

SBIA MEDIA COMMITTEE

MEDIA AND ISLAM

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 7 9 SAFAR, 1427/ MARCH 10, 2006

MOSQUE WORKS TO BETTER THE COMMUNITY

AMAN MEHRZAI

Every Friday, Ibrahim Talib and his brothers in faith look for a new street corner where they will give out free popcorn and cotton candy.

Their East Oakland neighborhood might be marred by drugs and violence, but the popcorn stand is a streak of optimism in an otherwise bleak neighborhood, they say.

"You might ask, 'What can a bit of free cotton candy and popcorn do?'" said Talib. "In this sea of gloominess, even a little light can serve as a beacon (to) take the darkness away."

For nearly two years, Talib and others have given away the treats, as well as warm meals, as an outreach initia-

tive by the Masjid Al-Islam mosque.

The mosque is at the corner of MacArthur Boulevard and 82nd Avenue, where prostitutes and drug dealers stride the streets, soliciting passing motorists, police say.

Across the street, a broken fence borders a field with open syringes and condoms on the ground, clearly visible to passers-by.

But the crime that normally would drive away religious people from the corner is the very thing that attracts the Muslim activists. Nearly 30 families have moved into the neighborhood over the years, all with one goal: to better the community.

Yahsmin Bobo moved to

East Oakland with her husband and three children from suburban Walnut Creek. "I see coming here as a hijra to live a better life" said Bobo. "In order for us to (have a better life), we have to help better our own community."

Salwa Khalaf moved to East Oakland from San Ramon with her husband and four children 15 years ago. She now teaches at the mosque's children's school.

Khalil Yasin, 38, soon will move into the neighborhood with his wife and four children, even though he says he can afford to live in a safer area.

"These people need help the most," said Yasin. "We could move somewhere

nicer, but then nobody will be here for them. We have a goal, a mission. These young kids are who need guidance the most."

On Feb. 17, 10 teenagers, ages 16 and under, were involved in a shootout next door, witnesses said. Gunmen opened fire from a moving vehicle, prompting the teenagers to return fire.

The imam, Amir Abdul-Malik Ali, quickly moved all the women and children to the back of the mosque and instructed them to lay low. Bullets shattered a window and blew out a tire on one Muslim woman's car.

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CLONING CONTROVERSY

ZEENAT UMAR

Are we playing God? Human cloning has provoked a hotbed of controversy couched in ethical and religious terms worldwide. The birth of the first celebrated, cloned sheep, Dolly, in 1997, through a process called, "somatic cell nuclear transfer," redefined possibilities in the

biomedical field.

The three major religions of the world, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, influence their follower's standpoint on the morality of this issue by engaging it to the beliefs and scriptures unique to each faith. However, it is interesting that people belonging to the same faith

hold opposing reflections upon this issue. Nargis Saleem, a practicing Muslim says, "Somewhere in Surah Baqrah, Allah talks about the people who cut the ears of one to make another of the same kind. Scholars say that these verses are about cloning, or about trying to ad-join two totally different

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

- 3/11 *Does God Love War? Lecture @ MLK Jr. Middle School at 7pm*
- 3/25 *Media Committee Meeting at SBIA at 11 am*

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CLONING CONTROVERSY

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species in the way to create/design a third new specie that presently does not exist.

“Afterwards, in the next verse, it is said that it is the devil’s work. I think what is called the devil’s work is the misuse of knowledge,” says Saleem. In her opinion, “it is humans who make it right or wrong by using or abusing it.” Saleem, although a firm believer in the Islamic faith, concludes the argument by stating that it will ultimately be defunct if it does not adhere to the will of God.

Afroze Khan, another practicing Muslim, however, disagrees with Saleem’s opinion, in that, “human cloning, in my opinion, is absolutely inhumane. It

goes against the law of nature. There are some lines that should not be crossed, no matter how innovative, and this is definitely one of them.”

The Islamic Fiqh Council reached a similar viewpoint in a meeting organized in Casablanca in 1997 to discuss human cloning with the Organization of Muslim Doctors in Kuwait. The majority of council members agreed that human cloning is not permissible as it would create intense social and moral problems in that the clones would be deprived of a soul, and lose his or her identity from a mother and a father to a cell.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that human cloning is violation of morality and human dignity. Franke Stallworth, born into the

Roman Catholic faith, expresses disagreement with his religion’s perspective on this issue. “As I tend to be agnostic, I have no problems with cloning from an ethical standpoint whether it be stem cell research or even whole human organisms for possible ‘harvesting’ of body parts should the original donor be in need of said body parts. Though if I was a fully practicing Roman Catholic, then I would have possible qualms in regards to cloning from a moral standpoint if ‘harvesting’ occurred more than three weeks after conception.”

The Jewish tradition allows cloning only under beneficial circumstances. Some believe that mankind should improve the creation of the Creator if it can benefit human needs. Those who oppose it do not see it as a reli-

gious belief, but more in ethical terms. They fear that cloning might deprive the cloned humans of family life and inheritance; also, cloned humans may be treated more like objects than humans. “The Jewish demand that we do our best to provide healing makes it important that we take advantage of the promise of cloning to aid us in finding cures for a variety of diseases and in overcoming infertility,” says Rabbi Elliot Dorff regarding the Jewish view.

There has not been a clear consensus on the morality of cloning. The risk of physical harm to the embryo, psychological harm to the child, degradation of parenting, objectivity of cloned children, and social harm are arguments placed forth by opponents.

REVIEW OF SLEEPER CELL—DO WE REALLY NEED THIS?

BUSHRA BURNEY

Having heard about the cable show *Sleeper Cell*, about Muslim Terrorists in the U.S., I decided to not pass judgment until I actually saw it, which I was just recently able to do.

The story revolves around Darwyn Al-Syeed, a practicing Muslim FBI agent who goes undercover to infiltrate a sleeper cell in Los Angeles. Michael Ealy, who plays

Darwyn, is believable in his role as the conflicted FBI Agent. Oded Fehr, who plays the leader of the cell, gives an even better performance. But, at this point, I don’t really want to talk about performances and whether or not it makes for some good television.

At first, I wasn’t sure what to think. I know that this is just a TV show. I know these are just actors who are being paid to play a part. I

know that this isn’t meant to be some ‘true story’ account. Yet, it still disturbed me. Do people really need to see this? Granted, one must have faith in the average intelligence of a TV viewer, but I still worry that when someone watches this, they will then become suspicious of friends and neighbors.

The cell consists of an African American, a white convert, a Bosnian, an Egyptian,

and a French Muslim. And then there’s Oded Fehr’s character who not only masquerades as a Jew, but also coaches the temple’s little league to keep up appearances. Funny enough, Oded Fehr is Jewish and even served in the Israeli army in real life.

All these characters are employed in tax-paying jobs in Los Angeles, ordinary citi-

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MOSQUE WORKS TO BETTER THE COMMUNITY

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Abdul-Malik later approached the teenagers to scold them about their dangerous life styles. The young people seemed regretful and apologized. Yasin, who was present during the shooting, said violence occurs all around the neighborhood, but most people see the mosque as a safe zone.

"They respect the amir," said Yasin. "They know what we are about, and they listen sometimes. But the environment around them takes away their alternatives. They don't have work or good role models."

Khalaf also emphasized people in the neighborhood respect what the mosque is trying to do. "You can see them hide their beer bottles or cigarettes whenever they see the Muslim women walk by," said Khalaf.

The idea to reach out to the community was inspired by Abdul-Alim Musa and Abdul-Malik.

Musa was born Clarence Reams, but locals knew him by his "Big Hank" alias during the 1960s and 1970s. He says he was a drug dealer who imported cocaine and other drugs from South America, a fact confirmed by authorities.

Musa said he got involved with the black nationalist movement in the 1970s and sold drugs to help fund the Black Panther movement. After several years of living the drug lifestyle, he said he came to regret it. He turned himself in to police as a wanted fugitive and served prison time.

In prison, Musa said, he accepted the teachings of Orthodox Islam and began to change his life, with a determination to undo the harm drugs had done to his community.

When he was released from prison, Musa helped develop the As-Sabiqun movement, an initiative he says is aimed at helping poor

neighborhoods.

Musa raised money and bought several stores on MacArthur Boulevard, where the mosque is now located. In one store, Musa said, he had witnessed friends sell a kilo of cocaine. He since has transformed the room into a library.

"We (Muslims) chose Oakland to help transform things," said Musa. "If we (previously) gave them good quality drugs (and) crime, we surely could give them good solutions and truth. That is what Islam is to us, because it is a part of our culture to reach out and change things for the better."

Many of those benefiting from the outreach initiative are homeless. Larry Lillard, 60, explained how the program has helped him.

"Giving this food to us, the homeless, means we don't have to steal ... because we're hungry."

Sandra Lamb, 52, has been living on the streets for a

year. "I am handicapped," she said, noting two of her wheelchairs have been stolen. She said she often feels hungry. "So (the food program) really helps."

One day while Abdul-Malik was handing out food, a man called out, "You all keep doing what you keep doing, and do it for us."

Abdul-Malik said that convinced him the Muslim group was doing the right thing. "We don't think we can change everything out here," said Abdul-Malik. "But we're just trying to give (the neighborhood) an alternative and we don't want anything back from them, except to bring them hope and optimism."

Those interested in visiting Masjid Al-Islam should call 638-9541. The mosque's Web site is:

www.asabiqun.com.

This article originally appeared in The Oakland Tribune on 2/27/06

SLEEPER CELL REVIEW

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zens with lifestyles that would not differentiate them from anyone else. This is the disturbing part. Through this series, one could make a logical leap that maybe one really is surrounded by terrorists who come in all colors and backgrounds and live

as proper Americans. At one point, Darwyn even told Tommy, the white convert, that it was almost funny to see a 'blond haired, blue eyed' person talk about eating kosher and halal. Tommy's response: "That's why I'm the perfect weapon. Just another American Idiot, cruising the

mall. I'm harmless."

After watching a few episodes, I came to the realization that there really is no point for this series to be on the air, a show that alludes to a sleeper cell that could very well be in your own neighborhood. Think of *Sleeper Cell* as 24 where the

baddies are always shown to be Muslims who talk of *sharia* and conduct prayers before venturing out to 'bring down America'. If anything, it may become a struggle for a viewer to separate reality from the world created by *Sleeper Cell*.

COMMUNICATION TRAINING FOR KHALEEFAH LEADERSHIP

ABOUT

IMAM BILAL IBNMUHAMMAD AP.L

Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem
Assalaamu-Alaykum

The Objective: To introduce the application of basic Human Psychology and the application of the Science of Communication.

In our historical studies of **Al-el-Mul-E-te-Saal - the Science of Communication**, we discover that it begins with **Al-AA-daa-bul-Isfaa' - the Etiquettes of Listening**. As we shared in our last newsletter, today this sunnah-practice of **Isfaa'-bi-Na-Shaa-Te**, translated into English, is called **Proactive Listening**. This scriptural science defines the **Messenger vs. the Message - listening for feeling vs. listening for facts**.

Next we study **Al-el-Mul-E-te-Saal - Ghaeer Sauutee - the science of Non-Verbal Communication**. This Science is dedicated to the understanding and application of sight, color, feel, taste and body language etc., beginning with **Interpersonal Communication**.

For example, the scriptural theme of the psychology or science of color is: let there be light vs. darkness and includes all of the color moods in between.

So we begin with the basics of **Interpersonal Communication**, then evolve into general conversation and graduate into **Li-Qaa' wa Majlis As-Shuura - small group-meetings and consultational gatherings**.

Next we graduate into **Al-el-mul Mu-faa-wa-dah -the Science of Negotiation**, which includes getting past deadlocks and realizing **win-win** results. In Japanese it is called **Akido** negotiating.

Finally we evolve to **Al-el-mul-Ee-laamul-Hadeeth**, which covers **the Principles of Modern-Day Mass Media**. This includes oral, print, and electronic information production and global mass dissemination/distribution for the purpose of educating, inspiring, and persuading for universal good.

Conclusion: Graduates from our training are introduced to **Al-el-mul-Nafs At-tat-bee-qe-yaah, the science of applied psychology** and **Al-el-mu Ah-luu-ghaat At-tat-bee-qe-yaah, the science of applied linguistics**.

Their credentials of authority as **media consultants** enable them to seek the **intentions** of what is happening as well as the **attentions** of how things are happening and to be able to integrate both sides of their brain **feelings** and **facts** in the communication experience.

Jazakum Allah Bi-Khaeri

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The SBIA Media Scholarship Program

Up to \$1,000 available for any student interested in pursuing an education in a Media field (Journalism, Radio/TV, Film/Video, Public Relations, Mass Communications, etc.) in an accredited college or university in the U.S. or Canada. Download the SBIA Media Scholarship requirements and application form from the SBIA website at www.sbia.info. For more questions/comments, please email: mediarelations@sbia.info