

MARISTAN

A MENTAL HEALTH GUIDEBOOK

Resources for Community and Religious Leaders on Syria



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Trigger Warning

This document discusses genocide and other possibly traumatic topics. Please take care of your mental health while reading. If you find yourself feeling distressed, please take a break, talk to someone you trust, or reach out for professional help.

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The authors of this document do not assume responsibility for the content or political beliefs of included resources. We have done our due diligence to ensure all of the information is accurate, up-to-date, and attempted to avoid biased language.

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SECTION I

Historical Context

Islamic Importance of Syria and As-Sham

The region of As-Sham, the Arabic word for the lands of Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and the surrounding areas, is blessed explicitly in both the Quran and hadith. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “If the people of Syria are corrupted, there will be no good in you. A group among my nation will continue to be supported, unharmed by those who fail them until the establishment of the Hour” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2192). At a time when Syria and its surrounding lands were still controlled by the Romans, the Prophet (ﷺ) made a special dua to “bless [the Muslims] in our Sham” (Sunan at-Tirmidhi 3953). This implies that not only would the Muslims conquer As-Sham, but that As-Sham would be a palace of immense significance as a future center of the Ummah. In a longer hadith, Zaid Ibn Thabit Al-Ansari said: ‘We were with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) collecting the Qur'an on pieces of cloth, so the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: 'Tuba is for Ash-Sham.' So we said: 'Why is that O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'Because the angels of Ar-Rahman spread their wings over it.'” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 4335). Additionally, it is frequently mentioned in the Quran, that Allah (ﷻ) Himself has blessed Masjid Al-Aqsa and its surrounding lands (Surah Israa 17:1, Surah Al-Araf 7:137, Surah Al-Anbiya 21:71). For example Allah says in Surah al-Israa’ 17:1, “Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing” (Surah al-Israa’ 17:1).

The lands of As-Sham hold an unparalleled place in Islamic tradition. From the Quranic affirmation of its sanctity to the Prophet Muhammad’s (ﷺ) heartfelt duas, As-Sham has been established as a land of barakah (blessing) through its association with Masjid Al-Aqsa and its deep connection with various prophets. This collective

importance to the Ummah makes the recent overthrow of a brutal dictatorship so much more impactful. May As-Sham soon witness a future that reflects its esteemed status in Islam, characterized by peace, prosperity, and unity.

Overview of the Current Situation in Syria

On December 8, 2024, the approximately 54-year reign of the Assad family, marked by authoritarian rule and suppression, came to an end. Political upheaval has colored Syria's history, with the country experiencing eight major or attempted coups in its history, with Hafez Al-Assad launching the last coup called the 'Corrective Movement' in 1970 (Secen, 2024). The Assads used brutal measures to maintain their power, utilizing chemical warfare on their citizens (Human Rights Watch, 2017), detaining individuals without trials, and militarizing the state (Laub, 2023). Beginning in late November 2024, a collective of opposition groups, including Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), mobilized against the Assad regime, taking hold of the territory once controlled by Bashar Al-Assad (Marx, 2024). Capturing Aleppo and then pushing south, they soon captured the capital, Damascus, resulting in the Assad family fleeing and seeking asylum in Moscow (Marx, 2024b).

An interim government has been put in place, with Ahmed Al-Sharaa, a commander of HTS, being named the de facto leader of Syria and Mohammed Al-Bashir as the transitional prime minister (Reuters, 2024). This transitional government will be in place until March 1, aiming to stabilize the country, decide on a new governance structure, and hold elections (Al-Jazeera, 2024). Establishing a unified political system is further complicated by Syria's diverse religious and ethnic pluralism. The transitional administration has taken steps to ensure the protection of all religious groups, including Christians, Druze, Alawites, and Shi'ites (France 24, 2024). HTS has stated that minorities would be protected, creating optimism about the possibility of inclusive governance (Limaye, 2024). This goal was further

enforced by facilitating the integration of the rebel armed forces under one cohesive unit within the Defense Ministry. This move aimed to centralize the military and establish a cohesive military force that incorporates Syria's diverse population. All the armed groups, except for the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, agreed to integrate (Al Jazeera, 2024c). Thus, there is cautious optimism that the sectarian divides that the Assad family exploited to stay in power are slowly being addressed under the new regime (Alkousaa & Azhari, 2024). Only time will tell if their efforts to unite a country scarred by years of authoritarian rule and civil war will be successful.

Historical Context of the Syrian Struggle

The Syrian struggle is historically rooted in colonialism, sociopolitical upheaval, and authoritarian rule. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations granted France a mandate to govern Syria (French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon, 1923). This policy gave France the authority to facilitate the establishment of a democratic state in Syria. Although the stated objectives of the mandate made it appear as though the transition in power would result in self-governance, it was ultimately a colonial agenda aimed at resource extraction (Nakhle, 2024). The French utilized a divide-and-rule strategy to divide Syria and create separate administrative systems to govern the land based on ethnic lines (Fildis, 2011). Six administrative states were created: Damascus, Aleppo, The Alawite State, Jabal Druze, Sanjak of Alexandretta, and Greater Lebanon (White, 2012). This policy aimed to quell Arab nationalism and discourage unified revolts against the French, ultimately exasperating sectarian divides and delaying the formation of a unified national identity. It was not until after World War II and the rising Syrian nationalist movement and global post-war decolonization efforts that France withdrew from Syria in 1946 (Nakhle, 2024).

However, the impacts of the French mandate had far-reaching consequences on the state government. It ultimately laid the foundations for the eventual rise of the Ba'ath party and consequently,

the Assad regime. The Ba'ath party appealed to Syrians as it preached a secular ideology and platformed Arab nationalism (Devlin, 1991). After the failed proposed United Arab Republic and the Egypt-Syrian unification, Syria faced a period of political instability. The Ba'ath party eventually came into power, and in 1970, Hafez Al-Asaad, a party member, staged a coup and became the president (Myre, 2024). He maintained power by purging political rivals until he died in 2000, after which his son, Bashar Al-Asaad, became the leader (Syria's Assad Regime, 2006). Bashar faced challenges in consolidating his power, but by promoting military loyalty and seeking minority support, he maintained his position (Laub, 2023).

Bashar's power was soon under threat after the wave of pro-democracy uprisings across the Arab world in 2011 made its way to Syria. Protestors were seeking change rooted in long-standing grievances against the Assad family, including the lack of political alternatives, state repression, economic hardships stemming from agricultural collapse, and widespread corruption (Sen, 2016). The detention and torture of 15 children in Daraa after they spray-painted graffiti against the Assad regime ignited the protests in Syria (Tarabay, 2018). The people of Daraa protested for their release; however, security forces opened fire on the people, killing at least 418 individuals and employing a siege, cutting electricity and phone lines, collectively punishing the residents (Human Rights Watch, 2011). What began as a protest movement in Syria against the Assad regime soon escalated into a civil war.

Assad's responded with force, committing genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes against his people in a bid to maintain power (Sparrow & Roth, 2024). His crimes include extrajudicial killings, with one mass grave recently found outside Damascus holding 100,000 bodies, with other mass graves being discovered after the regime fell (Al-Jazeera, 2024b). At least 96,321 cases of enforced disappearances were documented (Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2024), and the United Nations estimates at least 306,000 civilians have died from 2011-2021 (Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2022).

After the fall of the regime and the celebrations that followed, citizens rushed to find loved ones who had disappeared as a result of the Asaad regime. Among the most notorious places that citizens were sent was Sednaya Prison on the outskirts of Damascus. Individuals were often taken at military checkpoints, never to be seen again. After the rebels took Damascus, Sednaya was one of the first places freed (Goldbaum & Berehulak, 2024). The 54-year rule of the Assad family has left a legacy of authoritarianism, corruption, and repression that the country must reckon with while it rebuilds itself.

SECTION 2

The Syrian Crisis as a Global Issue

After more than a decade-long civil war marked by violence and destabilization, over 13.4 million Syrians have been displaced, with 6.7 million internally displaced and 6.7 million refugees registered in other countries (Cratsley et al., 2021). To date, the Syrian crisis remains the largest displacement crisis globally (UN Refugee Agency, 2024). While the scale of the crisis is staggering, it is important to recognize that this is not merely a Syrian issue. The displacement of millions has created a global humanitarian crisis that has created ripple effects extending beyond Syria's borders. Neighboring countries, such as Turkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan, have shouldered a disproportionate share of the burden (Hijazi et al., 2015). They have hosted the majority of refugees while grappling with strained healthcare systems, overburdened schools, and limited economic resources (Hijazi et al., 2015). Though supportive in their response, these nations faced significant challenges in sustaining infrastructure and social services over time.

Further afield, the influx of Syrian refugees has tested immigration policies, social cohesion, and resource allocation in Europe, North America, and other resettlement areas (Sharif et al., 2021). The global community's response, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initiative to implement the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), may be a step in the right direction toward

addressing these challenges (UNDP, 2024). Yet, these efforts remain insufficient to fully meet the growing needs of displaced Syrians and the host communities supporting them (Sharif et al., 2021). Thus, a thorough and robust investment in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities is needed to help mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of displacement.

Syria in the context of the Palestinian Liberation Struggle

The struggles of Syria and Palestine, while distinct in their history and contexts, share commonalities in their narratives of displacement, oppression, and resistance. Both countries have endured decades of occupation, violence, and ongoing perseverance in the pursuit of freedom (Barkil-Oteo et al., 2018). While the Palestinian oppression has been externally induced by settler colonialism and occupation, the Syrian oppression has been largely inflicted by its own government (Shakir, 2023; Secen, 2024). Despite these differences, the collective experiences of Palestinians and Syrians reflect a broader pattern of underrepresentation, misrepresentation, and marginalization in global discourse, perpetuating cycles of injustice.

Palestinians have faced over 75 years of occupation, with over 5.98 million externally displaced worldwide registered under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency as of 2024 (UNHCR US). Similarly, Syrians have endured mass displacement, with 13.4 million forced from their homes since the onset of the civil war (Cratsley et al., 2021). Despite the scale of these crises, media narratives often exacerbate these struggles by misrepresenting or erasing the root causes of both Palestinian resistance and Syrian revolutionary movements. For instance, Mahar Nassar reported that from 1979 to 2019, less than 2% of approximately 2,500 New York Times opinion pieces discussing Palestinians were actually written by Palestinians themselves (Sinnar et al., 2024). Instead of addressing the systemic injustices at the root,

mainstream coverage tends to amplify isolated acts of violence or circulate unverified stories, perpetuating stereotypes and undermining solidarity efforts (DC ACW, 2023).

For both Palestinians and Syrians, faith plays a critical role in navigating feelings of grief, loss, and oppression. In communities where close to 99% of Palestinians and 90% of Syrians identify as Muslim, Islamic principles such as Tawakkul (trust in Allah), Qadr (divine decree), and Sumood (steadfastness) offer a framework for conceptualizing suffering and maintaining hope (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). In Palestinian testimonies, concepts such as Amaanah (trust given by Allah ﷻ) and Hikmatullah (wisdom of Allah's plans) are frequently invoked as affirmations of purpose and strength (Mental Health Guidebook for those Concerned about Palestine, 2023). Similarly, Syrians draw upon their faith amidst hardships, finding solace and fortitude in the belief that justice and divine accountability will ultimately prevail.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge concerns within the Muslim community about Syria's evolving political landscape and its implications for Palestinian solidarity. While the Syrian government historically maintained ties with the Palestinian liberation movement, there is uncertainty about how the new regime may approach this relationship in the future. This uncertainty may spark feelings of anxiety and apprehension about maintaining collective support among oppressed communities.

Experiences of Refugees in Turkiye and Elsewhere

The Syrian refugee crisis has transcended borders, with Turkiye hosting the largest population of Syrian refugees worldwide (Kaya et al., 2023). Beyond Turkiye, millions of Syrian refugees have sought refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Europe (UNHCR, 2024). Despite finding housing, refugees continue to face numerous challenges post-

resettlement, including economic hardship, cultural adjustment, and mental health crises (Morris et al., 2009). In Jordan, for instance, 93% of Syrian refugee families live below the poverty line and are unable to afford even basic healthcare expenses (UNHCR, 2024).

Displacement imposes an immense psychological toll on refugees (Yilmaz et al., 2024). A 2024 study by the Frontiers in Psychiatry found that nearly 60% of Syrian refugees in Türkiye who participated in the study experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with 33.5% depression and 4.5% anxiety rates among participants (Yilmaz et al., 2024). In Lebanon and Jordan, 45.6% of Syrian children and adolescents have developed PTSD (Rizkalla et al., 2020). Among Syrian refugee adolescents in Jordan, 53% report experiencing high levels of insecurity, and 82.5% have experienced more than four lifetime traumas (Rizkalla et al., 2020). In addition to grappling with the trauma of war, refugees have to acclimate to entirely new environments and navigate the difficulties of rebuilding their lives in a foreign place, often with a completely different language and culture. In many cases, discrimination against refugees and social tensions can contribute to additional stress and isolation (Hassan et al., 2016).

Women and children, in particular, face heightened vulnerabilities to mental health challenges (Hosseini et al., 2023). Women increasingly serve as heads of households, and nearly 6 million people are in dire need of nutritional assistance, 74% of them being women and girls (United Nations, 2023). Children, who comprise more than half of the refugee population, endure interrupted education, trauma, and limited access to specialized care for growth and development (Rizkalla et al., 2020). Compounding these challenges is the concept of intergenerational trauma, where mental health challenges of one generation can impact the emotional development of future generations (Dashorst et al., 2019). Addressing the needs of Syrian refugees requires more than immediate humanitarian aid. A sustainable response must include a long-term investment in mental health care, education, and economic opportunities to reduce suffering and empower refugees with the tools needed to

rebuild their lives.

SECTION 3

Mental Health Impacts

Psychological and Emotional Effects of War, Displacement, and Trauma

Mental Health Consequences of War

The psychological impact of armed conflict and war is profound and well-researched. Studies exploring this relationship show that individuals exposed to war are two to three times more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety than individuals who haven't been exposed to war (Carpiniello, 2023). Since the beginning of the 2011 uprising, Syrians have experienced multiple traumatic events such as indiscriminate bombings, attacks on hospitals and schools, chemical weapons attacks, forced displacement, devastating earthquakes, and more (Albaba & Sahloul, 2023). Surveys examining the prevalence of mental health disorders in Syria have found that 44% of respondents are likely to have severe depression and/or anxiety, while 36.9% meet the full criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (Kakaji et al., 2021).

With the deliberate targeting of infrastructure and society, millions of Syrians have been left with nothing other than their memories of how multiple traumas have seeped into every area of their lives. The combination of post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety has lasting impacts on daily living. Flashbacks of traumatic events, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, and experiencing ongoing feelings of shame and guilt are just a few symptoms of PTSD that can impact an individual's ability to live their daily life (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). Depression and anxiety can also be debilitating, causing excessive worry, lack of motivation, feelings of helplessness, and

uncontrollable worry or fear (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Researchers have highlighted that the destruction of healthcare infrastructure in Syria makes it exceedingly difficult to address the public mental health crisis and that efforts to increase access to healthcare are necessary for rebuilding Syrian communities in a post-war context (Abarra et al., 2015).

Perimigration and Post-migration Trauma

With millions of Syrians being forced out of their homes, either to other parts of Syria or to other countries, it is important to consider the mental health consequences of this grueling migration process. The trauma Syrians experience by being exposed to war and violence is compounded by the challenges of fleeing their homes to seek safety elsewhere. Thousands of Syrians had to choose between continuing to live in an active war zone where they were being bombed indiscriminately or risking going on potentially deadly journeys in search of safety.

Perimigration, the period between leaving one's home and resettling in a new place, is marked by its own unique challenges, which include a lack of resources and aid, poor living conditions, discrimination experienced in host countries, and increased risk of refugee exploitation (Miles et al., 2019). The decision to leave makes Syrians vulnerable to these conditions, which can further exacerbate symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety.

Post-migration refers to the period after perimigration, where refugees have settled in a new place. For many Syrians, post-migration comes with its own set of challenges, such as a lack of savings, difficulty obtaining residency status for the purposes of education and employment, decreased resources and opportunities, loss of social status, material losses, and social isolation (Miles et al., 2019; Rommes & Chaer, 2023). Pre-migration traumas coupled with the challenges of fleeing to a new place have prompted researchers to find a high prevalence of continued PTSD, depression, and anxiety even after years of settling in

host countries like Turkey and Jordan (Basheti et al., 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2024). Syrians also struggle with the loss of culture and identity fragmentation that happens through acculturation and must find ways to cope with their traumas while facing these added challenges of living among different societies (Rommes & Chaer, 2023).

Intergenerational Trauma and Effects of War on Child Development

Millions of Syrian refugee children have been exposed to and impacted by the horrors of war and displacement. Labeled as a “lost generation,” Syrian children have faced traumas, including displacement, witnessing mass deaths and acts of violence, and lack of adequate shelter, food, aid, and education (Rizkalla et al., 2020). Studies have found that women and children exposed to armed conflict are the most vulnerable to developing mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Carpiniello, 2023). Syrian children have also been found to experience high rates of mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, panic attacks, suicidality, developmental regression, and more (Rizkalla et al., 2020). Additionally, the impact of trauma on families can influence parenting styles and manifest in developmental delays, as children are exposed to both traumatic events and the negative mental health outcomes of their caregivers (Hazer & Gredeback, 2023). When parents and caregivers are suffering from mental health issues, coupled with a lack of resources and social support, there is a higher chance of harsh parenting and negative, stressful parent-child interactions taking place (Hazer & Gredeback, 2023). The combination of these ongoing stressors impacts children’s emotional and psychological development and can even make them more vulnerable to physical illnesses (Hazer & Gredeback, 2023; Rizkallah et al., 2020). Increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health symptoms can be passed down through generations through behaviors and also through chemical changes to DNA, a concept known as intergenerational trauma (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Therefore, addressing the mental health consequences for children in the context of Syria requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the interaction between the mental health of their families, their social and economic conditions, their access to social support and resources, and their internal family systems. Children internalize their environment, the stressors and emotional health of their parents, and the traumatic events that they witness and experience directly (Rizkallah et al., 2020). Having an awareness of the way these various stressors and interactions can impact the mental health of our brothers and sisters who have been displaced and fled Syria is essential to being able to support them in a post-Assad era.

Mental Health of Syrians Living in Syria and Abroad

With millions of internally displaced peoples (IDPs; people displaced from their homes to other parts of Syria) in Syria and with the economic devastation of ongoing war, Syrians who never left the country struggle with an array of challenges that negatively impact their mental health. Since the beginning of the war in 2011, 80% of Syrians have been living below the poverty line (Kakaje et al., 2021). The mental health of Syrians was neglected long before the war due to stigma surrounding mental health across the country (Kakaje et al., 2021). With the significant mental health impact of war on Syrians, this leaves a massive mental health crisis with little to no infrastructure to address it. The destruction of hospitals, the mass exodus of health care professionals, and a severe shortage of mental health care workers further exacerbate the crisis (Albaba & Sahloul, 2023). The World Health Organization (2024) notes that in the region of Northwestern Syria, approximately 1 million people struggle with mental health conditions but have only two psychiatrists and 78 trained doctors to serve them. Additional surveys examining the mental health of 3,989 Syrians living in Syria found that in 2021, 83% (3,326) had depressive and anxiety symptoms (Mohsen et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of supporting efforts to increase access to resources and aid that can begin to address the mental health crisis in Syria directly.

Since the toppling of the Assad regime, distressing footage and documentation of torture survivors being released from notorious prisons have become widespread and shared across the news and social media platforms. According to Amnesty International (2024), around 56,000 Syrian men, women, and children were arbitrarily held in Assad regime detention centers, where they experienced mass torture and death. Additionally, since the fall of the Assad regime, human rights groups have discovered that over 100,000 forcibly disappeared Syrians experienced horrific violence and torture before ultimately being murdered and buried in mass graves (Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2024). Survivors of these detention centers experience a wide range of psychological symptoms, including shame and guilt of having experienced such humiliation, as well as physiological symptoms, such as headaches, body pain, and much more. (Hassan et al., 2016). This population is particularly vulnerable and must be given significant consideration as they struggle to integrate back into their families and society.

Refugees from Syria have experienced similar traumas to Syrian IDPs. Massacres, forced displacement by Assad regime forces, torture, wrongful imprisonment, high levels of poverty, and inadequate resources for shelter, food, and education are just a few of the horrifying realities Syrian IDPs and refugees have experienced (Hassan et al., 2016). However, studies suggest that the challenges related to being a refugee in another country are the main cause of their mental health problems (Rommes & Chaer, 2023). Resettlement, discrimination, socioeconomic hardships, loss of community, identity fragmentation, and loss of social support are overarching themes of the Syrian refugee experience, often leaving severe, lasting impacts on their mental health. In a study exploring how Syrian refugees cope with these hardships through narrative storytelling, researchers found that narrating their lives from a perspective of strength and empowerment helps them cope with their hardships and reconstruct their fragmented collective identity (Rommes & Chaer, 2023). Among Syrian refugees living in the United States, Armstrong-Mensah et al. (2023) note that a lack of social services coupled with families' worry about their relatives back in Syria are factors

that contribute to their mental health problems.

Collective Trauma and Resilience

Hirschberger (2018) describes collective trauma as a traumatic event that affects the fabric of an entire society and is represented in the collective memory of the impacted group (Hirschberger, 2018). The devastating nature of the traumatic event prompts the group to construct their own meaning in order to promote shared meaning and identity (Hirschberger, 2018). The Assad regime's response to the Syrian uprising devastated the fabric of Syrian families, communities, society, and identity overall. Syrians' sense of collective identity was disrupted and had to be redefined in the aftermath of their collective trauma. Narratives of collective trauma have helped shape Syrian memory, and researchers have shown that despite their collective trauma, many Syrians have taken their experiences as an opportunity to search for new meaning, reconstruct their worldview, and develop a new sense of purpose (Matos et al., 2021). Additionally, research shows that social support helps promote adaptation in the face of trauma. In a qualitative study exploring resilience among Syrian refugee populations, researchers identified that Syrian adolescents coping with collective trauma did so by fostering a sense of communal resilience that provided a sense of security (Nagi et al., 2021). These are key considerations to make in order to address our role as a Muslim Ummah in supporting our Syrian brothers and sisters as they move forward from the brutality of the Assad regime. Providing social support can promote collective healing, which protects against the long-term psychological effects of trauma and war.

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious traumatization happens when an individual is psychologically affected by witnessing the traumatization of others (Muslim Mirror, 2023). The effects can be debilitating, with symptoms of vicarious trauma including pessimism, loss of hope, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and more (Muslim Mirror, 2023). It is

important to note that vicarious trauma is a natural response we, as Muslims, feel when we see the suffering of our Ummah. Strategies to address vicarious trauma include practicing self-care, seeking social support, and maintaining balance between work and life (British Medical Association, 2024). Although the fall of the Assad regime is something Syrians and Muslims around the world are celebrating, feelings of joy may be clouded by witnessing the uncovering of past crimes committed by the Assad regime against the Syrian people. Additionally, our communities' vicarious trauma from witnessing the genocide in Gaza, along with the other ongoing tragedies across the Ummah, may be compounded by learning about the horrors our Syrian brothers and sisters faced under the Assad regime. From a mental health perspective, it is important to emphasize that it is natural to experience a mix of emotions in this peri- and post-Assad stage. Journalists in Syria have noted how in the aftermath of Assad's fall, Syrians themselves are hopeful about an Assad-free future while also grieving the destruction and loss of life they have faced over the last 13 years (Makki, 2024).

SECTION 4

A Personal Narrative of Syrian Trauma and Resilience

Role of Community and Religious Leaders (CaRLs)

What It Feels to be Syrian: Complex Trauma from the Diaspora and First-Generation Children of Immigrants by Imam Ahmad Deeb, PhD

On December 8, 2024, a free Syria emerged from the depths of 50+ years of brutal tyranny in what almost every Syrian felt was a divine miracle. Like many Syrians, I am still processing these events two months later. I was born in Damascus and my father moved us to the United States around the age of 5. Upon settling, I struggled with national identity like most third-culture kids in a post-9/11 America. As a result, I had a profound appreciation and love for my Syrian identity which I leaned on as I navigated these complex terrains. Unfortunately, I was only able to return to Syria once as a 15-year-old due to the delayed processing of our citizenship in America. When I intended to pursue seminary studies abroad in Syria, this was the year the Syrian revolution broke out. On December 8, many asked:

“How do you feel?”

I felt everything. I found myself crying at random points of the day, completely unprompted. Is this trauma? Is this shame? Is this joy? I felt euphoric joy over the fall of a regime that has brought my family and people unimaginable suffering. My father was tortured repeatedly in Assad’s prisons and by his police force, and he would tell me what he saw and lived through. They were undoubtedly the most horrific things I ever heard in my life. (would you like me to provide details?). I felt

excitement that maybe my uncle didn't die in those torture dungeons and that I could finally meet him, for the first time in my life. Unfortunately, we are still unable to locate him. I felt an unflinching obligation to speak and act for Syria. But I also felt confused:

“What role must I play as an Imam or religious leader?”

I felt anxious; “Will I be put on a no-fly list again? Will ‘SSSS’ show up on my boarding passes? Will I once again be treated like a second-class citizen, constantly interrogated for hours by the US government every time I fly abroad?” I also felt betrayed. How could the same people who claimed the liberation of Palestine—a cause of justice I and many others would give their life to—be so blinded as to gaslight our people from even expressing their joy? Many of us were told myths by these individuals which they desperately wanted to believe: this was just a psyop by foreign powers, particularly Israel and the US, and Syria will only get worse for the people and the Muslim community at large.

Mostly, I felt an overwhelming, almost crippling, sense of shame. I was in America where I had the privilege of speaking freely, yet I could never say anything about Syria. I was too horrified by what my father and other family members had been through. It was common for the secret police under Assad's rule to make your family members “disappear.” I lived through it. They would then take exorbitant bribes, only for you to receive your family member in a body bag, or to hear “We did a final check and he's not in our prisons.” As a result, any joy and excitement on December 8 was constantly followed by a form of PTSD that haunts every corner of my mind:

“What if they come back? Do you want to be the source of your family's torture and suffering by speaking out? Have they not been through enough?”

“What if they come back? Do you want to be the source of your family’s torture and suffering by speaking out? Have they not been through enough?” And sometimes, I feel nothing. I feel parts of me are so broken by the stories I vicariously lived through, that the capacity for emotion is switched off.

The psychological trauma experienced by many Syrians involves a pervasive sense of fear and helplessness, instilled by years of living under a regime that used surveillance and repression as tools of control.

Many first-generation Syrians experienced an intergenerational trauma informed by the stories of their families who immigrated and the lived experience of their family abroad. In my case, my entire family remained in Syria with the exception of my immediate family.

When the revolution broke out, it was no longer a secondary stress trauma from a story, but a painful and prolonged vicarious trauma. For people like me who felt unable to speak to protect our family members, it was accompanied by both a survivor’s guilt, and a sustained moral injury—even if the reasons were valid for many Syrians who abstained from active support of the revolution. As a result, it felt like a never-ending chronic and collective trauma that influenced our approaches to life in a new country. For some, it emboldened a greater political involvement under freer conditions; for others, it engendered a very cautious attitude towards any form of political organizing, informed by the fears of their parents. In the diaspora, there was widespread displacement trauma as millions were forced to flee the violence in Syria, leading to ongoing stress from instability and a profound grief that those uprooted unjustly never stop feeling. Even within Syria, there were those forcibly removed from their homes which they may have had for generations given to Assad’s allies—many of whom were not even Syrian.

Trauma was simply a fact of life as a Syrian—whether you remained in Syria, were forced to flee, or chose to immigrate. Those who remained experienced a form of complex trauma, growing up under conditions of regular disappearance of family members without any just case, torture trauma, and a constant fear that they are being watched for every word. A common saying in Syria was “the walls have ears.” This led to one of the most common traumatic experiences amongst Syrians: betrayal trauma. Not only were Syrians consistently betrayed by their government, but there was a mass distrust socially engineered by Assad’s rule.

Paranoia was systemic so that no one would dare question the political authority. Secret police were everywhere, paid to simply spy on their people and communities. Some would be paid to spy on their own family members or friends and report any dissidence; many would be forced to do so under the threat of their family’s torture. The consequences of this are severe, leading to deep distrust of authority and feelings of insecurity with others. Like any relationship, the rebuilding of trust is no easy path.

“With the fall of Assad, I have never felt more hopeful, and proud, for the future of my people.”

However, these forms of trauma take years to heal. We should not be surprised to see the effects of it in the slow rebuilding of the society. Professional healing institutions and services remain desperately needed for Syrians who were too plagued by poverty and fear to even consider their personal healing or the effects of these conditions on their overall wellbeing. This is why all that I feel now is a heavy responsibility to help rebuild Syria. It will take time, especially as we all process complex pain and trauma, but as the Syrians often say:

“Everything in its time, is beautiful.”

SECTION 5

Role of Community and Religious Leaders (CaRLs)

The Unique Position of CaRLs in Destigmatizing Mental Health

Community and religious leaders (CaRLs) in the Muslim community hold a respected and influential role in guiding the perspectives, direction, and actions of the communities they serve. Research indicates that CaRLs are often one of the first sources of support (frontline providers) that Muslim community members turn to for guidance on a variety of topics (Ali, 2016).

In particular, during times of emotional and psychological distress, many turn to CaRLs for guidance, even if these CaRLs may not have the skills necessary to respond adequately (Humam et al, 2023). In moments of experiences of emotional distress or confusion, it is critical that CaRLs are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively address the challenge within the community in a healthy and responsive way. If they are not, they could unintentionally cause more harm than good to members of their community.

In the context of the crisis in Syria, with the variety of perspectives, experiences, opinions, and emotions present within the Muslim American community, having a strong understanding of the mental health implications of the current events and the tools and resources available to community members is critical for CaRLs. This is especially important so as to not unintentionally inflict additional harm on community members who come to CaRLs seeking support and aid as they navigate the emotional, spiritual, and psychological challenges that come with events such as this.

| *“I’m just an Imam, not Superman.”*

Community and religious leaders often face a multitude of demands from varying stakeholders: the internal Muslim community they serve, the board and organizational structures they work within, the external community in which they advocate, and more (Schmid, 2020). Increasingly, CaRLs are faced with emotionally demanding interactions, as they act as frontline providers for many social and emotional challenges for the Muslim community (Ali, 2016). Therefore, we recommend the following:

KNOW AND ENFORCE YOUR BOUNDARIES

Community and religious leaders face increasing demands to meet the needs of increasingly complex community challenges. CaRLs are often called upon to provide pastoral care, counseling, and spiritual guidance, beyond their other duties and responsibilities in the community. They are also expected to mediate conflicts within the community, as well as be a representative of Muslim interests outside the community. CaRLs juggle these expectations on top of organizational management and administrative responsibilities (Hough, 2021). To further exacerbate the pressure and challenge, the role definition of imams is increasingly diffuse with an increasing task load and a blurring of the professional role and private life. CaRLs are expected to be available 24/7 for emergencies. Further, the position of CaRLs is often marked by a contradiction in which community members are both clients and indirect employers (through involvement with the board or voting power) (Trucco & Dehbi, 2024). Given the reality of these pressures, it is integral that CaRLs prioritize self-care and boundaries in order to ensure they are well enough to serve.

KNOW AND USE YOUR REFERRAL LIST

It is essential to aggregate a list of trusted mental health practitioners, chaplains and other professionals to whom you can make referrals. This will ensure that you are able to serve the community at the point of its needs without overburdening yourself. See the resources below for a list of mental health organizations.

- Guide for [“when to make a referral”](#)

KNOW WHAT THE COMMUNITY NEEDS FROM YOU

Steer clear of re-triggering/re-traumatizing content.

- See the section on vicarious trauma above.
- Community and religious leaders occupy an important and influential position. For that, emotional and psychological sensitivity is an important asset to cultivate, particularly during times of distress or intensity. It is vital that mass communication remains respectful and sensitive. This avoids any unnecessary trauma that can be experienced if more graphic or triggering topics are broached. For example, steer clear of discussing examples such as rape or torture during an obligatory worship service such as Jummah.

VALIDATE EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONS

- Validating the experiences and emotions of individuals in your community, regardless of your personal position on the issue, is an important step in ensuring they feel appropriately seen, heard, and respected.
 - This validation is to be done generally if the political context is polarizing (as mentioned below), but a non-negotiable is a dua in the khutbah and following the lead of the majority most affected when it comes to understanding and processing the issue at hand and determining what is needed by those affected from the community to best serve in such moments. From the perspective of many Syrians, the latter point seemed to have been the most missed and neglected point with Syria, as many in the diaspora and beyond experienced consistent gaslighting for any joy expressed at the liberation of their homeland.

ACKNOWLEDGE DIVERSITY

CENTER THE UMMAH AS A COLLECTIVE.

The Muslim community is an Ummah, and as the hadith says, when one part of the Ummah hurts, it is as if the whole Ummah is in pain (Sahih Al-Bukhari 6011). We feel each other's pain, and we celebrate our victories — collectively. Despite the variety of differences of opinions, experiences, and perspectives on the situation in Syria, this is not the time to be divisive. Our Syrian brothers and sisters, like many of our brothers and sisters around the world, were in immense pain and experienced severe suffering over the last several decades, and the wounds of this trauma will be deeply embedded into generations to come.

Whatever the future may hold, regardless of personal opinions of what happened, how it happened, and what might happen, the Ummah needs **unity** and **collective power**. Nurturing and growing that solidarity starts with the community and religious leaders - the ustadhat and asatidha, the imams, shaykhat, and mashayikh. These individuals hold the responsibility of leading the rest of the community to follow the teachings of Islam.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLECTIVE PROCESSING

Increasingly the Muslim community is seeking emotional guidance when faced with complex geopolitical realities and other stressors. To help alleviate and support, CaRLs can partner with mental health practitioners and clinicians to create spaces for collective processing of these realities. Creating this space is a powerful way to validate the needs and experiences of your constituents with the use of knowledge and training of mental health experts. CaRLs may feel anxious about delving into the “political content” of these issues, given that they serve diverse communities in an Ummah of various crises. However, centering personal experiences of a Syrian doing humanitarian work, a doctor who went to Gaza, or a Sudanese professional in the community familiar with the challenges in Sudan, can be very healing in times like these.

- When creating these spaces of processing and healing within the community, it is critical to invite the experts on these topics to lead*. Those with mental health or sociopolitical knowledge, as well as those who have personal lived experience, can help the community cope and process.

*Examples of this can be observed in the [Maristan Healing Circles](#) that are held in the wake of tragedy in the Muslim community. These circles feature the perspective of religious leadership as well as mental health professional experience, as well as that of lived/on the ground experts.

INVEST IN YOUR OWN GROWTH AND MENTORSHIP

CaRLs are often looked to as role models. Therefore it is essential that they have an avenue for continued self-development to increase their self-awareness and growth. This can be through formal therapy, cultivating mentorship with a respected teacher, or professional coaching, among other ways. This ensures that CaRLs are cultivating a measure of self-awareness, particularly about their own biases, needs and limitations. Communities and community leaders, especially community organization employers, should provide their CaRLs the time, resources, and opportunities to engage in such continued growth.

ENSURE YOU ARE SUPPORTED

In a similar light, CaRLs are humans too and need to ensure that their needs for emotional and social support are fulfilled, particularly given they occupy such a visible and high-demand position. This becomes doubly important during times of high stress. You cannot give from an empty cup, so it is vital to ensure your cup is filled and replenished continuously.

BE OPEN TO CHANGE, FEEDBACK, AND GROWTH

Feedback might be plentiful, or you might have to seek it out in your community. Either way, feedback can be a valuable resource to forward your growth and is worth embracing.

Navigating Community Conversations

The recent events in Syria and the global era of social media that we live in have shown that there are a variety of emotions, opinions, levels of knowledge, perspectives, and experiences from within the Syrian community and the Ummah at large. This means that community conversations on this topic can become tense, uncomfortable, and, unfortunately, in some cases, harmful to individuals and the community at large. In these moments, it is important for CaRLs to remind themselves and the community of the principles of Islam taught to us.

1. The strong one is not the one who can win at wrestling but the one who can control their anger.

If you feel yourself becoming angry or being involved in an emotional conversation, engage in the calming techniques taught to us by our Prophet (ﷺ). Make wudu, pray two rakaat, lay down, engage in dhikr, or recite some Quran. See this comprehensive [article](#) from the Yaqeen Institute on controlling one's anger for more information. Abu Hurayrah (RA) reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “The strong man is not the good wrestler, but the strong man is he who controls himself when he is angry.”

2. Leave an argument even if you are right.

We know that it is from the sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) to not engage in arguments, even if one knows they are right, and the reward that comes with that patience and wisdom. This is not the time to fight amongst ourselves as a community. The Ummah will not be better for it, when one of us feels the need to prove our point or assert our opinion at any cost. Anas Ibn Malik reports that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “...Whoever gives up an argument when he is in the right, a palace will be built from him in the middle (of Paradise). And whoever had good behavior, a palace will be built for him in the highest reaches (of Paradise).”

3. Verify information before you share it.

We have a tradition of rigor and validation of information - just look at the science of Hadith. We are not an Ummah that spreads information without fact-checking first. Verify your information. Ensure you gather from trusted and reliable sources. Be cautious in what you share. Remind others gently to do the same. Allah (ﷻ) says in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 6: "O you who believe! If a fasiq (evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterward, you become regretful for what you have done."

4. Speak good, or remain silent.

Even if the information that you have has been verified to be true, ask yourself: what is the benefit of sharing this information with others? Will it be a source of good, or will it cause harm? We know from the Hadith of Abu Hurayrah (RA) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent..."

5. Be an active participant in change for the betterment of others.

We know that the highest level of faith is to remove an injustice with one's own hand. While there is no longer a part to be played in removing the injustices that occurred in Syria over the past several decades, there is still much to do to help the people of As-Sham. What are you actively doing to help in relief, aid, and rebuilding efforts? Abu Saeed Al Khudri (RA) said that he heard the Prophet (ﷺ) say, "Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith."

Beyond the tips, it is important that we recognize that although these events impact the whole Ummah as one body, it is the people of Syria who are living this reality firsthand. It is important that we give space and time to honoring and centering the lived experiences and stories of the Syrian people, first and foremost.

SECTION 6

Mental Health Resources

Khutba

Start of Khutba

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, seek His help, and seek His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evils of our own selves and from the consequences of our bad deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, none can misguide; and whomsoever He allows to go astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, alone and without any partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His servant and His Messenger.

لَحْمَدُ لِلّٰهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللّٰهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا
وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللّٰهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يَضِلَّ فَلَا هَادِيَ
لَهُ

وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللّٰهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا صَلَّى اللّٰهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

قَالَ اللّٰهُ تَعَالَى يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا
وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

وَقَالَ اللّٰهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللّٰهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ
رَقِيبًا

وَقَالَ اللّٰهُ اتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ
ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللّٰهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا

إِنَّ أَصْدَقَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابُ اللّٰهِ وَأَحْسَنَ الْهَدْيِ هَدْيُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللّٰهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَشَرُّ الْأُمُورِ مُحَدَّثَاتُهَا وَكُلُّ مُحَدَّثَةٍ بِدْعَةٌ وَكُلُّ بِدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ
وَكُلُّ

ضَلَالَةٌ فِي النَّارِ

أَمَّا بَعْدُ ...

Allah, the Exalted, says in Surah Ali-Imran, ayah 102: "O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims [in submission to Him]."

And He also says in Surah An Nisa, ayah 1: "And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Verily, Allah is ever an Observer over you."

And He says in Surah Al Ahzab, ayah 70-71: "O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice. He will [then] amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly attained a great attainment."

The most truthful of speech is the Book of Allah, and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (ﷺ). The worst of affairs are those newly introduced, for every innovation is a misguidance, and every misguidance leads to hellfire.

As to what follows:

My dear brother and sisters, the lands of As-Sham — an area including parts of Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan — holds a special place in Islam. It is reported in Sunan At-Tirmidhi that The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "If the people of As-Sham are corrupted, there will be no good in you. A group among my nation will continue to be supported, unharmed by those who fail them until the establishment of the Hour." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2192)

At a time when Syria and its surrounding lands were still controlled by the Romans, the Prophet (ﷺ) made a special dua to “ble**ss** [the Muslims] in **our** Sham” (Sunan at-Tirmidhi 3953). This tells us that not only would the Muslims conquer As-Sham, but that As-Sham would become **Ours**: a place of immense significance for all Muslims. In a longer hadith, Zaid Ibn Thabit Al-Ansari narrates: ‘We were with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) collecting the Qur'an on pieces of cloth, so the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: 'Tuba is for Ash-Sham.' So we said: 'Why is that O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'Because the angels of Ar-Rahman spread their wings over it.'” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 4335)

This land is blessed through its association with Masjid Al-Aqsa and its deep connection to the Prophets. It is a region mentioned repeatedly in the Quran, including Surah Al-Isra, ayah 1 in which Allah says, "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed."

This is not just a history lesson—it is a reminder of our responsibility toward the people of As-Sham.

On December 8, 2024, the Assad regime's 54 year reign came to an end, marking the conclusion of decades of oppression. This moment is significant, not just for Syria but also for the entire Ummah. Families are being reunited and a new chapter begins. Yet the scars of war remain:

Over **13.4 Million Syrians** are displaced.

Refugees face **significant challenges**, from finding shelter to grappling with psychological trauma.

An **entire generation** of Syrian children have grown up with interrupted education and limited opportunities.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) likened the ummah to one body, “The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6011).

Therefore, how can we not feel at the same time immense happiness and sadness at the plight of our Syrian brothers and sisters? For so long, they have suffered, and now finally, they have the end of oppression, but their path forward will be difficult and full of trials. But as Allah has promised in Surah As-Sharh, ayah 6, "Indeed, with hardship, there is relief."

This is a promise from Allah. No hardship lasts forever, and every trial is an opportunity for growth and purification. As the Prophet (ﷺ) states: "Strange are the ways of a believer for there is good in every affair of his and this is not the case with anyone else except in the case of a believer for if he has an occasion to feel delight, he thanks (God), thus there is a good for him in it, and if he gets into trouble and shows resignation (and endures it patiently), there is a good for him in it." (Muslim 2999)

Our Syrian brothers and sisters exemplify this hadith - who despite their suffering, continued to hold on to their iman, trusting in Allah's plan. There are many of us, especially Muslims in Western countries, who at times think to themselves: Why? Or How can Allah allow this to happen? Yet, this was not a thought that seemed to cross the minds of Syrians. There are many stories of faith, perseverance, and iman that are coming out now; Muslims who stood up for the oppressed, refusing to abandon their principles even if it meant losing their lives to the most brutal torture.

Brothers who prayed fajr in prison with their eyes because the guards would beat the Muslims who stood to pray.

Sisters who memorized the Quran in secret, whispering verses to each other in the darkness of confinement, drawing strength from the words of Allah. Communities such as those in Aleppo who shared their last crumbs of bread even when being starved to death by the regime. Such is the faith of the believer who understands that these tests in this world are a mercy from Allah for the believer, to expedite their sins and reward them in the next life. There was a picture being shared that showed one ayat written on the walls of Sednaya prison, the notorious prison where unspeakable horrors are being uncovered, that truly exemplifies the faith of the believers as well as the perspective we should take with our trials:

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّحِمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

“And ‘remember’ when Prophet Ayyub (Alayhi-Assalam) cried out to his Lord, “I have been touched with adversity, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.”” (Surah Al Anbiya 28)

Let us all reflect on our tests and the responses we take when faced with adversity. Seek forgiveness from Allah, for verily he is the most forgiving and the most merciful.

أقول قولي هذا وأستغفر الله ولكم

[Sit Down Here]

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله

So, what are some practical steps that we can take during this time:

- **Start with Dua and increase in your ibadah:**
 - This is an essential step that is often skipped. As verily the only change that will happen is through the will of Allah.
 - Pray tahajjud and make dua specifically for the people of Syria. Include Syria in your daily prayers. Even a simple dua like “Oh Allah, bless As-sham and guide us to be of service to them” can have a powerful impact.
- **Provide financial and material support.**
 - Support trusted organizations actively working on the ground, such as Islamic Relief, the Syrian American Medical Society, and Syria Relief.
 - Even small contributions matter, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “Charity does not decrease wealth, no one forgives another except that Allah increases his honor, and no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises his status.” (Sahih Muslim 2588)

- **Verify information.**
 - In the age of artificial intelligence, governments attempting to sway public opinion, and social media algorithms designed to reward divisive content, there is an increase in false information, especially surrounding the Syrian crisis. Before sharing news or opinions about Syria, ensure your information is accurate. As Allah says in Surah Al-Hujurat, ayah 6, "O you who believe, if a fasiq comes to you with information, investigate, lest you harm people out of ignorance and become regretful for what you have done." (Surah Al-Hujurat 49:6)
- **Be a source of emotional and mental support.**
 - During trying times, people often turn to the community for support. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness nor a sign of low iman. In fact, intertwining mental health support, such as therapy, with Islamic practices, such as salah, dhikr, and reading the Quran, can provide an integrated approach to healing.
 - There are many resources that Muslims can seek, including [Maristan](#), [the Khalil Center](#), [the Ruh App](#), and the first 24/7 mental health hotline, for Muslims, by Muslims with the [Naseeha Helpline](#).
 - Reach out to those in the Syrian community. Even something as simple as inviting someone for meals and checking on their well-being can have an immense impact.

My dear brothers and sisters, Syria's trials remind us of the resilience of our Ummah. Let us be inspired by their perseverance and remain steadfast in our own faith. Do not be like the people of Bani Israel who turned a blind eye, closed their hearts, and ignored Allah's guidance and warnings. These tests are not just for Syrians but for all Muslims. We should take this time to examine our own lives and the efforts we make to help others.

We ask Allah to heal the wounds of Syria, reunite families, and bring peace and stability to our Sham. May He bless our efforts to support our brothers and sisters and strengthen the unity of our Ummah.

O Allah, bless our Sham. O Allah, bless our Yemen. O Allah, bless our Palestine. O Allah, unite our Ummah and grant us hearts filled with compassion and resolve.

O Allah, send your grace, honor, and mercy upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad, as You sent Your grace, honor, and mercy upon Ibrahim, You are indeed Praiseworthy, Most Glorious. O Allah, send Your blessings upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as You sent Your blessings upon Ibrahim, You are indeed Praiseworthy, Most Glorious.

End of Khutba

Mental Health Care

An-Nu'man ibn Bashir narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said, “The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6011). As Muslims, we may feel collective pain for the people of Syria, understanding that their struggles are intertwined with our own. Their pain is our pain, their resilience is our strength, and their healing is our shared responsibility. As Muslims of the global community, whether as educators, community leaders, or parents, we form the other limbs of this aching body. It is our duty to advocate for and support mental health initiatives that address the psychological impact of displacement and conflict. Evidence from the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) encourages us to care for our mental and emotional health (Yaqeen Institute, 2020). Allah (ﷻ) says, “Surely with hardship comes relief” (Surah As-Shahr 94:6). In this verse, the Quran reminds us of Allah’s mercy and the importance of patience during times of hardship. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness nor a sign of weak faith. In fact, intertwining mental health support (ie. therapy) with Islamic practices such as salah, dhikr, and reading the Quran, can provide an integrated approach to healing. May Allah (ﷻ) ease the burdens of the Syrian people, grant them healing, and inspire us to be instruments of His mercy.

The organizations listed below offer faith-based support and culturally congruent counseling services that are designed to meet the unique needs of the Muslim community and provide them with the tools needed to navigate mental health challenges.

1. [Maristan](#)
2. [Khalil Center](#)
3. [Naseeha Helpline](#): The first-ever 24-hour, 7 days-a-week helpline for Muslims, by Muslims: 1 (866) 627-3342
4. [Ruh Care](#)
5. [Collaborators - Institute for Muslim Mental Health](#)

Educational Resources

Learning More About Syria

It's crucial to stay informed about the ongoing crisis in Syria to better understand the challenges of the Syrian community and how we can best support them. Given the mixed media coverage, it's essential to approach information critically while discerning, for yourself, accurate and reliable sources. Below are additional resources to learn more about Syria and the ongoing crisis, including lesson plans for educators and video lectures.

Learning About the History of Syria

1. Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years by John McHugo
 - a. A concise history of Syria from World War I to its descent into Civil War. The book highlights the French colonial legacy as well as the impact of the Assad regime.
2. The Islamic Struggle in Syria by Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah
 - a. Provides a comprehensive outline of not only the history of Syria but also what led to the Islamic struggle before the Syrian Revolution of 2011

Books by Syrian Authors

1. As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow by Zoulfa Katouh (Fiction)
 - a. Set during the Syrian Revolution, this powerful story tracks the journey to self-discovery and hope of a young Syrian woman whose life is upended by war.
2. Death is Hard Work by Khaled Khalifa (Fiction)
 - a. This moving narrative follows three estranged siblings navigating Syria's war-torn landscape to honor their father's dying wish, embarking on a perilous journey that tests their resilience and transforms their lives.
3. The Home That Was Our Country: A Memoir of Syria by Alia Malek (Non-fiction)
 - a. A memoir tracing Alia's return to Damascus during the start of the Arab Spring to reclaim her grandmother's apartment after it was lost during Hafez Al-Assad's regime.

Other Resources

1. [Teaching Resources on the Syria Conflict](#)
2. [UNICEF Syria Parenting](#)
3. [The Whole of Syria \(WoS\) self-learning materials](#)
4. Essential Resources on Misinformation:
<https://www.deadlydisinformation.org/>
5. Syria: Resources and Archive by Razan Saffour
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SECTION 7

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