

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Alleviating Suffering through Faith, Commitment and Hard Work

Kameelah Mu'Min Rashad, MS, MRP, M.Ed.

By Brenda Lange

When hearing details of the life story of Kameelah Mu'Min Rashad, MS, MRP, M.Ed., it's easy to feel somehow less-than. She has done so much in a relatively short time, one might wonder how — and why — others don't do the same?

And yet, that is the last thing Rashad wants anyone to do. She is the first to build up those around her and support them in myriad ways and the first to point out that she does not operate in a vacuum, that there are many others out there working for their principles and working to help lift others up.

Currently in the fourth year of CHC's Psy.D. program, Rashad already has earned several degrees and made a positive impact on the world. She has a strong reputation as a social justice advocate, especially within the American Muslim community, and she has represented that community twice at the White House during President Barack Obama's administration.

"None of this is something I think only a certain kind of person can do," says Rashad. "I always encourage people to think about who they impact on a daily basis ... what are my opportunities to change or be effective? You never know what kind of impact you can have on a small scale that may have a ripple effect."

Rashad's "small scale" was her family and neighborhood, where she discovered issues that were affecting her as well as those around her. Then she identified friends and colleagues who shared her beliefs and would help to make their corner of the world a better place. The ripples are still spreading.

"I'm not a lone crusader. There are many who are as committed. I found others, and it doesn't feel overwhelming," she says, explaining that she has built her life over more than a decade, trusting in and



Kameelah Mu'Min Rashad, MS, MRP, M.Ed., speaks at the Black Muslim Psychology Conference at SugarLoaf in July 2016.

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having patience with herself for the evolution.

"As an African-American Muslim woman with multiple roles as a student, wife, mother, clinician, consultant, lecturer, workshop presenter, and founder and president of her own non-profit, Kameelah juggles all of her responsibilities with great acumen, grace and profound dedication," says Cheryl Rothery, Psy.D., ABPP, associate professor of psychology, director of clinical training, chair, Department of Professional Psychology and Rashad's dissertation chair.

"She is already a force of powerful change in communities near and far, and there are no limits to what Kameelah can achieve and the difference she will make. It is a privilege to be part of her professional journey."

Linking faith and her ability to alleviate suffering

As the founder of the nonprofit Muslim Wellness Foundation, Rashad works to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, addiction and trauma in the American Muslim community through education, training and dialogue. Part of the challenge is the diversity within this community that is often seen as

Rashad meets former President Obama at a round table discussion on issues facing the American Muslim community during his historic visit to a U.S. mosque (Islamic Society of Baltimore).



homogenous. Its heterogeneity requires a variety of approaches, and for Rashad, each approach comes from a foundation of faith and spirituality.

“We need to be contextual in our approach. There are great differences between a Muslim family who has experienced forced migration and one living in an urban city, for example,” she says. “We need to ensure our activities are culturally competent and resonate spiritually. We need people to feel empowered and know they can access the resources they need. And we look at faith and spirituality as a protective factor that is important and a source of resilience. So we pay attention to both the challenges and the resilience that comes from their faith.”

Rashad also serves as a resource to the University of Pennsylvania community in Islam and Muslims as the Muslim Chaplain Emeritus. She continues to integrate the various aspects of her work at Penn, where the conversation around faith-based activism, wellness and mental health began long before November’s election, the results of which have caused a lot of stress in her community. Finding compassion and support isn’t as hard as making sure that people don’t suffer from burnout, compassion fatigue or cynicism that things aren’t moving forward as quickly as they would like.

One of Rashad’s motivating factors is her 8th-grade daughter whose fears and misperceptions over political events led her mom to found another organization, Muslims Make It Plain. This coalition of Muslims works at the grassroots level to address police brutality, racial and religious profiling and other discriminatory actions. In 2014, the group ran the first Muslim-led rally and march in the country in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

“There is real discrimination,” says Rashad. “But we have an opportunity to ask ourselves, ‘How do we use this moment to act in solidarity and align with other marginalized groups who may lack education or live in poverty and seek justice?’”

She sees a silver lining of communal reflection and opportunity and a chance to renew faith.

“It’s important to recognize the impact of marginalization and racism on people who are just trying to cope on a daily basis,” she says. “These things impact their emotional wellbeing in a negative way. My commitment is to alleviating suffering and providing a space where those emotional injuries can be addressed.

“I believe in a merciful and compassionate God and I recognize that this moment in time may be a way to reconnect with those deep spiritual principles, values and commitment to my faith and community.”

The Third Annual Black Muslim Psychology Conference, organized

by Rashad, will be held (for the second year) at SugarLoaf’s Commonwealth Chateau in July. This year’s event links the themes of wellness, justice and diversity and will address how to be a leader within that context. She hopes to repeat last year’s success wherein more than 125 attendees forged a space where they were free to explore the experience of being black and of being Muslim in an Islamophobic environment.

Her evolution

Rashad is a 2014 Ariane de Rothschild Fellow and recipient of the 2014 Student Multiculturalism and Education awards from the American Psychological Association and of the 2015 Mental Health First Aid Community Impact Award. In February 2015, she was one of 14 American Muslim leaders who attended a roundtable discussion with President Obama and other senior officials at the White House. At that meeting, Rashad shared her concerns regarding the psychological impact of anti-Muslim bigotry on the Muslim community, particularly as it affects youth and African-Americans.

Prior to enrolling at CHC, Rashad, who was born and reared in Brooklyn, N.Y., earned her bachelor’s degree in Psychology and a M.Ed. in Psychological Services from the University of Pennsylvania. She earned a second master’s degree in Restorative Practices and Youth Counseling from the International Institute for Restorative Practices and a post-master’s certificate in Family Therapy from the Philadelphia Child and Family Therapy Training Center. She is a certified instructor in Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid and a trained PREPARE/ENRICH premarital counseling facilitator.

She has one year left in the Psy.D. program, followed by a one-year internship.

Rashad also has a one-year-old son and, although she admits time is at a premium, says that she can accomplish all that she does because of the connections she has made.

“All the things I love and look to do are connected in beautiful ways,” she explains. “My passions are so well-connected that it doesn’t feel like work all the time.” 