

## Chicago educators do it again!

### First Islamic Studies standardized test

By Samana Khan

Chicago is considered the birthplace of American Islamic institutions that have pioneered an Islamic Studies curriculum to establish weekend and full-time schools. Now, Chicago educators have done it again with the introduction of the first nationally recognized

Islamic Studies Standardized Test.

Two reputable organizations, IQRA' International Education Foundation and HQEC – an up and coming industry leader providing resources to educators in their quest for quality education; have teamed up to create District 786. This newly found organization has collaborated with Riverside Publishing – creators of IOWA (ITBS) tests – to publish and distribute Islamic Studies curriculum testing to fulltime and weekend schools across the nation.

Islamic educators are confident that the usage of standardized tests – similar to those in public and private schools, will help streamline the test taking process of our Muslim students; ultimately uniting our schools in taking a step forward to create a more challenging and meaningful standard of excellence for Islamic Studies curricula. This year, weekend schools are especially excited to be included in the process.

"I think it's about time that such a program has been established," said Faiza Khan, who teaches

5<sup>th</sup> grade at the Al Huda Weekend School. "Weekend schools desperately needed this. As many of us are inexperienced in teaching, these tests will help us ensure that there is no overlap of curriculum between classes."

The test has been piloted in six major Islamic schools in the Chicago land area: Islamic Foundation, College Preparatory of America, Furqaan Academy, Universal School, MCC Full Time School, and Al-Aqsa. Data analysis for the pilot test program was carried out by former Northwestern professor, Dr. John Wick of WickPartners, Inc. Test questions were derived from a collection of standards especially designed for each grade and subsequent content.

District 786 is optimistic that schools adopting the Islamic Studies Standardized Testing program will be able to use this assessment as a benchmark to help fulfill each school's quest for superior education and revolutionize the way Muslim communities work together to improve the overall education of our youth-- the leaders of tomorrow.



Imam Abdul-Malik Ryan, Rabbi Avi Finegold and Dr. Farhat Quadri from IFANCA discuss the similarities and differences between halal and kosher and other dietary guidelines based on scripture.

## That's the Spirit: Food!

by Tayyaba Syed

On January 10, a group of Muslims and Jews sat together to learn more about each other at the cozy Awake Café in Chicago. The "Discussion over Coffee" event was held by the Jewish-Muslim Community Building Initiative and is one of the many inter-faith programs organized by the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.

Over the past year, JMCBI has been bringing together Jews and Muslims to explore various themes in Islam and Judaism in a casual, relaxing café atmosphere.

"Discussion over Coffee" brings people together for an authentic and inspiring engagement with text and tradition," said Asaf Bar-Tura, coordinator for JMCBI. "It creates spaces where people from diverse backgrounds and practices can explore their commonalities without the often distorted mediation by mass media or preconceived ideas. It is a space where everyone is a student, and everyone is a teacher."

This particular discussion was on food and ethics led by Imam Abdul-Malik Ryan and Rabbi Avi Finegold. Imam Ryan is an attorney who also serves as the Muslim chaplain at DePaul University. Rabbi Finegold works as an educator at the Newberger Hillel Center at University

of Chicago and the Levine Hillel Center at University of Illinois at Chicago.

Followers of both these two monotheistic faiths adhere to specific dietary guidelines. Judaism has a set of dietary laws known as Kashrut. Food in accordance with Jewish law is termed kosher in English. Approximately 1 out of 6 Jewish Americans maintains a kosher diet. Similarly, Muslims also believe in eating only from the lawful or halal and from the pure or *tayyib*. Imam Ryan and Rabbi Finegold educated the attendees with brief but insightful breakdowns of the halal and kosher rules and regulations. They also discussed the commonality in the religions of refraining from pork products.

The scholars both emphasized the idea that by eating pure foods, the consumer in turn purifies his/her character and spirit. There needs to be a respect and value of God and His creation. If we take a minute and reflect on what we eat, we can be more God-conscious by remembering that everything is made by Him. Therefore, not only the animal being slaughtered has to be pure, but how it is slaughtered, the purity and intention of the individual who slaughters it, the environment the animal is raised in, how humanely it was treated, what it was fed, all affect

the purity of the end-product that is consumed.

"Spiritual pollution in food needs to be avoided," Imam Ryan stated. "Prayers cannot be answered if [one] eats from the impure," he explained.

Along with the different levels of kosher, Rabbi Finegold also enlightened the group with the forbiddance of mixing milk with meat in Jewish law. In Deuteronomy 14:21, the Torah states God's command not to cook a "young goat in its mother's milk." In other words, meat and milk (or any kind of its derivatives) cannot be mixed so that meat and dairy products are not served at the same meal, served or cooked in the same utensils, or even stored together. In turn, observant Jews may have separate sets of dishes, and sometimes even separate kitchens, for meat and milk, and may wait anywhere from one to six hours after eating meat before they consume any sort of milk products.

As people become more health conscious, kosher and halal products appeal to even those that are not following religious requirements such as vegetarians and those with sensitivities or allergies to certain ingredients.

This just reconfirms that God knows what is best for us.

## The importance of Vitamin D for Muslim women



What comes to your mind when you think of vitamin D? Fortified milk, sunlight and healthy bones? All three are critical for our body to store vitamin D, which helps our bodies absorb calcium.

It is often overlooked in the Muslim community that because women dress conservatively, they are most likely not receiving the benefit of sunlight, which is the best source of vitamin D, and as a result, are at high risk of deficiency. In fact, studies from Middle-Eastern countries have reported numerous cases of women who had low levels of vitamin D-3. In addition, living in the Midwest does not help, as sunlight exposure is limited compared to other parts of the country.

Vitamin D works with other nutrients and hor-

mones in your body on a cellular level to promote normal cell growth and maintain a hormonal balance as well as a healthy immune system. Researchers are now drawing attention to the correlation between adequate levels of vitamin D and warding off seasonal influenza. Some of the symptoms of vitamin D deficiency are muscle pain, weakness, headaches, low-energy, sleep irregularities, mood swings and symptoms of depression.

### Get tested!

Testing for deficiency is a simple blood test at your internist's office. The physician will order a 25-hydroxyvitamin D test. Dark-skinned women and those who dress conservatively who may experience some of the symptoms should especially consider testing

for vitamin D deficiency. Darker skin reduces the skin's ability to convert sunlight into vitamin D; similarly, sun does not penetrate through clothing. When you get your test results, if you do not fall in the proposed optimal range of 50–70 ng/mL, speak to your physician for treatment options.

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### How can I increase my daily intake of Vitamin D?

**Diet:** Select whole foods that are dense in nutrients. If your diet currently does not include vitamin D rich foods, such as salmon, cod liver oil, eggs and fortified drinks, chances are that you may already be deficient.

**Sunlight:** If your lifestyle does not encourage you to seek sun daily, you are missing the best source vitamin D. However, do not forget the sun block!

**Supplement:** Select a supplement of vitamin D-3 but first consult with your physician to determine the additional amount your body requires.

## Local Muslim receives fair hearing for hate crime

The woman who yanked the scarf off of a Tinley Park Muslim at a grocery store two days after the Fort Hood shootings was sentenced to two years probation, 200 hours of community service, and a \$2,500 dollar fine.

Valerie Kenney also apologized openly in court to Amal Abusumayah, her family and the Muslim community. Local Muslims

felt that the court's decision was fair based on the verbal abuse and public humiliation that Abusumayah had to endure. They also believed this is a prime example to show that Muslims should not feel hesitant to call the police if they are attacked and abused on the basis of religion or ethnicity.

"I feel vindicated," said Abusumayah after the hearing. "This is a major victory

for not only women who wear the headscarf but for everyone who stands for religious freedom and freedom of expression."

Christina Abraham, Civil Rights Director at CAIR Chicago said that they were pleased with the decision and hope this sends a message to the public that this sort of behavior should not be tolerated by a fair and just society.