



Dear Woolf Friends,

Those who have spent nearly a full month fasting daily from sunrise to sunset welcome the first day of Eid al-Fitr with open arms. Toward the end of Ramadan, you are physically exhausted but spiritually satiated. I can certainly attest to this having spent the month fasting with my family in Birmingham, Alabama. Growing up Muslim in the Deep South (I still don't know how my Syrian parents migrated from Damascus and settled in Alabama!) mirrored the main lesson fasting is meant to teach us. According to traditional Islamic theology, the month of Ramadan is the month of *patience*. As a believer, you are meant to learn what it takes to deprive your body of its desires for food, drink, and sexual pleasure. Through this depravation, you initiate the purification of your inner being by forcing your mind and body to retreat from the material world and connect more closely with God.

In Arabic, the word for human being—*insān*—comes from the root word *nasa* meaning “to forget”. I find this extremely fitting for we as human beings are forgetful creatures. We need to write things down, study and memorize over periods of time, set reminders and alarms on our phones to function efficiently. We also tend to forget our spiritual health and practices. The month of Ramadan is meant to remind us of our relationship with God and to rekindle that intimacy with our creator. This reconnection, if you are sincere and committed to your fasting for the whole month, perfects the purification process. Therefore, the morning of Eid al-Fitr is not only a celebration for being able to drink and eat again during daylight (and indeed being able to sip a coffee after a month of deprivation is the sweetest delight for the caffeine addicts among us!). The day is also a celebration of the triumph of

disciplining your mind and body and conquering your most basic desires. This is the true joy of Eid typically spent praying, eating, and connecting with family.

The great Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi wrote: "If metal can be polished to a mirror-like finish, what polishing might the mirror of the heart require?" Eid is a time to celebrate our attempt at polishing our inner selves during Ramadan. Perhaps this is why most people cannot help but feel an overwhelming sense of joy throughout the day. Although some might argue that the morning coffee could have something to do with it too!

In any case, Eid Mubarak!

Wishing everyone peace and blessings on this special day.

Best wishes,

Dunya Habash  
PhD Scholar, Woolf Institute

## Upcoming Events

9 May @17:00

The Five Pillars of  
Islam – A Jewish  
Perspective



10 May @18:00

Reading Group:  
Qur'an and Bible  
(By invitation only)



12 May

London Research  
Day  
(By invitation only)



1 - 5 June

Patrons' Tour -  
Istanbul  
(By invitation only)



7 June @14:00

Jubilee Garden  
Party  
(By invitation only)



7 June @17:00

Archives and  
record-keeping in  
medieval Eastern  
Mediterranean



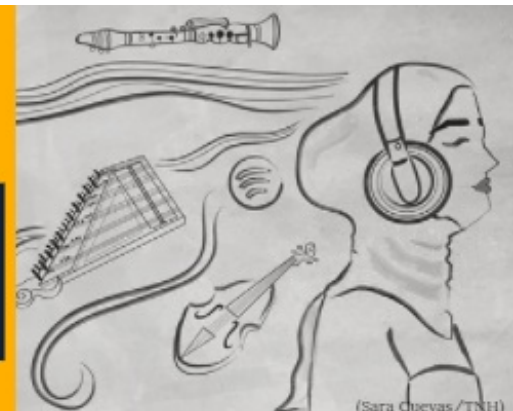
12 June @14:00

The Written Word:  
Timeless Arabic &  
Hebrew Calligraphy



**DUNYA HABASH**

**PLAYLIST: THE MUSIC  
OF SYRIAN EXILE**



(Sara Cuevas/TNH)

## PLAYLIST: THE MUSIC OF SYRIAN EXILE

Eleven years of war in Syria has destroyed lives, homes, and uprooted

millions. But even in exile, culture – art, music, literature – survives, and often even thrives.

That's part of what ethnomusicologist Dunya Habash is exploring in her doctoral research at Cambridge University. Over the past few years, Habash, who is Syrian American and a trained pianist, has been following a group of Syrian musicians who fled the war and settled in Turkey. She is exploring how they have struggled, adapted, and sometimes flourished while continuing to create in a new country, albeit one with longstanding ties to Syria

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE](#)

## The Woolf:

*Within Living Memory* 

### CALLING ALL ALUMNI OF THE WOOLF INSTITUTE

Were you a student at the Woolf? What was it like? Did it change your life? We are collecting memories from our alumni about their experiences of studying in Cambridge at the Woolf Institute, particularly those who studied here in the early days of the Institute. Please tell us where you came from, what you studied, what your first impressions of Cambridge were and how your research at the Woolf affected you and the decisions you took afterwards. What are you doing now? Have you kept in touch with people you met back then? Do you come back to Cambridge?

We would love to hear from you. If you would like to contribute a short piece of around 300 words, please send it to Liz Winter at [ejw39@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ejw39@cam.ac.uk), together with any relevant photos you have.

We look forward to hearing from you.

[CLICK HERE TO SEND IN YOUR MEMORIES](#)

WEBINAR 9 MAY @17:00

## THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

**RICK SOPHER**



### THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM - A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE MONDAY 9 MAY @17:00

We are delighted to share an event presented by one of our affiliates and long-standing friend of the Woolf Institute, Rick Sopher

The ASF Institute of Jewish Experience presents:

Rick Sopher will explain the so-called “Five Pillars of Islam” (declaration of faith, prayer, giving, fasting and pilgrimage) and look at connections, similarities and differences with Jewish Practice. He will explore the basis of these practices and how one might have influenced the other.

Bonus: Rick will also look at the basis of the very close practices of Jewish and Muslim dietary laws and explain the history of this connection, which was first stated explicitly in the Qur’an.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



### EID MUBARAK

Eid Mubarak to all our Muslim friends celebrating this week! Eid-ul-Fitr is the first of the two Eids and celebrates the end of Ramadan. Muslims mark this festival with congregational prayers and community celebrations.

# GETTING READY TO DIE

*Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute*

DYING IS A NECESSARY AND INEVITABLE  
PART OF LIVING. SO WHY ARE WE SO HUNG  
UP ABOUT IT?



## PODCAST: GETTING READY TO DIE

Dying is a necessary and inevitable part of living. So why are we so hung up about it?

Compassion, common sense and expert knowledge are what we would hope a good doctor would bring to the process of managing a death. But with more and more life prolonging technologies available, the danger of litigation and the growing need to consider different religious traditions, things are not straightforward. Philip Lodge and Ruwaida Randeree talk about getting ready to die...

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

## COMING SOON

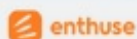
*Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute*

## THE GREAT AWOKENING

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