry out to you from Gaza: we have no time to lose! You have to stop this madness! You have to scream louder that the sickening noise of bombs! Imagine Gaza people will be free, independent and peaceful like



us. Palestinians should have the same human rights, the same legal right to protection with Israelis, Americans and Norwegians. Palestinians' worth as humans are no less than others like us who live on this earth.

When weapons are dropped, despair will also drop!

We can create peace when we create the value of humans!"

Mads Gilbert has tried everything to get his voice heard in countries who turn a blind to what is happening in Palestine whilst also working as a doctor in Shifa. Thanks to his efforts thousands turned out in demonstrations held in Oslo and Paris to back peace in Gaza.

Banned from Entering Gaza

After the assault in 2014 he returned to Gaza. Before long he decided to go back to Palestine as he felt that Gazans needed him more. He was stopped from entering Gaza at the border regardless of his multiple entry visa. He tried to talk to the border police and said "I am a doctor and never involved in an illegal activity. I never acted against Israel law. I did not even complete the period of stay that Israel gave for my stay in Gaza" but to no avail. They said that he was in the list of banned persons and prohibited from entering Palestine for a lifetime.



In his statement afterwards he said “I did not do anything wrong against Israel. This has nothing to do with me. They are punishing Palestinians for my political views.”

Mads Gilbert’s Books on Gaza

During 20-day assault in late 2008 and early 2009 thousands of Palestinians lost their lives. Mads Gilbert, who witnessed all that, showed solidarity with Palestine, which was razed to the ground. Living witnesses of the events that happened on the ground MD Mads Gilbert and his friend MD Erik Fosse took notes of what they saw everyday in order to tell everything as they happened. Later they co-authored a book where they published all their notes. The book, *Eyes in Gaza* gives an authentic account of Israel’s assault on civilians and what happened in Shifa hospital during the attacks. Following the assault in 2014 Gilbert wrote a second book, entitled *Night in Gaza* and continued to be the voice of Palestine.

Mads Gilbert, who was the witness of horror Palestinian civilians had gone through, is a kind man with a giant heart as he values human life not based on race, faith and language but based on humanity and he has been the voice of Palestinians.



After Leyla





After Leyla



Leyla was only 6,5 months old when she first came in for treatment at Istanbul University Medical School Hospital. Soon she was diagnosed with rhamdoid tumour; a new kind of cancer. Leyla's little body was not going to be able to fight it long.

Övgü Sinem Buğan, Yüstra Betül Medik and Kübra İlliceınar were three bright students at the School of Medicine. They got to know Leyla at the hospital and witnessed all her treatment stages.

First Time Meeting Leyla

“We met Leila on an eid morning. She was the first little one we met in our Paediatric Oncology Ward. She did not get the chance to go home much due to her illness. We learned through her mother, as Leyla was too young to talk much, that she wished to have a bike.”



These three kind-hearted friends got together to develop a project, which would help all the children struggling with this disease. However there was heavy bureaucracy and many procedures to be followed. Getting approvals, carrying out official procedures and naming the project in order to make every child's wish come true took a long time.

It was one of these days that they were running around to get the bureaucratic stuff done. Övgü Sinem Buğan found Leyla's mother's phone number in her room. Leyla came to the mind of doctor-to-be Övgü. It was a holy day. Övgü Sinem Buğan called Mrs. Fatma to say greetings. Then she hesitantly asked about Leyla. Fatma could barely tell her that her daughter passed away. As Övgü called, Fatma was indeed making sweets to give away to the neighbours as a blessing for the young one's soul. Övgü Sinem had no words to say. They both hung up with heavy hearts.

Övgü Sinem was so sad after this phone call. She deeply regretted not to have gotten Leyla's gift on time. Her short life did not give them enough time to do it. The cancer spread to her little body faster than they thought. In one of those days that they felt so down after little Leyla's death they have made that big decision. They were going to fulfil the wish of every child patient that they meet at the



hospital. They failed to fulfil Leyla's wish while she was alive and now they would fulfil that wish for those children they meet after Leyla. With these vivid thoughts they named their organization "After Leyla."

The idea, which started with three young doctors, was soon heard out and wide. Many medical students, who will as doctors soon hold the hope of life for many patients, offered a helping hand to make the children's wishes come true. Starting with Istanbul School of Medicine in 36 schools of medicine across Turkey the charity movement of "After Leyla" built a network of kindness.

They started to work toward the happiness and joie de vivre of little bodies whose tiny arms were decked out with serums and mouths closed with masks. The child patients were spending majority of their time in the hospital. The blood value of the kids who received chemotherapy would drop immediately after a couple of days and they would become vulnerable against all sorts of health threats. Since their immune system was down they could easily get infected and suffer high fever. So the families would rush them back just a couple of days after they were released from the hospital. The masks worn by doctors, nurses and hospital attendants serve to prevent the wearers from



spreading viruses to the patients, not the other way around. The worlds of children, who lost hair and paled out in the face, start to resemble each other. To make a fun activity in the hospital was invaluable for families who are generally hesitant about contacting people out of fear of infections for their little sick ones.

The medical students who joined After Leyla Movement invested themselves so much in these children and their families that they would play games and draw pictures together. Sometimes they would cheer them up with cartoon character masks; sometimes they would bring little presents on their birthdays creating great moments in their hospital rooms.

The children were in love with those medical students in white doctor's coats, who cared and played with them. Soon they started to regard them as sister, brother and friend. They would even ask their doctor friends when they got bored. The young doctor candidates also changed in the process. They felt happy as they witnessed children's happiness and strove more to fulfil their wishes and mobilized the people around them to this end.



While getting involved with the children in paediatrics ward Övgü Sinem says “Everyday we witness children`s struggle to survive. They live through pains greater than their small bodies so much so that their suffering cannot be stopped even with heavy painkillers like morphine. What we do is trying to make their time in the hospital a little prettier.”

In a short space of time After Leyla movement spread. The medical students announced it through social media and online websites. To make a child laugh, to be a gift for a child, to alleviate a child`s suffering a little bit, to be the voice of a child...

Connecting Patients with Volunteers

After Leyla Movement first started with two to three-person teams of medical students. These teams started to regularly visit the children at the hospital. Initially the children were cranky, shy, and unwilling to talk but they could not resist the charm of these young people. Before long they would get in the groove with these fun doctor-to-bes. Their relationship grew deeper everyday; they would talk about the movies they have watched, about the colours they love, what they want to be when they grow up. The next would be finding out their wish in life; a bubble-gum, a balloon, a



doll, a toy car, a chocolate, a teddy bear, a musical instrument, a soccer team uniform were among dozens of wishes... The only wishes of some children were mere french-fries or cheese crackers. Once they find out the children's wishes After Leyla Movement teams would set out to fulfil them. They would post them on the website they have opened up for this purpose and let everyone know.

How Wish Fulfilment Works?

The medical students would post a note on their social media accounts and the movement's website about the child patient's wish along with a little info about the child, then wait for the volunteers to show up. Those who would like to fulfil those little wishes would get them and mail it to the hospital or deliver them in person. When the box comes in the mail the medical student in charge would receive it and pass it to the child. They would also take a picture as the child receives the gift and post it online for the donor to see.

The donors would even compete with each other in this charity. The online conversations among them would be like "You have already fulfilled the wish of such and such child, so please allow me to fulfil the wish of this one."



The medical students take this voluntary charity work very seriously and keep contact with the children even after they fulfil their wishes. They become friends and visit them at every opportunity. They love every child they visit like their own and support them in every which way possible.

The Joy of Children as Their Wishes Fulfilled

Four-year old Hümeyra was being treated in the hospital for a certain kind of haemophilia. When medical students went to meet her at her hospital room they found her speaking to her parents. Although they tried to talk to her she did not pay them much attention. They did not give up though and thought about another way to get to her. They admit that getting admission into a child's world is both easy and difficult. Believe you can and you are half way there. Although Hümeyra did not initially communicate with the medical students she could not remain totally indifferent to their presence. They started having conversations, playing games and drawing pictures. Hümeyra changed as they played, she cheered up, she started to laugh. When she laughed the students were relieved. Her troubles troubled them as her happiness cheered them up... Happy for spending time with them Hümeyra would tell that she would like to be a doctor when she grew up. Her only wish was play



dough. Soon after they posted her wish online a donor has mailed it to the hospital. The best moment was to share the happiness as she opened her box. The medical students sharing Hümeyra's excitement would with the consent of her parents post the picture of that joyful moment online.

Hasan is only 10 years old. Unlike other young patients he is full of energy. The medical students had no difficulty becoming friends with him. He wanted to be a pilot and promised that he would take them off to their travel destinations for free when became a pilot. They planned together where they would love to go on a trip and so on. Hasan's wish was a toy helicopter with remote control, which arrived from a donor who saw the online post about it.

The parents are so happy thanks to these kind hearted medical students who put a smile on their children's faces. These fairy-like young people give psychological support to the families as well. They started a project to provide a chance for parents to have a break and rest while getting psychological support. The parents sometimes break into tears in front of the doctors or share their troubles with them, as they are unable to show their emotions before their sick children.



Every medical student volunteering in After Leyla Movement refers to the sick child whom s/he regularly visits as “my child.” Once the child is hospitalized they regularly spend time together. These times are crucially important to maintain high morale in children when they are in between injections, blood tests, serums and drugs in boring hospital rooms as it pulls them out of that suffocating world. The medical students enter their world and share their dreams; they laugh when they laugh and get sad when they feel sad.

The medical students’ social awareness campaign helps child patients open up and get out of their depressive mood. Moreover the students work hand in hand with child psychiatrists on how to approach the children thus they provide professional support to the children.

Their lecturers also support After Leyla team. Particularly Istanbul University faculty member Prof. Dr. Bülent Zülfikâr’s communication with child patients is an inspiration for the team. They admire how he addresses each child patient by name and shows diligence and attention while taking care of them and try to emulate it.

Fulfilling the sick children’s wishes did not only make the children but also their parents,



volunteering medical students, and the donors happy. According to young doctor-to-bes doing good lets them experience this indescribable emotion.

They are goodwill ambassadors, who set on the road to make the world a little better, to put a smile on child patients' patients. They find out about sick children's wishes and wait for the donors to help them out. To make a child happy is something that has no other match in the world. After Leyla movement team says that their goal is not to meet needs but to fulfil wishes. And they do full justice to this social awareness campaign.

One Drop, One Hope

The founders of After Leyla Movement are spearheading another project called One Drop, One Hope, which aims at delivering blood and thrombosis to the child patients at the hospitals when needed. They ask the donors to fill out the form designed for this purpose online and when this type of blood is urgently needed they get in touch with the donors requesting them to make the donation. Hence they give support to child patients on both emotional and physical level. In other words After Leyla team puts their best efforts to get the children feel and do better.



One idea... And three kind people who gathered around that idea... Now After Leyla is a huge project spanning across over thirty schools of medicine with thousands of volunteering medical students having fulfilled wishes of over two thousand sick children and keeps going without any benefits in return and on voluntary basis only...



Ismail Ertem





Ismail Ertem



Sometimes kindness means sharing; sometimes it means helping others; sometimes it means smiling to a total stranger, or like Ismail Ertem did it means risking your own life for your friend.

It was December in 2015. İsmail Ertem and Süleyman Yalçın were away from home, in Şırnak's Cizre, an eastern town of Turkey. They were stationed in Cizre for an important task. The fate of these two brave men, who never knew each other before, was connected for a holy duty. Their task was to ensure the security of people in Cizre as there were illegal groups threatening lives and properties of innocent civilians in the region. Ismail Ertem came across many things that broke his heart in his post; civilians were killed, schools, villages, streets and hospitals were damaged, local residents taking shelter at home were threatened, pupils going to school were learning to fear.

Law and order was disrupted; there were roadblocks on the streets. Some of the residents started leaving



their homes out of fear. But the people were not alone. Thousands of soldiers and policemen like İsmail Ertem and Süleyman Yalçın were putting great efforts to make sure that the civilians in the city would be able to breathe again. The locals were relieved to see the soldiers and policemen stand by their side and the cloud of sorrow started to disappear slowly.

The only concern of İsmail Ertem and those like him who left their families and children behind was to end the suffering of the locals living under the threat of terror and to let them live in a safe environment without ditches and barricades on the streets.

The duty of the soldiers and policemen is to ensure the safety of the civilians. This was the task that they were assigned to. While they were trying to protect the lives of others and themselves they would act considering one step ahead. Tales of dozens of heroes were written everyday.

This is the story of İsmail Ertem who has acted to honour the duty; the story of how travel order turned to kindness...

İsmail Ertem was a brave soldier fighting to end the suffering of terrorized civilians in Cizre, Şırnak. He was a young man who is the father of three small children.

He used to carry the pictures of his children in his pocket and was longing to see them again. Ertem



thought that thousands of policemen and soldiers were working toward restoring the law and order in these cities where the security and peace was broken out. They were stationed here in order to make sure the students would go to school without fear; the shops were not looted nor destroyed; people could sleep in peace and children could dream.

Ismail Ertem trusted his wife and three children to God and set off to Cizre, because only if children in Cizre could live happily then his own children would be happy too. If Cizre children would again safely play in the parks then he would feel his children were safe too.

Süleyman Yalçın, whom he calls “my elder bro,” was a senior police officer in his fifties that always remained by his side. They were more than friends, almost like father and son. The footage of Ismail Ertem shielding injured Süleyman Yalçın with his body had touched everyone’s heart across the country.

Süleyman Yalçın was shot in a cold winter day. When he fell on the ground specialized sergeant Ismail saw this and rushed to him. He moved his friend to a safer place and tried to keep him conscious until the ambulance arrived. The ambulance did not arrive for a long time as it could not enter the street due to the ditches dug up by the terrorists...



Süleyman Yalçın was losing blood; he was supposed to be taken to the hospital immediately. Meanwhile Ismail Ertem applied the first aid to his friend and consoled him telling him that he was going to be all right.

After a while a tank arrived to take them to the ambulance. They were supposed to go to the place where the ambulance was trapped by tank.

They put police officer Süleyman Yalçın at the front of the tank with face down. Ismail Ertem did not leave his friend, whom he called brother, alone as he lied down next to him to protect him. They had to travel in this fashion for about 250-300 metres. The skirmishes were going on. It was getting increasingly difficult to get to the safe zone. Süleyman Yalçın was injured and vulnerable. The skirmishes escalated. The buzzing bullets were flying past them. So this is how it feels to be face to face with death two friends thought.

Right at that moment Ismail Ertem without hesitation threw himself upon his friend using his body as human shield. “Brother Süleyman`s children came to my mind” says Ismail Ertem recalling those life threatening moments. He feared that his brother Süleyman Yalçın’s children would lose their father. Indeed he himself had three children who have been waiting for him to return home.



Sacrifice... Selflessness... Even if all the kind words came together they would fail to describe what specialized sergeant Ismail did for Suleyman Yalçın. Because he put his own life at stake to save his friend`s life. Specialized sergeant Ismail Ertem risked his life to protect someone, who was assigned to protect his people. “If the same situation happened again I would do the same,” is his only comment.

Visiting Brother Sulaiman

Ismail Ertem visited Süleyman Yalçın some time after he was taken to the hospital. Ismail Ertem was so excited as if he was going to see a family member. Likewise Süleyman Yalçın was so happy to see him as if one of his own children were visiting. He could not hold back his tears and the words stuck in his throat. Obviously Süleyman Yalçın had a vivid memory of what they experienced together on the top of the tank. “I would kiss the hands of your parents as they raised such a brave son. I will not forget your sacrifice to the end of my life,” he spoke slowly.

Not only Süleyman Yalçın but everyone, who fought and prayed for the unity and solidarity of the nation, will never forget Ismail Ertem`s heroic sacrifice. Their love for our land and our people will remain as a legacy and a prayer in the path of kindness.



Osman Gerem





Osman Gerem



A heart that is beating for kindness for quarter a century...

A charitable person who makes where he lives a centre of kindness and unite the differences in kindness...

Osman Gererm is a selfless man who has dedicated his life to doing good and only good...

Osman Gerem, who lives in Şanlıurfa, had this urge of kindness instilled in him when he was a child. His father was a farmer and he grew up in a big family. He counts this one memory from his childhood as the starting point of kindness in his life: “ I was only seven. When we were hanging out in the front porch with my dad our neighbour’s two sons showed up. They told my dad that they ran out of wheat and asked for one sack of wheat to make flour. We had only one sack of wheat left in our house. Yet my dad wanted to give it away to them without a moment’s



hesitation. Realizing it our neighbour's sons did not want to accept it. Then my dad knocked on the door of another one of our neighbours and lent some wheat just to make sure that the boys did not return home bare handed."

Osman Gerem did not make much sense out of this incident but later realized that giving when you do not have much either is not everyone's cup of tea. That moment when his father motioned to give away the last bag of wheat to his neighbour marked the start of acts of kindness in Gerem's life. His father would gather all his children and advise them: "Look children, when you are breaking bread together give the bigger piece of bread to your friend. By doing that you make sure that your friend learns to do the same if not the first time surely the second time around."

Kindness has taken root in Osman Gerem's heart at young age. In 1978 he moved from village to the city centre in order to work in the constructions. He had made up his mind to do good no matter what kind of job he had. So he picked Fridays when it was off day for the construction as his charity day. Along with his three other friends also working on the construction, every Friday he would bring food to a needy family.

For years Osman Gerem and his friends would find out the needy families and do shopping for them



during the day and deliver them to their house at night. Helping people that they do not know and getting blessings and well-wishing prayers from them made Osman Gerem and his friends so happy. Those days mean a lot for Osman Gerem as they are unforgettable. Osman Gerem continued his charity work in the furniture shop where he started working after his work on the constructions ended.

Together with his four colleagues from the neighbourhood where he worked they would get together and discuss what they could do for the families in need. Then with the approaching month of Ramadan they decided to distribute loaves of bread to the needy families. This charity work initiated by Osman Gerem and his friends continued for years. The supporters grew as they kept distributing bread. So this charity, group which they started as five people, expanded gradually.

After a while Osman Gerem could think of nothing but doing charity. If the supplies required for next day's charity work is in place he can go to sleep. Other wise he would just rack his brain about what to do till morning. He handed over his furniture shop to his children in order to reach out to more people in need and to occupy himself with charity work only. First with the help of his children he set up spaces for co-curricular activities of children in their neighbourhood. Then in collaboration with expanding grassroots they built houses for homeless



families, helped poor families repair their houses, opened Quran schools and refurbished them. Thus they reached out to nine thousand orphans and poor families. Gerem and his sons' charity work continue to this day.

After the earthquake in Van they set to work and sent out nine aid trucks to the area. Gerem and his sons did not turn a blind eye to the troubles in the Muslim world while carrying out charities at home. They have also sent aid trucks to Afghanistan, Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Somalia.

Aid to Syria

Syrian civil war, which erupted in 2011, turned the country into rubble in a short space of time. The entire cities were razed to the ground. Leaving their homes, belongings, and friends behind people fled to the Turkish border. Turkey opened the borders and welcomed them as guests. Turkish people have shown their hospitality right away. They embraced the Syrians who crossed the border and tried to deliver regular aid to those left in Syria.

According to the report by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2016 the registered Syrian refugee number in Turkey was 2.801.586. However unofficial sources report that Syrian refugees currently are about five million. According to the same UNCHR report Turkey is the number



one country hosting the biggest number of refugees in the world. Turkey sets up tent cities for refugees where food, healthcare, security, social activities, education, prayer space, interpretation, cleaning and similar other services are offered for free.

Turkish people put hand in hand and started to share their bread and houses with the refugees. Locals brought aid to over fifty thousand tent cities and container cities set up across the country. All doors of kindness opened to make sure these destitute people, who were forced out of their country, lost their loved ones, relatives, homes and gardens, retain some form of normal life.

Osman Gerem describes the horror in Syria, “A great massacre is carried out before the rusty hearts, deaf ears and blind eyes of the world, and an entire nation is being wiped out.” We should not just watch the fire that engulfs our neighbour, he adds. Syria was our neighbour and it was impossible to stay put when it was on fire. Osman Gerem set off the road like an ant as he puts it. The only question in his mind was how to alleviate the suffering however little as he can.

In Şanlıurfa various aid campaigns started with the incentive from the mayor, logistic help from the municipality, support from government institutions, NGOs, and unions. Osman Gerem set to work. He has united 60 NGOs based in Urfa in a platform



under his leadership. First they sent aid to the Syrians caught up in war in their home country. When the civil war turned into a massacre in Syria the constant flow of immigrants grew bigger. The number of Syrian refugees within Şanlıurfa rose to 600.000 and with Afghans and Iraqis it reached 650.000.

Thanks to the aid platform set up already the problems of refugees in Şanlıurfa were discussed. First of all basic needs were identified; housing, education and healthcare were the areas where they focused more. Osman Gerem, who works day and night in the platform, does not refer to them as Syrian, Afghan or Iraqi refugees but mukhajereen brothers and highlights he and his friends carry out the charity work with the diligence of al-Ansar.

Moreover, they opened clothes stores exclusively for Syrians living in Turkey where to this day 173.000 Syrians have walked in and picked up their clothes for free. The stores run by appointment. Children and women can come in at different hours and pick their clothes as they wish. Every Saturday they have fun activities for children at these stores which turn into fun fair where refugee children can escape a little from their troubles while having fun.

Osman Gerem repeatedly points out that a helping hand should be offered to Syrian mukhajereen: “In a society if people are hungry then do not expect peace. People who go hungry are likely to fall prey



to dangerous stuff. They will either beg, or steal, or engage in immoral activities. If these crimes were committed in a place then there would be no peace, prosperity and happiness. If we want our society's moral fibre and peace remain intact we have to make sure that our mukhajereen brothers do not go hungry. After all Allah entrusted them to us. Turkey is trying to set an example of humanity to the rest of the world with the aid work that it has undertaken. Everyone in our country is trying to carry out the task of al-Ansar as best as he can.”

“We have a soup kitchen in Syria and we distribute food there. After handing out the aids we headed toward half destroyed residences where families still live in order to give away chocolates and toys to the children. Then I saw a big crowd gathered around a cauldron. Women and children who have gathered in the crowd were picking up the potatoes cooking inside the cauldron. Each person was getting only one potato. Right there one woman said that she is eating something for the first time in three days.” His words stuck in his throat as he recounted the event.

What he has witnessed and experienced made him more sensitive to his surroundings. He is unable to sleep without meeting the needs of his mukhajereen brothers. He is putting his utmost efforts to make sure that children and babies did not go hungry.



This altruistic man reports that Şanlıurfa is the city accommodating the biggest number of refugees in the world. He would visit other cities to raise funds for the refugees in Şanlıurfa. He would meet mayors, NGOs, charitable businessmen and describe the situation in Şanlıurfa to ask support for their refugee brothers.

Syria and Memories

Osman Gerem has witnessed so much horror in Syria as he went there numerous times to deliver the aid in person. One of those days that he went to Syria to deliver aid with his colleagues a group of women stopped them. The women first thanked them for bringing in aid and asked baby formula for their babies as they went dry from the horror of the warplanes and deafening drones. Osman Gerem and his team of aid workers were so upset by these words and did what they asked for. But the incident did not end there. One of the women held out the baby in her arms and pleaded, “Here take her so that she might survive. Here she will either be killed or die from hunger!” Her words still ring in Osman Gerem’s ears.

Little Girl Asia

Osman Gerem loved Asia like his own child. When their house was shelled and her two legs were broken they brought little Asia from Syria to Şanlıurfa. She



received treatment in Şanlıurfa for a while. But the doctors decided that her legs should be amputated. Osman Gerem somehow heard about the situation and visited her in the hospital. When he asked the doctors if there is a way out of this they responded that her legs might have the chance to heal with treatment in Istanbul or Ankara. Upon learning this Osman Gerem immediately took action and called a charitable friend of his to ask for sponsorship. His friend arranged a hospital in Istanbul for Asia's treatment and covered all her hospital fees. After a long treatment Asia's legs were saved. Asia was only one of the eight hundred and fifty thousand disabled people in Syria. Luckily she came across a charitable kind-hearted man like Osman Gerem and was able to walk again thanks to his help.

Helping Addicts

Osman Gerem began helping drug addicts and vulnerable people in prisons after he heard an incident. One day his friend told him about a woman whose husband was in prison. Once her husband's sentence was confirmed her neighbours were estranged from her and kids no longer played with her children. Osman Gerem was so touched by this situation. What was the children's fault? If they were isolated from society they would grow up with grudge toward society. That is how he took the prisoners' families to his agenda and started aid work catering to them. In collaboration with his



colleagues and the prosecutors they started to help both the prisoners inside and their families outside.

They have set up a committee with the Green Crescent to reduce substance abuse and other dangerous addictions. Osman Gerem tries to work on all problem areas of the society. If the rehabilitation of alcohol and drug addicts were going to take place in another town he would go to the extent of giving the addicts traveling there for rehabilitation per diem. His point of view is that saving a person is better than everything else in the world.

Osman Gerem is nicknamed “Aid Robot” in Şanlıurfa because of his extensive charity work. He regards all acts of kindness as a tree planted in the hereafter. Therefore his passion never wanes. “On the contrary grows bigger,” he says and adds “someone who has tasted the sweet joy of doing good and being kind will never stop doing it.” When asked what kindness means to him he answers:

“Mine is some kind of love, deep love. It is not like the love of Leila and Majnun, neither like Asli and Kerem’s, nor it is like Shireen and Farhad. This love is driven by the desire to be a drop in the ocean of kindness. Once you have caressed the head of an orphan, felt the smile of a orphan, heard the sigh of an orphan you can walk as long as you can, run as fast as you can, fly as high as you can. No one can stop the person who has a conscience and compassion.



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