

Our achievement in 10 years & future plans

Academy for Learning Islam (A.L.I.)

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M K Merali house, Richmond, BC

Holy Qur'an Aayat 9:122

■ وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنْفِرُوا كَافَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ
وَلِيُنْذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

■ *And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every group of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil).*

-Students & teachers are doing *jihad* in their learning & dissemination.

■ - O people strive hard more to discover and collect knowledge than to make money and amass wealth. A community which learns and has command over the true knowledge of the religion of Allah (the laws governing the universal plan of creation) and applies it to regulate individual and collective life, becomes truly great (Imam Ali 'alayhis salaam)

Mission Statement of ALI

- The **Academy *for* Learning Islam** (A.L.I.) is a registered charity committed to advancing and teaching the religious tenets, history and practices of Islam, according to the Shi‘ah Ithnaa ‘Ashari school of thought. It maintains a religious school of instruction for children, youths and adults. ALI also provides counseling services for people experiencing religious and social difficulties. It further has programs aimed at reaching out to the public and creating awareness about Islam.
- For many years community leaders have been contemplating on what can be done for Muslim youths who complete the last grade at a local *Madrasah*. With the grace of Almighty, the Academy for Learning Islam is one attempt to address this situation.

Humble beginning

- ALI acquired a 1600 sq. ft. space in Jan 2001 / Shawwal 1421 with the help of two philanthropists to run Islamic education classes for youths who had graduated in the weekend Madrasah and were eager to continue Islamic studies. A group of about 8 youths wished to learn about Islamic spirituality. The first course on “Introduction to *al-Sahifa al- Sajjadiyyah*” was conducted for 8 weeks on Sunday mornings.

Islamic Education deliverance

- On site effective, relevant & interesting courses
- Short courses (3 – 4 sessions) onsite and online
- Portable courses, designed to suit need of host community
- Intensive summer camps
- Seasonal courses that include in-house living with fellow students and instructors and/or mentors
- Weekend seminars
- Webinars and online course sessions

Onsite courses

- Three different sites in Richmond, BC from January 2001 to April 2006, including at Az-Zahraa Islamic Center
- Two different sites in Richmond Hill, ON from Oct 2008 to present- in the basement of residence & now in a rented space
- Proper classroom atmosphere: white board, over head projector, desks & chairs, notes & text books
- Numerous instructors, about 10 so far
- Instructors put efforts to prepare for class sessions
- Student involvement & dialogue encouraged
- Always break for salaah at prime time; provision for salaah room
- Holy Qur'an oriented: begin with it, & refer to it often

Portable courses

- Short courses designed to suit the need of a group, community & for common interests
- ALI sends instructors to different places
- Canada: Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto & Vancouver
- USA: Allentown, Chicago, Minneapolis, New York, Seattle
- UK: London, Peterborough, Wessex

Online courses & webinars

- Academy was first to reach out to the world
- The first online course was in?
- So far conducted about 50 courses & webinars
- Students from far & wide benefitted, including tulaba from Qum & their spouses
- At nominal fees or gratis
- Special invitation to select teachers, leaders & African muallims & muballigheen
- Different instructors: about 12

Sharing the good practice with interested communities

- RD moved to Orlando, FL 04/06 – 07/08
- Established Florida Institute of Religious Studies & Trainings (FIRST)
- Conducted more than 30 courses in 2 years
- About 225 registered & participated for courses
- Madrasah teachers & dhakireen felt they were better equipped to preach & teach
- Now a fulltime Hawza has been established

Total courses & participants

- In the last 10 years, the Academy has conducted:
 - 200 courses, seminars & webinars
 - 30 courses & seminars for another community
 - 4 intensive summer camps & 1 spring camp
 - Between 1200 – 1300* participated worldwide
 - Five students have gone to seminaries
 - One is serving fulltime ‘alim in a community
 - About 25 instructors/teachers involved

- **best estimate as precise records on the participants not kept*

Immense reward for the donors

- وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَا نَنْفُسِكُمْ ۚ وَمَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ ۚ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ
- الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ
- 2:272 And whatever good you spend, benefits your own souls; and you do not spend but to seek Allah's pleasure; and whatever good things you spend shall be paid back to you in full, and you shall not be wronged. 2:274 (As for) those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve

ALI reaches out to public

- Presentations at public schools
- Participating in multi-faith programs
- Representation on Council of Imams of ON
- Assisting reverts to Islam (new converts)
- Conducting school tours at AIC & JCC
- Radio interview during Ramadan
- Article in the local paper on Ramadan
- Train mothers for presentations in libraries

Publications & sponsorships

- FAQs on Shi'i Islam, Ramadan, Zakat al-Fitr, Muharram, Marriage brochures, Xmas cards, laminated Short Du'as cards, sample of Islamic Will
- Du'a and Ziyaarat Internet Guides
- Reflections on Qur'anic passages, 6 x in a year
- Pocket size *Tahajjud Salat* booklet
- Sponsored publications of: *Discovering Islam, Inquiries about Shi'a Islam, Islam & Religious Pluralism, Last Luminary, Sunan al-Nabi, Weapon of the Believer,*

Distribution of literature

- Useful books for scholars & lecturers
- Qur'an translations for African mu'allims
- Books for libraries in Tanzania & Toronto
- Gifting of select books on Shi'i Islam
- Make available books at subsidized prices
- Donating books to public libraries & colleges
- *Tabajjud Salat* booklets to *tulaba* in Qum, Sham & I'tikaaf participants in Toronto & Vancouver

Hajj & Ziyaarat services

- Beginning 2003, the Academy has been sending at least one religious guide (*murshid*) to Hajj. The guide gives presentations on different aspects of Hajj in Madina, Makkah & Muna. He/she also answers various questions on Islamic Law and Etiquette of performing 'Umrah & Hajj Tamattu. There is more need for a sister guide.
- The Academy also sends a guide to Sham, Iraq and Iran to guide pilgrims on the Etiquette of ziyaarat as well as do presentations on the history of holy places & visiting maraja`-e Taqlid

Youth programs

- YA ALI (Youth Arm of the Academy for Learning Islam), carried numerous programs:
 - - Online Madrasah resources
 - - Posters for al-Quds days
 - - assisting in Qur'an Tilawah program
- Religious guide & lecturer to Sweden Summer camp (5 years), Toronto camp (1 year)
- Distribution of newly published *Phrase by Phrase English translation of the Qur'an* at 50% price

Serving local communities

- Whilst in Vancouver from 20001 – 2006 RD often helped AzIC, AkIC, AmA, & NIC
- In Orlando from 2006 – 2008, RD served at IEC in Orlando & Tampa, HIC & JIC.
- In Toronto from 2008 to present, R has served 2 centers in Kitchener, 1 in Kingston, 1 in Hamilton & 9 centers in GTA
- I'tikaaf in Vancouver & Toronto

Poem: Generosity of the Prophet

- A poet praised the generosity of a noblemen in words that are only fitting for the Messenger of Allah (s):
- *He became so accustomed to opening his hands in charity to such and extent... that were he to order his fingers to close, clinging to something, they would not obey him.*
- *You see his face lit up when you come to him asking... as if you are giving to him what you are asking of him.*
- *He is an ocean [of giving] from any direction you approach him... his depth is goodness and generosity is his shore.*
- *If he had nothing in his hand other than his very soul... he would give that away so let one asking of him be mindful of Allah.*

Challenges encountered

- Youth volunteers who can dedicate their time, commitments & technical know-how
- Scholars & lecturers for online courses
- Lacking Monthly donations/contributions
- Dig into *Sehme Imam* for regular overheads
- Hajj & Ziyaarat *niyaabat* not there for murshid
- Cannot support fulltime staff
- Despite intensive efforts, many still not aware of our online courses, seminars & programs

Future plans, subject to support

- ALIIM (ALI Internet Madrasah) in coordination with a few select madaris
- Useful Guide books & Pilgrim manuals for 'Umrah, Hajj & Ziyaarat
- Online Qur'anic Arabic classes
- Yearly programs for youths, onsite & online
- Islamic classes for children after school hours
- Islam 101 classes for converts & non-Muslims
- Islamic applications for hand held tablets