

The Light House

MAS-SSF

Volume 1, Issue 4

Sept. 2008

RAMADAN AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE FAMILY

In the Blessed Month of Ramadan parents can focus on modeling the spiritual dimension of family life. Many children will want to get up to have Suhoor with their parents. Being allowed to stay up a little late or get up early in the dark has a special effect on children. They will enjoy the special holiday feeling if the home is decorated with some of their own art projects, made together with artistic or "crafty" parents or at Islamic weekend or day school. Lights can also be strung, even in an apartment.

Many families will be preparing traditional foods and sweets for the month. Children can help with this, according to their ability. In this way they can learn both traditions and skills they can pass down to their own children someday. Inviting families from different ethnic background to a potluck Iftar together can help them learn about the traditions of Muslims from diverse backgrounds. Inviting a non-Muslim family, perhaps a neighbor, to Iftar can model hospitality.

Charity is a large part of Ramadan.

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THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

With the new school year children and parents are anticipating a good learning experience. For parents of students in public school it is important to communicate with new teachers as soon as possible. If the child has moved to a new school or moved up to middle school, junior high school, or high school it may be necessary to talk to the counselor or a principal or vice-principal. Most teachers in public schools are only beginning to learn about Islam. Some topics, which parents may want to talk to teachers and their child about, are:

- How can the child do dohr prayer in school?
- How can the child maintain modesty in gym class?
- How can the child answer questions about being Muslim
- Wearing of a headscarf in school.
- Ramadan
- Eid holidays
- Knowing if school foods contain pork
- Overnight field trips where

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Upcoming from MAS-SSF This Fall:

Matrimonial, Two New Programs

November 15: Matrimonial Event for Singles at SALAM

This will be a gathering that will allow Muslim singles to meet in a modest Islamic environment. For more information call (916) 486-8626.

Milati Islami Twelve Step Substance Abuse Program

MAS Social Services Foundation will start a 12 step substance abuse program for Muslim individuals struggling with substance abuse. Millati Islami is a Twelve Step recovery program for persons that experience problems associated with addiction. The steps and traditions of Millati Islami are based upon Islamic principles. With the traditional Twelve Step program some principles have proven to be in accord with our Islamic way of life. When Islamic principles are included, they have proven to further enhance the recovery process.

Call for more information and for meeting dates and location. (916) 486-8626.

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Children can help decide to whom donations will be made. Parents might talk about some possibilities and include school age children in the discussion. Making gifts is a good activity for children who will learn that buying and shopping are not the only way of giving. Older children can be involved in volunteer work for charity. Since children in more affluent families may enjoy receiving new clothes and toys for Eid they may understand a donation which gives them to less fortunate children.

Parents of children who attend public school need to speak with their child's teacher about Ramadan and to explain, depending on the age of their children, what the teacher needs to know to understand and have a positive attitude about Ramadan. This writer has heard teachers complain that children stay up too late day after day and are sleepy in school. Parents need to reflect on the demands school makes on their children and find a path which is best for them and then communicate with the school.

Some young adult Muslims in the US have good memories of going to Taraweeh prayers with their parents and playing with other young children. Older children can participate.

Here are some suggestions from SSF president Samir Ead: My advice to parents is involve your kids, boys and girls, in sports. Why sports? My son Wahib is 13 years old and he is crazy about soccer. The game has taught him endurance especially when playing in high temperature. Soccer has developed his body and mind. So this endurance has helped him in dealing with hunger and thirst. So he has been fasting in school and taking his PE period with no problem. I keep an eye on his grades to make sure he is not slipping. Obviously I needed to provide him with some Islamic education with the sport. He attends Sunday school at SALAM and studies Quran with Imam Amer.

boys and girls sleep supervised in the same area

- Sports uniforms, gym classes and modesty
- What the home language (or languages) is, how much English the child knows, and whether the child is also learning to read Quranic Arabic in afternoon school and/or weekend school
- If the child has any special health or other needs (see information on upcoming SSF support group for children with special needs on page 4).
- If the parents are financially needy they may need to take advantage of programs like free school lunch, assistance with buying school supplies, school fees for athletics and so on.
- How the parents can volunteer in the classroom or for other school activities. Some Muslim parents may be interested in being chaperones on field trips.

With all children parents will want to talk to their children about how to behave Islamically in the school environment/culture. For many this will be their first experience without their parents outside of the everyday life of their Muslim family and community. It may be the first time they play with children of other faiths and cultures and languages.

If possible it is very good for parents of elementary and middle age school children to volunteer to help in the classroom once or twice a week. In the high school years other volunteer activities are available.

If you have a questions, concerns, or problems related to your child and school, MAS-SSF has peer counselors whose children have attended public school through high school. It is best to resolve issues early in the year. Please call us at (916) 486-8626 for an appointment.

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Support Group for Parents of Children with Special Needs

Later this fall SSF will be starting a support group for parents of children with special needs. This will be an opportunity for exchange of information, experiences, and emotional fellowship. In addition, if parents wish, guest speakers can be invited on topics such as school (IEPs, 504 accommodations, testing and assessment), stress in the family, social development in the Muslim and mainstream community, stigma, and so on. Child care will be provided. Look for more information in the next newsletter. Call or email for more information and to sign up. (916) 486-8626.

MAS-SSF NEWS

In June Nassiba Cherif conducted a workshop on Mastering Marital Communication for couples. Couples learned and practiced positive skills such as showing understanding, conflict management, and problem-solving. The emphasis was on putting and keeping emotional honesty, compassion, empathy, and trust in the marital relationship. SSF is planning another workshop for next year.

In August Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D. conducted a training workshop on community interpreting for SSF counselors and others interested in learning more about this. Since some clients may need an interpreter this training was necessary.

Islamic Relief has awarded a grant of \$10,000 to MAS-SSF. Thank you to Islamic Relief.

MAS-SSF Family Development Circle

Ramadan is here and we are all thinking about how to help the needy, grow spiritually as individuals and in our families, as well as nurture our growing Sacramento Muslim community. Family Development Circle (FDC) is a way to support the work of MAS-SSF on a regular basis. With a monthly donation (tax deductible) of \$10 or more you (and your family will help SSF and in return you will receive this newsletter by email. In addition you will be entitled to a 50% discount on MAS-SSF workshops during the year of your membership. It is generally agreed that your

zakat donation may be given to Islamic service organizations such as SSF. There will be a further benefit, one that will help SSF obtain larger amount. SSF will be applying for grants from government and private foundations. It is essential to demonstrate grass roots support for SSF work. A healthy number of FDC members will be strong evidence. Membership may be anonymous if requested.

To join, or just to make a one-time donation, call SSF and leave a message. Soon it will be possible to join online. For now, please call (916) 486-8626 and leave your name and phone number or email address and we will contact you to explain how to join off-line.

How Children Grow Part IV:

Choosing Child Care

For various reasons some parents may look for childcare. Choosing childcare is always a challenge. Children's Home Society of California has produced a video and curriculum guide to help parents. Please call SSF (916) 486-8626 to learn more and obtain these materials.

Some important considerations Muslim parents may want to think about are:

Is the provider able to speak the language(s) of the child's family? Is the provider able to speak English well?

Is the environment Islamic? Will reading material, decor, games, songs, and holiday celebrations incorporate Islamic content?

Will the food offered to children follow Islamic dietary rules?

Sometimes an Islamic day care will not be available or be the parents' first choice. However parents will want to think about which of the above questions can be answered positively. A school with children of many religions may often incorporate some material from each so that children learn about many faiths from an early age. Some nursery schools will be receptive to parents sharing the family's celebration of Muslim holidays in the classroom and bringing in materials which illuminate Islamic arts but are not intended to convert other children away from the faith of their family.

A Serious Issue: Part II

MAS-SSF received the following anonymous question:

Q. What happens and how do you tell your parents you re pregnant before marriage?

Editor's Note: As we explained in the previous issue this is clearly a sensitive and difficult issue. For precisely this reason it needs to be answered. The person who sent it may not know anyone whom she can talk to about this question. If there is an unwed mother there is an unwed father. Both may wish to avoid the consequences and responsibilities of their actions. In reality their lives, spiritual, emotional, and legal, will never be the same again. They will always be joined by the legal fact of their parenthood of their child, whether they marry others and have other children. In this issue, a Muslim lawyer and a SSF member address the question from the perspective of California state law. In subsequent issues the question will be addressed by an Imam and a Muslim mental health professional.

A. By Rabea Chaudhry and Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D.

From the standpoint of California state law, having a child is a huge responsibility. A father and mother who are unmarried have essentially the same financial responsibilities as unmarried parents. The child will always have certain rights with regard to their parents.

Once a child is born, both his mother and father have a legal obligation to care for him by ensuring that he is provided with food, clothing and reasonable shelter and that he receives proper medical care and education until he is eighteen years old. Whether the father and mother are married is irrelevant. If parents fail to properly take care of their children, the State of California may step in to revoke the parents' custodial rights over the children and custody of the child or children may be granted to a relative (such as a paternal or maternal grandparent or aunt or uncle) or the child may become a ward of the state and be put in foster care until the age of 18. A foster home is not likely to be Muslim. So the child is not likely to be raised Muslim by foster parents. They may live in many different foster homes as they grow up. Additionally, biological parents may be charged with

criminal child abuse and neglect if they fail to properly care for their child and/or mistreat them physically or mentally.

Sometimes men think that they can hide their fatherhood and marry another woman and start a family. They do not realize that they will still be financially responsible for their illegitimate child(ren). If they try to deny paternity a court can order a paternity test. It is highly unlikely that a secret like paternity will remain a secret over time. A father's wages can be taken from the employer by the government to support his illegitimate child. A child will grow up and have a right to know who his or her father is. Adult children often seek out a parent who has abandoned them. They may have an intense desire to connect emotionally or financially with that parent.

When parents have a child out of wedlock, the mother automatically has sole legal custody of the child. Assuming that the mother and father of the child do not live together, this means that the mother of the child has the right to have her child live with her and usually the father of the child will have mutually agreed upon visitation rights. If, however, the parents choose to share custody of the child, then the child's time will be split between each parent.

Either the mother or the father of the child can turn to the California court system for help determining paternity of the child or mediating custody issues, visitation rights, and/or child support issues.

Usually both of the child's parents are stated on her birth certificate. If this is not the case and a mother does not know who the father of her child is, she can fill out a Petition to Establish Parentage and ask a court to order the potential father(s) to undergo the proper paternity tests to determine who the child's father is. If a child's mother claims that a man is the father but this claim is disputed by the purported father or anyone else, a court will usually order a paternity test. In the unlikely instance that a mother's maternity is questioned, all she needs to do is submit the child's birth certificate to prove that she is the mother.

Unless there is court order that holds otherwise, the mother of a child born out of wedlock has the right to refuse the father any visitation rights. If the father of the child has been barred from visiting his child by the

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mother, he can appeal to the court to request visitation rights. The court will usually grant visitation unless it believes that he will put his child in grave danger. A criminal record or substance abuse problem may be such a problem. If the father has been convicted of statutory rape or child sexual abuse because the mother of his child was under the age of 18 at the time of conception this might be a reason to refuse visitation. If a father seeks to share custody with the mother, he can ask the court to order this as well.

Whether he can see his child or not, the father of the child has a legal obligation to financially support her to the best of his ability. In the best case scenario, both the mother and the father of the child will agree upon how much child support will be provided by either parent. In the worst case scenario, either the mother or father of the child can petition the court for a ruling on how much child support is due from either parent. In California, the court will use a pre-determined formula that will take into account each parents' income, how much time the child spends with each parent, and relevant factors such as the cost of living in the areas that each parent lives in and if the child goes to public or private school.

If a child born out of wedlock dies before his parents, his biological parents have a right to inherit from his assets that were not disposed of in a will only if they acknowledged him as their child and contributed to his support during his life.

If either of the child's parents dies before she does, she has the right to claim a share of the assets that were not disposed of in their will. She may do this publicly in court. because an illegitimate child can claim their right to inherit from their deceased parents, so long as lineage was proven during the lifetime of the parent or can be proved at the time the deceased's assets are being divided.

These facts should cause any man or woman to stop before engaging in sexual activity outside marriage. What may happen is a lifetime of legal responsibility for both parents.

For Our Readers

The name chosen for this newsletter is The Light House, or in Arabic, Manara. Winner of the \$50 prize is Roxanne Aga. Roxanne submitted the name Illuminate. Since a very close title, Illumine, has been taken by another organization of Muslim journalists, we have chosen a name which captures the same spirit. Thank you Roxanne for thinking of a great title.