

Assalamu alaikum, Alhamdulillah wa salatu wa salam alarasoolilah

And now for the theme talk that you have all been waiting for... Let's start with a story, in sha Allah. The story of Nur al-din Zengi.

Nur al-din Zengi is well known to many Muslims and probably many of you who are interested in history, but for those of you who don't know who he is, he was the mentor of Salahuddin, a legend, the person who laid the foundations for Salahuddin to do all of the incredible things that he did. So let me tell you more about Nur al-din.

Once there was a crusading prince who was well known for his bravery and his gallantry, who defeated Muslims left right and centre. He could always be found on the frontlines and time and time again he would be caught by the Muslims. When he was caught, the crusading people would immediately ransom him, they would give as much money as they could find to get him out of the Muslim prison. And then, just as before, he would go back to killing the Muslims left right and centre. One time he was on the frontline, killing the Muslims, winning the war, and he got caught again. But this time he got caught by Nur al-din's men and these men would not let this prince go, they would not ransom him, they knew this man is too dangerous, they kept him locked away. And straight away just like clockwork the crusading kingdom sent more than 100,000 gold pieces to try and ransom him but Nur al-din's men refused, they said no way, no way, we are not going to ransom this man. Nur al-din agreed with his people but he said, you know what, I like to pray salat-ul-istikhara for everything so let me pray salat-ul-istikhara for this. So he went and he prayed salat-ul-istikhara and the answer he got was different, the answer he got was take the money. So he told his people, he said, I prayed salat-ul-istikhara and it told me that I should take the money and let the prince go, but his army were not willing to accept this, they said no, we are not going to take the money, we are not even in this for the money, this man is too deadly, we are going to finish him off.

Nur al-din was not comfortable with this plan so that night when everyone went to sleep he snuck off to the prison, opened the gates and, in front of a crusading emissary, he let the prince go. And he took the money. 100,000 gold pieces. He told the prince, run away as fast as you can because if my people find out that I let you go, they will kill you and they will kill me. So the prince escaped and Nur al-din took the money. The next day, the camp of Nur al-din saw that the prince was gone, they were up in arms, they were frantic, asking where has the prince gone, he has escaped, he has escaped. And Nur al-din told the truth, he said, the prince didn't escape, I let him go. And the men couldn't believe it, they said, what you let him go and you took the money, we got you all wrong, we thought you were someone who is brave, someone we should look up to, someone who cannot be corrupted, but instead it's all about the money for you. It's

only about the money. And while they were cursing him and being angry with him, a Muslim rider came quickly from the desert to the camp and told Nur al-din and his army, you know that crusading prince that you let go in the middle of the night, Nur al-din said yes, the rider said well he never made it to his destination back to his people, before he reached them, he died of natural causes, subhanAllah. So Nur al-din was right, his istikhara was right, not only did he let the prince go and that prince never reached his army because he was destined to die anyway, but now the Muslims had 100,000 gold pieces. When Nur al-din's men heard this, they celebrated, they said, this is amazing, what are we going to do with all this money. And Nur al-din said, we aren't going to do anything with the money, you didn't believe in the istikhara, you didn't trust in the plan of Allah SWT, so every single penny, every single coin, is going to be spent building a bimaristan. A bimaristan to serve the people. And this story is the inspiration for our theme this year.

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Our theme for charity week 2021 is healthcare.

I know what you are all thinking. Healthcare? What has healthcare got to do with anything? How can CW do healthcare? We have just been through a global pandemic, we are still going through a global pandemic, and every single person in the world is thinking about their health more than ever before. Every single one of us in this call has been directly or indirectly affected by a part of healthcare at least once, often more than once, so far in our lifetime. And we have seen amazing things happen with healthcare, we have seen vaccines developed faster than ever before, from 10-15 years to a matter of months, we have seen healthcare staff giving everything that they have to fight against this disease, we have seen communities rally together to support each other during these difficult times, we have seen the best and the worst of healthcare, when things go right and when things go wrong. It is something that is so important, so integral to us, that we made it our theme.

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Now be careful, our theme is not COVID

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It is not about exercise, it is not about the gym

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It is about healthcare. Its everything to do with healthcare. Its medicine, vaccines, science, doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, every single aspect of healthcare.

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And our case study is going to be the bimaristan which Nur al-din built with all of those gold coins. And this is a picture of the bimaristan nuri, Nur al-din's own bimaristan. So what is a bimaristan? You're thinking to yourself, wait a minute, I've heard of Pakistan, Afghanistan, I've never heard of a bimaristan, what is a bimaristan? Well a bimaristan is a land of the bimar, where bimar is Persian for sick, a land of the sick, it is the place for the sick people. Now a lot of you are thinking, a bimaristan is just an ancient hospital right? And you are right, it was the forerunner of the modern hospital. Before bimaristan there was not really the concept of a hospital as we know it today, there was a place where people went when they were sick but it was like an asylum, people didn't want to see you, you got shunted off to this house and you just stayed there until you died or until you got cured. There was no such thing as healthcare or doctors. So the bimaristan is something different. The bimaristan was a first in healthcare.

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So what if a bimaristan did CW? If a bimaristan did CW, it would be completely different to the way CW is done even today. Because the bimaristan completely revolutionised the world of healthcare, before the bimaristan, healthcare was undertaken in asylums hidden from the city centre but the bimaristan was right in the centre of the city, in plain view, accessible by all of the people. It is not like most things where you set up your organisation or project and you expect people to come to you. No, you need to go to the people, you need to take your project to the people and serve them there. And that's what the bimaristan did.

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And the bimaristan was beautiful. It was not a rundown and unwelcoming building which we associate with most hospitals. We don't think of a hospital as an architectural wonder. If we think of beautiful architecture we think of a mosque, a palace, a tower, a bridge, we don't think hospital. But bimaristans' were beautiful.

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They had huge arcades and columns and courtyards, they were build next to the palace and the mosque, in the very centre of town. The palace was for the sultan, the mosque was for Allah SWT and the bimaristan was for the people. And this made sense, if it looks nice, then people will want to go there.

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And this is a bimaristan in Cairo, a beautiful bimaristan, it looks like a palace because it is a palace.

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And when you went to a bimaristan, the very first moment you walk in, it was a different institution to what we know today. The people of the bimaristan took your old clothes and they gave you a brand new set of clothes, high quality beautiful clothes, and immediately you can imagine that these people felt welcomed and they felt better.

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They even gave you your own furniture so you had your own little space, rather than crowding you into a huge wards with no space and no privacy like we see today. You had your own space.

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And they had separate facilities for men and women and in fact they even had separate doctors for men and women so people felt comfortable.

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In the bimaristan, they knew that hygiene is important. It is not about a dirty bathroom or not being able to take a shower for days or weeks on end. No, there is a hamam for the men and a hamam for the women. You were expected to have the highest level of physical cleanliness. Because as the Prophet SAW said “cleanliness is half of iman”, cleanliness is half of faith. So they would emphasise hygiene. And as we know, hygiene is key for healthcare.

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So now that you have your new clothes, you have had a shower, and you feel great. You start feeling hungry, so you've got a kitchen, cooks, ingredients. Not just any cook or any kitchen or any ingredient, this is literally the same kitchen, using the same ingredients from the same gardens as that of the sultan or the khalifa.

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You had the best food available at the time, the healthiest food, the tastiest food, food literally good enough for the sultan or the khalifa. When you go to a hospital now, you don't think about getting the best food, you just get some mush and you put up with it or there is nothing else. Nobody looks forward to hospital food. But, if you were in a bimaristan then you would because the meal would be amazing, probably the best meal you'll ever have in your life, because it is literally the same food that the sultan or the khalifa was getting. And that is because healthcare is about more than just medicine or drugs.

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And healthcare includes what the doctor looks like, does he look friendly? Does the doctor look like the man on the left, a medieval European doctor wearing a bird mask and carrying a scalpel in one hand and a cane in the other to keep you at a distance and examine you without touching you. Or does he look like the man on the right, a wise, majestic and kind faced man, wearing the same clothes as you, no mask, no cane, no uniform.

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And the doctors would go around the bimaristan every day

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They would see the patients every single day so that you are not just left there lying in bed for days on end wondering what is going on with you.

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And they would have a pharmacy in the bimaristan. This doesn't look like a pharmacy that we know today, it looks like a beautiful garden, but each of those plants are used to make medicine. Most medicines come from plants, even modern medicines are derived from or inspired by plants.

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So they grew these plants so they could make the medicines.

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And in a bimaristan they would have premade the medicines so they were ready to use as soon as they were needed, no waiting around.

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Most of us here have learned more about healthcare in the last year because of the pandemic, we have learnt about viruses, transmission of viruses, signs, symptoms, PCR testing. In a bimaristan they understood that there is specific teaching that you need to do for medical students because they are apprentices, they are future doctors, future nurses, future midwives, but...

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You also need to teach the general population, the general population need to know about healthcare, they need to know how to look after themselves, they need to know how to cure themselves of minor ailments. So they would do public lectures for public health. Could you imagine if we had that today? How amazing that would be? If we had a health literate population. Today, most of the population of the world are health illiterate, healthcare information and teaching is just not available or accessible for them.

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And they also had the mobile bimaristan like an ambulance service where if people were too sick to come to the bimaristan, the bimaristan would go to them

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And they would not just look at physical healthcare, they would look at mental health as well, making sure that people with mental health diseases are not treated as if there is something wrong with them, they were treated like human beings who had a disease that was

psychological. No stigma, no fear, no banishing from society. They would be treated with dignity just like everyone else.

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They would be allowed to walk in these beautiful gardens with beautiful wildlife like peacocks and gazelles. You were admitted into a palace, given a new set of clothes, given the same delicious food as the khalifa and allowed to wander in these beautiful gardens. It is a contrast to other institutions where you'd be locked up, shackled, bound and beaten. You were treated like royalty and it is very difficult to see how you wouldn't start to feel even a little bit better.

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And at the end of your treatment, they would find out if you were well enough to go home by giving you a baby chicken and two loaves of bread to eat. If you could finish it all, then you were done, you could be discharged. Now when you were discharged the whole bimaristan would celebrate. It wasn't like today, you're a bed blocker, you're wasting our time, you're bothering us, no, we have done this together, we have all worked together, you have done your part as the patient, we have done our part as the doctor or the nurse or the pharmacist, we worked together, we are going to celebrate together, and you would feel like you are part of a team and you would feel positive about your recovery and about the future

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And if things didn't go well, then they would pay for your burial, so even your death is with dignity

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The bimaristan would be funded by the treasury, up to 20% of the wealth of Egypt was spend on the bimaristan, so this was a serious business.

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The sultan himself would visit every single Friday after Jummah to check up on the bimaristan to make sure it was running properly.

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This final story illustrates the beauty of the bimaristan. There was a child who came to the bimaristan complaining of abdominal pain. The doctor who was examining him could not figure out what was wrong so he called a more senior doctor, then a more senior doctor, and a more senior doctor, until none of them could figure out what was wrong with this child, so they called the most senior doctor at the bimaristan who came, examined the child and then said, admit him for 3 days and 3 nights, give him some food, give him a bath, and look after him, and in sha Allah he will be fine. And that is what they did. And the child was cured. And afterwards the doctors asked the most senior doctor, what was wrong with the child because none of us could find out what was wrong with him, so could you tell us what was wrong? The most senior doctor said, there was nothing wrong with the child, he was well, but he was an orphan, he was hungry, he was poor, he was lonely, and he was sad. So I admitted him so that he could get food, shelter, clothes and a bit of tender love and care in the safety of the bimaristan for at least 3 days and 3 nights. And that is why his fake abdominal pain disappeared, subhanAllah. This is the essence of the bimaristan. It is not to look at a person as a disease, which is what happens nowadays, but to look at them as a whole human being. Not to look at them just in terms of their illness but their society as well. What's going on around them? What is their situation? What is their diet? What is their hygiene? What is their home atmosphere? What is their mental state? And that is what the bimaristan was about.

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Today, in healthcare, you go to the doctor and your disease is treated. You have diabetes, here take this drug. What about your diet? Well, that's not my problem. You can't afford healthy food. That's not my problem. What about exercise? You can't afford to go the gym. That's not my problem, just take the drug. You have depression, here take this drug and this drug. But what about the problems I have at home, me and my family are fighting, we don't have much money, I'm getting bullied at school. That's not my problem.

In a bimaristan, you are treated as a human being. Not just as a disease. And you are treated as someone who is part of a family, a community, a society, that needs education. They didn't just look at you as a physical illness, they looked at your mental health and your spiritual health as well.

They didn't just look at you as someone they could get money off, the bimaristan was free for everyone who couldn't afford it, and if you could afford it, then you should contribute towards it. And they didn't just look at you as someone who needed to be treated and gotten rid of as

quickly as possible, they saw you as a partner, and you worked together to defeat the disease and then celebrated together when you were cured.

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So, what is the main lesson? The main lesson is that disunity treats symptoms. When we are not working together, when we are disunited, we only treat symptoms. If we are not united in CW, then we start to see problems, we see symptoms. We don't have enough people taking part, then what do we do? We try to force more people to take part, we hype it up, hey do you want to take part, do you want to take part? If we are not motivated, what do we do? We are going to try to artificially motivate people and just push them to feel excited, do it for the sake of Allah SWT, think about the orphans. We have treated the symptoms, we have treated a lack of engagement and a lack of motivation, but the disease remains. The disease remains and gets worse and worse. Disunity remains.

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But unity builds systems. If we are united, then we think holistically, we think bigger, if my team isn't motivated, why are they not motivated? What system can I build that will motivate them not just when I'm there but next year and the year after that. If people aren't taking part, what system can I build so that not only the next 100 people take part, but the next 100,000 people take part. If it is difficult for us to get another country on board, what system can I build to get another 10 countries on board. Unity builds systems. Systems that make CW easier for all parties involved, systems that make CW more sustainable, systems that help CW grow.

It's the same in healthcare and it's the same in CW. In CW, we don't like to give one drug, or one operation, or build one hospital. That is not what CW is about. Even if that is what we are doing, our real desire, our real goal, is to build a healthcare system that looks at education, water, food, hygiene, physical health, mental health, infrastructure. A system that will grow and grow and grow all across the Muslim world so that anyone and everyone can get free holistic healthcare at the point of use rather than just handouts.

Unity builds systems, and I ask you all what system are you going to build? What systems are you going to develop within CW that will grow and outlive you?

Jazak Allah Khayr my brothers and sisters