

Choice

Newsletter of the Centre for Islamic Studies

New Series Issue 1

Ramadan 1434 (August 2013)

Islam by Choice

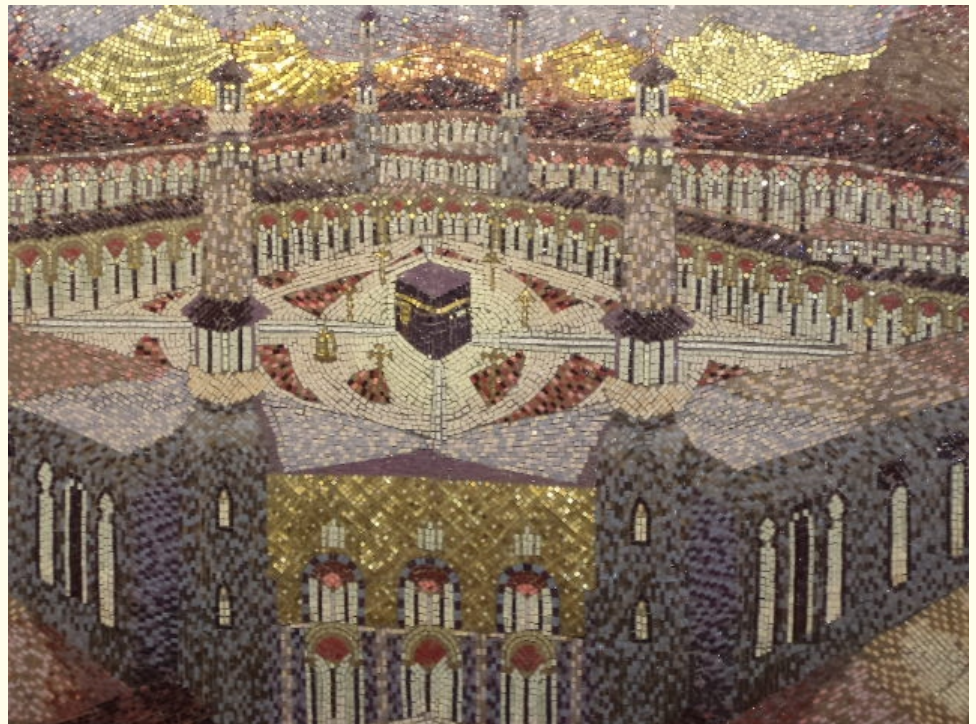
Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error

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ATMT – Da'wah Tours

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thy Lord with wisdom and
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(Surah Al-Nahl: Verse 125)

“Awareness Through Mosque Tours” or ATMT, a unique concept of passive da'wah conceived by Syed Raziuddin Ali, a Director of the Discover Islam organization in the late 1980s.



Why a Scientist believes in God

We are still in the dawn of the scientific age, and every increase of light reveals more brightly the handiwork of an intelligent Creator.

Published by The Centre for Islamic Studies

AWARENESS THROUGH MOSQUE TOURS

-Bringing People Closer to Islam

Da'wah or inviting people to Islam is an important duty of the Muslim community. This is especially so since no Messenger of Allah will appear after our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). In fact, the Qur'an makes numerous references to spreading the message of Islam through beautiful preaching. Our Prophet (PBUH) also cast upon his followers the duty of conveying Islam to others such as seen in his Final Sermon. Thus Muslims have a duty to convey the universal message of Islam to the rest of humanity.

The early Muslims went far and wide spreading the message of Islam so that within a hundred years Islam came to dominate a good part of the world from Spain in the West to China in the East. Today, however, it has not been as easy to promote Islam due to adverse media publicity and political pressures, so that we Muslims have to think of other means of conveying the message of peace and truth of Islam.

One such is "Awareness Through Mosque Tours" or ATMT, a unique concept of passive da'wah conceived by Syed Raziuddin Ali, a Director of the Bahrain-based Discover Islam organization in the late 1980s. The program which commenced at Al-Fateh Mosque in the Kingdom of Bahrain and was later introduced to other historic mosques in many parts of the Islamic world, including the Blue Mosque in Turkey has proven to be a success story.

Our Noble Prophet's Example

There is a mistaken belief among many Muslims today that Non-Muslims cannot be allowed into mosques. In contrast, there are many instances in the lifetime of our Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) where

those of other faiths were admitted into the Prophet's Mosque, Masjid-ul-Nabawi in Medina. For instance, a delegation of Christians from Najran was housed in this mosque by the Prophet and were even allowed to practice their devotions in this sacred spot. Further there is evidence in the ahadith that a non-Muslim prisoner was tied in one of the pillars of the mosque in the Prophet's time. Seeing the conduct of the Muslims he was convinced of the truth of Islam and lost no time renouncing his earlier beliefs and becoming a Muslim.

Ali observes that while in the olden days, the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) went far and wide spreading the message of Islam in keeping with the commandments of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet, the Muslims of a later time neglected this duty and this very much remains the case even today. However, today we have a situation where tourists from all parts of the world are keen to visit mosques and admire its architecture besides curiosity about *what's going on in mosques* due to media publicity, often adverse, which has been going on especially since September 11.

As such, this should be viewed as the ideal opportunity to introduce Islam to these visitors in a subtle way, so that even if they don't accept Islam, they go away with a favourable impression of Islam, contends Syed Ali.

The choice of the mosque for ATMT lies in the fact that it lends itself well to introduce Islam to those of other faiths and serve as a forum to engage meaningfully with them. It is in fact a form of passive da'wah which should be acceptable to all. In this form of da'wah Islam is subtly introduced to the visitor without generating any impression of preaching.



Syed Ali in Hong Kong's Kowloon Mosque giving a talk on Islam to Chinese students



Daeer Abdul Saleem explains about Islam to an European lady in Sultan Mosque

Here lies the importance of the mosque in this program. The mosque is a place to which Muslims resort many times a day, for their 5 times a day prayers and their weekly congregational prayers. Thus it occupies an important place in Muslim religious life. It also contains features which reflect Islamic values and it is these features that could be dwelled and elaborated upon to give visitors a good idea of Islam. The tour guide could start with introducing the history of the mosque before getting on with its architecture, in other words, its features such as the dome and prayer niche and more importantly its absence of graven images. It is at this juncture that the tour guide should have the sagacity to introduce Islam to the visitor, albeit in a subtle way. This technique, perfected by Syed Ali, is known as the *Sandwich Technique* and has helped many a tour guide introduce Islamic faith and culture to tourists in a very subtle manner, prompting their interest to know more about it.

There is one feature almost every tourist will be impressed with, and that is the tranquil atmosphere of the mosque. Its wide open area without seating arrangements of any sort, absence of idols and pictures and beautiful mosaics, arabesque and geometrical patterns found in its interior such as windows and doorways cannot but fail to impress upon the visitor that the mosque is a safe and serene place devoted for sincere worship.

Dwell on commonalities

One may start with the total absence of idols or other graven images in the mosque since this feature pervades the entire mosque. This may not be immediately apparent to the tourist and it may be necessary for the tour guide to bring his or her attention to it. Through this he or she could introduce to the visitor the unique concept of Islamic monotheism and if they are Christian dwell on the commonalty between the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam which are all monotheistic in nature. For example one could refer to the Ten Commandments which explicitly prohibit images of any kind. One could also point out that the Arabic word *Allah* which Muslims employ for God merely means 'The God' or in other words *The One True God* and that even Arab Christians use the word *Allah* to refer to God. If they are Hindus one could still appeal to their religious beliefs, since Hinduism too has a faint monotheistic thread as apparent in scriptures like the Vedas, Brahmanas and the writings of Hindu scholars like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, founder of the Brahma Samaj.

The Tour Guide may then bring their attention to the *mihrab*, the niche in the wall of the mosque towards which Muslims face in prayer. The *mihrab* as we know is oriented towards Mecca, and this could be used to impress on the tourist why Muslims face towards the direction of the Ka'aba in Mecca, as a form of unity binding the entire Muslim community and as

importantly its hallowed place in Islam, being as it is the first temple dedicated to the One True God built by Prophet Abraham. Such facts should be particularly appealing to Christians. Besides this, one could dwell on the other aspects of the mosque, such as the dome, comparing it to the domes of Christian religious edifices and highlighting its importance in giving the exterior of the mosque its grandeur and more practically for internal acoustic purposes, that is to say, its ability to amplify sound.

Similarities in faith

One could even point to the worshippers, and while they are at it, inform the visitor that Muslims are expected to pray five times a day and that this is more of a prayer service rather than a simple prayer or supplication made to the Almighty. One could even give them a practical demonstration of the prayer with its cycles of standing, bowing and prostrating, stating for instance how every prayer commences with the *Fatiha*, which is the equivalent of the Christian Lord's Prayer which it somewhat resembles. When ending the *Fatiha* the Muslim says *Aameen* while the Christian says *Amen*. Such similarities between Islam and other faiths should be stressed as far as possible. One could also dwell on the various postures of the prayer, focusing particularly on the aspect of *sajdah* or prostration as a gesture of utmost humility before the one True God which even Prophet Jesus engaged in when in the Garden of Gethsemane. One could even point out to them that the very term for mosque in Arabic, *Masjid*, derives from the Arabic term for prostration, *sajdah*, making the mosque basically a place of prostration. One might even go further and if they are responsive request them to prostrate on the ground and experience for themselves the pleasure one gets from this activity. One should however be careful to focus less on ritual and more on the underlying meaning of the prayer which is what the visitor would like to know.

Finally if illustrated panels highlighting Islamic teachings have been installed in an appendage or section of the mosque, one should lead visitors to it, to consolidate in their minds what they have already learnt and also provide them more information on Islam which may not have been covered in the tour such as human and women's rights in Islam and Muslim contribution to science and civilization. Before seeing visitors off, the guide must ensure that his visitors are given booklets on Islam based on their needs. For instance booklets like *Jesus in Islam* and *Muhammad in the Bible* should ideally be given to Christian visitors.

ATMT in Practice

ATMT is practiced in a big way in countries like Bahrain, Malaysia and Singapore, the last being a largely non-Muslim country with an influential Muslim minority. In Malaysia, it has taken off to a

good start with the Malaysian Government giving it official recognition. In Singapore too five historic mosques have been selected for ATMT including Masjid Sultan located in Muscat Street, an old quarter of Singapore's influential Malay minority, where this program is operative. It was selected for ATMT due to its historicity and potential to attract tourists.

Its unique hybrid architecture is a blend of Indo-Saracenic features with domes and minarets seen in the exterior and typical church features with Gothic arches adorning its interior. Being a heritage mosque, it was declared as a national monument by the Singapore government in 1975. In Turkey, it has been well received at the historic Blue Mosque, a large and beautiful Mosque in Istanbul which was built by the Ottoman Sultans several centuries ago. It is estimated that the number of tourists visiting this mosque averages 20,000-40,000 a day.

In Sri Lanka, a few historic mosques have also been identified by us for the implementation of ATMT, among them the Sammakot Masjid, also known as Red Mosque in Pettah in the heart of Colombo. The mosque, characterized by a lovely red and white exterior and an ornate interior with exotic floral arches, has undergone substantial extensions retaining its traditional architecture and should be ready for ATMT by September this year.



Zayed Mosque Abu Dhabi where ATMT is practiced in a big way

Tolerance in Islam

1) The evidence from the Qur'an

There are no less than seven verses of the Holy Qur'an which command that Islam is not to be compelled on people and that they are to adopt it of their free will:

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. For thy Lord knoweth best who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance

(Surah Al-Nahl: Verse 125)

And say to the People of the Book, and to those who are unlearned "Do ye submit yourselves ?". If they do, they are in right guidance. But if they turn back, thy duty is to convey the Message. And God's Sight is on His servants

(Surah Ali Imran. Verse 20)

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks

(Surah Al Baqarah. Verse 256)

If one amongst the pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the Word of God. And then escort him to where he can be secure

(Surah Al Tawbah. Verse 6)

If it had been the Lord's Will, they would all have believed- All who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?

(Surah Yunus. Verse 99)

Tell those who believe to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God. It is for Him to recompense each people according to what they have earned

(Surah Al Jathiyah. Verse 14)

Obey God, and obey the Messenger. But if ye turn away, the duty placed on him is on him and the duty placed upon you on you. If ye obey him, ye shall have guidance. To preach clearly only is the Messenger's duty

(Surah Al Nur. Verse 54)

2) Evidence from the Sunnah

The Prophet entered into a treaty with the Christians of Najran in Southern Arabia near Yemen. When the delegation arrived at Medina the Prophet permitted them to pray in his mosque and gave them the following accord:

The people of Najran and their dependents shall remain under the protection of God, and Muhammad the Prophet, the Messenger of God. Their persons, their religion, their lands, their possessions and their churches shall remain safe. This treaty holds good for all people of Najran, whether present or not. No bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, no monk from his monasticism and no devotee from his devotions (Tabaqat Al Kubra of Ibn Sa'd)

3) Evidence from the Practice of the Rightly guided Caliphs

Caliph Umar entered into the following covenant with the Christians of Jerusalem following the capitulation of the city in 637 AC:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is the security which Umar, the servant of God, the commander of the faithful, grants to the people of Aelia (Jerusalem). He grants to all, whether sick or sound, security for their lives, their possessions, their churches and their crosses, and all that concerns their religion. Their churches shall not be changed into dwelling places, nor destroyed. Neither shall they or their appurtenances be in any way diminished.

When Umar visited the Christian holy sites, the patriarch Sophronius accompanied him to the Church of the Resurrection and as it was the appointed time for prayer, he bade the Caliph offer his prayers there. Umar thoughtfully refused and disclosed his honourable motive: *“Had I yielded to your request” said the Caliph “the Muslims of a future age would have infringed the treaty under the colour of imitating my example”* (Tarikh of Tabari)

We find the same kind of tolerance being extended to those of other faiths by Umar's successor, Caliph Uthman. A lady who accepted Islam, Umm Al-Muhājir says: *I was captured with some girls from Byzantium. Uthman offered us Islam, but only myself and one other girl accepted Islam. Uthman said: “Go and circumcise them and purify them”* (Al-Adab Al-Mufrad of Bukhari).

4) Historical Evidence for Tolerance in Islam

History bears ample testimony to the tolerance extended to those of other faiths by the early Muslims. For instance, when the Muslim army reached the Jordan Valley in the conflict with the Byzantines, its Christian inhabitants are known to have preferred to submit to Islamic rule in preference to that of the older empire. They even wrote a letter to the Arabs that stated: *“O Muslims, we prefer you to the Byzantines, though they are of our own faith, because you keep better faith with us and are more merciful to us and refrain from doing us injustice and your rule over us is better than theirs, for they have robbed us of our goods and our homes”*. The people of Emessa went further, closing the gates of their city against Heraclius army

and telling the Muslims that they preferred their rule and justice to the oppression and injustice of the Byzantines. So it was that many other cities in Syria and elsewhere entered into treaties with the Muslim army, agreeing to submit to their rule while at the same time preserving their religious freedoms.

The Nestorian Patriarch Ishoyabh III wrote to Simeon, the Metropolitan of Revardashir, Persia we find the following words testifying to the tolerance shown by the Muslims: *“And the Arabs, to whom God at this time has given the empire of the world, behold they are among you as you well know...And yet they attack not the Christian faith, but on the contrary, they favour our religion, do honour to our priests and the saints of the Lord, and confer benefits on churches and monasteries. Why then have you people of Merv abandoned your faith for the sake of these Arabs? And that too, when the Arabs, as the people of Merv themselves declare, have not compelled them to leave their own religion* (Bibliotheca Orientalis. Joseph Assemani. 1719-28).

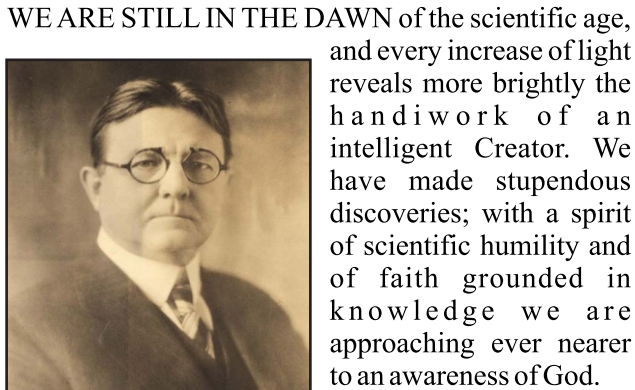
When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453 after nearly a thousand years of withstanding Islamic forces, the Ottoman emperor Muhammad II saw to it that he secured the allegiance of the Christians. He proclaimed himself the protector of the Greek Church and strictly forbade the persecution of Christians. He even granted a decree to the newly elected patriarch Gennadios, securing to him and his successors and the bishops under him, the enjoyment of all the old privileges enjoyed under the former Byzantine rule. The patriarch received from the hands of the Sultan himself the pastoral staff, the symbol of his office, together with a purse of a thousand gold ducats and a horse with gorgeous trappings, on which he was privileged to ride with his train through the city (Annales. Georgios Phrantzes. Ed.B.G.Niebuhr.1838)

Extracted from the book *Tolerance in Islam* by Asiff Hussein published by the Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum (2012)



Seven Reasons Why a Scientist Believes in God

By CRESSY MORRISON Former President - New York Academy of Science



Abraham Cressy Morrison

For myself, I count seven reasons for my faith:

First: *By unwavering mathematical law we can prove that our universe was designed and executed by a great engineering intelligence.*

Suppose you put ten pennies, marked from one to ten, into your pocket and give them a good shuffle. Now try to take them out in sequence from one to ten, putting back the coin each time and shaking them all again.

Mathematically we know that your chance of first drawing number one is one in ten; of drawing one and two in succession, one in 100; of drawing one, two and three in succession, one in 1000, and so on; your chance of drawing them all, from number one to number ten in succession, would reach the unbelievable figure of one in ten billion. By the same reasoning, so many exacting conditions are necessary for life on the earth that they could not possibly exist in proper relationship by chance.

The earth rotates on its axis 1000 miles an hour at the equator; if it turned at 100 miles an hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long as now, and the hot sun would likely burn up our vegetation each long day while in the long night any surviving sprout might well freeze. Again the sun, source of our life, has a surface temperature of 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and our earth is just far enough away so that this "eternal life" warms us *just enough and not too much!* If the sun gave off only one half its present radiation, we would freeze, and if it gave as much more, we would roast.

The slant of the earth, tilted at an angle of 23 degrees, gives us our seasons; if the earth had not been so tilted, vapors from the ocean would move north and south, piling up for us continents of ice. If our moon were, say, only 50,000 miles away instead of its actual distance, our tides might be so enormous that twice a day all continents would be submerged; even the mountains could soon be eroded away. If the crust of the earth had only been ten feet thicker, there would be no oxygen, without which animal life must die. Had the ocean been a few feet deeper, carbon dioxide and

oxygen would have been absorbed and no vegetable life could exist. It is apparent from these and a host of other examples that there is not one chance in billions that life on our planet is an accident.

Second: *The resourcefulness of life to accomplish its purpose is a manifestation of an all-pervading Intelligence.*

What life itself is, no man has fathomed. It has neither weight nor dimensions, but it does have force; a growing root will crack a rock. Life has conquered water, land and air, mastering the elements, compelling them to dissolve and reform their combinations.

Life, the sculptor, shapes all living things; an artist, it designs every leaf of every tree, and colors every flower. Life is a musician and has taught each bird to sing its love song, the insects to call one another in the music of their multitudinous sounds. Life is a sublime chemist, giving taste to fruits and spices, and perfume to the rose, changing water and carbonic acid into sugar and wood, and, in so doing, releasing oxygen that animals may have the breath of life. Behold an almost invisible drop of protoplasm, transparent, jellylike, capable of motion, drawing energy from the sun. This single cell, this transparent mist-like droplet, holds within itself the germ of life, and has power to distribute this life to every living thing, great and small. The powers of this droplet are greater than our vegetation and animals and people, for all life came from it. Nature did not create life; fire-blistered rocks and a saltless sea could not meet the necessary requirements. Who, then, has put it here?

Third: *Animal wisdom speaks irresistibly of a good Creator who infused instinct into otherwise helpless little creatures.*

The young salmon spends years at sea, then comes back to his own river, and travels up the very side of the river into which flows the tributary where he was born. What brings him back so precisely? If you transfer him to another tributary he will know at once that he is off his course and he will fight his way down and back to the main stream and then turn up against the current to finish his destiny accurately.

Even more difficult to solve is the mystery of eels. These amazing creatures migrate at maturity from ponds and rivers everywhere - those from Europe across thousands of miles of ocean - all bound for the same abysmal deeps near Bermuda. There they breed and die. The little ones, with no apparent means of knowing anything except that they are in a wilderness of water, nevertheless start back and find their way not only to the very shore from which their parents came but thence to the selfsame rivers, lakes or little ponds. No American eel has ever been caught in Europe, no

European eel in American waters. Nature has even delayed the maturity of the European eel by a year or more to make up for its longer journey. Where does the directional impulse originate?

Fourth: *Man has something more than animal instinct - the power of reason.*

No other animal has ever left a record of its ability to count ten, or even to understand the meaning of ten. Where instinct is like a single note of a flute, beautiful but limited, the human brain contains all the notes of all the instruments in the orchestra. No need to belabor this fourth point; thanks to human reason we can contemplate the possibility that we are what we are only because we have received a spark of Universal Intelligence.

Fifth: *Provision for all living is revealed in such phenomena as the wonders of genes.*

So tiny are these genes that, if all of them responsible for all living people in the world could be put in one place, there would be less than a thimbleful. Yet these genes inhabit every living cell and are the keys to all human, animal and vegetable characteristics. A thimble is a small place to hold all the individual characteristics of almost three billion human beings. However, the facts are beyond question.

Here evolution really begins - at the cell, the entity which holds and carries the genes. That the ultra-microscopic gene can absolutely rule all life on earth is an example of profound cunning and provision that could emanate only from a Creative Intelligence; no other hypothesis will serve.

Sixth: *By the economy of nature, we are forced to realize that only infinite wisdom could have foreseen and prepared with such astute husbandry.*

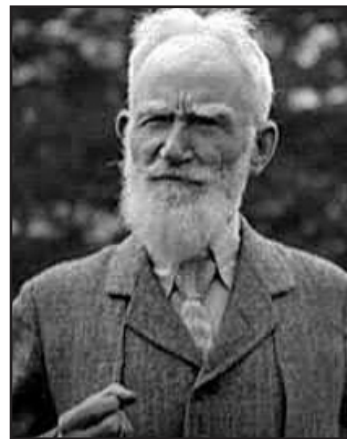
Many years ago a species of cactus was planted in Australia as a protective fence. Having no insect enemies in Australia, the cactus soon began a prodigious growth; the alarming abundance persisted until the plants covered an area as long and wide as England, crowding inhabitants out of the towns and villages, and destroying their farms. Seeking a defense, entomologists scoured the world; finally they turned up an insect which lived exclusively on cactus, and would eat nothing else. It would breed freely, too; and it had no enemies in Australia. So animal soon conquered vegetable, and today the cactus pest has retreated - and with it all but a small protective residue of the insects, enough to hold the cactus in check forever. Such checks and balances have been universally provided. Why have not fast-breeding insects dominated the earth? Because they have no lungs such as man possesses; they breathe through tubes. But when insects grow large, their tubes do not grow in ratio to the increasing size of the body. Hence there never has been an insect of great size; this

limitation on growth has held them all in check. If this physical check had not been provided, man could not exist. Imagine meeting a hornet as big as a lion!

Seventh: *The fact that man can conceive the idea of God is in itself a unique proof.*

The conception of God rises from a divine faculty of man, unshared with the rest of our world - the faculty we call imagination. By its power, man and man alone can find the evidence of things unseen. The vista that power opens up is unbounded; indeed, as man's perfected imagination becomes a spiritual reality, he may discern in all the evidence of design and purpose the great truth that heaven is wherever and whatever; that God is everywhere and in everything that nowhere so close as in our hearts. It is scientifically as well as imaginatively true, as the Psalmist said: *The heavens declare the Glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork.* Similar verses are there in the Quran too to ponder. *The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! Verily, He is forbearing, much-forgiving.*

What George Bernard Shaw said about Islam



"I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion, which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence, which can make itself appeal to every age"

"I have studied him - the wonderful man - and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Savior of Humanity. I believe that if a man like him, were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it the much needed peace and happiness. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today. If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe within the next hundred years, it could be Islam".

(George Bernard Shaw in *The Genuine Islam*. 1936)

CIS Activities



The Centre for Islamic Studies (CIS) is the pioneering organization involved in spreading the message of Islam in Sri Lanka. It conducts a comprehensive orientation program for New Muslims besides undertaking welfare activities.

The Centre is also extensively engaged in welfare activities. It has set up a housing scheme at Ahamed Village, Kahatowita for new Muslims while it also organizes free health camps. The Ladies wing of CIS maintains an orphanage, the *CIS Infants Home*. The centre also provides financial assistance to needy persons, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. Here are some highlights for this year:



A sister declares the Shahadah



Lecture organized by the CIS

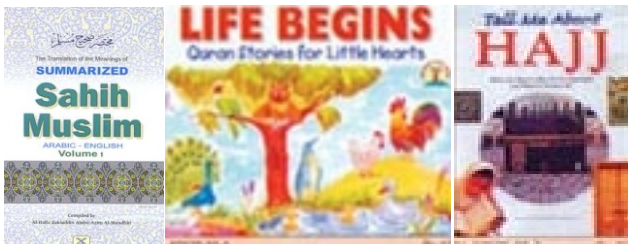


Ifthar Program organized by the CIS



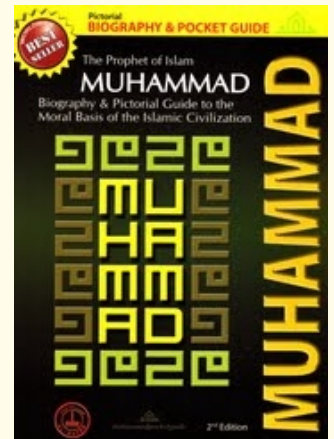
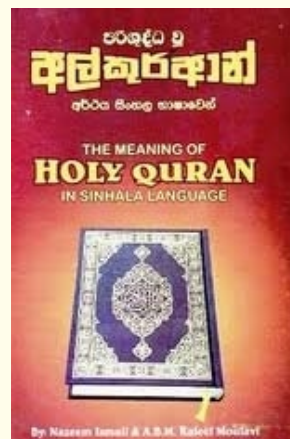
Distribution of dry rations, Kahatowita

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