



The Lighthouse

**Muslim American Society-
Social Services Foundation**

Volume 1, Issue 5

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MAS-SSF is Happy to Announce:

The creation of a **Parents with Special Needs Children Support Group**. This group will first start online as a Yahoo group. You can request to be added to the Yahoo group and for information about meetings and events. by emailing massfsac@yahoo.com or call (916) 486-8626. The purpose of having the support group is to:

- Provide on-going support
- Help in time of crisis
- Reinforce positive coping behaviors
- Help focus energy in positive ways
- Share information, ideas and resources
- Provide training for parents to increase skills
- Help in dealing with educational, medical and other service agencies
- Give an opportunity to relieve loneliness and form new friendships

Substance Abuse Support Group Milati Islami

Many Muslims have heard of Alcoholics Anonymous, a Twelve Steps program, but do not know **Milati Islami** is a Muslim group they can attend anonymously and for free. Milati Islami is a Twelve Step recovery program for persons who experience problems associated with addiction. The traditional Twelve Steps program has been modified to include Islamic principles. For more information, email massfsac@yahoo.com or call (916) 486-8626.

Here is a letter from a member of Narcotics Anonymous 12 steps program taken from The International Journal of Narcotics Anonymous, 2008, 25(4)

Eighty-four days

My name is Habib and I am an addict. Greetings to all the addicts at the Central Prison of Qazvin, and to all NA groups around the world. I am writing this letter as I pass the final moments of my life. I am very close to death. I wish to send a message to all fellow members: I got clean through a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in jail, and through attending these

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Join the MAS-SSF Family Development Circle (Zakat-Eligible) Donate \$10 a month

WHAT: Support Muslims in need, especially families in crisis. \$10 provides one hour of peer counseling or a consultation with a Muslim psychiatrist, \$50 provides a scholarship to a 36-hour marriage preparation workshop, \$100 provides 12 hours of pre-marital counseling for a needy couple.

WHY: Help directly and demonstrate community support to obtain grants so we can expand services to local Muslims.

HOW: Sign up to contribute \$10 (or more) a month.

WHERE: Fill out the form on the back of this newsletter, and give to a MAS-SSF member or mail to the MAS-SSF office. On-line donations are coming soon.

WHO: Anyone who wants to make a big impact by making a little donation on a regular basis.

BENEFITS: Receive this newsletter directly by email, no need to worry about missing an issue. In addition you may attend one SSF workshop for free each year and all others for 25% off.

How Children Grow: Children with Special Needs/Disabilities

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D.

(Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education)

Unfortunately some children have disabilities, physical or mental or both. Parents are shocked and saddened, whether the disability is present and seen at birth (congenital) or discovered and acquired later. It is normal for parents of children to feel a sense of loss. Why our child? What happened to the perfectly healthy child we dreamt of? If the child's disability causes suffering normal parents will suffer as well. If the disability is genetic parent(s) may also feel guilty.

Although we have made a lot of progress society is still uncomfortable with people with disabilities. This is true of Muslims as well. We hope the day is gone when parents were told to keep their child with a disability away from the masjid or school, to hide them at home. We hope parents are teaching their children to be kind and accept every child.

Along with the progress society has made have come many services for children with disabilities. Local, state, or federal governments provide some. Other services are provided through non-profit or NGO (non-governmental) organizations. Learning about all the kinds of help available is like driving in San Francisco without a map or GPS. You don't know where you are going and at the same time you have never dreamed of such a steep and scary street!

One way parents can learn is by joining a support group. MAS-SSF will be starting a support group.

*Just a note on language: "Children with special needs" is another way of saying "children with disabilities. The words "handicapped" and "crippled" are out-of-date. The phrase "deaf and dumb" has been replaced with "deaf" or "hearing impaired." The word "Deaf" with a capital "D" refers to people who identify with the American Sign Language speech community. Linguists have proved American Sign Language and other sign languages are not just random gestures but natural, fully developed human languages with vocabulary and syntax (grammar) like Arabic, Urdu, and English.

meetings, I stopped using drugs. I have become very close to God, I feel good, and I am at peace with myself and the world. I have accepted the will of God. I'd like to ask you fellows to stay clean and be of service. Try to help other addicts stay clean physically, mentally, and spiritually. Please continue this path to save other addicts. I have nothing else to say. My name is Habib, and by dawn my life will end. I will be hanged for the crimes I committed, but I have been clean for eighty-four days beside you. I wish success for all addicts...members and non-members. God bless.

Habib, Qazvin, Iran
October 2006

What is a support group at MAS-SSF?

In traditional societies the extended family included many related people of different ages living near each other, often in the same home. Here in the United States there are many nuclear families-just a married couple and a few children. Grandparents, in-laws, aunts and uncles may live far away, too far to be of help with a serious ongoing problem.

What can people do when they are so far from family?

They create "support groups" with others who have a similar problem. Help may include learning about the problem together, sharing personal experiences, listening to others' experiences, giving emotional support. A support group may also invite an expert guest to answer questions.

At MAS-SSF the support groups will be as large as the need. If a group wants to divide into smaller groups for conversation they will.

At the beginning each group will have a MAS-SSF staff member to help get them started. Later they will meet on their own. At first they can meet on-line, then later at the MAS-SSF office. If a group becomes too large then we will help them find a larger meeting place.

Some support groups maintain anonymity, others do not. Later if the some of the group members wish they may meet together at the MAS-SSF office or other locations. The groups will be increasingly self-directed.

Financial anxieties:

Are you worried about losing your job? Is your business losing money? Has your retirement account lost value? Are you losing your home? Or has your landlord allowed the home you are renting to be foreclosed?

Financial tsunami! We have been hit by one and many people are in financial pain. Money problems affect family relationships in many ways. And most of them are bad. Anger, shame, and frustration may lead to hurting family members. Insults and hitting rise when the economy falls.

MAS-SSF cannot give you money but we can help in other ways. Peer counseling may help you vent your anger safely. We can refer you to agencies, which may be helpful in providing financial and other aid.

Please call (916) 486-8626 or email us to make an appointment at massfsac@yahoo.com.

Visit MAS-SSF now at www.mas-ssf-sac.org

Learn more about our services and activities! Please visit us online at our website. You will find useful links, important information for all Muslims, and news, as well as previous newsletters.

And more to come in 2010, inshallah.

If...

If a Muslim brother or sister comes to you for help with a personal or family problem, please give them the MAS-SSF confidential contact information, (916) 486-8626 or massfsac@yahoo.com. Please put this information in your cell phone or wallet in case of need.

Did you know?

MAS-SSF can assist in Arabic, Farsi, French, Pashto, Sinhalese, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu-Hindi, and American Sign Language.

A Serious Issue: Part III

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, Imam Azeez of SALAM addresses this question from the point of view of Islamic thought.

A. It has always been an intriguing question to ask: In the context of making fornication prohibited in the Quran, and unlike any other prohibitions, God says: "don't come near fornication, for it is an abomination and an evil way" (Quran: 17-32). Instead of saying do not commit fornication, just like other prohibitions against alcohol, murder or theft, it says do not come near it, do not come close to it, do not even consider walking down the path that might lead to it. Why this stringent prohibition on sexual relations outside of wedlock in Islam? Sexual relations are not looked at in a negative light in Islam. As a matter of fact, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on numerous occasions made it clear that intimacy, if practiced within the proper boundaries (i.e. marriage) would be considered not only permissible, but an act of worship! In other words, having sex with one's spouse is not a dirty or animal act, but rather something that can bring one closer to his or her God! Why then the harsh rejection of extramarital sexual relations and the strict prohibition of fornication and adultery?

First, the Quran emphasizes strongly the value of the human beings in the sight of God, and how he elevated their status and gave them the upper hand, and the stewardship of this planet. Allah says: "and we have created the humans in the best form possible

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(physically, mentally and spiritually) (Quran: 95-4). Being in a position of power over other beings, animals and otherwise, requires that we refrain from descending to the level of animals. Although sexual relations are celebrated within marriage, as intimate expressions of love, appreciation and compassion between husband and wife, extra-marital sex is performed for the mere purpose of pursuing the animal pleasure, and for the sole purpose of satisfying the desires of the flesh, in neglect of and even at the expense of the needs of the soul. In this fashion, those who indulge in illicit sexual activities slide down the slope of moral decadence into the abyss.

Second, human spiritual survival is enhanced by a consistent level of excitement about what lies ahead. We always need to look forward to something, we aspire for achievement, we are motivated by want and need to work harder and to live another day. It is true that almost all persons past puberty want, but not necessarily need, sex. Within the sacred institution of marriage, sexual relations are subject to the normal limitations of life: time, convenience, availability, emotional readiness, special restrictions, etc. If the married couple is interested in intimacy at a certain moment, the surrounding environment might not be appropriate, so the experience is postponed. Extramarital and premarital sex, on the other hand, are often surrounded by abnormal secrecy and lies and the knowledge that others are being harmed—innocent spouses, children, and parents especially.

Third, marriage in Islam is a sacred institution that places great emphasis on treating everyone, men and women, as intrinsically valuable human beings, not as objects that can be used by others to attain pleasure. Marital relations involve much more than sensual pleasures. A successful marriage can only be sustained through compassion, love, compatibility, respect, and patience, in addition to a satisfying sexual relationship. In extramarital sex, often the only bond that brings a man and a woman together is mere sexual pleasure, and as such, the possibility of taking human beings, particularly women, as objects of pleasure, rather than as entities of genuine self-worth, becomes greater. This view is incompatible with the Quran's vision of humans as being honored by Allah:

"And indeed we have honored the descendants of Adam" (Quran: 17-70). Whenever and wherever men see women as consumable sexual objects sexual abuse occurs. Both abusers and the abused, as well as their entire society, are degraded.

Fourth, Islam considers the family to be the building block of a healthy society. This ideal Muslim family is the creation of a successful marriage, which brings a man and a woman together, to live in happiness, compassion and love, and to be blessed with good and healthy children. Extramarital sex, together with its ramifications, from unwed pregnancies to alternative life-styles, could eventually lead to the extinction of the family. This could happen at two levels. First, the family as a unique social concept would be less attractive because intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and even children would all be obtainable without marriage. Second, the family as a reality would be threatened because adultery and intimate affairs lead to the destruction of existing families since no spouse would approve of such treacherous behavior.

Fifth, one of the most consequential effects of extramarital sex is unwed pregnancies. There are risks for mother, family and society. It is one thing for us to make a decision in regards to our own lives, however wrong and unjustified it might be. However, bringing to the world a child in an illegitimate manner certainly takes the sin to a completely different level. There are two profoundly substantial principles in Islam: That any soul is born innocent and free of sin, and that Allah will forgive any sin, regardless of its magnitude, if one was remorseful about it and vows to never do it again. From that, we could contend that Allah, with his compassion and grace, can and will forgive the sin of adultery or fornication, if one repents, and that the illegitimate child is a normal human being that is born without sin. Nevertheless, when the sin is extramarital sex that **leads** to an unwed pregnancy, things are different.

Committing a sin and repenting from it is one thing, but being reminded of it daily is another. No person wants to be faced with thoughts of their moments of bad judgment. In the psyche of the mother and father, as well as the hearts of families, friends, and society, the

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illegitimate child will always symbolize disobedience to Allah. Cruel and evil backbiting people will prey upon the innocent child with slights and insults. The mother and father will be helpless to protect their son or daughter. Who can measure the pain of such a child? Do you want to be responsible for such suffering?

So in answer to the first part of the question, "What happen and how do you tell your parents when you are pregnant before marriage?" it can be said that a lifelong chain of painful consequences begins, for the pregnant mother, the father, the parents of both of them, and the innocent child. In the next issue we will consider the second part of the question, telling the mother's and father's parents.

Food for Thought

There was once a wise old man who decided to test his three children. He gave each of them a piece of candy, and told them to eat it only when they were sure that no one would see them eating it. Each of the three children spread off in different directions.

The oldest child went to his room. Closing all of the curtains and doors, the boy went under his covers. *Nobody can see me here*, he thought as he quietly unwrapped and ate the candy.

The second child, decided to go to the basement and shut off all of the lights. *If I can't see myself eating a piece of candy, then no one will be able to see me either.* Hurriedly, the second child swallowed the candy whole.

Now, the third child had thought of every single place he could hide and eat the candy. But, instead, he gave the candy back to his father.

"Why are you giving back this piece of candy?" the father asked.

The youngest boy sighed. "Well, wherever I go, I know that Allah (SWT) will be watching me."

Remember, in everything you do, Allah (SWT) will be watching you. If you have done something you feel badly about seek forgiveness from Allah (SWT), and strength from family, friends, religious leaders, or others you trust. SSF may be able to help as well. (916) 486-8626. Or email: masssfsac@yahoo.com.

Youth Corner

College applicants:

This is definitely an exciting and stressful time for you and your parents!

Many of you are working on applications, preparing for tests like the SAT, ACT, and achievement tests. Your parents are paying for much of this and thinking about how much college will cost and financial aid. They may also be thinking hard about whether they want you to live at home and commute to college or go away. Sometimes youth want to go and parents want them to live at home. Naturally all of this can be stressful. In a sense it's like getting married because where you go to college will have an impact on your whole life. So think about it like a match: what do I want and which colleges have those characteristics? Of course you have to be realistic: grades, test scores, volunteer work, and activities are all important.

If you and your parents would like to relieve some of the stress by going to peer counseling please call us at (916) 486-8626 or email us at masssfsac@yahoo.com. We have counselors who have gone through this process.

At the same time rely on the college counselor at your high school to give you up-to-date information, especially about financial aid and scholarships.

Next summer will be coming soon. Please think about volunteering as an intern at MAS-SSF. This is good volunteer work experience and a good way to earn an enthusiastic letter of recommendation to the colleges you may apply to or to potential employers. In the spring we do not have internships but volunteer work is always available. Call SSF if you are interested at (916) 486-8626 or email masssfsac@yahoo.com.



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Donation Form

Personal Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Donation: (Zakat-Eligible)

***Family Development Circle*: Monthly Donation Pledge of \$10 or More Monthly: \$10 other \$**

One time pledge of: \$25 \$ 50 \$ 75 \$ 100 other \$

Payment Method:

Cash Check

Auto Pay through your bank to Bank of America Account # **08068-70840** Routing # **121000358**

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: Annual donation of more than \$120 qualifies donor for membership in the Family Development Circle.

***FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE BENEFITS:**

***MAS-SOCIAL SERVICES FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER WILL BE DELIVERED TO YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS.**

***ONE FREE MAS-SOCIAL SERVICES FOUNDATION WORKSHOP/CLASS PER YEAR.**

***25% DISCOUNT ON ANY OTHER SSF WORKSHOPS/CLASSES PER YEAR.**

Your donation at work to help those in need:

\$10 provides one hour of peer counseling or professional consultation with a Muslim psychiatrist.

\$50 provides a scholarship to a 36-hour marriage preparation workshop.

\$100 provides 12 hours of premarital counseling for an engaged or recently married couple.