

Parents Weekend Multifaith Service
University Public Worship, February 27, 2011
Student Reflection by Mai El-Sadany

Being a Stanford student has certainly been one of the most inspirational, educational, and formative experiences in my life. Whether it's learning how to program a car simulator (which is actually quite a challenge for a Political Science major like yours truly), spending a quarter in Washington under the mentorship of the former US Ambassador to the UN while participating in an immersive Stanford program, or walking to raise money and awareness for cancer survivors and victims in a campus-wide Relay for Life, Stanford has provided me with the opportunities to grow whether in the halls of its libraries pulling all-nighters to submit a paper on time or in the lasting friendships I've nurtured with the most genuine of human beings.

As the author Robert Byrne once said, "The purpose of life is a life of purpose." Never have I had the opportunity to engage with students, faculty, and people who truly live, breathe, and emanate the beautiful essence of Mr. Byrne's quote like Stanford students do. What makes the Stanford community unique is not necessarily the stellar academic record of its students, the well-rounded sports program and athletes, or the architectural beauty of its campus, but rather, the belief of this community that they are here not only to bring happiness, success, and wealth to their own lives and immediate families and friends, but rather to the greater global community. Naïve or not, Stanford students sincerely believe that they can affect change in the world and make a difference, dedicating their lives to seeking the aforementioned life of purpose. Whether this entails collecting leftover dining hall food and packaging it for the neighboring homeless communities or starting a non-profit that changed the lives of thousands of HIV-AIDS victims in Africa, our students seek a unique experience and inspire their colleagues and fellow human beings in the process.

In revisiting my own Stanford education as I near the waning months of my undergraduate career, I see academic, personal, and moral growth, whether through vivid images of meeting my thesis and major advisor for the first time, walking into Roble and feeling warmly welcome and at home, or engaging in the most challenging of theoretical debates in sections of my political philosophy class. Something that many people overlook however, is the immense spiritual growth that numerous students experience in their time at Stanford.

Some will falsely assume that being at a world-class university drives its students away from faith and religion. I have found it to be truly the opposite—spirituality at Stanford is something that all students experience, whether they find it in their commitment to public service, their academic drive to solve moral dilemmas around the globe, in their meditations as they observe the beauty that surrounds us, or in the very halls of this majestic Church. Spiritually, Stanford has provided me with an environment that welcomes and nurtures my very personal decision to wear the Islamic headscarf, the *hijab*, without hardship; it has given me the opportunity to engage with a welcoming Muslim community which hosts everything from spiritual prayers to surprise birthday parties and movie nights; and it has blessed me with the chance to do interfaith work with a colorful array of religious student groups and organizations that all come together under a unifying banner of public service. Spirituality at Stanford has meant not only the opportunity to practice my religion with complete freedom and ease, but also the process of engaging with thousands of other spiritual students who seek happiness and success for others, even before seeking it for themselves.

As I look at the last four years of my life and imagine the time to come, I find the commitment of my professors, mentors, co-workers, and colleagues to live this life as one full of purpose on academic, social, and spiritual levels to be the most beautiful, heartfelt and

remarkable identifying characteristics of what my Stanford education has meant to me and I know that I will take these memories and experiences with me every step along the way.