

Islamic private school
scores the highest GCSE
results in Luton Page 11

**Jumadul Oola
1437
February 2016
Issue 11**

**LUTON
COUNCIL OF
MOSQUES**
Public Announcement Page 8

Luton Muslim Journal

Islamophobia - is a hate crime Don't Suffer In Silence!

REPORT IT! ISLAMOPHOBIA IS A HATE CRIME

If you have been a victim
of an Islamophobic attack,
whether physical, verbal or
online - **REPORT IT!**

Ensure you make it clear
that you have been subject
to an Islamophobic
or Anti-Muslim Hate Crime

EMERGENCY
CALL 999

Please email your crime reference
number to lutonmosques@gmail.com

NON-EMERGENCY
CALL 101

or report online:
www.report-it.org.uk



One of the real tragedies of our time is that we definitely know of a problem clearly, hear about it regularly, see it sometimes, and even experience it ourselves every so often too, yet we actively do very little about it!

That problem is **Islamophobia** – i.e. where people give Muslims a hard time either by ridiculing them, inciting people against them, or even attacking them, just because they identify themselves as Muslims – and it is on the rise. And it's getting worse.

The Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

"The believers, in their mutual mercy, love and compassion, are like a (single) body; if one part of it feels pain, the rest of the body will join it in staying awake and suffering fever."

(Sahih Muslim)

This is a reminder to us all, that if we just sit back and remain in our apathetic states thinking we can ride out the storm, and that we should only protect ourselves and our individual Iman, then we will fail. **page 3**

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Announcements

>Weekday School-hours Islamic Courses

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Open to Brothers & Sisters

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www.alhikmahschool.com, admin@alhikmahschool.com

School Mobile: 07435 786 493



LET THE QURAN SPEAK



On the weekend our volunteers set up a stall outside the Discover Islam Centre welcoming people to come and listen to the Quran. For many this was the first time hearing the Quran and was an interesting experience, leaving some speechless in awe and amazement.

One guest in particular (Marco from Italy) was keen to find out more and returned to the Centre after his shopping trip to sit down and discuss some questions he had with our centre managers.

After his discussion he chose to remain behind to watch the team perform their Maghrib Salah.

Indeed the Quran continues to captivate minds and souls 1400 years after its revelation despite many being unable to understand a single word.

Lets all get involved in spreading the beautiful message of the Quran in word and action.

Editorial

Firstly, I would like to start off by welcoming our readers to our 11th edition of this journal. May Allah make your reading fruitful and reward all the contributors for their time and research.

Since the last issue many events took place, both positive and negative. Luton Muslim Journal (LMJ)'s role is to focus on all the positive work, which is often kept quiet, to create positive mentalities.

This issue covers the subject of Islamophobia which is on the rise and is one of the greatest concerns of our time and especially in our society. Luton Council of Mosques, along with other partners in Luton have campaigned to promote awareness of Islamophobia and get it recognised as a separate crime in Bedfordshire, even before the government made it mandatory on a national scale - which is of course a very positive gesture.

Luton Muslim Journal

Luton Muslim Journal is a monthly journal which promotes Islam and Muslim contribution to the wider society. It has no affiliation with any political organisation. The journal covers various topics which effects the Muslims and the society.

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Contributors: Mawlana Thaqib Mahmood, Salmaa Islam, Discover Islam Luton, Mawlana Aminul Islam, Dr Mamnun Khan, Imran Choudhury, Hafiz Sadikul Islam, Ustadh Abdul Alim, Danyaal Saghir & Luton Council of Mosques (May Allah reward everyone for their contribution)

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Contact: For all enquires, feedback, sharing community news and any contribution please contact:

lutonmuslimjournal@gmail.com

Mawlana Thaqib, Shaykh Abdul Hamid and Mawlana Rayhan introduce us to 'Love', 'Friendship' and 'Spreading Salam' to enhance our social side of Islam.

Dr Mamnun Khan takes us through a great Muslim scientist - Al-Biruni (973-1052) – the Arab genius of India. Readers will be fascinated by his thoughts and scholarly contributions to the Ummah.

Imran Choudhury reports on some of the troubles many 'new Muslims' endure after accepting Islam.

LMJ also celebrates a great achievement of Jamiatul Uloom - a Muslim private school in Luton, and also some of the great works Discover Islam centre - Luton is doing!

Jazakumullahul-Khair

Mawlana Muhammad Rayhan

Islamophobia - is a hate crime -Don't Suffer In Silence

Firstly, Islam is bigger than just you, and your actions alone. **Secondly**, keeping yourself to yourself and nothing else is anti-Islamic, because part of Islam is to be established for the benefit of others as well. **Thirdly**, hoping that others will step up and sort it out – when actually, they are also just thinking the exact same as you – is disingenuous and will lead to the fitnah increasing and then lead to an even bigger threat and problem.

There's a very interesting hadith, authentically narrated by Ibn Majah (304), that Sayyidina Abu Bakr al-Siddique (radhyAllahu 'anhu) came to some of the Sahabah and recited this verse to them:

"O You who believe, you are responsible for your own souls; if anyone else goes astray it will not harm you so long as you follow the guidance."

(al-Ma'idah, 105)

Then he turned to them and said, *"The people are taking this verse and not applying it properly."*

What he wanted to say is that some of the Companions were understanding this verse in a very restricted sense, i.e. that if there are problems affecting the community, affecting others, well, as long as you look after yourself, then that's all that matters. Which is completely wrong, because Sayyidina Abu Bakr then said:

"But verily, I heard the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) say,

"When a people see an Oppressor and do not hold him accountable, or they see an evil and they do not change it, Allah will punish them all."

So the ruling is clear. Yes we concentrate on ourselves. And yes we know those that wish to harm cannot harm us as long as we stay upon Divine Guidance.

But when there is harm and evil and oppression and injustice in front of us, and when our brothers and sisters need our help, then we must ACT! Immediately!

The Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said in Sahih Muslim:

"Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand [by taking action]; if he cannot, then with his tongue [by speaking out]; and if he cannot, then with his heart – and that is the weakest of faith"

So whatever one does, but you have to do SOMETHING. Doing nothing is NOT an option.

And what you do is based on your ability, things which you really CAN do. No-one is going to ask you to do the impossible. But what you WILL be told is to come out of

your comfort zone and work together to make sure that the threat of Islamophobia doesn't reach a state where neighbours start harming each other.

These are not scare tactics. If we don't all do something to change the status quo, if we don't get out there and create our own narrative as per the Book of Allah, then those who hate us will create that narrative for us!

Here are 2 things you can do:

Number 1. Educate yourself and other Muslims on hate crime in particular Islamophobia and encourage people to report every crime to the Police

Number 2. We need to create Public Awareness Campaigns to help non-Muslims understand the impact of anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crime on Muslim communities.

Dear readers!

We have to learn quickly that this work is 'ibadah! – that just because this act of worship doesn't have a label saying Namaz-Salah, or Zakah, or Hajj, or Charity, that this is somehow a lesser act of worship.

This is blessed work, the work of defending the Deen, protecting our brothers and sisters from being harmed, defending the Honour of the Prophet (SAW). And once we act and get busy, Allah will help us as well.

LCM Luton council of Mosques



Some good habits.... *Salam* the greeting of Jannah

By Mawlana Muhammad Rayhan

Salam- greeting a Muslim with the words of Jannah is not just a 'greeting' but an act of worship and a supplication to Allah.

When a Muslim meets another Muslim with this dua and greeting it should automatically create an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, that's if the first person and the second person understand and mean what they say. Since Salam has become an empty habit with no meaning for most people when they say it therefore people do not benefit from it. The purpose of this reminder is to build the importance of Salaam, its etiquettes and some practical tips.

Assalamu Alaikum, Wa Rahmatullahi, Wa Barakaatuh – May Allah's peace, blessings and mercy be upon you.

Reply: Wa Alaikum Salam, Wa Rahmatullahi, Wa Barakaatuh - May Allah's peace, blessings and mercy be upon you also.

There are 10 rewards for saying each section of the Salam totalling 30 rewards.

The legal ruling for Salam is Suunah however the reply is wa-jib- compulsory.

Always be the first to say Salam

The Prophet (May Allah bless him) said:

"The one who says Salam first is free from pride." (Bayhaqi)

When a person begins Salam then it shows his humility. Generally, those who internally feel that they are the most worthy and hold hidden supremacy inside themselves, wait for others to greet them, invite them and serve them- which is all a sign of pride, a deadly sin. Taking the initiative in saying Salam or serving others is a clear sign of humility.

Say Salam to all Muslims regardless of relation and connection

It was narrated from 'Abdullah bin 'Amr that: A man asked the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him): "What quality of Islam is best?" He said: "To feed (the poor) and to say the Salam to whomever you know and whomever you do not know." (Sunan Nasai)

It is sunnah to say Salam to everyone without any differentiation based on one's relation.

Abu Ummah said that Allah's Messenger (May Allah bless him): said:

"Indeed the nearest of people to Allah are those who begin with Salaam". (Tirmidhi)

السلام عليكم

Repeating Salam if something comes in between

Abu Hurairah said that Allah's Messenger (May Allah bless him) said:

"When one of you meets his brother, he should say Salam to him. If a tree or a wall or a rock comes in between them, then they meet again, he should (again) say Salam to him." (Abu Dawood)

The above hadeeth encourages us to say salaam abundantly and seize all opportunities to say Salam. When one's phone cuts off one should restart the conversation with Salam.

Some etiquettes of Salam

Abu Hurairah said that Allah's Messenger (May Allah bless him) said:

"The younger should say Salam to the old, the passer-by to the one sitting, and the small (group) to the bigger." (Bukhari)

The above hadeeth shows some manners of Salam. The hadeeth doesn't mean the older person, sitting and the bigger group should demand Salam. Everyone should race to say Salam first as it is more rewarding.

If parents or teachers for the purpose of tarbiyah- teaching good manners remind the children to say Salam first then it is a good practice.

Saying Salam to women

Jabir narrated that: "The prophet (May Allah bless him) passed by women (group) and said Salam to them". (Ahmad)

This is the normal case however when there is a fear of Salam leading on to inappropriate conversation then one must avoid it. This can only be judged by the person himself.

Saying Salam to children

Anas passed by some children and said Salam to them and said "The Prophet (May Allah bless him) used to do this."

This practice shows the Prophet's humility and leading and teaching by example. Parents and seniors should greet the younger ones so they watch and learn.

Shaking the hands is the completion of Salam

Abu Umamah narrated that: The Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him) said: "The completion of greeting (Salam) is shaking hands."

Musafahah- is to shake both hands. This can be done by shaking both hands of each person or by one hand of each person. Salam must be done first followed by musafahah. It is only allowed within the same gender and Mahram (close family, marriage is permanently haram) opposite gender.

Some practical tips;

1. Always be the first to say Salam
2. When entering and leaving home, say Salam
3. Whilst waving at someone from distance say Salam as well
4. Always start all conversations by Salam, this includes written or phone conversation
5. Avoid saying Salam to people who are praying
6. Avoid shaking hands with people who have their hands occupied and it will cause them some difficulty to shake hands

Spread the LOVE

The forgotten Sunnah

By *Mawlana Thaqib Mahmood*

In the recent past I was blessed by Allah with the opportunity to visit the Holy city of Madinah. As I was walking to the Masjid An-Nabawi (May Allah bless him) from the direction of the Qiblah. The Epic scene is still extremely transparent in my mind. It was the time of Asr Salah. The Azaan could be heard echoing in the surroundings and dragging its listeners towards the Masjid. As I look towards my right I can see the Baq'ee, the blessed graveyard of some of the noblest individuals of our history. On my left a wave of people rushing to their prayer. In front of me is the beautiful Masjid and the Green Dome, which symbolises the resting place of the paragon of Allah's creation. Whilst I am enjoying this experience, suddenly, after the completion of the Azaan a Man greets me and says 'I love you for the sake of Allah' and walks away.

For a moment I was perplexed and speechless, I was struggling to react appropriately. Then, in a flash of memory from the books we have read long before, the replying dua came to my mind; taught to us by Rasulul-lah (May Allah bless him). I turned and shouted 'May the one Love you, for whom you have loved me' This incident made me realise how far away our society is from this Sunnah. We express much love for the Prophet (May Allah bless him), his city and his land marks, yet we don't have the same love for his Ummah. We don't have the same level of love towards the ones he loved.

I still contemplate on this till today and think why is it that we lack the sincerity to love each other? Why is it that families, friends and communities all struggle to hold selfless love for each other?

My suggestion is that we don't hold enough love for Allah. Allah is the only being who is absolutely reliable whilst, others can let you down. Maybe that is why we lack commitment in our love, because we don't love for Allah.

So the next question is how to attain it? How do we gain this asset of loving for Allah?

The answers I am sure are many. One way for sure is to follow this Sunnah, and remind each other of it. Let us express to those who we care for that we love them for the sake of Allah. This will be penetrative even in the most stubborn of hearts. It will ensure that we love only that which our creator wants us to love. If I think about it, then this beautiful Sunnah has certainly impacted me for the better. The only sad thing is how long will this last for, before I need another reminder.

Let me conclude by mentioning some profound statements of the Messenger (May Allah bless him).

Narrated by Anas:

The Prophet (May Allah bless him) said,

"Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith:

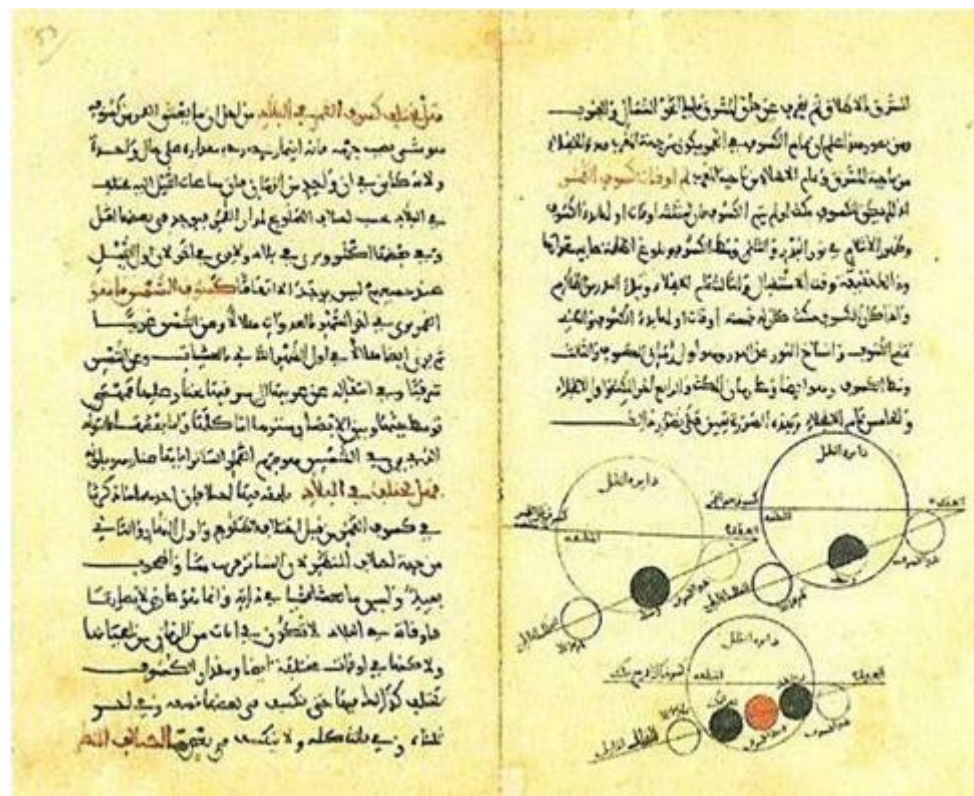
- 1. The one to whom Allah and His Messenger become dearer than anything else.*
- 2. Who loves a person and he loves him only for Allah's sake.*
- 3. Who hates to revert to disbelief as he hates to be thrown into the fire." (Bukhari)*

Narrated by Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'dikarib:

The Prophet (May Allah bless him) said: *When a man loves his brother, he should tell him that he loves him.*

Al-Biruni (973-1052) – the Arab genius of India

By Dr Mammun Khan, Jumadal Oola, 1437



A page from one of Biruni's works showing the lunar eclipse. Today, on the Moon there is a crater named after al-Biruni

(Source: www.muslimheritage.com).

Abu Raihan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni was born in 973 in the city of Khwarizm in the Central Asian province of Khorasan (Uzbekistan) – the same birthplace of the great Musa al-Khwarizm (780-847 – covered in the Dhul Hijjah 1436 issue). While in Khwarizm, al-Biruni mastered Arabic, Persian, traditional Islamic sciences as well as many of the natural sciences of his time. In the physical sciences, such as astronomy, he was a student of Abu Nasr al-Mansur whose teacher was the great astronomer – Abul Wafa al-Bujazani. At the age of 23, in 995, he began to travel in pursuit of knowledge.

In 997 he settled in another Central Asian city called Jurjan, where he stayed for a decade, studying and researching history, science and mathematics. It was in Jurjan that, at the age of 27, he wrote "A Treatise on the Chronology of Ancient Nations". In this book, al-Biruni explored the concept of time and factors that led to the changes over time and fates of ancient societies mentioned in the Qur'an, looking at such things like changes in the Earth's geology. In this book al-Biruni defended the belief that time was finite, going against the opinions of many philosophers who considered time to be eternal and not created.

In 1012, al-Biruni returned to Khwarizm to study under Abd al-Samad al-Awwal, a prominent scholar. During his stay, the political situation in Central Asia changed as rival dynasties fought each other for dominance. It was not until the Ghaznavids took control under the leadership of Sultan Mahmud that peacetime returned. However, Sultan Mahmud took al-Biruni and his teacher back to Ghazna (in Afghanistan) as captives. While as prisoner, unlike his teacher, al-Biruni was spared death. Soon thereafter, Sultan Mahmud noticed al-Biruni's vast knowledge and intellectual ability and appointed him as his own scientific advisor and astronomer. Whilst al-Biruni was against warfare, it was his travels alongside Sultan Mahmud's military expeditions that led to al-Biruni's decade-long stay in India (1021-1031).

While in India he mastered the ancient language of Sanskrit, and studied almost everything about Indian religions, cultures and traditions. His appreciation and respect for different civilisations persuaded Sultan Mahmud to do more to preserve India's ancient cultural and religious heritage. In fact, al-Biruni studied Indian history, and pioneered the study of human culture and civilisation. In the book "The History of India" (*Kitab al-Tarikh al-Hind*), for example, al-Biruni detailed geography, climate, geology and demographic make-up of India.

Al-Biruni translated ancient Sanskrit texts into Arabic, as well as introduced works of Greek philosophy such as Euclid's "Elements" and Ptolemy "Almagest" from Arabic to Sanskrit for the first time. With time, al-Biruni became a prolific writer with a remarkable ability to assimilate diverse knowledge and to carry out research in a wide range of subjects. In total historians think that al-Biruni authored between 180-200 books on different subjects covering astronomy, geology, religion, history, geography, philosophy, comparative religion and culture. Though most of these books are now lost.

Despite knowing Persian and Sanskrit, al-Biruni wrote mainly in Arabic. His approach to writing and research was extremely professional and balanced. For example, he was not known to be sectarian in his analysis, and preferred to focus on improving awareness and better understanding of subject areas, religions and cultural diversity.

At the age of 58, al-Biruni returned to Ghazna. While in Ghazna, under the patronage of Sultan Mahmud's son and successor – Sultan Mas'ud, he compiled most of his famous books, including "The Canon of Mas'ud" (*Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi*) on the subject of astronomy. Profoundly impressed, it is said that the Sultan gifted al-Biruni an elephant loaded with silver coins, which he politely returned saying that he served knowledge out of love, not material gain.

Al-Biruni spent the rest of his life in Ghazna and died at the age of 78. Unlike Ibn Sina, al-Kindi and al-Farabi, al-Biruni's works did not reach Europe until recently. But of all of these scholars and thinkers he was one of the most influential thinkers in the East. So much so that the period 973 to 1051 is considered by some as the "Age of al-Biruni". This was a deeply religious man who pursued knowledge and sought a dialogue of civilisations – the very attitude that students of knowledge today would do well- to follow in his footsteps.

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Public Announcement

Friday/12.02.2016

Luton Council of Mosques and Sunni Council of Mosques have been working with organisations like MEND and Bedfordshire Police to ensure robust measures are in place to record and support community members who have been victims of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate crime. We are aware the number of community members who have become victims is on the rise. However, we are also aware many hate crimes are not being reported.

It is extremely important we encourage the reporting of such hate crimes. If these crimes are not reported it leaves our community vulnerable to even more Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime. The perpetrators of such crimes need to be brought to justice.

Here are a few actions you should take:

1. Educate yourself and other Muslims on hate crime in particular Islamophobia and encourage people to report every crime to the Police

- a. Call 999 if it is emergency
- b. Make it clear to the operator that you are reporting an anti-Muslim hate crime when you call the police
- c. Call 111 for non-emergency or report it online to the police:
www.report-it.org.uk
- d. Ensure the crime reference is emailed to lutonmosques@gmail.com
- e. Spread the poster and cards with details on how to report to family and friends

2. We need to create Public Awareness Campaigns to help non-Muslims understand the impact of anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crime on Muslim communities.

- a. We must as Muslims reach out to non-Muslims by organising informal and formal meetings, open days and events to engage and educate.
- b. We must meet and engage our politicians whether councilors or MPs on taking a robust stand against Islamophobia. Start by writing and emailing your local councilors and MPs about your concerns.

Poem— Islamophobia

Peace! Peace! Peace!

This is what we shout and this is what we say,
But all around the world do we see it to be this way?

A mosque is vandalised, a Muslim family killed,
But when it comes to Islam we are always chilled.

Peace is what we shout and peace we want to gain,
While hatred runs through our bloods and our protests are in vain.

Humans killing humans without a single care,
Though we are taught love and peace is what we should share.
Islamophobia runs through our system and coils up in our heart,
We call out for peace but when will we really start?

It's time for justice and it's time for real peace,
It's time for all the pain and anguish to finally begin to cease.

When will you rise and see this common error?
Blaming Muslims for all your problems and accusing them of terror.

It's time we rise and bring the human in humanity,
Time to stop this injustice and plain insanity.

The religion of peace "Islam" has lost its true name,
Stereotypes, curses and accusations has brought it down to shame.

When will we grow into people and finally repair our minds,
Indoctrinated by media and so blind to the apparent signs.

Peace runs through every system and it is just one face,
Fixated on one body in every single place.

We humans are that body and peace is what helps us grow,
So next time think before you lift that stone to throw.

Maybe don't break that car window and maybe don't hurt that man,
Why not leave the veil on that woman and do not damage that van.

Put your lighters away, don't burn that holy place,
And when you see that Muslim, why don't you just embrace?
Shake our hands once in a while and give us a little smile,
Lift those lips up high it won't even take a while.

It's okay to say hello and wish us a good day,
And don't worry we won't bite if you ask us 'to come play'

So throw your hatred on the ground and open your arms out wide,
Let's become humans once again and finally find peace inside.

By Hafiz Sadikul Islam | Zuhri Academy

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Friendship in Islam

By Shaykh Abdul Hamid

**You have 2 friends
in this life, 1. Allah
and 2. Those who
remind you of
Allah.**

A community is composed from various fragments of the society and society is an integral part of human necessity. Society has always been a nucleus point of human interaction which is called sociology. Fair dealing, good behaviour and attitude, good manners and justice all contribute to the well being of a healthy society which is known in Islamic terminology as *Husan Mua sharat*. Hence, *Husan Mua sharat*- good social conducts is a fundamental element of our Deen as many of its branches are structured on it.

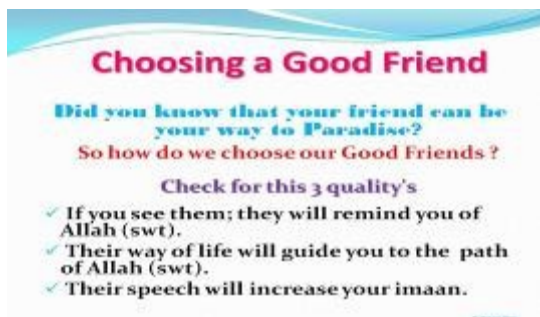
As a human one cannot live a productive and happy life on their own without association and interaction with others, and neither is this advocated in Islam. Isolation from society has no part in Islam as this is called *Rahbanaiyat* (Hermitism). Friendship is part of a social need of human in society, without which life will be very difficult to function. Therefore Islam has facilitated the provision of friendship with divine guidance and instructions.

The concept of friendship in Islam is embedded in the *Uboodiya* 'worship of Allah' perspective rather than materialistic objectives. Thus gaining His pleasure and nearness.

The frame of friendship should be centred on the following two basis, they are:

1. Love of Allah
2. Ikhlaas.

To be continued



Islamic private school scores the highest GCSEs results in Luton

Alhamdulillah, Jamiatul Uloom Al Islamia has achieved the highest GCSEs in the Luton league tables! We achieved 83% A*-C, including English & Maths, outranking all the other Luton high schools for the second consecutive year. This is an outstanding achievement and it is through the Benevolence of the Almighty, that he has bestowed us with this honour. This is coupled with the fact that Jamiatul Uloom Al Islamia has been in the top three in the GCSE Luton league tables for the past 7 years; a feat that is exceptional in its own right. We are also ranked (joint) 21 out of 87 Muslim schools nationally, making up the top 25% of Muslim schools in England.

The class of 2015 were extremely proud of their achievement and felt privileged to uphold the hard work and dedication that Jamiatul Uloom Al Islamia represents. One of the students, Imran Hussen, who achieved an astonishing 4A*s, 5As, 1 B and 1C, and was celebrated in "The Muslim News", was delighted by, not only his own performance, but by the school in general. *"Alhamdulillah, I was thrilled by the results I achieved, and the school in general, thanks to the Grace of Almighty Allah."*

"This would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my amazing teachers, who guided and aided me to strive for excellence. This just goes to show that even though we have limited resources, or that we are not as established as other high schools, we can compete and surpass even the best of them."

Imran is currently studying Further Maths, Physics and Computer Science in Luton Sixth Form College and has found the transition to be not as demanding as he expected. *"I think studying in Jamia, handling two programmes of study (Islamic & Academic) has really helped me deal with a rigorous timetable. Our teachers at Jamia would have high expectations and encourage us to really push ourselves."*

"Not only does the school support its student academically, but Jamia was like my family. Our school culture is such that everyone is there for one another. We could talk to our teachers regarding personal issues, prospects and careers, gain general advice, or just talk about the football!"

Congratulations to Imran and his classmates.



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Reverts to Islam

By *IMRAN CHOUDHURY*

REVERTs to Islam are often left feeling isolated from their families and the rest of society, according to a new study. Researchers at Cambridge University's Centre of Islamic Studies looked at the experience of 50 British men of all ages, ethnicities and faith backgrounds.

The study, titled *Narratives Of Conversion To Islam In Britain: Male Perspectives*, said many converts found themselves a minority within a minority.

They are often targeted to work as informants for British security services and end up cut off from their families.

Abdul Maalik Taylor, who reverted to Islam from Hinduism 20 years ago and now runs Islamic-themed tours of London, took part in the study.

"I suffered physical and emotional abuse from my family. It was a very testing time," he said.

He added many felt demonised by media coverage.

"You find a number of stories that concentrate on radicalisation.

"If there are successful Muslim converts who have contributed to society and to Britain, they won't get highlighted by the media.

"Why do the media have a set agenda to try and demonise us?"

Professor Yasir Suleiman, director of the Centre of Islamic Studies, said: "In the West, conversion to Islam has been tarnished by claims of extremism (violent and non-violent), radicalisation, and, sadly, terrorism.

He said the report, which gathered together converts from white, black and South Asian backgrounds from across the UK, highlighted the need for convert-specific initiatives.

One organisation which takes care of new converts to the religion is the New Muslim Project, which has a dedicated helpline and is the only support group of its kind in the UK.

Batool Altoma, director of the project said there has been a considerable increase in their work, since the group started in 1995, with calls for help rising fast.

"From the time I started I here it's definitely doubled or trebled," she explained.

"You will have converts looking for direction. Things like 'how do we inform our families about our spiritual path' but at the same time not fuel any fears they have about Islam which is more or less based on media information."

"For the people who were responsible for the incident in Woolwich, they themselves come from backgrounds whereby on entering any kind of mosque they would probably be regarded as Muslim from another country, particularly if they said they were from Nigeria.

"They would have slipped under the radar of the networks that are out there that support converts. It would mean they would have been floating around and looking for a means of support. When converts tend to do that they become conspicuous and easy prey for people who are preaching a fairly radical or hate orientated kind of Islam."

Anisa Atkinson, a student from Scunthorpe studying for a bachelor honours degree became a Muslim in 1997 at the age of 17.

She grew up in a community where there were lots of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims and explained it was difficult to settle in.

"With people of my own age there was pride that I became Muslim and a lot of support. With the older community there was a lot of suspicion and I was told by various elders that because I was white I was only half a Muslim.

"A lot of the women thought I done it because I was pregnant or I'd done it for a man. I had a constant battle to prove myself and to prove that I actually done this after intellectual research and reasoning."

"I was told that I was dressing as a 'gori' even when I had long skirts and fully covered. They said unless I was wearing sarees and salwar kamees I wasn't really dressing as a Muslim.

"I did at point wear the salwar kameez and even give up English food. After a while I realised this was not right and that my Islam is a British form of Islam and is still valid.

Dr Amina Coxon a consultant physician from north west London embraced Islam in 1993 and revealed that it took her over 15 years to find a group which would accept her.

"You're a total oddball" she said. "When you come to England each Muslim group huddles in its own racist integrity. The people who helped me enormously were Muslims from the Arabian continent. My current family are a Sierra Leone community in Peckham.

"I found Islam in my 50s so my wish to convert was intellectual. I'm not interested in its culture or politics."

At one point she felt saddened when a "crook" had exploited her of money.

"There's discrimination then there's also exploitation. For some the white convert is seen a cash cow. When I was used in that way I was very upset. One person asked me whether I would leave Islam. But I said 'why should I? Just because this person is a crook I'm not going to give up a great religion'. I'm just angry that I was exploited."

IMRAN CHOUDHURY is a freelance journalist based in Luton

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TIPS FOR DEALING WITH FAR RIGHT & EXTREMIST GROUPS – DO'S

UNITED WE STAND

Extremist groups like the far right are looking for a reaction, the best and most peaceful way to react is by **doing** some of the following:

- Respond with a smile**
- Remain Positive**
You are stronger than them
- Record Them**
Evidence of their actions will be needed
- Call the Police**
- Ensure Your safety**
- Support one another**
We are stronger together
- Report all Crime**
- Keep Calm and Carry On**



TIPS FOR DEALING WITH FAR RIGHT & EXTREMIST GROUPS – DONT'S

THEY CAME. THEY FAILED.

Extremist groups like the far right are looking for a reaction so they can use this against **YOU**, as they did very recently. Below are some useful ways of how **NOT** to react.

- Don't engage in discussion**
They're not here to talk, they're here to provoke!
- Don't Retaliate**
They will use it against you
- Don't react negatively**
Refrain from foul language
- Don't be intimidated**
Remain confident
- You Are Being Recorded**
Your actions will be exploited
- Don't make physical contact**
This is what they are looking for
- Don't stand in their way**
Their march will end very quickly
- Don't be afraid!**



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