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Objectives

The Academy for Learning Islam (ALI) is a non-profit organization to advance and teach the religious tenets, history and practices of Islam, according to the Shi`ah Ithna `Ashari school of thought. It maintains a religious school of instruction for children, youths and adults. ALI also provides counseling services and Islamic outreach programs to people experiencing religious and social problems.

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ACADEMY AT A GLANCE

For many years our leaders, Madrasah teachers and Islamic Educationalists have been contemplating on what can be done for Muslim youths who graduate or complete the last grade at a local Islamic Madrasah. A number of ventures such as Correspondence Courses and sending some of the youths to Hawzahs have been tried. Besides consuming a lot of resources, these ventures have benefited only a select youths of the community. *Alhamdu lillāh* in the Academy for Learning Islam (ALI) we believe that we have found one of the ways of addressing this problem. Please read this booklet and you will notice how the Academy has been able to sustain the interest of so many youths in a medium-sized community of the Mu'minīn in Vancouver, Canada.

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1. Tributes to those who helped us

Allah ﷻ says in the Holy Qur'ān; *is not the reward of beneficence but doing good (in return) (55:60)?* We would first like to express our gratitude and thanks to all those who assisted us in the establishing and running of the Academy since its inception.

We begin with praising the Almighty Allah for the innumerable and unlimited bounties that He has granted the directors, teachers and volunteers at the Academy to undertake the huge challenge of educating religiously the youths of our community. As He Himself has said *if you were to count the favors of Allah, you shall never be able to complete counting them (14:34).*

We thank all those who have given their valuable time, expertise and efforts in various fields and served the Academy in one way or another. Some of them are: Assisting in electrical maintenance and cleaning; Abu Ahmad Noori, Firozali Rashid, Karrar Abbas and Shabbir Dewji; in computer, Internet, web & publication designing and other technical issues; Aarif Rashid, Sayyid Ali Nasrallah, Sayyid Jalil Nasrallah, Mahmood Abdulrasul Jaffer, Muhammad Mahdi Kassamali, Rizwan Rashid, Sadik Rashid, Shaykh Saleem Bhimji (Kitchener), Salim Yusufali (California), Shaheen Rashid, Sumayya Kassamali, Zuher Dhalla (Edmonton); for office, legal and tax advices; Shaykh Hamid Mavani (California), Jafir Abbas Jaferi (Ottawa), Shaykh Shafiq Hudda (Kitchener), Shaukat Moloo (Edmonton); and

for voluntary work at the Academy office: Sayyid Ali Zein, Azeemali Moledina, Habib Rashid, Muhammad Mahdi Kassamali, Sumayya Kassamali and Zehra Moledina. We are also thankful to Br Murtaza Bachoo for assisting in Qur'ān Tilāwah course and Sr Zainab Khadr for teaching Arabic courses to women.

We would also like to thank those who are the backbone of any charitable organization, namely the generous donors. Those who donated cash (\$100 and over) or items such as books, computers, equipments and office furniture were - locally from BC: Dr Akber Mithani, Sayyid Ali Zein , Amu Investements Ltd, Sayyid Asadali Zaidi, Dr Asif Tejani, Azeemali Moledina, Cedar Auto Services, Dr Gulamabbas Moledina, Hassanali Dewji, Ladies Tabligh Committee, Mohamed K Merali, Shirinbai Merali, Tayyiba Publishers & Distributors, Zahir Syed; from Edmonton: Ashraf Jaffer, Mohamedraza Fazal, Sayyid Javed Naqvi & family; Ontario: Mohamed Yasin Devji, Murtaza Salehmohamed, Habib Optical Ltd, Islamic Humanitarian Services, Mihrab Publishers & Distributors, Naeem Thaver; from the United States: Abbas Pyarali (MN), Dr Abdul Hamid Kanji and family (IL), Islamic Educational Center of Orange County (CA), Sayyid Kazim Mehdi (MN), Mujtaba Amini (WA), Mujtaba Dato (CA), Sadik Aloo (CA); from Overseas: Abdel Karaim Alahmad (UAE), Sayyid Hadi al-Hindi (UK), the Islamic Education Board, IEB of the World Federation of KSIMC (UK), and Murtaza Dato (UK).

2. Our Main Activity: Short Courses

The Academy for Learning Islam (ALI) was established in February 2001 to cater for the Islamic education need of our youths after Madrasah graduation. One night in the Holy month of Ramadhan 1421, three youths – Aarif Moledina, Rizwan Rashid and Talib Jaffer, approached the Resident Alim of the community to give them courses on Islam. After the holy month, they gathered 12 youths (7 girls and 5 boys) to attend our first course on the “Introduction to *As-Sahīfa as-Sajjādiyyah*.” The students used to sit on the floor and wear winter jackets to protect themselves from early morning cold. This continued for 12 Sundays. The second course on “Ja`fari Fiqh” was an intensive course conducted in June 2001. This was our humble beginning.

Beginning August 2001 the Religious Director, Hasnain Kassamali, attended to the Academy activities fulltime. *Alhamdu lillāh* sixteen more courses were conducted in the first year from August 2001 to July 2002. Each course consisted of 16 hours classroom instructions, a comprehensive syllabus comprising of readings, recommended texts, list of resources online and in print, classroom agenda, discussion topics for students, quizzes and filling of student survey form. The following courses were given, most for youths from ages 16 to 40 but some courses were open to adults also.

1. Introduction to *As-Sahīfa as-Sajjādiyyah*. For Youths
2. Understanding the Ja`fari Fiqh. For Youths
3. Select Du`a's from *As-Sahīfa as-Sajjādiyyah*. For Adults

4. The Reciprocal Rights in Islam. For Youths
5. Learning Tilawah of the Holy Qur'an. For Adults
- 6 - 8. Arabic for Beginners, three courses levels 1, 2 & 3. For young and adult women
7. Sirah of the Prophet ﷺ. For Youths
8. Family Life in Islam. For adults and married couples
9. Understanding Islam – a special course prepared for non-Muslims in public schools.
10. Lessons from *Nahjul Balagha*, Part 1 for youths and adults. Dr Mohamedraza Dungersi kindly agreed to give this course when he came for Muharram 1423 majalis to Vancouver.
- 11 - 13. Motherhood in Islam – most popular course with the majority of our mothers. The instructor had to repeat the course three times for different groups of students over a period of five months.
14. Sirah of Amirul Mu'minin Ali b. Abi Talib ؑ for young Adults.
15. Karbala through History for young Adults.
- 16 – 18. Qur'anic Arabic was open to all youths and adults. Three different sessions, one for gents and two for ladies were held.

In the first year about 80 different students have taken at least one course at the Academy, half of whom have benefited from two or more courses. This, we humbly believe, is a good achievement taking into consideration the small size of our community living in the greater Vancouver area.

A course to be taught by Sayyid Hazim al-A'raji on *Kitâb at-Taharah* was planned but had to be cancelled due to lack of

response from the Arabic speaking Mu'minin. Also, a full-time eight-day Intensive Program was planned for during December 2002 holidays for girls who could come to Vancouver from other North American cities. Enough registrations from outside were not received to justify the holding of this program. Insha Allah we would be planning for similar programs in coming years.

Please visit our site at www.academyofislam.org to view detailed flyers, syllabuses, resources, lessons and student surveys for some of the courses.

3. Students speak about our courses

At the end of every course a Student Survey form is filled in by each and every student. Herein the students give their honest and frank opinion about the course material, instructor and the facilities at the Academy. *Here are abstracts from their survey forms:*

On Understanding Ja'fari Fiqh the survey said:

- The course helped me in understanding the other madhahib & the followers of other madhahib - made me more familiar - and may help me in debating with Sunnis. The course lectures & discussions were all beneficial to me, as was the reading & research.

- This was an excellent course. I am extremely proud now to be a Shi'ahh of the Ja'fari madh-hab because our Fiqh is supported heavily by the Hadith of the Ahlul Bayt ؑ.

On Motherhood in Islam the students commented:

-This course was absolutely amazing. Not only the content-which was really insightful, but also the mothers and non-mothers' input made the class a lot of fun!

- Excellent notes etc. useful to keep as reference

- Nothing [needs to be improved] - everything was perfect- the right mix of religious and secular, lecture and conversation, discussion and guidance

-I would really like to see a fatherhood class. Also a Parenting/Motherhood Part II

-The course also made me appreciate my mother much more

On Karbala' through History they said:

- I really enjoyed the course and it should be offered again for an older age group

- I feel it was an essentially important topic for us, since these issues are commonly misinterpreted due to ignorance and this was a good way of understanding them

- Improvement may be to spend more time on certain concepts.

4. Other activities and services

Religious Lectures: the Religious Director of the Academy who was previously the Resident Alim for the Shia Muslim Community in Richmond for nine years, continued assisting the community for Friday prayers and on numerous occasions to remember the birth and death anniversaries of the Ma`sumin (a). He also gave a few lectures at Al-Kawthar Islamic Association in Surrey until the center began procuring services of Sayyid Hazim Al-A`raji in Arabic.

School visits: Following the incident of September 11 in the US, a letter was sent to 11 school districts in greater Vancouver area to offering to do an interactive presentation on Understanding Islam. Four districts responded positively and many more invitations from schools were received directly. Four presentations were conducted in two schools in North Vancouver (Nov 09 & 22) and two in a school in Vancouver. One of the presentations at a Vancouver school was conducted by Sr. Fehmida Tejani, and she says in her report; *Overall, I sensed the visit to be a very productive one in that the response from the students was greater than expected under the circumstances. In many ways, the events of September 11th provided an opportunity, once and for all, for us to clarify the overwhelming misconceptions about Islam in the West. The students' level of curiosity about Islam was probably higher than it has ever been, I assume due to the overload of conflicting information from the media.*

Family and social counseling: In the absence of a resident Alim at the Shia Muslim Community and Canadian Husseini Association and an English speaking scholar at Al-Kawthar Islamic Association, the Religious Director continues to perform *nikāh* ceremonies, *Shar`i talāq* pronouncements, assisting in procuring short term loans in liaison with local jamaats social and welfare committee, counseling members who have personal and family problems.

Publications: one fact sheet titled "Twelve Common Questions on Shi`i Islam" was prepared for the volunteers of the Spirit of Islam Exhibition at University of British

Columbia in Vancouver. The students of the classes on “Motherhood in Islam” came up with two booklets entitled *Motherhood to Me* and *Motherhood* that consisted of articles on personal thoughts, stories, experiences, advices and insights on being a mother. The students of the on “Karbala’ through History” came up with a compilation *Books on Karbala* that has book report/review on many popular books on the history and tragedy of Karbala’. A pocket size plastic card containing the “Du’a’ after Meals taught by our 4th Imam, Ali Zaynul Ābidin (a) was also prepared for limited circulation.

A compilation of 50 sayings of Imam Ali (a) from *Nahjul Baaāgha* was prepared for distribution at the summer camp for boys organized by the Council of European Jamats in Sweden.

Assisting new converts: A number of people continue to embrace the *madh-hab* of the Ahlul Bayt. ALI assists them with literature, answering their queries, teaching them how to say salat, introducing them to Islamic sites and literature on regular basis.

Multi-faith Activities: In November the RD participated at UBC Multi faith Panel Discussion for visiting students from two universities in Quebec on the current world crisis. The participants were asked to do a presentation based on religious tradition on terrorism attacks and various responses to the attacks, as well as the underlying factors that partly take terrorism to be an acceptable response to experienced oppression or injustice. Thereafter, the RD continues to participate at other multi-faith activities held in churches and synagogues.

5. Qur’ān Tilāwah Program (QTP)

The Academy hired extra four rooms in the adjacent offices to convert these into classrooms. The program began in early July and will continue till the end of August 2002.

Here is an *interim report* prepared by Br Murtaza Bachoo, the coordinator for the Qur’ān Tilāwah Program:

The objective of the QTP is to raise the level of Qur’ān recitation in the Shī’ī community in the Greater Vancouver Area. As such, the program was open to all Shī’ī communities, as announcements were made in various centers and flyers were distributed both in English and Arabic. The program is held four times a week to accommodate people with different schedules, with sessions held both in the morning and evening. In part, the Academy would also like to provide multiple sessions in the week to allow students to maintain practice and consistent progress throughout the months. During these sessions three male teachers and three female teachers are made available to help students on a one to one basis. This ensures that every student learns at his own pace and is instructed in a manner suited for his or her needs.

Along with facilities and teachers, the Academy is also providing texts and materials for teachers and students. These texts include level 1 and 2 booklets, a teacher’s manual, the *Qa’idah* and the Holy Qur’ān. In addition, various Hadiths on the importance of reading and studying the Holy Qur’ān with

meaning were professionally prepared and posted on the walls of the corridors and the classrooms.

Special thanks go to the following who agreed to teach the reading of the Qur'an during summer holidays: Aarifa Mohamed, Abu Muhamamd Iyad As-Samak, Akil Champsi, Amir Meghji, Amir Rashid, Dr Asif Tejani, Eman Alatar, Fatema Rashid, Habib Rashid, Hussein Afshankia, Laila Rashid, Mahdiyyah Mohamed, Maher Rashid, Masuma Fazal, Muhammad Mahdi Kassamali, Roshan Jaffer, Sadik Rashid, Sajjadhusayn Dewji, Salma Fazal, Tahera Khaku, Zainab Bachoo, Zarinbai Sheriff, and Zeharabanu Meghji. We also are grateful to the following who assisted in painting the classrooms: Abbas Ladak, Akil Champsi, Azeemali Moledina, Mohamed Husein Meghji, Zehra Moledina.

The Academy is pleased to inform that so many people agreed to volunteer their valuable time to come and teach students participating in the QTP. This is encouraging, taking into consideration that many people spend their summer time on holiday. May the Almighty reward them amply for their dedication and love for the Qur'an.

To date, thirty-four different students (23 male and 11 female) have attended the QTP program. The level of these students has ranged considerably, and no categorization can be made based on the age of the students. The evening sessions are well attended, with an average of 10 male students and 3 female students in attendance per day. The attendance for the morning sessions has been dwindling; therefore this session will be dropped during August 2002.

Our observation indicates that we have made some progress and we plan to implement some changes based on Teacher survey results. The Holy Qur'an prints available at the Academy contained small writings not suitable for many students. Consequently, some Mu'minin have kindly lent us Qur'ans with large prints.

6. Ulamā' who visited the Academy

Locally from Vancouver: Sayyid Hazim al-A`raji
From Toronto: Dr Hussein Khimjee, Dr Liyakatali Takim, Shaykh Muhammad Ebrahimi Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi; From New York: Shaykh Fadhil Sahlani; From Montreal: Sayyid Khalili Tabatabai; From Kitchener: Shaykh Saleem Bhimji, Shaykh Shafiq Hudda; From Los Angeles: Sayyid Murtadha Qazwini, Sayyid Mustafa Qazwini; From Chicago Shaykh Mukhtar Faezi and from the Islamic Republic: Sayyid Abul Hasan Navab and Shaykh Ali Irvani.

The visiting scholars apparently approved of various activities of the Academy and graced their presence with lot of du'as.

7. Our Vision and Future Plans

1. Provide Internet-based online courses on Islam. These courses will cover a variety of Islamic subjects.

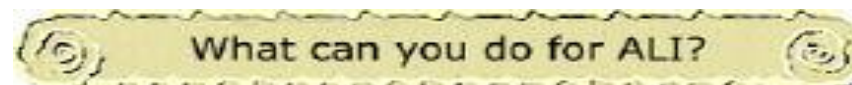
2. Internet Resource Center (IRC) at the Academy is not far from completion. Praise be to the Almighty, we have been able to procure 8 personal computers all linked to Internet on broad band Internet services. This facility will be available to students taking courses in the fall and winter of 2002. We also intend to welcome seniors of the community to make use of this facility in the daytime whereby they can come to surf Islamic sites and listen to lectures and majalis online, besides enjoying our hospitality of free coffee or tea in the kitchen.

3. Offer Diploma and Mini Degree in Islamic Studies. We have offered a number of organizations outside Canada to begin a similar venture in their countries so that over time more course modules get prepared which can be used to give Diploma and Degree programs.

4. Associate with renowned Hawzas, colleges and universities to deserve Educational accreditation for courses and programs given at ALI. Communications in this regard have begun with at least one Islamic college and we are hopeful that Divine help will come in this regard.

5. Outreach Programs for the general public. *These may include:* assisting in preparing course syllabi and material for summer camps, visiting institutions of learning such as a colleges and universities and make presentations on Islam, inviting law enforcement officers and other public officials to dialogue with the Muslim community about issues of insecurity for Canadian Muslims following 9/11 and providing school teachers and counselors with the information that they

need in order to teach or talk about Islam & Muslims



1. Volunteer part of your time to assist in the compilation of course material and/or in maintaining a section of our website and volunteering at the Internet Resource Center.

2. Sponsor a course for Canadian \$1400/US Dollars 900/GB£ 600. ALI Charges nominally for courses so as to attract as many youths and new converts as possible. We also allow students to register free of charge or pay part of the fees if they cannot afford. If you wish the reward of studying the course sponsored reaches the souls of these *marhumeen*.

3. Donate monthly amounts of \$25, \$50, \$75 or \$100 toward the activities of ALI.

For financial donation please make checks payable in favor of the Academy for Learning Islam. Since our application for charity status is still under consideration, those wishing to benefit form Tax deductible receipts may make checks payable to Islamic Shia Ithna Ashari Association (for Canadian receipts) and Shia Ithna Ashari Jamaat (for US receipts).

Note: Please distribute this booklet to all those interested in assisting in the Islamic education of our youths & new converts.