

## Transcripts

### **1. Liberation**

I went down to the library. I remember one of my teachers, she was doing her PhD at the time, and she was in the library as well. And she was like, “are you alright?” because I just went on the attack on all of these books. And I didn't even know what I was looking for. I just knew that there was this hierarchy that was being imposed on me and my friends. And we were suffocating underneath it. And we were feeling really disempowered. And we were feeling at a loss of our agency. And we were feeling dehumanised. And we were feeling like we were suffering. And I was okay with that if, if it could be found to be fair. And if I could find something in Allah's words that would make clear to me why Allah who would choose to allow this to happen. And there was even a part of me that was like, if I find that, I might just reject Allah. You know, I was scared. I didn't know what I was going to find. But I was at a point now where I was like, you know what, I can't breathe, and I need to, I need to find a way out- me and my friends, right? And so I went to the library. And like I said, Erum, I honestly, I didn't even know what I was looking for. I just remember, I started in the section where we had all the fiqh books, so all the books on Islamic law. And I don't know why something in my head said, “nah, you're in the wrong section, girl, you want to go to the tafsir.” So I went over to the tafsir section, because I was like, actually, you know what, forget the law. I want to know what Allah is saying because the law is made by man anyway. And tafsir as well, of course, is is a human endeavour, but tafsir is where I went. And you know what? I can't even remember whose tafsir it was that I was looking in. I imagine that it was Fakr al-Din al-Razi but I'm not sure. And I pulled out this book. And I went to this verse on marriage. And I came to this ayah, where Allah talks about- is addressing men folk, and He says to them to treat their women, “bil ma'ruf”. With ma'ruf, okay and I'm going to explain the word. So in the tafsir, it said that maruf means good, right? With kindness with goodness, right? So basically treat your wives with goodness in every form of good, that is how you should be treating your wives. I thought, okay, that's still a little too vague. And then the mufassir went on and he'd written, but maruf is- it also means what's known, right? Something that's maruf is something that is known. And so essentially, he said that the ma'ruf here- the goodness that is being asked of you is what is the best that is known in your society at any given time. So, the standard by which a man, a Muslim man is being held to by the Quran in terms of how he should be treating his wife is the

highest point, is the most exemplary point of treatment that a man can give to his spouse at any given time and space. And to me that was that was the moment I came out from under the the suffocation of patriarchy because that is such a non-patriarchal command from Allah. Okay? Because the verse is actually *wa ashiru huna bil ma'ruf*. The *ashiru* - live with them - it's a command. The the form of that verb, it's a command, this is the haram and the halal, okay? So this is a command. It's haram for you to behave in any other way with your wife because Allah has said live with- it's a command- Allah is demanding this of Muslim men, and the verb is conjugated in such a way that it is in the plural masculine, Allah is talking to *all* men. And then He says *ashiru huna*: them. That is also conjugated on the female plural. Allah is talking to the men with regards to how they need to be with the women. It's very clear, even though Arabic because of it being a gendered language, it can become ambiguous at times. In this verse, you couldn't be more clear, okay? And so the command is there. "This is how you are going to live with the womenfolk and you know what it's going to be? It's going to be by the best standard that is known to you, in any given time, space and society with which women can be treated." That was the moment for me, and I always thank Allah for that moment. I always thank Allah that I had that moment where I was breastfeeding for hours and this thing was churning around and around around in my head, and I and that that evening, I was able to just hand this baby boy over to my husband, and that I had access to this library, and that I had access to this language, and that I was able to go down there and that Allah just guided me to this- these pages in this book that I can't even name for you now. But that was the moment where I was like, you know what? There are Allah's words, and then there's man's word. And too often as Muslims we are following man's word over Allah's. And we seek refuge in Allah from that.

## **2. Out of Reach/The Everyday**

And just to really imagine that life, and it's never going to be an accurate imagination, and it's always going to be changing. And that is the intimacy that is needed to kind of think of how your life can be tied to the lives of these prophets and these chosen- God's chosen people. And then you realise like, it's- *you're* God's chosen people. We're all God's chosen people. This is, this is the life that God is talking about. And then you start seeing it in your own life, and you're like, oh, what would what would what would Ruth do in this situation? Am I doing it with love? And you start seeing the poetry in your life, the very divine poetry in your life. And that's where meaning comes in. It's a love affair with your life. And

yeah, so I feel like going through that journey with the Bible has really inspired me to go in that similar journey with the Quran because I feel like all my life the Quran was an idol. "Don't touch it. It's got to be on the top shelf, you do wudhu, wash your hands, wash your face, say a prayer. If you have your periods don't touch it. For God's sake." No, it's a book that you carry with you everyday. Even if you're cooking, you're like, hmm, maybe I'll go and look at it. It has to be that intimate. Something that you use everyday. And God's word can never be... Like, who do we think we are that we are going to take God's word and make it dirty? That's arrogance. We always think God is going to be mad at us about something. God is not mad at us about anything. God really doesn't, I mean, we've just kept God at like, "you're over there, God". God wants intimacy. God wants us to really just live with Him every moment. And you can't do that if you keep God on the top shelf. Got to be in use. It's got to be like your teapot or your table or something. You know, it's got to be there with you all the time.

### **3. Al-Rahman**

As I memorised the Quran, through that process, I definitely felt like it was a process of getting this direct connection. And that was invaluable, like this direct connection to God's words, you know, and such. At one point for me. Like I was like, in this debate with this Christian missionary, and they're like, this Christian missionary was like, "oh, there's no love in the Quran, God's love isn't in the Quran, it's all about like, like a fear of God, fearing God" you know? And I think and then it sort of struck me that the so like there's there's like translations that we have of like the fear of God, translating taqwa as the fear of God. So like, connecting with the roots of the Arabic terms changed a lot of that experience like taqwa, rather, awareness or consciousness or mindfulness of God has like had a very different connotation to me than the fear of God, so to speak. And then also one of the- a big realisation, realisation is that, when, like the, that the term rahma, that connection with the rahim, the womb, and compassion, and going through, like, I ended up writing like this article on, you know, how our translations of rahma as mercy are deficient in the sense that mercy, we use it as a term like, with the connotation of like, somebody who's like going to harm you, and holding back from harming you, whereas the term rahma as used by the Quran and used by the prophetic tradition is always this very deep, loving experience of like, the feminine, the maternal and always like, expressed in that way, in the in the prophetic er- and I found that really, really powerful, like this connection to God like this, the feminine aspect of God

very, like powerful through this term rahma. I think the fear becomes more of a fear of disappointing a fear of disc- this displeasing. Fear of like like like that relationship with one's mother this like sense of like, rather than like one of facing like facing like, like punishments so to speak. I will say like like that that connection on rahma has been a very powerful part of my religious like connection with with the Quran and with with the tradition and and now I think I have a very different experience reading the Quran.

#### **4. Returning**

When I see works by... when I see works by like, amina wadud and Kecia Ali, I find like their perspective important, but like what, what else do I see in Oman happening in terms of queer expression or feminine empowerment? From from a legal, modern legal point of view, I think like Oman has done a better job than its neighbours in terms of women's right to vote and property ownership and, and these kinds of like modern necessities, but things that are more related to historic traditions? Then, no, we still have a long way to go, and maybe we're not one of the best places. But let me talk about my own tribal stronghold location. So it's a walled or a gated community. And inside that community, everything is architecturally historic. Everything is built according to historic needs, and- why were they built? They were there to facilitate something that existed. And I remember, inside our historic village there is a women's only mosque where women lead the prayer. And it's not common. It's usually a men's only mosque with a women's section at the back or with a backdoor or something like that. I mean, sad architecture of reality. But there is a mosque, which is like a women's only mosque, and it's in the very middle of the historic, gated village. But again, it's a historic area; it's not a representation of what people are doing nowadays. If you go to the modern neighbourhoods where most people live, then no, it's it's- the type of mosque we know about nowadays, like a men's mosque with a women's section at the back. And there is very little reform done about that. In fact, there is like no thought or no discussion about that at the moment. But when a women's mosque only- when a woman's only mosque existed, there was also no discussion about that, and it was okay! And the building's still there. And it's the mosque is still in use. But now because nobody lives in that historic area - most people have moved out or they're extremely like, from an older generation - that mosque is mostly closed, and it's only open on certain days at certain hours, only to serve the very local residents. But I also realised that within our tribal historic gated village, men and women were not

segregated. They would walk out, walk around the same areas, same public spaces, same everywhere like, you'd pass by, and you might get into a very close proximity even because there are such they're built in very narrow pathways. There are lots of narrow pathways within the gated community. So the relationship between men and women there, as population grew, were built to be more egalitarian than segregated. But in 1970, when modernization suddenly boomed, everyone suddenly moved out of the gated village and culture suddenly changed. So with that came absolute segregation, so much segregation, it's like there was a segregation balloon inflated so much, that in a single year, it was, like blown out and, and now everywhere is segregated, and (laughs). But the marks that were left by those who lived before in terms of like gender egalitarianism are still there. And that mosque is one of them.

## **5. Joy**

So I really started questioning it and it got to that point where I was like, I just have to make a choice. And I genuinely, it's like really funny but I genuinely remember, like googling, full on Googling, inclusive Islam because I had just learned what inclusive meant. And I was like I'm just using it everywhere. I googled inclusive Islam. And guess what popped up? The Inclusive Mosque, like the Inclusive Mosque Initiative in London. And honestly, I felt like that was my sign to just like, not fully give up on Islam. And I emailed them instantly, I was like, I have to be involved like one way or another. I checked the website, I was so in love, like I was so obsessed. That was in 2016, like very early 2016. And I remember emailing them immediately saying, "I really want to volunteer with you guys and I just want to help out in any way, I want to be involved, I want to attend." And then yeah, that's how I got into it and I met with one of the volunteers at the time and it was just like a chat in the park. It was really chill. It felt really safe. It felt really... just really exciting and very like, like, I never thought I would ever have like or find a space like that. And then I started attending like the jumah's and the events and really got into it and it was very like... I just, there was like a lot of joy that I was experiencing at the time because it felt like, wow, finally, I can be comfortable in my Muslim identity and also have access to inclusive spaces where I don't feel that I was inferior to cishet men. I was also like reading a lot about Islamic feminism. So I discovered amina wadud's writing around- Dr. amina wadud's writing around the same time, and I really, really just found their writing like really intriguing and interesting. I was really obsessed, especially the 'Woman and Quran' or 'Quran and Women' I can't remember but that one, the first

book that they published. I'm saying they/them because I know Dr amina wadud came out as non-binary so I was like, which again, in itself is such a cool thing. It's really like amazing to like witness that journey, but um. So that's really cool and I was like reading that book. And it really shifted my perspective on a lot of these like the, the so-called problematic verses that a lot of privileged men and a lot of like, you know, that specific type of man use to oppress women, to oppress like, you know, queer people to oppress anyone who's basically not a cishet man. And the way you know, Dr. amina interpreted them in this like different way just really it completely took me by surprise so I was like- so, and it made sense in my head and it made sense in so many different ways. It's like okay, this makes sense with like the concept that I had of God and honestly, at that time I like that's like I felt that I could actually have this connection to God and I could be spiritual and I gen- I literally like started feeling it I was like, okay, like, now I can actually can believe in God because that like fear that like rejection that I felt before like just fully disappeared I was like, just because it was interpreted in this way and it was practised in this way and like people told me these things, that doesn't make them true, and there's all these other versions that like are just as valid so I don't have to like- why would I have to follow a version that makes me feel rejected to the point where I genuinely kind of got pushed to like not even believing in God at one point? And then realising no, like no one like no one is gonna gatekeep me from like my own religion in a way. Like it felt really powerful to reclaim it. And then discovering like the writings of like Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi as well. Yeah, like a lot of really life-changing the really life-changing books for me like really life-changing like essays and just like articles that I like just like really got into it and it's just, it felt like almost like, yep this is like a whole world that I like I'm just I felt so lucky and like privileged to like even be allowed to like- not be allowed I guess but like be able to discover because not everyone gets the opportunity like, not everyone gets the chance to like reevaluate the way they see religion and the way the religion has been like imposed on them in a specific you know, like specific ways and all that so it was really yeah, it was really powerful.

## **6. Homecoming**

Yeah, in LQM that was, and it was so interesting, I think during the first ijihad was travel, so it was totally non-sexual, and I'm like, yes, we are sexual beings having a conversation about God and travel. And I think that paradigm, that... that was the biggest shift. We were not talking

about sex, but we knew that we are all sexual beings, complete beings not pretending to be polite and, you know, like hiding, like "oh no we don't have sex." And I think that was what the biggest shift is like the acknowledge the- the quiet acknowledgement that sex is a part of our lives, and it's not anything to be ashamed about. And that we can have that and talk about the world was the biggest thing that I faced, that I found with LQM that was, oh okay, now I'm with people who are my friends. Now, now I'm home. Yeah, now I'm comfortable. And it felt like, you know, that that sort of openness to being a part of the world when everybody wanted to cut you out of it, and then finding that sort of place where you can be a full human being. Because there's so much shame around sex, even as a heterosexual person, even as a straight person, like even if you don't explore your bisexual side, there's so much shame around sex that being part of an openly queer-accepting spiritual space is, by itself exorcises shame. And that is something that I am so thankful for with LQM because it's the only time you really get to say, ha, so God did make us to fuck one another, and make love with one another, you know, like, God did create sex, so He must have a sense of humour because sometimes the noises, you know, the slapping, the noises... (giggling) yes I'm just saying, like, God has a sense of humour and you can be like, "ah, this is not a judgemental God. This is a playful God who likes fluids. Okay, okay. I love God. God is funny. God has a sense of humour". And it's just like, your relationship with God changes, you know, it's no longer punitive. It's no longer serious. God is just as silly and squishy and, like, just just loving of the tactile to have made us the way we are. Yeah, that's kind of like how I feel about spirituality and Islamic spaces and LQM and now, my relationship with God and my body.

## **7. Love**

It's only in the Bible study where there are some really complicated, like really problematic passages. And you're like what does this mean? And you have to stay with it. You cannot change it. Okay, fine, you cannot change it. You cannot change the past. What does it mean for you? What do you take from it? And you know, Richard Rohr has this book called, 'What Do We Do with the Bible?' And he talks about- religion is the best thing in the world and the worst thing in the world. The Bible is the best thing in the world and the worst thing in the world. The Bible has been used to justify mass murder, harms unimaginable, done to people, quoting the Bible, but the Bible has been a source of so much change and so much love for people. How is it that it's happening that way?

Comes back down to interpretation. Comes back, whether you're looking at everything, reading everything, reading not just books, reading each other- Because that's what this is: a conversation is an act of reading what we say to each other... Are you doing it with love? When you're having an argument with each other, are you trying to win the argument, or are you trying to lovingly understand the person? Are you giving them the benefit of the doubt? Are you clarifying where that person is coming from, for the sake of love? I'm now in a place where I can now read not for the sake of argument, but for the sake of love. To interpret only for the sake of love. To make meaning only for love. This life is so wonderful. It's only for love. Only for love.

## **8. The Welcoming**

### *Audio 1*

Then they had like other policies to it like they talk about like, right in their announcements, they're like yeah, come dressed as you are policy. So however you dress outside of the mosque, you're welcome to come to the mosque. You don't have to change the way that you dress when you come to the mosque.

### *Audio 2*

There aren't many, there are many kind of safe spaces where you can just show up completely as you are. Whether that's, you know, because of you know, Islamophobia or because of homophobia or because of transphobia, queerphobia as well. And so I think that's why it's really important, I think, for us to to I guess have like create that safe space for firstly for LGBTQIA+ Muslims but also just other as I said, like other other Muslims as well. Because even other Muslims from from what i've from my own well from, I guess from what I've heard from other people, generally you know, a lot of the questions that they had about Islam they couldn't ask their parents or they couldn't ask their teacher or they couldn't ask or they couldn't ask like the imam at the mosque for example. Like they would have had to had to like go and discover those the answers to those questions themselves over via Google or speaking to other people like themselves who they felt safe to speak to. And I feel like there's just, there's so much that that we can all learn from each other, that we can all learn from our own our own teachings like. I think because we try to be inclusive or welcoming of people of different sects within Islam, there's just so much so much knowledge and so many traditions and ways of practicing Islam that could be so you know, that if we all shared those those kind of learnings or those things with each



other, I feel like there's so much that that could maybe resonate with another person like you know, for example, somebody who grew up in a in a Sunni family may find a lot of peace in a in a Shia I practice for example, or vice versa. And and so I think that's, I think that's why we want to create that safe space for people to just discover, I guess what it is what is that what it is they actually feel about spirituality, about Islam, about being Muslim, about practice- about how to how to practice as well.

### *Audio 3*

But yeah, I kind of like I really liked that it was very flexible in comparison to like mainstream Jumah's, you know what I mean? Like, we'd pray at this set time and we'd would do all these things but it was very flexible in comparison, way more accessible. And it felt like it's just there was like, no pressure to perform in any way. You know what I mean? You can literally just attend and sit in the back, you know, you don't have to pray, you don't have to do anything.

### *Audio 4*

People are just like, not just tolerated, but actually, actual effort is made towards making people feel like they are part of the main group and not like, you're allowed to be there, but we're not really catering to you. I think it's like taking different needs into account. So for example, at Inclusive Mosque, what like really struck me, like things that I never really thought about before was like that they always have like a sign language interpreter present, so people with disabilities can, can can be there and can engage with everything. And even though like maybe majority of the time, it wasn't actually needed, it's just the practice of saying it's worth it to invest in that, and it's worth doing this, even if it is just for one person sometimes but it's kind of not, oh we'll deal with it if we have to; it's like a proactive approach to it.

### *Audio 5*

I think that's really core to, to what LQM is trying to do - it's to give people as I mentioned before, that kind of that breathing room, to, to just even, even if they don't want to say anything, just to just to exist in a space like that, or to have access to a space like that, where it's just, they can bring their whole self, they don't have to leave anything behind. They don't even if even the kind of the horrible, ugly parts of themselves, like or the doubts and the fears and all of that they can bring that that's

that's, that's great if anything like we want this space to be to be healing in some way, even if it's the little way.