

ISCJ COMMUNICATOR

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Our Lord! Forgive us our sins as well as those of our brethren who came before us in faith and let not our heart entertain any unworthy thoughts of feeling against [any of] those who have believed. Our Lord! You are indeed full of kindness and Most Merciful (59:10)

Haj: A Spiritual Journey

By Faraz Khan - Also published in *The Home News Tribune*

Editor's Note: Eid al-Adha is a Muslim festival that celebrates [completion of Haj and] Abraham's commitment to God in his willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. This year, the holiday will be celebrated Nov. 27 to 30. Muslims are required at least once in a lifetime to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. That pilgrimage is known as Haj. In this column, local Muslim speaker-activist Faraz Khan reflects on the first-ever trip to Mecca he took last year.

As my wife and I were leaving for Haj, one of my coworkers asked, "Is Haj like a vacation tour?" I could not answer. Another friend asked, "What will you gain from it?" Flabbergasted, I told him, "Well, it is a duty upon every Muslim."

My response lacked any insight. I was embarking on a journey with my wife for three weeks in Mecca and its surroundings for a hefty price of more than \$10,000, with no cruise or beach activities. They must have thought I was mad.

Haj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is one of the fundamentals of Islam. Every physically and financially able Muslim is required once in a lifetime to visit the Holy Mosque and perform the rituals of Haj as related by Abraham, the Patriarch and Muhammad, the last messenger of God. In his last year, Prophet Muhammad performed Haj and resuscitated a direct relationship to God by absolving all intermediaries: idolatry and clergy system that had enslaved the minds of people. He preached a universal message of equality and piety based on a direct relationship to God.

Once we arrived in Mecca, I went through an emotional roller coaster. We had heard some bizarre stories about people losing family members or their luggage, or going through great physical hardship to perform the rituals of Haj in a sea of more than two million people.

Initially, we enjoyed our stay in beautiful luxurious hotels and open buffets that shielded us from the poverty and pollution on the streets of Mecca. I thought to myself that Haj is definitely a vacation.

that my father had suffered a stroke and he was in critical condition. I chewed my heart while hearing my mother weep on the phone. Like the mountains in Mecca, my brothers were speechless. We were spiritually connected but thousands of miles apart. Lost for words, I saw my earliest memories of my father -- a man whose shade I grew under, played back in a split second. I spent my days and nights in the Holy Mosque praying for his recovery and a revival of my spiritual journey to God.

At our hotel I met a pilgrim guide, a Pathan (ethnic people from Pakistan and Afghanistan) who had not slept for four days, yet he was always smiling and busy with pilgrims. While many guides would remain in the Holy Mosque, this man stayed in the hotel to assist new pilgrims. He rarely ventured out of the hotel. Once another guide taunted him, "You guys stay in this hotel, but I love to sit in the Holy Mosque lost in devotion to God." Upon hearing the statement, the Pathan guide said, "You could gain paradise by worshiping God, but you can only gain God by serving people." I thought it was great advice for religious people to consider.

In the mosque, I met an elderly Moroccan villager who was suffering from heat exhaustion. His feet had swollen from excessive walking. We conversed and I told him that I was from America. He then asked me how many kilometers it was from Rabat, the capital city. I could only smile at his simplicity. The man told me that he had come for Haj and left his country and faced great hardship only to please God. I was humbled.

On the way out of the mosque, I rubbed shoulders with rich and poor people of all localities. I could recognize Malaysian, Chinese, Bosnian, Turkish, Persian, Indian and other pilgrims who walked toward the Holy Mosque in a hurry but always smiled on their way out. It was as if they had found what they were searching for.

At the door, I saw two very old couples standing, raising their hands and outpouring their hearts.

Then the dreaded news came from New Jersey

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Observant Muslim Americans are patriotic, involved citizens

By Fakhruddin Ahmed - Also published in NJ.com on Thursday, September 17, 2009

As Muslim Americans fast from dawn to dusk to purify their body and soul during the holy month of Ramadan (Aug. 22 - Sept. 19), two insults were unfairly hurled their way. Mayor John Piper of Clarksville, Tenn., sent an e-mail to every member of the city council, many city employees, friends and family members urging "patriotic Americans" to boycott the U.S. Postal Service's "Eid" (pronounced "eed") stamps that commemorate the two important Muslim religious holidays. The e-mail falsely accused President Barack Obama of ordering the printing of these stamps. The stamps were actually issued during President George W. Bush's presidency in 2001, and reissued several times as the price of the stamps increased. One would like to ask Mayor Piper what crime Muslim Americans committed to deserve the wrath of "patriotic Americans."

Late last month, some very young students belonging to a church group entered a Florida school recently, wearing T-shirts proclaiming the message "Islam is of the Devil" printed on the back. Amid parents' protests that this was merely a case of the students exercising their "free speech," the authorities sent the students home. The church authorities and the parents do not seem to realize that they are teaching innocent youngsters

prejudice at a very impressionable age.

This could taint them for life. Imagine the consequences if a Muslim American youth, wearing a similar anti-Christian message, entered a school.

Fasting in some form is a requirement in many major religions. Catholics fast during Lent, for example, Jews fast during the High Holy Days and Hindus fast on certain days of the month such as Purnima (full moon) and Ekadasi (the 11th day of the fortnight).

Fasting is a very special form of worship for the Muslims. The holy Qur'an was revealed during the month of Ramadan. Muslims are required to fast from dawn to dusk the whole of the lunar month of Ramadan (lasting 29 or 30 days). Pre-adolescents are not required to fast, neither are the sick, travelers and menstruating women; they are expected to make up the fasts later.

What is different about Muslim fasting is that not only are the faithful forbidden to indulge in things that are sinful ("Haram") during fasting, they also have to abstain from things that are normally allowed ("Halal"), such as food and conjugal relationships. Fasting is between the worshipper and God - no one else knows whether someone is actually fasting. Muslims believe that there is a special reward from God for those who fast to please him. Fasting requires that a person abstain not only from food and drink, but also from impure thoughts. It is a spiritual cleansing of the body and the mind.

Through abstinence from food and drink, hungry. This allows them to empathize with the poor and those who are forced to "fast" daily for lack of food. Muslims are required to donate 2.5 percent of their wealth to charity every year. Charity during the month of Ramadan carries special rewards. Muslim Americans will celebrate the end of Ramadan (Eid-ul-Fitr) with food, festivities and thanksgiving, which takes place this coming Sunday.

In the spirit of charity, the Islamic Society of Central Jersey (ISCJ) responded to President Barack Obama's call for a day of "United We Serve" on Sept. 5, hosted an interfaith dialogue and offered free health care and free legal clinic services. Many local residents took advantage of the free medical clinic and legal services.

Reflecting the true spirit of Ramadan, the Islamic Society of Central Jersey donated \$10,000 to the Trenton Soup Kitchen, \$10,000 to the South Brunswick Elementary School, \$1,000 to South Brunswick Food Pantry and \$1,000 to South Brunswick Women's Committee. New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine sent a message of gratitude to the Islamic Society of Central Jersey for its generosity. Guest speakers who expressed appreciation for the ISCJ's gesture included Sen. Bill Baroni, Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein, Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo, member of the South Brunswick Township Council Mahesh "Mac" Shah and South Brunswick Township Mayor F. Gambatese.

Haj: A Spiritual Journey (Cont. from page 1)

They spoke in Punjabi (regional language of Pakistan) about their longing for this day and search for forgiveness and His pleasure. People gathered around them. The old couples were engrossed in their supplication and disconnected from their surroundings; they spoke from their hearts and melted the hearts of those in their vicinity. As I watched their spiritual ecstasy, I felt ashamed of my own religiosity.

We stayed in the tent-city of Mina for three days with other pilgrims, while reciting the Qur'an, performing prayers, and engrossed in conversations that often touched upon the question of our personal journey to God. Many proclaimed that they had come to start afresh and were no longer interested in "running after the world." There were American students from the universities of Medina and Mecca who lived by the trademark, "What can I do for you?" They did not get paid or asked for tips. They only were interested in one thing, "Ya Haj (O pilgrim) remember me in your supplications to God." They viewed the pilgrims as guests

of God and volunteered day and night. I asked them to pray for my sick father who was now recovering at home.

Interestingly, as required by Haj rites, we had to walk and run around the Kaba, a black cubical building originally built by Abraham and his son, Ishmael. Afterward, we drank water from the spring of Zamzam.

Tradition notes that upon God's command, Abraham left Hager and her son, Ishmael, in the desert of Bakka (ancient name of Mecca). Her provision expired in a few days. She ran from one mountain to another in search of water, while keeping a constant watch on baby Ishmael. God loved this act so much that He gushed a spring (Zamzam) under the feet of Ishmael.

Today, this ritual of running and drinking Zamzam is performed by all pilgrims in Mecca. The pilgrims quench their spiritual thirst, while running toward God. These rituals aid the heart in recognizing another spiritual reality.

During Haj, a question followed me that this hustle and bustle of strangers, my inadvertently running into wheelchairs, losing my gaze in the glitter of shops, gaining appetite every hour, and yearning for my bed in exhaustion, how does all of this translate into something spiritually tangible that I could take back home? We often get this idea of spiritual experience in meditation -- deep reflections in isolation from people and close to nature but Haj was different.

Toward the end of my journey, it hit me that one had to seek God and remain loyal to Him despite all the surrounding commotions. Haj explained to me that our world is full of distractions and one has to focus on this journey to God. Our time is limited and we can only find God while serving others. I believe that spiritual experiences are not based in luxury and entertainment due to extreme self-indulgence of such habits. Rather, a spiritual journey begins when we recognize our dependence on God and commit to a life of sacrifice and piety.

Massacre at Fort Hood troubles Muslim Americans

By Fakhruddin Ahmed - Also published in NJ.com on Thursday, November 19, 2009

Once again, the killing spree by a co-religionist has put Muslim Americans on the defensive. Chastened by the post-9/11 criticism that Muslim Americans were slow to condemn the atrocity, most Muslim-American organizations immediately condemned Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan's massacre of fellow soldiers and civilians at Fort Hood on Nov. 5.

Unfortunately, they did not know much about the person they were condemning. Muslim Americans are in such a deep hole that any time a Muslim wacko does something heinous, Muslim Americans are expected to first own him, then dissociate from him and finally, condemn him. And they have learned to do so dutifully.

Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan may have been known to the law-enforcement agencies, but he is not a name familiar to Muslim Americans outside his immediate family. Muslim Americans were just as shocked and as incensed as other Americans to learn about Hasan's massacre of fellow Americans in cold blood. That's where the unity ended and the dichotomy began.

The media pointed a not-so-subtle finger at Muslim Americans, spreading the innuendo that something may be inherently wrong with Islam and those who practice it, even in America. It did not help that Hasan was American-born and not a zealous new convert. Time magazine put Hasan on its cover and wondered in print whether Hasan's actions were just an aberration or the true reflection of the criminal mind of a true believer.

The right-wingers harbored no such doubts. While most ordinary Americans make a distinction between the peaceful, ordinary Muslim Americans and the extremists who invoke Islam to perpetrate criminal acts, many right-wingers do not. If one were to listen to the radio and television talk-show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck and Michael Savage, one would conclude not only that Muslims should not be allowed into the U.S. armed forces, but that America would be better off if its Muslim population were somehow shipped out, and come to think of it, the world would be in better shape if it could rid itself of its 1.5 billion Muslims!

Muslim Americans worry that such incessant anti-Muslim bigotry and vitriol spouted by these right-wingers, who have a tremendous following, may inspire some impressionable Americans to take the law into their own hands and do some serious damage to Muslims Americans.

Such apprehensions are not far-fetched. Muslim-baiting has reached a fever pitch in western Europe. In the same Time magazine that featured Hasan on its cover was the story of a Muslim German woman, Marwa el-Sherbini, who was stabbed to death in a German courtroom by a man who was being tried for spewing racial epithets at her. The German police stood by and shot only her husband, who tried to save her.

Maj. Hasan was unfit to serve as an armed forces psychiatrist entrusted with the responsibility of healing the mental wounds of soldiers returning from combat. Hasan needed psychiatric help himself. He left a long trail of inflammatory anti-U.S. rhetoric

and, astonishingly, was not disciplined for it. It is hard to believe that he was treated with kid gloves because he is a Muslim American. If that were the case, it is political correctness gone way too far. Clearly, Hasan was a walking time bomb; unfortunately, no one came forward to defuse him.

Reportedly, Maj. Hasan did not want to fight fellow Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, where he was about to be deployed. He should have thought about that before he enlisted. America has a volunteer armed forces; only Americans who wish to join do so. After joining the armed forces, one cannot place conditions on where one can be deployed. Americans join the military on the armed forces' terms, not on their own terms.

By his cowardly act, Maj. Hasan has cast a shadow over the exemplary reputation of thousands of Muslim Americans who loyally serve their country in the U.S. military and die for their country. They never ask for special privileges or exemptions. They don't kill fellow Americans.

The road Maj. Hasan traveled is well-trodden. He was dealing with his own demons. He needed help. He neither sought it nor was offered it. He decided to depart the world in a blaze of "glory," taking dozens of innocent lives with him. What better way to do so than to invoke his religion and God as his protective shield?

Muslim Americans do not buy Maj. Hasan's martyrdom rationale; they consider him a criminal who should be treated as such and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Maj. Hasan's actions represent Maj. Hasan only, and no one else.

The Power of Prevention

By Dr. Nadeem Hajjaj, MD MSc BS

It is important that every person take an active role in their own health- Allah has entrusted you with your bodies and it has a right over you. The most important step that one can take in order to improve his health status is to focus primarily on the power of prevention. This is mainly done by keeping regular appointments with your primary care doctor. If you do not have a primary care doctor, find one located nearby and establish a regular schedule. It is best to select one primary doctor from your background who speaks your language or one with whom you feel comfortable. A growing problem in our community is the increasing number of the Muslim population who refuse to visit their doctor unless they have an emergency or a sudden, serious sickness. While an emergency does warrant a trip to a doctor,

there are many other chronic problems that need to be managed or checked regularly. These include, but are not limited to, regular check-ups for hypertension (high blood pressure), diabetes, cholesterol, thyroid hormone imbalance, and, the most avoided of them, the genitourinary and gastrointestinal systems. Your body is like your automobile - if you do regular checkups and fix small problems; you can increase the quality of your life and extend it insha'Allah.

The American Medical Association has many guidelines that should be followed to improve your health- these should be discussed with your doctor on your next visit. It is important to visit your doctor often because avoiding primary prevention can cause a simple, treatable problem to escalate into a life-threatening illness later in life.

Suggested blood tests for your first visit or if you have not been tested in over a year are Complete Blood Count, Comprehensive Metabolic Panel, Thyroid Stimulating Hormone Level, Fasting Lipid Profile, and Fasting Glucose Level. A Urinalysis test is also recommended. Suggested examinations for our brothers over 50 years of age are colonoscopies and a prostate exam, but even earlier if there is a family history of problems in those areas. Women should also perform regular breast exams and pap smears yearly or as directed by their primary care doctor. In addition, ask your doctor about the yearly flu vaccine or about the pneumococcal vaccine. Finally, my brothers and sisters let us not forget that Allah is the Healer and all final decisions are with Him. When he decides a matter, He says "Be" and it is. May Allah keep you and your families strong in body and faith, insha'Allah.



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ISCJ Free Medical Clinic Schedule for December 2009

6th December 2009
Dr. N Rehmat (Sr)
Pediatrics

20th December 2009
Dr. S Hussain (Sr)
Family Practice

Clinic is open between
10:30 AM to 12:30 PM

ISCJ - Reaches Out

As many people in the township struggle to pay their bills and tighten their belts, the Islamic Society of Central Jersey is doing its part to help the less fortunate in the community.

The ISCJ held its United We Serve event on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. with a free health fair and legal clinic that was open to all residents.

"The Islamic Society has given back to the community in every way possible," said Atiya Aftab, secretary of the board of trustees for the ISCJ. "We hold a free health clinic every Sunday, but we decided to just make a day of it and give back even more."

Ms. Aftab said numerous volunteers have offered their time and multiple rooms were set up to ensure the privacy of residents. In addition, a variety of experts in varying fields of medicine were on hand, including an emergency room doctor, internal medicine doctor, plastic surgeon. There also was skin screenings.

In addition, attorneys in different specialties were on hand to offer their time for residents.

"We have people who will be prepared to give advice, point people in the right direction and give help to people who need help," Ms. Aftab said.

"Some people have simple questions and don't know where to turn. We want to try to help those people who don't have access to this type of opportunity."

The event featured invited guests from the community and local politicians. Following the

clinic, the ISCJ held a ceremony to present donations to a number of local organizations. The ISCJ donated \$10,000 to South Brunswick's schools, including a donation of school supplies. A \$10,000 donation was given to the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, a \$1,000 donation was given to the South Brunswick Commission on Women and a \$1,000 donation and food was given to the South Brunswick Food Pantry.

Ms. Aftab said the donations are representative of this time of year for the ISCJ, as Muslims celebrate the holy month of Ramadan.

"One of the tenets of our religion is to give help to those who need help," she said. "You're not successful if your neighbor is in need. The donations are part of the everyday thought process of Muslims. During the month of Ramadan we have a heightened feeling of awareness to remember those who don't get food during the day, as we break our fast at the end of the day. Some people don't have food waiting for them at the end of the day, so it's imperative to give back at this time of year."

Donations have been raised year-round by the ISCJ to help make the donations throughout the area.

"This is to show everyone that we are a part of the fabric of this township," said ISCJ Board of Overseers member Arif Patel. "We are contributing, proactive and responsible citizens of this community."

"Helping those in need is something we do all year round," Ms. Aftab said. "This is a great opportunity to pull everything together on one day."

First 10 days of Dhu'l-Hijjah

Among the special seasons of worship are the first ten days of Dhu'l-Hijjah, which Allah has preferred over all the other days of the year. Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "There are no days in which righteous deeds are more beloved to Allah than these ten days." The people asked, "Not even jihad for the sake of Allah?" He said, "Not even jihad for the sake of Allah, except in the case of a man who went out to fight giving himself and his wealth up for the cause, and came back with nothing." (Al-Bukhaari, 2/457).

It is recommended to exert oneself in good works, such as remembrance of Allah (dhikr), fasting, charity, and other righteous actions, because these are the best of days. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) commanded us to recite a lot of Tasbeeh ("Subhan-Allaah"), Tahmeed ("Al-hamdu Lillaah") and Takbeer ("Allaahu Akbar") during this time. 'Abdullah ibn

'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "There are no days greater in the sight of Allah and in which righteous deeds are more beloved to Him than these ten days, so during this time recite a great deal of Tahleel ("La ilaaha ill-Allaah"), Takbeer and Tahmeed." [Ahmad, 7/224].

Abu Qatada (Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace be upon him, his family, and companions) said, "Fasting the Day of `Arafah [9th of Dhu'l Hijjah] expiates for two years, one prior and one forthcoming. And fasting the Day of `Ashura [10th of Muharram] expiates for the past year." [Muslim, Abu Dawud, Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah] May Allah give us success in these blessed days and nights, and in every moment of our lives, to follow the path of the Prophet (Allah bless him & give him peace), and may He make us of those whom He loves and who love Him.