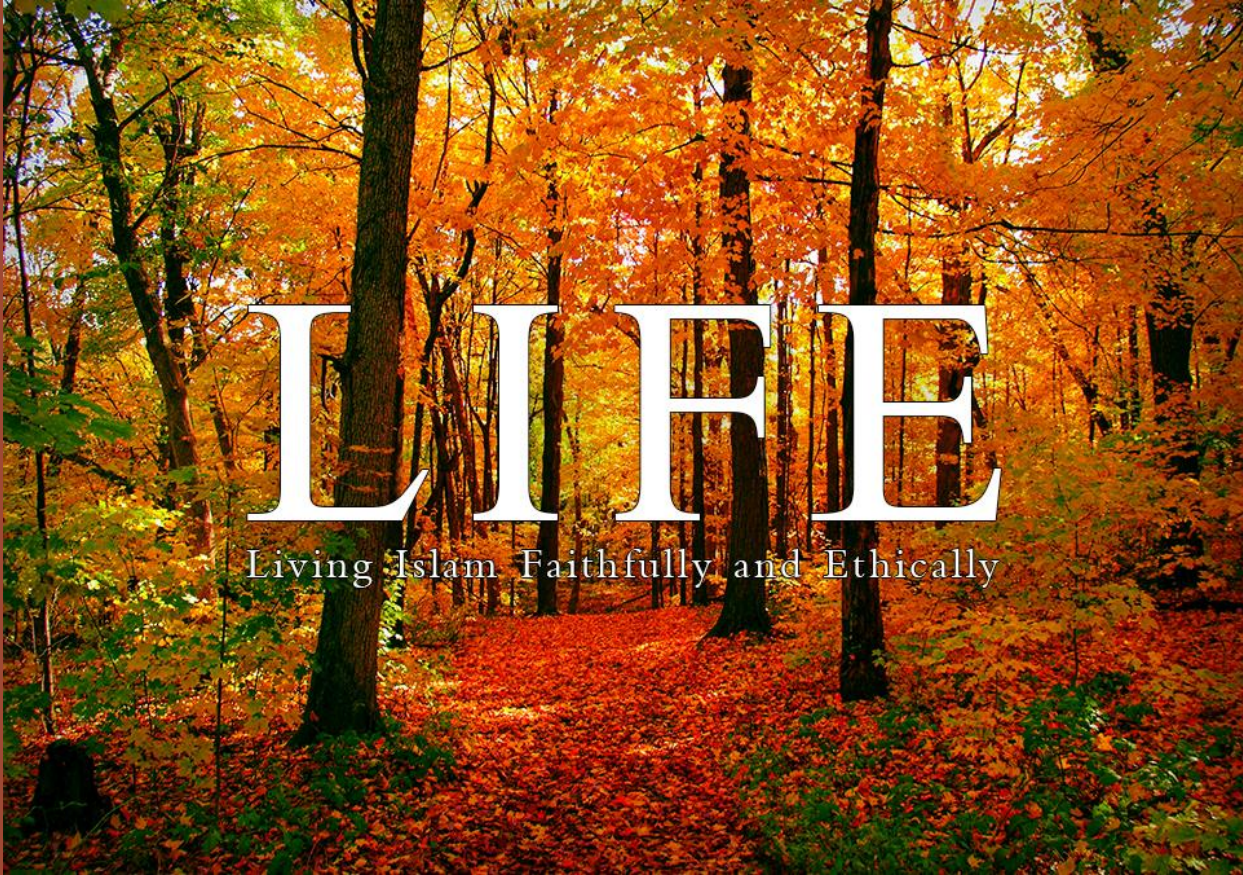


LIFE 2016 Summary Report

An intensive summer course hosted by the
Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Seminary and Baitul Ilm
Academy in Streamwood, IL





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الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ
وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مَّن نَّشَاءُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ

“

‘... Those who believe and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing—for them will be safety, and they are the guided.’

This was our argument that we gave to Abraham over his people. We raise in rank whomever we wish. Your Lord is all-wise, all-knowing.

- The Noble Qur’ān Chapter 6 “The Cattle”, Verses 82-83

Translated by Ali Quli Qarai



L.I.F.E.

The role of a vibrant *hawzah* (Islamic Seminary) is to provide the intellectual and spiritual resources necessary for Muslim communities to deal with the numerous challenges they face. As a community institution, the seminary's efficacy depends directly on how well it is integrated with the community. Ideally, every Shī'ī community should have ready access to a seminary that is part of their society and that they can interact with in their own language. The Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Seminary was founded to create such a resource for the Shī'ī Muslim community in the United States.

The L.I.F.E. intensive course was borne out of these same concerns. “Living Islam Faithfully and Ethically” provided 9 days of instruction to community members from the United States and Canada, aiming to broaden and deepen their understanding of Islam and survey the subjects studied in the *hawzah*. Courses were taught by a variety of *hawzah*-trained scholars. The courses furnished participants with the insight and tools needed to examine both the Islamic tradition and their intellectual milieu in order to better serve their communities in the future.

LIFE Overview

The 9-day intensive program focused on developing a comprehensive understanding of Islam. The program delved into the intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and practical aspects of Islam's teachings and how they relate to community life and experience. Sessions included modules introducing Islamic Philosophy, Theology, Law, Mysticism, and Ethics. Activities included du‘ā’ gatherings, akhlāq sessions, workshops, round-table discussions with scholars, and recreational and service activities. A new component to this year's LIFE Intensive course was the Initiatives Session, which involved a group project aiming to address important challenges by conceiving and planning out new initiatives and building institutions. Participants were provided a comprehensive project plan to facilitate their projects.

This year's course instruction was based on the text by the distinguished scholar Shahid Murtada Mutahhari, titled "Understanding Islamic Sciences" and included all of its major themes: Philosophy, Theology, Mysticism, Jurisprudence, and Ethics. A review of this text can be read on our online publication, [al-Sidrah](#).

Instructors

We were blessed with the presence of various ‘ulama’ from a number of communities in the United States and Iran, who provided a unique opportunity to learn from scholars with different life, academic, and professional experiences and perspectives. Instructors included:

Shaykh Amir Mukhtar Faezi, Chicago, IL

Sayyid Sulayman Hassan, Chicago, IL

Shaykh Hamza Sodagar, Qum, Iran

Ustadha Fatemeh Soltan, Qum, Iran

Shaykh Jafar Muhibullah, Qum, Iran

Sayyid Sameer Ali, Milwaukee, WI

Shaykh Ammar Haider, Dallas, TX

Sayyid Rizwan Rizvi, Somerset, NJ

Ustadha Fatemah Meghji, Qum, Iran

Shaykh Mahdi Mohammadpour, Qum, Iran



A few LIFE 2016 participants and faculty



LIFE Classes

The core courses of the L.I.F.E. program were designed to provide students with a comprehensive yet general overview of the main disciplines of the Islamic studies, along with courses considered supplemental topics in the traditional seminary curriculum. The LIFE 2016 courses were broadly based on the text, *Understanding Islamic Sciences*, by the distinguished scholar, Shahid Murtada Mutahhari. The major themes covered by the book were addressed in a classroom setting. Participants learned about Philosophy, Theology, Mysticism, Jurisprudence, and Ethics. Students were provided a copy of the text to read and reference during courses. Course instructors utilized this text and supplemented courses with additional material. Classes took place every day of the LIFE course.

LIFE Classes Subjects

- **State and Status of the Ummah** with Shaykh Mukhtar Faezi

Our vibrant, dynamic Ummah has had a tumultuous history. Shaykh Faezi discussed Muslim history from the latter Imams until the present day, and explored contemporary challenges facing the community, while proffering possible ways forward.

- **History** with Shaykh Jafar Muhibullah

This course provided students with a survey of some of the major themes in the life of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) and their role in shaping Islamic history.

- **Qur'anic Sciences** with Sayyid Sameer Ali

Sayyid Sameer outlined the major concerns of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Qur'anic sciences), such as the Qur'an's literary style, its inimitability, and compilation.

- **Akhlāq** with Shaykh Ammar Haider

Discussions on theoretical and practical ethics are the purview of Akhlāq. Shaykh Ammar provided insights into self-building and purification.

LIFE Classes Subjects

- **Philosophy** with Shaykh Hamza Sodagar

Shaykh Hamza outlined major themes in Islamic philosophy, and contrasted it with other sciences, such as ethics and ‘irfān.

- **Sunni-Shi‘i Issues** with Sayyid Rizwan Rizvi

This course touched on a few major contentions that are discussed in polemical works between Sunnis and Shi‘i on the validity of their schools.

- **Tafsīr** with Ustadhah Fatemah Meghji

Ustadha Fatemah provided students with a broad outline of major works in Qur’anic exegesis, its major topics of study, and went through case studies to explore how exegesis studies handled such topics, such as the issue of human evolution.

- **Fiqh** with Sayyid Sulayman Hassan

Sayyid Sulayman discussed the linguistic, legal, and Qur’anic definitions of fiqh, and surveyed the philosophy of a few major concerns in Islamic law.

- **Hadīth Studies** with Ustadhah Fatemeh Soltan

Ustadha Fatemeh introduced students to the methodology of evaluating traditions in ḥadīth literature, examining related issues such as historical context for reports and reporters.

- **Contemporary Theology** with Shaykh Mahdi Mohammadpour

Shaykh Mahdi introduced the study of theology as it developed in light of early Christian-Muslim interactions, and contemporary theology in the context of emerging modern theories in science studies, philosophy, and epistemology.

LIFE Discussions

LIFE Discussions are designed to take our participants beyond the traditional curriculum, and to cultivate critical thinking about pressing intellectual, social, ethical, and spiritual problems that the Muslim community faces, and the solutions to those problems developed through our tradition's ethos. Each discussion session featured a unique topic, along with a panel of scholars who spoke on the issue for up to 20 minutes. Thereafter, moderators facilitated the discussion, and fleshed out specific questions posed to the audience. These types of discussions were a daily event during the LIFE course.

LIFE Discussion List

Holistic Living with Ustadhah Fatemah Meghji and Sister Fizza Razvi

“It Takes a Village”: Strengthening Religious Life through Community Planning with Sayyid Sulayman Hassan and Shaykh Ammar Haider and Shaykh Jafar Muhibullah

Exploring Plausibility Structures: The Impact of Liberalism and Secularism with Sayyid Sulayman Hassan and Shaykh Mahdi Mohammadpour

Civic Engagement and Political Activism with Shaykh Jafar Muhibullah and Sayyid Rizwan Rizvi

Islamic Sources, the Academy, and Authenticity with Shaykh Jafar Muhibullah and Sayyid Sameer Ali

Islam and Changing Gender Roles with Ustadhah Fatemah Meghji





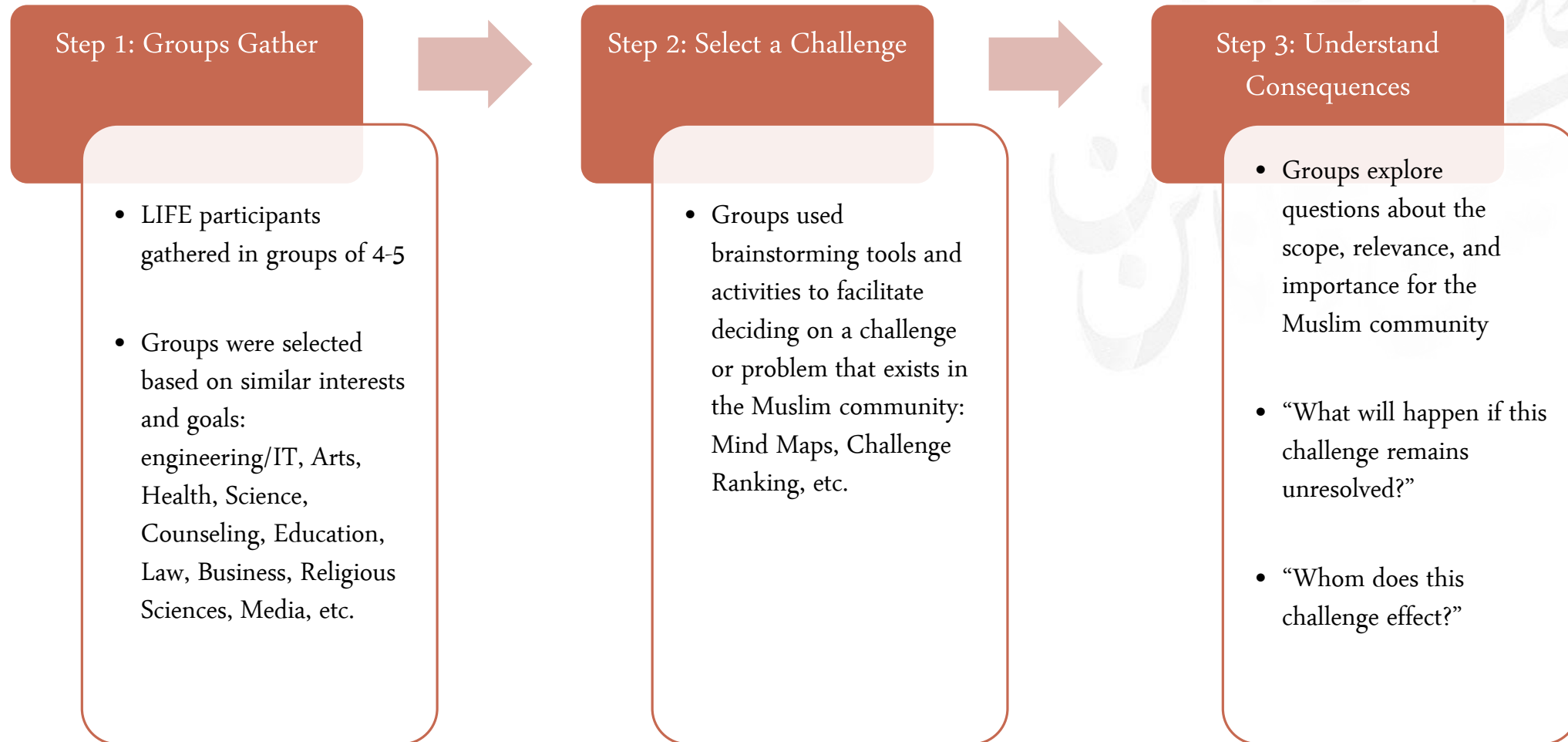
A LIFE Discussion Session

LIFE Initiatives

New to the LIFE Intensive course was the Initiatives module, a group project where students developed an initiative that aims to address a challenge facing the Muslim Community. Working in groups, students decided on a particular need or challenge facing the Muslim community and developed a project plan known as an “Initiative” to address the challenge. Participants then received a set of methodological tools, professional and scholarly feedback, and networking opportunities to develop their projects. The Initiative could be an institution, a book or document, an organization, an online collective, or any other such effort. Groups presented their initiatives towards the end of the LIFE 2016 course.

After presentations were complete, LIFE administrators worked with students to choose two groups whose initiatives were considered most pressing, creative, and feasible. The Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Seminary will, God willing, work with those teams to further develop and facilitate their chosen initiatives.

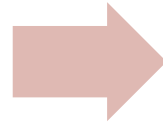
LIFE Initiatives Process



LIFE Initiatives Process

Step 4: Decide an Initiative

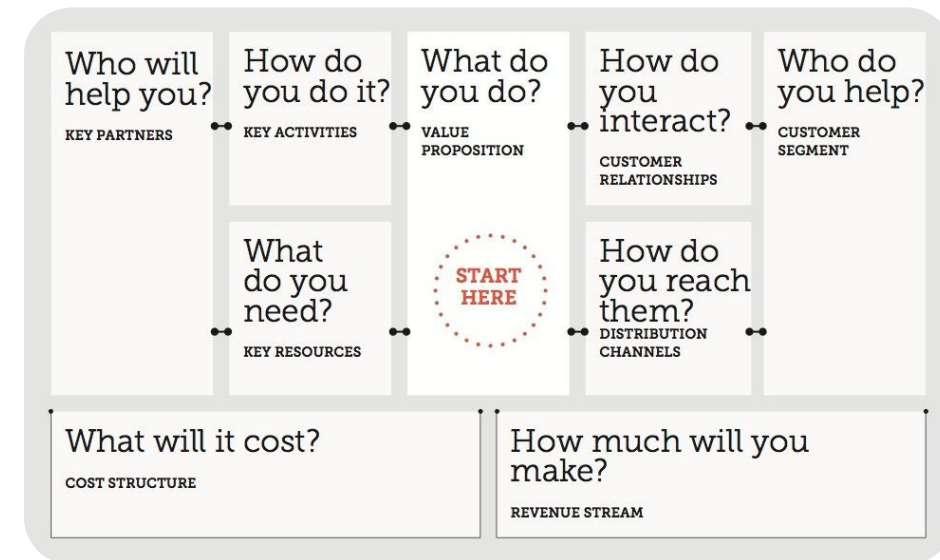
- Groups sought to determine an initiative that would address the chosen challenge, using brainstorming tools, such as, (1) mind maps, (2) idea categories, (3) online idea generators, (4) analysis of initiatives that exist already, etc.



Step 5: The Organizational Model Canvas

- Groups utilized a modified version of the “Organizational Model Canvas”, a visual tool for determining project requirements, so as to develop a detailed plan for their chosen initiative.

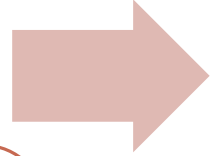
The Organizational Model Canvas



LIFE Initiatives Process

Step 6: Fine Tuning

- After developing a plan, groups considered their initiative in light of:
 - Community Cohesion and Stability
 - The Role of Scholars
 - Diversity
 - Moral Challenges
 - Generation Gap
 - Convert & Immigrant Experience
 - Feasibility of Cost and Effort



Step 7: Presenting the Initiative

- Groups organized all relevant material into a presentation, and delivered them to LIFE peers, scholars, and community members.
- Groups received feedback from scholars, professionals, and well-wishers.
- Two Initiatives were chosen for further development and support by the Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Seminary, creativity, feasibility, and importance.



Supplemental Activities

Du‘ā’ Gatherings & Akhlāq Sessions

During the LIFE course, gatherings were held that focused primarily on spiritual self-development. Sessions included short lectures on ethics, remembrance of God and the Ahl al-Bayt, and du‘ā’.

One-On-One Sessions

The One-on-One sessions provided students extra time with various scholars to discuss personal interests and intellectual questions, and to seek personal advice.

Volunteering and Service

Each day, LIFE participants were responsible for numerous set-up and clean-up activities to ensure the Baitul-Ilm masjid was well-maintained and ready for LIFE activities. Students also participated in a service activity where they prepared lunch-bags for impoverished communities in the area.

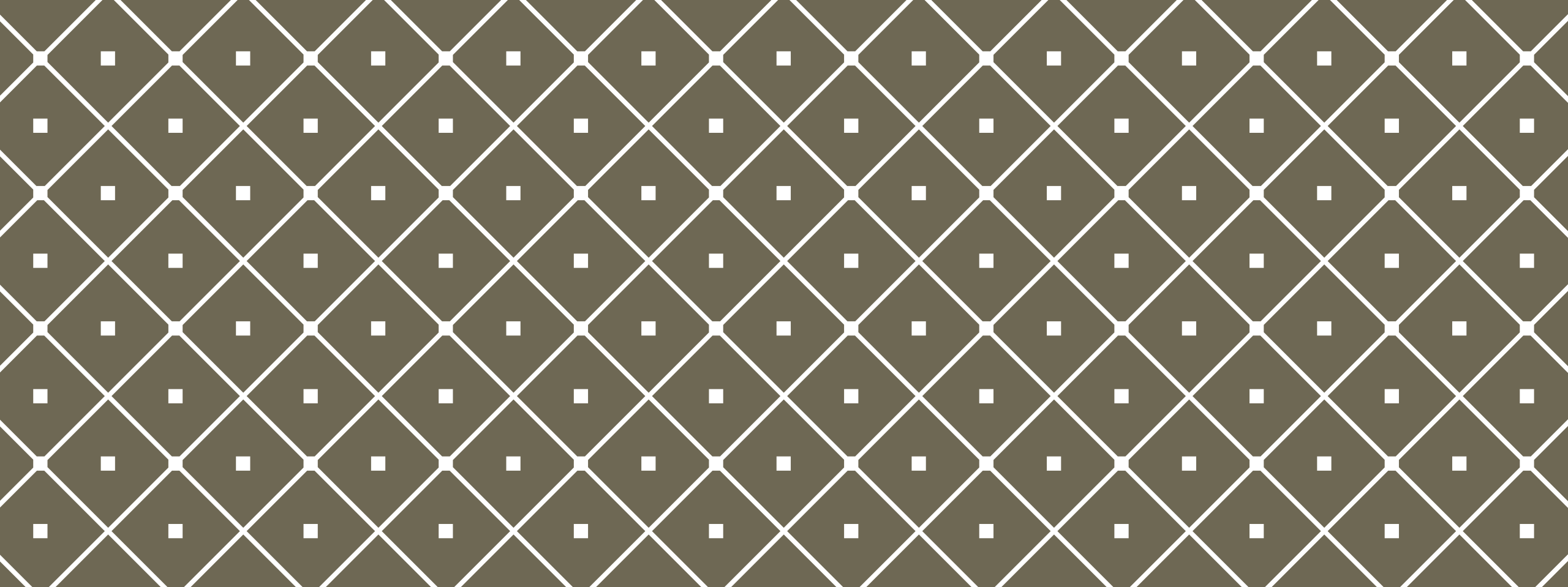
Field Trip

LIFE participants and faculty enjoyed a half-day field trip to a local forest preserve. The natural environment provided a change of pace and facilitated rejuvenation of mind, body, and spirit.





Shaykh Mahdi Mohammadpour leads prayers



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