



Learn English Through Stories.

J Series

J2

**Adapted and modified by
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Contents

Keepers of the Kalachakra.

Part 2: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Keepers of the Kalachakra

By Ashwin Sanghi

Part 2

Five

The Sringeri Sharada temple was famous for an ancient geometrical design called the Sri Yantra that had been installed there in the eighth century by one of Hinduism's most famous thinkers, Adi Shankaracharya. It consisted of nine perfectly interlocking triangles, with four of them pointing up and five pointing down. While many people could draw the design using various tools, most of them got it wrong. The Sri Yantra at Sringeri was considered to be one of the perfect examples of sacred geometry. Vijay would spend hours gazing at it.

One day Amma asked him whether he could draw the design. Vijay quickly drew a perfect Sri Yantra from memory, marking the key fifty-four points of intersection, something that even mathematicians could rarely achieve freehand.

Six

A languid lake bordered the school and the children would often swim there during their free time. Vijay loved breasting the water and became a good swimmer.

One day, he noticed a girl of his age playing in the water with her friends. They were ducking each other into the water. Vijay watched with amusement until he realized that the girl had not reappeared above the surface. He jumped into the lake without a second thought, sliced through the water and emerged a minute later with her struggling in his arms.

After she had recovered, spluttering out the last of the water she had taken in, he asked her name.

‘Sujatha,’ she said shyly, grateful for what Vijay had done. ‘Sujatha Iyer.’

Seven

The hotel in Manhattan had been lit up like a Christmas tree. It was top-billing night at the hotel, with a wedding, birthday party and a business conference all happening on the same day in various select public spaces. The hotel had 100 per cent room occupancy and the staff were putting in double shifts to cope. The hotel's General Manager was all over the place, ensuring that the guests were well looked after.

The main ballroom was stuffed to capacity and the band was in full form. The waiters and the guests had to literally shout to make themselves heard above the din. No one noticed the lone figure wearing an oversized blue blazer and shuffling his way towards the dance floor up front.

Suddenly, there was a dazzling burst of light, followed a nano-second after by a deafening blast. Then there came the low rumble of everything crashing to the ground—the walls and ceilings included. It was like a massive shockwave that dominoed down the entire hotel, shaking it to its very foundations. In the ballroom, the floor collapsed while the plate glass windows overlooking the street were blown out. The piteous screams that followed begged to be heard over the clamour. The suicide bomber in the blue blazer had tightly packed ball bearings, nails and crushed razor blades around the explosive material. These lethal bits of metal zipped through the hotel like supercharged projectiles, tearing through flesh and instantly killing or grievously wounding anyone in their trajectory.

Police and rescue workers landed up soon enough, but they were greeted by hundreds of corpses—bodies flung great distances, torsos with heads or limbs missing, and hideous chunks of melting human flesh. The first priority of the new arrivals was to locate survivors, people who had been knocked unconscious or were trapped under falling concrete. In parallel, they needed to ensure that there were no more timed devices in the area. It would be another twenty-four hours before the total count of dead and wounded would emerge.

The cold numbers came to 163 dead and over 200 wounded. It was one of the deadliest attacks since 9/11.

Eight

Abu Ahmed al-Mafraqi was dressed in sandals and a pilgrim's ihram—two pieces of white seamless cloth, one tied around his waist and reaching below his knees, the other draped over his left shoulder and knotted at the right side. His dark eyes framed by bushy eyebrows, and his black beard interlaced with streaks of white completed his look of sacrosanct authority.

Earlier that morning, he had washed, prayed and consumed a simple breakfast from the tent's buffet along with his companions, appreciating the sense of brotherhood that this communal eating afforded him. He had declined the offer of a swanky \$2,700-room overlooking the Kaaba. What was the point of performing Hajj as though it were a designer holiday?

It was the largest annual gathering of human beings and, for the moment, Mafraqi blended with the three million other pilgrims to the Hajj in the last month of the Islamic calendar. But he wasn't any other pilgrim. The Mabahith, the Saudi secret police, was keeping a close eye on him.

He was on his seventh and final tawaf circuit around the Kaaba, having effortlessly done the first three at a nimble clip as required by tradition, and slowing down for the next four. The crowds respectfully made way for the distinguished figure in their midst when he bent down during each circuit to kiss the black stone. Around him, his security detail also performed the tawaf in sync. Accompanying him was Habib bin-Wadih, his second-in-command.

Tawaf completed, the men prayed at the Muqam Ibrahim and made their way to drink water from the Zamzam well. Refreshed, they walked back and forth seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwah, close to the Kaaba. It was a comfortable walk because the entire stretch was now enclosed by the Masjid al-Haram mosque, accessed through air-conditioned tunnels. It was a respite from the forty-eight-degree heat of Mecca.

They headed back towards their tents to rest before embarking on the remaining stops on the Hajj route—Mina, Arafat, Muzdalifah and Jamarat. As they walked, Mafraqi turned to Habib.

'The timing is auspicious,' he said in a low tone. 'Our brother in New York has done us proud. After this Hajj is over, we will ensure that every Muslim brother

around the world will rise up and defeat the Kafirs. This will, insha'Allah, lead to a golden age of the umma living under Sharia!

'Khalifat Rasul Allah,' began Habib hesitantly. The title simply acknowledged that Mafraqi was already viewed as caliph by millions of Muslims around the world. 'What about those countries in which the majority is non-Muslim?'

'There are only two types of countries in the world,' said Mafraqi. 'The first fall under Dar al-Islam, or where Muslims rule under Sharia.'

'And the other?' asked Habib—a little unnecessarily, everyone knew the answer—because the boss liked to intone platitudes.

'Dar al-Harb, or lands of war, where we need to fight to establish Muslim dominance. Islam took over Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and Constantinople. Rome is the last bastion. It shall eventually be the capital of my caliphate.'

'But we have many Muslims around the world who do not think alike,' said Habib. 'Our brothers living in America, England, France and Belgium have adopted new habits and rules. Many of them have become murtadd! Apostates!

'It is their foolish desire to assimilate,' said Mafraqi. 'They want to be more like their hosts. To fit in! But what will happen when their hosts turn against them? They will have no alternative but to return to their Muslim roots. That is what we must accelerate!'

Nine

Mafraqi had been born in the city of Mafraq. Alim, for that was what he was originally called, had been a difficult child. His parents were ordinary working-class Jordanians; his father a municipal engineer and his mother a devoted housewife whose entire life was spent looking after the nine children she had borne her husband. Alim was the youngest.

The family lived in a derelict house that overlooked a garbage dump. It was the dump that became Alim's introduction to drugs, alcohol and crime. Alim dropped out of school and then succeeded in getting himself sacked from the job that his father had arranged for him. But he excelled in his chosen career as a street Arab instead. He rapidly progressed from petty theft to vandalism to drug-dealing and then eventually to rape and murder—none of these traceable to him. The feats of violence, which made him a byword in the small and secret criminal world he inhabited, included slashing the face of an old man for rebuking his ways, brutally sodomizing a boy till he haemorrhaged to death, and his indescribable cruelties to the hookers he pimped for.

And then something changed.

A new preacher moved into the neighbourhood and arranged for Alim—just the right age and with no known record of misbehaviour—to marry his niece. He nudged Alim towards religious classes at the local mosque, convinced that the young man would find role models in such places. The strategy worked like a miracle. Alim gave up drugs and booze and delved into Islamic studies with all the zeal that he had once reserved for crime. He became a permanent fixture at Qur'an discussions and prayer meetings. He eagerly consumed all propaganda videos and audio recordings of speeches relating to Afghanistan, Bosnia, Palestine, Kashmir, Xinjiang and Chechnya. When the imam asked for volunteers to fight the communists who were attacking Muslim brothers in Afghanistan, Alim's was the first hand that went up.

He reached the Afghanistan–Pakistan border a month later, just in time to be part of the action to drive the Soviets out for good. His bravery on the battlefield was often mistaken for foolhardiness, but it always seemed to work. It was as though he longed for death more than anything else. Whenever he had free time, he would visit the mosques of Peshawar, usually moved to tears by the imam's sermons, fervently hoping for martyrdom one day.

Ten

By the time that Alim returned to Jordan a few years later, he was a battle-hardened mujahid whose mental circuits had been irreversibly altered by the Arab clerics of Peshawar. Alim found himself angry with the liberalism of Jordan. He hated the fact that women dressed however they wanted, that couples mixed freely at cinemas, that liquor stores and pimps flourished. The fact that he had once been part of that ecosystem only seemed to make him more determined to destroy it. Alim was convinced that divine intervention was possible. After all, a motley army of mujahids from Muslim lands had sent the Soviets packing. The very notion was unthinkable, unless one considered the Hand of God. If Allah led them towards that unbelievable victory in battle, why would He not help Alim establish a caliphate? One where His will would prevail?

Alim put together a plan to disrupt the Jordanian parliamentary elections, but there was an information leak. The notorious Mukhabarat, the Jordanian secret police, came knocking on his door and he was arrested along with seventeen others and taken to Al-Jafr prison, a fortress that lay in the middle of a searing hot and isolated baked-mud plateau. Not a blade of grass nor a human being was visible for miles around. It was the most dreadful place on earth. The prison was infamous. New inmates were routinely sodomized, administered electric shocks, burnt with cigarettes or suspended upside down from ceiling fans or hooks. Alim not only survived, he also became the undisputed leader among the inmates. He regularly led prayers, and his word was law.

Upon the death of the ailing King Hussein and the coronation of King Abdullah II, Alim was released along with two thousand other Jordanian prisoners, as part of a general amnesty. His group moved to a camp along the Iran–Iraq border from where they began plotting their next moves. They carried out petty terror attacks until the Americans handed them the perfect prize—the invasion of Iraq.

Alim undertook terror operations within occupied Iraq and caused massive losses for the Americans. During one particular operation, though, Alim was captured and he found himself in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. He used it as a networking opportunity to expand the span of his web. He also let it slyly be

known that he was descended from the Quraysh, the tribe of Prophet Muhammad.

By the time he emerged from Abu Ghraib, he was no longer Alim. His new name was Abu Ahmed al-Mafraqi. Instead of a trigger-happy thug, Mafraqi was now a soft-spoken teacher whose radical ideas had the devastating power of a thousand bombs.

One of the most short-sighted and self-destructive decisions that the American administration took was to disband the Iraqi army. The result was a quarter of a million unemployed Sunni fighters on the streets. Mafraqi capitalized on this. Thousands of former army officers joined him and brought with them millions of dollars' worth of equipment that they stole from army depots. The Americans helped things along by withdrawing prematurely from the mess that they had created.

The vacuum caused by American withdrawal provided the ideal environment for Mafraqi to flourish. He became notorious because of his ruthless terror attacks on almost everyone — Shia worshippers, personnel of the United Nations, even women and children. Captured prisoners would be crucified, flogged, stoned, drowned, skinned alive or set alight. Horrific videos were posted on the internet so that his macabre deeds could be viewed by everyone. It was shock and awe to the extreme.

Mafraqi became the most wanted terrorist on America's list and the authorities put a reward on his head. The unforeseen fallout was that Mafraqi's reputation surged and thousands of Sunni Muslims from around the world queued up to join him. His men cut wide swathes through Iraq and Syria, establishing their dream of a glorious caliphate on both sides of the Syria-Iraq border. It would only be a matter of time before Mafraqi was declared Caliph at the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul, having been duly elected by the majlis al-shura.

Mafraqi was certain the best was yet to come.

Eleven

It was a clear day in Columbus, Ohio. More than fourteen thousand people were packed into the Greater Columbus Convention Centre that had been decorated with balloons, bunting and posters of the candidate.

The crowd was restless. They had been waiting for over an hour for him. Suddenly, there was a roar of applause, as the candidate walked up to the lectern on the stage. He was wearing a dark blue suit with a golden-yellow tie. His black hair was perfectly parted and he was wearing rimless spectacles so he could read the teleprompter.

‘Thank you, Columbus, for your very warm welcome. It’s great to be in Ohio this afternoon,’ he said, waving enthusiastically to the crowd.

‘Today is a very important day on my campaign tour. It is the day I begin outlining my plans to make America secure. Our country has, in its great and valiant history, succeeded in erasing the evil designs of forces as malevolent as Fascism, Nazism and Communism. Today we are faced with a challenge that is far greater—yet another — ism. You know of what we speak—the hydra-headed monster of Islamism and terrorism. And let’s call it what it is. It constitutes that most insidious threat to the home of the brave.’

The crowd was enthusiastic. It was refreshing to hear someone who wasn’t afraid to give a monster its name.

‘Just a few days ago, 163 Americans died in a New York hotel, in which another 200 were injured. Remember, ladies and gentlemen, that this incident is only one of many in a deadly pattern that started with 9/11. At that time, 3,000 were killed and 6,000 injured in one satanic swoop. They were our kin, our colleagues, our innocent civilians, people we loved, people who wanted nothing more in life than to work towards the safety of their families and the preservation of our hallowed shores.’

The orator paused for effect. ‘And that was just the beginning, my friends,’ he resumed with renewed energy, marking off his points on his fingertips. ‘Since then, the Boston Marathon bombings wounded 264 people while another 14 blameless Americans were gunned down at an office party in San Bernardino at which 22 were injured. At the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, 49 Americans were killed and another 53 were injured—it was the ghastliest mass shooting

in America and the worst-ever attack on the LGBTQ community. Are we going to let all this continue?' He thumped the lectern in front of him in tandem with the applause and cries from the audience of, 'Never again, never again!'

The speaker decided it was time to address the wider audience television brought him. 'And the violence is not limited to America,' he began quietly, building up to a crescendo. 'In Mumbai, terrorists killed 164 people and wounded another 308 during a series of 12 coordinated shootings and bombings lasting 4 days. In Belgium, terrorists detonated a bomb inside Brussels airport killing 32 and injuring 340. Another crazy truck driver mowed down 12 and injured 56 in Berlin. In Bangladesh, 26 people were killed inside a café. It never stops!'

He took a much-needed gulp from the glass of water placed near him.

'In France, the office of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo was attacked for publishing cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. In that shocking blow to not only human life but to freedom of expression itself, 12 died and 11 were wounded. Later that year, terrorists went on a frenzied shooting spree in Paris that killed 130 people and wounded another 368. In the south of France, a terrorist mowed down 85 people and wounded 308 by simply and cold-bloodedly driving his truck into a crowd.'

The candidate's eyes swept over the assembled persons, which consisted of mostly blue-collar workers and white stay-at-home moms wearing t-shirts that had his name emblazoned on the front.

'Citizens of America, remember that those atrocities did not stop at killing and wounding. Children were kidnapped. Girls were sold into sexual slavery. Men and women were burned alive to the thrill of cheering multitudes. Crucifixions have been brought back as penal measures, in addition to beheadings, drowning and ritual disembowelling. Holy sites — ours, theirs—have been desecrated or bombed. Ethnic minorities have witnessed mass executions. Non-Muslim populations are being ethnically "cleansed".'

'My friends, we will never again let such evil perpetuate itself. Nor can we let the vengeful ideology of radical Islamism and its oppression of women, gays, apostates and non-believers be allowed to spread within our own borders. We must defeat this hateful ideology and the terrible creatures that it spawns. Just as we have exterminated such vermin in the past!'

There was a thunderous ovation and hoots of approval. One section of the audience began chanting his name. The candidate smiled and waited for the crowd to settle down. He had kept an important point till the last.

‘There are political leaders in our country who wish to pussyfoot around the issue. They are unwilling to even name the enemy. They wish to close their eyes to the bloodshed that has been the direct result of this ideology. They mouth platitudes but are unwilling to call evil what it is.

‘I stand before you today to tell you that enough is enough! I will not allow this to continue. If I am given a chance to serve as President of this great country, I will ensure that this threat is destroyed. Once and for all!’

The crowd went wild as he uttered those words.