

**Repository**

LGBTQ Religious Archives Network

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/>

**Title**

Daayiee Abdullah Oral History Interview and Transcript

**Date**

February 3, 2011

**Extant**

1 hour 43 minutes interview (two files) and 1 transcript

**Abstract**

Imam Daayiee Abdullah discusses his childhood in Detroit, and his study of Islam, law, and Chinese language, as well as the discrimination he has faced as a gay imam and how this has influenced his work as an activist and Moslem.

**Biographical**

Imam Daayiee Abdullah is a prominent human and sexuality rights activist within Muslim and interfaith contexts. He was born into a family of eight children and raised in Detroit, Michigan, in an educated community into a family that was successful in business as well as community activists. His parents encouraged him to have faith in something greater than himself, and he was nurtured and baptized at age eight in a Southern Baptist church. Daayiee had exposure to many faiths in his formative years, and he was a precocious and adventurous youth who eventually moved to San Francisco, California, in 1975 at the age of 20.

While in San Francisco, he went to court reporting school and became a stenographer and worked for the Internal Revenue Service for several years. Although at the age of five he knew there was something different about him and he voiced this to his parents at the age of 15, he would not meet his first adult partner until the move to San Francisco. While attending a Metropolitan Community Church, he met a mentor Monty Cardwell who acclimated him to the Black gay community. Daayiee began his own activism within the gay community, which lead him to work as one of the San Francisco coordinators for the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. After spending extended time in Washington, D.C., he decided to move there in 1979.

After arriving in Washington, D.C. he had a vision that told him to study Chinese. He entered Georgetown University as a Community Scholar and quickly began studying Chinese language and literature. While in this program, he was encouraged to go to Beijing University to further his studies. During his tenure at Beijing in the early 1980s, he met some Chinese Muslims that invited him to experience the “real Islam” at their mosque. He was initially drawn to the faith because of its prayer process and continued to visit the mosque but did not formally convert until 1985. His program at Georgetown also concentrated on Arabic which made possible study abroad in the Middle East and gave him the preparation for his further study of Islam and the Quran.

Imam Abdullah was 37 when he completed the degree at Georgetown and entered D.C. School of Law. He graduated from law school and practiced corporate then public interest law for several years before returning to the Middle East in 1997 to teach for the Royal Saudi Air Force. While in Saudi Arabia he researched a homosexual positive interpretation of the Quran. In that work he argues that homosexuality is not an issue in Islam because his comparison of various interpretations of the Quran reveals that interpreters made generalizations and misrepresentations of the original Arabic. He sent that paper to Faisal Alam, founder of the Al-Fatiha Foundation, a GLBTQ Muslim organization. Upon returning to the United States at the end of 1999, he started volunteering with Al-Fatiha as a board member and religious advisor. Daayiee became an authority on homosexuality and Islam and traveled widely lecturing that the Quran does not speak against homosexuality. He frequently lectures internationally on progressive Muslim concepts, interfaith networking and the development of inclusive revisions of Islamic theological thought and interpretations of the shari’ah and fiqh. In addition to this work, he has served as moderator for the Muslim Gay Men Discussion group for over 10 years. His many roles within progressive Islam led many in the gay Muslim community to consider him an imam as he was performing marriages, funerals, and counseling those in the community. Realizing his deep scholastic interest in Islamic studies, Imam Abdullah began training in Virginia at the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences in 2000 with aspirations of becoming a sheikh. Before completing his master’s degree in Shari’ah Sciences and Quranic Interpretation he was kicked out of the school for being openly gay. Despite this shunning, Imam Abdullah has served as an Imam for ten years here in the United States as well as in Europe, Norway, the Netherlands, and the U.K.

Daayiee has been active with Muslims for Progressive Values as an advisory board member and D.C. chapter co-leader. He is the Imam and Educational Director of Masjid el-Tawhid An-Nur Al-Isslaah (Mosque for Enlightenment and Reformation) that is affiliated with the el-Tawhid Prayer Circle of Toronto, Ontario in Canada, and the California-based organization Muslims for Progressive Values. Imam Abdullah’s D.C. mosque is an intentionally inclusive community with mixed prayers, gender equality, queer friendly, intrafaith welcoming and intrafaith involved, and led by an openly gay imam, to show the diversity of their model for progressive Muslim worship across the globe.

Although he has long been involved in actively promoting understanding and awareness of issues of racial, sexual and gender equality both within and beyond Muslim communities, he has an equally productive social life. He enjoys claymation, music concerts, and community work. Finally, Imam Abdullah takes considerable pride in helping other Muslims find the same peace of knowing God that he has found.

## **Scope and Content**

Imam Daayiee Abdullah, one of few openly gay Imams in the world, discusses the path that led him to starting Masjid el-Tawhid An-Nur Al-Isslaah (Mosque for Enlightenment and Reformation) in DC. Born to an educated Southern Baptist family in Detroit, Abdullah was exposed to many faiths as a young person before moving to San Francisco in 1975, where he became more involved with the gay community.

While studying in China, Abdullah converted to Islam in 1985 and went on to become a Muslim scholar, researching a homosexual positive interpretation of the Quran. He continues to present lectures worldwide and is a leader of numerous Muslim groups.

This interview was conducted by Dr. Monique Moultrie, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Georgia State University, and author of Hidden Histories: Faith and Black Lesbian Leadership. She conducted this interview as a consultant of LGBTQ-RAN as part of the oral histories project.

## **Access**

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/daayiee-abdullah>

## **Reproduction and Use**

Copyright to this content belongs to Monique Moultrie and Imam Daayiee Abdullah

## **Languages**

Collection material is in English

## **Custodial History**

This tape was given to LGBTQ-RAN archives by the interviewer.

## **Cite as**

"Imam Daayiee Abdullah | Oral History", LGBTQ Religious Archives Network,  
<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/daayiee-abdullah>.

**Digital finding aid created by Sarah McCall, 2023**

## **Tags**

Islam

Al-Fatiha

Black

International Human Rights

Racism

Theology

Washington, D.C.

Abdullah, Daayiee