

WE RISE BY LIFTING ***OTHERS***



Tayba Foundation 2021



Stories From Behind Bars and Beyond.

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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Tayba Supporters,



Talib Z. Tayba Student

Talib means “seeker” and can mean “seeker of knowledge.” It also happens to be the name of one of Tayba’s earliest students. From the time he became Muslim in 2001 until his first parole hearing in 2020, he showed exemplary character. He was free of disciplinary actions, yet the board found him unsuitable for release. He was denied the freedom he had hoped for and anticipated for 32 years. The reason: Talib was accused of extremist tendencies, though there wasn’t any proof at all.

Once a person becomes part of the prison system, they are no longer offered due process and can be denied freedom based on a frivolous claim. The Board of Parole Hearings may deny freedom by simply citing ‘information in the confidential file’. This is a file which neither the prisoner nor their lawyer has access to. In Talib’s case, it was a baseless claim driven purely by Islamophobia.

I joined a phone conference of the Board of Parole Hearings at which members of the public can speak. I cited proof that their claim was outrageous and asked about their jurisdiction, their evidence, and their training. I pointed out fallacies and glaring contradictions in their assertions and process. A lawyer Tayba hired to represent him, and worked with in the past, spoke on his behalf as well. None of that changed the board’s decision to deny Talib his freedom.

In August of this year, I received wonderful news: Talib was finally eligible for release! He would be walking out a free man after 33 long years! He has to wait just a little while longer to go through the process but looks forward to rejoining free society in January 2022! I personally read through the entire 120-page transcript, looking at page after page of the commissioner’s findings that the claims lacked any evidence. Ultimately, he proclaimed, “I don’t think there’s any evidence of any Islamic radicalism within this inmate.”

When I sent the lawyer her payment from Tayba, I also sent her a replica of an anti-slavery token from 1838. I told her she is a modern-day Harriet Tubman, leading people to freedom.



“Am I Not A Woman & A Sister”
Anti-Slavery Conder Token



We Rise by Lifting Others



“We Rise by Lifting Others.” This is the message on the door of the case manager’s office in Tayba’s San Bernardino office. At some point in our lives, we have all helped to lift someone up. Remember what that felt like? It did something for you, right? We, the givers, are more in need of the act of giving than the recipient is of receiving. Not only do we rise by lifting others, we can ONLY rise by lifting others.

Talib’s story, and the rest of the stories in this booklet, are the true narratives of students who have been lifted up. Making these successes possible is how you and I - and all Tayba supporters and staff - rise.

Thank you for your continued, unwavering support of our incarcerated brothers and sisters, as well as fostering Tayba’s expansion and development. We hope to continue to rise together through lifting up others, insha’Allah. Thank you.



RAMI NSOUR

*Tayba’s Director &
Co-Founder*


WHAT'S NEW?

Want to learn about the US prison system and Muslims in it?

Why does the US imprison people at the overwhelming rate of North Korea? And why are so many prisoners in the US accepting Islam? What happens when they convert and what struggles do they face in practicing their Deen behind bars? We've been working on an educational series of articles and videos to explain just that. Unlike mainstream content that covers the general dynamics and impacts of the American criminal justice system, Tayba's educational series brings you inside knowledge accumulated from years of experience working in the field, plus the firsthand perspective of the incarcerated Muslim population. Want to learn more about this topic or know someone who does? Sign up at taybafoundation.org/series.

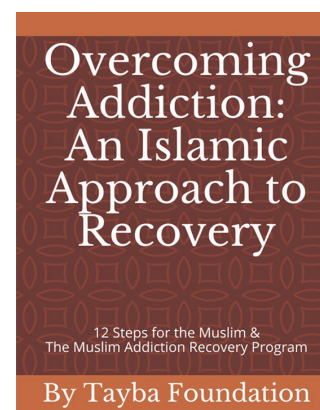
Project Fatima: Muslim Women Affected by Incarceration

Thanks to the generosity of Muslim donors, especially the Bay Area Community Grant (BACG), Tayba Foundation was able to launch a project focusing on the needs of women in prison, titled "Project Fatima". Project Fatima aims to:

 <p>Increase Islamic scholarship amongst women through sacred learning in prison and after release.</p>	 <p>Provide relevant and compassionate counseling, advice, and support from female Tayba staff with personal incarceration experience.</p>
 <p>Create a Muslim female prisoner network that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and fosters support across a normally disconnected community.</p>	 <p>You can learn more about the project at tay.ba/project-fatima</p>

An Islamic 12-Step Addiction Recovery Course

Tayba Foundation hosted an online event to launch its newest life skills addition, a course on overcoming addiction, in September 2021. The course was created by currently incarcerated Tayba students Ahmad Adisa and Justin 'Abdus-Salaam Steiner. For many years, these students struggled with addiction and participated in - and facilitated - many addiction programs in their respective institutions. This work is similar to the traditional 12-steps program, but is aligned with Muslim beliefs. Purchase of this course is available on Amazon.



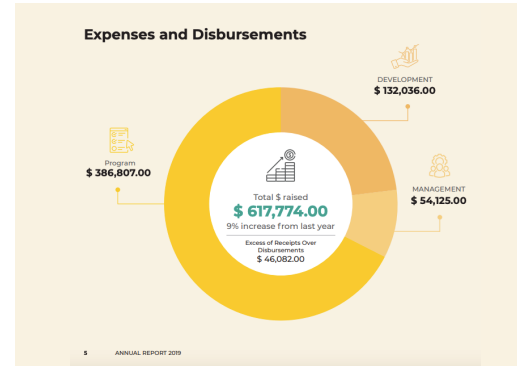
Updating the Salesforce Platform

Tayba is undergoing a software upgrade. This will enable all Tayba teams to work together to ensure that every prisoner we work with gets everything he or she needs. Our software was originally designed for handling shipments. But with our expanded student body, services, and team, things are getting complicated. Customizing our Salesforce platform requires highly-skilled developers and thus costs money - but this is a one-time expense that is still cheaper than an annual subscription for a competing product. You can still support this project by going to launchgood.com/tayba-future



Financials/Highlights Webpage

Finally, a one-stop place to find all of Tayba's financial reports and accomplishments over the years. Supporters can view all major financial indicators and achievements since our inception in 2002. We like to think of this new page as OUR story: how we began with nothing more than a cell phone and a PO box and have grown so much since then. (And when we say OUR, we mean you as well, dear donor. We couldn't have done it alone!) Check it out at tay.ba/financial



2019 slide of the highlights & financial report.

Tayba Legal Initiative

In December 2020, we asked for your support of a new endeavor, the Tayba Legal Initiative (TLI). The project was created to support those in need of legal assistance while leveraging the legal knowledge accumulated by our students to benefit those in need of guidance. Alhamdulillah, many brothers and sisters are still benefiting from the TLI. We are currently considering the creation of a manual by students, for students to act as a road map for the incarcerated who seek legal action.

SoCal Reentry - Office Expansion

In July 2021, Tayba received a generous grant from San Bernardino County to broaden reentry services in the SoCal area. These funds made it possible to expand both our physical office in San Bernardino and the range of services we offer: including mental health, substance abuse, system navigation, links to medical services, case management, and more. The office is staffed by 3 personnel: a case manager, a mental health specialist, and an office clerk. This expansion complements advances in Tayba's ongoing nationwide reentry program.



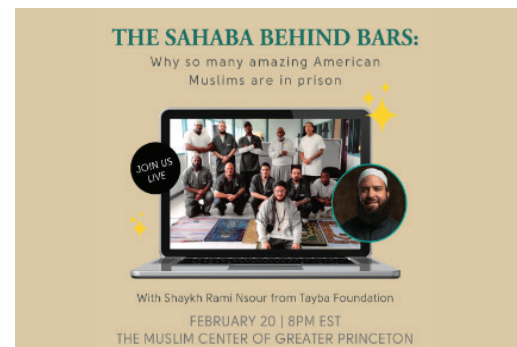
Reentry Manager Tabari Zahir addressing guests at the San Bernardino office.

Essential Curriculum

The rapid increase of student enrollment at Tayba resulted in the need to create an Essential Curriculum. As we assessed the educational needs of a segment of the population we serve, we learned that many of the students drop or fail the courses due to the academic level of the material and other learning challenges. It became clear that a new track for these students was needed. The Tayba Academy team was joined by experts in the field to develop an alternate 6-course curriculum that will be made available to those in need. Alhamdulillah, once more, thanks to your donations, we were able to fund the project and it is in the early stages of creation.

The Sahaba Behind Bars: Why are so many amazing American Muslims in prison?

This presentation is designed to educate Muslim communities around the United States about incarceration. Tayba is offering this online live event free of charge by request to mosques across the country. Tayba representatives, including previously incarcerated students, will answer commonly-asked questions about prison and the practice of Islam inside prisons. To schedule this program for your community, please email us at info@taybafoundation.org.



Flier of a past event offered to The Muslim Center of Greater Princeton.

YUSUF K.

He thought life would be easier after his release

You may have already seen Yusuf's interview that was recorded in early 2020. After becoming Muslim in prison and studying with Tayba behind bars, Yusuf was released in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This made the already difficult reentry process even more challenging.

He had planned to become a truck driver but couldn't get a driver's license without a lawyer because the courts were closed. Ironically, he couldn't afford lawyer fees without having a job. Finally, Yusuf found employment, but it was a less-than-ideal situation. He had to commute 4 hours a day while living in a halfway house with a strict curfew. If he violated it, he could end up back behind bars.

He wanted a new job and was offered a promotion instead

Yusuf's experience in prison, combined with the Tayba courses he took to develop good character, helped him succeed. He works hard, maintains his patience in difficult situations, and treats all those around him with respect. It made him an irreplaceable worker. When he announced to his employer that he had found a new job with a better salary, his boss offered him a promotion instead... twice! Yusuf is now training to manage the entire store and will have a salaried position once he completes his training.

Incarceration still affects him to this day

Alhamdulillah, Yusuf has achieved a lot since his release, but his past is never far from his mind. He still struggles to find his way around grocery stores, and more populated places like the mall or a grocery store can overwhelm him so much that he leaves before his shopping has been completed. After being alone for so long, it is often difficult to be in a crowd. Modern technology can also be a challenge - Yusuf regularly has to rely on younger coworkers to help him navigate the internet and social media.

Everyday decisions like what to wear or eat are not as simple for Yusuf. Clothing styles have changed - and so has he. He's still trying to find a way to dress that is both modern and in-line with Islamic guidelines on modesty. As for food, he spent many years in prison relying on a microwave; cooking on a stove is an entirely new skill he has worked to acquire.



A Tayba nikah

While he was incarcerated, Yusuf communicated with a sister on the outside that he hoped to marry. Once he was finally released, he couldn't find an imam willing to do their nikah, since none of them knew Yusuf as part of their community. Finally, Tayba founder Shaykh Rami Nsour conducted the nikah, at last enabling the couple to be married according to Islamic law.

Dreams ahead, challenges in the way

Though they are married now, Yusuf and his wife are not able to live together. They currently see each other just once a week or every other week. He hopes to live with her under one roof someday, but many logistical and familial challenges lie in the way.

As for his career, Yusuf plans to continue with his job that has been progressing well, alhamdulillah. In the long run, he hopes to become his own boss and start his own business. This will require him to learn even more new skills and acquire various certifications, a long process that will be doubly challenging given all the things Yusuf has on his plate right now.

Yusuf has participated in several interviews with the Tayba team over the years. You can watch them here:



AMIN R.

He was sentenced to die

Amin (born Ralph) was arrested at the age of 17 for possession of less than 1 gram of cocaine. For this crime of owning – not dealing – an illegal substance, Amin received an unbelievably harsh punishment. The state of Florida chose to try him as an adult and sentenced him to 3 consecutive life sentences. From the time he was 17, Amin expected to die in prison for possession.

A prayer from the Haramayn is answered

A few years into his incarceration, Amin accepted Islam. When Tayba first launched, he became one of the first Muslim prisoners to enroll in the program. When Tayba co-founder Shaykh Rami Nsour performed hajj, he made du'a for Amin to be released. When Amin heard of this, he was deeply affected. "He lifted my name up in the Prophet's mosque and in the Ka'ba," he told us. "I knew for a fact I was going home." And alhamdulillah, the du'a was answered: in 2013, Amin became one of the first Tayba students to be released after a reduced sentence.

Surprising challenges on the outside

After being locked up for so long, Amin had a hard time with some simple everyday things, like touching glass or a knife, both of which are banned in prison for safety reasons. He was also reluctant to be around other people and struggled with physical affection, which was entirely absent from his life behind bars.

The past comes knocking

For nearly every prisoner who returns to free society, ghosts of the past arrive on their doorstep. This is why reentry support is critical. Amin was no exception: just a few weeks after his release, one of the key witnesses against him during his trial barged onto the property where Amin was staying. Amin had to tell the man, who had been instrumental in his conviction, that he was not welcome in his home. Later, Amin learned that another witness had called his parole officer to ask why he'd been released, having believed that Amin would spend his entire life behind bars.

From prisoner to masjid leader

He didn't know it then, but alhamdulillah, Amin's life was about to change for the better. After relocating to California, Amin was asked to talk about his experience with the youth of a large Bay Area masjid.



This talk eventually led to a job interview, and then to employment as the operations manager of the masjid. Eight years later, Amin is still employed there with no plans to move on - he feels extremely blessed to be able to serve a house of Allah.

A new family

Alhamdulillah, a connection made in those first few days in California introduced Amin to the woman who would become his wife. Today, Amin is a happy father of 6 children - one from their marriage and 5 from his wife's previous one. For a man who once lost a child to senseless violence, being able to be a father again is an enormous blessing.

"The biggest thing for me is my mother being proud of me."

Early on, Amin's conversion to Islam caused some tension with his mother. Over time, especially after he lived with her during his reentry, her attitude changed. She even began to make iftar meals for him during Ramadan.

"One memory that sticks out for me is when I consulted my mother about changing my name to a Muslim one. She said 'I trust you. You'd never do something without thinking it through.' That meant a whole lot to me because the biggest thing for me is my mother being proud of me."

"I just can't begin to express how grateful I am to Allah that He did not decree that I be tried thus far with the many things that so many other men and women who have come out of prison have been tried with. I really thank Allah for the blessing of the Tayba Foundation. May He bless them for all that they've done and all that they continue to do."

Amin has participated in several interviews with the Tayba team over the years. You can watch them here:



GARY G.

Alienated from his faith

Although he was born into a religious Christian family, Gary never felt satisfied with what he was taught about faith. "I wanted to hear what Jesus said, but I only heard what the preacher or my grandmother said instead," he recalls. He became alienated from religion at a young age and began to spend time with the wrong people. He landed in prison while still in his teens.

It was in that prison where he first encountered Islam. He heard Muslims praying in another cell and their recitation of the Fatiha resonated with his heart, though he did not understand a word of it. Gary felt compelled to learn more and picked up a translation of the Qur'an.

To his surprise, the Qur'an answered his questions about faith, one after another. After a year of study (now back in free society), Gary took his shahada and changed his name to Isa.

Accepting Islam and still landing in prison

It wasn't a smooth road ahead. Isa lacked access to learning more about his deen - there was no Muslim community in the area and he didn't know any Muslims who could teach him. Unable to even learn how to pray, he lived as a Muslim in name only and kept with the same criminal companions as before. This soon brought him back to prison.

Like many white converts, Isa struggled behind bars. On the one hand, he was largely an outcast in the overwhelmingly black Muslim prison community. On the other hand, he was under attack from other white prisoners for "trying to be black" and regularly got into fistfights with them.

Finding knowledge in the strangest of places

Ironically, prison was also a place where he could learn more about Islam. In spite of the fact that North Carolina prisons do not provide chaplains for Muslims, which often results in many of the incarcerated following non-traditional Islamic movements, there were still materials available in the prison library. There were also Muslims of whom he could ask questions about the religion.

Through his love of reading and learning, Isa soon learned about Tayba. He found a Tayba book of Maliki fiqh at the prison library and, when he realized that there was an entire curriculum available, he immediately requested coursework. Though the semester had already begun, he convinced the Tayba team to send him materials and has taken 2-3 courses every semester since. He has now completed the entire Tayba curriculum and is one of the most advanced students we have ever worked with.

"I'm a completely different person"

For Isa, "The most important part of learning is putting it into practice." His intense study made him a different man. Today, thanks to his knowledge and character, he is well-respected by his Muslim community, regardless of his skin color. Even other white prisoners gained respect for him after seeing the acceptance he receives from the black community. In fact, one even took shahadah through him. The change has been so dramatic that he decided to change his name one more time - to Muhammad Abdul Rahim - signifying a new chapter in his life. He chose the name Muhammad because he felt that he owed his salvation to the Prophet ﷺ, and Abdul Rahim because the only way he could be thankful to Allah is to realize that he could not be thankful enough for the mercy bestowed upon him.

25 years a Muslim and his mother still tells him he's going to hell

When he first became Muslim, Muhammad's parents kicked him out of the house. He has been Muslim for 25 years, yet little has changed. Although they feel obligated to maintain relations with him, his mother rarely fails to tell him that he is bound for hell during their conversations. When he was in free society, he would mow his parents' lawn and was not allowed to pray inside the house when the time for prayer came.

Thanks to learnings from the Rights...



Read the rest of Gary's Story here:





MARIAM C.



She went to prison for social work

In 1998, Mariam came to the United States from Mali. After working hard to obtain a master’s degree in counseling, she began a career as a social worker. Unfortunately, a child in the care of one of her colleagues died from malnutrition and her entire department was accused of negligence. In total, 9 people – Mariam included - went to prison as a result.

Ailing and abandoned behind bars

Mariam suffers from sickle cell anemia and often experiences bouts of acute pain. She requires routine blood transfusions to help manage the disease; this became even more challenging during her time in prison. In addition, her husband stopped supporting her and ceased making payments on her home, which was destroyed in a fire during her incarceration. It was Mariam’s father who would send her money, all the way from Paris, until he passed away in 2018.

By the time she was released in 2020, Mariam was wheelchair-bound. Alhamdulillah, she has since regained her ability to walk.

“It was like gold in my hands”

Mariam was an exceptional Tayba student while in prison: from 2012 on, she took every single course Tayba offered and often took more than one course at a time, something most students weren’t allowed to do.

“Anytime Tayba sent me courses, it was like I had gold in my hands - I was so happy. It was only these courses that helped me get through my time in prison. And I learned a lot.”

The prison “mom”

Mariam says that Tayba courses transformed how she carried herself. Learning how to be respectful, loving, and patient with others, earned her the title “Mom” from fellow prisoners. Her character inspired many people around her to convert to Islam, and she taught them (and other Muslims at her prison) everything she learned from Tayba’s materials.

\$10,000 for a green card

Mariam was released from prison in 2020, just as COVID-19 swept through the nation. The green card she had before incarceration was suspended, making her current status in the US unclear. Lawyers are asking for more than \$10,000 to handle her case.

Mariam would love to get a job and dreams of continuing her education, but finding work in her situation is nearly impossible. Her criminal record prohibits her from going back into social work, while her health does not allow her to stand for more than 5 minutes at a time. She takes it all in stride. Mariam continues to make du’a for a job (“Allah is al-Fattah,” she reminds us) and stays in touch with a Tayba counselor for assistance. Mariam asks us not to feel sorry for her. “This is life,” she says. “I just need your du’a.”



TAYBA FOUNDATION
Freedom Through Education

and they feed...the prisoner
Quran 76

GIVE TODAY

Your zakat*, sadaqa, or gift can help an incarcerated Muslim:

- » Learn His or Her Deen
- » Learn Critical Life Skills
- » Succeed After Parole

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