



ISLAMIC AWARENESS MONTH SHINING LIGHTS



Written by Dr Sabir A Bham





Introduction

There are a few misconceptions about Salaam Peace and me.

- My career in community engagement started aged 12/13 after hearing “Man in the Mirror” by Michael Jackson.
- My academic background is Religious Studies. I have met and been taught by Dr Delia Cortese (Islam and Gender in Religion) and Ralph Bates (Indian Religious traditions).
- I set up Salaam Peace after the London bombings of 2005.
- Salaam Peace only engages young Muslim and Black men. We are universal, and our reach includes 3-year-olds to people in their 60's. We have a membership that represents the communities we work in.
- Our staff are built from our pool of participants. Our programmes include walking, study plus, 1-2-1 therapy and PE.

I turn 50 in February. The core values of my work and that of Salaam Peace are based on:

1. Respect for all the way you want to be treated.
2. Understanding – giving others the space to share their beliefs and traditions as you want for yourself.
3. Giving your best in all you do with what God has instilled in you.
4. Compassion – thinking of others and their needs.
5. Citizenship – respecting and loving the land you live off.
6. My relationship with God is a personal one. I have friends and family from different faiths and non-faiths. At Salaam Peace we never impose our beliefs but implement them in what we do and how we do it.

The journeys shared below inspire me to continue to BE THE CHANGE in the community I want to see. I am the change, so enjoy the next few pages.



Ralph Bates - Friend, inspiration and Lecturer at Middlesex University 1990s.

Ralph and I met in my first semester at university in 1996. He had a calm and welcoming manner. He made you all feel important and interesting. His ability to share his knowledge and passion for Indian religious and cultural traditions was infectious. I have instilled all the above in my work, and are core principles of all we do at Salaam Peace. A shared passion for Religious Studies and football means we are lifelong friends.

Mention the word 'Salah' and people think of Mohamed Salah, the Liverpool footballer rather than the Arabic word for prayer. However, it is this *salah* I first witnessed as an illiterate 5-year-old starting primary school. Abdul, our Yemeni bearer at RAF Steamer Point in Aden, took a pitcher of water to cleanse the concrete slab and his bare feet. Then alone and in the open-air facing Makkah, he performed the daily ritual. These names I remember – Abdul the worshipper and Mecca the real place in the distance but within reach.

My own journey to appreciate Islam began in Istanbul, following the overland route from Turkey to India. Only in Iran did I feel unwelcome due to the paranoid atmosphere generated by the Shah's secret police. In

Afghanistan I was treated as a *hajji* bound for Hindustan. In Lahore I accepted an invitation for tea at the home of relatives of the Pakistani family in Nottingham who gave me the only practical advice for my trip. Even crossing the Khyber Pass I never doubted the hospitality of my Muslim fellow travellers. From the retired teacher in Istanbul to the sociology lecturer at Dacca University, and many anonymous individuals in between, I am forever grateful.

On my return to England, I studied in London, Oxford, and did an Open University course called 'Man's Religious Quest.' All prepared me for postgraduate studies at the School of Oriental & African Studies at the University of London. From here Middlesex University invited me to teach Religious Studies, meeting an undergraduate named Sabir Bham whose name is synonymous with Salaam Peace.

A final thought. Growing up in Nottingham I was at the same secondary school as Viv Anderson. Knowing his background, watching him play for Nottingham Forest and captain England confirms the work of Sabir and Salaam Peace. Sport is a proven path for crossing borders – race, class, gender, or religion.



Azi

Seeing Azi evolve into an all-round leader has been a privilege. He is a modest and very industrious individual, forward-thinking, and ensuring Salaam Peace is always meeting changes to local needs. His achievements and impact at the youthful age of 26 are something I cannot comprehend.

I am Azi Mohammed, a British Muslim and currently the COO of Salaam Peace. My role involves overseeing day-to-day operations in the organisation as well as fundraising, monitoring/evaluation, and partnership development.

My journey with Salaam Peace started as a participant aged 11. I progressed through the community champions pathway, volunteering, and part-time work, plus delivering community sports sessions in Waltham Forest. After graduating with a first-class degree in Psychology from King's College, London I joined the SP management team in August 2020.

The work we do incorporates many key Islamic values, including:

- Kindness – being friendly and welcoming to participants, staff/volunteers, parents, and external partners, promoting a sense of community.
- Charity – giving our time and expertise to those with the most to gain from this, making extra efforts to support those in our local communities.
- Respect – treating others how we would like to be treated. Use positive language, conduct ourselves with dignity and treat others fairly. We have a duty to be role models for others, so our language and attitude sets the tone for this.
- Being a Muslim has its challenges. People regularly mispronounce my name, there is often an empty seat next to me when on public transport, and finding a suitable social group at university was challenging. However the pros far outweigh the cons. I have tried to adopt the stance of 'turning my cheek' and showing even more kindness and respect rather than hostility during these challenging situations.



Mohammed X

An inmate when we met, a loyal friend years later. I knew from our first encounter a few wrong turnings led Mohammed to a place he never should have been. Mohammed is a spark in the dark. He has shown what can be done, turning adversity into positivity.

I met Sab during my final few months at Pentonville Prison in 2008. The Imam had called Sab in to introduce himself and his work. As an inmate ready to come out, we have many people coming to speak to you. Sab was different. We connected at a Friday prayer in Leyton in 2009. Salaam Peace was just getting started, and Sab invited me to come to a group gym session and football, my two favourite pastimes. I was made to feel welcome, and bought into a community of varied faiths and cultures. They made football very engaging, and along with success on the pitch we built a common friendship.

I began volunteering and supporting work in east London. I was caught up in a cycle of hate and money-grabbing. As a Muslim I bought into a frenzy of extreme views. The drugs were easy money. Through Salaam Peace I was exposed to role models who lead by example, saying little but doing so much. I understood the Islamic values of community, respect, understanding and giving to the people that need it.

Now in 2024 I live in Southern Spain, married with two children, and work in the regional equivalent of our NHS.

Mumtaz

The diamond in the SP crown, 15-year-old Mumtaz has been with SP for a decade. We first met at her primary School, and from the start she was always a joy to work with. Recently she started her journey on the 'Community Champions Programme' doing the staff monthly payroll, event planning and being PA to Sab.

My name is Mumtaz Moola, and I am a British Muslim. I play for our under 14 girls football team as well as being a community champion. I joined the girls' football team when I was in Y4. Salaam Peace would do our break/lunchtime sessions in the Muga, and I would come to the girls after school club sessions. My friends and I then got introduced to Saturday girl's football.

Salaam Peace has taught me many values, one of the strongest being respect to everybody even if they are a whole different race or religion. Also, not only do I get to play for a football team at weekends, but I also have opportunities that not a lot of girls like me get.





Shamrez Darr

I met him in his formative years, and we developed a special bond. Despite the challenge of a single parent's home his achievements on the pitch and in life are great. Running a team in the SP way means our journey has been worth it, but there is yet much more to do.

My journey began when I first met Sab taking our Y9 PE classes at Tom Hood School in Leytonstone. Sab was not just a coach, he was a mentor and a father figure to many of us, especially those from single-parent households. Sab also ran a Saturday football team, Leyton All Stars, with players from Waltham Forest and Newham boroughs. In 2002 we played 39 games, winning 38 and the Cup. Through his guidance I underwent coaching leading to trials at Leicester City, Leyton Orient, Northampton Town, Coventry City, Reading and Dagenham & Redbridge.

Beyond football, Sab got us work as sports coaches and youth mentors. With his support I obtained FA coaching badges and completed a refereeing course for youth football. Armed with these I was able to give back to the community by coaching young children at schools, after-school clubs, and holiday camps.

I served with the Met Police for over 12 years, and now work as a train driver instructor. I continued my passion for football by playing at semi-professional. Together with Geoff Ocran, who shared a similar journey under Sab's mentorship, we co-manage Clapton CFC who are a successful fan-owned semi-professional club.

Sab taught us the core principles of professionalism, and the foundations necessary to thrive in diverse corporate environments. We learned the importance of teamwork, respect, and understanding of different beliefs and cultures, fostering a welcoming attitude towards all. Sab's influence has not only helped me achieve my personal goals, but he has also inspired me to lift others up in their pursuits.



Mohammed Bhayat

Wow, this young man's transformation from being immature and incredibly challenging to a role model, captain, and Salaam Peace Community Champion. He has witnessed fatality first hand, but used every setback as a springboard. Utilizes all the help myself and Azi and the team have given.

My name is Mohammed Bhayat, and I am British Muslim. I am captain of the U21 Salaam Peace men's team while college studying a BTEC level 3 in sport, and a member of SP staff helping coach the youth. I started at Salaam Peace around 10 years ago in the playground at primary school. Sab asked me to attend after school clubs so I could be more involved, then invited me to his training sessions where I became a regular participant.

One value taught to me is my behavior on and off the football pitch. Between the ages of 11-14 my behaviour was poor, which led to Sab taking me out of matchday squads and even having meetings with my parents. I started to see my friends behaving well and getting awards, so ever since then I have never been a burden and try to be as best behaved as I can.

One thing about me is I have always been determined to become a great footballer who has good morals and be a role model for the youth. It takes a lot mentally and physically to become great, and if you are willing to make a lot of sacrifices then this is really what I would like to do. I hope to become a professional football player one day. I would not mind playing semi-professional, balancing this with a degree apprenticeship in a construction or electrical course. Sab has been a huge help, and without him I do not think I would have all that I do.

Elizah:

I met Elizah when she was 7, the only girl attending our after-school club. Her year group was not the best, but persevered and joined Mumtaz in our girls' group in 2021. An absolute joy to have around.

My ethnic background is half Mauritian, half Indian, and I captain of the under 14s girls football team and young volunteer. I started my SP journey aged 5, attending their after-school clubs. Later on I was invited to join the girls' football team.

I was recently awarded Player of the Year. Sab encouraged me to continue with football, and many of the coaches were there to support and help me develop my skills. They helped me improve my performance by motivating me to practice regularly.

The values my faith and Salaam Peace instill is how to be kind and patient with others and try to understand them by demonstrating empathy. SP has also taught us the good language we use on and off the pitch.



Esa

A modest young man who gives his best. Over 100 sessions he developed into was coined a 360 player who can do it all, but still has the modesty and desire to improve. Recently started doing the monthly balance sheet for SP. Not yet 14, he has done so much but the best is yet to come.



My name is Esa and I am British Asian, and captain of the u16s football team. I started attending 10 years ago when there was football training and multisport sessions at Kelmscott LC. SP also came to my primary school to deliver lunchtime sessions and some of our PE lessons. I am now at Arsenal's advance development center, and I played for my borough district team

My religion and salaam peace have taught me a lot of values. The most important thing is to respect other people and try to help people less fortunate than me. Sab has developed me a lot as a sports person, but also a lot as a person. He has given me so much of his time and effort, which is invaluable, and I cannot thank him enough.



Tolga Ulasan

I met him aged 16 as an opposing goalkeeper. When his team folded, I did not hesitate to sign him. A real Turkish Muslim - welcoming, hardworking, and humble. A career opened many doors, including weekly use of the world class Copper Box Arena.

I am a Turkish Cypriot and an officer in the Met Police. I started my journey attending school clubs, then community programmes, and played against Leyton All Stars FC. Sab then asked me to play for him. I could not be happier, as they had some great characters on and off the pitch.

For me, the values of SP run alongside with what a respectful Muslim father and son should be. I treat everyone equally, I respect every person along with their views, and I commit to making myself a better person regularly. Without SP and Sab guiding me through my younger years, my life could well have panned out completely differently.

Around 12 years ago I wanted a new challenge, but did not really know how to go about it. Sab guided me to the answer – “go ahead, utilizing all the skills you’ve learnt within SP.” The new challenge was to become a police officer. I am in my 11th year and have Sab to thank for the guidance he gave me.

Sumayyah Mamewoollah

My name is Sumayyah, I am half Mauritian and half Indian, and I play in the Salaam Peace under 13s football team. I started with SP in year 1 of primary school. I joined the girls’ only football club on Saturdays, multisport on Sundays, then their holiday clubs. These included trips to ice skating rink and trampoline park. It has allowed me to make more friends outside school. Salaam Peace has boosted my confidence in PE and general self-esteem and given me a chance to play against children from various parts of London, preparing me for adult life by adapting to the outside world.



Zuhayr Seedat

Zuhayr inspired during the covid 19 lockdown, when his mum, my sister, attended a SP female fitness session where we had girls, boys, young people, men, and women all being socially distanced as we came out of lockdown. Roll on 2024 we have a flourishing SP Leicester arm. Zuhayr has great leadership skills to ensure the model is localised.

I am a Leicester-based volunteer at Salaam Peace, a Gujarati Indian and my professional role is a Global Digital Product Manager at BP. In 2017, shortly after moving from Leicester to the LSE as the London School of Economics. Being the first family to attend university — I struggled with feelings of imposter syndrome. Salaam Peace provided a grounding space, and I regularly attended Monday evening football sessions. These gatherings were more than just sports, they were a community of individuals from similar backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging and support.

For me, Islam is a comprehensive way of life, guiding my interactions and actions in every sphere, whether in the workplace or on the football pitch. After benefiting from Salaam Peace's initiatives as a participant, I learned the significance of giving back. It is a privilege to contribute alongside my full-time work, applying the values of service and community building SP instills in all its members.

Through Salaam Peace, I have embraced my identity as a Muslim and deepened my understanding of my roots. Sab's mentorship has taught me that in today's world time is often scarcer than money, and we should each strive to make a positive impact wherever we are.



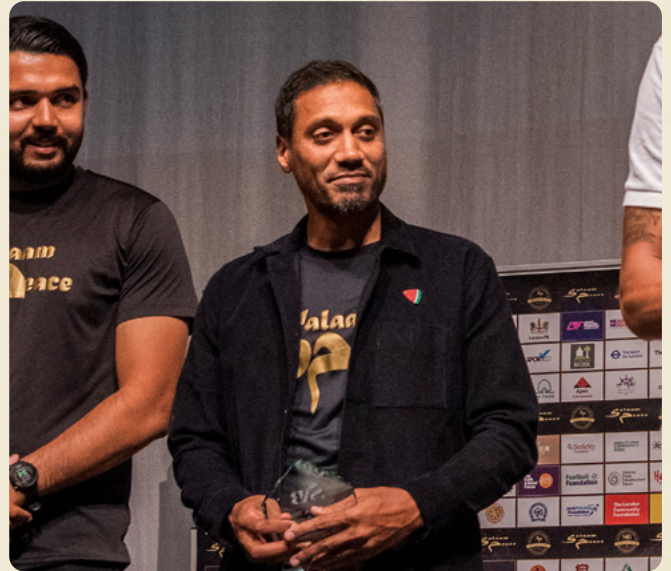
Erkan

I met Erkan aged 9 in primary school. Seeing him grow and be a fantastic maths teacher in his old secondary school is inspirational. I helped Erkan as a person, and have self-belief in his ability as a leader. A real star in our SP family.

At nine, I was fortunate to be part of a group of schools that Sab and his team worked closely with. Even luckier, Sab became my mentor, teaching me much more than just how to play sports. Through his guidance, he instilled in me core values that I live by to this day. Sab taught me respect, the importance of empathy, and to appreciate the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those around me. Sab demonstrated what it meant to approach every situation with integrity, commitment, and a sense of purpose.

Years later as a volunteer I had the chance to be part of something truly meaningful. I developed the skills and knowledge to engage young people in positive social activities, promote health and well-being, and help break down barriers in the community. It was during this time I realised I wanted to be a teacher. Thanks to Sab's guidance and connections, I was able to transfer my skills to the classroom, where I could have an influence on young people's lives in a different setting.

Today I teach Maths in Waltham Forest, and as a SP lead practitioner I can continue the important work of SP. I help open doors for young people that might otherwise remain closed.



Asif

My first protégé, I took him under my wing as a footballer. His standout contribution to me was helping set up the Hackney arm of Salaam Peace. An example of a Muslim and a human being to us all.

Born and raised in Hackney, I am of Indian ethnicity speaking primary Hindi at home. My journey with Salaam Peace started many years ago. I grew up near Sab and began playing football with him in the school playground, and many others were also invited. He started 11-a-side football in Walthamstow, the first steps of the Salaam Peace journey as an entity. This allowed us to have fun, and a sense of belonging outside my home.

My faith is my life. Salaam Peace strengthens my duties as a Muslim, allowing me to engage in activities helpful to others. Being able to help in the Salaam Peace way helps me remove the social and mental barriers of practicing my faith while being involved with others of all faiths. Background, faith, career, ethnicity – none matter. What matters is providing respect help to each other.

I have been part of and seen many activities provided by Salaam Peace, benefiting both myself and communities. Sab's natural ability to tutor and guide people helped me stay in the safe zone while growing up. My children now are part of the SP 'family,' and really enjoy attending their sessions.



Zayn

To be such an elegant and eloquent speaker as well as role model at only 15 is mind blowing. The work across networks with Go London, Access Sports, St James Big Local and as Head Prefect at his school means he is as busy as me.

I am Zayn, a 15-year-old British Asian, currently a coach and community champion at Salaam Peace, whilst also being a secondary school student. My journey with Salaam Peace began aged 4, where I engaged in multisport projects at Walthamstow Leisure Centre. At age 11 I began volunteering at our parent and child multisport session. I now coach our U13s football team as well as support with social media.

A key value both Salaam Peace and my faith instill is citizenship; the importance of community and the responsibility we as citizens of our community must benefit it. Attending events and meetings, such as the Shared Endeavors Fund gathering, gives me the platform to voice my opinions on issues within our community and furthers my passion to “be the change” and make a positive impact.

The value of unity is particularly important in an era of conflict in the Middle East and recent far-right riots across the UK. Violent acts like these can cause fear, division, and hatred, but Salaam Peace encourages respect, understanding and celebrating diversity. The Quran says, “We have made you nations and tribes, so you may get to know one another” (49:13), highlighting the importance of being one united community, regardless of differences.

Salaam Peace has provided me with so many opportunities for personal development:

- being a part of the GO! London Young Evaluators Group
- being a part of the Access Sport London Youth Board
- becoming Head Boy at Kelmscott School

All these opportunities have deepened my passion for community work, which will undoubtedly shape my future career path. It could be in community sports, the charity sector, or a political route (hopefully as Mayor of London or even Prime Minister) to support underserved and underprivileged communities.

The document highlights the values of Islam are values of humanity. The role model chain that passes teachings from one to another is spread to show that we have more in common that we are led to believe. My man Billy, Marlon, my black son both Salaam Peace proteges are devout Christians. My dearest friend since 1986, Gurnam, is a passionate Sikh. We all share the practices of understanding, unity and respect. We embrace our cultural and religious beliefs and use these to bring us forward as one SP Community Family

From my learning with Dr Delia Cortese, specialist in Islami, we were exposed to the reality that when Islam spread from Mecca and Madina during the time of prophet Mohammed, they never dismissed existing customs. Islam embraced all and shared the religious teachings. As a famous Dr once said, “afford people the space to believe and practice with the same space we expect and desire.”



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