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- ❑

Editor's Message

Assalamu Alaikum Brothers and Sisters in Islam,

The VOW staff, the Board of Trustees, and the Board of Directors of the Muslim Congress (MC) are thrilled to present this issue of VOW – the first issue of the second year. By the Grace of Allah (SWT) and the blessings of the 14 Infallibles (*Masumeen*), the VOW team has seen the growth in the readership, has been inspired by the feedback from the *momineen*, and is looking forward to service in the future. Hopefully the VOW team will grow to meet the future challenges.

Alhamdulillah, we had so many informative and inspiring reports from the 3rd Annual Muslim Congress Conference, and the programs held around the country during the holy month of Ramadhan and commemorating Day of Quds (*il-Yaum al-Quds*), that we elected to push out the articles on the theme of **Spiritual Values**. *Ensha'Allah*, we will try to present articles on this important topic in the future.

The theme for the next newsletter is: **Muharram / Martyrdom, due out in January 2008**

Suggested topics: How can Muharram bring the community together? How do you commemorate the tragedy of Karbala? How does Karbala influence your life and culture? What is the Islamic point of view on Martyrdom? How do you elevate yourself to understand Karbala? What is the message of Karbala? Are we truthful to this message? Is the message being preserved and passed on to the next generation? How can we bring this message of Karbala to the majority of the people of this country? Of course, articles that bring/build the community together, preserving the original message of Islam, are always welcome.

The deadline to receive articles for the January issue is Dec. 15, 2007. Please try to submit these articles in Word 6.0 format. Once submitted, these articles become the property of Muslim Congress, and Muslim Congress reserves the right to edit these articles before publication.

We ask Allah (SWT) for His support and blessings for all *muslimeen* in these very challenging times. As followers of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his *Ahlul Bait* (AS), we are blessed with role models, but the challenge of living up to the expectations is upon all of us. To send ideas and suggestions for the e-newsletters, please email us at newsletter@muslimcongress.org.



Muslim Congress Conference News

The third annual Muslim Congress Conference was held in Orlando, FL on the Weekend of September 1 and 2, 2007.

VOW presents the views of some of the attendees who were kind enough to share their thoughts and feelings of this event.

Sr. Madiha Butool Zaidi – a young Muslim writes:

'SMS'. No, I'm not talking about a text message. **So Many Shias!** This was the initial feeling, and phrase, a lot of young Muslims got when walking around the halls of the Muslim Congress '07 Conference.

As a minority in school, a lot of young Shia Muslims cannot believe the number of brothers and sisters they



Zulhijjah 10/December 20:
Eid al-Adhha

- ❑ **Zulhijjah 15/December 25:**
Birthday of Imam Ali an-Naqi al-Hadi (AS), 212 A.H. / 828 A.D.
- ❑ **Zulhijjah 18/December 28/:**
Akbar ul-A'yaad: Eid al-Ghadeer - Holy Prophet (SAWA) announces upon the command of Allah that Imam Ali (AS) as his vicegerent at Ghadeer, 10 A.H.

truly have across the states, and the Muslim Congress allowed for that to be a reality check for so many of us. Always hearing negative things about "Shi'ite Islam" has definitely had an effect on young Muslims growing up here in the states. In school, it causes a feeling of inferiority along with a sense of loneliness. The Muslim Congress, for the past three years has definitely helped in reassuring the young Muslims that they are not alone.

As I walked around I saw so many different faces, ethnicities, and clothing. I heard many different accents, languages, thoughts, ideas, and mentalities. It was truly a much-needed environment especially with today's world issues and war on Islam. To know that I had maybe 50 or more sisters my age, going through my struggles, and sharing the same experiences I have, was a blessed feeling. Growing up here has given us a sense of alienation because we do not "fit-in" with our *hijab* or beards. The Muslim Congress gave us the opportunity to meet our long-lost brothers and sisters, network, and discuss issues, common struggles, future ideas, and plans.

Although it was an amazing conference and setting, let me share with you true thoughts from the mindset of a "Muslim Congress groupie" as it seems we have become. Every year we come and we see a workshop titled "Marriage and Youth," or something along those lines and every year the majority of the young Muslims can agree---it's been enough. We all know that marriage is the number one point of discussion or action, when it comes to us, so let's talk about it. We hear the respected *ulema* telling us to look for a spouse who is high in *taqwa*, a good person, seeks knowledge, is mature, etc... *Alhamdulillah*, as I got to know the situations of many of the young Muslims there, the criteria is understood, and many have even been successful in finding that. The problem: when parents, adults, or elders of the community disregard these qualities and we see racism and nationalism rear their ugly heads. Why not hold that as a main lecture for both "youth" and adults?

As a young Muslim I have also been blessed, along with my fellow brothers and sisters, to have more face time and interaction with the *ulema*, allowing us to learn about the importance of propagating Islam *da'awah* and reaching out to **everyone**. There are so many new issues that have come up at Islamic Centers around our nation that a lot have come to ignore.

The "curtain" issue is a hot one: why do we separate sisters from brothers when *hijab* is being observed? This is a common question we have no real answer to.

On music, if my *marja* says some types are *halal*, why are my elders saying "completely haraam!" The Muslim Congress can help us on what to do when we are bombarded by cultural taboos in our local Islamic Centers that won't allow us to put into full effect our true calling.

My point: There has been a revolution in the minds of many of the young Muslims who attend(ed) the conference and it needs to be addressed. We like to see the real issues picked at and dissected to a point where we can say we have fully mastered and understand and know where to go. This is one thing we need to see more of at our next conference, *insha'Allah*.

So the next time us "youth" are together, and surrounded by our fellow lovers of *Ahlul Bait* (AS), we can wholeheartedly feel that we have come out of an awakening that will aid us in practicing brotherhood to its maximum capacity.

Br. Jamsheed Abbas - a young professional writes:

The third annual Muslim Congress Conference in Orlando, Florida met and exceeded my expectations in more ways than one. If there was, however, one thing that I would point out that really stood out, it would be the diversity of the participants and quality of speakers. The venue was wonderful, the food was good, the accommodations were great, etc. But what is often missing from events such as this that was present here, was a sense of spiritual wholeness, a sense of Islam as it is meant to be, a sense of dynamism that was palpable and uplifting.

The first speaker, Sheikh Ahmed Haneef, set the tone. With a Ph.D. in psychology and over 10 years of *howza* education, this articulate *a'alim* gave a presentation on 'Women in Islam' that showed a depth of research and academic work that is often missing amongst Western Islamic scholars.

He spoke of women and men as being representative of the two '*asma*' or names of Allah (SWT) namely 'majesty' and 'beauty'. The manner in which he illustrated how these two names of Allah are represented in the creation of man and woman was very educational.

There were other speakers as well, but the keynote speaker if there was one, had to be Syed Tijani Samawi. Yes, that Syed Tijani, the one who wrote the seminal book in Shia- Sunni dialogue, **Then I Was Guided** and who is said to have converted over 30,000 people to the *Ithna Ashari* school of thought.

Another notable speaker has to be Sheikh Abdul Jaleel Isaah. Here was a young African gentleman who personified the creed that the only thing that makes a man worthy in the eyes of Allah is *taqwa* or guarding against *haram* or forbidden deeds and performing that which is *wajib* or obligatory. There was something in the way that he spoke, a certain charm, eloquence, profundity, wisdom along with warmth and humor that left the audience spellbound and thirsting for more. This great young *a'alim* is surely a bright star for our future generations.

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The atmosphere at this conference was truly reflective of the brotherhood/sisterhood that *tawheed* or belief in the Oneness of Allah should invoke. Over 800 people, African, Asian, Caucasian, American, non-American, Sunni, Shia, mingled together in a cacophony of laughter, exchange of ideas and pleasantries, and a feeling of warmth and love that was inspiring. I watched as white hugged and kissed black, Asian sat at the feet of African scholars as they dispensed knowledge, women taught men who listened respectfully, and felt that this must be a microcosm of what Islam is, the great brotherhood of *tawheed*, and I was moved at times, literally to tears.

Dr. Mehran Rezai - a professional writes:

Labor Day Weekend is usually a great vacation time for one and all. The Muslim Congress ensured that all its attendees had a greater sense of accomplishment this Labor Day weekend. Yes, it was time for 3rd annual conference of the Muslim Congress at a picturesque location in Orlando, Florida. The presence of pious scholars, an extremely wonderful audience, and diverse yet focused activities for all age groups/genders made this trip to Orlando worth recollecting.

The atmosphere was truly magnificent; it seemed like one big family busy in giving some purpose to their lives. Old friend's jovial hugs reminded you of Rumi (conceptually) - "they are one body, one soul, they are united." Vibrant energies of youth giving hope for tomorrow. New faces of Islam; showing how diverse, open and free from bias this very religion is. All this and more bode a great future for Islam in this nation.

'Unity', the buzzword of the conference was showcased perfectly by the presence of esteemed, pious and knowledgeable scholars from different ethnicities with one thing in common: their adherence to Islamic virtues and their stand on Islamic values. Their illuminated faces showed their piety, their humbleness depicted their knowledge, their open-mindedness showed the depth of their personality, and altogether they illustrated the essence of Islam. Their astonishing speeches shed lights on contemporary issues that Muslims face. Finally, the workshops were designed to touch the shortcomings and problems of Muslims in the West, from marriage to careers.

Maulana Ahmad Haneef opened the conference with "The Status of Women in the Teachings of the Prophet (SAW)." He posed the premise that reality comprises opposite forces, opposite forces that are complimentary. 'majesty' and 'beauty', two of Allah's attributes, manifest power and softness, two forces that are indeed complimentary, he said. Power of men resembles Allah's majesty and kindness of women resembles Allah's beauty. Then he asked whether everybody could see the beauty of Allah, even in its abstract concept. Hence the philosophy of *hijab* is to cover the beauty and show it only to whom it belongs. Finally he concluded that the most sublime position of women is to serve as nurturing mothers for children, but if needed women should play great roles like Bibi Zainab, (AS) did in Karbala.

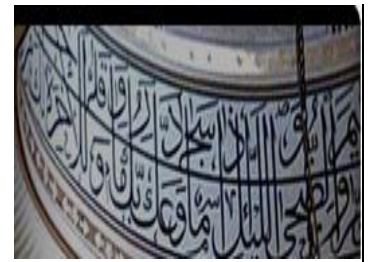
Syed Tijani, this lofty scholar, took the podium to talk about *Ahlul Bait* (the household of the Prophet) in the Eyes of the Prophet (SAW). He visited the famous tradition narrated by both Shiite and Ahle-Sunnat sources, "the two precious treasures – Qur'an and *Ahlul Bait*", ***Hadith-e-Thaqalyn***. He explained the *hadith* and importance of these two treasures in a Muslim's life. Finally he articulated the theme of his talk "the call to unite on the love of Allah, the love of the Prophet, the love of *Ahlul Bait*, and the love of Qur'an," and he proved that this is what Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has requested from Muslims.

On the second day of the conference, Moulana Syed Abbas Ayleya addressed the audience about "Unity in Contemporary Times." Based on Qur'an and *hadith*, he clarified and identified the root cause of disunity, i.e., the lack of intellect. Then he defined and categorized human intellect as ideological and practical. An intellectual is the one who has religion, a practical religion, and so whoever has religion enters Paradise, he said. Intellect means belief in the Oneness of Allah, and if there is a dispute, one should know that he has deviated from intellect. There should be the Right Path and that is the mainstream community. The people with *haq* (legitimate truth) are the mainstream community, he added. Practically, the Prophet has given the guidelines, "Ali is with *haq*, and *haq* is with Ali." Then he posed a different approach and explained misguidance and its two elements, "not knowing the goal" and "not knowing the path." Finally he concluded that the two elements of misguidance were the results of "not knowing and not recognizing the leader," the product of lacking piety.

Moulana Baig whose original thoughts always amaze me, gave The closing speech of the conference. He asked whether "we are waiting for our Imam or he is waiting for us." Moulana Baig explained the concept of occultation and reminded us that if the Imam was waiting for us, then we had to move. "If there is a leader there should be a movement," he added. He concluded that the Muslim Congress conference was a small step towards the reappearance of the Imam. The theme of the conference, 'Legacy of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and Muslim Unity', was, to the extent possible, described by the scholars. The fruit of the conference was a confluence of thoughts and resolutions. Growing to be a better Muslim, a follower of the Prophet and *Ahlul Bait*; recognizing the goal and the path, hence recognizing the leader; and finally improving the pace in our movement to hasten the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) were among the provisions that we took home from the conference.

Hajj Massoud Nashatizadeh

Once again Br. Hajj Massoud shares his knowledge and thoughts in his own unique style, which is refreshing and thought provoking.



The Holy Prophet (SAWA) stated:

إمام جعفر الصادق عليه السلام قال:
عَلَيْكَ أَنْ تَصْحَبَ ذَا الْعَقْلِ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدْ كَرَمَهُ وَ
لَكِنْ أَنْتَفِعَ بِعَقْلِهِ.

"Whosoever among the servants of (Allah) purifies his deeds for Allah (alone) for forty days, the spring of wisdom will flow from his heart to his tongue." Prophet Mohammad (SAWA)

The word for 'sincerity' – *ikhlaas* – is derived from *khalasa*, which means to be uncorrupted by foreign substances, to be pure. The term 'pure' (*khaalis*) is used as an adjective to describe something's purity, such as 'pure water', 'pure gold', etc. In the Islamic code of ethics, the term 'sincerity' (*ikhlaas*) refers to the purity of a believer's motive or intention when performing a commendable deed, which must be done exclusively to please Allah (SWT). If an obligatory or recommended act of worship is performed to demonstrate one's piety to the people, to gain influence or for any other ostentatious reason, then such an act is only to boast or put on a show (*riyaa*). In addition to voiding the commendable nature of the act (if *riyaa* takes place during the act), such an intention is a major sin.

However, there is another form of intention that is called 'deficient or tainted' (*mashoob*). An interesting feature of this type of intention is that a person is hardly aware of its flaw. In this category, other indiscreet thoughts and purposes are associated with the primary intention of seeking closeness to Allah (*qurbatan il-Allah*). For example, when fasting, in addition to the necessary intention of *qurbatan il-Allah*, one might contemplate the health aspect of fasting. Similarly, when making ablution (*wudhu*) as a prerequisite for a prayer or some other Islamic act, one also might include other intentions such as performing personal hygiene, cooling off, etc. Consequently, such a deed is not fully accomplished due to the deficiency of its intention. The highest degree of *ikhlaas* is 'absolute sincerity' (*ikhlaas*) and it belongs to the foremost among the servants of Allah (SWT), who are called 'those with consummate sincerity' (*siddiqeen*). They are the triumphant ones, a minority who have dedicated their lives to the cause of Allah (SWT). They have even transcended the lawful desire for reward or the dread of retribution in the Hereafter. Imam Ridhaa (AS) stated that Ameer ul-Mominnen Imam Ali (AS), the Commander of the Faithful, used to say:

"لَا تَصْحَبُ الشَّرِيرَ فَإِنَّ طَبْعَكَ يَسْرِقُ مِنْ طَبْعِهِ شَرًّا
وَأَنْتَ لَا تَعْلَمُ." - إمام علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام

"How fortunate is he who makes his worship and supplications purely for Allah, prevents his heart from the preoccupation/occupation of those things which he sees with his eyes and hears with his ears, and he is not forgetful of the remembrance of Allah; neither is he disheartened for those things that Allah has granted to others." Imam Ali (AS)

It is important to bear in mind that the concept of *ikhlaas* - in fact even the term itself - has a direct correlation with the integrity of each soul or the essence of every human. If the purpose, intention, and the life of a believer are totally submitted to Allah (SWT), the power of devotion would ultimately strengthen the believer's resolve to the extent that every aspect of his life would incline unconditionally to the Divine Will.

A simple way to determine the presence of such *ikhlaas* is to make an assessment of one's deeds as to whether or not they are influenced by the approval or disapproval of others. It is also important to understand that even if one's original intention was to please Allah but at the end one enjoyed the praise of others, then this hidden satisfaction is considered boasting or showing off (*riyaa*), and thus the deed is deemed worthless. In his book of ethics, **Jaami'us Sa'adaat**, the great scholar an-Naraqī (RA) related about a notable person who stated, "For thirty years I performed my prayers in congregation (*Jamaa'ah*). One day, due to an unexpected delay in my schedule, I could not pray in the first row. Following the conclusion of the prayer, I felt a sense of uneasiness for being seen in the fourth row. After brief contemplation, I concluded that all my prayers in the last thirty years were invalid; therefore, I had no other recourse but to repent and perform the prayers over again." At this point, a question may arise: is it conceivable for anyone to have a pure intention? One thing is clear, when the purpose in life is other than Allah, one cannot maintain a true spirit of *ikhlaas*, because the primary driving force behind that purpose is a brief worldly desire. It is sensible to conclude that the parameter for determining the worthiness of any deed in Islam is the purity of its intention. Therefore, in performing the acts of worship, one must

contemplate the purpose rather than the consistency of a deed or the number of times it is repeated. Ameer ul-Momineen Imam Ali (AS) stated, "Do not be troubled with the insufficiency of your deed, however, be mindful of its acceptance." The Holy Imam (AS) suggests that more attention should be given to the intention rather than the abundance of deeds, considering that any effort without a pure and sincere intention does not merit anything and it is utterly worthless. The Holy Prophet (SAWA) asserted:

"Perform your deeds with sincerity for Allah, because Allah (SWT) will not accept a deed without sincerity."

يَا وَبَلَّتِي لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فَلَانًا خَلِيلًا.

and

"Purify your faith (be sincere in your belief); a small deed will suffice you." Prophet Mohammad (SAWA)

According to Imam as-Sadiq (AS), Allah is beneficent, and He esteems a sincere deed however small. Moreover, for one who performs two units of prayer (*rak'ah*) with a pure intention solely for Allah, Allah (SWT) may grant him Paradise. The Imam (AS) also cited the Holy Prophet (SAWA), saying, "Perform your deed with pure intention. Though it may be small, yet it might be adequate."

Suffyaan Ibne O'yaynah reported that Imam as-Sadiq (AS) elucidated the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

"الْمَرْءُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ وَقَرِينِهِ."

"To test you and see who has the best conduct." The Holy Quran

He stated: "This ayah does not allude to abundance of deeds but it refers to the most appropriate deed that is being performed with the presence of Allah in mind (to be fearful of wrongdoing in the presence of Allah), and to have pure intention and a virtuous deed." Then the Imam (AS) added:

"Steadfastness in performing a deed to maintain its purity is much harder than the deed itself, and a pure deed is one that you do not desire anyone to praise you for it except Almighty Allah, and verily the intention (to accomplish a deed) in essence is the deed itself. (As Allah (SWT) says):

"يَا بَنِيَّ! إِيَّاكَ وَمُصَادَقَةَ الْأَحْمَقِ، فَإِنَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَنْفَعَكَ فَيُضُرُّكَ"

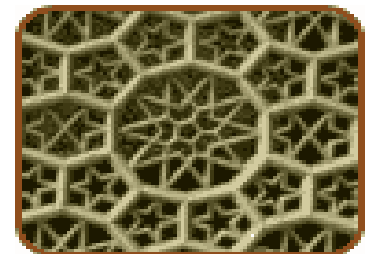
'Say, everyone act according to their own way.' meaning according to their intentions' [Qur'an 17(al-Israa'): 84]." Imam as-Sadiq (AS)

Prophet Isa (AS) commanded his disciples whenever they were fasting, to rub oil on their lips so no one would know that they were fasting. *Ikhlaas* is an exalted station on the illuminated path of Islam. Whoever arrives at that position will achieve prominence and a distinction that is exclusively reserved for the favored servants of Allah (*muqarrabeen*). *Ikhlaas* reigns supreme over all other virtues, and the acceptance of all deeds is contingent upon sincerity's enduring presence. Although there is a plethora of evidence in the Islamic resources to substantiate this fact, the following verse of **The Glorious Qur'an** is sufficient for those who desire to reflect.

"He (Satan) said, 'Then, by Thy might, I will surely beguile them all, except Thy sincere servants among them'" (Holy Qur'an 38 (Saad): 82-83).

Satan, the manifest enemy of mankind, is determined to mislead everyone except those servants of Allah who are eminently sincere. **The Holy Qur'an**, by referring to Satan's pledge, makes it clear that within the microcosm of all true worship lies a dynamic component and a central force, known as 'sincerity' or *ikhlaas*, or the purity of intention.

1 The pronouns "he, him, and his" or the word 'brother' that are frequently used in this series of "Hadith for Thought" do not pertain to gender. They signify mankind, both male and female.



History has in its chronicles innumerable instances of youth revolting against the accepted norms of society and going against the wishes of elders. This rebellious behavior of man can be traced back to the earliest time of creation. Adam and Eve too fell prey to a similar malady. Satan (*Iblis*) after receiving a respite from Allah (SWT) said, ".....***If Thou should put me off to the Day of Resurrection, I will most certainly cause his progeny to perish, except a few***" (The Holy Quran 17:62). Thus, he relentlessly tried to lure Adam and Eve to go against the dictates of Allah (SWT). Both Adam and Eve were forewarned by Allah that *Iblis* was their open enemy, and to enjoy the bounties of heaven except for eating from a particular tree. "***And We said O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the garden and eat from it a plenteous (food) whenever you wish and do not approach this tree for then you will be unjust. (The Holy Quran 2:35)***". Nonetheless, *Iblis* successfully drove Adam and Eve to eat from the very tree Allah (SWT) had forbade them by asking Adam, "..... ***O Adam shall I guide you to the Tree of Immortality and a kingdom which decays not***" (The Holy Quran 20:120)?

Adam and Eve fell prey to the guile of *Iblis* and as a result they were banished from heaven - "***But the Satan (Iblis) made them fall from it and caused them to depart from that (state) in which they were.....***" (The Holy Quran 2:36). Thus commenced the rebellious behavior of mankind, and behind every such behavior one can find the planning and handiwork of Satan (*iblis*). Adam realized the enormity of his poor choice (*Tark-e-Awla*) and prayed to Allah (SWT) for forgiveness and for continuation of his bounties and favors. "***Then Adam received some words from his Lord, so He turned to him mercifully, surely He is Oft-Returning (to mercy), the Merciful***" (The Holy Quran 2:37). Allah, being merciful, readily accepted the prayers of Adam and once again guided him to the Right Path with a promise to reward the doers of good and to punish the wrong doers.

Thus started the struggle of 'truth (*haqq*) and falsehood (*batil*)' between true believers and *Iblis* and his followers among humans and *jinn*s. Generations upon generations have endured this struggle; the majority of people have fallen prey to the designs of *Iblis*. However, true believers, who placed their full faith in Allah (SWT), stood steadfast on the Right Path proving to *Iblis* that in every generation there will be a select few who will defeat all the designs of *Iblis* to lead them astray.

In no generation can one find anyone free from vices or sin, unless that person develops the capacity to abhor or hate sin and vices (like the members of the *Ahlul-Bait (AS)*). It is individual believers who show small signs of love for this world and its pleasures, for whom *Iblis* lies in wait along the Path of Allah (SWT). No sooner than *Iblis* spots someone showing signs of love for the world, he seizes the opportunity and drives that person far away from the path of truth and justice.

Iblis has been working relentlessly, sharpening his tools, improving and innovating the designs by which he is successful in luring people to his fold. In addition, most of the believers have not only slackened their vigil against *Iblis* but a majority has altogether stopped guiding their youngsters to the Right Path. This two-pronged attack has swelled the army of *Iblis* and left the believers vulnerable to misguidance.

The example of Adam and Eve should be an eye-opener for any seeker of truth or for any person repenting for any of his mistakes or sins. Repentance should be genuine and with an intention of correcting the behavior. Repenting for mistakes committed while still not correcting oneself will not bring any blessing from Allah (SWT) - it is useless. "***But whoever repents after his inequity and reforms (himself), then surely Allah will turn to him mercifully, surely Allah is forgiving***" (The Holy Quran 5:39). Reflecting on ones' disobedience or mistake without feeling any remorse or guilt will bring no good to oneself except lowering oneself in the eyes of people whose lives were made miserable by ones' act or disobedience.

Many a time, people commit mistakes either due to lack of knowledge or out of sheer foolishness, and sometimes these are due to the instigation of *Iblis*. But no sooner than they realize their folly, they repent and ask Allah (SWT) for forgiveness, and amend their ways and life. "***Repentance from Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then turn (to Allah) soon. So these it is to whom Allah turns (mercifully) and Allah is Ever-Knowing, Wise***" (The Holy Quran 4:17).

After committing a mistake, sometimes people realize their folly and withdraw into a shell, cutting themselves off from family and friends. They neither get over their mistake nor may they fully understand and realize the appropriate recompense required and the impact of their error or their response to it on themselves and their family. They may reason to themselves as to how to respond to their mistake while having the wrong impression of the proper atonement and they may not realize that their response might be ruinous to themselves and their immediate family members. For every action there is a reaction; events and actions are related to each other as cause and effect. Therefore, a person should apply oneself to good and pure actions and follow the true path of salvation.

True believers never give into despair and dejection, but always have faith in Allah (SWT) for all their affairs. They are sure that Allah (SWT) will forgive their mistakes, if they ask for forgiveness and that Allah (SWT) will guide and make their lives successful, provided they genuinely repent. "***If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with your small sins and cause you to enter an honorable place of entering***" (The Holy Quran 4:31).

In conclusion, I beseech Allah (SWT) to give blessings and the guidance of the Imam of our Age to this community. I also ask that Allah (SWT) gives much-needed guidance to all those who are striving to remain on the Right Path (despite the all out efforts of *Iblis* to misguide and drive them towards destruction). Finally I pray that those who are in 'slumber' and those who are indifferent to the call of truth, awake and meet the challenges like true Muslims - Amen.

Spiritual Values - The Purpose of Life

Syed Hadi H. Abedi



Every human being who has common sense and intelligence would like to know the purpose of his life. A wise and intelligent person wants to know: why have I come to this world? What is the purpose of my life? Why was I created by the Almighty Creator?

To get the answer, let us look around us. When we look around us, we see the other creations of the Almighty: **living** and **nonliving**. If we study the life cycle of the living things other than human beings such as animals and plants, we come to the conclusion that they all are created to move through their lifecycle from a lower, weaker and imperfect state towards a higher and stronger state, and towards 'perfection' as defined for that organism. All living things thus acquire strength and move towards 'perfection' in the course of their prescribed lifespan. From this study and observation, we can conclude that the purpose of our life might also be to acquire strength and move towards 'perfection'. There is an important difference between human beings and the other living things in their respective life journeys. The journey of living things towards strength and perfection is natural and compulsory (forced by the laws of Almighty's creation (*takveeni*)), but for human beings it is not so. We have to achieve strength and perfection by our own desire and efforts through the training course that has been prescribed by Divine teachings.

Human beings are composed of body and soul, as we read in the last issue of the VOW newsletter. The body and soul have their own unique requirements that are different in nature. Human beings are neither only body nor only soul, but are composed of both. Our physical form is more visible and perceptible than the soul, while the soul is more important, more meaningful and more durable than the body. For a successful life in this world both body and soul should be given importance according to their status.

Modern science says our body is composed of billions of cells, every moment hundreds of them die and new cells take their place, and in every nine years our body is almost completely changed. Since the soul doesn't turnover in this way, the body is more transient in nature. In addition, the body lives in this world after death; whereas, the soul is transferred to the next world (*barzakh*). In fact, we tacitly acknowledge the superiority of the soul when we honor the soul when we bury the bodies of our loved ones. Thus the body is less important than the soul. The body is given to the soul merely as a means to achieve the goals of creation in this world.

Now, after acknowledging that the soul is more important than the body, a wise person would give more importance and provide more time to train and strengthen the soul as compared to the body.

The journey of the soul towards perfection is possible in this world only when the soul has enough strength to control the body's desires. This strength for the soul is achievable through the proper training, which requires learning and acquiring Divine guidance. Divine guidance is acquirable and is useful for a person who is pious.

The **Holy Qur'an** has declared this: "***This is the book; there is no doubt in it, (it is) a guidance to those who safeguard themselves with full awareness of Divine laws.***" (Qur'an 2 (al-Baqara): 2)

Piety or *taqwa* is the most important subject of ***Nahjul Balaghah***. No one describes piety so vividly as Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). In this book, he teaches that piety is a spiritual strength that is generated in a believer by continuously and repeatedly doing good deeds. Imam Ali teaches us that a good deed in Islam is an action that is logical and acceptable to the intelligent person. Keeping away from illogical and unintelligent actions are also considered good deeds. Good deeds are the means to exercise, train, and strengthen the soul, and thus increase one's piety. As a result of repeated and continuous good deeds, the soul becomes stronger and stronger, and piety acquires higher and higher positions. As the soul becomes stronger and stronger, it becomes easier and easier for a person to protect himself from sinful actions. In time, the person not only starts keeping himself away from sinful and wrongful actions, but also keeps himself away from the company of wrong doers, just for the pleasure of Allah (SWT). This is the first step, after belief in Oneness of the Almighty, the Prophethood and the Authority (*Walayat*) of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW), and the the Imams (AS), toward the 'perfection', which is the purpose of our life in this world and the purpose of our creation.



Islam respects all the 124,000 prophets sent by Allah for the guidance of human kind.

Islam does not accept Jesus to be the son of God. Instead, we believe Jesus (*Isa*) AS was a holy prophet, and a messenger and servant of Allah, miraculously born to the virgin Mary (*Maryam*), another obedient servant of Allah.

God is God; He is not of matter, but has a metaphysical and a non-physical absolute existence. If God is a physical and bodily thing, and all bodies are material and need material components and parts, then God would stand in need of the components and parts to become complete. Otherwise, the body will be incomplete.

And an incomplete existence, cannot be an All-Powerful, All-Knowing God. Also in such a case, such a god will be in need of its parts and components, and a needy existence or an existence standing in need of something cannot be God.

God is the one who does not stand in need of anything or anyone - otherwise that thing would be superior to God. An inferior can't be taken as God in the presence of a superior.

So we believe that all stand in need of Him. He is needful-less and not reliant on anyone nor anything.

A physical thing also is constrained by place and time; it is located in one place at a given time and cannot be found at any other place at that time or in any other time, at that time. So, a physical thing is limited by its nature, to time and place restrictions.

And any limited thing cannot be and does not deserve to be the All-Powerful, All-Knowing God.

Having learned by now that God is and should be non-material, non-physical, and non-restricted, and not in need of anything or anyone for anything, we can conclude that God is absolutely complete and perfect.

An Absolute, Perfect, Complete, and Needful-less God is what we call Allah. It is He who deserves to be worshipped and obeyed, as our Creator, our Master, and as the Master of both the worlds - this world and the Hereafter. It is Allah who is the Guide who sent all the prophets for our guidance and for our success in both of these worlds.

"How can an Absolute God stand in need of a son?"

"Who is His wife?"

"Is God a bodily thing with desires, as you desire a wife because of your needs?"

All these questions imply lies that were spread by people after the departure of Jesus, and are completely non-sensible and baseless.

Allah says in the **Holy Qur'an** in *an-Nisaa'*, (4:171):

"O people of the scripture (Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allah but the truth. The Messiah Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary (Maryam) and a spirit (Rooh) created by Him, so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not: 'three' (trinity), cease! (it is) better for you. For Allah is (the only) One God, Glorified is He (far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is All-Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs."

Prophets are infallible, and never sin; therefore, all of them invited the people towards worship of the One and only One God, called Allah in Arabic. All the prophets were His servants, His slaves, His obedient representatives, and guided the people towards His Oneness and to obedience to Him. All the prophets had one agenda: guiding people towards the One Allah's worship and obedience to Him.

Thus, Jesus is not the son of God, but a holy messenger and a servant of Allah.

Allah says in the **Holy Qur'an** in *an-Nisaa'*, 4:172:

"The Messiah will never be proud to reject to be a slave of Allah, nor the angels who are the near ones (to Allah). And whoever rejects His worship and is proud, then He will gather them all together unto Himself."

If not having a father makes Jesus a son of God, then let's not forget that Adam did not have a father and mother both, as mentioned in the **Holy Qur'an** in *aal-Imraan*, 3:59:

"The example of Jesus (Isa) in the eyes of Allah is like Adam, (He) made him with soil and then

said to him be and he became."

This verse was presented by the Seal of all Prophets - Mohammad, peace be upon him and his holy progeny, to the Christians of Najran who came to debate with him and could not reply to this logical statement.

Jesus, like all the other prophets, may Allah's peace be upon all of them, was a holy prophet, and a servant of God, like his holy mother the Virgin Maryam (Mary) who was also a servant and obedient worshipper of Allah.

Allah says in the **Holy Qur'an** in *al-Maaidah*, 5:116:

"And (remember) when Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection): 'O Isa (Jesus), son of Mary (Maryam)! Did you say unto men: 'Worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah.?'"

Jesus will say, ".....' ***Glorified are You! It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my inner self though I do not know what is in Yours; truly, You, only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden (and unseen)."***

May the peace of Allah be on all the prophets of God, starting from Adam, Noah (*Nooh*), Abraham (*Ibrahim*), Moses (*Musa*), Jesus (*Isa*), and the Seal of the Prophets and the most superior, the Holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA).

All of them were Muslims, and preached one religion, as God does not have multiple agendas (multiple religions from one God would show multiple contradictory "wisdoms." He has one agenda based on His absolute wisdom and absolute knowledge without any contradiction. So all of His prophets preached the same one religion that is known as ISLAM.

All preached Islam and that is the goal pursued by all.

The **Holy Qur'an** says in *aal-Imraan*, 3:85

"And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers."

May Allah guide us all to follow the common teaching of all the prophets of Allah: ISLAM- the religion of submission, peace, and justice.

Ramadhan Report



Phoenix

Ramadan report from the Al-Mahdi Benevolent Foundation of Arizona, Tempe, AZ

This year for the first time since our founding, the Al-Mahdi Center offered a program for the first 15 days of *Ramadhan*, in addition to the usual last 15 days. Every night the program started with *salaat-al-Maghribain* then our community shared the *iftar* meal, which was potluck on some nights and fully-sponsored by generous members of the community on other nights. *Masha'Allah*, even on the weekdays, we had at least 100 people each night, and usually double on the weekends and special nights like *Lailatul Qadr*. Following dinner, there was Qur'an recitation, and a speech. Each evening was concluded with the reading of *Du'a Iftetah*. Throughout the month, we had several non-Muslims join us in the *iftar* and the programs as well, and owing to the welcome, open discussion, and the benefit they felt they received, they returned night after night.

We were honored to have had Moulana Mohammad Baig from Tampa, FL, as our visiting *a'alim* during the first half of the month. *Alhamdulillah*, with his beautiful presentation skill, he took us all on a journey, detailing night by night how the various rites and aspects of *Hajj* are templates for the physical life journey of man, and that the Prophet (SAW) and his *Ahlul-Bait* (AS) are the examples for living our lives. Moulana Baig garnered much praise and appreciation from the community, young and old. He sat down with members of our youth, answering general religious questions and discussing issues faced in daily life by the youth. Introducing their potential participation in a national Shi'a youth organization, he also encouraged and inspired the youth to develop into a functional and effective group for the community. During the last 15 days, Moulana Syed Zafar Naqvi traveled from Paris, France to serve as our community worship leader. He also presented speeches each day following a shared *iftar* meal. The Syed's series of lectures involved the exegesis of **Surah Hujurat**, where various spiritual and practical topics were discussed. These included discussions on the necessity for respecting the Prophet (SAW) and acting with humbleness, and the social duties of believers to be critical of the media and to resolve differences within the community. His command of many languages enabled direct personal Q&A time, and he generously made time to meet specifically

with the women of our community to answer questions. Both speakers also spent one evening during their visits serving the Shi'a community in Tucson.

Led by the Al-Mahdi Youth Association (AYA), our community also participated in the annual Islamic Relief Humanitarian Day for the Homeless, held on September 29th for the first time in Phoenix this year. We distributed much needed medical services and personal supplies to the homeless in a festive event that also included entertainment, Sno-cones, rootbeer floats, and cotton candy. *Insha'Allah*, we hope to have many more opportunities in the future to serve those less fortunate and to show the true face of Islam, the face exemplified by the deeds of the *Ahlul-Bait* (AS).

We celebrated the end of Ramadhan with our *Eid-al-Fitr* Picnic at a local park. *Alhamdulillah*, we had one of our best celebrations ever! With nearly 300 people in attendance and nearly perfect weather, we ate together and played games – football, soccer, and sack races with prizes etc. We also had a Bouncer, Sno-cones and Spin-Art, and we introduced the very fun 'Under 30 vs. Over 30 Tug-of-War'. Let's just say that the 'mature' men of the community have the bragging rights for the next year!

Insha'Allah, the fasting and prayers of our community and yours will be accepted.

Houston:

Ramadan report from the Islamic Education Center, Houston, TX

Houston has a large Muslim population and there are five Shi'a centers. The Houston community was blessed this year to start Ramadhan with the moonsighting and end Ramadhan with the moonsighting. One of the 'mother' organizations and most famous centers within the country is the Islamic Education Center (IEC) Houston. IEC is very active throughout the year but as Ramadhan is the month of blessing, mercy and forgiveness and it is the spring of Qur'an, IEC was especially busy. Before Maghrib prayers, Moulana Ghulam Hurr Shabbiri led Qur'an recitation followed by the recitation of the congregational (*jamaat*) supplication (*du'a*) of *iftar*. People then left the prayer hall daily to share the evening post-fast meal (*iftar*). IEC kitchen is equipped with various foods and has a very experienced crew. It serves the community during the year but its role during the Holy Month of *Ramadhan* is appreciated. The community enjoyed a variety of food for *iftar* owing to the generous donations from the community. Hundreds of believers (*momineen*) attended the Center's activities throughout the month.

During this special month, *Du'a Iftetah* was read at least twice a week and there was a youth speech planned every night. All special historical observances were organized very well, especially those commemorating the demise of Hazrat Khadija (SA), the birth of Imam Hassan Mujtaba (AS), and the very sad event of the martyrdom of Master of the Faithful Imam Ali (AS). The IEC had a special guest come for three days during the Nights of *Qadr* – the honorable and respected Moulana Mohsin Qara'ati from the I.R. of Iran, who is an important teacher and scholar, the writer of many books published in different languages, and an orator on Iranian TV. He kept the *momineen* interested, and talked about very important topics, such as respecting parents, doing prayer on time, and taking care of our responsibilities. He spoke in Farsi, with a translation done by the respected brother Abdul Hamid. Although the majority of the community is non-Farsi-speaking, his style of speech delivery was very inspiring and attracted everybody - people couldn't stop listening and were focused on his every word. The programs for the Nights of *Qadr* were live-broadcasted on the Internet and a large number of other communities were following in the inspirational programs of the Islamic Education Center of Houston. Even during the break times people were asking, "why did the program stop?" His three days of speeches were recorded on a CD and sold at IEC during Eid day.

200-300 people stayed all night for the *amaal of Qadr* on all three nights but during the night of 23rd, we had a large crowd of around 400-500 people. A **Qur'an** contest was also held for the benefit of youth. About 40 youth participated in the contest and they memorized many Qura'nic *surahs*. They were all recognized during the Eid celebration program. At the end of the Holy Month of Ramadhan, after completing all the fasts and sighting the new moon of Shawwal, the community prepared for the Eid celebrations. The crew worked very hard to prepare the IEC facilities, for the Eid prayer on Saturday. Once again this year there was a large participation of around 1,000 people in the Eid prayer.

The PTO (parent-teacher-organization) for Alhadi School made the celebration of Eid even more wonderful by organizing an interactive carnival on the very next day of Eid. All the members of the community enjoyed the carnival and it was a very successful event.

Quds Day Reports from Around the Country

Phoenix- Br. Zohair Zaidi reports:

On the last Friday of Ramadhan, an Al-Quds day event was organized by the Al-Mahdi community and held on the Arizona State University campus through the support of the Muslim Students' Association as well as the local Sunni Masjid. The program included presentations and a panel Q&A session by Hajj Mohammad Riyad, a lawyer and political activist, Hajj Hani Rahal, a leader in the Al-Mahdi Community and long-time political activist, and Rev. Chuck Carlson, a Christian and pro-Palestinian activist who is an avid critic of Christian Zionism. Along with the speeches, there was a short video documentary presentation on the atrocities happening in Palestine. Carlson, the founder of the organization called "We Hold These Truths," discussed his personal experience in visiting Jerusalem. Using his extensive Biblical knowledge, he also enlightened everyone about the propaganda and Bible misinterpretation within an ever-increasing percentage of Christian churches around the nation and how this misinterpretation is being used to foster

support for Zionism. At the end of the program, there was an intense Q&A session that brought forth many different views and perspectives about the solutions to the apparent hopeless situation. The program was a great success leaving people with a greater awareness and understanding about the situation in Palestine and about the lesser known prevalence of Christian Zionism in America.

Dallas - Br. Masoom reports:

"The al-Quds Day is a day in which Islam is to be revived", said Imam Khomeini (RA) – the leader of the Islamic revolution. Almost 100 Muslims from the Dallas Muslim community celebrated al-Quds day, declaring the illegitimate occupation of Palestine by the Zionist regime and exposing the crimes against humanity. The program started with recitation of the Holy Qur'an by a 10-year-old Qaari, a young brother gave a very enthusiastic and passionate speech and filled the crowd with the energy to walk and shout slogans denouncing U.S. administration's policies that support the Zionist regime of Israel. A very important question for all patriotic U.S. citizens was also raised by this young brother: "*Why should young Americans die for Israel?*"

The Friday sermon (*khutbat ul-jumu'ah*) was given by a local clergyman who emphasized the unity of all Muslims and the importance of al-Quds Day. The Rally was a big success since it attracted crowds from all walks of life, according to the local rally organizers.

Houston - Sr. Samira reports

Brothers and sisters attended a rally hosted by the Worldwide Movement for Justice and Peace in Houston. It was held outside the Israeli Consulate on U.S. 59. Hundreds attended the event and there were great speeches by the local clergy and a few Muslim activists. The community also walked around the block chanting slogans and holding placards.

Seattle - Sr. Zahra reports:

Friday, October 5th, was commemorated as Yaum al-Quds, or Quds Day, by the greater Seattle Muslim community, as per the instructions of Imam Khomeini (RA) who called upon the *ummah* to observe the last Friday in Ramadan as a day of protest against Zionist oppression and occupation of Palestine. In previous years, the Seattle community has joined the Portland, Oregon community for the al-Quds rally, but since last year, the community has made an effort to spread awareness amongst the people of Seattle.

The demonstration was held in downtown Seattle at the busy intersection near the Westlake Mall. This is a popular site among protest groups due to the heavy traffic flow and the constant stream of pedestrians.

The theme of the demonstration was not limited to al-Quds but focused on the overall atrocities committed by the Zionist regime against the civilian population. There were graphic posters blatantly showing the inhumane treatment of Palestinians and Lebanese people by Israeli forces. For example, there were the infamous pictures of Israeli girls signing deadly weapons gleefully and the poor, lifeless bodies of Lebanese children. There was a poster of Palestinian youth, unnecessarily arrested, stripped and then killed. There were posters protesting U.S. aid to Israel and the resulting state terrorism, and posters that mocked Israeli democracy by providing facts on inequitable water distribution. Many children were carrying posters saying 'Israel is killing babies/ children like me.'

In addition to posters we distributed fliers to expose Israeli and the U.S. administration's hypocrisy. There were facts about the state of Israel ranging from nuclear proliferation to occupation and also from actual Zionists' quotations to current AIPAC lobbying.

We also gave two sets of freebies to the pedestrians. There were bumper stickers with a picture of the great holy Al-Aqsa mosque, demanding an end to terrorism and freeing of Al-Aqsa mosque, and refrigerator magnets with a picture of a dead Lebanese infant accompanied with a slogan: "Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine... Occupation is a crime."

Although we have protested many times since last year, this time I got the impression that people were more accepting, or perhaps this is just an impression. Many people accepted the fliers as compared to previous times, and some even personally asked for them. There were people who honked showing appreciation and some even joined us to show their support. This was indeed encouraging. What was a bit disheartening was the fact that despite repeated announcements, e-mails on major sites such as COSMOS, Imanforum, etc., very few people from Islamic centers other than the Zainab community showed up. Anyway, for all those who did, may Allah (SWT) reward them for the time they took out of their busy schedule to speak for those who have no voice, and to stand for those who have no standing. May Allah (SWT) give us the *tawfeeq* to form a united front for justice and global peace and raise a united voice against the tyranny of our time. Ameen!

Feedback Solicitation

If you would like to contribute towards future issues of **VOW**, the bi-monthly Muslim Congress newsletter, please send an email with your content, write-up or suggestions to newsletter@musimcongress.org. You can also email questions to be answered by an *A'alim* in our 'Ask-the-A'alim' section. Thank you.

"Islam is founded on five pillars: Salat, Zakat, Hajj, Sawm (fasting), and Walayah; People took

the first four, and left this (Walayah). I swear to Allah, they cannot complete/perfect the four, unless they complete them through the fifth one (Walayah)"

Hadith of Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) narrated in al-Kaafi, by Zurarah ibn Aayan.

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