Imam A Rashied Omar

The Role of the Masjid in the Twenty First Century
In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Dispenser of Grace

The Role of the Masjid in the Twenty First Century: Part One

Jumu'ah Khutbah/Friday Congregational Sermon
Claremont Main Road Masjid
Friday 9th March 2012/16th Rabi` al-Thani 1433
Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar

Introduction

On Sunday 18 March, 2012, the Claremont Main Road Masjid (CMRM) will be convening its Annual General Meeting (AGM). It is therefore expedient for us to be focusing on the changing role of the masjid in the twenty first century. Since the topic is vast I would like to divide my reflections into two parts. In this first khutbah, I would like to remind us of the central and multi-faceted role the masjid should play in the lives of Muslims. I will also provide some guidelines on adab al masjid i.e. the decorum, etiquette and proper behavior to be observed in order to respect the sanctity of the masjid. In the second khutbah, I shall endeavor to make some modest suggestions as to how each one of us can make a contribution to revitalizing the role of the masjid in light of the globalizing conditions of the 21st century. I shall propose that by harnessing the three critical ethico-moral Islamic concepts of shura, nizam, and sadaqah jariyah, the masjid as an institution will better able to live up to its dynamic role.

The central message I would like to convey in the khutbatayn is three-fold:

1. The masjid is a vital foundation in the building of a healthy and vibrant Muslim community.

2. The masjid should be a sacred and welcoming space wherein the spirits of both men and women, boys and girls, are nurtured, their intellects inspired and their skills and contributions appreciated and utilized.

3. In order to achieve these noble goals we need to work hard at respecting the masjid's sanctity and strengthening its capacity and governance.
In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Dispenser of Grace

The Role of the Masjid in the Twenty First Century:

Part One
Importance of the Masjid

The Arabic word masjid literally means a “place for prostration (sujud).” The sujud represents the most important posture in the Muslim ritual prayer, the salah, in which the forehead of the worshipper gracefully touches the ground in a supreme act of submission and surrender before God. Notwithstanding the fact that salah, can be performed anywhere, since the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him) informed us that the whole world is a masjid, we are taught through the noble examples of Prophet Abraham and his son Prophet Isma'il (peace be upon both of them) that to set apart special and dedicated places of worship for God, is a praiseworthy offering. In Surah Al-Baqarah, chapter 2, verse 127, Allah, the Sublime proclaims:

When Ibrahim and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House of God: (they made the following prayer): Our Lord! Accept from us (this house that we have dedicated for your worship); Surely, Thou art All-Hearing, All-Knowing (Q2:127)

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) clearly understood the great importance and value of establishing masajid (plural of masjid) and so he encouraged us in an authentic tradition (hadith) reported by `Uthman ibn `Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) that:

Whoever builds a masjid, seeking through it God's grace, God will reward him with a dwelling in Heaven (Bukhari & Muslim)

What greater encouragement and motivation can we have for establishing and patronizing a masjid than these clear and unequivocal words of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). To underscore the great importance of his words one of the first things the Prophet (pbuh) did shortly after arriving in Madina, after being freed from the Makkah persecution, was to build a masjid at a place called Quba.

Multi-faceted Role of the Masjid

The masjid has a multi-faceted role in Islam and should be the centre and the fulcrum around which the life of a conscientious Muslim revolves. I would like to briefly elaborate on what I regard to be the three most important functions of the masjid.
1. Masjid as a Place for Prayer & Worship

Undoubtedly, the most important function of the masjid as its name denotes is a place for prostrating in prayer and worshipping God. In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) counseled us to gather together at the masjid to perform salah as much as we can in congregation (jama`at). In order to encourage us to do so he taught us that God grants a greater reward to someone who prays in congregation in the masjid than someone who makes the obligatory salah alone at home. Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) himself used to dedicate small portions of his time to enter into i`titaf i.e. spiritual retreat in the masjid more especially during the final ten days of the fasting month of Ramadan.

The most important masjid event is the weekly Friday congregational prayer service (jumu`ah), which has been made an obligatory duty on the believers. It ensures that Muslims visit the masjid at least once a week. In this regard, Allah, the Sublime, proclaims in Surah al-Jumu`ah, Chapter 62, verse 9:

Believers! When the call to prayer is sounded on Friday (the day of congregation), then move promptly and earnestly towards the remembrance of God (dhikrullah), and leave off worldly business; this is for your own good, if only you realized it (Q62:9)

In the above verse we learn that the sublime purpose of attending the jumu'ah service is the remembrance of Allah (dhikrullah). In order to encourage Muslims to attend the jumu`ah service the Prophet (pbuh) in a hadith related by the companion Salman al-Farsi and recorded in the authentic hadith collections of Bukhari and Ahmadis reported to have declared that the sins of the worshipper who attends the Friday congregational service will be forgiven until the next service. As exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) the Friday congregational service is accompanied by a weekly sermon (khutbat al-jumu`ah). The purpose of the Friday khutbah is to remind, exhort, inspire, and most of all engage the entire community, both men and women, on the spiritual, ethical, social, cultural, and political issues which affect it – and draw it all back to loving, serving, and glorifying Allah and improving our own character dispositions and the human condition.

In light of this primary role of the masjid as a place of prayer, worship, and spiritual retreat it is logical and understandable that the masjid should be regarded by the conscientious Muslim as a sacred sanctuary and a hallowed space. As such we are commanded by God in the Glorious Qur'an in Surah
al-An`am, chapter 7 verse 31 to respect the sanctity of the masjid by being appropriately attired (zinat) whenever we visit it:

O Children of Adam, wear your best apparel whenever you visit the masjid (Q7:31)

It is significant to note that the above Qur'anic exhortation to appropriate dress codes for visiting the masjid is not merely directed at women, but also at men. In my own experience I have found that many Muslims are quick to notice when women are not appropriately attired in the masjid but are blind to the large numbers of men who come to the masjid with tight fitting trousers which has swept dirt from the streets and distracting T-shirts that expose their naked flesh when they bend down and prostrate in the sujud. I exhort both men and women to try our best to observe the sanctity of the masjid and the sacredness of our communications with our Lord through the salah by trying our utmost to dress appropriately and modestly whenever we visit the masjid. I hasten to add that the challenge of appropriate and modest masjid dress codes is an ongoing challenge of times in which we live and needs to be resolved through ongoing education and patience rather than rebuke and coercion.

The most important way in which we can overcome this challenge is to emulate the exemplary conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He has taught us that whenever we enter the masjid to recite the following prayer

(Allahum-maf-Tahli Abwaba Rahmatika)
"O God Open the doors of Thy Mercy unto me."

After we have entered the masjid the Prophet (pbuh) has further taught us that before sitting down we should perform two units of salah known as the tahiyyat-ul-masjid, the greeting of the masjid. Both of these rituals should serve as a timely reminder of the sacredness and blessedness of space we have just entered.

Moreover, throughout our stay in the masjid the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has taught us to be kind and considerate to each other and not to climb over people's backs to reach the front of the masjid. This of course presumes that people will be reasonable and not fill up the masjid from the back and the doorways and leave large gaps in the front of the masjid for latecomers. This is an exasperating problem which masajid all over the world face. Small wonder the Prophet (pbuh) encouraged worshippers to be disciplined and to
fill up the rows (sufuf) from the front. Furthermore, he has taught us not to raise our voices in a loud manner such that we distract other worshippers. In this regard I would like to cite an instructive prophetic tradition (hadith) concerning the etiquette of jumu‘ah (adab al-jumu‘ah). Abu al-Darda’ reports that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was upon the mimbar and was delivering the khutbah and he quoted a verse from the Qur’an and next to me was ‘Ubayy bin Ka‘b and I asked him: “When was that verse revealed?” He refused to talk to me until the Messenger of Allah came down from the pulpit and then he said to me: “You have nothing from your jumu‘ah, except useless talk.” When the Prophet (pbuh) had finished, I went to him and informed him of what had happened and the Prophet (pbuh) answered by saying “‘Ubayy has spoken the truth. If you hear the Imam speaking, be quiet until he is finished.” (This hadith is related by Ahmad and at-Tabarani). Let us all try to do better in this regard, and refrain from loud chatter and raised voices that cause a distraction to other worshippers.

To balance the picture I have thus far sketched on the role of the masjid it would be important to note that some people mistakenly believe that the role of the masjid should be limited to acts of prayer alone. This brings me to the second most important role of the masjid:

2. Masjid as a Place of Teaching & Learning

From the very beginning the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) established the masjid not merely as a place of prayer (salah) but also as a place of learning and teaching. The first Islamic school (madrasah) was also housed in the Prophet’s masjid in Madina. There are also numerous prophetic traditions (ahadith) which informs us about the robust educational role the masjid played during the life of Prophet (pbuh). According to one report attributed to the companion ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once entered the masjid and noticed two groups of people. One group was praying and reciting the Qur’an and another engaging in teaching and learning. The Prophet (pbuh) commended both but preferred to join the group engaging in educational activities. He then proclaimed:

I have been sent (i.e. the purpose of my prophetic mission is) to educate.

Later Muslims understood the vital role of the masjid as a centre of learning and established universities with the masjid at its centre. The largest and oldest masjid university in the Muslim world is al-Qarawiyyin situated in
Fez, Morocco, is a great example in point. Interestingly it was established by a wealthy women Fatima al-Fihriyya, in 837 C.E. Another symbol of teaching and learning that many traditional masjid have adopted, is to have a special kursi i.e. the scholar's chair of teaching and learning which is occupied by the Imam during his regularly educational sessions. In this regard I am delighted to announce that CMRM shall in the near future be installing a masjid kursi– chair of teaching and learning. Through the generosity of one of our members the chair has been constructed by a master craftsman in Cairo and is in the process of being shipped to Cape Town. Our vision is to also invite women scholars to occupy the masjid kursi, so as to take yet another small but significant step in the fostering of a women friendly masjid. It is also our intention to sustain the adult education programme which we have tried to revitalise since last year and which got off to a good start this year with the Islam for Beginners Course.

3. Masjid as a Place of Social Justice & Solidarity

Last but not least, al-Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's masjid) in Madina not only served a religious and educational function, but it also had an important social function. It became the hub and center of religious, educational as well as social life of the early Muslim community. The masjid served as a focal point for the caring of the poor, the needy and the wayfarers. Moreover, whenever the Prophet (pbuh) needed to consult his companions on an issue of public concern he used to call them together at the masjid to convene a shura or consultatory council.

Moreover, during the formative years of Islam women participated freely in all of the social justice programmes taking place in the Prophet's masjid in Madina, and they shared the main space of the masjid with men. After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) when some men tried to ban women from attending the masjid not only to participate in social justice programmes but also from the daily salawat by arguing that it had the potential for corruption, it was rejected by eminent Muslim scholars. For example, `Abdullah ibn `Umar rejected this argument by citing an important hadith wherein the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) decreed: “Do not deprive women of their share of the masajid, when they seek permission from you.” Bilal remonstrated against this by saying; “By Allah, we would certainly prevent them.” `Abdullah ibn `Umar responded by saying; “I say that the Messenger of Allah said it and you say: We would certainly prevent them!” (Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith Number 891). The early Muslims, indeed, respected the sanctity of the masjid but they did not understand its role in a narrow parochial sense and therefore they did not hesitate to use it for any commendable purpose. Thus the indigent traveler found shelter in the masjid, and in some cases even the sick were treated, and
infrequently the early Muslim community used it as a court of justice; for even the administration of justice was deemed something sacred.

But even more extraordinarily in the tenth and final year of the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) mission he engaged in an interfaith dialogue with a high delegation of sixty Christians from Najran, about 450 miles south of Madina. They were received and accommodated in the Prophet's masjid in Madina, and he allowed them to pray in the masjid, which they did facing east. This is unequivocal evidence of the welcoming and broader social role that the Prophet (pbuh) himself sought to engender for the masjid. This is a role that CMRM strives to perpetuate through organizing of inter-faith events at the masjid and planning for our social justice programmes.

Conclusion

From our discussion thus far we can learn that there can be no doubt that the primary role and function of a masjid is to serve as sanctuary for prayer and worship as its name denotes. However, I have also hopefully shown how the precise function and role of a masjid is much broader than being merely a place for prayer and worship, symbolized by the salah. The masjid also has an important educational as well as social role.

In minority contexts, like South Africa, and in a globalizing world, where face to face social relationships are being eroded by faceless cyberspace encounters, the masjid should serve as a real space for nurturing community solidarity and supporting social justice struggles. In order for the masjid to be able to play this broader and more dynamic role we need to first, delicately balance between the spiritual, educational and social roles of the masjid in a way which does not erode the sanctity of the masjid. Second, the masjid needs to be a sacred and welcoming space wherein the spirits of both men and women, old and young are nurtured, their intellects inspired and their skills and contributions appreciated and utilized. In order to achieve these noble goals, however, we need to work hard at strengthening the masjid's capacity and governance. This is the subject of my sequel khutbah to be delivered next week, insha-Allah.
In the Name of Allah,
the Most Compassionate,
the Dispenser of Grace

The Role of the Masjid in the Twenty First Century:

Part Two
In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Dispenser of Grace

The Role of the Masjid in the Twenty First Century: Part Two

Jumu'ah Khutbah/Friday Congregational Sermon
Claremont Main Road Masjid
Friday 16th March 2012/23rd Rabi` al-Thani 1433
Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar

Introduction

On Sunday 18 March, 2012, the Claremont Main Road Masjid (CMRM) will be convening its Annual General Meeting (AGM). It is therefore expedient for us to be focusing for the second week in succession on the changing role of the masjid in the twenty first century. This khutbah is a sequel to last week's focus on the multi-faceted and dynamic role of the masjid. In last week's khutbah I called for a delicate balancing between the spiritual, educational and social roles of the masjid in a way which does not erode its sanctity as a hallowed space, bayt Allah. In this khutbah, I argue that in order to cultivate the masjid as a welcoming sacred space and to render the masjid as an effective platform for social justice programmes we need to work hard at strengthening the masjid's capacity and governance.

I would like to approach the topic of the masjid's organizational capacity and effective governance by addressing two interrelated questions: first, is it necessary for a masjid congregation to convene regular general meetings, and second, is it permissible to have formal congregational membership of a masjid?

My short answer to both these questions is in the affirmative. Yes, both of these organizational formalities if you will, are valuable modern innovations (bida`ah). However, I maintain in line with the noted jurist and legal theorist, Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d.1388), that Islam does not a priori condemn innovation (bid`ah) in and of itself. An innovation is always appraised in terms of whether it resonates with the teachings of Islam, classified as a good innovation (bid`ah hasanah) or whether it violates the teachings of Islam, classified as a misguided innovation (bid`ah sayyi`ah).
With respect to the organizational procedures of meetings and membership it is instructive to note that our current generation did not invent the novel idea of running masjid affairs through these modern conventions. In fact we are the beneficiaries of these good innovations (bid`ah hasanah). Moreover, it is ironic that these organizational innovations which was very robustly embraced by many masajid in the Cape for more than a century is currently in decline with increasing numbers of masajid just not concerned with convening annual general meetings. It is evident, therefore, that our forebears including the majority of our 'ulamaat the Cape saw no inherent contradiction between formal masjid membership and convening masjid general meetings on the one hand and the Islamic value system on the other.

It is my considered view that the goals and objectives that masjid general meetings and formal masjid membership serves and seeks to promote resonates well with the critical Islamic values of shura (i.e. conducting public affairs by mutual consultation), nizam (which means running institutions with organizational proficiency, transparency and accountability) and sadaqah jariyah (i.e. charitable acts from which others will reap perpetual benefits). All three of these standards and norms are indispensable dimensions of effective governance and capacity building for contemporary organizations as well as key values of any Islamic society. In the main section of this khutbah I would like to briefly reflect on the vital importance of shura, nizam and sadaqah jariyah from the perspective of Islam and demonstrate how they can be operationalized in enhancing the organizational efficiency and proper governance of the masjid.

1. Conducting Masjid Affairs through Shura

First and foremost, we need to affirm that the masjid and everything within it is consecrated and therefore its proprietorship rests with God. For Allah, the Sublime, proclaims in Surah-al-Jinn, Chapter 72, verse 18:

The Masajid (places dedicated to the worship of God) belongs to God alone: So do not worship anyone along with God (Q72:18)

Because the masjid does not belong to any particular individual benefactor, clique or tribal group each one of us has a shared responsibility towards taking care of it and seeing to it that the masjid's administration and services are run efficiently and transparently. For the masjid's affairs to be run in an open and transparent manner mutual consultation or shura should be at the centre of the administration of masjid affairs.
Shura is one of the most defining features of any Muslim society, public institution, or organization. The most common understanding of shura means to conduct public affairs by mutual consultation, transparency and accountability. In most issues pertaining to public issues in which there was no specific Qur'anic directive, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), would deal with it through shura - mutual consultation and public consensus. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was so robust with regard to shura (consulting his followers) that one of his famous companions, Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him), described his leadership and organizational style as follows:

I have never seen anyone who consults his companions as much as the Messenger of God (peace be upon him)

In fact, the concept of shura is so significant that one of the chapters of the Qur'an is titled Surah al-Shura, chapter 43. In verse 37 of this surah Allah, the Sublime, describes shura or mutual consultation as being one of the fundamental characteristics which adorn the lives of the good believers.

They (conscientious believers) are those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; and who (conduct) their affairs by Mutual Consultation; and spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance (Q43:37)

In the above verse, shura is identified as one of the vital attributes of a conscientious believer. In the context of the masjid, shura cannot happen without the active participation of all of its congregants. I would like to suggest that the extent to which the masjid Board or Committee can be held accountable for its shura decision making rests on the active participation of its congregation. And the strategy we at CMRM and many other masajid in the Cape and elsewhere in the world have adopted to strengthen our congregation's active participation in masjid affairs has been to promote the idea of formal masjid membership.

In this context registering as a member of a masjid should be a commitment a congregant makes to participate in the processes of shura that ensures that masjid affairs are conducted transparently and by mutual consultation. In order for the Claremont Main Road Masjid or any other masjid for that matter to continue to thrive, it needs to grow its active membership so that there are constantly new voices, new ideas, new energies that can take forward its vision, its projects and programmes.
2. Effective Masjid Governance through Nizam

The second concept I would like to elaborate on is that of nizam. I would like to highlight two dimensions of the notion of nizam. First, nizam means to be organized and second, nizam means to conduct public affairs with organizational proficiency. The first significance of nizam is usefully depicted in the early life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through his membership of a voluntary organization called hilf al-fudul—the pact of the virtuous—whose primary aim was to promote socio-economic justice in his society. Many years later when he adorned the mantle of prophethood, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) praised the virtues of this organization by proclaiming:

I was present at Abdullah ibn Jud`an's house with the formation of hilf al-fudul. I would not exchange this experience for any material gain even if I was to be offered a herd of red-camels. And if now, as a prophet of God, I was to be asked to defend its just cause, I will most certainly do so.

(Ibn Hisham, al-Sira al-Nabawiyyah)

Hilf al-Fudul thus holds great significance in Islamic teachings; not least the fact that it makes the joining of organizations with noble causes, a sunnah, highly recommended.

The second dimension of nizam, namely, to conduct public affairs with organizational proficiency, is a challenge that many organizations face, more so an organization such as a masjid that is largely dependent on voluntary participation and contributions from its members. For an organization to operate with proficiency and adeptness means that it is able to harness the best skills and expertise available to reach success in its endeavors. In the context of the masjid, this is only possible if it can grow the pool of skills and expertise that it can draw on through its membership. The programmes and projects of the masjid require amongst other things, administrative skills and expertise, social skills, technical skills and expertise and intellectual and theological cum jurisprudential expertise. I have no doubt that we have many talented people in this congregation and so we need more people with skills and expertise to become active members in masjid programmes and projects. In this way we can strive to become a masjid that operates with nizam, that is, a masjid that operates with organizational excellence.

In this regard, I particularly want to encourage young people to become active members of the masjid so that their voices can be heard and so that we can tap into their talents and skills. In this way we can nurture a new generation of leadership that will bear witness to Islam that upholds the virtues of social
justice and compassion that this masjid has always espoused. In the final section of my khutbah I propose that contributions and pledges made towards masjid membership could be considered as a kind of sadaqah jariyah i.e. a perpetual charity.

3. Masjid Membership as Sadaqah Jariyah

When we think of sadaqah we most frequently think of it in terms of giving charity to the poor and needy. This usually takes the form of money, food or clothes. These are indeed noble acts of charity. However, in Islam, the concept of sadaqah is not limited to these forms of giving. Islam considers all good deeds as charity. The Islamic concept of sadaqah i.e. charitable giving of money or volunteerism i.e. acts of social service is broadened through the notion of sadaqah jariyah. The significance and meaning of sadaqah jariyah is explained in the following hadith, reported by the companion Abu Hurayra who reports that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

When a person dies, no good deeds live on after him or her, except for three things: continuing charity (i.e. sadaqah jariyah), knowledge which can benefit others, and virtuous offspring who will pray for him or her (Muslim)

In the above hadith the meaning of charitable giving is extended to a 'continuing charity' – a sadaqah jariyah. By this is meant a sadaqah that continues to benefit others even after our deaths, and for as long as it does so, it brings reward to the donor even if he or she has passed on to the hereafter. Examples of sadaqah jariyah are given in another hadith also narrated by the companion Abu Hurayra in which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is reported to have said:

The good deeds that will reach a believer after his death are: knowledge which he learned and then spread; a righteous child whom he leaves behind; a copy of the Qur'an that he leaves as a legacy; a masjid that he built; a house that he built for wayfarers; a canal that he dug; or charity that he gave during his lifetime when he was in good health. The rewards of these deeds will reach him after his death [Ibn Majah/242]

We learn from these examples that sadaqah jariyah are the legacies, the heritages, the bequests, the gifts we leave behind when we die – things from which others will reap perpetual benefits.

We have a wonderful tradition within the local Muslim community, where people print and distribute yasin surahs to friends and family in memory of a deceased relative. This is indeed a sadaqah jariyah, for as long as people read
from these yasin surahs, given as gifts, the reward is accrued to the donor, as well as the deceased for whom supplications are made. So too, contributing to the establishment and maintenance of public institutions like masajid, educational facilities, orphanages, old age homes, libraries and other public facilities that will continue to benefit others after our life time, are just a few examples of opportunities for sadaqah jariyah.

I would like to end with an inspirational story. CMRM's oldest member, al-Marhumah Aunty Aisha Van Rooyen passed on in September 2011, at the age of 90. Aunty A, as we fondly used to call her, embraced Islam at the age of 43 years and hardly missed a jumu'ah service in the more than 20 years she was a registered member of CMRM. Her routine was always the same. She arrived early for the jumu’ah prayers, and after performing her tahiyyat al-masjid salah she would trotter through the main section of the masjid straight to the office and pay her masjid membership subscription and other sadaqah donations, after which she would sit down and recite surah yasin. Aunty A also made a special point of attending masjid general meetings even when she was struggling with her health. A few months after her passing, her son, gave me a cheque for an amount that Aunty A had stipulated in her will that must be donated to the masjid as a sadaqah jariyah. We have deposited Aunty A's sadaqah jariyah into CMRM's investment account and make du’a that Allah, the Most Generous, grants her the continuous rewards and blessings He promised her through the noble words of his beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Aunty A’s inspirational act is a shining example to all of us, both women and men, to emulate.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is my considered view that all three concepts of shura, nizam and sadaqah jariyah are key ethico-moral values that should adorn the life of any conscientious Islamic society and Muslim institution. By harnessing these critical Islamic values through expanding masjid membership and convening regular general meetings, the masjid as an institution will be empowered to enhance its organizational capacity and effective governance, thus rendering it better able to live up to its role both as a welcoming sacred space as well as a platform for social justice programmes. Not only does masjid membership enable one to make a sadaqah jariyah and to imbibe one of the key characteristics of the conscientious believer through participating in mutual consultation (shura), but by becoming a member of a masjid also affords the Muslim an opportunity to fulfill an important and neglected sunnah, namely that of joining a noble organization and contributing to its organizational proficiency (nizam).
To this end, I would like to encourage those of us who are not yet registered as masjid members to seriously consider becoming one and to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Claremont Main Road Masjid this Sunday morning 18 March, 2012, at 10.30 am at the Auditorium of the Sports Science Centre in Newlands.

We are grateful to Allah, the Most High, that the Claremont Main Road Masjid which is the 6th oldest masjid in South Africa will insha-Allah be 160 years old in 2014. We make du`a and pray that Allah blesses the founders and benefactors of this masjid with an abundant and continuous reward, insha-Allah. May Allah bless the Board of Governors, registered members and the broader congregation of the Claremont Main Road Masjid for their generous contributions and allow us all to live up to our Islamic responsibilities of being witnesses to the justice and compassion of Islam. I end with the famous du`a recorded in the Glorious Qur'an that Prophet's Ibrahim and Isma`il made after they had completed building the ka`bah the first masjid ever to be established on earth:

(Rabbana Taqabal Minna Innaka Antas Sami`ul `Alim)  
Our Lord and Sustainer! Accept from us (this house that we have dedicated for your worship); For surely Thou art All-Hearing, All-Knowing (Q2:127)
A. Rashied Omar is Imam of the Claremont Main Road Masjid in Cape Town (pictured above) and Research Scholar of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame, USA.

These two khutbah's describe the multi-faceted role of the masjid as a welcoming sacred space for both men and women and a platform for social justice programmes. It argues that by harnessing the three critical ethico-moral Islamic concepts of shura, nizam, and sadaqah jariyah, the masjid as an institution will be empowered to enhance its organizational capacity and effective governance, thus rendering it better able to live up to its dynamic role.

Featured on the cover is the Yesil Vadi Mosque Istanbul Turkey, one of the new masjid designs to emerge in the 21st Century