

Cape Town couple brings spirit of Ramadan to young readers

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WITH the holy month of Ramadan fast approaching, Zaahied Sallie and his wife, Nurah Tape, launched their new children's book, *We Love Ramadan*, at Mosque Shafee in Bo-Kaap on Sunday, November 30.

Published by Red Kufi Books, it is the second in a planned five-part series, following *We Love to Play Pray*, released in 2016. The book follows three siblings — Yusuf, Suhaib and Maryam — who are also the authors' children. Their natural curiosity for Islam inspired the series.

Sallie explained that using his own children as central characters was not intentional but evolved naturally. 'It was all incidental. We did not sit and one day decide this is what we wanted to do; it developed through observation.'

He believes that the Five Pillars of Islam, which every Muslim is encouraged to uphold, should be fulfilled out of love rather than obligation. Through storytelling, he and his wife discovered a creative and engaging way to introduce these values to young read-

ers.

'The Five Pillars should not just be articulated to the child for them to learn it so that they know it. It should be incorporated through care, love and fun so when they take it on board, it is not just something that they do because they must. They do it because they love to do it,' explains Sallie.

The couple decided that the series had to be 'natural, organic and gentle'.

We Love Ramadan explores the values of the holy month and how it captures the hearts of the three siblings. Sallie chose Cape Town as a central setting to reflect its unique Muslim culture, including moon-sighting at Three Anchor Bay. Bo-Kaap features prominently in the illustrations as one of the primary backdrops — a community rich in Islamic heritage.

Bo-Kaap holds deep meaning for Sallie, who spent much of his childhood there due to his late father, Shaykh Abdurraghiem Hasan Sallie, Imam of Mosque Shafee from 1979 until his passing in 2013. His grandmother also lived in the area, further strength-



A children's story in which every family member played a part. Seen at the launch of *We Love Ramadan* at Mosque Shafee in Bo-Kaap are the Sallie family (from left): Yusuf, Nurah, Maryam, Zaahied and Suhaib.

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ening the family's connection to the community.

Sallie says *We Love Ramadan* continues both the visual and narrative thread of the first book, with his three children remaining central characters throughout future releases. The couple are already working on the third book, provisionally titled *We Love Allah*, and are in the process of

updating and re-releasing their first book.

Reading is an essential part of Islamic tradition. Yet with technological distractions such as phones and computers, children are reading fewer books. Sallie says the key to balancing faith-based teachings with child-friendly storytelling is allowing children to flourish in their natural environments.

Their approach emphasises that laughter, fun and happiness are gifts from Allah, and these emotions should be part of how Islamic concepts are introduced to young readers.

Creating and publishing the book was deeply rewarding, though not without challenges, including tight deadlines and delays from external contributors. Sallie said that understanding one's limits and trusting in Allah SWT helped them navigate these obstacles.

'We do not have control over everything. One of the big ways in which I maintain sanity is to understand that I have agency only in so much. I can do what I can and then I need to turn it over to Allah.'

At its core, *We Love Ramadan* is more than a storybook — it aims to revive a reading culture within Muslim households. Sallie hopes the book, and eventually the entire series, will help ignite a love for stories rooted in Islamic values.

'Children love stories,' he says. The ultimate hope, he adds, is simple: that the series 'enters every Muslim home'.