

# THE MEDIATOR

A publication of the New Jersey Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.

NJRID, INC.

JULY, 2014



## THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY: An Interpreter's Perspective

by

*Diane Lynch, CI/CT, ED:K-12*

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Assalamu Alaikum is the Arabic term for the phrase "peace be upon you". It is the customary greeting for those who are Muslim. I had heard the phrase in the past, knew that it was a term that Muslims used, but I never knew what it meant and had always been too embarrassed to ask. The culture in which it was used was not my own, and I had always thought that it was rude for me to even dare to enter it. Knowing what the phrase meant and knowing when to use it wasn't my custom, so why would I want to take the extra effort to fully understand? The religion of Islam and the practice of being Muslim was something of which I knew very little. As professional interpreters, becoming self-aware of one's limited knowledge base and linguistic barriers about a specific topic is the first step toward remediation and personal and professional development. So, I decided to expand my schema and had a lengthy dialogue with a skilled presenter and Sign Language interpreter who is Islamic. We talked about the Islamic faith (deen in Arabic), some of its practices, and how becoming more knowledgeable about the topic can build bridges between cultures. Mallerie Shirley, M.S.W., NIC, presents in her workshop, "Interpreting in the Muslim Community", the core beliefs within Islam, common customs, and dispels negative stereotypes that are commonly held, such as the fact that Islam never condones violence. Until this open dialogue, my understanding of the faith had been veiled with social stigmas, preconceived notions and non-factual suppositions that had been filtered to me through media of every kind. The fact is that for many of us, the Muslim world is an unknown. So, what prevents many of us from delving into this seemingly taboo topic, or even interpreting for an Islamic event? Perhaps it is indifference coupled with the fear of those things that we do not yet understand. I chose not to be a foreigner in my own land, so I share with you now my conversation that I had with Mallerie, and some concepts and vocabulary that I gleaned from one of the trusted YouTube resources that Mallerie recommended. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne7\\_n-VQRFw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne7_n-VQRFw) (Common Words and Phrases in ASL by Sarah Tisdale)

Mallerie was born in Chicago, and spent her formative years in the Windy City and then moved to Minnesota when she was 13 years old. She converted to Islam in 1998 and she became a trained speaker on Islam in 2007. Mallerie states that there is no organizational or hierarchical structure to the Islamic faith. Mosques are independently run by community volunteers. Very rarely are Imams (signed by F.S. IMAM) paid a salary. Weekly services are held Fridays in the mosque; men sit in the front of the mosque, while women sit in the back. The Deaf and hearing worshipper will accept the services of Sign Language interpreters regardless of their beliefs, male or female, Muslim or non-Muslim. Mallerie encourages interpreters who work in any

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NJRID is a non-profit organization designed to fulfill the functions of The Registry Of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) on a statewide basis. The principal purposes of this organization are to initiate, sponsor, promote, and execute activities that will further the profession of the Interpretation / Transliteration of American Sign Language and English.

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THE MEDIATOR is published quarterly and is mailed to members of the New Jersey Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. THE MEDIATOR invites contributions of articles or news items. Views and opinions expressed are not those of NJRID unless so stated. NJRID Box 213, Eatontown NJ 07724 Copyright @ 2014 Printed in the USA

SUBMISSIONS Submissions may be edited for space if published. Please include your name and contact information, such as e-mail address or phone number. Letters to the editor regarding articles in THE MEDIATOR are welcome. Send articles, notices or news items by e-mail to: lynchinterpreting@charter.net

## ISLAMIC

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religious setting to alternate between services that they may not attend, with service they may go to. Professional interpreters are expected to serve, not worship where they interpret. It is not important to Deaf worshippers if the interpreter catches the spirit, it is important

that the Deaf worshipper catches the message. Mallerie states, "The stereotypical "Church Interpreter" helped us become professionals, it began there in church. We



need to be mindful to not be oppressive. Professional interpreters could potentially do their best work when they are out of their comfort zone and interpreting a totally different belief system. We have the ability to detach, remain impartial and focus on the message. It may be difficult to do just that in religious services that we routinely attend. "When we worship, it is about me; I think, I reflect, I contemplate on what might resonate with me. As an interpreter, it frankly is doesn't matter if something spiritual is resonating with me or not. Its purposes are different." It is the interpreter's duty to ensure the message is presented with fidelity and professionalism.

In a country like America where accessibility and communication accommodations are a high priority, in general, Muslim organizations don't understand the need for Sign Language interpreters. Muslim immigrants often do not understand the need for accessibility, and generally do not accommodate for those with disabilities. More recent immigrants and educated Muslim scholars may be respected leaders, but the majority of the Imams in local mosques simply do not understand the needs of Deaf members due to lack of exposure and education. A centralized national office or religious hierarchy simply does not exist, which makes it difficult to form policies and procedures for communication accommodation. Muslims are a minority, and Deaf issues are simply not a priority

The New Jersey Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (NJRID) is a non-profit membership-driven professional association. The members span the entire state and include professional American Sign Language (ASL) / English interpreters, transliterators, Deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers, students currently enrolled in interpreter training programs and others who have a personal interest in the field.



in mosques. Some mosques are run like a co-op, with volunteers opening and closing the mosque for services. A few research polls found a huge disconnect: the percentage of members of the Islamic faith that practice is greater than all other religions. And yet, its leadership is the most informal. And, unfortunately, Deaf Muslims who have immigrated to the US are marginalized in American mosques as they were in their former homelands. Muslim organizations in the US have begun to do great work for their communities. If one googles "Deaf Muslim" or does a search on Facebook, organizations that serve Deaf Muslims come to the fore.

Professional interpreters are often called to work outside their comfort zones, and exposure and understanding of those that are different than us not only adds to our toolboxes but also enriches our lives. When asked how a team interpreter might be sensitive to her needs, Mallerie mentioned that Muslims pray for a short time five times per day. If her team would be sensitive to the fact that a Muslim may wish to be alone during a break to practice afternoon prayer (Asr), this would be most appreciated. And, if a Muslim interpreter and a non-Muslim interpreter were to share a room, for example, during a long-term assignment, the Muslim interpreter would appreciate if alcohol were not brought into their shared room. In addition, while Mallerie does not practice it, many Muslims practice the custom of refraining from shaking hands when greeting those of the opposite gender. This, in no way, is meant to be disrespectful. Instead, it should be seen as a sign of

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**ISLAMIC***(continued from page 3)*

respect for the person's dignity and space.

Mallerie Shirley was a very gracious and willing teacher to me. She allowed me a brief glimpse into her world as a practicing Muslim by sharing reliable, extralinguistic knowledge that increases my capacity for future successful interpreting outcomes. Though the Muslim demographic is widespread and often barely visible, there may be occasions when services are needed to accommodate Deaf individuals who are Muslim. Throughout the United States, the same ritual is performed in every Friday service (Jummah), and the first step to those who wish to be first-timers in this venue would be becoming familiar with a Arabic terms and expressions which are provided on the YouTube link above. It can give professional interpreters confidence to consider working in this setting. Islam teaches that Muslims are not to impose their belief system on someone who holds a different belief, so as far as interpreters go, all are welcome.



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We would like to thank and acknowledge those members who have contributed articles to *The Mediator* by issuing each writer a \$5.00 coupon towards an NJRID workshop. We hope that implementing this incentive will entice more members to participate in shaping the organization's newsletter.

**JULY, 2014**

**DIANE LYNCH - PAM WHITNEY**

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Tickets will be available for sale through July 31, 2014.

For more information contact:

Meg Ellis at [meg.ellis@comcast.net](mailto:meg.ellis@comcast.net)

## PROGRESS IS LIKE PUSH-UPS

by  
Pam Whitney

Over the last two years, I've started doing something new, something hard and something I never thought possible – going to the gym. I'm not an athlete and I had bad and frustrating experiences in gym class, so the idea that I could not only make, but also keep and follow a commitment like this, is a big deal and a huge win.

Let me be clear, it wasn't an easy process but I realized I needed to do something to improve my overall level of fitness – which wouldn't be hard. There was (and is!) a LOT of room for improvement and growth! I shopped around for a program that would work with what I could do, yet be challenging and have guided instruction to be sure I was doing it right. There were several places that couldn't answer my questions, had no idea what or how to adapt exercises and offered no instruction beyond, "Well, I guess you could just skip that part.". I've been "skipping that part" for too long and look where that's gotten me – nowhere.

Then I walked into another place where the answer from the coach was, "That's no problem, anyone can do this. We can scale (adapt) everything and make it work.". Holy cow! Now, I was really in a jam because I'd run out of reasons not to try to get healthier and fitter than I currently was.

So, I tried. It was hard. Four thirty a.m. comes VERY early and a 6:00 a.m. class is rough...and simply brutal in February. And, I kept trying. I wasn't fast or strong or first to finish, but I didn't die. That may not sound like much, but there were some times when I honestly wasn't sure I'd survive. The measures of victory became finishing, not quitting, and coming back. Over time, because I was writing down what I did each day, I saw incremental progress: a bit more weight on the barbell, a slightly faster time, a few more repetitions than last time. I found a community of support in people on the same path toward improving their fitness, too. Each person was doing something that was hard for him or her and each understood the value of progress over time. Comparison with others wasn't the point; comparison with myself was my only competition. Am I stronger than yesterday? Can I do more than last month? As a result of all this, do I see myself as more physically capable than last year?

Among the many things I've learned, the one that correlates best with interpreting is this: Progress is like push-ups.

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Push-ups can be done in many different ways. There isn't one right way and each kind of push-up can be challenging for the doer, depending on where that person is on her/his path. Push-ups done standing up against a wall and pushing yourself away from the wall can be just as difficult as those done at an incline with a chair or on your knees or the "big girl push-ups" done from the floor with straight legs. Progress requires we meet people where they are and grow from there, not from where we think they should be. What's hard for me may not be hard for you, but that doesn't make it less difficult for me. Comparing one another hurts the group. Comparing personal progress motivates us to do better and be better than yesterday.

Progress with push-ups happens incrementally. Five push-ups are just as hard as 10, 25, 40 or 100, depending on the length of time one's been traveling on the developmental path. Getting to 100 push-ups (however you do them) doesn't happen overnight ... and if it does, you'll regret it the next day and the day after and the day after that! Progress happens slowly, week-by-week, push up by push up. First, I can do 10 push-ups on my knees, then 20, then 50. I'd stay here forever and get to the bigger numbers. My coach has other ideas. I graduate to the "big girl push-ups", just a few, then a few more and then even more, until I get to a number I never thought possible. I'm not fast, but I have good technique so I do it right every time... and in between I lay right on the gym floor and try not to die... but I keep

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**PROGRESS**

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going ... keep breathing, challenging myself beyond what even I thought possible. My coach and my own evidence of progress over time tell me that I can do more than what I think. I've proven it to myself, so I keep going.

Push-ups can be painful. No joke. And here's something I didn't know until I started this journey: it's not the day after where you really notice it; it's the day after the day after. Holy cow! There have been times when I thought someone else would have to brush my teeth. Challenging yourself is hard work and can be uncomfortable, even painful. Progress requires we stretch, try and grow beyond where we are now and step outside of that comfort zone. This causes discomfort, literally. Sometimes, on our path of progress, we temporarily fail, and need to step back and try again before getting to the goal. Sometimes, I can't do all the push-ups and my muscles fail. I pause, I breathe, I try again. My coach pushes me, reminding me of what I have temporarily forgotten: I can do it. I can get back to it and do just one more.... and get to the goal, one by one. I'm sore for the next few days from the effort required, but feel accomplished and proud of the small win.

The path of progress has set backs and times when we need to regroup, rest, find new strategies and get back to it. We need coaches and teammates to ensure we don't get complacent and talk ourselves away from our goal. I'd spent years waiting for fitness to find me and having reasons as to why I couldn't do it on my own. Without instruction, monitoring, correction, direction and expectations set by someone else, I wouldn't have made meaningful and measurable progress and would have given up long ago. Now, because I'm stronger in one area, I find that my capacity in other areas has increased. For example, doing better with push-ups has made me better able to carry the patio chairs from Home Depot to the register and then out to the car myself. This definitely wasn't what I had in mind when I started at the gym and set a goal toward the "big girl push-ups", but I'm pleased and encouraged by the other ways such progress has helped me.

Finally, progress requires patience with myself. My expectations of myself weren't always reasonable. When I didn't recognize this, I set myself up for disappointment and frustration. It's here where the counsel of a coach, along with experiencing the unreasonableness of my original goal, helped me reframe, reorganize and reset

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the goal to a more feasible step.

Growth is hard. It's why many people opt not to do it. Change is uncomfortable. It's why many of us resist. Progress requires risk. It's why many people are afraid. If we want to make something new happen, we must choose to commit, to be uncomfortable and even afraid. Push-ups have made me sweaty, sore, and frustrated. In the midst of trying, I've laid face down, sweating, sucking for air on what, on any other day, would be a disgusting, dirty gym floor. Push-ups have also made me do what I didn't think was possible, have faith in what I can do instead of what I tell myself I can't do, and have a capacity that helps me do better beyond the push-ups themselves.

I hope that each of us finds our "push-ups" and shares the journey with others to support, encourage and model the diversity in our paths, the impact of our proficiency, and the victories in our progress.

Pam does her push ups at Crossfit Diamond State and would love to hear your comments at [pamwhitney@comcast.net](mailto:pamwhitney@comcast.net)





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