

## Notable Muslims in Islamic History

**Abdullah ibn Umm Maktoum** was the blind man who Allah asserted had more right to the Prophet's (PBUH) time and attention than the powerful leader of the disbelievers (80:1-10). Later, this companion became the acting governor of Medina when the Prophet (PBUH) was away, and after that, a high ranking army general.

**'Ataa' ibn Abi Rabah** was paralyzed, blind in one eye and later fully blind. He dedicated his life to seeking knowledge from the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and later became the Mufti of Mecca.

**Abu Ubaidah Ibnul Jarrah** had a disabled leg, yet he insisted to join the battles with Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).

**Julaybib, another companion of the Prophet** (PBUH), was described as being deformed or revolting in appearance. While many people in Madinah had made him an outcast, the Prophet (PBUH), instead approached a family to give their beautiful daughter as a bride for Julaybib. Although the parents themselves showed their reluctance, the daughter herself willingly accepted to get married to him, and they lived very happily together by the Grace of Allah.

**Ibn 'Abbas once said to me ('Ata bin Abi Rabah)**, "Shall I show you a woman of the people of Paradise?" I said, "Yes." He said, "This black lady came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said, 'I get attacks of epilepsy and my body becomes uncovered; please invoke Allah for me.' The Prophet (peace be upon him) said (to her), 'If you wish, be patient and you will have [enter] Paradise; and if you wish, I will invoke Allah to cure you.' She said, 'I will remain patient,' and added, 'but I become uncovered, so please invoke Allah for me that I may not become uncovered.' So he invoked Allah for her."

**Abdullah Ibn Masoud was a weak man**, yet he was able to perfectly explain the meanings of the Holy Qur'an. Once Abdullah Ibn Mas'oud (May Allah be pleased with him) climbed a tree and the Prophet's (PBUH) companions laughed because his legs were tiny. The Prophet (PBUH) stopped them and said: "What makes you laugh? For the legs of Ibn Mas'oud are heavier on the scale on Judgment Day than the Mountain of Uhud."

**Abul Alaa Alma'arry** was a renowned Muslim scholar with a disability.<sup>12</sup>

*EquallyAble plans to make similar disability outreach guides for other faiths, if you are an expert and can help develop them, please contact us.*

### Special Thanks to



While care has been taken to verify the content, Equally Able is not responsible for any errors or the content. Please write to us for any corrections, suggestions or improvements.

## Call for Action

1. Schedule annual khutbas, seminars or similar activities to build disability awareness and inclusion
2. Make community centers accessible for people with physical or intellectual disabilities by removing physical and attitudinal barriers
3. Get to know one individual with disability or his/her family and offer any assistance as possible
4. If you are an educator, look for ways to integrate students with disabilities in curriculums and programs
5. If you are an employer, explore ways to hire, retain and accommodate people with disabilities
6. Create disability funds that supplement aid to families in need where other such assistance is unavailable
7. Build institutions and initiate policy changes to ensure a dignified life and equal opportunities for people with disabilities and their communities
8. Form support groups among families with disabilities and others to share and learn together
9. Contact Equally Able to review building plans for new construction or renovations, to make sure they meet accessibility guidelines
10. Create summer program to increase awareness among our youth
11. Train our youth on improving inclusion and disability awareness and to act as champions of change
12. Provide ASL interpreters at all events whether disability related or not
13. Seek the best people from the community to act as champions to lead inclusion and disability awareness
14. Set goals at each center to become disability friendly and push more involvement of Shura and key leadership
15. Host an event on improving inclusion, contact Equally Able, EnabledMuslims and/or MUHSEN to assist

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*Equally Able would like to hear from you if a disability-related event is held as a result of this effort. Please email us the date of the event with approximate number of people who attended.*

### References

- <sup>1</sup> World Report on Disability, 2011 WHO
- <sup>2</sup> Musnad Ahmed, 22872
- <sup>3</sup> World Programme of Action, Global Partnership on Disability and Development, United Nations
- <sup>4</sup> Cornell University Study, 2007
- <sup>5</sup> People with disabilities in India: from commitment to outcomes, World Bank, 2007
- <sup>6</sup> Sahih Bukhari, 5250
- <sup>7</sup> Sahih Bukhari, 555
- <sup>8</sup> Sahih Bukhari, 1057
- <sup>9</sup> Sahih Bukhari, 799
- <sup>10</sup> Sahih Bukhari, 4300
- <sup>11</sup> AdabMufrad of Bukhari, 887
- <sup>12</sup> theisticworkplace.com/disability-and-islam

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PO Box 221441 • Chantilly, VA 20153  
**Request for Disability Khutba  
4th Disability Awareness Campaign**

*Since 2001, Equally Able Foundation has provided assistance to thousands of individuals with disabilities around the world and organized various inclusion and disability awareness seminars and workshops in the USA. Besides India, Equally Able has active projects in Uganda, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Kenya.*



## Understanding Disability in Islam

**A Guide for Khutbas, Seminars & Workshops**

*(Endorsed by ISNA, ICNA, Protect Sakinah, MAS-DC, Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, Muhsen and Enabled Muslim)*



This guide is made possible by Equally Able's Interfaith & Worship Initiative which focuses on making houses of worship more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities and on finding synergies among different faiths on disability and inclusion.



**Equally Able**

PO Box 221441 • Chantilly, VA 20153, USA  
www.EquallyAble.org • info@EquallyAble.org

## 4th Disability Awareness Campaign Launched!

Dear Imams, Shaikhs, Presidents, Chairmans & Community Leaders:

Assalamu Alaikum:

All Hamdolillah, as a person who lived with a disability most of his life, it is encouraging for me to see that there are more events and discussions in our community about disability awareness and inclusion. However, more needs to be done to make a difference, especially when dealing with less apparent disabilities, because their issues are many and the challenges are unique.

There seem to be differing approaches and attitudes towards those with Autism to Down syndrome to individuals on crutches and wheel chairs, when it comes to access to masajids, muslahs and the community events, not many of them are welcomed and their needs understood. We need to provide a welcoming environment to encourage full participation and inclusion of not only the individuals with disabilities but their family members and care givers irrespective of their disabilities.

EquallyAble is once again launching the disability awareness campaign this year. This campaign will start in October, which is Disability Awareness Month, and end in December, to mark International Disability Day for persons with disabilities. Refer to the "Understanding Disability in Islam" guide which has been specifically prepared to provide talking points with references to disability from Quran and Hadith, and a call for action at the end.

Thank you for your support and cooperation in making this campaign a success previously. We request you to make this campaign a success again by scheduling a khutba or workshop at your community center on inclusion and disability awareness.

Wassalaam  
Mohammed Yousuf  
President, EquallyAble Foundation

## Introduction

Many people with disabilities do not have equal access to health care, education, and employment opportunities; they do not receive the disability-related services that they require, and experience exclusion from everyday life activities.<sup>1</sup>

Family members, relatives, friends and more importantly, communities, can play a critical role in unlocking the vast potential of people with disabilities. This guidebook is created to highlight some of the issues and provide a disability narrative from an Islamic perspective to encourage inclusion of people with disabilities.

## All Are Equal

In the eyes of Allah, everyone is created equal; in fact, the weak or the disadvantaged among us are created for a reason. In his farewell sermon, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) proclaimed to humanity, "your Lord is one and your father is one"<sup>2</sup>. He established that Allah does not favor anyone because of his/her race, sex, or physical condition. Every human being is dignified and honored, as Allah said, "We have certainly honored the children of Adam." (17:70).

Our fates are intertwined and the wellbeing and prosperity is deeply connected to the wellbeing and prosperity of our more disadvantaged brothers and sisters. Our religion teaches us that the downfall of humanity begins with false sense of omnipotence, but the Qur'an warns us against transgressing (96:5-7). We are all reliant – not just on our Lord and Sustainer, but also on each other. Indeed, it may be the prayers of individuals with disabilities that are sustaining our communities, for as our Prophet (PBUH) said, "you are given sustenance and victory because of the virtue of those who are disadvantaged amongst you".

## Role of Faith

Faith plays a major role in the lives of people with disabilities. When nothing seems possible, they turn to their faith and houses of worship to draw strength and regroup. This is why it is very important to have houses of worship that are not only accessible to those with special needs but also willing to create a welcoming environment, an environment that nurtures their potential and values them as people who happen to have disabilities rather than "disabled" people. Our faith communities should be the one place where we are all truly conscious of the needs of others, including the over 1 billion people with disabilities. We have a religious obligation to make this a reality.

## Disability Data

Depending on how data is reported, disability rates tend to vary in different countries. The World Report on Disability<sup>3</sup> indicates that the average disability rate worldwide is about 15%. Below are some key indicators:

- Over 54 million people in the United States have some form of disability. Out of 70 million families, 20.3 million have at least one family member with a disability
- 1 in 88 American children has some form of autism spectrum disorder, CDC says. That's a 78% increase compared to a decade ago. for boys it's 1 in 54
- Over 90 million people in India have some form of disability. Less than 1% of them go to school. Of the 520 school districts in India, 300 have no facilities for people with disabilities
- Canada, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Egypt reported to have 4 million, 17 million, 8.8 million and 7 million people with disabilities, respectively<sup>1-3-4-5</sup>
- Over 1 billion people around the world have some type of disability. At least 350 million persons with disabilities live in areas where disability related services are not available
- Of the 105 to 115 million children who are not in school, 30 to 40 million have disabilities. \$1.71 – \$2.23 trillion are lost from the global GDP because of the presence of disability
- At least 25% of the population in a given country is adversely affected by the presence of some form of disability. As many as 80% of people with disabilities live in isolated rural areas in developing countries

## Disability in Islam

Disability is not a defined term in Islam; instead, there are specific words for specific conditions. Someone who is vision impaired is a'ma, hearing impaired asamm, speech impaired abkam or akhras, mobility impaired a'raj. This means that Islam recognizes the fact that disability can lead to disadvantage – that society disables an individual by not creating inclusive norms and being accessible. There are several generalized adjectives to describe classes of disadvantaged individuals, including yateem (orphan), da'if (weak), mustad'af (oppressed), 'alasafer or ibn us-sabil (traveling), miskin (indigent), marid (sick), and faqir (needy). Marid can encompass individuals with physical disabilities such as amputees.

## Punishment or a Test

Allah the Almighty has promised us that "with every hardship there is relief," (94:5) and that "no person shall have a burden laid on him greater than he can bear"

(2:286). If we look at disabilities through this light, we can understand that disabilities should not be viewed as a burden or punishment – but merely tests from Allah with multiplied rewards. The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) narrated that Allah declared, "When I test my servant by taking away his two beloved [eyes], and he remains patient, I grant him Paradise"<sup>6</sup>

And know that for those who endure pain and tests with patience, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) promised Jannah, or heaven.<sup>7</sup>

## Obligations and Exceptions

As believers and servants of the Almighty, some individuals with disabilities also have the responsibility to worship Allah and fulfill their religious obligations to the best of their abilities. If an obligation is beyond their means, Islam has the mechanism to accommodate them. The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) states, "Pray standing; if you cannot, pray sitting; if you cannot, pray lying on your side"<sup>7</sup>. In battles, Allah exempts those with physical conditions from fighting: "the blind, the lame and the sick will not be blamed [if they stay back]" (48:17). He adds that their reward remains the same: "those believers staying at home, apart from the disabled, are not equal to those striving in Allah's way" (4:95). This verse equates those with disabilities who wish to strive for the sake of Allah but cannot with those who are capable and do so.

## Societal Responsibility

It is society's responsibility to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities. Allah encouraged the practice of the Prophet's (PBUH) companions of hosting people with disabilities and sharing meals with them (24:61). The Prophet (PBUH) once visited a man and prayed in his home when the man decided to start a mosque in his home due to his weak eyesight<sup>8</sup>. He also honored a woman with a psychological illness when she asked to consult with him privately<sup>9</sup>.

Respect is not optional. Allah forbade believers to mock each other, and the Prophet (PBUH) clearly warned, "Allah curses anyone who misguides a blind person and leads him away from the path"<sup>10</sup>. On another occasion, the Prophet (PBUH) tells anyone with pride that victory and providence come from the sincere prayer of the weakest among us!<sup>1</sup>

The great Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz (d. 720) conducted a census of people with disabilities and appointed guides and servants to care for them. Sultan Qalawun (d. 1290) built a hospital that later specialized in treating psychologically ill patients. It provided a natural and peaceful atmosphere, with free boarding and stipends for its patients.