[Snap Judgment intro]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay, so, back in the day, I used to live near three separate mosques. One was basically across the street, the other is not too far away. And I loved living there, because several times a day, you'd hear the call to prayer.

[call of prayer in mosque]

**Glynn:** I don't know if you've ever heard the call of prayer performed from a mosque. And nowadays, some places, they will use recordings. But where I lived, they were old school. No Spotify, CD player, none of that nonsense. The imams took the microphone themselves, and they were not half stepping. Decades and decades of practice and history in each and every syllable, this song, poem, recitation. And yeah, they recited for the edification of whomever came to the mosque. But the sound was amplified for the benefit of the neighborhood. It was beautiful. Every single day right before dawn, beautiful.

It wasn't like a competition between mosques, but when one mosque in my neighborhood would finish, the other would often begin their version, their interpretation. You would hear echoes of one recitation even as the other one started. And I'm overusing this word, beautiful, because it was just so glorious. I was not raised in a Muslim tradition, but it still touched me, helped me both start and end every day.

And this beauty is why I'm so excited, because on today's Snap Judgment, we've got a special episode to share from our friends at Ritually. It's Nelufar Hadayat's new podcast from Brazen Media. And in each episode, she tries out a new spiritual, a wellness ritual to find out if practicing it will actually make you feel better. Nelufar, she did grow up with a Muslim upbringing. And today, she's going to dig into a ritual at the center of her religion, this daily call to prayer, a practice uniting 1.8 billion Muslims around the world. But for a lot of reasons, she never felt comfortable responding to that call. So, today, she takes a slightly different approach. Snap Judgment.

**Nelufar:** In this episode, I'm going to explore a ritual that is at the center of my religion, the call to prayer. I'm a Muslim, but my relationship to Islam is complicated, and so is my relationship to prayer. More on that later.

[call to prayer]

**Nelufar:** So, for an entire week, I'm going to challenge myself to wake up at the crack of dawn to hear the call to prayer. I want to know if this ritual will bring me some comfort and connection to the world around us. But first, I'm going to need a guide.

**Sara:** My full name is kind of ridiculous, Nelufar. It's Sara [unintelligible [00:04:29] Zaltash. But I don't go by that in England. That would be ridiculous. My name is Sara Zaltash. And then my working name, the name that I share when I'm holding space in order to show myself as the person that I'm becoming is Beloved Sara Zaltash.

**Nelufar:** Beloved Sara Zaltash is a spiritual practitioner who's offered the call to prayer in all sorts of secular places, from extinction rebellion protests, through to Burning Man Festival. I asked her why she chooses to call herself Beloved Sara.

**Sara:** I wanted something that would demarcate that, yes, this is my vocation. I looked and a Muslim nun would be referred to as habibi. I'm sure, you know, habibi translates, one of the words is beloved.

**Nelufar:** Yes.

**Sara:** So, that's where it comes from. It's like a way to say, I have held myself in this path, and I continue to hold myself in this path. As much as I hope that people hold me as a beloved one, it's also to say that I'm dedicated to the beloved.

**Nelufar:** Beloved Sara has been practicing, teaching, and learning about Islam for a long time, and she's made headlines for giving her unique version of the Islamic call to prayer all over the world. So, I wanted to talk to her about this particular ritual. What is the call to prayer?

**Sara:** The Azan, the Adhan in Islam. It is the way that Muslims are called in to come in to pray five times a day. In that sense, it is a prayer in itself. And it's also a beckoning. It's saying, "Come-come, come-come." It's a way for people to be able to recognize that they are part of something bigger and greater than them.

**Nelufar:** Beloved Sara and I are both in our 30s, and we've both grown up knowing what it's like to be a liberal, open-minded Muslim. Yet, I feel like our religion has no place for us, for women who are different, who choose to speak up. I struggle to be in a religious world that silences women and a secular world that doesn't have space for spirituality. So does Sara.

**Sara:** My father and my mother who were Muslim, they really wanted my siblings and I, If we wanted to come into faith by ourselves, to have respect for it and to be aware of it, but really just to make our own choices. So, when friends started going through this fashionable atheist phase when they were like 12, 13, 14, I was like, "No number of answers to scientific questions can answer that big question of like, 'Yeah, but what put all of this here?'"

**Nelufar:** I too lost many an argument in school with friends who decided Richard Dawkins was their god and Nietzsche their prophet. But at the same time, Sara points out, a lot of people, including me, associate religion with some form of oppression.

**Sara:** Even if somebody is willingly going into prayer, perhaps, they go in that place and witness gender inequality, they witness that their mother has less of a voice than their father, and they don't understand why. This threading of oppression alongside spirit means that it's natural that people want to pull away from that. Nobody wants to be oppressed, and everybody, every human, every plant, every animal longs for liberation. And for that reason, we throw the baby out with the bathwater. We lose this incredibly natural capacity for faith, for belief, for questioning, and for communicating with something thing far greater than us.

So, when I talk about God, I'm not talking about the God of some people over here or over there. I'm talking about my God. I'm talking about the God that I experience when I'm at a rave. I'm talking about the God that I experience when I'm with my partner. I'm talking about the spirit of life force that moves through everything that is in all of creation.

**Nelufar:** Beloved Sara grew up hearing the call to prayer every summer in Iran, where her family is from.

**Sara:** You know, it comes out of every mosque, it comes on the TV, it comes on the radio, it interrupts the day to let people know that it's time to pray. Until I was about nine years old, I thought it was a lovely song that the Islamic regime was playing for everyone. Until one day, I said that out loud to my uncle, we were driving and the Azan came on and he switched the radio off and I was like, "Oh, uncle, please, it's that lovely song." And he was like, "Sara, it's not a lovely song." I was like, "What are you talking about? It's a lovely song." And he started to explain to me the purpose of it.

**Nelufar:** But that lovely song was only ever uttered from a man's lips, and Beloved Sara just couldn't accept that. So, she decided to learn to call the Azan herself.

**Sara:** I've been told I'm not allowed to do this. In Islam, that a woman's voice is haram.

**Nelufar:** Haram, an action or deed that is deemed to be sinful and therefore, prohibited in Islam.

**Sara:** The call to prayer, it can only be heard from a woman's voice by other women, that it's somehow dangerous for men to do that. When I look at Islamic culture around the world, I see the enormous suffering that both men and women and nonbinary people are really stuck in because of the patriarchy of Islam. I see that lack of female voices in Islam as being one of the things that all people can address in order to shift the suffering of Muslims under patriarchy. And so, really, it begins from there of like, "I just wonder what happens if people hear this in a woman's voice."

**Nelufar:** I've heard this call to prayer [laughs] countless times.

**Sara:** Right.

**Nelufar:** But I've never heard it in a woman's voice. There's something terrifying, and beautiful, and agonizing, and transgressive, and just owning it about the whole thing is making me giddy. This is where I'm going to be a bit of a journalist, because that is my job.

**Sara:** Yeah.

**Nelufar:** Arguably, what you're doing is haram, right?

**Sara:** Yes. Many people would say that.

**Nelufar:** [laughs] Have people told you to your face?

**Sara:** Oh, yeah.

**Nelufar:** Beloved Sara has been heckled when she's given the call to prayer on stage at festivals and gatherings. She told me about one time, when an older Muslim man confronted her at an event.

**Sara:** He was trying to admonish me, and I just kept saying, "Dear uncle, all I have done is bring people into connection with Allah, and that's all I wanted to do." And then, he would say, "Yes, but you know, this and then this and then this, and this is the problem, and this is the problem." I say, "I know, uncle. I know it's hard for you, but I just want them to understand the beauty of Islam. And I know that this is an unusual way to do it. Please forgive me for being unusual, but can you see that it has been effective?" And he was like, "Yes. Yes, it has." [laughs] I was like, "Okay, good. Hallelujah. Masha Allah."

**Nelufar:** Masha Allah, God joyfully wills it. Okay, I have to jump in here, because what Beloved Sara just said means so much to me. There are so many times in my life, a man has confronted me and told me, "No, you shouldn't be allowed to do this because you're a woman." Work, religion, personal life, all of it. It makes my blood boil.

Beloved Sara was able to connect with an ideological foe in a way that made her more powerful. She used her voice not to ridicule or degrade the other person. In one instant, she wrote herself into the vast and varied tapestry of Islam. It's time to hear that voice.

Beloved Sara Zaltash, let's hear your call to prayer.

**Sara:** Oh, my God. Is it time? Okay.

**Nelufar:** It's time.

**Sara:** I know. I'm actually quite nervous.

**Nelufar:** No, I'm not. I'm excited. Hold on. Let me turn the volume up.

**Sara:** I just want to say, Nelufar, that the words that I use and the order that I use them will be different to the one that you have regularly heard.

**Nelufar:** In Sara's version of the call, it's not a demand to make an offering to God. It's a call to connect with God. She's changed some of the words to make the call feel more inclusive, at least to me. You're going to hear Beloved Sara's call in full at the end.

**Sara:** Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem, in the name of Oneness, Compassionate, and Merciful. [praying]

I would normally invite people now to find some piece of nature, even if that is their own hand, and to kiss it and to place their forehead upon it three times in order to ground the prayer in life. Thank you.

[somber music]

**Nelufar:** I don't know how to conceptualize what I'm feeling right now. I can only thank you for introducing me to that, and to say that I've never experienced anything like it. I feel like I've been waiting to hear it forever, which is kind of crazy. Oh, I'm going to need some time to process that. I can't explain to you how profound that is. Just to hear it in your voice, Sara, just to know that you mean it with all the good intention and all the beauty that you speak of.

**Sara:** I feel so grateful that you have opened your heart to it. That's all I really want, is that it reaches people.

**Nelufar:** To all of the people that were listening to this conversation and your call to prayer, your Azan, how can they incorporate this into their lives if they're not Muslim? Do you need to be Muslim to listen to you do this?

**Sara:** We don't need to be a Chinese person to eat Chinese food, and I don't think we need to be any specific religion in order to appreciate the beauty and the gifts of that religion.

**Nelufar:** So, every day for the next week, I will be waking up at the crack of the lovely dawn-

**Sara:** [laughs]

**Nelufar:** -and partake in this ritual. Thanks. Bloody hell, you couldn't have picked a better slot, could you?

[song]

**Glynn:** Oh, don't go anywhere. After the break, day one. Time to partake in the ritual. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Ritually episode. When last we left, Nelufar Hedayat was sitting down with Sara, a spiritual practitioner, about to try a new ritual. Snap Judgment.

**Nelufar:** Day one.

[alarm ringing]

**Nelufar:** I'm up, I'm up. It looks light outside already. Sorry, I have my teeth guards on. I'm still really sleepy. Okay, wait, hold on. It's happening, it's happening. Here we go, here we go. Okay.

**Sara:** Good morning, dear ones. I found a perch- [crosstalk]

**Nelufar:** Hi, Sara.

**Sara:** -in the vastness of Tempelhofer Feld. Sometimes, I hear the call to stay with my dreams. And sometimes, I hear the call to come and share them with you.

**Nelufar:** That's lovely.

**Sara:** Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem.

**Nelufar:** Okay, here we go.

**Sara:** In the name of Oneness, Compassionate, and Merciful. [praying]

**Nelufar:** My main instinct is to go and hunt for coffee, but this is just the most beautiful way to wake up in the morning. I'm not going to pray, not like in the traditional sense, but I'm going to think about everything Sara just did. I'm going to start my day.

I felt energized. It was the first time in many, many weeks where I had something to do. I was on a mission. I was going to challenge myself in a way that felt healthy, inspirational, even maybe enlightenment might be at the end of that tunnel.

Day two. And I woke up earlier than the call. I kind of can't sleep, because I want to hear it. I'm going to go downstairs, look out at nature, as Beloved Sara Zaltash would like me to. Despite my enthusiasm, my internet connection cut out, and Beloved Sara had internet issues too. So, I couldn't really wake up to the call as intended. Onwards to.

[alarm ringing]

It's day three. Today, I have woken up well before the actual time to call. [giggles] I set my alarm 15 minutes early so that I can go downstairs, make a cup of tea, sit down. I look forward to it the night before when I set my alarm, and it's got nothing to do with the prayer element of it. I think at this point, it's really soothing to me. Her voice, her call. [Sara praying] Just looking at her, watching her, the fact that she's outside and making an effort to be amongst nature, I feel like she's talking to me directly, even though I'm just watching.

[Sara praying]

**Nelufar:** Then came day four.

[alarm ringing]

**Nelufar:** So, it's about five minutes until the call. I was up late working, and I'm just not in the mood today, I think. No, I don't want to think. It's dawn. I want to sleep. I'm not thinking. I'm going to sleep.

Yes, so that was a tough day. I missed the Azan altogether.

[somber music]

**Nelufar:** I was losing my drive to keep up this ritual, and I needed inspiration from a devotee of Islam and someone passionate and learned. So, I reached out to the person who made me a Muslim, my mum. For as long as I can remember, my mother has heard the Azan blaring from the radio or from her phone five times a day and she answers. My mum is cool, she's smart, and she's really confident. She grew up in the hopeful hippie days of Kabul, Afghanistan, in the 1960s and 1970s. That's where she got the fire brand version of feminism that she raised me with. So, in the midst of this challenge, I went back to my childhood home in London to talk to her about what I was feeling. I wanted to know more about the origin of this ritual.

Mama, do you want to be on my podcast? I will take your silence for yes. Just say it.

**Patuni:** My name is Patuni Hedayat. I'm a TA in one of the London secondary schools.

**Nelufar:** When I was a kid, she used to tell me stories from the history of Islam. So, I asked my mum to tell me the story of how the Azan came to be.

Can you tell me the story of Bilal ibn Rabah? Bilal ibn Rabah was a slave.

**Patuni:** Yeah.

**Nelufar:** He was black?

**Patuni:** He was black. Yeah. When he accept Islam, he always wanted to-- because he had a beautiful voice, he was hoping, one day, there will be the opportunity for him to say Allahu Akbar.

**Nelufar:** Allahu Akbar. God is great.

**Patuni:** At the beginning, Muslims were just few and they were very weak and they were practicing. Muslims were praying in secret. Omar.

**Nelufar:** Omar was one of the most powerful people in Islam at the time.

**Patuni:** He asked Bilal to go to the roof and do the Adhan. So, for the first time, he climbed the roof and said "Allahu Akbar" in a very loud voice. And at that time, being black is-

**Nelufar:** Looked down.

**Patuni:** -looked down. Yes. Him getting this position. So, it makes me so happy that Alhamdulillah--

**Nelufar:** Praise be to God.

**Patuni:** I have a religion that there is no difference between callers, between rich and poor.

**Nelufar:** So, just to recap, Bilal ibn Rabah was the first ever person to offer the call to prayer back in the 7th century. When Bilal converted to Islam, his enslavers tried torture him into renouncing his faith, but Bilal would not give in. And then, he believed that he was an important enough devotee of Allah to go and stand on a minaret and tell the world about Islam despite the fact that he really, really didn't fit in. A rebel. The gall of this man, I felt lost in this story. This wasn't the Islam that I had grown up fearing. This was an open invitation, not a closed book.

But here's the awkward part that I couldn't get my mum, Patuni, to tell me about. It's something that's uncomfortable for most Muslims to even acknowledge. In Islam, it's not forbidden to enslave people. And prominent Muslims, well, they did. So, Bilal found himself part of a religion that was okay with a system that had dehumanized him. I don't want this to feel like a win for Islam, but a win for rebelliousness. The story made me feel even more respect for what Beloved Sara has done. And so, I wanted to share the story of her rebellion with my mum.

I want to show you something that I've been listening to, because when I heard the story of Bilal ibn Rabah Bilal for the first time, I cried because I didn't know about Islam that there is space for people who are different. When I went to Arabic school and I learned the Quran and all this, they didn't tell me that you can be different and you will find a place. So, I want to play you something and see what you think.

**Sara:** Good morning, Nelufar Jun and Nelufar's mother. I am recording this especially for you. As precious as you're welcoming me into your heart, and your practice, and your ritual is, I hope that this is precious for you. Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem. In the name of Oneness, Compassionate, and Merciful.

[Sara praying]

**Nelufar:** What do you think of that?

**Patuni:** Beautiful. This lady, just she sang and she said it from the bottom of her heart. She feels it. When she said that call for prayer, it was beautiful.

**Nelufar:** It's unusual to hear it from a woman.

**Patuni:** Yeah, they do it, but not as loud a speaker like men. In the prayers time, even women are excused for it because they are so busy with their lives, their children. They can miss it and do it later.

**Nelufar:** Why is it not women who do this? Why do women not do the call to prayer? Why does that shock you and shock me?

**Patuni:** Because of the culture. It's not because of the-- In Islam, in Quran, they are not allowed to do. It's the culture. In Quran, there is no difference between-- In prayers, there is no difference between men and women prayers.

**Nelufar:** Why?

**Patuni:** Because they don't let women to voice, to have a voice. Don't bring this-- This not included, I think in this.

**Nelufar:** Why?

**Patuni:** Because of the men. They wanted to control women from having a voice.

**Nelufar:** Do you think that praying for you is like meditation is like--? [crosstalk]

**Patuni:** Yes. It relaxed me a lot. It kept me away from all the disturbing things that happened, on problems that I had, or sad news from the media, from my children, from my family.

**Nelufar:** Thanks.

**Patuni:** But this is the time that I make time for myself, when I am with my God, when I am connected with Him.

**Nelufar:** [laughs] Okay. Well, you didn't get angry at this, so I'm happy. Thank you for talking to me about it, mum.

**Patuni:** It should be the last time.

**Nelufar:** Never, I will speak to you again.

**Patuni:** No, I'm getting old. I don't have the voice and energy to interview you all the time. No.

**Sara:** [laughs]

**Nelufar:** You're my mother. I listen to you differently. Okay. Until next time, say goodbye to the audience.

**Patuni:** Goodbye.

[somber music]

**Nelufar:** On day five of the ritual, something really special happened. So, just before dawn, I opened my phone to a private call to prayer just for me from Beloved Sara Zaltash to make up for the days that we'd missed.

[Sara praying]

**Nelufar:** So, that was incredible. So much of my relationship with my religion is just action and this just feels so refreshing. Oh, God, I am so glad I got up at dawn today. It's so different to how I usually get up, which is five minutes before I have to actually functionally sit in front of my laptop and start my Zoom day. Probably rolling through Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok in a hot, toxic mess of the three trying to just get validation from the likes of my posts the night before, and see whatever toxic crap is in the news and in the ether that day. And this is just a different way.

[Sara praying]

**Nelufar:** By the final day of rising for the call to prayer, I could see some positive changes in my life. For example, my daily social media time was down. I felt less pulled to pick up my phone. I felt more attuned with my faith, closer to it and the Muslim community than ever before. There was something about hearing a woman's voice, first thing in the morning oozing with devotion. This ritual, it was begging me to have a better day. It's like a golden thread that connects me, a modern-day Muslim woman, all the way back to the 7th century, to a black man named Bilal who, emancipated, stood on top of a minaret and called to his people to come and be together. And this, well, it's just the beginning. I'm going to start this journey to find rebellious voices on the margins of spiritual life that offer rituals that I hope will really help me connect. I hope you'll come along.

[intriguing and upbeat music]

**Glynn:** That was Nelufar Hedayat. Nelufar Hedayat, thank you so much. If you want to hear more, check out Ritually wherever you get your podcasts. And a big thanks as well to the entire team over there for their work on this beautiful piece. Ritually's theme music is by Amaroun. The original music is by Jay Brown. And Snappas, if you're enjoying this Snap spotlight of Ritually, know their current season explores a bunch of diverse rituals, including reading *Harry Potter* as a sacred text using techniques from medieval monks. Ritually, it's out now wherever you get your podcasts.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** After the break, we're going to pop a wheelie with Hasan Minhaj. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment. My name is Glynn Washington. You learned, I learned even as a little person that the way towards acceptance, and love, and ice cream is by following a certain set of rules. Rules laid out for every age, every situation with the understanding that if you follow these rules, everything and everyone else is going to do their part. That way, the world has order, and justice, and more importantly, predictability, right? Acquiescence leads to harmony. Transgression, on the other hand, produces disorder. But what if this little equation gets turned on its head? In fact, what if your world is not made out of rules, but is instead constructed of quicksand?

Next, one of the funniest guys I know, Hasan Minhaj, formerly of The Daily Show, recently rocked his own special, *The King's Jester*. Today, he brings us a story before the cameras and before the fame. Snap Judgment.

[intriguing music]

**Hasan:** It's my seventh birthday. It's September 23rd. It's a Saturday, and my dad, he wakes me up super early in the morning, and he's like, "Hasan, get up." And I was like, "Okay." He's like, "Get in the Camry." I get in the Camry. And in Davis in the morning, it's really foggy, because we live in Davis, Sacramento, Northern California, it's like in the fields. So, it's really foggy. And we're in the Camry, and we're driving from Davis to Sacramento.

And we get to this intersection. I look to my left, and it's the one place that every kid dreams about. It's Toys“R”Us. I was like, "Oh, my God. Dad saw the cutout on my wall." On my wall back home in my bedroom, I had this cutout from the Toys“R”Us kids catalog. And it was this cutout of this beautiful blue BMX bike that I wanted. 21 speed, 17.2 pounds. I was like, "Oh. Dad saw the Toys“R”Us kids catalog cutout on my wall. He saw my little baby vision board, and he's going to get me this beautiful blue BMX bike that I always wanted." And then, he turns right, and I'm like, "Home Depot? No."

He took me to Home Depot on my birthday. I'm walking through the aisles of Home Depot. I'm in my pajamas. It's like 07:30 in the morning. "Dad, do you even know what day it is today?" He's like, "Yeah, it's Saturday." And I'm like, "No, it's my birthday. Today's my birthday. It's September 23rd. Did you forget that it's my birthday?" And he's like, "No, Hasan, of course, I know it's your birthday. That's why I brought you here to Home Depot so you could pick out the door handle for the bathroom." And I'm like, "Why don't you have me pick out the toilet, because you're [beep] all over my dreams".

The first eight years of my life, it's pretty much me and my dad. And my mom, she's back in India going to med school. She got married to my dad young, so she has to finish up the residency and rotation thing. Now, my mom, conversely, she would come to the States, and she would just kill the mom game. It was like being at Disneyland. We were a family. We were all together. She would bring physical gifts.

She came to Pioneer Elementary School and brought me a Ghostbusters 1 Proton Pack. I'm talking about the backpack. I'm talking about the gun. I'm talking about the wheelie thing that catches ghosts. Kids were losing their minds like, "What? Hasan's a Ghostbuster?" I'm like, "Yes, I'm a Ghostbuster." It was one of the happiest days of my life. She was really sweet, and she was really into what I was doing, and she wanted me to have fun. But then, she'd have to go back to finish her studies in India. I'd be like, "Dad, when is she coming back? When is she coming home?" And my dad would be like, "Look, when her visa goes through, we'll be together. We'll be a family again."

And I remember the day she came home. It was August 11th, 1993. I'm eight years old. I was so excited. I run into my room, and I put on my Ghostbusters Proton Pack, and I'm standing there in the living room. My dad takes one look at me and he's like, "Hasan, put on Indian clothes." I'm like, "All right, I'll be an Indian Ghostbuster. That's fine." I'm wearing salwar kameez, this backpack on, and I'm waiting in the living room. The door opens, and my mom walks in, my dad walks in, and then immediately behind my parents is this little brown girl with a mushroom cut. She just runs over to me and she's like, "Hasan bhai." And she hugs me, and I'm in full hover hands mode because I have no idea who this person is.

Basically, what happened was my dad would go back and forth to India to visit my mom. And then during one of his trips, he knocked her up. And I had a sister, but no one told me about her. My immediate reaction is like, "Who is this person?" I was supposed to have mom to myself. I didn't get that. We were supposed to be a family, the three of us. I didn't get I had a sister. No one told me about her. So, my mom took this photo of us, and this is the first photo of me and Ayesha together, like brother and sister. Ayesha is wearing this blue jumpsuit. I'm in all white salwar kameez, so I'm like white kurta, white pajama bottoms. I'm hugging her. Her arms are squeezed tight around me. She's looking at the camera like smiling, like, "Aha, America." And then I'm hugging her, like, "I guess this is the way people in movies are supposed to hug."

Then, the thing that was the worst was, they were just like, "Now, go take care of her." And my dad's like, "Hasan, why aren't you happy?" And I'm like, "Why am I happy--? Because you brought this girl a lot like Maury for *Immigrants*. You were just like, "Hasan, you are the brother." And she just comes out and she's dancing, just like, "Where's my bunk bed?" I'm like, "Who are you?" She's like, "You don't know me?" "Yeah, I have no idea who you are. Get out of my room. I didn't sign up for this. You guys did." And my dad's like, "Hasan, we're a family. We're all that we have. We're a family. We're all that we have." He just kept saying that and I'm like, "No, that's on you and mom." I already had this feeling at school where I wasn't even getting by. "Hasan bhai, Hasan bhai, Hasan bhai." Kids are like, "What's Hasan bhai?" It's like, how do I explain to Cody, "Oh, it's a term of endearment in my culture. It means Hasan brother"?

As a kid, all you want to do is fit in. That's all I wanted to do more than anything in the world. Having my sister follow me around on the playground, I'm playing kickball, wall ball. "Hasan bhai," I'm like, "Get lost." And eventually, I just couldn't take it anymore. And so, I try to ditch her, and I run into the boy's bathroom. She follows me into the boy's bathroom, "Hasan bhai." And eventually, I just turn and I snap. I'm just like, "Hey, you're not my sister."

And she couldn't understand English. She could get what I was saying, and she started crying, and all these tears are going down her little chubby cheeks, and she runs out of the bathroom. And I look at her and I'm like, "Oh, man, she's going to tell dad, and I'm going to get it." But she didn't tell dad.

My dad, he had told my mom all these big promises when they had originally gotten married, "I'm going to take you to America. It's going to be like this and that." And all those things didn't exactly go over the way he had planned. He really wanted to make it up to Ayesha in a really big way. And so, for her fifth birthday, my sister's very first birthday in the United States, he wanted to make it super special. So, he brings everybody in the living room, and he drags in this big brown box, and he hands Ayesha a pair of scissors. He's like, "Ayesha, come over here. Open the box." She cuts, open the box, and opens the flaps. And on the right flap, I see Toys "R" Us. My dad reaches in and pulls out this beautiful blue BMX bike.

I'm staring at this bike, the exact bike that was on the Toys "R" Us catalog cutout in my room. My dad, when he presented the bike to my sister, and he didn't even look over or wink or smile at me or give me this thing where like, "Hassan, maybe one day you'll understand." Nope. He just looked at Ayesha and was like, "Here you go, Ayesha." She's looking up at me, and she stares at me, and she can just tell how mad I am, and she's like, "Hasan bhai, lo na? Lo." "Why don't you take it out for the first ride?" And I'll be honest, as an older brother, I felt very entitled to that first ride. She opens the door, and she's like, "Look, Hasan bhai, just take it for one lap around the cul-de-sac."

I grab those rubber handlebars, and I'm just like [beep] that. Boom, and I take off, and I'm flying. She's like, "Hasan bhai." I'm like, "Eat my dust." And I am moving on this bike. I am switching through all 17 speeds. It is 21.1 pounds as advertised. I am flying. She's like, "Hasan bhai, come back." And I see this curb, and I'm about to pop a wheelie on this curb. I'm like, "Yeah, I'm going to fly on this BMX bike." And I hit that curb, bam. And the bike goes left, and I go right, and that beautiful blue BMX bike, boom, crashes into the sidewalk. All of that fresh blue paint just chips off the side of the bike. Hadn't even been 20 minutes.

Then, I can hear the pitter patter of Ayesha's chappals. She's running over, and she's just crying, and she's standing there in her sandals and sweatpants. She's like, "Hasan bhai, why did you do that? Why did you do that? I gave you the first ride. Tumne aisa kyun kiya?" I didn't say I'm sorry. I just remember I fell off the bike, and I looked at it, and I knew. I knew when I saw that paint off the side, I was like, "This is messed up." I didn't even say-- I was speechless. I just remember going to her room the following day and being like, "Ayesha, listen, I'm really, really sorry." Because kids are so honest, she couldn't even lie to me and say it's okay, because it wasn't. That was the first time where she wasn't thrilled to follow me around. She didn't follow me around. All of a sudden, this girl who was my shadow doesn't really want to hang out with me.

After that moment, the mushroom cut started growing out and she got hair down to her shoulders. We got older. We had separate rooms. She started learning English so she could speak to other kids at school and make friends. Because before, I represented also like a mediator between Aligarh and America. "This is the playground. This is where you play tetherball. This is where we do this. That's the girl's bathroom. This is the boys' bathroom. This is this. This is *Sesame Street*." I could explain all these things to her. I could see it, the more and more she learned English and started having her own autonomy. And once she started to get her own autonomy, but that meant that she needed Hasan bhai less and less.

**Nelufar:** Did you miss the shadow when you were losing it?

**Hasan:** Yeah, it sucked. I started to realize it and I was like, "Man, yeah, I missed that time in our life."

**Nelufar:** Does she look up to you now?

**Hasan:** I don't know. She looks up to me. I know she calls me every once in a while for advice. What's crazy is Ayesha has always used it as emotional blackmail on me, because that blue BMX bike is still in the garage to this day. We were going to what's called like a family dawat. A family dawat means like a family party. I'm late. Get in the Camry. You close the doors, and she's like, "Oh, my God, Hasan bhai, you are so selfish." I'm like, "What are you talk--?" And she's like, "Really? You're not selfish?" She points to the corner of the garage, garage door opens, and she'll be like, "Hey, look at the side of the bike. Why is one side of the bike just completely missing paint? Oh, yeah, because you crashed it, Hasan bhai. You crashed it when I was a little kid." Yeah, it's a joke now to us, but it's one of those things that she's always had to just remind me of how selfish I am, of just from the earliest memories, "You always screwed me over, Hasan bhai. Remember it."

**Glynn:** Big, big thanks to Hasan Minhaj for that story. Hasan has a new special. It's available right now. It's called *The King's Jester*. It will make you laugh. It made me laugh. I'm going to have links to all that is Hasan on our website, *snapjudgment.org*. The original score for that story was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Lina Misitzis.

[somber music]

**Glynn:** Snappas, you know what's better than hearing a story? Giving one. You can give the gift of story by sending your friends and your enemies a little taste of the Snap Judgment podcast. They will be forever grateful, I promise. Did I mention Snap's evil twin podcast, Spooked, is available everywhere? And yeah, we've been known to make comments from time to time on the Twitter, the Instagram, the Facebook, even Threads, because we're cool like that.

Snap is brought to you by the team that has hitched hype from one end of America to the other. All of us except for the uber producer, Mr. Mark Ristich, but it's not for lack of his trying. It's just that he had a hard time getting a ride clad in just his speedo swimsuit. There's Nancy López, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, John Fecile, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Marisa Dodge, Bo Walsh, Flo Wiley, David Exumé, and Regina Bediako.

And this is not the news. No way is this news. In fact, you could take one step to your right with your right foot, cross your left foot to the right, bring it behind your right foot, uncross your feet, take another step to the right, and you could bring your left foot to your right foot and close both feet together. And even then, you would be doing a corny version of the Electric Slide. But you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

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