

THE MUSLIM STANDARD

Number 12

Shawwal 1396/September-October 1976

25 cents Monthly

From Christianity & Black Nationalism to Islam

Face to Faith

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HOW TO PAY ZAKAH



Thousands performing Eid prayer in Karachi

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO TAKES A STEP TO THE LEFT

The most significant thing about the General Elections is not that the PNM did win, but the emergence of the ULF — the United Labour Front— as the undisputed opposition. Amidst the bewildering multiplicity of parties —there were about nine in all—the electorate came down solidly in favour of the two-party system and many must have breathed a sigh of relief that for the next few years at least the prospects for political stability in this small but extremely rich nation must seem rather good.

Although victory for the PNM was a foregone conclusion, there is precious little of a positive nature that they can really congratulate themselves about after twenty years as the ruling party. It is said with a great deal of plausibility that the factors responsible for the victory were : (1) the powers of patronage; (2) the influence of the PNM created capitalist elite; (3) the massive Special Works force created by the Government over the years which has devalued not only the workers themselves but the idea of work as such; (4) a well-organised and sophisticated party machinery with enough funds at its disposal compared to the other parties most of which have ended up in dire financial straits and oblivion and (5) the towering figure of Papa Doc himself.

It was not the inherent strength and goodness of the PNM which have allowed them to hold the reins once more. The charges of mismanagement, inefficiency and corruption all contributed to a widespread feeling of frustration and this is what, played upon by charismatic ULF platform speakers, gave the ULF their thrust into Parliament.

Was the ULF's showing merely then a flash in the pan? Or has the element of class struggle and conflict based upon the economic injustices and iniquities in our society taken permanent root? The ULF only seemed to have gathered momentum in the final days of the election campaign and many who voted for the party did so as an anti-PNM

gesture rather than any commitment to the ideology of the party. Regarding this, there is still a number of areas to be cleared up. The party is certainly a 'leftist' party espousing Marxian ideals but it denies being Communist. But it also has leaders who are confirmed Marxists whether of the MAO or other brands. So it seems clear that Trinidad, Tobago has to be left out on this, has definitely taken a step to the left and it remains to be seen whether the party has any real staying power.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO GENERAL ELECTIONS 1976

A STEP TO THE LEFT

At least the presence of a united and hopefully constructive opposition in Parliament should act as a brake on the excesses of another five years of PNM rule. The Opposition leader, Basdeo Panday, has indicated that he doesn't see their role as making Parliament a lively talking shop. He has suggested that if things which are urgently needed —like proper sanitation— do not get done by the authorities, then they would set up alternative machinery to get things done.

This is a dynamic idea and one which could add a new dimension to the task of nation building. One may remark that there are a variety of areas, with or without Government assistance, where people can take the initiative and make positive contributions to the quality of their lives. The habit of tongue-lashing and finger pointing may be necessary but they are not sufficient to bring about a change in our environment and our life styles. (And talking about life-styles,

many people would be forgiven for thinking that there was no significant difference between the two parties, judging by the pre- and post-election 'razmataz' —the motorcades, the rum and beer swilling and the obscenities displayed and encouraged by the parties' rank and file. And it was a particularly galling thing to see 'Muslim' candidates in the height of the fasting month of Ramadan leading these Carnival-like parades).

Some areas where voluntary initiative can be taken to improve the condition of the people are the provision and upkeep of proper recreational facilities, library services, sanitation at a district level, help to existing public institutions like hospitals, career guidance and training and a host of other projects. These would help to create greater civic awareness and assist the government of the day in determining priorities. It is in areas like these that the people as a whole and the Opposition in Parliament too can come out and support the government in whatever good they are attempting to create. By the same token, they should be vigilant enough to point out and forbid any wrongs that are being perpetrated.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has selected the ministers to form the government and has discarded some of the millstones. No doubt the duties and responsibilities of public office are very onerous and it is to be hoped that some of the genuine causes for concern —some of which we highlighted in our last issue— should be tackled. We do not yet see total justification for the fulsome praises which have been heaped on the Prime Minister; at least the tendency to be over-bearing and arrogant should be tempered to reflect a more genuine concern for the people.

We note too that there are a few persons with Muslim names in the new Parliament. Over the years this has been so but their presence has seldom been reflected in the type of legislation passed. May we hope for a change?

EID MUBARAK

to the
Muslim Community

KEEP 'EID CLEAN!

Celebration here often means 'fete like peas' with rum, roti, music and bacchanal down the line. But we may just have carried some age-old habits to certain extremes. In fact for much of the history of mankind, wine, women and song was the accepted thing in celebrating any event or occasion.

But upon reflection, such behaviour is not in keeping with the normal and natural pattern of living so we must make special preparation to get into the act, drink a lot and then we can behave "drunk and disorderly" dancing with everyone's wife or husband in a manner that makes sober eye balls roll.

Many religious celebrations have deteriorated to this level of behaviour too. We see it at weddings, wedding receptions, and at religious occasions which have been made into national holidays. When sober people see things like "Eid Dance" and "Eid Blockorama", they would ask with a mixture of indignation and helplessness, "What is this world coming to?"

Muslims, however, must be rather careful of their duty to God and not allow their Celebrations to be reduced to this level. The celebrations in Islam do have a powerful religious significance and the manner of observing them is not left to individuals to do their

own thing.

On the two Eids, a Muslim must bathe, put on clean clothes, and perfume, go to the mosque, give Sadaqat (charity) and on the way to the mosque he must celebrate the praises of his Lord. He would then visit homes, exchange gifts or share meals and strengthen the bond of brotherhood.

In his celebrations too a Muslim is strongly reminded that he is in the presence of God and therefore is not encouraged to commit any transgression or sin. He is asked to celebrate the praise of God at all times —morning, noon and night, standing, sitting or reclining. This is what all celebration should really be about.

SOVIET UNION

The situation of religion

'Every religious idea, every idea of God, even flirting with the idea of God, is unutterable vileness...vileness of the most dangerous kind, "contagion" of the most abominable kind. Millions of sins, filthy deeds, acts of violence and physical contagions...are far less dangerous than the subtle, spiritual idea of a God decked out in the smartest "ideological" costumes...Every defence or justification of the idea of God, even the most refined, the best intentioned, is a justification of reaction.'

—Lenin, Sochineniya, Vol.35, pp 88-90.

A new study published last month by the World Council of Churches analyses Soviet legislation concerning religion and presents 'objective and ready-made proof of the fact that there is in the USSR religious discrimination sanctioned by the State'.

Earlier, in June 1976, a group of 28 Christians sent a letter to the Soviet Praesidium in which it was stated: "The aims on which the present attitude of the State to religion is based were developed more than half a century ago, when the total destruction of faith in God was proclaimed as a realistic goal that could be attained in the near future. But life has demonstrated the illusory nature of these hopes.."

Hijra Centenary: big celebration planned

The onset of the 15th century of the Islamic Hijra calendar, three and a quarter years from now, is expected to be celebrated in a big and lavish way.

The next conference of the Islamic foreign ministers due to be held next May in Tripoli is expected to declare the year 1400 AH as the Hijra centenary year and approve a detailed celebration programme prepared by a committee of experts appointed by the Islamic Secretary general, Dr. Amadou Karim Gaye.

The experts who met recently in London are understood to have recommended an all-inclusive programme comprising exhibitions, conferences, publications and a variety of ceremonials and competitions. It is suggested that a summit of the Muslim heads of state be held in Jeddah/Mecca/Medina with a ceremonial parade by military units from all member states.

An exhibition of books may be held in Cairo, another in London and a third in Paris. Two other exhibitions, one on Muslim sciences and the other on Islamic art are billed for Isfahan and Istanbul respectively.

At least nine international conferences have been proposed. An Islamic law conference will be held in Cairo.

Damascus is to host a history conference, and Baghdad, a conference on the Arabic language. Fez in Morocco is the suggested venue of a conference of Muslim universities and Tripoli may host a conference on Muslim minorities. Two separate conferences on Christian-Muslim relations are planned in Lahore and Kuala Lumpur. And finally there is a Seerat conference beginning one Friday in Mecca and concluding the following Friday in Medina with the possible signing of a document, tentatively called 'The Declaration of Medina.'

Other programmes include an international sporting event, mobilisation of the mass media, writing of books, issue of special coins and stamps, subsidised interstate tours plus a whole range of activities at the various local and national levels.

The main aim of the celebration is said to be to revive and refresh the commitment of the Ummah to Islam and its civilisational objectives.

It is to be hoped that the paraphernalia of conferences and parades and the other expensive exercises would not obscure the real message of the Hijra which is a symbol of man's struggle against the forces of injustice and tyranny and of a believer's hope in the support and reward of his Lord.

FLASHPOINT!

It is now a year since the Mecca Conference on "The Message of the Mosque" was held. That Conference was attended by representatives of 80 countries including Trinidad and Tobago. It was the ASJA President, Sheikh Shafiqur Rahman who attended and he was even elected to the Board of Founding Members of the Supreme International Council of the Mosques.

In the adjacent columns we publish some of the recommendations of that Conference many of which have a direct and urgent bearing on the needs of the Trinidad Muslim community.

One year after the Conference, we may well ask what has the ASJA which has a hold over the majority of mosques in the country done to implement any of the resolutions. To all outward appearances, the answer seems to be precious little.

Moreover, not only has nothing been done, but there has been a noticeable drift towards ignoring the spirit and the letter of the recommendations with the result that there are in many mosques and Jamaats much strain and tension. In the blessed month of Ramadan just completed, this tension has in some cases reached flashpoint.

We believe that it is time to give serious consideration to implementing the resolutions if only to prevent further alienation. The Muslims in Trinidad are going through a new and critical phase and the true Message of the Mosque must be heeded. The Mosque must become once more "the citadel of the Faith from where radiate the light of truth, guidance, justice and peace"; it must become "the stronghold of virtue and true morality, the seat of knowledge and the first school where the most God-fearing scholars, the perspicacious of jurists, the most valiant of men in battle and power, and the most understanding and merciful of judges are trained".

The Message of the Mosque

Concerning "The Message of the Mosque", the Conference recommended the following:

1. Attention should be given to the formulation of Islamic programmes for Da'wah (Islamic propagation) in accordance with the actual conditions of the Islamic movement in each region. Such programmes should also be reviewed between now and then in the light of the experience of the du'at (propagators of Islam: singular - da'i) in their practical life and field work.

2. Schools and colleges of Da'wah should coordinate their efforts in the Islamic world so that each one would pay special attention to its specific geographical area.

3. There is a need for coordination between mosques, communication media and educational and social institutions so that they all can work in the service of the Muslim's belief and to the transformation of his action according to the teachings of the Islamic Shari'ah.

4. Mosques should be expanded to provide various cultural, social and educational services to their people in their own supervision.

5. Various means of da'wah should be employed through the use of both written and the spoken word.

6. It is necessary that the mosque should be up with its message in all those places where Muslim groups are found so that the presence of the mosque may become a necessity in every place where Muslims get together like schools, colleges, industries, clubs, colonies and military camps, etc.

7. It is necessary that the youth should be given special attention in the mosque, with full consideration of their difficulties due to their age and the spirit of the contemporary world.

8. Attention must be given to the needs of women so that they can receive their full share from Islamic culture and Islamic education.

8. Regular meetings should be held for the Imams of the mosques in each region for the exchange of ideas and experiences, for the study of difficulties that confront the mission of the mosque and for the adoption of proper solutions to deal with these difficulties with methods that aim at the welfare of the Muslims in the correct Islamic framework.

10. Revival of the educational message of the classical Islamic mosques like the mosque of Qayrawan and Azhar, and the need for the continuing of the educational activity of these mosques in such a way that they can re-invigorate

their historical past, which has played such an important role in the Islamic life.

11. It is important to train the Imams and their assistants because the most important part of the message of the mosque depends upon their ability and qualifications.

12. It is necessary to pay attention to the mosque as far as its building and other accessories are concerned. All planning should be done around its basic purpose and it must be purified from everything that is contrary to the command of Allah.

13. Continuous efforts to urge Muslims to rescue the Holy places of Islam, especially the Mosque of Aqsa, the Mosque of Ibrahim and the call must be made for their liberation.

14. It is also recommended that the Imam must have enough protection to guarantee his independence to think and to express his free opinion concerning the problems of Muslims and their lands in the framework of the Islamic Shari'ah.

II
Concerning the selection and training of Imams, the Conference made the following recommendations:

1. He should be faithful in his relationship with his Lord and be a good example for others, commanding that which is good and forbidding that which is evil, possessing enough courage to speak the truth in each situation.

2. He should seek the pleasure of Allah and success in the Hereafter for whatever he does and should refrain from showing off or being nice to people at the expense of the truth. He should have no desire to solicit the praise of the people for himself.

3. He should be constantly in touch with the two basic sources and the unadulterated streams: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet (peace be upon him), studying them, reflecting upon them, seeking guidance from them, practising their injunctions, deriving strength from their light and observing their limits.

4. He should have sharp understanding, wide information, fully aware of his environment, knowing his situation and circumstances and the challenges that are confronting Islam.

5. He should constantly study Islamic history and the history of mankind in general and should also know other human sciences.

6. He should have a good grasp and command of language, and should also know some languages other than Arabic so that he may be able to know what the

RECOMMENDATIONS OF MECCA CONFERENCE, RAMADAN 1395

friends and foes write about Islam and can teach and convince those who speak non-Arabic languages whether they be Muslims or non-Muslims.

7. He should have enough sense of responsibility and intellectual ability that he can solve the pertinent issues with strong arguments and in a convincing manner.

8. He should have a good character and righteous behaviour so that his people may love him and have true faith in whatever he says and follow his advice.

9. He should be patient, steadfast and anxious to benefit his people and to enlighten them.

10. He should abstain from what people have and be content with what Allah has given him. Then he will be dear among them, worthy of their respect and affection and above any malignance or attack from their side.

11. He should be able to recite the Qur'an well and know the rules of Tajwid.

Concerning the Friday Khutba, the Conference recommended:

1. The Friday Khutbas should aim at achieving the following objectives:

a. Admonition and reminding concerning Allah, His judgment and His recompense in the Hereafter. Speaking about Allah and His attributes in such a way that can move and revive the hearts, commanding good and forbidding evil.

b. Instruction and education to Muslims about the truth of their faith from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet, peace be upon him, with special care to safeguard the doctrines from all superstition, the worship from all innovations and the moral and ethical values from all extremes.

c. Correction of the misunderstood aspects of Islam refutation of objections and falsities that the enemies incite to confuse the minds. This is, of course, to be done in a convincing and wise manner, free from vulgarity and accusations. All the dissenting, destructive and erroneous views should be replaced by presenting sound Islamic views, with special emphasis on their comprehensiveness, balance, depth and positivity.

d. Bringing the Khutbah into contact with life and with the contemporary situation of the people. This ought to be done by concentration upon the cure to the diseases of the society, upon the presentation of solutions for all its problems as derived from the Shari'ah. Attention should also be directed to matters concerning women and the Muslim family due to the fact that they

have become the special target of attack and doubts that the enemies of Islam are spreading around.

e. Taking special note of different Islamic occasions that recur during the year like Ramadan, Pilgrimage, Hijrah, etc. which occupy the minds of the audience and they are interested to know more about them.

f. Deepening the spirit of Islamic brotherhood and the unity of its great Ummah, and fighting all regional, racial and sectional bigotries that cause separation in the unity of the Ummah. Concern with the problems of Muslims within the Islamic world or outside of it, so that the Muslims may not be alienated from the other Muslim brothers, neither in mind nor in feelings. "Whoever does not care about the affairs of the Muslims, he does not belong to them." (Hadith).

g. Reviving the spirit of Jihad and strength in the soul of the Ummah and kindling the fire of zeal and ardour to protect the sacred ideals and sacred places of Islam and its countries, to protect the blood, dignity and property of the Muslims and to defend the beliefs of Islam and its Shariah, and to strive to eliminate all those tyrants who obstruct the march of the Da'wah of Allah.

2. Khutbah must never be used as a means for the publicity of a person or a party or a system. It should be solely for Allah and His religion, to raise His word and to convey His call. "Verily the mosques belong to Allah, so call not anyone with Allah." (The Qur'an).

3. It is not correct to oblige a Khatib (one who delivers the khutbah) to deliver a Khutbah (a sermon) that is forced upon him from the side of the authorities and which he repeats in a mechanical way with no spirit. The Khatib should be free to choose his subject and prepare and deliver his Khutbah the way that satisfies his mind and his conscience in accordance with what he has studied from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet, peace be upon him.

4. It is an obligation upon the Ulama and also the able propagators of Islam to set high examples of Khutbah on various Islamic topics containing the basic material for the structure of Khutbah with references from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, Seerah, Islamic history, narrated sayings and meaningful verses, so that they can be in the hands of Khatibs in various parts of the world and can be used by those in need.

5. In the preparation of a Khutbah it is necessary to use the reliable Islamic

sources. The weak and fabricated ahadith, Israeliyyat, false legends, absurd exaggerations and whatever is not corroborated with authentic narratives and show sound reasoning should be discarded.

6. The language of the Khutbah in Arabic speaking places should be easy and understandable literary Arabic. Local dialects, deliberately composed rhymed prose and strange words must not be used. In places where Arabic is not understood it is sufficient to have the prologue of the Khutbah and its essentials in Arabic, but the subject matter of the Khutbah must be in the language that is understood by the audience.

7. The Khutbah should be delivered in a natural way without chanting, over-acting, shouting and all those ways of repugnant deliberations.

8. The Khatib should not prolong his Khutbah to the extent of burdening or boring the audience, neither should he shorten it so that his subject is incomplete and broken.

9. All that is mentioned earlier also applies to the Khutbah of 'Id, with special consideration, of course, to the occasion. It should be more comprehensive and should speak about the principles of Islam.

IV

Concerning supervision of the Mosque, the Conference recommended:

1. Since the mosque is a very important institution and has its own independence, whether belonging to a state or to a community, it requires to have a special organizational set-up to discharge its message. This set-up should cater for:

i. Supervision on the performance of prayers in their appointed times.

ii. Looking after the affairs of the Muslims living in its locality and extending help to them; encouraging them to perform prayers in congregation and solving their social and economic problems and their personal differences.

iii. Collection of donations and their direction in the requirement of the mosque, as well as the assistance of needy Muslims.

iv. This committee should be an elected body of the regular attendants of the mosque.

v. This supervisory committee should select the Imam with the consultation of the Muslims of that locality.

In this work-saturated and survival-oriented world of materialistic values, success has been looked upon as the accumulation of as much of the products of the Earth as possible. We are all familiar with, or at least aware of, the projected picture of the "successful" man or woman: fancy cars, money, property, business places, affluence. The whole of present-day society is geared towards achieving this goal; the wealthy flaunt it; the poor strive for it. And in the mad scramble for material prosperity, the higher things of life are relegated to minor positions or trampled into the ground.

Yet, in the midst of all the hustle and bustle, few of us really know the real reason for the deep desire to be successful. Almost every one desires the best out of life, yet most of us have not an inkling of what life is all about. This ignorance leads us to naught but anarchy, frustration and agony. Those of us who succeed in accumulating any of the Earth's wealth find ourselves faced with the problem of not knowing how much is enough and how best to utilise what we have. Consequently, we misuse what we have and spend our whole lives trying to keep it; those of us who have not got any wealth spend our lives in search of a way to obtain some. This keeps us occupied all of our lives in search of a phantom which, even if found, cannot be recognised.

This type of success leaves a lot to be desired if we really examine it. After its accumulation, the wealth is attacked by such natural enemies as expenditure in terms of living costs, taxes, devaluation of currency, etc. Then comes the problem of preservation from thieves, bad investments, social upheavals, international political intrigues such as war, etc; and a million and one other complications. Even if the hoard is preserved against these agents, we are not so protected from the ravages of time and disease which are always there to curtail the enjoyment of our privileges. Then there is the final clincher wielded by Death, which puts an end to our ownership and the wealth goes to someone else. The accumulation of wealth therefore, cannot be the final or real success that we human beings crave, rather it is a means of sustenance of life.

Furthermore, the mere accumulation of wealth, while greatly helping out

SUCCESS and the Human Being

the sustenance of life, does not indicate the true purpose of human existence and it is this ignorance which is responsible for the eventual misuse of our treasure. Then the world opens its doors to frustrated human beings who are materially successful yet humanly miserable failures. The very wealth which is supposed to bring us happiness brings us nothing but sorrow and destruction. Without a purpose to live for, we use our wealth for the fulfillment of our own selfish desires, whims and fancies in a vain bid to find the happiness which we so crave. In the process, we destroy or harm other human beings and creatures, thus making the world that much more tough to live in.

Since the accumulation of wealth is but an aid for living, then true success can only lie in the fulfillment of the purpose of life itself. This task, however, requires much more effort than mechanical imitation of the existing social system. It calls for an independent inquiry into the nature of the human being, its definition, its norm of behaviour, its relationship with other creatures, the origin of the species, its place in the universe, the type of society that it should occupy and its relationship with the Creator of the Universe in which it resides. In short, this task calls for the accumulation of knowledge — a profound knowledge upon which to base our life! It is of the utmost importance that the term "MAN" be defined — meaningfully defined — because without a proper definition of what we are supposed to be, we would not even be able to treat ourselves properly, not to speak of other creatures!

Where will we attain such a profound knowledge? Since we do not exist in a vacuum, because we have to inter-react with the things which surround us, and because these things are subject to the laws which govern the Universe in which we all commonly exist, then we shall have to seek the guidance of the Authority who drafted the Universal laws. For it is only that Authority who can tell us how best to use the things

which surround us and upon which we depend for our sustenance. Further, we are an integral part of the Universal System, so the Creator of the Universe should also be able to tell us where we fit in. And it is only when we fulfil the obligations which we are thus given that we will be able to achieve success — real success.

It is a known fact that throughout the history of the human race, men have appeared with the most extraordinary knowledge of humanity and its place in the Universal Scheme of things. It is only sceptics and fools who refuse to accept the information imparted by these men or to even examine the evidence which they brought to prove their claims of communication with the Author of Creation. What these disbelievers fail to understand is that Knowledge has only two sources — deduction, or speculation, and Divine inspiration, or Revelation. The former depends solely on the use of the senses and is fundamentally unstable and fragmentary whereas the latter is of a more comprehensive and all-embracing nature, providing a permanently deeper insight into human affairs and attitudes which liberates the hearts and minds of men and purifies the soul and guides human beings in the light of truth and unto the straight path of obedience to their Creator and fulfillment of their purpose of life. Apart from being perfectly logical, it is free from the stigma of doubt which is inherent in speculation. Such is the type of knowledge brought by the Prophets of Allah, the Creator of the Universe.

In our frantic search for success and the benefits of material prosperity, we need the knowledge of the proper uses of the things of the Earth because it is these which mankind must utilise for its welfare. Not only that but we also need to know the 'whys and the whereofs' of the natural processes which abound around us so that we may bring ourselves into harmony with the rest of Creation and so please the Creator. The knowledge which we need has been provided for us today, as it was provided for our father, Adam, in the earliest days and it points us in one direction and One Direction only — Islam — complete submission to the Will of the Creator.. True success can only come about by obeying the injunctions of the Creator and becoming what He designed us to be in the first instance!

From Christianity and Black Nationalism to Islam

VIBRATIONS

Interview with Kwesi Attiba

Brother, for the past 8 years, you have resided in North America. What were the circumstances surrounding your migration?

Among other things, a dead-end job at the G.P.O. and an attempt to widen my experiences in life rather than stay in the stagnation of the Civil Service.

Many Trinidadians have been leaving to take up residence in North America. How do you view this considering the situation there of which you have first-hand knowledge?

North America is itself a very 'heavy' experience. Some of the situations are unbelievable especially the way some of our people exist and consider it living, for example, poor housing, backward schools and unhealthy schools in some cases.

In my opinion, the place is spiritually barren. Seeing that most people are attracted by the material gains of metropolitan living all other values play second fiddle to the American dollar sign.

It was only a year or two ago in America that you became a Muslim. What attracted you to Islam?

This story goes back to about 5 years at a time when I was a serious Black Nationalist and practising Christian. It was then that I became disenchanted with the relationship between the Christian churches and oppressed people. I was also confused by some of the tenets of my Roman Catholic faith. I read most of the Black Nationalist material available, my favourite being "Muhammad Speaks". But deep down I knew that Elijah was running a game with the issue of the

divinity of Fard, so I stuck with the Christian con-game.

Eventually, al hamdu lillah, I got into a serious level of study in African history which highlighted Islam. The final move however came after I read the book "The Eternal Message of Muhammad," by Abdur Rahman Azzam. This book established in my consciousness the concept of the Oneness of God.

Do you believe that you would have become a Muslim if you had remained in Trinidad taking into perspective the activities of the local Muslim community?

Allah alone knows that answer and I can only speculate. Firstly, for years I thought that Islam was an East Indian religion. I think most people in Trinidad have the same opinion even the East Indians themselves.

It is unfortunate that the universal message of Islam to mankind from their Lord had to be so abused, but that's the way it is. I think then, on that basis, the answer is 'No'.

How do you compare the North American Muslim community with the local Muslim community? Any suggestions for improvement of the local community?

Coming from Canada, I see parts of the same problems affecting Trinidad, these being lack of community and leadership, and education. These problems go hand in hand. The Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago have allowed themselves to go the way of the Christian Christians, practising their faith only on special occasions and not allowing faith in Allah and the example of prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, to be the real guidance.

Islam is built around community and leadership in order that institutions such as Zakaah and Bait-ul Maal can be implemented. Simple things like 'halal' foods are difficult to obtain in Trinidad.

It is also incumbent on Muslims to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. Again, this can best be done in community and with proper leadership.

The question of educating our children and providing the proper Islamic environment for their growth is crucial and it is time such problems are tackled with the tools given to us by Allah.

What changes have you observed in Trinidad since your return?

The changes most noticeable are the deterioration of values in many sectors of the society.

How do you view the change to Republic? Do you see any solutions on the horizon to critical problems confronting us?

I think that the Republic came 14 years late. In 1962, if we were truly independent we should have thrown off the yoke of colonialism together with the "Queen" and the pile of antiquated nonsensical values—peerage, knighthood, judges powdered wigs, etc.

I think at this point in time it is purely opportunism and I doubt it will solve anything because the present government is a regime of crisis, mismanagement and cheap ploys. The only solution for Trinidad and Tobago is Islam and the Muslim community MUST show the example.

Now that you are back, what are your plans? Do you intend playing a greater role in the Islamic awakening?

Most of my plans now are very flexible so I cannot be too definite. I do not know what my role in the Islamic awakening can be because of my limited knowledge of Islam. I can say though that personally I want to submit myself totally to the will of Allah and use whatever ability that Allah has blessed me with in the fullest to establishing the deen of Islam on earth, in sha Allah.

After Salah (Prayer), Zakah is the greatest pillar of Islam. Salah and Zakah are often mentioned together in the Qur'an just like belief and the doing of good deeds are frequently mentioned together.

Zakah means purity and cleanliness. These two meanings are implicit in the following verse of the Qur'an: "Take alms of their wealth whereby you may purify them and make them grow." (9 : 103). A portion set apart from your wealth for the needy and the poor is called Zakah because in this manner a man's wealth and along with it his own 'Nafs' (self) becomes purified.

All the prophets of God were commanded to collect Zakah from their peoples. A few references to this in the Qur'an can be found in 21 : 73, 19 : 55, 7 : 156. These verses clearly show that the religion of Islam has been established from the beginning in the period of every prophet, on the two great pillars of Salah and Zakah and it never happened that any Ummah (nation) believing in God God was exempted from these obligatory duties.

The two obligatory acts of Salah and Zakah go hand in hand. In the beginning of Surah al Baqarah we read:

"This Qur'an is the book of God wherein there is no doubt. It is a guidance to the God-conscious people. These are the ones who believe in the Unseen and observe Salah and spend of what We have bestowed on them, in the path of God. (2 : 1-2)

This is followed by another verse which says:

"It is such people who receive guidance from their Lord and it is they who are successful." (2 : 5)

The implication of these verses is that those who have no faith and do not adhere to Salah and Zakah are neither receiving guidance nor can they achieve success. In spite of the importance of Zakah in Islam, it is beyond our comprehension why the institution of Zakah is not practised as, for example, Salah. It may be because the latter is to some extent ritualistic, something which appeals to the people whereas the former is not. Another possible reason is ignorance of the mechanics of computing collecting and distributing Zakah. This article is intended to give brief guidelines in the three categories stated above.

WHY AND HOW TO PAY ZAKAH

Haidar Ali

♦ ♦ ♦

From the Qur'an we learn that everything in the heavens and in the earth and in particular wealth really belongs to God. It is for this reason that we have been advised to spend out of what Allah has given us. It is foolish to think that by spending our wealth in the way of Allah, we get poor. For the Qur'an says, "The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it grows seven ears, and each ear has a hundred grains." (2 : 261).

More explicitly, the Qur'an tells us that it is Shaitan who suggest that the giving of Zakah leads to poverty (2 : 268). The institution of Zakah discourages the habit of hoarding. For example if one has a certain fixed sum of money, by paying Zakah every year on it, this sum becomes

negligible after forty years. The Qur'an promises a painful doom for hoarders. One must not get the impression that the acquisition of wealth is unlawful (haram). For the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah on him) said, "Earning of wealth by honest means is next in importance only to the duty of Prayer." [1]. This idea is further corroborated in Surat-ul-Jumu'ah where we are told to disperse after the Friday prayer and seek the bounty of God (62 : 10). See also 2 : 198. The abstinence of hoarding leads to healthy consequences for the community. For then, one invests his money in halal (lawful) business which creates employment and so reduces the risk of helplessness of Muslims. In passing one could mention that investment is also one of the solutions to the menace of ribaa (interest). The importance of Zakah is further clarified by Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) who said, "By Allah, I shall fight those who make a difference between prayer and Zakah, for Zakah is a tax on wealth..." [2]. The concept of Zakah is beautifully put in the instruction of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah on him) to Mu'adh when he was being sent as governor to the Yemen: "Invite them (to Islam)," said the Prophet. "If they accept tell them that Allah has made obligatory a charity on their wealth which is taken from the wealthy among them and returned to the poor among you." [3]. The significance of the word 'returned' sums up the concept of Zakah.

We should note that everytime we fulfil a command of Allah, we earn His pleasure and in the case of payment of Zakah the rewards are clearly mentioned in the Qur'an. When one pays Zakah one is assured of the hereafter, guidance and prosperity. (The Qur'an, 31 : 4-5) The Qur'an also considers those who keep up prayer and pay the Zakah are brothers in faith. (9 : 11)

COMPUTING ZAKAH

Silver and gold are the two commodities which man has always loved and loves to hoard and they are the two precious metals which form the basis of the currencies of the world. Zakah is levied on all cash holdings in the currency, gold and silver as well as other kinds of property with certain exceptions, and any form of capital whether in the shape of cash or kind.

Zakah is an annual charge on property which remains in the possession of a person for a whole year if its value reaches a certain minimum amount. This minimum amount is called the NISAB. The Nisab differs with different kinds of property, some details of which will be given below. In the case of all things on which Zakah is payable, whether cash, gold or silver, cereals, livestock or other articles of merchandise, their value is determined according to the current rates.

The following are the guidelines for the computation of the Zakah in a few categories:

a. Hoarded wealth.

The Nisab of silver is approximately 21oz. and that of gold is approximately 3 oz. Since our currency is based on gold reserves, the Nisab of cash amounts is based on the current price of about 3oz. of gold. At the time of writing (Ramadan 1396) this is equivalent to about \$1,000.00, one ounce of gold being US\$140.00*

In the case of ornaments, the nisab is that of gold or silver if the ornaments are of gold or silver respectively. If gold and silver are in the form of jewelry, then according to 'Umar and Ibn Mas'ud (may God be pleased with them), Zakah is compulsory and Imam Abu Hanifa has accepted this verdict. [See 4.]

b. Mines and Treasure Troves.

If a mine or a treasure trove is discovered in the land of a Muslim, he is to submit 20% of it to the Islamic State.

c. On Agricultural Produce.

In the case of agricultural land which depends for irrigation on rain water or natural springs, the tax is 10% of the land produce. Where the land is irrigated by wells or other artificial means in which labour is engaged by the owner, the tax is 5% on the produce of the land.

d. Tax on Capital.

* Finally, after deducting all debt, the idle wealth is taxed at the rate of 2½%.

"The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of God is that of a grain of corn: it grows seven ears, and each ear has a hundred grains." —The Qur'an, 2 : 261)

i. Livestock. Heads of cattle are subject to a capital tax from 1% to 2½%. In the case of goats and sheep, Zakah is one goat or sheep from 40 to 120, two for 121 to 200, three for 201 to 300 and one for each hundred or part of a hundred. In the case of cows, a one-year old calf for every thirty cows and a two-year old one for every forty are prescribed. Horses are taxable according to their value at 2½%.

ii. Merchandise. Taxable at the rate of 2½%.

EXEMPTIONS FROM ZAKAH

No Zakat is payable on the following: Private abode, personal clothing, furniture, weapons, animals used for transport, jewels such as pearls, rubies etc. which are not traded in, books that are not for trade, equipment used for handicraft from which the owner earns his living such as a hammer etc.

UTILIZATION OF ZAKAH

The Qur'an (9 : 60) mentions explicitly how Zakah collected should be used:

"Alms are for the poor and the needy and those employed to administer the (funds) for those whose hearts have been recently reconciled and those in slavery, the debtors, and in the way of Allah and for the wayfarer."

Scholars are agreed that the term 'alms' in this verse refers to Zakah. This verse tells that the Zakah money could be spent on eight categories, which are:

1. The Poor — these are the poor who do not own enough to be liable to Zakah and those who do not have enough to carry them through the year.
2. The needy — there is a difference of opinion as to whether they or the poor are worse off. The needy, it is said, are those who own nothing and owing to age or sickness cannot earn anything.
3. Those employed to collect and administer the funds.
4. Those whose hearts are recently reconciled come under two categories:
 - a. Alms were given to chiefs to protect some Muslims under them (this was discontinued when Islam became predominant).
 - b. People who were afraid to openly declare their faith for fear of oppression (there is some doubt about the applicability of this now).
5. Those in slavery — free them and raise their status, although this type of

slavery no longer exists.

6. The debtors, provided the cause of their debt is not any vice or mishandling of money.
7. In the way of Allah — any form of Jihad.
8. The wayfarer is the traveller who is far away from home and in need of money even though he may have money at home.

RESTRICTIONS

1. Those who receive Zakah, in addition to the above stipulations, must be:
 - a. Muslim
 - b. Reached the age of majority
 - c. Have full use of his intellect
 - d. Wise in disposing of it.

2. Zakat should be limited as far as possible to the town or place of the funds.

3. To pay is imperative, although making it public is not necessary as this might embarrass the receiver.

We should note that in an Islamic State individuals are not free to give Zakah to anyone they like for the Qur'an states that those who administer it have a share in it which implies that it is the State's concern. In the absence of any machinery for the collecting of Zakah, it will be correct to take out Zakah and distribute it on an individual basis.

WHEN TO PAY ZAKAH

Zakah in most cases is due once a year. People engaged in farming or mining are required to pay Zakah immediately after harvesting or extraction.

Traditionally, Zakah is paid during the month of Ramadan, but if one establishes his own year, he should pay Zakah in the month following the end of the year.

Any Muslim who has not paid Zakah on his assets in the past should pay that now. In the terminology of Islamic law, even this payment for the past would be 'ada' (valid discharge of obligations) and not just 'qada' (defective but obligatory discharge).

- [1]. Kanz-ul 'Ummal, Vol. II. Quoted in [3].
- [2]. Sahih al Bukhari, 24:1.
- [3]. S.M. Ahmad, 'Economics of Islam', Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore.
- [4]. Abul A'la Maududi, 'Fundamentals of Islam'. Lahore.

VOLUNTARY FASTING - Post/Ramadan Discipline

With the completion of Ramadan, we pray that God would accept our fasting and our devotions performed during the month.

Ramadan should have induced in us a greater awareness of our purpose in life and a discipline and a determination to work towards that purpose long after the month is completed.

We cannot simply return to our old, careless and sluggish ways now. The struggle has to be constantly developed and renewed. This is why fasting on certain days of the year apart from Ramadan has been recommended by Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace and observed by himself and his devoted companions. This is voluntary fasting and some companions exerted themselves so strenuously with it that they were told to reduce their exertions.

Because of the importance of voluntary fasting, we give below some of the recommended days and the method for observing it. Fasting is recommended on:

1. Six days in Shawwal. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Whoever fasts Ramadan and then six days of Shawwal, it is as if he has fasted a year.' According to Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Ash-Shafi'i, it is better to fast the six days consecutively.

2. 10th of Dhil Hijja—the Day of Arafat. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, 'Fasting on the day of Arafat atones for two years - the past year and the year ahead.' It is recommended to fast on the day of Arafat except at Arafat itself, according to Tirmidhi.

3. 10th of Muharram (the Day of 'Aashuraa), a day before it and a day after it. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked, 'Which Salat is better after the prescribed ones?' He replied, 'Salat in the thick of the night.' He was then asked, 'Which fast is better after Ramadan?' He said, 'The month of Allah...al-Muharram.'

There are three ways of observing

the fast of 'Aashuraa:

1. Fasting 3 days—9, 10 and 11 of Muharram;
2. Fasting 9th and 10th.
3. Fasting the 10th alone.

4. Most of Sha'baan.

A'isha said, 'I have never seen the messenger of God fasting the whole of a month except Ramadaan. And I have not see him fasting more days in a month than in Sha'baan.'

Usama ibn Zaid once said, 'O messenger of God, I have not seen you fasting in any month (apart from Ramadan) as you fast in Sha'baan.' The Prophet replied, 'That is a month which people forget, between Rajab and Ramadan. It is a month in which deeds are raised up to the Lord of the Worlds. I like my deeds to be raised up so I am fasting.'

Note: Special fasting in the middle of Sha'baan (15th Sha'baan) thinking that it has special virtues over the rest of the month, has no sound evidence to back it up in the Sunnah.

5. The sacred months—Dhul Qa'dah, Dhul Hijja, al-Muharram and Rajab.

A man came to the Prophet, peace be upon him and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am the man who came to you in the first year (of the Hijrah).' So the Prophet asked, 'What has changed you? You were in good shape then.'

'I only ate food at night since I left you,' said the man.

'Why do you punish yourself?' asked the prophet, upon whom be peace, adding, 'Fast the month of Sabr (patience) and a day of every month.'

'Make it more for me, in case I have strength.'

'Fast two day (every month),' said the Prophet.

'Increase it for me,' said the man.

Whereupon the Prophet said, 'Fast in the sacred months (indicating with his fingers) three days and leave off three days.'

6. Mondays and Thursdays.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to fast most on Mondays and Thursdays. He was asked about this and said, 'Deeds are displayed (or reviewed) every Monday and Thursday and God forgives then every Muslim and every Mu'min (believer).'

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked about fasting on Monday and he said, 'I was born on that day and on that day I received the revelation.'

7. Three days in every month.

Abu Dharr Al-Ghaffari said, 'The Messenger of God commanded us to fast three days in the month—the 13th., 14th., and 15th., 'It is like the fasting of a year,' he said.'

8. Alternate days.

Abdullah ibn Amr said, 'The Messenger of God said to me, 'I was told that you stay up during the night and fast during the day'.

'Yes, O messenger of God,' he replied.

The Prophet thereupon told him, 'Fast (one day) and do not fast (the other). Pray and sleep, for your body has a right over you, your wife has a right over you, your guest has a right over you. If it is sufficient for you, fast three days every month.'

I said, 'O messenger of God, I have the strength (to fast more).' So the Prophet told him, 'Then fast three days from every Jum'a (i.e. every week).'

I said, 'O messenger of God, I have the strength (to fast more).' Thereupon the Prophet said, 'Fast (according to) the fast of Dawud, 'the Prophet of God and do not increase on it.'

I asked, 'And how was the fasting of Dawud, upon whom be peace and blessings, O messenger of God.'

The Prophet replied, 'He used to fast on one day and not fast the other.'

It is also related that Abdullah ibn Amr said that the Messenger of God said, 'The best fasting in the sight of God is the fasting of Dawud and the best Salat in

the sight of God was the Salat of Dawud. He would sleep a half of the night, stay up (in prayer) one third and sleep one sixth. He would fast one day and not fast the other.'

PERMISSION TO BREAK THE VOLUNTARY FAST.

Umm Hani, may God be pleased with her, said that the messenger of God came to her on the day of the Conquest of Mecca and he brought a drink. 'He drank and then offered me and I said, 'I am fasting.'

He replied, 'The one who fasts voluntarily is an amir(commander) over himself. So if you wish you may fast, and if you wish, you may break it.'

Abu Juhayfa said, 'The Prophet established brotherly relations between Salman and Abu Dardaa. Salman once visited Abu Dardaa and saw Umm Dardaa (his wife) downcast. He said to her, 'What is worrying you?' She replied, 'Your brother, Abu Dardaa, has no care in the world.'

Abu Dardaa then came and made some food for Salman. 'Eat,' he said. 'I am fasting.' Salman replied, 'I will not eat until you eat.' So he ate.

When night came, Abu Darda got up to spend the night in prayer. Salman said to him, 'Sleep.' So he slept.

He got up again and Salman said, 'Sleep.' Towards the end of the night Salman said, 'Get up now.' And they prayed. Salman then said to him, 'Your Lord has a right over you. Your self has a right over you and your family has a right over you. So give to each one having a right, his right.'

The Prophet, upon whom be peace, then came and the episode was recounted to him.

'Salman is right,' he said.

Abu Said al-Khudri, may God be pleased with him, said, 'I prepared food for the messenger of God. He and his companions came. When the food was placed before them, one of them said, 'I am fasting.'

The Prophet, peace be upon him, thereupon said, 'Your brother has invited you and so has imposed an obligation on you.' And he added, 'Break the fast and fast another day in its place, if you wish.'

(So although one who is fasting voluntarily is allowed to break his fast, it is recommended that he should make up for it by fasting another day).

DAYS ON WHICH IT IS FORBIDDEN TO FAST.

1. The day of Eid ul Fitr and the day of Eid ul Adha.
2. On the three days following Eid ul Adha—the days of Tashriq.
3. On Fridays alone. But there is no prohibition on fasting on a Friday if one fasts on the day before or the day after, or if it is the day of Arafat or 'Aashura.

4. On Saturday alone.
5. Fasting for a complete year.
6. The Prophet forbade a woman to fast in the presence of her husband without his permission (except in Ramadan). A husband may ask his wife to break the voluntary fast.
7. Fasting on consecutive days without having Having Iftar or Suhur. (Although the Prophet did this, he forbade Muslims from doing so).

(From 'Fiqh as-Sunnah'—Understanding the Sunnah—by Sayyid Sabiq. Extracted by Abdul Wahid Hamid)

A TIME TO SPEAK

Freedom versus Comfort

There were two brothers: one of them was an attendant to the Sultan of Egypt and the other earned his livelihood by doing manual labour. On one occasion, the Sultan's attendant said to the labourer, "Why do you not serve the Sultan so that you may be relieved of the hardship of labour?" The labourer replied: "Why do you not engage in some business of your own or labour hard to be delivered from the disgrace of being under the yoke of a man other than yourself." Wise men have said, "It is better to have barley bread and be master of your own self than gird up a golden belt and stand up in service. To use your hands in making quicklime into mortar is better than to cross them on your breast in attendance to a Sultan. Get your belly content with a crust of bread. It is better than bending your back in servitude."

Eat to Live or Live to Eat

Once a king asked a doctor, "How much should I eat?" The doctor said, "As little as the weight of one hundred coins a day." The king queried, "What strength would this little quantity give me?" The physician replied, "This quantity will support and carry you. If you eat more you will have to support and carry it."

Man and Dog

A man had a complaint in his eyes, and went to a vet, saying: "Prescribe something for my eyes." The vet prescribed for his eyes what he used for the eyes of a dog; and the man went blind. He complained to the Qadi (Judge), who decreed: "The man has no ground for complaint, for had he not been an ass, he would not have gone to a vet!"

A Time to Speak wherefrom the above anecdotes are taken, is a collection of Sheikh Sadi's epigrams that entertain and also educate. Sheikh Sadi was born at Shiraz in Persia in 571 A.H./1194 C.E. and was one of the greatest storytellers of all time. He understood that a successful story must revolve around a human personality and must at the same time lead to its logical conclusion: if the tyrant refuses to listen to the wise men, his tyranny must ruin him; if you do not practise moderation, then you should not expect to bear hardship; and if you go to a vet for a prescription for your eye, you should not be surprised at being treated like an ass. The justification for and the beauty of Sadi's anecdotes is that they teach the profoundest truths in the plainest way.

A Time to Speak is published by the Islamic Foundation, United Kingdom, and is available from the Islamic Trust Bookshop, price \$2.00.

THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

In all of my years of hearing about religion, about God and about the Divine Guidance, about Heaven and Hell, Satan, Angels, etc, etc, it is only about two years ago that it all started to make sense to me. Of course, like a lot of my friends and some people I once knew, I would get "saved" every now and then, you know, whenever some strange preacher came to our own town on a "crusade". And like a lot of the people who got "saved", it took me about two or three days to get "lost" again, all ready to repeat the process whenever a really "good" preacher came along again.

To be honest with you, it was much more fun being "lost" than being "saved". I mean, look at it this way. Whenever I got "saved", I had to give up being friendly with most of my real "pardners" — after all, they were "sinners", weren't they? That meant that I could not go on any "lime", could not join them in a "rap session" because they would "waste me down"; when I was going to church they would be going to "lime". After two or three days, I would be dying to spend one minute in their company, then two minutes, then three, then . . . I would be "lost" again! And so, I gave up ever trying to be "saved"; I "hardened" my heart and had a ball!

After suffering the tedium of "salvation" and experiencing the joys of "eternal damnation", being reinforced by the status of a secondary education wherein I was exposed to a medley of revolutionary ideas about Man and his World (according to Darwin and his boys), robbed of any superstitious or romantic ideas about priests, nuns, etc, I joyously and willingly went "the way of all flesh". No amount of Preaching, threatening, beseeching, ranting or raving could turn me back or "soften my heart enough to make me see the light". I could out-talk any preacher who tried to "save" me; if I could not out-talk him, then I could out-cuss him and I never felt ashamed to do so. After all, I did not intend to die now anyway, so what did I need with "salvation". God's business could wait till I got too old to enjoy Life; just then, it was my business that counted. There were things that I wanted and I intended to get them without any interference from God whatsoever!

The thing that I really could not appreciate about the "Divine Guidance"

FACE TO FAITH:

THE QUR'AN AND I

Muhammad Sayyid

which the Preachers talked about was the way it never could provide solutions for the problems of daily life. While it was nice to know that all was well with you in Heaven when you died, things were not so well while you were alive, and that is what counted just about then! I mean to say, racial discrimination kept you out of jobs that could provide you with adequate income to cover all the expenses of life; the discriminator was just as "saved" as you are: Your neighbour would be stealing you blind, even though you belonged to the same church. You did not possess the means for providing a meal and nobody cared; while you were starving to death, everyone would be singing: "Rock of Ages, cleft for me . . ." and you would be wishing you could find some food in the cleft. If you were ever given "charity", it would be by a up somebody or other, and you could never forget that. The whole society you lived in would be up to its throat in filth, but you would not care; you would be "saved"!

No, not me! I could not deal with that sort of thing. What I wanted to know was what life is all about; how to deal

with the problems of life; how to make the best use of the things that surrounded me; how to deal with my fellow men; what was I doing here on the face of the Earth! I doubted that I was here just to "accept Jesus as my lord and saviour" so that I could be "saved". If that was what it was all about, then God sure went to a lot of trouble for nothing! What kind of guidance is that? Guidance for what? "If a man slapped you on your left cheek, turn the right"; why should I? Some of the people who turned their cheeks were dying from the blows! I could do without such "guidance"; it was tough enough fighting back.

Then, I MET a Muslim. It was the most fantastic thing that ever happened to me. All that I "knew" about Islam was that it was an "Indian religion"; Muslims prayed topsy-turvy with their faces on the ground and their bottoms in the air; they followed the Quran and some man called Muhammad. It turned out that I did not know a thing about Islam! When that brother started to talk about Islam, he talked about Life, its problems, Man and his purpose, the Universe, Prophets, and above all, GOD! It was unlike any "preaching" that I had ever heard; but I was still skeptical; not me and no religion! I wanted to find out what this "Quran" had to say about me as a man on the face of the Earth, and it better come good.

I had gotten some books on the Prophet and his Companions and they were fascinating reading . . . but the Quran was something else! It did not possess any division into the familiar "testaments, books, acts and letters, epistles and gospels" with which I was accustomed; it was one, undivided, complete book. It was not written in stilted, old-fashioned, puzzling language, nor in impersonal, flat, story-telling script; instead it addressed ME in a most direct manner, telling Me, in no uncertain terms, about who My Creator was; what I was doing to Myself; to My neighbours and friends; the results of My good deeds and My evil ones, and even why I was living the way I was! At the very first reading, the Quran destroyed most of my blind arrogance; I hated it.

Chapter after chapter, page upon page, the Quran tore up my carefree existence! Written at the top of every chapter, were the words: "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" and every page had something to say about

God, His Mercies to Mankind and the way people react towards these mercies. It laid down laws for ME to live by and invited me to think about why I should abide by those rules. It did not Beg me, it told me; and it questioned My reasons for refusing to believe, for doubting reason and logic.

I fought with every thing I possessed; I hid the Quran under all the books that I had; still, what I had read was fresh in my mind and I still thought about it. (Tough me, number one "dread-man", the man who knew it all, I could not beat a simple book.) No matter where I hid the Quran, whenever I wanted to read, I would dig it up, I had to dig it up. I talked about it constantly. I tried to criticise, but I could not think of anything better than the Quran put forward; as far as the Quran was concerned, I was mentally bankrupt. I had wanted to know what the Quran had to say about Mankind, about Life, society and me; well, I was finding out . . . the Hard way!

One night, (the Thursday before I got paid), I picked up the Book to have a read. As I opened it, I got the first of many shocks. I had got as far as the ninth chapter and I was unaware that I had begun to look forward to the words: "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful". This chapter had not got it and somehow, this came as a shock to me! But if that was shortlived, the contents of the first four verses scared the living daylights out of me! I was informed that from that time on, Allah and His Messenger were no longer obligated to me and that I had a period of four months to travel freely throughout the land with the knowledge that I could not escape Allah because He encompassed everything. I slept terribly that night, but I knew what I had to do. The next day, I embraced Islam. It was the tenth day of the Ramadaan, the month of fasting. The Prodigal Had Returned!

Incidentally, the ultimatum contained in those four verses had been delivered to the Unbelievers of Arabia during the month of fasting almost fourteen hundred years ago! Like I said, it is only about two years ago that I found out what Divine Guidance is really all about...! It is about HOW to live and WHY.

'Why That Chick Dress up So?'

PETE: *Why that chick dress up so?*

HERBIE: *How you mean?*

PETE: *With her head covered and wearing long sleeves and long skirt.*

HERBIE: *She's a Muslim.*

PETE: *So what that have to do with it?*

HERBIE: *Boy, you don't know is so Muslim does dress?*

PETE: *Who say so? We have three Muslim chicks in the office and they ~~don't~~ dress so. They always in the latest styles and them is real Muslims.*

The above dialogue is typical and it mirrors the impressions created in the minds of many non-muslims because of the manner in which some muslim women dress.

As muslims our guidance comes from the Holy Quran and Hadith, yet we find that many muslim women have allowed western fashion, which emphasizes nudity and the "sexy" look, to influence the way that they dress. They have unashamedly adopted bareheads and mini skirts and even criticise others who dress as Muslim women ought to dress i.e. covering their bodies with the exception of their faces, hands and feet.

With particular reference to the mode of dress for women in Islam, the Holy Quran says "And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms . . ." (XXIV: 31). "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad) that is most convenient that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful (XXXIII: 59).

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) in his farewell pilgrimage address said that he

has left us the Quran and his Sunnah which, if we take hold of, our affairs shall not go wrong. Then is it not foolhardy to think that we can establish a strong muslim community by borrowing from and patterning ourselves after western philosophy and culture, seeking to be inspired by them rather than the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh).

Let us not be taken in by the glamour of western society, because Quran tells us "Verily this is My Way, leading straight: follow it: follow not other paths: they will scatter you about from His great Path: Thus doth He command you that ye may be righteous" (VI:153) "Then We put thee on the right Way of religion: so follow thou that Way, and follow not the desires of those who know not." (XLV:18).

Wake up Muslims we have been asleep too long. The Holy Quran says of us that we are the best community that has been raised up for the guidance of mankind, let us therefore, by adhering to the Islamic principles of proper dress set an example which the rest of mankind can follow.

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 اَلْعَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝ الرَّحْمٰنُ الرَّحِيْمُ ۝
 مَلِكُ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝ اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَاِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ ۝
 اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ ۝ صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ
 عَلَيْهِمْ ۝ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝
 صَدَقَ اللهُ الْعَظِيْمُ ۝

The writing of Zenobia Rahaman of San Fernando after two-week course.

'Family Atmosphere'

The Arabic course conducted by Abdul Wahid Hamid at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, between 19 - 30 July 1976 was enthusiastically patronised by Muslims and non-Muslims, males and females, from 8 - 80 years, and from all walks of life.

Students were regular and punctual in spite of inclement weather and distance of venue from normal transport.

The course was a resounding success considering that those who knew some Arabic discovered that there was so much more to learn, while those who knew no Arabic were fired with enthusiasm to go forward seeking to know more of this intriguing and interesting language of the Qur'an.

The general atmosphere of the class was that of a happy family working together towards one goal. The highlights of the course included the following:

- the clarity and ease with which the lessons were put over to the group;
- the orderly and effective way in which the course progressed, step merging into step;
- the patience and understanding with which the teacher worked amongst us, and the feelings of satisfaction plus accomplishment among the students.

A closing get-together surprised the teacher, at which the students made their remarks. A mother from Guyana was so moved by the wealth of learning which she and her children gathered, that she invited the instructor to take some time off to run a few Arabic courses in her country. Dr. Barakat Ali, High Commissioner for India, said that he had seen the teaching of Arabic in several important Islamic areas, the world over and that Mr. Hamid was a capable and competent teacher of the subject. He was specially happy to see a course of reading and writing Arabic so capably put over in two weeks..

Our 80-year old student, Mr. Hanief Hosein of Arima was loud in praise of the work done and the quality of the instruction received at so little cost. He thought every person should use the opportunity to grasp this learning given with so much ease and skill.

The class as a whole was happy, but dispersed sadly, with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment gained in so short a period, and also the friendships developed through learning together.

It is the general feeling that these courses should continue, in view of the fact that so many persons would like to learn more of the subject.

The three two-week intensive courses in the reading and writing of the Arabic script organised by the Islamic Trust duly came to an end on 1st. Ramadan, 1396. The classes were held at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine; St. Thomas Aquinas College in San Fernando and the Montrose Mosque Hall, Chaguana. The tutor was Abdul Wahid Hamid and he was assisted by Ousman Ali and Nadir Baksh. Altogether, 190 persons took the course though some of these did not complete it. Among them were principals of schools, students at university, secondary and primary schools, housewives and people who took special leave from work including an official of the United Nations office in Trinidad.

The materials used in the course were: an Arabic reader 'Ahsan-ul 'Qawa'id'—probably the best and the shortest 'Qa'idah' available for teaching the reading of the Qur'an; a specially prepared chart giving the characters of the Arabic Alphabet, their English equivalents, the various forms of the letters and examples of words in which these letters occur; flash cards; tape recordings of the alphabet and of the Opening Chapter (al-Faatihah) and the last ten chapters of the Qur'an recited by Shaikh al Husari of Egypt.

Each course was actually conducted on ten days, three hours a day. By way of introduction, there was a talk given on the importance of studying Arabic as the language of the Qur'an and as a major international language which has had a profound effect on languages of Africa, Asia and even Europe. Concerning the course proper, the correct pronunciation of the alphabet was first emphasized and reading from the outset went hand in hand with writing. Reading was done through spelling using the English equivalents of the Arabic characters. Individual work was mixed with group effort and both reading and writing were reinforced by dictation and other exercises. Much written homework was emphasized.

At the end of the first five days, the basic elements of reading and writing were covered. Students were able, although slowly, to read any vowelised Arabic script and to write their names in Arabic. The next five days were given over to consolidating the principles learnt by reading some Hadith, verses of the

Qur'an, the last ten chapters of the Qur'an (in one class these were not completed) and words in English coming from the Arabic (cotton, sugar, alcohol, tariff etc). Some elements of grammar and the structure of the Arabic language were also given in order to spur students on to learn Arabic as a language.

Many individuals did extremely well in the course. These took it seriously and put in a lot of work. There were quite a few slackers, however who really did not benefit as they might have done with some more attention and diligent work. They failed to appreciate the nature of an intensive course during which one cannot afford to attend late or miss a day.. On the whole, the best results were obtained from those who did not know any Arabic previously. In some cases a prior knowledge of the Arabic alphabet helped. In other cases a presumed knowledge of reading Arabic was a definite hindrance since many things had to be unlearned.

Those who took the courses at the three venues were invited to a follow-up session which was held on Saturdays at the Highway Mosque, Charlville during Ramadan. The number attending was comparatively small.

It was hoped that the intensive courses would have served as a preliminary to a one year course in Arabic as a language. Unavoidable circumstances have caused this to be cancelled for the coming year.

The Islamic Trust wishes to thank all those who responded to the course for their encouragement and also those who assisted willingly in arranging venues, publicity etc in the North, South and Central. It is hoped that whatever was learnt will be practised and made use of in order to gain greater fluency and that it will be a stepping stone to reaching the richness and treasures of the Arabic language in general and the Qur'an in particular.

NOTE: The same intensive course will be conducted at the St. James Mosque, to cater mainly for working people and any others who may be interested. The Course begins on Monday 4 October at 7 p.m. Anyone wanting to attend should contact the Imam of St. James Mosque and be careful not to miss the first day of the course especially.

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Published by The Islamic Trust, Pundit Street, El Socorro Road, San Juan, Trinidad, West Indies.
Printed by Sam's Printery, 5 Mohammed Ville, El Socorro Road, San Juan, Phone: 638-4968.