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Islamic awareness is increasing among the non-Muslim Canadians and many employers are willing to accommodate Muslim employees.

by Imam Abdul Hai Patel

Thirty years ago, I arrived in this country and within two months Ramadan began in December. For the first time, I experienced the shortest fast in my life. Yes, I

can recall 1969, when Ramadan began in the first week of December and as a student, except on the weekend, I did most of my Iftar (breaking of fast) either in the lab or on the Queen St. streetcar.

This year once again, we will experience the shortest fast for most of December, when Ramadan begins on December 9 or 10, 1999 and ends on January 8 or 9, 2000. As I compare my first Ramadan thirty years ago with today, I can share some thoughts on the differences in the observation then and now.

Today, Al-Hamdulillah, we are blessed with a very large Muslim community in the Greater Toronto Area with numerous Masajids, Musallah, and specially arranged venues for Taraweeh and Iftars. Back in 1969, the Muslim community was very small and there were only two Masajids with regular Jumua'ah Salat at the University of Toronto's Hart House.

Iftar gatherings were held at the two Masajids and at U of T. Taraweeh was also held at the two Masajids. Coping with short fasts was a challenge for many students and single people, as we had to come home, prepare meals, and then go to the Masjid for 'Isha and Taraweeh. I was lucky in my first Ramadan, since I was boarding with a Muslim family and was living near the Rhodes Avenue Masjid, where I also led the 'Isha and Taraweeh prayers.

Today there are many families,

Muslim food outlets, and numerous Masajids throughout Toronto and vicinity, where we can stop for Iftar and Salat. This is a tremendous blessing of Allah (swt) for Muslims in the GTA, as we look forward to greet the last Ramadan of this century, according to the Gregorian calendar.

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an: "O those who Believe, the Fast has been enjoined upon you as was enjoined upon those before you so that you may attain piety." Fasting is prescribed by Allah (swt) and is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam. It is a physical and spiritual exercise that intensifies our piety. So let us ask ourselves how we can best maximise our attainment of piety. We need to do a self-evaluation before the beginning of Ramadan as to the level of our relationship with Allah (swt) and then compare it with the level at the end of Ramadan. Is it any stronger than before? If yes, then Al-Hamdulillah (thank God), our fasting has served its purpose. If it remained the same or less, then there were serious deficiencies in our fasting.

The Prophet (pbuh) has enjoined us to enrich our fast with other 'Ibadah (worship). And this is where we have an opportunity to avoid minimising the many blessings of Ramadan, with supplementary Salat (prayers), Zhihr (remembrance of Allah), Sadaqat (charity), and other good acts. The

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Muslim Schools: A View From Within

Her parents were sending her to the Muslim school because they wanted "at least one good one."

by Yahya Emerick

"Most parents send their kids here for reasons other than Islam," lamented the principal of a large Muslim school. "A lot of our students have older brothers and sisters who have gone out of control. They smoke, use drugs, sleep around, and disobey their parents." I knew from my own experience that what he was saying was true. In my first year of teaching I had met the families of many of my students in the Muslim school. What I saw shocked me.

The older siblings were completely and thoroughly non-Muslim in their behaviour and demeanour. One girl had an older brother with an arm full of tattoos! The girl, who had seven older siblings that went through an urban public school told me that her parents were sending her to the Muslim school because they wanted "at least one good one."

On another occasion, I happened to be standing in the school office talking to the secretary when a middle-aged, Indo-Pak couple came in with their teenage daughter. She was wearing tight jeans, no Hijab and a lot of make-up. Her face said it all: She's been around. Her parents, as it turned out, wanted to enrol her in the Muslim school because they didn't want her to become "Christian." Oh... the parents also mentioned that

she had a boyfriend and that they didn't want her to "get into trouble."

She was enrolled in the ninth grade and therefore would be in my Islamic Studies class. As it happened, she didn't know how to pray, she had never made Wudu in her life and she knew nothing of Islamic teachings. She was, for all practical purposes, a non-Muslim with a Muslim sounding name.

Do you see a pattern emerging here? After having been involved with Muslim education for the last seven years as a teacher in Sunday schools, summer schools and full-time Muslim schools, I have had the chance to observe the immigrant Muslim community very closely. I wish I could say the indigenous Muslim community, but the immigrants have not seen fit to spread Islam to native-born Ameri-

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The Millennium Effect

We should not be frightened to face the future, as long as we are mindful of Allah and the Last Day.

by Naseer Syed

People who have grown up under this calendar, have long been culturally conditioned to anticipate something special with the start of a new year. Some of us receive invitations to New Year's Eve Par-

ties or we may hold our own. We may wait in eager anticipation for the stroke of midnight, and when it comes, "Happy New Year!" and best wishes are exchanged. Resolutions are made to accomplish something new or attempt again

at what we had failed to do in previous years. But the upcoming new year will be different, going beyond extra special celebrations and parties that have been planned. With all the media hype we can't help but be aware that we are coming rapidly to the end of the second millennium of the Christian calendar, a milestone of temporal and spiritual significance.

Ironically, the new Christian year will start in the Islamic month of Ramadan. Some Muslims may be torn between two conflicting desires: To adhere to the spirit of Ramadan or to participate in the

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Editorial

If only we knew the rewards of Salat!

The importance of Salat (prayer) in Islam cannot be stressed enough. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) mentioned Salat as the first pillar of Islam after Shahadah (testimony of faith by which one becomes Muslim). Allah (swt) made Salat obligatory upon all the Prophets and Messengers and for all people. For example, when Allah (swt) spoke directly to Moses (pbuh), He said: "Verily, I am Allah! There is no god but I. So worship Me (only) and perform Salat for My Remembrance" (Qur'an 20:13-14). Similarly, Salat was made obligatory upon Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) during his ascension to the Heavens.

Our relationship with Allah (swt) is put into practice, as well as improved and increased, by Salat. Therefore, if our prayers are sound and proper, then the rest of our deeds will be sound and proper, as the Prophet (pbuh) himself stated.

Salat is a type of spiritual purification. If it is performed properly, with true remembrance of Allah (swt) by turning to Him for forgiveness, it will have a lasting effect on us. After we finish the prayer, our hearts will be filled with fear and love of Allah (swt): "Verily, Salat prevents from al-Fahsha' (great sins) and al-Munkar (disbelief)" (Qur'an 29:45).

This repeated standing in front of Allah (swt) five times a day should keep us from sinning and should also wipe out our minor sins. Abu Hurayrah (ra) narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Five prayers and from one Friday prayer to (the next) Friday prayer is an expiation (of the sins committed in these intervals) if major sins are not committed" (Muslim 2:448).

Allah (swt) has ordered us to establish Salat with due care. He has told us to take special care concerning the middle prayer, which is the 'Asr prayer: "Guard strictly the (five obligatory) prayers, especially the middle prayer ('Asr), and stand before Allah with obedience" (Qur'an 2:238).

Unfortunately, there is also a growing number of Muslims who miss the Fajr (dawn) prayer altogether. Motivation must be lacking among these Muslims. When they are required by their jobs or for their own worldly benefits to wake early at dawn, they would no doubt take necessary precautions not to miss such appointments. They would forsake peace of mind and have a restless sleep just for the fear of being rebuked by their bosses. When it comes to Salat, they have no excuse, especially today when we have alarm clocks that can be set to any time we wish.

The problem therefore, is one of laziness. Such people do not know what they are missing, as the Prophet (pbuh) said: "He who observed the 'Isha prayer in congregation, it was as if he prayed up to the midnight, and he who prayed the Fajr prayer in congregation, it was as if he prayed the whole night" (Muslim 4:1379). But alas, our Mosques are becoming virtually empty of people at Fajr, except for a few elderly people and some adults who, with Allah's help, found their way back to the Mosque.

By praying Fajr in congregation, we can show that we are free from hypocrisy and that we have true faith in Allah (swt), for the Prophet (pbuh) said: "No prayer is harder for the hypocrites than the Fajr and the 'Isha prayers, and if they knew the reward for these prayers at their respective times, they would certainly present themselves (in the Mosque) even if they had to crawl." (Bukhari).

Another incentive to pray Fajr on time is to avoid the feelings of depression and melancholy that arise when failing to do so. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "During your sleep, Satan knots three knots at the back of the head of each of you, and he breathes the following words on each knot: 'The night is long, so keep on sleeping.' If that person wakes up and celebrates the praises of Allah, then one knot is undone; when he performs ablution, the second knot is undone; and when he prays, all the knots are undone. And he gets up in the morning lively and happy, otherwise he gets up dull and gloomy" (Bukhari 4/54:491).

We should strive to follow our Prophet's example of praying Fajr on time. Ask your friends, relatives, or neighbours to help wake you up. Once awake, do not linger lazily in bed, as this indicates a lack of enthusiasm to Satan who will try to prevent you from praying.

As a reminder, Allah (swt) has warned not to be neglectful of our Salat due to wealth, family, and other temptations: "So woe unto those performers of Salat, who delay their Salat from their stated fixed times" (Qur'an 107:4-5). Ironically, this verse is from a Surah most of us have memorised and frequently recite during our Salat.

Insha-Allah, if we sincerely try to perform Salat on time, this Ummah will not suffer the fate of the generations that followed the Children of Israel: "Then, there succeeded them a posterity who had given up Salat and had followed their lusts. So they will be thrown in Hell, except those who repent and believe (in Islam) and work righteousness. Such will enter Paradise and they will not be wronged in the least" (Qur'an 19:59-60).

Muhammad Basil Ahmad

Our Mail

An evening with TDMEA

On Monday September 27, 1999, I attended a meeting of the Toronto District Muslim Education Assembly (TDMEA) at the Islamic Foundation in Scarborough. I did so as a representative of the Bosnian Islamic Centre. Seven brothers and six sisters attended the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to continue a discussion on certain policies and practices of the Toronto District School Board that are in direct conflict with the teachings of Islam. These include the promotion of homosexual culture as a part of their recent reforms. It also includes the non-discretionary encouragement of activities such as dances, which affect our sensitivities.

The TDMEA's position has been to ask the Board to take into consideration the feelings of the target groups such as ours before forging ahead with certain activities. It also wants the Board to keep parents, Muslim parents in this case, adequately informed about activities their children would participate in which could be considered as being un-Islamic. The TDMEA's position is therefore, not unreasonable under the circumstances.

Unfortunately, the language used by the TDMEA in its communications may not have been the most sophisticated. It has, therefore, not received the support it deserves from the different segments of the Muslim community.

Halaal and Haram

With reference to the article on *Haram and Halal Foods* published in the September October issue. "O Ye who believe! forbid not the good things which Allah has made 'lawful' for you, and transgress not. Lo! Allah loveth not transgressors. Eat of that which Allah has bestowed on you as food 'lawful' and good, and keep your duty to Allah in whom you are believers." (Al Quran 5:87-88)

One can not base judgement on ingredients alone in a product. One has to know the rules of Ifta (Jurisprudence) and its interpretation and application. One of the fundamental rule is to observe transformation of an ingredient from one state to the other, losing its original properties. If this has occurred the product becomes permissible, (Shami). Some exceptions apply where such product is a major component and its effect is retained. e.g. lard used in bread, pastries etc.

A good example is Neera (sap from Date Palm). It is Halal when sap is running in the early hours of the morning. By noon (fermentation), or by boiling it becomes Liquor. it is now Haram. But when it is boiled again to make Vinegar, it becomes Halal. From Halal to

Haram to Halal by undergoing transformation.

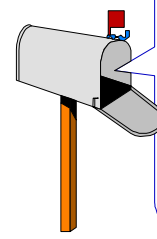
Haram ingredients in products for external applications are permissible, especially when transformed, that includes rubbing alcohol also. Alcohol content in medicines is permissible, if no alternative is available. Alternative is generally not available in all places and its consumption is permissible during illness. Ignorance of these principles have caused untold sufferings for many Babies and sick people in Toronto area that I am aware of. Alcohol is a great disinfectant in healing navel infections after the umbilical cord is cut. Throat infections have caused chronic bronchitis for refusing to take cough syrup.

This does rule out products that contain lard and animal shortening in bread, cookies, and even in many Chocolates especially in UK as my daughters just told me on their return.

In some products they are not ingredients, but they are contaminants and they should also be avoided.

May Allah help us to understand these subtleties better and guide us to consume the Halal.

Imam Abdul Hai Patel



Letters to the editors are published unedited regardless of the paper's policy. We entertain all letters except ones with impolite language. Please include your name, address and telephone number. Only names are published.

A number of well-known Imams in the city appear to have distanced themselves because the very direct approach of the TDMEA made them uncomfortable. This is indeed unfortunate! In issues such as these, the Muslim community should unite in a concerted effort to address the problem instead of getting fragmented for the sake of what may be regarded as political expediency. Our inability to stand united is politically expedient for those who seek to desecrate our values.

Munawwar Merchant

Reader finds The Ambition interesting.

I like The Ambition as I find it interesting especially "Women in Islam and the New Muslims" column.

Waheeda Khan

The Question of Islamic Schools

Assalamu Alikum The following is a quick note that has been in my mind since i first read the article written by Br. Patel on the need for Islamic schools.

While no one disputes the dire need for affordable Islamic schooling to our children, the big challenge is how to achieve this goal.

For instance, at the end of the article there is a note saying to contact Br. Patel regarding this matter, when this issue of paramount importance that it really should be fully discussed openly and community wide through such venues as the Ambition. The Ambition should definitely serve as an exchange medium where the community raises issues of common concern and the ways and means to resolve them.

So then the actual question is

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Muslim Role Models

Maryam (Mary), The Mother of 'ISA (Jesus), (pbuh) *A model of devotion, patience and piety for believers*

by Ayub Azhar Hamid

Maryam, the mother of 'Isa (Jesus), peace be upon him, was a very special woman who was chosen by Allah (swt) for a unique service for the Prophetic Islamic movement.

Maryam's parents were pious servants of Allah (swt). When her mother became pregnant, she vowed to devote her child for the service of Allah in the Masjid of Sulayman (Temple of Solomon).

Since women were not given for God's service in the Temple at that time, Maryam's mother was naturally hoping to have a son. But Allah (swt) had different plans. He had decided to bestow upon them a girl who was going to play a great role in the history of Islam, a role for which no man was suitable. Thus, she was chosen for Islamic service when still in her mother's womb.

When Maryam was born, her mother was disappointed to discover that she delivered a daughter instead of the son she was hoping to dedicate for God's service. However, she kept her vow and apologetically offered Maryam for Allah's service. She did not know

that Maryam was not an ordinary child but one whom Allah (swt) had already accepted in His Service. People often forget that Allah (swt) does not discriminate on the basis of a worshipper's gender. He appreciates sincere devotion and dedicated service from both males and females. He utilises the services of both men and women to fulfil His Plans for humanity.

When Maryam had grown old enough to be able to serve, she was dedicated to the Temple to serve and worship Allah (swt) full-time without the burden of any worldly roles or responsibilities. This being the first incident where a girl was being dedicated, there was quite a debate among the Temple authorities. After lengthy arguments, the decision was made to accept Maryam. To resolve the issue of her guardianship, lots were cast. By lottery, Zakariyya (pbuh), a high priest, was chosen to be her guardian and caretaker at the Temple.

As a grown up woman, Maryam stationed herself in an easterly chamber and secluded herself behind curtains for uninterrupted devotion, away from the sight of men. She served and worshipped Allah (swt) with such dedication and sincerity that she attained a tremendously high spiritual level. She was even provided special provisions from Allah (swt). Whenever Zakariyya (pbuh) visited her in her chamber of devotion, he found her with both spiritual and physical provisions from Allah (swt).

During one of her devotional seclusions, an Angel appeared to her in perfect human form. Maryam was scared to see the stranger, but the Angel assured her that he was a harmless Servant of Allah (swt) who had been sent by Him as a Messenger to deliver important news. Maryam was informed that she was going to bear a son. Puzzled, she asked, "How can I have a son when I have not even been touched by a male?" The Angel reminded her that Allah (swt) could create whatever He wanted just by intending it to happen. Whenever He wants something to happen, He just commands, "Be" and it happens. That was the way He created Adam (pbuh). As soon as Allah (swt) decided to create human beings, all universal resources and nature, created by Him earlier, worked in harmony to make the creation of Adam (pbuh) happen. Maryam's son was to be created in the same manner. On Allah's command, the child would start developing in her womb without a man touching her. Nature would find its own ways to make it happen just as it did for Adam (pbuh).

Maryam was told to name her

son 'Isa, and that he would be an extraordinarily special person. He would talk as a new-born, just like he would as an old man. He would be Allah's Messenger to the Israelites and he would be taught the Book as well as the wisdom to apply the teachings of the Book appropriately in life.

Thus, Maryam became pregnant by the Command of Allah (swt). As the pregnancy progressed, she was in a dilemma about what to do. Soon the pregnancy would be noticed; people would automatically assume that it must have been the result of an illegitimate sexual act, since she was not married. Pre-marital or extra-marital sex has never been acceptable in the religion of Allah (swt) ever. How would she face her people? How would she explain to them about the Miracle that had happened? Regardless of her truthfulness and purity, no one would have believed her any way. So she decided to move away to some distant, secluded place where she would not be known or noticed.

At the time of delivery, nobody was around to comfort her. Under the pangs of childbirth, she was holding the trunk of a date palm for support. She was also worried about facing her people with the child and about their expected disbelief in her chastity. It was an extremely difficult time for her. Dis-

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The Fatherless Birth

by Ayub Azhar Hamid

The pagan festival of the winter solstice in December has over time come to be associated with the birth of 'Isa (pbuh). Although researchers, including many Christians, challenge the notion of Jesus (pbuh) being born in December, the occasion can still be used to reflect on his birth. Some people may think about the fatherless birth of 'Isa (pbuh) and ask: "Why did Allah (swt) have to put Maryam through difficult social circumstances and create Jesus (pbuh) without a father? What was the purpose that could not have been achieved with a normally born Prophet?"

To understand this, we must have a clear perspective of the purpose of human creation, the purpose of religion, the mission of the Prophets and the condition of the Jews at the time of 'Isa (pbuh). A brief review of these perspectives will show the Wisdom and Mercy of Allah (swt) behind this Miracle.

Allah (swt) has created everything in this Universe to be obedient to Him and to work submissively for Him to fulfil His Plans. Except for human beings and the Jinn, all other creations have not been given a choice of action. They have been pre-programmed through the laws of nature and their instincts to be obedient to Allah (swt). Human beings were also created for Allah's obedience, slavery, and servitude, but they were not forced to do so. The matter was left to their choice. Allah (swt) wanted them to freely opt for a lifestyle of servitude and slav-

ery to Him and, as a result, establish an Islamic society of obedient people (Muslims): A society permeated with love, affection, care, peace, fairness, and justice as well as human dignity, equality, and respect.

To guide people about how they, as Allah's slaves, should live and how they should establish the aforementioned Islamic society, Allah (swt) taught them Religion through His Prophets. Therefore, the purpose of Allah's Religion (Islam) was to guide humanity to live completely in Allah's obedience for which they were created and to organise those who voluntarily submit to Him (Muslims). Similarly, the task of the Prophets and Messengers was not only to deliver the Message and teach the Religion, but also to establish an Islamic community. This community would consist of a core group of dedicated Muslims who could then continue after the Prophets with the work to globalise the ideal and peaceful Islamic society. Thus, the Muslims, individually, and the Islamic society, collectively, were responsible to invite other people to Islam and to win their hearts over to the beauties of Islam so that the majority of the humanity adopts Allah's Slavery and the peaceful Islamic society becomes a universal reality.

After Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his sons Ismail (Ishmael) and Is-haq (Isaac), peace be upon them, this responsibility of propagating Islam and establishing the Islamic society was given for the longest time to

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The Question ...

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how to go about materializing this goal.

The most important element is public awareness of the importance of the issue, and Br. Patel's article, among others, is a good example on creating this public opinion.

But then obviously an article or two will not do the job for a project of such scale. It has to be adopted by a responsible body trusted by the community and in a transparent manner. Br. Patel raises the idea of a "Muslim Board of Education" which is not bad; but the key to it is that it must be adopted by the community and really be without any selfish agenda.

Perhaps the council of Imam can undertake the initiative in jump starting this long process. Government funding must be secured and the new body must actively lobby toward this end. Br. Patel mentions that "sooner or later the funding for private schools will come" but definitely the sooner the better, and it makes sense for us to work to make it happen and be ready for it when it comes instead of just waiting for it to come. Meanwhile this "Muslim Board" needs to reach out to the community members. The challenge here, as usual, is how to overcome petty quarrelling of personal nature and the selfish agenda of those involved?? to this question, i'm afraid, i have no easy answer

Usman

Muslim Schools: A View From the Inside

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cans, but that's another story.

The idea behind Muslim education is simple: Our children identify with those around them so they should be schooled with other Muslim children in an environment that is friendly to Islam. The theory goes that when they graduate they will be practising and believing Muslims, ready to take their rightful place in society.

This goal should be the first and foremost priority of every Muslim in the world. After all, what's more important? Being rich in this life but losing your soul to eternal punishment, or somehow getting by in this life and gaining Paradise in the next?

In my voluminous experience, most Muslim families have chosen the first option.

Muslim families are, by and large, more concerned with their child being rich than with them going to Paradise after this short life is over. The depth of this statement is sickening when I consider all the wealthy families I've seen who practice little to no Islam but go crazy if their child gets lower than a 95 percent on any test. Their child could be cursing, smoking, dating, fighting, cheating or whatever, but all that really matters is that the kid's going to get into medical school.

So why have Muslims here and there opened Muslim schools? They usually provide a different level of education than most public schools and they're sometimes not operated in a standard manner. (Remember, I'm speaking as an insider.)

The answer is simple, the families are losing their children. Not losing them away from Islam, necessarily, because Islam is the first thing most families will do away with. It's much worse. The children are rejecting the ethnic culture of their parents and adopting the American culture they experience every day. The mother and father want their child to be like them: Eating kabobs, wearing a shalwar or jilbab, speaking Urdu or Arabic and identifying with the customs

and ways of the old country with respect to marriage, family structure, and social interaction. Who cares that the kid's not praying or wearing Hijab; they're not Pakistani or Indian or Arab anymore! Horrors! Of course, a few, a very few, families want to send their children to a Muslim school so the children will be staunch believers. Such families know what the most important ingredient in a person's life is.

Sure, their children will grow up to become doctors or engineers or whatever, but the main priority in the household is that whatever they do, they will do it as practising Muslims. But such families are not the majority in a Muslim school project. The vast majority of students who come to Islamic schools are from families where Islam is either not practised or is mixed in with cultural ways and never fully explained to the children.

By the time the parents notice their children have different values from them, it's too late. The children are thoroughly "Americanised" (whatever that means) and love pizza, Power Rangers, video games, and alternative music. They date, disrespect their elders and dabble in alcohol or whatever.

Perhaps the older siblings are so completely corrupted that the parents want that "one good one."

Do you know how many parents have come to me in the last seven years begging me to "save their child?" One man enrolled his three children in my summer school and they were so wild and unruly that the teachers asked me to remove them, and they were all under nine years old! These monsters were cursing, throwing things, and fighting with all the other children around them with no regard to any manners or respect.

When I called the mother to take them home she came in a Mercedes wearing a mini-skirt. The father called me and when I told him that our small summer

school program couldn't handle this type of serious discipline problem, he sobbed that his wife, who was a non-Muslim, was turning his children into "Christians." I suggested to him that he should spend more time with the children, but he brushed that idea aside saying that he owned three businesses and was always away from home. He wanted the summer school to teach his kids the "Muslim religion." Hey, we all dig our own graves and decide what really matters.

So what about the schools themselves? A typical Muslim school is started by a group of concerned parents who quickly attract big-name players who are eager to soothe their consciences over their Haraam business dealings.

These doctors, businessmen, engineers, and other professionals develop a project outline and raise funds. Usually they have to go outside to Arabia or other foreign sources for the bulk of the money because local donors are a bit scarce. (Abu Bakr donated all he had when the cause of Allah needed it. I've seen millionaires give less than a thousand dollars at fundraising dinners. Then they intone that being wealthy is allowed in Islam. But not if you're not willing to part with the money when the cause needs it!)

After the school is built, the original concerned parents are muscled out of the Board of Directors and the qualifying criteria for a seat on the board becomes tied to the size of a person's bank account. (Don't disagree with this statement because you know it's true.)

Then the school advertises for teachers and a principal. The starting salary that the school is willing to pay is somewhere below the poverty level. Of course they could pay competitive wages but who wants to sell their Mercedes Benz or mansion just to augment the salary of a poor Muslim teacher?

There are two types of people who work in a Muslim school: Those who care and are willing to sacrifice for the cause and then those who can't find a job anywhere else. There are no exceptions to this rule. In my experience, the usual ratio between those who care and those who can't find a better job is about three to ten. For every ten teachers, three will care about Islam and the other seven just happen to be biding their time until a better job opens up.

Many teachers are unqualified to teach according to local public school standards and most don't know how to relate to American-raised children. In all my years of teaching I have only seen perhaps twenty out of a hundred Muslim teachers who knew how to teach kids. The rest would either bore the kids with lectures, yell and curse at them, or stand mute in the class as the kids took over. (I guess the same holds true for public

schools in inner cities.)

The administration of the school usually fares no better. Most schools are run in the drab, Third World methodology where one man dominates like a lord in his castle. No one is important but him and nepotism and favouritism are rampant. If you're just off the plane from the old country and you're so and so's cousin or aunt or brother-in-law, you've got a job. If you're a true believer in Allah, behave as a sincere Muslim and love kids, you're likely to feel like a misfit in this type of environment.

So with all these difficulties in Muslims schools, again, why are they popping up all over?

Many parents look at the schools as the savior of their children after the children have embraced "American" values. But is this the way to establish Islam here? Reacting when it's too late?

Our communities are not even communities to begin with. For most Muslims, they are the only Muslims on their street or in their neighbourhood. The term "community" is used but how can we say "our local Muslim community" when all there is are scattered families here and there who happen to drive to the Masjid for dinner parties once a month? That's the first level of danger. We're isolated from each other and interact with non-Muslims most of the time.

The second danger is that some of our Masjids are being operated by people who would be considered hypocrites in the Madinah of the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) time. They have Haraam earnings, they look for fame and status and they feel nostalgic surrounded by people of the same ethnic group as they. The Masjids are ethnic clubs by and large! Those of you who have converted to Islam know what I'm talking about! Therefore, our Masjids are dead structures with next to no meaningful Da'wah or community support being conducted.

The third problem then, becomes our children. Out of the six million or whatever Muslims that our foolish pollsters claim to be here in North America, perhaps only half a million fit the definition of a Muslim according to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Many of the second and third generation kids are gone. That leaves only a few hundred thousand Muslims who will take over when the older generation dies off. Out of those kids, only perhaps two percent have any contact with a Muslim school where they can develop a sense of belonging to a community.

What the immigrants fail completely to understand is that they grew up surrounded by Muslims so it's much easier to feel like a Muslim, even if you don't practice Islam very much.

Our children are growing up with almost no Muslims around them and are therefore identifying

themselves as non-Muslims!

Despite all the problems associated with a Muslim school, then, one fact remains. In my experience, it is the only place where you can give Da'wah to the next generation and show them what it means to be a Believer.

I've seen problem after problem in the structure of Muslim schools, but at the same time, I've seen the awareness of Islam and Iman blossom in even the most lost of children. I was telling a parent the other day that the only ones, by and large, who will be Muslims after us, are those who went to Muslim schools.

He objected and said that the local Sunday school was providing all the Islamic education the kids needed. Well, I visited that Sunday school on numerous occasions and found the children to be more non-Muslim than the non-Muslims! The teachers were sincere but helpless, the children were noisy and disinterested, and the principal ran from problem to problem like he was in a soccer game.

Again, we all dig our own graves and decide what is really important. I just hope there will be a Muslim community twenty years from now when the old people, who grew up in Muslim countries, die off.

In my experience, the only children who remain Muslim are those who had very strong Islamic tendencies in their family or those who went through Muslim schools. So while Muslim schools are not perfect, it's the only way that many children will be saved from the Hell-Fire. It would be nice if the Muslim community got serious about its schools and its future. In some places they are.

What about your neighbourhood?

**Your Ad
should
be
Here!**

*If you have a
product that can be
used by*

Muslims

*regardless of their
ethnic background*

*then let them know
who you are!*

*To place an ad
contact:*

The Ambition
(416) 740-1491

Success Stories

A gifted writer

Reported by Aneesa Lakhi

Rukshana Khan is full of stories. She made her first attempt to write a novel at the age of fourteen. She wrote about a gypsy girl who was secretly a Muslim. At sixteen, she wrote a children's book in order to impress her baby-sitting charges. This book, "Waldo the Worm," was eventually sent to a New York children's book editor.

A rejection letter was the response, but these first forays into writing and publication pointed out the substance and form that would inform Sister Rukshana's later writings.

Her subjects would be wide-ranging, yet her focus would be on identities of various sorts, and her potential audience, too, would be broad, and yet their experiences and concerns would be central to the stories being told. If we want to understand Sister Rukshana's identity, we must go back to her past.

She came to Canada with her family from Pakistan at the age of three. The family moved to Dundas, Ontario where they were the only non-White family in the neighbourhood.

As Sister Rukshana recalls, the racism that she experienced was rampant, and books were a means to escape the often-unpleasant realities of everyday life. Along with her own reading, the family read the Qur'an together in both Arabic and English. Sister Rukshana, still full of stories in her head, married, had children, and graduated from Seneca College as a Biological-Chemical Technician. She then worked in a pharmaceutical lab.

Ten years ago, however, she came across the old letter from the New York publisher, and saw that the letter was not so much one of rejection as of encouragement, and so she decided to give herself one year to try her hand at writing down her stories once again. Since

that time, she has published five books and counting.

"Bedtime Ba-a-a-lk," a picture book published in 1998, is about a little girl who has to deal with rebellious sheep who will not do as they are told when she is using them to help her fall asleep. "Roses in My Carpets," another picture book, is about an Afghani refugee foster child. Sister Rukshana describes this book as her most Islamic story to date, but it is also one that has received much praise from non-Muslims. In fact, this book was the winner of the honorary Yansz Korzak award through the Polish section of the International Board on Books for Young People.

Sister Rukshana's first young-adult novel, "Dahling If You Luv Me Would You Please Please Smile," was released in February 1999, and deals with the growing pains of a young Muslim girl named Zainab, as she learns to make decisions about who she is and what she values. "Muslim Child" is a collection of Sister Rukshana's short stories and poetry, interspersed with information about different aspects of Islam, while "The Kite Thief," a picture book once again, is about a young boy's desire to be King of the Skies as he flies his kite.

As Sister Rukshana expresses it, she does not write "fluffy stories." She believes that although writing must be entertaining, it should also serve some higher purpose. In the end, the words on the paper must make readers respond, rather than just read.

Sister Rukshana emphasises that stories provide a community with a sense of identity: Stories tell us not only who we are, what our concerns, hopes, and memories are, but also who we can become and what we are capable of. Stories, and storytellers, can give us the power to shape ourselves and the perceptions of the world around us.

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the descendants of Ya'qub (Jacob) also called Israel, peace be upon him. The Israelites were chosen to be the workers of the Islamic movement and accorded special status for that role. Many Prophets and Messengers came among them to fulfil this goal of establishing a sustainable, self-perpetuating Islamic society, but the goal remained unsustainable. Soon after the departure of each Prophet, the Israelites would abandon the Mission and indulge in worldly pleasures, although maintaining the rituals to some extent. This continued for quite some time. The irony was that because of their maintaining the customs and rituals, they always thought that they were sufficiently practising their religion. To them, religion had become just a set of rules, rituals, and incantations instead of a dynamic movement and mission to establish the Islamic society. This narrow concept of religion got so ingrained in their minds that they could not think of religion beyond that concept. Their religious leaders and their "pious" people would spend all their energies on petty rules for the rituals of the religion but they would oppose the holistic concept of Islam. This became such an acute problem, that they would even kill the Prophets sent by Allah (swt) to remind them of the real purpose of religion, i.e., establishing a society of peace, equality, and justice based on Islam as the complete way of life.

Considering their attitude, it was evident that they would never be able to fulfil Allah's plan of establishing the Islamic society. They needed to be removed from their office so that new people could be raised for that responsibility. But before depriving them of the special status of being the Islamic workers, Allah (swt) decided to give them a final chance. Being kind and merciful, Allah (swt) wanted to make this final chance very clear by sending them a special Messenger in such a way that every reasonable person would know beyond doubt that the Messenger was a special one from Him. Naturally, if they clearly knew from 'Isa's birth and from his astounding miracles that he was a

The Fatherless Birth

special person from Allah (swt), they would easily be able to discern that only his concept of religion was right as opposed to the established jurists who had differing views. If, after this Clear Sign, they did not correct their concept of religion and did not follow the Messenger in establishing a global society based on Islam as a complete way of life, then they would prove themselves unfit for their status as God's Favourite. They would be removed from their office, condemned forever and a new people would be chosen who would make Islam their Mission for life. This is the Law of Allah (swt). If one people do not fully submit in slavery to Allah (swt) for the establishment of an Islamic society, they are replaced by others who would. As Allah (swt) says: "O you who Believe! Whoever among you turns back from his religion (Islam), Allah will bring a people whom He will love and they will love Him; humble towards the Believers; stern towards the Dis-

believers; striving in the way of Allah and never afraid of the blame of Blamers" (Qur'an 5:54).

This was the reason that Allah (swt) took special measures so that the Israelites would know exactly and clearly that 'Isa (pbuh) was a very special Messenger from Allah (swt) and that if he was not followed in earnest, they would be doomed. When the Israelites opposed even such a special person, they were clearly told through 'Isa (pbuh) about the advent of the Final Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who would succeed in establishing the Islamic society. Often 'Isa (pbuh) referred to the Islamic society as the "Kingdom of God."

Although Maryam had to go through some difficulty, it was a small price to pay for giving a last chance to a people before condemning them. In fact, it was a great honour for Maryam, as no other human being on this Earth has ever had that special privilege of bearing a Command from Allah.

Maryam, the Mother of Jesus

Continued from page 3

tressed by physical pain, post-natal depression, and worries about public backlash, she wished she were dead and forgotten. However, Allah (swt) was not going to leave her in anguish like that. Although difficult times do come in the course of His Work, Allah (swt) always provides full support to the people dedicated to Him. Allah (swt) already had a plan in place to take care of her physical and social needs. She was told not to worry as Allah (swt) had provided a small stream of cool, clean water right there underneath her. For her food, she just had to shake the trunk of the date palm, and fresh, ripe dates would fall down for her. As for the public reaction, when she came across any human being, she should keep quiet and let the baby boy do the talking.

She then came back to her people with her son. As soon as people saw her with the child, they assumed as was expected. They could not believe that such a pious woman from such a pious

family could be so bad as to have sexual encounters without marriage. A big crowd had gathered around her. They questioned her about the matter. She quietly pointed towards her son. Perplexed, they asked, "How can we talk to an infant?" But the infant 'Isa (pbuh) responded, "Certainly, I am a Slave of Allah. He has given me the Book and appointed me as a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be and has enjoined on me Salat and Zakat as long as I live. He has also made me dutiful to my mother, and not arrogant or unblessed. And peace be upon me the day I was born and the day I will die, and on the Day (of Judgement) I will be raised to life" (Qur'an 19:30-33).

After this witness from infant 'Isa (pbuh), Maryam had no need to explain anything. The truth was evident and people had realised it. Allah (swt) had protected Maryam beautifully from any embarrassment while at the same time showed to people that 'Isa (pbuh) was a miraculous child from Allah (swt) sent in an unusual manner for some extraordinary purpose.

Allah (swt) appreciated the devotion, dedication, and piety of Maryam so much that He presented her in the Holy Qur'an (66:12) as one of the two female role models from the era of previous Prophets.

The story of Maryam underscores some important points for us: (1) Allah (swt) appreciates devotion from people regardless of their sex. (2) With sincere dedication to the service of Allah (swt), anyone can achieve spiritual closeness to Him. (3) Women attain the maximum spiritual benefit from the worship that is performed in seclusion away from public sight. (4) Allah (swt) utilises both males and females according to their capabilities to fulfil His Plans for humanity. (5) Allah (swt) does not abandon His Servants during the hardships and troubles that they endure for His Sake.

Journey to Islam

Highlighting the experiences of new Muslims

by Sister Wilma

An unusual invitation on the Internet caught my eye and attention:

"Assalaamo Alekum, worldwide Muslims visiting or moving to Toronto. I offer a special welcome to you! Any one of you may phone or e-mail me to establish a personal contact in Toronto. As a convert to Islam, and a retired man, I have a yearning to be of service to all Muslims, because of a deep gratitude to Allah, for the gift of my conversion to Islam. Muslims from developing countries are especially welcome: Refugees or immigrants or any other servant of Allah.

Also, visitors to our wonderful city are most welcome. Through the Grace of Allah, I can offer you free, short-stay accommodation in a midtown apartment. No drinking, please. The home is quiet and clean. Pool, laundry room, cable TV, Internet, and so on are available. If we meet, I hope you can show me how Islam is working in your life.

In the true spirit of Islamic hospitality, non-Muslims are most welcome as well.

My home is close to the subway, to mosques, to Halaal outlets and Toronto's vibrant downtown area.

Phone: (416) 322-7889 or E-mail: paradise_@sympatico.ca

Please copy, forward, and circulate."

Intrigued, I immediately asked him for an interview and he graciously consented. His story is unique and very special. His sacrifice to follow Allah (swt) has cost him his wife and family. In 1996, his journey to Allah (swt), with all its strange twists and turns came to a successful end, and by the Mercy and Loving Care of Allah, he entered into the beginning of a new life. With this new life, his lifestyle changed drastically causing those closest and dearest to him to wish nothing more to do with him.

He had always been a very content and happy atheist, busy with his work as a social worker and his involvement with the Secular Humanist Society of Toronto, and enjoyed a happy marriage for 23 years. He felt no need to shop around for religions and felt no void in his life. Why should he? He didn't believe that God existed!

A Higher Power was working on him though; seemingly separate and apart from his own will. Allah (swt), in His Mercy, began to operate in his life, drawing him closer and closer, although he was busy with his work in the Secular Humanist Society and with his career as a social worker. As many of our readers know, Secular Humanists are those who reject the idea of supernatural causes and instead focus on natural phenomena and the environment.

Among the ways that Allah (swt) used, was to bring back the memory of his closest boyhood friend, Allen, who had died in an accident when they were young. For a five-year period, starting in 1990, he would wake up, in the middle of the night, calling for "Al," and both he and his wife thought he was dreaming of his friend Allen. His dreams continued, characterised by a soft white light and a gentle breeze; they were so pleasant, he joyfully looked forward to them. Throughout this time, however, he remained the happy and committed atheist, not in any way connecting the word "Al" to the Supreme Being.

In 1995, he was felled by a heart attack and as a result of this attack needed an operation. Reportedly, while coming out of the anaesthetic, he kept calling out for "Allah" in an urgent tone. This touched the recovery room nurses around him as they thought he

was in spiritual distress. Allah (swt) works in mysterious ways His Will to be done. The nurses, thinking of their patient's welfare made a decision to call a doctor on duty who was a Muslimah.

When the doctor inquired about his religion, asking if he was Muslim, he said that he was not. In fact, he replied he was an atheist and this information was on his

admittance form. He said it did not make sense to him why he was calling out Allah (swt).

After talking to him, the Muslim physician left a copy of the Qur'an with the nurses for him in the event he should want it. However, when leaving the hospital, he left the gift

behind.

Gradually, a series of personal changes led this Brother to Allah (swt) and to Islam.

All of these events were interior events in their character and were life-changing. Frequently and quietly he felt the presence of Allah (swt) protecting him, upholding him, and guiding him in his daily life; this led to meditation and a growing spiritual dialogue with this Higher Power. This sense of protection from Allah was such that his fears were removed.

When I asked how easy it was for him to find out about Islam he made some very valid points:

"In my limited experience, I've found that local Muslims, in general, do not socialise with non-Muslims. So how can they share the Islamic faith with others?" Jim, my new Muslim Brother, asked.

"At the time of my initial inquiries, Mosques were unlisted in the phone-book except for one. This made the search more difficult. As well, it was not helpful

when I finally did get in touch with a Mosque, to find the person who answered the phone had inadequate English skills to handle the call. The person was always well-intentioned, but was at a disadvantage having to deal with English speaking callers."

He got so frustrated by his inability to get information on Islam that, in desperation, he approached a couple in a shopping mall one day, hoping to finally meet a real, live Muslim. Since the wife was wearing Hijab, he presumed they would receive him graciously and be more than willing to discuss Islam. However, this experience too, was not successful. Unbelievably, the wife urged her husband not to speak to "the stranger." They then hurried away, leaving our searcher of the Truth, empty-handed once again.

This so discouraged him that he gave up concentrating on finding Mosques where he could learn "religion," as it was secondary to his goal. He was interested rather in a relationship with Allah (swt). If this happened in Islam, well okay, if not, then it is in the hands of Allah (swt).

Happily, months later, an advertisement appeared in The Toronto Star with a very pleasant invitation to an open house at an Ahmadiyya Mosque in Vaughan. Ultimately, it was through the kind, tolerant, and helpful men at this Mosque that he was referred to Imams of the Sunni and Shia sects. Due to the wonderful treatment of the Ahmadi, he stayed with them for a year. However, through his exploration of Islamic history, he later decided to search out information different from the Ahmadi teachings.

He also told me about one of his interesting experiences: "As a new Muslim, I wanted to go to 'The Hajj.' I went to a travel agency to book it, but the girl couldn't find any town or city called 'The Hajj.' She then asked me what happened at this town and I replied, 'Well

thousands of men go there every year.' She asked me innocently, 'Is it kind of like Club Med?' Not being able to solve my travel request, the travel agent went to her supervisor and asked her advice. This caused the supervisor to break out in hysterical laughter. She then called me over and enlightened me to what Hajj is exactly and referred me to a Mosque."

When asked by this correspondent if he had found a place where he felt at home in Islam he replied: "I feel at home with Allah, but as to the Muslim Brotherhood, no, unfortunately, in general, I have not. As a support group, I have found that local Muslims are not there for me (and perhaps not for each other). It would seem they prefer to make large promises, but then produce a poor performance. I am the one who always has to do the reaching out."

"I willingly gave up everything for Allah and Islam: My atheism, my wife, my family, my social contacts, and so on. It has been all well worth it, but I find that the average Muslim that I've met, is insensitive to these losses and really does not care. They pat me on the back, subtly trivialising the loss of my loved ones, while assuring me that I have found a new family . . . in the Brotherhood of Muslims, yet they soon disappear from my life."

"What would you like to see done differently to assist new Muslims?" I asked.

"First, I want to ask this question of your readers: If you, or a member of your family, were to convert to Christianity, how would you want them treated by Christians? How would you treat that loved one? Tough questions, huh? Yet, you are not immune from these possibilities. I have received next to no help. Oh, people want to tell one all about Islam, but to see evidence of it in their lives, one would need a microscope. As to

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A very happy atheist, he felt no need to shop around for religions and felt no void in his life.

Safety Tips For Women

Read and pass to other women. It will make you stop and think. Below is advice sent via the Internet from a woman that works for the police department

I have to share some things I have learned, in my job, with you. I review criminal and psychiatric files of imprisoned sex offenders who are approaching their release date. I decide if they are likely to re-offend based on certain criteria and then civilly commit them to a sex offender treatment facility if I decide that they are at significant risk to re-offend.

I have read hundreds and hundreds of files, and have taken note of some of the mistakes women make. Let me preface this by say-

ing that a woman is NEVER EVER at fault for being raped or attacked, but there are definitely ways to reduce your risk of being a victim.

Here are the most common mistakes women make that could result in them getting kidnapped, attacked, and/or raped:

Getting into the attacker's car when he pulls a gun and orders you to get into his vehicle. Most attackers don't want to shoot you; they want you to get into the car so that they can drive you to a deserted place and torture you. Don't comply. Run screaming. It is MUCH more likely than not that he will just move on to an easier target.

Pulling over when a man drives alongside of you pointing at your car pretending something is wrong. If this happens, drive to the nearest well-lit and populated gas station and look the car over yourself (or ask an attendant). Never pull over. Believe it or not, many women have fallen for this for fear of their car spontaneously exploding in the middle of the road. Not likely.

Not locking your doors while driving. I have read several cases where the attacker simply walks up to a woman's car while she's at a traffic light and jumps in with his gun or knife drawn.

Opening your front door at home when you have not positively identified who is there. If you don't have a peep hole, get one. I've seen countless cases where the attacker gains access to his victims simply by knocking on their door. Don't let an attacker get into your home. He then has a private, relatively soundproof place to attack you.

Not being alert in parking lots. If you go to the grocery store at night, don't be shy about asking for an escort to your car. Too many women are abducted from parking lots or even raped in the parking lot. Check your back seat before entering your car. Cars provide endless hiding places for attackers, both inside them and in between them. Be aware of your surroundings by looking to the left and right and behind you with your head up all the time. You may appear paranoid and look funny to others, but an attacker will think twice about approaching someone who appears so aware of what's going on.

Trusting a clean cut, honest-looking stranger. I see mug shots of every sex offender in the state of Florida. They do not look like monsters. They often look like they could be your friendly grocer, bank teller, waiter, neighbour, clergy, doctor, etc. They are every age between 15 and 90, and probably beyond. Only a small minority actually look scary. I just read a case yesterday of a man with only one leg who beat up his victim with his

crutch before he raped her. Who would have ever thought that a one-legged man could be a rapist?

Trusting people to be alone with your children. This is a difficult one, because child molesters end up being the LAST person the parents would believe is the molester. Most of the child molesting cases I see involve the stepfather, the uncle, the sister's boyfriend, the mother's boyfriend, the grandfather, the baby-sitter, the neighbour, the family friend, the youth camp director, day-care worker, etc. Although rare, even women can be molesters. In every case, the perpetrator is a nice guy, trustworthy, good with children, and the family is baffled or even in disbelief that the person could be abusing their child. When it comes to your children and grandchildren, be suspicious of everyone, no matter who they are. And pay attention to what your child says and how he/she reacts to the mention of different people in their lives.

I didn't mean to make anyone uncomfortable with this, but I am at work right now reviewing files, and realised that this e-mail is a way I can reach many women at one time. I have the dirty job of reading all these files, and it makes me feel good to know that I can share some inferences from what I have learned. This is not an exhaustive list of what not to do, but just some things that I have observed more than just a few times.

Pass this on to the women in your lives.

The Heavy Cost of Finding God

Continued from page 6

helping others in general, I would like to see local Muslims take an interest in the community, not just other Muslims or converts. religion and social status."

"Another thing I would like to remind everyone of is that Allah's address is not EGYPT.COM. He also has a link to Canada. Are Muslims here because they believe Allah has them here in Toronto for some reason, or are they here solely for their own gain? Do they believe that Allah is alive and well in Toronto? Does He want this city blessed?"

"Speaking of Canada, I have, on occasion, been offended deeply when I hear Brothers criticising Canadian culture, especially Canadian women. As a Canadian Muslim, this is hurtful to me."

"Curiously, I have been the one always having to reach out to Muslims; for their own reasons, they do not seem to reach out to me. Currently, I am involved in this global invitation to Muslims from around the world. This is my small way of reaching out to other Muslims."

"I must constantly remind myself that my relationship with Allah is at the heart of my Islamic journey. To those rare, but kind, Toronto Muslims who have helped me, I say 'Thank You,' from the bottom of my heart. To those who don't choose to help converts, what can I say?"

"I apologise to your readers if my remarks are unnecessarily negative. I realise there are many wonderful Muslims in Toronto, and to you, I encourage you to keep up the good work. Non-Muslims will be drawn to Islam by your good and compassionate example!"

Jim's sharing of his story and my note-taking having come to an end; we two Muslims, connected via today's newest technology, the Internet, finished our cold lassi (offered by the Muslim café owners) and parted ways, promising to keep in touch.

These words from Brother Jim who spoke out about our deficiencies and our lack of efforts to welcome new comers to Islam are something that we, as a believing community, should ponder and act upon the next time we meet a person searching for Allah (swt) and Islam. All of us are responsible for our actions, or should I say lack of actions, and we shall have to answer to our Creator in due course. Are we willing to say to Allah (swt) that we were too busy or too caught up in our daily money-making and piling up wealth to offer friendship and brotherly caring and sharing with those searching for Allah (swt) and Islam?

Brother Jim's story is unique but other people who have converted to Islam have lost jobs, have lost friends, and even families. What are we doing to fill this void in their lives? Is our lack of caring letting these people slip through the cracks, and through our lack of attention, will they leave Islam?

I challenge us all, including myself, to reach out to anyone in need: the hurting, the lonely, the sick, the elderly, street people, drug addicts, prostitutes, and even the pimps. Let's allow Allah (swt) to work through us to bring these people into the fold of Islam so that they will not perish but will have the forgiveness of Allah (swt) and, Insha-Allah, eternal life.

Our religion is a missionary religion sent by Allah (swt) to be a blessing to mankind. Are we doing our part to share our faith with those we meet?

Let us all be a bright light in the corner where we live, making life a little happier for those we meet in our daily lives.



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 many Muslim grocery stores.

From the Qur'an
"Verily, man was created very impatient; irritable (discontented) when evil touches him; and niggardly when good touches him. Except those devoted to Salat; those who remain constant in their Salat."
 (70:19-23)

From the Hadith
 Narrated Abu Hurayrah (ra): "I heard Allah's Messenger (pbuh) saying: 'If there was a river at the door of anyone of you and he took a bath in it five times a day, would you notice any dirt on him?' They said, 'Not a trace of dirt would be left.' The Prophet (pbuh) added, 'That is the example of the five prayers with which Allah blots out (annuls) evil deeds.'" (Bukhari 1/10:506)

Newsroom

Islamic Volunteerism and Social Responsibility

by Kashif A. Shaikh

On Sunday, October 17, 1999, a team of Muslim university students from York, U of T, and Ryerson formed a team to climb the 1776 steps of the CN Tower (that's about 155 landings with 11 steps each!). Why? The purpose was to collect contributions for the United Way charity organisation. The money raised was directly funnelled to many causes that ease the suffering of our local Muslim and non-Muslim neighbours. The United Way provides non-OHIP covered drugs for the children of those using women's shelters, checks up on elderly and socially isolated seniors, helps stock food banks, provides white walking sticks for our blind neighbours, and many other social needs overlooked by the government and the media.

While participating in this team climb, I was heartened to notice that there were many Muslims, both bearded and non-bearded, that were volunteering their time and energies on a Sunday to ensure this charity drive's success. Aside from the all-Muslim team I was a part of, there was a noticeable presence of Muslims among those that had chosen to form corporate or other teams for this en-

deavour. I thoroughly enjoyed going up to fellow Muslims and giving them a heartfelt and warm As-Salaamu-Alaykum and received their heartfelt and warm responses.

For a Muslim that has always believed in the formula espoused by Toronto's Muslim Welfare Centre of "Service to Humanity is Service to Allah (swt)," it was a pure delight to fully realise that I was not one of the few originals in the local Muslim community in implementing it and its wider social implications. Whether it is through the United Way or through a thousand and one other Muslim or non-Muslim endeavours we choose to practice, our service to humanity is all service to Allah (swt).

It is my humble understanding that Allah (swt) gave us different personalities, temperaments, talents, and opportunities to serve Him and humanity. Just as various Sahabah (Companions) during and soon after Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) lifetime were individually gifted and accomplished many different positive deeds, we too should try to help our community by volunteering our time and effort, all under noble inspirations and aspirations in relation to our Deen of Islam.

Swimming Lessons for Women

We have been informed via e-mail of different swimming programs that are being offered by the City of Toronto. Starting this Tuesday (8:45-9:45 pm) the City of Toronto is offering swimming lessons (beginners to advanced) for women only. The lessons are held at Albert Campbell CI at Finch/McCowan. Albert Campbell CI is located at: 1550 Sandhurst Cir.

Call at (416) 396-4009

You can register at the pool during the lesson.

All sisters are encouraged to attend programs like these, which address our specific needs. If we don't support these programs, the City will stop offering them. Please

let other sisters know about the program.

In addition, Midland Pool (720 Midland Ave, south of Eglinton) offers women-only recreational swimming from 5-7 pm on Saturdays, only \$2.00/session.

Also, Parks and Recreation is offering swimming lessons for women only (all skill levels) at S.H. Armstrong (56 Woodfield Rd, Queen/Greenwood) starting this Saturday, October 2 at 9-10 am and 10-11 am. Classes run for 9 weeks at a cost of \$52.00. For more info, call the school at 392-0734.

It's always good to support programs run by the city that cater to the needs of Muslim women!

Al Safa and ISNA Break Ties

Al Safa Halal is seeking a new Halal Certifier after a fallout with the Islamic Society of North America-Canada (ISNA-Canada).

Al Safa Halal is the non-Muslim owned Kitchener, Ontario-based meat company that used to get its beef and chicken products certified as Halal by ISNA-Canada.

On August 20 1999, ISNA-Canada announced Al Safa, along with its parent company, MGI Packers, which sells Halal meat to 22 Muslim countries, were no longer certified by ISNA-Canada due to "concerns that Al-Safa and MGI Packers have not been able to meet the standards required for ISNA-Canada's certification."

The announcement also said the withdrawal of Halal certification was effective August 20 but did not give details as to what ISNA-Canada considered a breach of its standards.

Three days later, Al Safa Halal responded with its own announcement.

"Unfortunately, it sounds from the ISNA Canada announcement that something has changed in the zabiha at MGI," it reads. "The zabiha at MGI has not changed. MGI continues to be, as it has been since 1991, an entirely zabiha plant, with slaughter performed correctly by Muslims."

According to Al Safa's announcement, differences between Al Safa Halal and ISNA-Canada began with a disagreement over how the slaughter of chicken is conducted.

ISNA-Canada certifies as Halal chicken that is slaughtered using machines.

But Al Safa Halal's consumers did not agree with this position.

"Virtually every consumer either by phone or by e-mail expressed their shock and disappointment that the chicken was machine-slaughtered because they felt it was not Halal," says David Muller, one of Al Safa's owners, in an interview with

Sound Vision. "We would not have gotten the support that we have received if we used machine slaughtered [meat]," he added.

Al Safa's August 23 announcement says after consumers demanded a stop to using ISNA-endorsed machine-slaughtered chicken, the company "immediately suspended manufacture of the chicken products and began searching for a hand-slaughtered chicken zabiha."

They selected Madina Wholesale, which is based in the Toronto, Canada area. After this, Muller says, Al Safa resumed its production of chicken products. But this led to further problems with ISNA-Canada.

"Unfortunately, ISNA Canada refused to certify the hand-slaughtered poultry by Madina Wholesale," says Al Safa's August 23 announcement.

"We had a choice to make. We felt that the hand-slaughter was so important to our customers that we had to go with hand-slaughtered chicken. As a result of ISNA Canada's refusal to certify the hand-slaughtered zabiha, we had no choice but to terminate ISNA Canada's certification of Al Safa products, and we sent ISNA Canada a letter to that effect on July 8, 1999. We would like to highlight the point that Al Safa terminated ISNA Canada's [sic] services, not the other way around."

Ashraf, however, tells a very different story.

"ISNA has never refused to certify any hand slaughtered Zabiha," he says. "We were willing to certify, but they [Al Safa Halal] put the condition that they would pay a low salary to the Muslim slaughtermen."

This is also why ISNA-Canada decided to no longer certify MGI.

"If we lose confidence, as we did in Al Safa, then how could you keep the same confidence in its parent company which is MGI?" asks Ashraf.

Al Safa seeks Certification

from IFANCA.

Currently, Al Safa is seeking Halal certification from the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA). The Illinois-based non-profit organization certifies as Halal, products in the U.S. as well as foodstuffs for shipment to Malaysia.

Muller says the deal is almost done. Al Safa's August 23 announcement goes so far as saying, "we are currently in the final stages of discussions with IFANCA (Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America) to perform certification services for both MGI Packers and Al Safa Halal."

But this is news to Mohammad Mazhar Hussaini, IFANCA's executive director.

"Al Safa's request has come to IFANCA and its Halal slaughter committee is discussing it" he says, surprised that any notion of a final deal was mentioned in the August 23 announcement.

Muhammad Munir Chaudry, president of IFANCA says, "our board of directors have to make that final decision," to certify or not certify Al Safa Halal, and adds, "we want to make sure we have complete information from whatever sources we can."

Some of these, he says, include MGI, Al Safa, ISNA, Al Safa's distributors, as well as some of the Imams and influential community leaders who have visited Al Safa and MGI.

Chaudry says a final decision on certifying Al Safa Halal should be made by the beginning of October.

For more information about this issue and to voice your concerns, you can call:

IFANCA 773-283-3708

Al Safa Halal 519-654-9989

Madina Wholesale 416-615-0416

ISNA-Canada 905-403-8406

<http://soundvision.com/halalhealth>

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Jan. 2000 issue.
Articles should not be
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words.

Include your full name, address,
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yourself if you wish.



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Happy Ramadhan

Rukhsana launches her fourth book and a storytelling session.

On Saturday October 30th, over a hundred people, mothers and children, gathered at the Islamic Institute, 1825 Markham Road, for a unique experience in the Muslim community. A storytelling celebration and launch of Rukhsana Khan's fourth book, *Muslim Child*.

The publisher and illustrator were on hand, giving insightful presentations of the why's and wherefore's of how this book came into being.

The publisher, Sylvia McConnell of Napoleon Publishing, spoke of how she chose this book to help fill a need in the community at large. She said that Muslims can help support the book by asking for and even or-

Some Islamic Sites to Visit

- 1) <http://www.dawateislami.net/>
 - 2) <http://www.sunnah.org>
 - 3) <http://www.iqra.net>
- Visit The Muslim Magazine's new 'webzine' at:
- 4) <http://www.muslimmag.org>
a publication of American Muslim Assistance relief organization
 - 5) <http://www.amahelp.com>

A great Cause

This is a really terrific thing. *The Hunger Site at the U.N.* This is a really cool website. All you do is click a button and somewhere in the world some hungry person gets a meal to eat at no cost to you. The food is paid for by corporate sponsors. All you do is go to the site and click. But, you're only allowed one click per day so spread the word to others. Visit the site and pass the word." <http://www.thehungersite.com>

dering in *Muslim Child*, at bookstores like Chapters, Indigo, Coles, Smithbooks etc..

This ensures that these stores will realize there's a demand for such books, and they will stock it on their shelves and reorder it when it sells.

Rukhsana Khan, a professional storyteller and author, told two stories from the collection and read the beginning and final poem.

Both the children and their mothers laughed at the antics of Jamal, one of the characters in the first story, as he tried to keep from farting during his Fajr prayer.

Rukhsana says she tries to write stories about situations all children (and adults) can relate to. All eight stories are about the daily struggles children face mingled with the joys of being Muslim.

Insha allah this is the first of many successful book launches within our Muslim community.

Islamic Book on Internet

Dr. Jamal Badawi and Rafik Beekun have just published a book entitled "Leadership: An Islamic Perspective." The first eighteen pages of the book, including the Table of Contents, can be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.islamist.org/> (Adobe Acrobat Reader is required). Book orders can be faxed to Br. Adnan Mohtasib of Amana Publications at (301) 595-5888. You may also contact him at igamana@erols.com. The list price of the book is \$9.95 US. The book is also available at <http://www.amazon.com/>. One of the authors can be reached via e-mail at ribeekun@netscape.net.

Islamic Mannerism

Islamic Greetings: A Message of Peace!

by Javaria Akif

Man is a social being who converses with others to carry on different tasks. Allah (swt) has blessed him with intellect. Being intellectual implies that each and every action he makes should be in harmony and accordance with the Word of the Most Beneficent and Merciful, Allah (swt). Each nation has a way to greet others. Muslims belong to one nation no matter what colour, class, or creed they have. The way Muslims greet each other distinguishes them from their non-Muslim fellows. Greeting is a custom.

History tells us that Arabs used to greet one another with the words "An'im sabaahan" or "An'imu sabaahan." These words are derived from, "al-in-mah" which means good living after the morning. It's similar, in meaning, to "good morning." But Allah (swt) prescribed that the manner of greeting among Muslims should be "As-Salaamu Alaykum." The literal meaning of Salaam is "peace." The greeting provides safety and protection from evils and faults. The name As-Salaam is a Name of Allah, may He be Exalted. So the meaning of the Salaam is "May the Blessings of His Name descend upon you."

The complete phrase of the greeting is "As-Salaamu Alaykum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh," which means "May the Peace and

Blessings of Allah be upon you." The complete reply is "Wa Alaykum As-Salaam wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh," which means that the person who is responding is returning the same greeting to the other. Such wonderful greetings not only foster Islamic brotherhood and spread Islam but also remove any ill will, which may be present in someone's heart.

Allah (swt) says in the Book of Wisdom, the Holy Qur'an: "When a courteous greeting is offered you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous (or at least) of equal courtesy. Allah takes careful account of all things" (Surah An-Nisaa).

Once a man asked the Prophet (pbuh): "What is the best thing in Islam?" He replied: "Feeding others and giving the greeting of Salaam to those whom you know and those whom you do not know." Once he said that it's the right of a Muslim over his fellow Muslim to return his Salaam.

If a non-Muslim says "As-Salaamu Alaykum," then the scholars agree that the reply should be only "Wa Alaykum," meaning "And upon you" or "Alaykum," meaning "Upon you." So we should be careful not to greet fellow Muslims in such a manner. Also avoid saying "As-Samu Alaykum," meaning "Death to you," something the Jews of

Madinah used to greet the Prophet (pbuh) with.

When it comes to writing this greeting while writing a letter, the person sending the letter should greet the addressee with the complete phrase, "As-Salaamu Alaykum," at the beginning of the letter. There is nothing wrong with ending a letter with the phrase "Wa'l- Salaam," as it's not a condition that the phrase should be used in full. The reason being is that the writer intends the complete expression by using the written abbreviation.

When entering someone's home, the manner prescribed by Allah (swt) in the Holy Qur'an is: "But if ye enter houses, salute each other a greeting of blessing and purity as from Allah" (Surah An-Nur).

In Islamic society, the one who is riding is supposed to greet the one walking and when one of a group of people gives a greeting, it is enough for all of them.

The best Islamic attitude is to love one another and be humble and courteous. Spreading Salaam is one way to do this. By obeying Allah (swt) and his Prophet's (pbuh) commands we not only secure better relationships with each other and possess good manners in this world, but also secure our position in the Gardens promised by Allah (swt): "Their greeting therein will be 'Peace.'"

The Millennium Effect

Continued from page 1

Millennium celebrations. This article is not meant to analyse or chastise the behaviour of Muslims, but rather to create awareness of potentially significant events, man-made dangers in particular.

The Sun and the Moon are Signs of Allah (swt), and help us mark the passage of time. The popularity and widespread use of the present solar calendar lies with its closer correlation with the change in seasons than the lunar calendar. Now, with the end of a millennium that marks the completion of a thousand years, several cultures, both Eastern and Western, are sensing or hoping that something significant will happen. The media is merely doing its job in creating an "event," but Christians and others have for some time been acutely conscious and concerned about this time in history and their place in it.

The current age has already

produced great and rapid changes and promises to continue at an even faster pace. Many of these changes are contributing to anxieties that are proving difficult to cope with. Modern technology allows people everywhere to instantaneously communicate their ideas and values as well as share their problems and struggles. Although the economy is booming in North America, we are aware of many conflicts around the world leading some people to think things are actually getting worse and worse. While it may be possible that there are more problems, it could just as likely be that we have a better capacity to be aware of problems that have always existed. Regardless, a combination of factors is now providing false "prophets" numerous opportunities to "help" people cope with their anxieties.

Some highly charismatic Christian evangelists on television and radio ("televangelists") have been

successful in collecting thousands of followers and amassing vast sums of money and influence. While some money may go to the personal use of the unscrupulous preachers, a great deal will also go towards converting others to their ways and beliefs, both in religion and in politics. The televangelists provide their own interpretations of Biblical prophecies to relate to current events. Their favourite topic is the Middle East.

We see little, if any, real sympathy or even understanding of the Arabs or Muslims among the televangelists. However, even though they often exhibit ardent support for the State of Israel, this passion may also be superficial. The interest of many "Millennium Christians" lies purely in events that may herald the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (pbuh). They may feel that upon such an event Jews and Muslims will either convert or perish.

Interestingly, while the Jewish

calendar is generally a lunar one with an intercalation of a month every so often to align it with the solar year, most Jews use the Christian calendar and may be unable to contain their hopes for the coming of their own Messiah. For example, news reports earlier this year announced the existence of a red heifer (cow) and how it could be a portent of the time for building the "Third Temple" on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the site of Masjid Al-Aqsa. Some Christians would consider the building of this Temple to be the necessary precursor to the return of Jesus (pbuh). This site of confluence of Jewish and Christian expectations presents a serious potential danger for all Muslims, not just the Palestinians in the region.

Muhammad and Jesus, along with all the Prophets (peace be upon them) emphasised that no one is aware of the Hour of the Last Day. The same applies to the

start of the End Times. There are Signs that we have been told to watch for, that will precede the Final Events. Some may have already occurred, others may be yet to come. People of all faiths will be scrambling to read their scriptures to find descriptions of these Signs; then they will look around to search for the existence of these Signs. For some people, the recent eclipse, earthquakes, and other natural disasters may be some confirmation. However, for others who feel the Signs are not readily apparent or convincing enough, there is the potential for mischief and danger.

At the onset of the new millennium, spiritualists and opportunists will wait with some expectation for "things" to happen. If they do, these people will provide their own "spins" or interpretations of events for their own purposes. However, if nothing happens, then people may feel it necessary to make things happen themselves. A real danger lies with those who may have the resources to deliberately precipitate a "fulfilment" of false prophecy. In an advanced age of world-wide communications that includes televisions, telephones, and the Internet in even remote places, frauds or hoaxes conducted with special effects combined with rumours and media hype could create confusion and generate mass hysteria. Such fear and suspicion can create groups of "us" and "them" and lead to profound divisions in a society, if not outright war among nations.

We have to be vigilant to prevent ourselves from becoming victims of other peoples' fears or mischief. However, at the same time, we must also exercise a cool sense of reason and prevent ourselves from spreading unconfirmed rumours, reacting ignorantly, or needlessly provoking others. Let us not seek to hasten God's Will.

On a lighter note, there will be of course those people who are completely irreverent towards all things. The end of the millennium will provide an excellent excuse for wild abandon and debauchery. In some people's thinking, if this is to be the End, they might as well go with a "bang" and have themselves the best party ever.

People in the Muslim community will succumb to one form or another of the "Millennium Effect," but the elements of reflection and remembrance are not a bad thing. We should not be frightened to face the future, as long as we are mindful of Allah (swt) and the Last Day. With that in mind, we should be prepared to deal with proponents of either gloom and doom or euphoric reckless abandon head-on and face their challenges in a cool, calm, and constructive manner. Take it as an opportunity to share your own beliefs and hopes and work towards making the next millennium better for everyone.

Ramadhan 1999

Continued from page 1

act of fasting should elevate us to a high degree of consciousness of Allah (swt), so that it can be a guiding force for the remaining months of the year.

How should we prepare ourselves for this year's Ramadan? The lifestyles prevailing in this country force us to do a lot of planning, ahead of time. Careful planning for Ramadan will help us to fulfil all our obligations, whether it is in the workplace, home, school, or in shops. Fasting should not prevent us from work or study. Remember that one Fard (obligation) cannot be fulfilled at the expense of another Fard.

By now, many families are already planning the Iftar menu and very soon we will be looking for Ramadan Timetables. We have to adjust ourselves to accommodate Suhoor (morning meal) and Iftar times. This is important, so that we do not miss the Fajr and Maghrib prayers. This year, both of these Salat could be at the time that we may be commuting to and from work. We may have to leave home before Suhoor time ends and Fajr time may expire by the time we reach our destination. Similarly, Maghrib time may expire by the time we reach home. Al-Hamdulillah, in 1999, we have many Masajids and Musallahs where we can stop and make these Salat. Some of the Muslims in my office offer Fajr when they arrive from suburban areas.

Eating Suhoor is a Sunnah (tradition of the Prophet) and it helps us to cope better with our fast. We can take advantage of this Suhoor time, by waking fifteen to twenty minutes early and offering Tahajjud, a very meritorious Salat to earn some extra rewards. It is a highly recommended Salat for spiritual uplifting and unless we are in the habit of observing it on a daily

basis, we should make special effort for praying it during Ramadan. This way, we will not miss Lailatul-Qadr (Night of Power), which can be any night of Ramadan, particularly one of the last ten nights. Similarly, five to ten minutes before Iftar is also a prime time for the acceptance of our Du'a (supplication) and Zhikr.

Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was revealed and Taraweeh prayers offer us another opportunity to earn extra blessings and refresh our Qur'an, as it is recited in many Taraweeh gatherings. Not long ago, we had to import Huffaz for Taraweeh, since we did not have enough here in Canada. Now, Al-Hamdulillah, it is a very pleasant sight for me to see many young Muslims born here who have memorised the Qur'an and who recite it so beautifully, leading our congregations. This is a fulfilment of a Qur'anic Prophesy: "Lo! We, even We revealed the reminder, and lo We verily are its Guardian" (Al Hijr 5:9)."

The Toronto District School Board is aware of the month of Ramadan. Some of the schools provide special rooms for Muslim children during lunch break, so that they are not forced to watch other children eat. The room is to be used for Salat also. However, because of the recent amalgamation of five school boards, some schools may not be aware of the accommodation guidelines. Parents must advise the school Principals and the Parent Councils.

Some of us may be writing exams in universities or colleges in the evening. Do not hesitate to ask for five minutes to break your fast and offer Maghrib Salat.

In workplaces, co-workers may notice that you are not taking coffee breaks and not eating lunch. It is a good opportunity to do Da'wah work by explaining about

our 'Ibadah of fasting. It will bring more respect to you for upholding the Faith. Islamic awareness is increasing among the non-Muslim Canadians and many employers are willing to accommodate Muslim employees by providing flexible work and travel schedules, wherever possible.

Fasting should flush out our mind and body of all impurities, so that our thoughts and actions are now more tuned to the Commands of Allah (swt) and so that we increase in our readiness to conform to the Shari'ah (Islamic Law). Every obligatory act is multiplied seventy times and every obligatory act is elevated to the level of Fard.

It is a good opportunity for us to maximise our benefits by: (1) Fasting the entire month without minimising the rewards. (2) Offering our five Salat with Jama'at. (3) Offering Taraweeh Salat regularly. (4) Reciting Qur'an as much as possible. (5) Observing I'tikaf (seclusion for prayers) during the last ten days, if possible. (6) Paying Zakat, if Ramadan is fixed as a calendar year; (7) Paying Sadaqatul-Fitra before of Eid Day, and (8) Paying additional Sadaqat for numerous charitable projects.

Fasting should also remind us

of the hunger and starvation in some parts of the world. Even here in Toronto, we have a serious problem of homelessness. At the time of writing this article, I drove through downtown one night with my wife, and we were shocked to see so many people camped out on park benches, scavenging garbage cans for food. We need to count our blessings from Allah (swt), but we also need to take some action by feeding our neighbours.

A few years ago, the Muslim Centre in Detroit started a program of inviting the poor and homeless to their daily Iftar at the Centre and it proved to be a very successful effort in reforming many individuals.

Please make Du'a for improving the lot of the entire Ummah, especially those engaged in Jihad, victims of natural and man-made disasters, and the many who are stuck in refugee camps. May Allah (swt) help us enjoy the blessings of Ramadan and fulfil our obligations to the best of our abilities. Ameen.

Imam Abdul Hai Patel is the Coordinator of the Islamic Council of Imams, Canada and is also a Commissioner on the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

What If...?

By Dr Nor Hayati Othman
Kelantan, MALAYSIA

What if ALLAH couldn't take the time to bless us today because we couldn't take the time to thank HIM yesterday?

What if ALLAH decided to stop leading us tomorrow because we didn't follow HIM today?

What if we never saw another flower bloom because we grumbled when ALLAH sent the rain?

What if ALLAH didn't walk with us today because we failed

to recognize it as His day?

What if ALLAH took away His message because we failed to listen to the messenger?

What if ALLAH stopped loving and caring for us because we failed to love and care for others?

What if ALLAH would not hear us today because we would not listen to Him yesterday?

What if ALLAH answered our prayers the way we answer His call to service?

Kids' Korner

The Writing Contest '99

Abortion: A Never Ending Problem

by Mir Zeeshan Ali Khan (16 years old)

One of the many debatable issues these days is abortion. Many people have different opinions and have supportive reasons for their opinions. However, I believe that aborting babies is immoral and that abortions should not be performed. Abortions cause many family break-ups in most countries, but more so in the West. Abortions are a great problem because the West allows free sex, pre marital sex, etc. Many states in the USA are fighting to make abortions legal; if this happens, then young girls will not be afraid of getting pregnant. Consequently, there is a loophole for them. There are many reasons that make abortions immoral but the best of all is that it is prohibited in Islam. Abortions are also considered to be murder and have many unnecessary detrimental effects on women.

I believe that abortion depraves the ethics in our society by killing the foetus present in the womb. In doing so, people destroy what people like me hold to be most dear: the value of human life. Over 30,000,000, and I emphasise, 30,000,000 potential lives have been taken away since abortion was first legalised. Emma Goldman supports those with the same opinion as myself when she said

in 1911: "The custom of procuring abortions has reached such appalling proportions as to be beyond belief... So great is the misery of the working classes that seventeen abortions are committed in every one hundred pregnancies." I feel that Emma Goldman would not be very pleased because the abortion rate has increased by 5%. This means that 22% of all world-wide pregnancies lead to abortion. This is totally unacceptable. If this isn't stopped now, who knows how high this figure might rise?

If the value of human life is so important, then it is not right for women to treat their children like property and dispose of them as they feel. Women have been fighting their whole lives to have a place in society and not be treated as property. Then why is it that some of them are treating their own children as property?

Performing an abortion is a sin in most religions. When looking at all the religions of the world, the majority of them believe that performing an abortion is a sin. More than half of the world's population believes this. The stages of embryonic development are mentioned in the Qur'an (23:12-14). But only recently have scientists discovered these facts. The Be-

lievers of Islam should also know that in the Holy Qur'an, they are many sayings that state one simple message: Committing an abortion is wrong. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah (swt) stresses that He is the only One Who can give life and take away life. This is evidently stated: "It is Allah that gives life and death, and Allah sees well all that ye do" (Qur'an 3:156). If people are religious and follow their beliefs, then they should follow this one too!

Another point that shows abortion is immoral is that aborting a baby is murder. Murder is the intentional killing of an innocent human being and is prohibited in the Holy Qur'an. In an abortion, the foetus, which is innocent and in its natural place, is being killed. A fertilised human egg that contains biological codes to govern its future forms the foetus. Therefore, it is already human.

However, committing an abortion is only allowed when a would-be mother's life is in danger. Also, abortions have many detrimental effects that could be avoided. Women have to face these effects which are not necessary. Some of them have to live with many physical and mental scars. I believe this is wrong because these women should not have to suffer when they do not have to.

In conclusion, whichever way you look at an abortion, it is wrong and evil. It is nothing but a cruel way of disposing of a potential life. Abortions can be easily avoided if people just think before they do anything foolish. If people believe in their religions and their teachings, they will realise it is a great sin to indulge in sex before marriage. Most of the time this results in having unwanted pregnancies that take them to the next step of having abortions, which is tantamount to murder.

by Mir Arslan Ali Khan (12 years old)

When the Prophet (pbuh) was forty years old, he received his first Revelation from Allah (swt) through Angel Gabriel. The Revelations continued for twenty-three years, thirteen in Makkah and ten in Madinah, after which the Qur'an was completed. Soon Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) began reciting the Qur'an and preaching the Truth that Allah (swt) had revealed to him. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers suffered persecution from the Disbelievers in Allah (swt). The persecution grew so fierce that Allah (swt) gave the command to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to emigrate. The emigration from Makkah to Madinah marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar and is known as the Hijra.

During the journey from Makkah to Madinah, Allah (swt) helped our Prophet (pbuh) in a miraculous fashion. On the third day of their journey, when our Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr (ra) took sanctuary in the cave in Mount Thaur, they heard sounds of birds, a pair of rock doves, and they thought they heard men's voices. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) looked at Abu Bakr (ra) and said: "Have no fear, for Allah is with us" (Qur'an 9:40). When the voices had died away, they went to the mouth of the cave. Outside, they saw an Acacia tree almost as high as a man, which was not there before. In a gap between the tree and the wall of the cave, a spider had woven its web. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Abu Bakr (ra) looked through the web and saw a rock dove had made her nesting place, sitting close to her eggs, with her mate perched on a ledge. In this way, the men who had come looking for the Prophet (pbuh)

were deceived and went away without trying to get into the cave. This is one incident of how Allah (swt) helped our Prophet (pbuh) in His Miraculous Way.

The second incident in which Allah (swt) gave His Miraculous Help was at the Battle of Badr (Ramadan 17, 2 AH). The Muslims were 313 in number but the enemy was about 1000 in number.

It was a marvellous victory for the Muslims. To help our Prophet (pbuh) in the Battle of Badr, Allah (swt) covered him with drowsiness to give him calm. Rain was sent to refresh Muslim spirits, and Allah (swt) also gave directions to the Angels to instil terror in the hearts of the Disbelievers and to smite them above the necks (Qur'an 8:12). When the Prophet (pbuh) threw a handful of dust, it was Allah's doing as He wanted to tested the Believers (Qur'an 8:17). Also, Allah (swt) showed the Prophet (pbuh) in his dream that the enemy forces were small in number (Qur'an 8:43-44).

In this battle, the enemy leaders, including Abu Jahl, were killed. Allah had promised Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that he would assist him "with a thousand of the Angels, ranks on ranks" (Qur'an 8:9). All help ultimately comes from God. One of the Believers was pursuing an enemy from the Quraysh and his head flew right off from his body before he could reach him, struck off by an unseen hand. Some people had glimpses of Angels riding on horses that never touched the ground. Wearing white turbans with one end streaming behind them, they were led by Angel Gabriel, who was wearing a yellow turban. The Quraysh were utterly humiliated and defeated. The Battle of Badr was a turning point for the history of Islam, a victory that established the Standard of Truth.

A Muslim Woman

by Samira Husain (16 years old)

One should be aware of the miserable condition that women in Arabia were prior to the time of Islam. The birth of a female child plunged the whole family into mourning. The birth of a daughter was considered a disgrace, an event of shame and people wanted to get rid of such unwanted female children. The infants were either drowned or buried alive. The father would search for a place to hide his face while the mother would weep at her own fate. Women were considered a sign of evil.

It is Islam that brought women to the same rank as men. Over fourteen hundred years ago, the Qur'an and the Prophet, peace be upon him, raised woman to the level of humanity by elevating her from the lowest level of society to the same level as of men.

Allah (swt) has made Muslimahs (Muslim women) equal but different from men. A Muslimah is the sharer of wealth of her husband, father, brothers, and children. The Qur'an and the Prophet (pbuh) allocated to her a one-fourth share in her husband's property and as a daughter she gets a share too. The husband is

responsible to look after his family's needs, pay off bills, etc. The woman does not have any financial responsibilities. She should be living at home like a queen.

Nowhere in the Shari'ah (Islamic Law) does it say that a woman is to do all the housework herself. The husband should help out with the chores because it is an act of Sunnah. The Prophet (pbuh) did all his housework himself. A woman's job is to stay at home and watch her children and make them pious Muslims and to keep her husband happy. By fulfilling these duties she will be placed in Paradise. Allah (swt) has said that Paradise lies beneath the feet of the mother.

Today's society believes that Western culture is the one to liberate women by giving her "equal rights." Women are "liberated" today, on the pretext of giving them equal rights, by reducing them to modern clerks in offices, immodest film actresses, shameless striptease dancers, or semi-nude models for advertisements and artists!

So you see, Islam is the true liberator of women, giving her the rights with the dignity that she deserves.

First Prize

Second Prize

Third Prize

Muslim Children Living in a non-Muslim Country

by Hibaq Ahmed (15 years old)

I think that living in a non-Muslim country is very hard for Muslim children. They are being pressured from all directions. Their non-Muslim friends will try to influence them into being like them: Telling them they look nice without a scarf or long skirt. They will tell them that taking drugs is cool and having a boyfriend or girlfriend will make them even cooler.

When some Muslim children go to school, they are made fun of because of what they wear, and that often makes them ashamed of who they are and so they try to act like the children who aren't Muslim. Sometimes there are activities in which a Muslim student

can't join, like the Dance Club, but because the Muslim student wants to fit in, he/she joins it.

In the middle schools and high schools, some of the students smoke and even encourage Muslim students to try it. Most of the time you miss your noon prayer because you are in school. In some schools though, including mine, the teachers allow the students to leave the classroom for about 10-15 minutes for them to pray and try to give easy activities in gym when it is Ramadan.

Television is another major influence for Muslim children. It shows violence in many programs. It also shows disrespect for parents and elders. In some of the programs, the people go to par-

ties, night-clubs, etc. They show indecent actions in almost all the programs, including movies and talk shows. A lot of children try to imitate what they see on TV and that includes Muslim children.

In conclusion, I think that we Muslims should all leave these non-Muslim countries and go to Muslim countries. However, that may not be possible for some people. They should try and teach their children more about their religion, so that they may understand why they wear scarves, tell them why they cannot take drugs, why they should pray to Allah (swt), and other knowledgeable things such as these. Hopefully, they will be good Muslims and not become bad people.

Hate crime rising, Toronto police say. Blacks, Jews and Muslims top groups.

From CIC

Crimes rose 22% in Toronto last year, according to figures by the Toronto Police. The numbers reflect a trend also seen in other Canadian and U.S. cities. The most victimized groups according to the 1993-1998 figures are Blacks and Jews, while Muslims are eighth on the list. Others include South Asian, East Indian, Somali and Iranian. However if the percentage of Muslims in the other categories are included, Muslims become third on the list after Blacks and Jews. Four groups were identified as being responsi-

ble for many of the reported hate crimes. They are the Ku Klux Klan, the White Aryan Resistance, the Heritage Front and the Aryan Blitzkrieg. The Toronto Police began keeping hate crime statistics in 1993 when 155 incidents were reported. In 1998 there were a total of 1,296 incidents. "The situation is worse. Many hate crimes are not reported or they are not identified as such" the Canadian Islamic Congress said in a statement, "But hate crimes can be stopped through education. The media and the entertainment industries can have a role. Multi faith workshops for teachers is an important educational tool. The Islamic Congress is working and willing to work with other ethnic and religious groups to have zero tolerance for the hate culture."

Canada 3000 Cancels Extra Charges on Halal Meals

On June 21, the Canadian Islamic Congress received a letter from Canada 3000 Airline Limited that it has cancelled a \$10 extra charge which it had imposed in May on requests for special meals, including Halal meals. The Canadian Islamic Congress, along with other organisations including the Jewish Congress have requested the airline to cancel the extra charge on meals for religious or dietary reasons because it is discriminatory.

Rich and Poor

From the 1998 UN Human Development Report it is estimated that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education and health care, adequate food, clean water and safe sewers for all the world population is roughly \$40 billion a year, or less than 4 percent of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world.

