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What is the Qur'an: An insider's view

The Qur'an commands the believers to use their God-given intellect to interpret the guidance

by Professor Mohamed Elmasry
(1st of a two part series)

The Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be the Word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Arabic over 1400 years ago. The language is unique and the style is exceptional. Although the Arabs at the time of its revelation were experiencing a peak in literary excellence, the Qur'an proved to be a challenge to them. None were able to produce anything similar, not even a short chapter. In the Qur'an it is categorically stated that they would never be able to do it. Had they succeeded, Islam as a religion may not have survived.

But why the challenge and why the failure? This stems from the fact that the Qur'an uses the same unique elegant language to explain a variety of topics: faith, theology, acts of worship, spirituality, as well as complex legal issues such as family laws and the civil and criminal penal codes. The Qur'an addresses such topics with varying degrees of simplicity and sophistication. But the language is always the same: a beautiful classical Arabic styled in poetry-prose, which made it possible for the entire book to be memorised by millions, including those whose mother tongue is not Arabic. Many scholars, Muslims and

non-Muslim, who are fluent in Arabic maintain that the Qur'an is a literary miracle (Mu'jeza).

Even today, the more a person (Muslim or non-Muslim) becomes fluent in Arabic the more he/she can appreciate the beautiful rhythm of the Qur'an, which often brings joy to the hearts. A skilled reciter of the Qur'an often reduces an Arabic-speaking audience to surrendering tears. As Professor H. A. R. Gibb put it, "No man in fifteen hundred years has ever played on that deep toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect." The literary miracle of the

Continued on page 8

The School Advisory Council

A positive and proactive attitude is needed to influence our children's education

by Osman Bakhach

This is a call to those who cherish the future of their children, to those who give priority to building and preserving their children's Islamic identity and personality. The focus of the article is to shed light on the role of the School Advisory Council. To know your right is the first step towards practising it.

In April 1997, the Education Improvement Commission was established to investigate and propose ways and means of improving the education provided by the public school system in Ontario. The Commission sought active consultation from the broad pub-

lic by issuing a discussion paper and requesting input. It received over 1800 written responses reflecting the views of approximately 16,000 people. The Commission then met with provincial associations and held public consultations in 22 communities, in which over 2000 people participated, before issuing its Report on the Role of School Councils (you can access the full report at <http://eic.edu.gov.on.ca/>) The report contained 43 recommendations on how to achieve a greater role for parents in influencing the education of their children. The report states that it supports parents in wanting "to be able to influence

decisions that will have an impact on their children and their local school" such as school councils, which "must be included in the school improvement planning process to ensure that the priorities of the community are reflected in the school's plan."

The membership of the School

Continued on page 8

Muslim Families, Children's Aid, and the "System"

It's time to work together to make a difference

by Asma Warsi

Councillor Judy Sgro wore a head-scarf that afternoon. No, she has not converted to Islam. This was her way of expressing her respect for the Mosque where she had been a speaker. And Mr. Bruce Rivers, Executive Director of the CAS, showed his respect by participating in the prayers with the

Muslims in the prayer hall.

Information booths sponsored by the Police, CAS and Public Health Department were set up in the auditorium at TARIC at this very successful symposium on Saturday, February 7th, 1999.

The focus of the afternoon was to establish communication between Children's Aid Society,

the Police and the Muslim community. Councillor Judy Sgro deserves our special thanks for bringing about this wonderful event and being instrumental in building bridges between the Muslim community and these agencies.

In the recent past there have

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*This Journal contains the words of Allah.
Please treat it with due respect.*

Muslims performing Hajj

Editorial

Hajj is a time for sacrifice!

It's that time of year again. The Islamic calendar year 1419 is coming to an end with the month of Zulhaj. As Muslims, once again we have the opportunity to perform Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah). A small reminder of its significance might help us take note of this important occasion.

Hajj is an effective means for the spiritual unification of Muslims all over the world. It is ordained that adult Muslims, who are physically and financially able, must perform Hajj at least once in a lifetime. Insha-Allah, an enormous number of Muslims from all corners of the world will assemble in Makkah. Nothing will distinguish them from each other. All will be dressed alike, all will be moving in a fixed way, having the same thoughts, and uttering the same words: "Here I am at Your service, O Lord! I am at Your service. You have no partner. I am at Your service. Yours is the Praise, and Yours is the Favour, and Yours is the Kingdom. You have no associate. I am at Your service."

It should be noted that Hajj is not merely a ritualistic ceremony, but a spiritual one with deep-rooted connections to the idea of sacrifice. One of the reminders of Hajj is the everlasting memory of the unparalleled spirit of sacrifice shown to the world by Prophets Ibrahim and Isma'il, peace be upon them.

Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) had a vision three times to sacrifice Isma'il (pbuh), his only son. He tried to execute this vision with the approval of his son, near Makkah. At the time of execution, Allah (swt) substituted his sacrifice with a lamb and saved his son. This story is recorded in the Qur'an (37:102-108) and there is a great lesson in it: a lesson that teaches Muslims to excel in the obedience of Allah (swt), whatever the price may be.

The first incidence of sacrifice as related to us in the Qur'an (5:27) can be traced back to the days of the children of Adam (pbuh). Habil (Able) offered a sacrifice of an animal to Allah (swt). He offered the best of what he had and Allah (swt) accepted it from him. Qabil (Cain) offered the worst and Allah (swt) did not accept his sacrifice.

There are many types of sacrifices including time, effort, money, wealth, property, and even life itself. Allah (swt) condemned and forbade the evil of human sacrifice, which was performed by some ancient nations. Even sacrificing an animal, as one of the rites of Hajj, is not meant to be just the act of shedding its blood. No one should think that meat or blood, as such, is acceptable to Allah (swt). Pagans before Islam used to think that their idols could be pleased by the sacrificial blood itself. In relation to their practices, Allah (swt) revealed this verse to us: "It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah, it is your piety that reaches Him" (Qur'an 22:37).

With Allah (swt), words or claims have no weight. It is actions, with sincere intention and humility, that count before Him. The best sacrifice is the one for the love of Allah (swt) with the expectation that He will reward us in this world and in the Hereafter.

Allah (swt) accepts the offering of our hearts, and as a symbol of such an offer, some visible institution of this sacrifice is necessary. During Hajj, Muslims all over the world are asked to sacrifice an animal in the name of Allah (swt), for His love and mercy (if they can afford it). We have to distribute the meat equally among us, our relatives and friends, and the needy. When we make our sacrifice, we should remember these verses from the Qur'an, as they should also be a motto for us in our daily life:

"Say: 'Verily, my Lord hath guided me to a way that is straight, a right religion, the path (trode) by Ibrahim, the true in faith, and he (certainly) joined not gods with Allah.' Say: 'Truly, my prayer, my service of sacrifice, my living and my dying are (all) for Allah, Cherisher of the Worlds. No partner hath He: This am I commanded and I am the first of those who surrender (unto Him)'" (6:161-163).

We must also keep in mind that it is not the outward acts of sacrifice that matter, but it is to live, according to the Qur'an and the example of our Prophet (pbuh), for the sake of Allah (swt). After all, that is what Islam stands for.

Once again, let this be a reminder for us to reflect on the significance of Hajj. On such a holy occasion, let us strengthen our faith and ask Allah (swt) to establish us firmly in His guidance. Let us learn how to sacrifice for those who need our help. Let us learn how to save the lives of innocent people in all parts of the world. Let us learn how to foster and sponsor their cause. Let us remember that Allah (swt) is testing us and finally, let us pray to Allah (swt) to guide us and to forgive us all. Ameen.

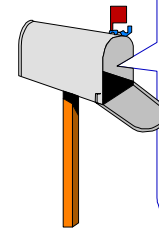
Muhammad Basil Ahmad

Our Mail

The article about Ahmadiya movement was timely, reader says...

Thank you so much for publishing the much-needed article about the Ahmadiyya movement (January-February 1999 issue). Its timing was certainly perfect. Two days after it was made available at our local masjid, one Muslim brother complained that his brother, with his family, had converted to Qadianism; moreover, his brother was now pressuring him into doing the same. In the process, his brother wanted to force him into installing a satellite receiver to receive the Qadiani channel based in the UK. I had never heard of the extent of their commitment to spreading their mes-

sage. As the article points out, this Qadiani movement was instilled by the British to corrupt the minds of the Muslims in India. Now they are going global with the aim of subverting Islam from within. But they are not "within" the Ummah. All Muslim scholars have unanimously determined that the Qadianis cannot be labelled as Muslims. While everyone has the right to believe in what he/she wants to, no one has the right to defame others by making false claims. I can not claim to be a Christian and then preach contradictory beliefs/ideologies. May Allah (swt) reward you best for the



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noble efforts to enlighten the Ummah and others who may be deceived by the Qadianis' false claims. I was glad to access the website of Dr. Rashid, and was very pleased with the wealth of information it contains. I think it's a must for every Muslim and non-Muslim who is interested in finding out the truth about this sect.

Wassalaam.

Mustafa Lahloub

...but another reader is not too happy about the article

I read with deep interest and profound apprehension Dr. Rashid's article on the "Ahmadiyya Movement in (Against) Islam," which was published in the January-February 1999 issue of The Ambition.

Information pertaining to the historical origin and development of the Ahmadiyya movement, together with certain aspects of its political alignment of orientation proved to be interesting and useful. However, now that we are living in Canada where Muslims from all over the world, irrespective of their ethnic origin, theological or "sectarian" affiliations, have the unique opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue in order to foster understanding, unity, and co-operation. I failed to understand the rationale or logic behind the publication of such a divisive and mean-spirited article. Indeed, I found the article to be neither conducive to trust among Muslims nor "to fostering Islamic views" and values, among the most important of which are tolerance, rationality and compassion.

The days of "The British Empire In India," during which time the colonial authorities used the

"divide and rule" policy to weaken the Muslims are long bygone. It is about time that instead of wasting our time and resources by emphasising our differences and dwelling on the destructive and useless, as well as endless, notion of who is "in" and who is "against" Islam among those who claim adherence to the faith, we should try to stress our commonalities, recognise the very fundamental right of every person to call himself/herself a Muslim, and thus begin to practice one of the basic tenets of Islam, namely, tolerance, especially among the Muslims themselves, including those who wish to be Muslims. No one has a monopoly over "the Natural Way," that is, Islam.

Let us not forget that God, through the Holy Qur'an, commands the believers to "invite in the way of your Lord with wisdom and the best of speech, or advice, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious."

The Ummah has to get beyond the petty politics of ethnicity, race, madhabs or schools of thought, and sectarianism, and work toward continuously re-focusing on global realities facing

the Ummah and the ultimate goal of living within the bounds of Islam.

Ibrahim Hayani

[Ahmadis are not a "school of thought" within Islam and have been declared by Muslim scholars as non-Muslims. Their claim to being called Muslims is not only offending and hurtful to Muslims, but it is also deceiving. Just as Christians believe in Moses (pbuh) but are not called Jews, Muslims believe in both Moses and Jesus (pbuh) but are not called Christians; Ahmadis follow Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as their prophet and hence are not in the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) anymore.

The article did not mean to instigate hatred against them but to educate Muslims and non-Muslims alike about the truth and the history of this movement so that people can make an informed and rational decision. We respect all religions but can not condone false prophets in the name of tolerance. Ahmadis will only earn respect when they come out of the closet and stop disguising as Muslims.]

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The Ambition

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Sister Wilma

Muslim families and the system

continued from page 1

been incidents when Muslims families through ignorance of the Canadian laws, have undergone the trauma of having their children removed from their homes and placed in non-Muslim foster homes.

It was indeed a very informative session and it is hoped that it won't be the last.

Among the guests and speakers were Councillor Judy Sgro, Bruce Rivers, Executive Director of the CAS, Wahida Valiante of Hidayat Muslim Services, Mohamed Gilao of the Somali consultative committee Theresa Monaghan, the child abuse co-

ordinator of the Metro Police, Bonnie Shipman of the public health department, and Barbra Siddiqui of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women.

The program started with the recitation of the Qur'an and followed by a short speech by the Imam, Faisal Abu-Jihad. The Imam presented the Islamic concept of a family as being the building block of the society. "Since Islam is not a religion but a way of life, children's needs must be met according to the guidance of the Qur'an," he said.

In her short speech, Judy Sgro emphasized the need to open the

doors of communication between the community and the CAS and the police. She stressed that more participation by the Muslim community will help make things better for all.

Bruce Rivers explained the role of the Children's Aid Society. There are 54 branches of the CAS across Ontario in different jurisdictions, he said. CAS follows the laws of the province to protect children in many different situations, e.g. abused, abandoned, orphaned or neglected children. There were only 10 Muslims employed by CAS and the need was a lot more, he told the audience.

Theresa Monaghan, the child-abuse co-ordinator of the Metro Police shed light on the procedure that is used when a case of abuse

is reported. The abused child is the first one to be interviewed by the police. Witnesses and siblings are questioned and the parents are investigated. The police, school system and the Children's Aid Society work hand in hand to protect the child from any possible abuse.

Wahida Valiante, who has been involved with social work for many years and knows the system from the inside out, stressed that Muslims should get involved with the agencies so that satisfactory service is provided to our community and the agencies can work with us rather than working against us.

Bonnie Shipman from the Public Health department also told about different services and help

available to new and expecting mothers.

All these programs are available free of cost. Agencies are willing to work with us. They want Muslims to come and join hands with them in educating them about their culture and preferences so the system may work better for everybody. It is suggested that Muslims become involved as volunteers, sit at committees, be foster parents, identify and solve problems before they go out of hand, and take their share of the responsibility. The big question now is: Are we willing to donate some of our time and take advantage of the facilities or would we rather bicker and complain about how unfair the system is?

A BALANCED LOOK

by Sister Wilma

So much is written about the negative things that happen in our society. This tends to colour people's thinking and outlook on life. In order to present a more balanced approach to news reporting, more space should be designated for articles which uplift and motivate people. The written word is a powerful tool which can be used for both good and evil.

If we know of positive things going on in society, should it not be our duty to present these good things as well?

Islam is a holistic religion which enjoins good and forbids evil (Qur'an, 3:110). Let us make a positive contribution to society so that people may realise that the stereotyping of Muslims does not present an accurate picture.

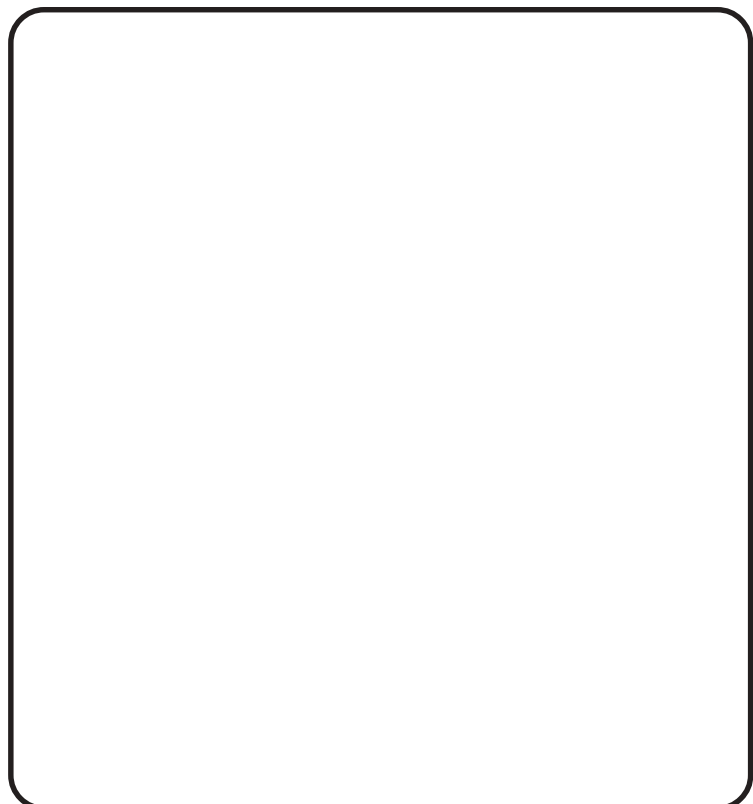
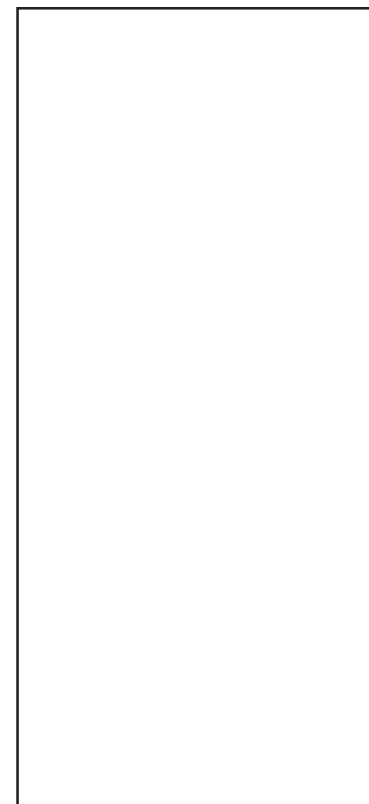
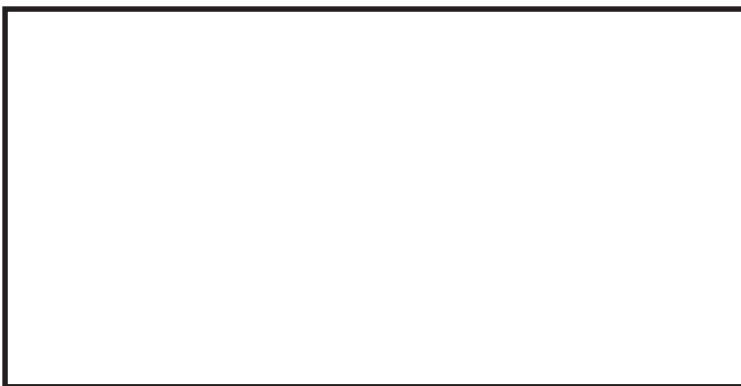
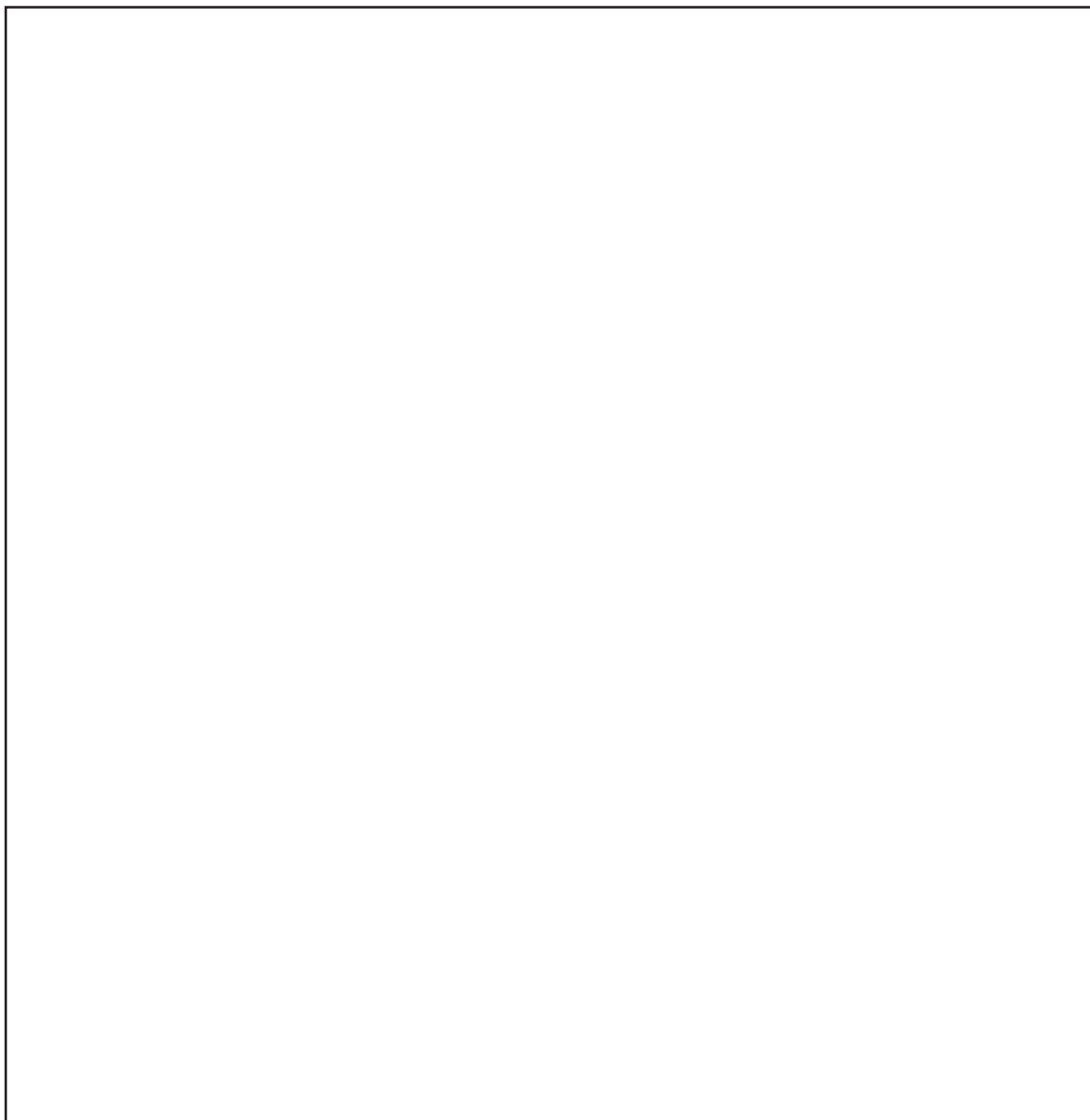
Let individual Muslims shine in the corner where Allah has placed them so that they can be seen as a bright light in a dark and sad world.

Let us be God's people, respectful to all, and a quiet but positive influence among our neighbours and in our chosen country.

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The Ambition



Politically Active

Many people gripe about government and politics in Canada. A few seek elected office themselves, but very few amongst these have realistic opportunities to be elected. It can be a long and difficult road to put oneself in the right position and even then there are no guarantees.

It is not well-known among the Muslim community that several politicians with Muslim

backgrounds have in fact been elected to offices in the past and continue in the present, including some in governing parties.

Part of the reason for their obscurity is that many of these candidates have not identified strongly with Islam, either because they are not very religious or because it was not in their political advantage to do so. However, now there are encouraging signs that members of our community who do publicly identify and associate with Muslims and Islam are finally coming forward to give it a try.

The Ambition, as an independent, objective, and community-based newspaper is in a unique position to profile these candidates in a manner that will not only introduce them to you, but to seek to find relevance for you in their efforts.

As none of these candidates are running for positions of religious leadership, their evaluations must be made having in mind the broader context of the balancing of the interests with other communities.

Insha Allah, there will be a series of interviews towards these objectives.

Tarek Fatah

by Naseer Syed

During the last few years, for political and social issues, one of the community's most vocal, prolific and visible activists in Toronto has been Tarek Fatah. He has been a presence on television, newspapers, and the Internet. Yet his background, which contributes to his activism and publicity skills, is not widely known.

Born in Karachi, Pakistan to a Punjabi family that migrated from Bombay, Mr. Fatah, now 49 years-old, has a diverse background and education. His grandfather was an Indian Consul-General for France in India before Partition and his grandmother was French. He studied Biochemistry, English Literature, Journalism, and Computer Science. During his studies he met and married his wife of 25 years, creating a family union across Sunni/Shia and Punjabi/Gujrati lines.

Most of his career has been spent in communications. He was an associate editor of The Sun newspaper in Karachi, then a television reporter/producer for Pakistan Television. He and his family left Pakistan in 1978 after the military take-over, and went to

Saudi Arabia, where he worked in advertising for the next 10 years. Concerned about the impact of Saudi Arabia's restrictions on his young daughter, Mr. Fatah again moved his family, this time to Canada. He remembers that on his second day in Canada, after arriving as an Independent Immigrant in Montreal in 1987, he was inspired by a television documentary on Tommy Douglas, the founder of what is now the New Democratic Party (NDP).

Soon thereafter, the Fatah family discovered that their second daughter was autistic and because of expected language difficulties they decided to move to Ontario. The family settled in Ajax, attracted in part by the Cricket Club. Mr. Fatah tried to continue in the advertising industry, but he found it difficult to break in. In fact, he was told, by the few racial minorities that did work in the industry, that people of colour would not be given positions on handling client relations. Rather, they would be relegated to technical positions only. Here, in his own words, he first saw the "insidious, deep racism in [this] society."

The Fatahs entered the dry-cleaning business and Tarek studied computer programming at George Brown College, and later worked as a computer administrator for an insurance company for a while. It was when he joined Amnesty International that he first learned about the NDP from activists and eventually got in touch with the local party. In 1993, when political staff positions opened in the NDP Provincial Government of Bob Rae, Tarek worked first with the Minister of Citizenship, Elaine Ziemba, as a scheduler, then as an advisor to the Premier on visible minority issues. It was there that Fatah said he saw that South Asians were really not serious players on the political scene.

He says that the South Asian Muslim community does not meet politicians for advocacy of issues. "They go for photographs, to flaunt their association, form friendships and entrench in the

culture of sycophancy. They're there to sell [their] credentials and personality rather than the issues of the community."

In 1995, Mr. Fatah ran as the NDP candidate for the riding of Scarborough-North (now Scarborough-Rouge) and managed to get 20% of the votes, although losing to the Liberal Candidate, Alvin Curling. He says that his campaign had no real expectation of winning and in fact he would expect to lose many times before winning. However, he ran to bring issues to debate in the public field. He says that goodwill doesn't last forever, therefore legislation must be asked for.

For the NDP nomination in the 1995 race, he had to persuade the existing members of the Riding Association as well as recruit new members, reaching out to a broad base, including Pakistanis, South Asians, and the Black community, and countering the suspicion peo-

ple had of Muslims. Eventually, his opponents for the nomination race dropped out and Tarek was acclaimed as the NDP candidate for the riding.

Since that general election, Mr. Fatah has been involved in many other activities including the Canadian Alliance for Fairness and Equity (CAFE), the Urban Alliance, and the Scarborough Muslim Association (SMA). With the SMA, Mr. Fatah hosted the Muslim Chronicles on Vision TV for two years. He eventually left when he felt his editorial independence was being curtailed.

Since 1996, until recently, Mr. Fatah had been the Media Coordinator for the NDP Caucus at the Legislative Assembly at Queen's Park. He says he is proud of his party which through his efforts adopted two very important positions: the lifting of the embargo on Iraq and the right of self-deter-

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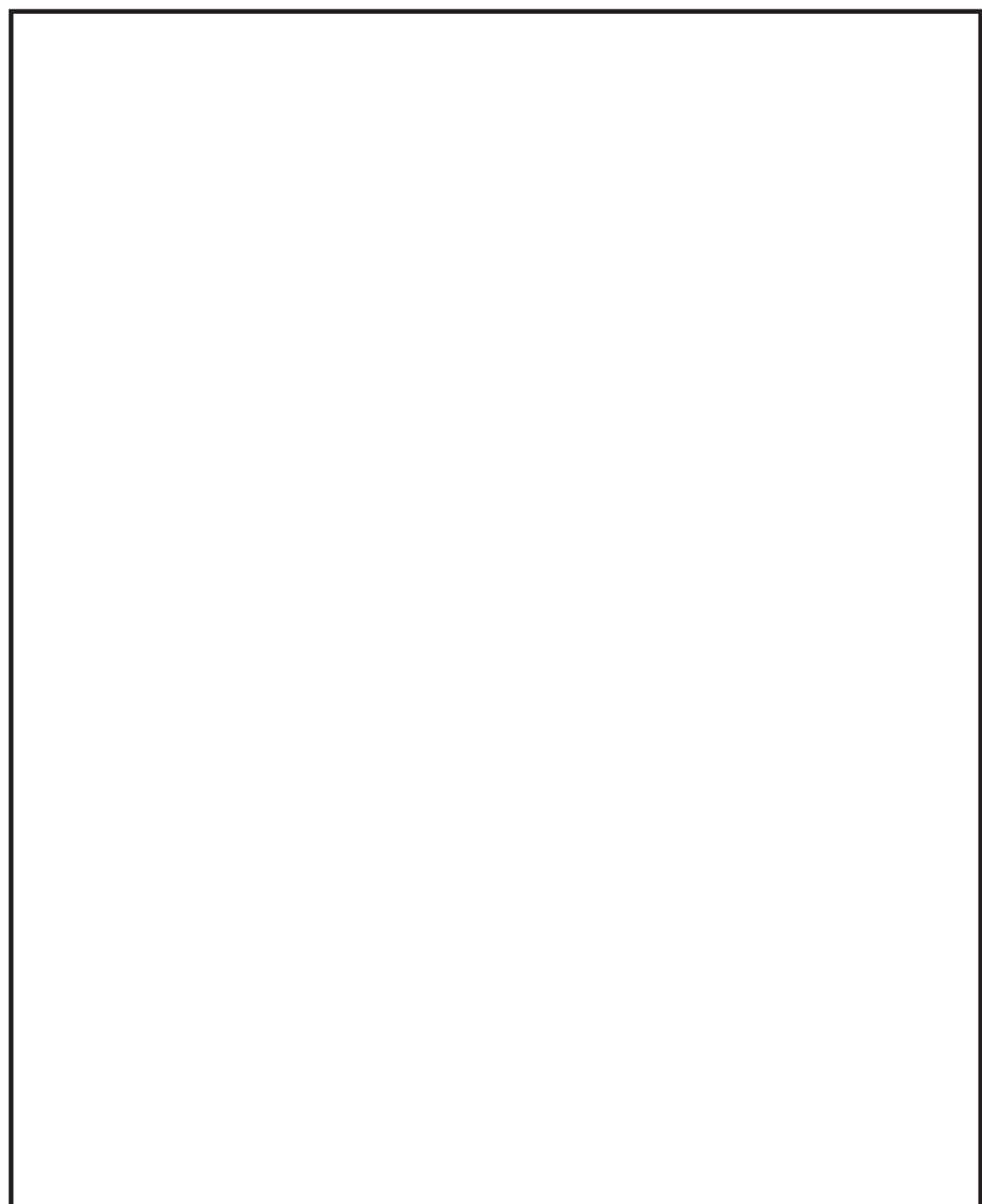
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Humour

Three Wishes

by Naseer Syed

This following joke is intended as a light-hearted commentary and not meant to offend anyone.

Three friends, a Muslim, a Christian and a Jew had travelled to a mountainous retreat in the desert for contemplation and debate. In a cave in which they took refuge for the night they found an ancient lamp, which they lit for illumination. A magical Jinn appeared.

"My masters, for freeing me I shall grant you three wishes. One for each of you," he says. "But, make not haste. You may make your wishes at any time." Then the Jinn disappeared.

After a little bewilderment, the three friends return back to their homes. A few days later they meet again. They discuss the encounter with the Jinn and the Muslim invites his two friends to make their wishes first. The Christian defers to his Jewish brother, who accepts the offer. After a few moments he says, "My family and my people have suffered greatly through-out the centuries. I wish that there was no more anti-Semitism in this world".

"Granted" says the Jinn's voice in each of the friends' ears.

Suddenly, the Jew disappears. The Muslim and the Christian are surprised and look around for their friend. They call his home

and find that his family is not there either. When they go to his synagogue, it too is gone. Soon they discover that all the Jews in the world have disappeared and no one remembers them.

"Wow!" says the Muslim. "It was weird how he got his wish."

"Yeah," says the Christian, "We better be careful what we wish for."

During the following week there has been increased rivalry between Christians and Muslims throughout the world as missionary activities are intensified. When the remaining two friends meet again, they are a little saddened at the departure of their friend and at the increased tension between people

of their own faiths.

"Based on what's been happening, I have given my wish lot of thought," says the Christian. "I wish that all the Muslims in the world were united with the Christians in one faith as brothers".

"Granted" says the Jinn's voice again in their ears.

The two friends look at each other. Both of them are still there.

"Are you o.k.? How are you doing?" asks the Muslim to his friend.

"Alhamdulillah!" replies the (former) Christian. "Shall we go now. I think it's time for Salaat, isn't it?"

The Muslim is overjoyed, yet saddened at the same time, as he realizes that his Christian friend has become a Muslim. "Now there will be harmony and peace

in the world, but will I have no one to debate and argue theology with?" he thinks to himself.

However, as the weeks go by, rather than there being peace in the world, conflicts increase. Muslims divide into classes, nationalities and sects, oppressing and fighting each other. The last friend, seeing all this dissension, makes his wish in frustration. "I wish all the Muslims could be united!" he cries.

"Granted" says the Jinn's voice.

All the Jews return and the Christians revert to their former faith. The Muslims continue their divisions but become united in arguing and complaining about the conspiracies of Jews and Christians against them.

Words of Wisdom

I can please only one person per day. Today is not your day. Tomorrow isn't looking good either.

Tell me what you need and I'll tell you how to get along without it.

On the keyboard of life, always

keep one finger on the Escape key.

I don't have an attitude problem. You have a perception problem.

Never argue with idiots. They drag you down to their level then beat you with experience.

There are very few personal problems that cannot be solved by a suitable application of high explosives.

Accept that some days you're the pigeon and some days you're the statue.

I don't suffer from stress. I'm a carrier.

Smiles

"That cat is pretty dirty," Mrs. Monroe told the little girl.

"Yes," the girl said. "And she's even prettier clean."

FATHER: Pru, why don't you clean your face? I can see what you had for breakfast this morning.

PRU: What was it?

FATHER: Eggs.

PRU: Wrong, Pop, that was yesterday.

Tarek Fatah

continued from page 4
mination for Kosovo.

Mr. Fatah is active on Internet e-mail lists and has started up the "Progressive Muslims Network." When asked about some controversial statements attributed to him on religious issues about women in Islam, he tried to clarify his concerns. He said that no one should be forced to have a dress-code against their will. Although he believes there is no reference in the Qur'an to a compulsory covering of the head and hair for women, he asserts that women who do, should have the absolute right and authority to do so. He says that both extremes are bad. The Taliban in Afghanistan demand head and full body covering for women, while the government in Turkey severely restricts them from doing so. Also of

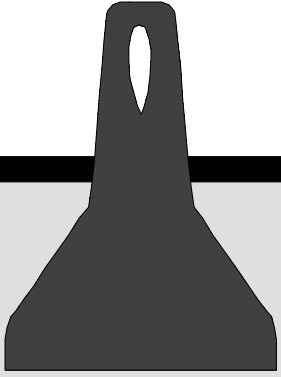
concern for Mr. Fatah is that in Muslim or Islamic social gatherings, women shouldn't have to sit at the back. He will not take a position on female Imams or how men and women should be placed for prayer, saying that is up to the scholars. However, he believes women should be allowed and encouraged to speak up, participate, and assume community leadership positions.

Currently, Mr. Fatah is taking a break from politics and refreshing his computer science studies. But politics are not that far away from his heart or mind. The NDP has eight ethnic committees including the Arab, Iranian, and African committees, and Mr. Fatah is Co-Chair of each, advocating "meaningful politics" for these communities. Also of impor-

tance is that Mr. Fatah has registered to seek the NDP nomination in the provincial riding of Scarborough-Centre, currently held by Progressive-Conservative Marilyn Mushinski.

Although in the past, through his contacts and position, Mr. Fatah has brought Muslim issues and representatives together with the NDP, he says that he will not promise to get meetings for anyone. Rather, his focus will be to raise the profile of the Muslim community in Canada, through whom Canada can learn. He says that Muslims can solve issues for the broader community in social and economic matters. However, they must speak for those who have no voice and must build alliances with non-Muslim communities.





Matrimonials

1. *Sunni Muslimah, 23 years old, Canadian-born, from a well-settled practising family. Prefers sincere, honest, ambitious Sunni Muslim. Inquiry #84*

2. *Professional, 44 years old, 5'10", divorced Muslim looking for a Muslimah, between the ages of 28-38 years of age with Canadian status. Interests include physical fitness, golfing, tennis and reading. Inquiry #85*

3. *Sunni Muslim parents are looking for a suitable match for their 30 year old daughter between the ages of 30-35 preferably. Seeking a practicing Muslim, who is university educated as well as well established. Inquiry #86*

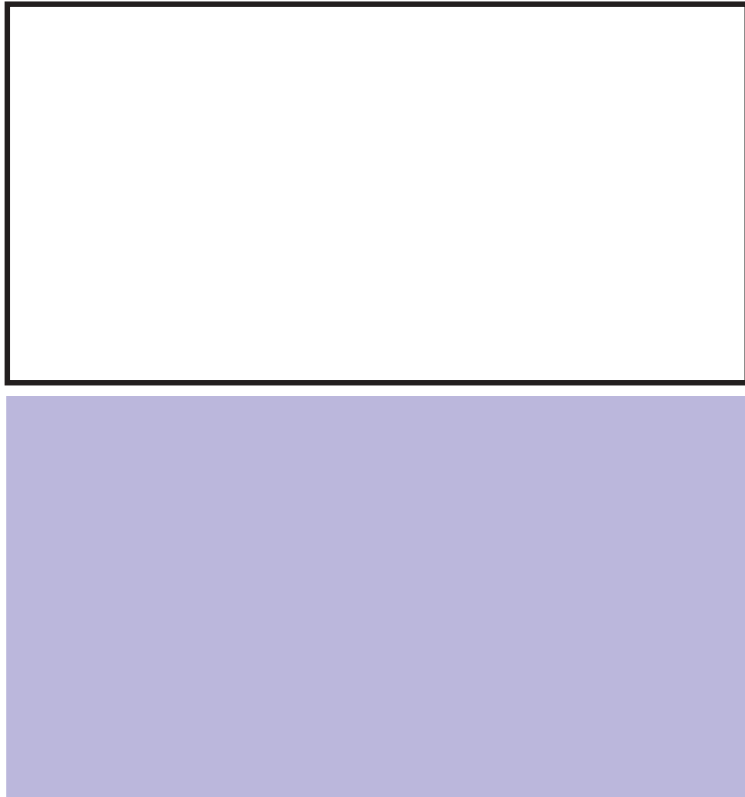
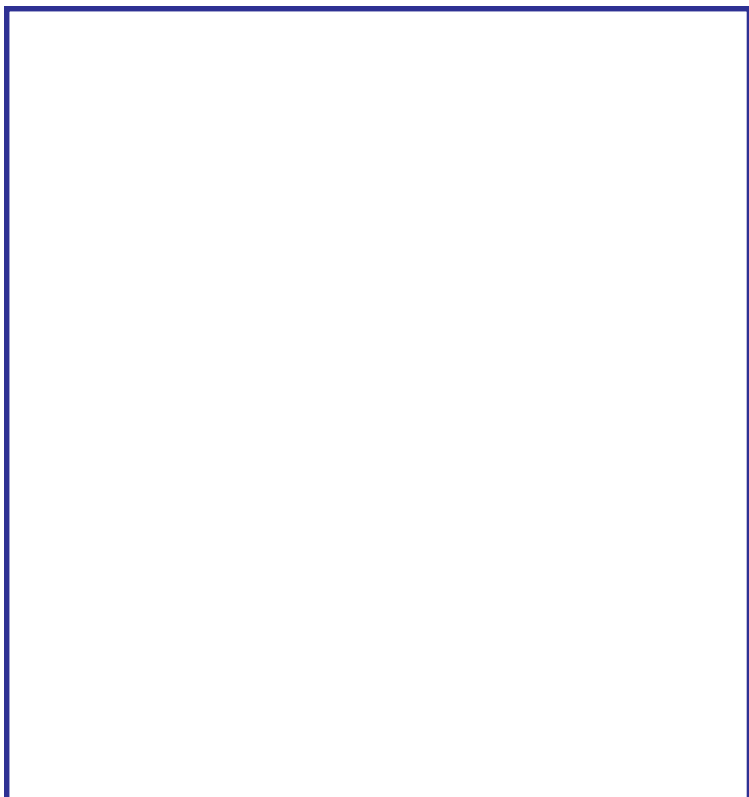
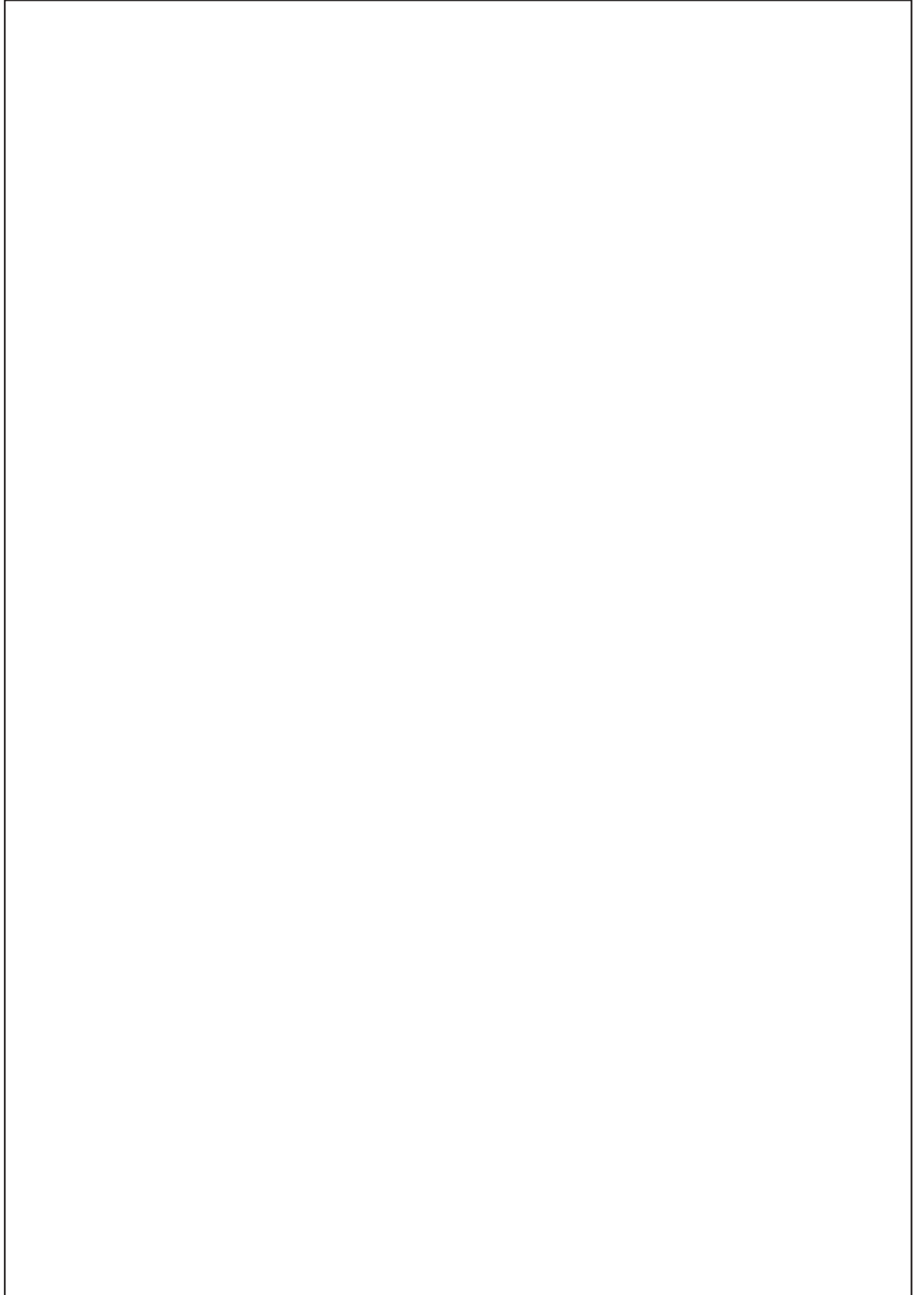
Matrimonial ads are published for your service but *The Ambition* does not take any responsibility of any sort.

Address your responses to *Matrimonials c/o The Ambition* and include the inquiry # on the outside of the envelope.

The Ambition accepts Matrimonial ads at \$15 for 3 lines per single insert. Additional lines are extra. They must be pre-paid by cheque or money order. To place an ad call Sister Wilma at (416) 247-0948.

The Ambition

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The Ambition
is distributed free of charge every two months at several mosques in and around Metro from as far as Kingston & Oshwa in the east to Brampton, Burlington, Kitchner and Hamilton in the west. You can also pick up your copy at some Muslim grocery stores.

What is the Qur'an?

Continued from page 1

Qur'an is one of several, which include the mention of future events and scientific principles that were later confirmed.

The non-believers at the time of the Prophet charged that the Qur'an was not the Word of God. Their claims ranged from: Muhammad wrote it himself; he copied it from Christian and Jewish writings; other people or alien beings helped him; it was a type of magic; he was possessed; he was just a clever poet. These non-substantiated claims are recorded in the Qur'an along with their rebuttals. Both are integral parts of the Qur'an and both are recited by Muslims in their daily prayers. Such claims do not offend Muslims as the Qur'an states that the free choice of faith is a God-given human quality which must be respected.

The Qur'an states that it contains God's Divine timeless guidance. However, the Qur'an commands the believers to use their God-given intellect to interpret that guidance. The interpretation of the Qur'an is at two levels. One is at the personal level as the Qur'an states that God made it easy for everyone to understand it. In Arabic, or in a good translation, a vast majority of the Qur'anic verses lead to direct and simple interpretation, readily available to be applied in one's life. Thus the difficulty is in practising the Qur'an, not in understanding it. The other level of interpretation is at the scholarly level. More popular versions of such scholarly interpretations are available as aides to one's personal interpretation. In Islam there is no Church. Hence, every Muslim is responsible for his/her own interpretation and practice of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an was very success-

ful in educating the early Muslims into becoming fully developed humans, spiritually, mentally, and physically, at both the individual and community levels. It did that in a quantum step: achieving a huge positive differential quality in the shortest time for the benefit

of the maximum number of people at the least social cost. The Qur'an taught the early Muslims the true meaning of (and how to exercise) tolerance, love, mercy, justice, peace, worship, happiness, success, pleasure, knowledge, trust, piety, equality, sincerity, hope,

gratitude, patience, truthfulness, and humility. It also taught the true meaning of (and how to avoid) suffering, arrogance, envy, miserliness, greed, jealousy, hypocrisy, and heedlessness. The Qur'an was also very effective in virtually eliminating social ills such as

drinking and gambling, bigotry, monopoly, over consumption, adultery, violent crimes, and reducing the gap between rich and poor.

Professor Arnold J. Toynbee suggested that Islam has the answer to "two sources of danger facing our modern Western society: race consciousness and alcohol, and in the struggle with each of these evils the Islamic spirit has a service to render, which might prove, if it were accepted, to be of high moral and social value." He goes on to explain that "the extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue; for, although the record of history would seem on the whole to show that race consciousness has been the exception and not the rule in the constant inter-breeding of the human species, it is a fatality of the present situation that this consciousness is felt and felt strongly by the very peoples which, in the competition of the last four centuries between several Western powers, have won at least for the moment the lion's share of the inheritance of the Earth." And he further explains: "This (Islamic) spirit may be expected to manifest itself in many radical ways; and one of these manifestation might be a liberation from alcohol which was inspired by religious conviction and which was therefore able to accomplish what could never be enforced by the external sanction of an alien law."

Prof. Elmasry is an engineer, researcher, academic scholar, community leader, philanthropist and a social activist. He is a faculty member of Middle East Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada

School Advisory Council

Continued from page 1

Council includes parents and guardians of students enrolled in school (they must form the majority of the Council's membership), a community representative (a Muslim neighbourhood with a sizeable student body in a school is entitled to be represented at the Council), a student representative, the principal, a teacher, and a non teaching staff member.

The School Council must be consulted on scheduling holidays and the beginning and end of the school year (the report states that "a school with a large Muslim enrolment may wish to ensure that exams or major projects are not scheduled during Eid"), school and board codes/policies on student behaviour (currently, the Toronto District School Board is drafting an "Anti-Racism and Ethno-Cultural Equity Policy"), program and curriculum priorities, community use of school facilities (Muslims may use the school facilities to hold an Eid party), etc.

Therefore, it's up to us to practice our right to ensure that our voice is heard when it comes to shaping and regulating the education of our children.

The Educational Committee at Salahuddin Islamic Centre has launched a drive to encourage the Muslim community to play a proactive positive role at the School Council level with the hope and goal that the community will gather enough momentum to influence the higher level apparatus;

in specific, we would like to see Muslim members on the school boards.

Action plan suggested and recommended by the Committee is as follows:

Every Muslim needs to be aware of issues and perspectives involved in his/her child's education, assign it due priority, and should strive to know his/her rights as well as know the ways and means of how to influ-

ence the educational system his/her child is subject to. In order for us to have a say in what goes on in our kids' schools we have to be there; it's our right to be absent and not worry about all the brainwashing, as much as it is our right to strive to play a positive role in our kids' education.

Muslim parents need to participate in their local School Councils. Phone the school; inquire about the next meeting of the School Council; ask for the minutes of past meetings and be there to attend future meetings. Let the first meeting be a learning experience for you. Go there as a listener first, so that you learn what goes on and get to know the other members. You are entitled to receive training from the Ministry of Edu-

cation for you to be an effective Council member.

Pass on the message to your Muslim neighbours. Seek their active participation in the process;

hold public gatherings for the community at the mosque, community centre, or even the school itself (you may discuss the idea with the principal of the school for him/her to attend and brief the Muslim parents about the role of the School Council; also, you

can ask the chair of the Council to attend).

In order for us to learn and benefit from each experience, please notify the Educational Committee at Salahuddin Islamic Centre about your activities, problems, and successes. The Committee is setting up an Educational Information Bank for the Muslim community across the GTA, but we badly need participation from the rest of the community. You may address your messages by calling the Islamic Centre at (416) 264-3900 or fax at (416) 264-3343 to the attention of Br. Osman Bakhach, whose home phone number is (416) 441-6100. You may e-mail him at obakhach@globalserve.net or call Br. Mohamad Khaled at (416) 335 8685.

It's our right to be absent and not worry about all the brainwashing or to play a positive role in our kids' education

From the Qur'an

And they feed for the love of Allah the indigent, the orphan, and the captive; (saying) "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: No reward do we desire from you nor thanks."
(Qur'ân 76:8-9)

From the Hadith Sayings of The Prophet (pbuh)

Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said three times: "By God he is not a believer." The companions said: "O Prophet of God, who is that?" The Prophet (pbuh) said: "He whose neighbour is not safe from his high-handedness."

Sahih Muslim

Take Time for Family

by Councillor Elizabeth Brown

Many family problems arise because of lack of time. We are busy working, going to school, helping family, relations, friends and others in the community. Sometimes we become so busy that we run out of time.

Please take the time to read to your children and take the time to let them read to you. Parents can learn too and the shared time will be wonderful memories forever. The experience will help the children cope with life and learn better.

Take time as a family to visit

the library, the fire hall, the Toronto Zoo or African Lion Safari, or Black Creek Pioneer Village. Visit museums and parks and places of worship.

Teach your children your faith, culture, your heritage and your personal family history. Teach them where they came from and then take the time to learn about Canada and to teach them about Canada. Taking this time will be the most valuable resource you can spend on you family. The government can not give your children what you can give them by spending TIME with them.

Shake it off and step up

By Anonymous

A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule 'braying' - or - whatever mules do when they fall into wells. After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened... and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

Initially, the old mule was hys-

terical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back...a thought struck him (as if mules could think).

It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back...*he should shake it off and step up!* This he did, blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage him. No matter how painful the blows, or distressing the situation seemed the old mule fought "panic" and just kept right on shaking it off and stepping up! You're right! It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well! What seemed like it would bury him actually blessed him...all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.

THAT'S LIFE! If we face our problems and respond to them positively, and refuse to give in to panic, bitterness, or self-pity...The adversities that come along to bury us usually have within them the potential to benefit and bless us! Remember that FORGIVENESS—FAITH—PRAYER—and HOPE...all are excellent ways to "SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP" out of the wells in which we find ourselves!

We invite writers, interviewers, community news reporters, story writers for children, etc. to send us their contributions. Please send your articles by March 31st, 1999 to be included in March/99 issue. We welcome new and budding writers.

Include your full name, address, and phone number. You can send your picture and a little introduction about yourself if you wish.

Newsroom

So That You May Know Me: Mike Harding sentenced to community work with Muslims

by Sister Wilma
Staff Reporter

The Ambition, one of the targeted Muslim organisations in the Hate Crime perpetrated by Mr. Mark Harding, is very pleased with the decision of Chief Justice Sydney Linden.

In his wisdom, Chief Justice Linden has seen the value of community service within the Muslim community and sentenced Mr. Harding to serve his sentence among us.

We applaud this sentence so that Mr. Harding may get to know us as God-fearing and God-loving people who are seeking to serve God and serve humanity.

It is our hope that Mr. Harding will benefit from this exposure to Muslims and will be able to overcome the negative stereotypic images which unfortunately may have been fostered by negative media reporting and perhaps, most importantly, by the poor practice of Islam by Muslims he may have met along the way.

As a community, this should be a lesson to us to remember that we all represent Islam and people judge Islam by what we do, or don't do.

Let us all remember God in everything we do so that people will be attracted to our good behaviour and thus seek God.

A Tale of Goodness and Kindness

Sister Wilma, Staff Reporter

Goodness sprang to life in the face of danger and was demonstrated by kind people from the Sackville/Dundas Street area of Regent Park.

On the way to work, a Muslim woman fell in the middle of the street and hit her head on the streetcar tracks.

Kind residents of Regent Park ran into the street and surrounded the woman so that the oncoming traffic would not hit her as she lay there bleeding.

A young Police Constable covered her with his coat and knelt beside her until the ambulance came after a considerable delay.

Due to the quick action of concerned human beings, what could have been a tragedy, turned into a positive story of human kindness on the part of concerned citizens and of our Toronto Police force.

Shaikh Hamza Yusuf comes to Toronto

Reported by Farheen Warsi

On Friday January 29, 1999, Toronto was honoured to have Shaikh Hamza Yusuf and Shaikh Muhammad Shareef present a lecture called In the Footsteps of the Prophet Peace in Troubled Times. Both speakers reflected on the life of the Prophet (pbuh) and how he represented a way of life that all Muslims should follow. In his lecture, Shaikh Hamza stressed the importance of living a life of piety and gaining fulfilment in life through Islam, not worldly pleasures.

The lecture was organised by Ihya Productions and co-sponsored by the MSA's of U of T, Waterloo, McMaster, Ryerson, and Western, the Muslim Association of York Region, Muslim Word, Talim-ul-Islam, the Forum for Islamic Studies, and the Ar-Rihlah Organising Committee.

It was held downtown, at U of T's Convocation Hall. It was quite heartening to see Muslims from all over Toronto, of different ages and nationalities, come to hear this very enlightening lecture. Convocation Hall, which seats over 1500 people, was full and tickets were sold out before the lecture even began. Despite the large crowd, the planning committee managed to stay organised and accommodated as many people as possible. Insha-Allah, more lectures will be as well organised and popular with the public as this one was.

I. E. I. E. is active in the East End

by our staff reporter

On February 17, 1999, IEIE was represented by Br. Muhammad Saleem Shaikh and Br. Junaid Shaikh at Stouffville Hospital. They discussed the fundamentals of Islam as well as a Muslim patient's needs. It was attended by hospital staff as well as lay pastor visitors.

On February 22, 1999, Earl Haig High School in North York hosted Br. Muhammad Saleem Shaikh, who represents IEIE. The topic of his discussion was called Comparative Marriage and Islamic Marriage. The OAC classes were in attendance.

On February 22, 1999, Br. Adnan, representing IEIE gave a

talk on the fundamentals of Islam to high school students who were invited to the Islamic Foundation.

MSA's Eid dinner attracts crowd

by Farheen Warsi

On Friday February 5, 1999, the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at the University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus, held its 6th Annual Eid Dinner. The event began with a Quranic Recitation, followed by a short lecture by Sh. Faisal Abu-Jihad, Imam of TARIC Masjid, and ended with a simple but tasty dinner.

The lecture, enjoyed by all present, held the title "Muslims: Diverse in Culture, United in Faith". In the lecture, Brother Faisal stressed the importance of Muslim unity, despite our different cultures. He stressed that although many of us have a different background, it is Islam that joins us all into one brotherhood. Brother Faisal enforced the importance of looking at our similarities as Muslims rather than our differences as individuals. The belief in the Shahada has united Muslims in the past, present and future.

The event was well organized and had a turnover of approximately one hundred students and their families. According to one sister present, MSA events such as this are necessary, as they not only provide youth with Islamic knowledge but also act as a social gathering for students to meet new Muslims.

Pass this copy of
The Ambition to a friend
after reading.
Help us bring
the message of Islam
to others.

Recommendations to the Task Group of TDSB

continued from page 12

more holistic education to Muslim children.

* We think that encouraging students to learn about other cultures/civilisations will broaden their understanding of the world and will prepare them to deal more effectively with the rest of the world. Thus the Euro-centric curriculum is not adequate to provide a truly balanced education. When a teacher asks a sixth or seventh grade student to write a report about a hero, the student's choice needs not be limited to a predeter-

mined list. Instead, the student needs to be encouraged to probe and explore other civilisations and their contributions to humanity, both in the past and present.

* In a global economy that is becoming increasingly integrated, it goes without saying that languages are a definite asset which deserve to be maintained and supported. Yet, we'd like to see a clear implementation plan to achieve these goals. Will the Board actively support the teaching of the students' first language, and how?

Things That Matter

Pickup in the Rain

One night, at 11:30 p.m., an old African-American woman was standing on the side of an Alabama highway trying to endure a lashing rain storm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet, she decided to flag down the next car. A young white man stopped to help her; generally unheard of in those conflict-filled 1960's. The man took her to safety, helped

her get assistance and put her into a taxi cab. She seemed to be in a big hurry! She wrote down his address, thanked him, and rode away. Seven days went by and a knock came on the man's door. To his surprise, a giant console colour TV was delivered to his home. A special note was attached. It read:

"Thank you so much for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes but my spirits. Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside just before he passed away. God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others."

Sincerely,
Mrs. Nat King Cole

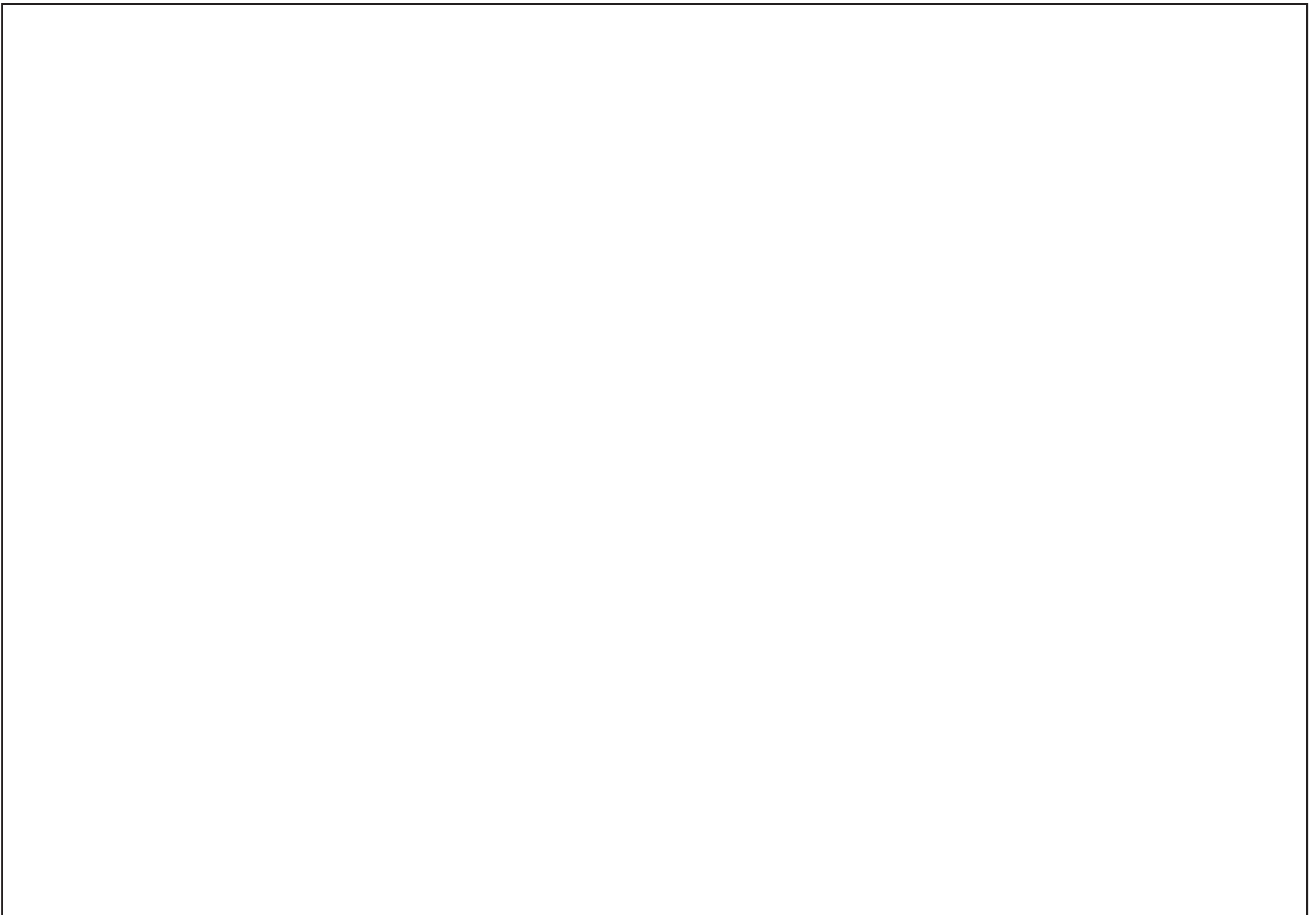
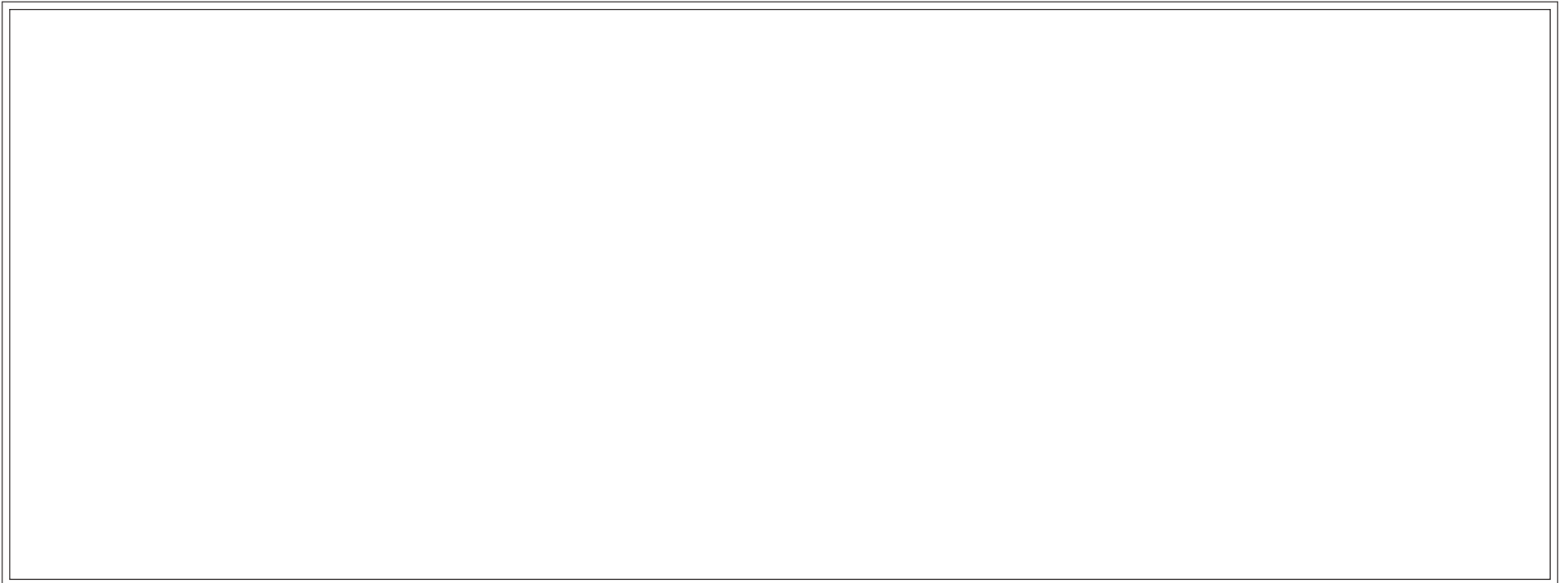
Most Important Question

During my second month of nursing school, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions, until I read the last one: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?" Surely this was some kind of joke.

I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her 50's, but how would I know her name? I handed

in my paper, leaving the last question blank.

Before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade. "Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say 'Hello.'" I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy.



Success Stories Around Us

Romineh Dawood

She uses the knowledge she has gained to concentrate on Islamic ways of investing.

by Aneesa Lakhi

Working for a Fortune 500 company which just happens to be in the very profitable business of database software would seem to be a pretty good place to be at. Speaking to Romineh Dawood, however, one gets the feeling that the place where she is at is only part of her story: How she got there and where she is hoping to go reveal the underlying principles which guide her.

After completing high school, Sister Romineh travelled south of the border to pursue undergraduate studies in physics and economics at Smith College in Massachusetts. Smith College, an all-women's institution, developed Sister Romineh's leadership skills and an increasing awareness of her religious identity. As president of

the Islamic Society at the college, Sister Romineh organized the twenty to thirty other Muslim women who comprised a small percentage of the total student population of about 2000.

Being at the forefront of her community continued when Sister Romineh went to spend a year at Oxford during her third year of undergraduate work. There she was president of the Islamic Society which consisted of about 400 students. Her experiences in England continued when she attended the London School of Economics for graduate studies. London is a place which Sister Romineh speaks of fondly, in part because of the tight-knit community of Muslims which she encountered there. Although still very much in a Western country, she found her-

self in the presence of an Islamic environment as well. Sister Romineh attributes this discrepancy to the large number of Muslims to be found in and around London.

Upon returning from England with a Masters degree in hand, Sister Romineh discovered that there were not many jobs to be found. She was, however, soon hired by the Oracle Corporation, initially as part of an intern program. She worked six months each in support, sales, teaching, and consulting. Although she had no computer background, Sister Romineh was hired by the software database company in part, she thinks, because of her extracurricular and leadership activities, as well as her strong academic background: the company was willing

to train her because they were made aware of her potential.

This focus on potential is a theme which underpins many of Sister Romineh's actions and thoughts. For example, in the summer of 1995 she enrolled in a Canadian Securities course in order to help her with her personal investing strategies. She now uses the knowledge she has gained to concentrate on Islamic ways of investing. She gives workshops on this topic through Islamic organizations in an effort to help others tap into the potential to create their own financial stability in permissible ways.

For Sister Romineh, where one places one's money is a personal decision which must not be made without information and deliberation. She recommends that peo-

ple research companies which interest them: Get in touch with the company, read the financial sections of newspapers, pursue the company's reports, know how the company makes its money and then what it does with that money. And a reasonably surefire way to start investing is with blue-chip companies.

With one's life as well, Sister Romineh feels that analysis and reflection must be incorporated into the daily fabric of one's existence. Although she recognizes that it is not easy to work in the path of Allah, she has chosen to do so, and she acknowledges that this choice must inform all of the other decisions which she makes. It would seem then, that her future path looks bright indeed.

Community in Action

Salaheddine Islamic Centre, TDMEA, and al-Shura submit recommendations to the Task Group of TDSB on Anti-Racism and Ethno-Cultural Equity

by our representative

In response to the current debate regarding the Anti-Racism and Ethno-Cultural Equity policy being proposed at the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto District Muslim Education Assembly, al-Shura, and Salaheddine Islamic Centre conveyed the Muslim community's wish to express support for the draft policy. While the community supports the focus on race, ethnic, and faith communities as being central to any Anti-Racism and Ethno-Cultural Equity policy, it wishes to express serious concern regarding the counter-proposed "Equity For All" policy.

Whereas the "Equity for All" policy attempts to collapse all forms of social difference into a single undifferentiated category of "other," it fails to acknowledge the full inclusion of religious/faith communities in seven of the articles listed . . . Issues of religion and religious discrimination are either absent from these articles or reduced to a generic category representing "other forms of discrimination." We, therefore, see this as a selective and partisan, rather than inclusive policy, which minimises the issues of faith communities, while centering on issues of sexual orientation. Furthermore, we reserve the right to dissent from the ideological views that equate homosexual practices and their corresponding lifestyles with the same status of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, or disability.

As Muslim parents we do not support the inclusion of sexual orientation within the school cur-

riculum. Unlike race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and disability, homosexuality is a moral issue. We resist the school becoming an arbiter of moral values and providing our children with unsolicited information on what our religion regards as deviant sexual practices. Furthermore, since Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights validates the right for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, we reserve the right to conscientious objection from such policies and/or related practices that threaten our religious freedom and sensibilities. The inclusion of homosexual content in the school curriculum violates the religious and moral sensibilities of our community and our children, and as such, we cannot support any policy that attempts to integrate essentially private sexual matters and their corresponding lifestyles into the public knowledge base of our schools. We, as a community, encourage tolerance and non-violence and support the safety of all students in our schools. However we seek to ensure that the moral safety of our students is equally protected and accounted for under any equity policy.

We strongly urge that the TDSB not impose any policies mandating that homosexuality be taught to children against their parent's will or without their knowledge and consent, and therefore acting with disregard to their religious freedom and/or moral sensibilities. Since "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (Article 26 of the

Najm International Corporation, a Toronto-based company has just released Muallim, the Interactive Islamic Teacher, first in a series of Islamic educational home-study software. This crea-

UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights), we strongly voice our objection to any inclusion of discriminatory material in the school curriculum. While we refuse to impose our moral value system upon others, we equally reject any attempt to impose on us unacceptable moral values. We ask that the Executives and Trustees of the TDSB consider that this represents a moral and not purely sociological issue for many faith groups and urge them to seek consultation among religious communities. Furthermore, we submit that any other proposed policies regarding this issue be open to community discussions and that equality of access to any documents be ensured. This requires that the policy be translated into all of the languages of our city, that it is disseminated widely, and that appropriate mechanisms exist for feed-back from all communities.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LETTER:

* Muslims in the West have long suffered from the stereotyping and biases of textbooks, public media, and the entertainment industry. Therefore, it's extremely important that the Anti-Racism and Ethno-Cultural Equity policy be truly implemented with the Muslim community's direct input.

* With Islam being the second largest religion in Canada, it would be beneficial to our children and the community at large to have an objective non-biased curriculum. Equally so, the school staff themselves need to receive the proper training to become familiar with Islam so that they can provide a

continued on page 10

Interactive Islamic Software For Muslim Children

tive multimedia presentation is the first of its kind and is based on today's Islamic school curriculum. Muallim has been authored with children in mind and the challenges of our modern-day society, imparting them with a sound knowledge of Islam. It also provides hours of fun, enjoyment, and learning for the whole family.

The focus of Muallim has been young Muslims, but its importance for all Muslims has not been overlooked. As it is based on Islamic school curriculum, it is a very valuable educational tool, both for a Muslim child as well as the Islamic school. Muallim includes printable audio notes to help learn and recite the Qur'an. Creative click-and-match school activities, interactive audio/video, colourful graphics, and animation teach various concepts of Islam in a creative and effective manner. Sayings

and practices of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) pertaining to an Islamic lifestyle are addressed in a pleasant and practical way.

This software also addresses Islamic etiquette and numerous other aspects such as prayers, the Islamic calendar, Arabic numbers, time, weather, seasons, Muslim holidays, and numerous other issues. Those who wish to learn about Islam can also benefit from this software.

Not intended to replace an Islamic school, Muallim certainly attempts to bring the Muslim teacher home. It is available at most Islamic bookstores in Toronto or could be ordered by calling 1-877-MUALLIM (682-5546). You can also send your e-mail to najm@muallim.net or visit the website at <http://www.muallim.net/>. The local telephone number is (416) 751-5127.

The Ambition Annual Picnic '99

Join us again

for a fun-filled day and Bar-B-Q

Date: Sunday, July 4/99

Time: 12:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Location: To be announced in the next issue

Food served: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

We beat the inflation. No price increase.

Tickets: only 7.00 per person,

Children 2 and under: Free

(please buy tickets in advance)

For more info Call The Ambition at

(416) 740-1491