

Br. Ahmed Raza Durrani, Muslim Youth Council Coordinator



Interviewed By: Abdulaziz Mian

Q. Can you tell me a bit about your background?

Br. Ahmed: I was born and raised in Winnipeg and I am proud to be a Canadian Muslim. My father is Raza Durrani. He emigrated from Pakistan in 1973. Many members of the community know him for his service to the Pakistani Association. My mother is Margaret Baker; and she was born and raised in Winnipeg. I am soon to be married to my fiancée Haania Bawahab in her city, College Station, Texas.

Insha'alah, I am graduating from the University of Winnipeg in June 2004 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Computing. I would also like to pursue graduate studies in either Business or Computer Science. Many people wonder why I delayed my studies for so long. It was difficult to choose a career path after high school.

Traditionally, our community approved of 3 career choices, Medicine, Law or Engineering. I didn't like any of those choices and couldn't see any other viable options. Therefore, I worked full-time and pursued an adventure in martial arts. I competed throughout Canada until 1999. That's when I decided to return to school. Alhamdulillah it was a good decision.

Q. What is your involvement in the community?

Br. Ahmed: I began to get involved in the Muslim community when Br. Jawad Shah started the Youth Halaqas on Friday night. These halaqas and other activities were organized by a new organization called the Muslim Youth Council of Winnipeg. The Youth Halaqa every second Friday night was always exciting to attend. I would ask my mother for a note to be excused from school to attend Jummah prayer, stay in the Masjid playing ping-pong and then enjoy the evening with the Halaqa. Those days were the best.

Currently, I'm involved with planning the Youth Halaqa. This is a difficult job. It's not easy to prepare interesting topics for the youth. They have all sorts of alternatives to the Youth Halaqa on a Friday night, so we have to make it attractive. For newcomers to the activity, if the Halaqa is boring, that's it, you've lost them and they won't come back.

Q. What is your impression of the Muslim community in Winnipeg? Do you feel the Muslim community has progressed?

Br. Ahmed: It has been a blessing to grow up in Winnipeg. My parents were always dedicated in bringing the family to the Masjid. Since my parents had little money, we would take the bus from the West End to St. Vital. The

bus would stop at Dakota and St. Mary's Road and then turnaround and go back downtown. So my parents would bring a toboggan to pull my sisters through the snow while I had to walk from the IGA Grocery store all the way to the Masjid! I remember this being very difficult.

The first activity that I attended and really loved was the youth camp. It was organized by Br. Waheed Mustapha and others like Br. Yousef Siddiqui. Those camps were so much fun and that is where I made my first Muslim friends. Omar Nasim, Bilal Rana, Sohel Bokhari, Faisal Ashraf, Muhammad Al-Shareef, and Abdulrahman Abdulrahman were some of the friends I made. I think having good Muslim friends was important for my religious survival.

I definitely think that the community has progressed. When I was a kid the Masjid was only open on Sunday. Now it's open for 5 daily prayers. Although some recent converts may disagree with me, I think the community has opened up more to new Muslims. My mom is not Muslim but she could've been if the community was more open to her. Can you believe that once, when I was young, she was asked not to come to the Masjid anymore? My mom is still hurt by those words.

Q. What are your views on the MIA, and the plans for the new centre?

Br. Ahmed: I think there are several issues facing the Muslims in Winnipeg. The first is to revise the structure of the Manitoba Islamic Association. This was an organization formed over 25 years ago. Many things have changed, but not the structure of MIA. I think we need more qualifications to run as president. For example, one should be a resident of Manitoba for at least 3 years, served on a recognized committee for at least 1 year and acquire the nominations of at least 20 members in order to run for president. The second most important issue of our community is our youth. If we want to have a future here in Winnipeg then we need to invest in our youth. Unfortunately, summer camp was cancelled this year because we could not find a site that would rent to us. It would be nice if we had our own.

I think that we definitely need a new centre for our community. The groundbreaking ceremony was very enjoyable. I commend all of those who helped bring it to this stage.

Q. As a community where do we need to go from here?

Br. Ahmed: As a community, we need to have a common vision. If you ask 10 people in this community where do we go from here you will get 10 different answers. I think this is due to the lack of leadership in our community. I think that the MIA needs to lead the community forward and help us define a common vision.

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