

Br. Jameel Khan

By: Abdulaziz Mian

AA: What can you tell me about yourself?

Jameel: My name is Jameel Khan. I was born in Trinidad in 1947 of East Indian Muslim parentage. I am the fourth of eight children. My parents are deceased and my seven siblings have all emigrated to Canada and the United States. My primary language is English. I was educated under the British System of education achieving Advanced Level certification from the University of Cambridge, England. To complement my academic achievements, I played team cricket and soccer for my College, sports I continued to be involved in Winnipeg. I play competitive cricket at City Park for many years and I also coached little league soccer in Fort Richmond for many years. Upon graduation from college, I taught physics and mathematics at government secondary schools in Trinidad.

I am currently single but was previously married for 28 years. I have two children, a daughter Nadia, age 28 and a son Dorian, age 25, both university educated. I am a staunch follower of Islam. I enjoy reading to enhance my knowledge and understanding of the holy Quran, Hadith and Islam. I have been to Hajj three times and hope in sha Allah to go again many more times. I have also participated as a guest speaker on the television program Islam 101.

AA: What brought you to Winnipeg?

Jameel: It was always my intention to travel abroad to further my studies but I did not have the financial wherewithal at that time to do so immediately. I came to Winnipeg after being assured by some of my teaching colleagues who had studied in Winnipeg that I would be able to support myself financially through lucrative summer employment on the trains. So in September 1968 I took the risk and came to study at the University of Manitoba on a student visa with just enough money to support myself for one academic year. Alhamdulillah, I was able with permission from Canadian Immigration to work the summers until I got my first degree. Immediately thereafter, I was granted permanent residence status and later on became a Canadian citizen.

AA: You mentioned lack of money and the desire to study. Tell me a little more about your career?

Jameel: At the University of Manitoba, alhamdulillah, I obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics and Mathematics and a Bachelor of Commerce Honours degree in Finance and Accounting. I subsequently studied with the Institute of Management Accountants and obtained a professional Certified Management Accountant designation. I have no current plans for pursuing further academic studies. However, I do currently keep abreast with current issues relating to my profession through self-study, workshops/seminars and reading current literature. .

AA: Why you ended up staying in Winnipeg?

Jameel: Prior to coming to Winnipeg, I had intended to complete my studies and return to Trinidad. However, I got married in 1972 and after graduating with the Bachelor of Commerce Honours degree, I started working for the Auditor General of Manitoba as an auditor. Today I still work for the Manitoba government as an internal auditor with the Department of Finance.

AA: How did you cope with harsh realities of Winnipeg without knowing anyone?

Jameel: When I arrived in Winnipeg in 1968, I was unaware of the existence of a Muslim community. I have always been very convinced in my religious beliefs, so I bought myself a mat and prayed in my apartment. It was not until the early 1970's that I was informed that there was a Muslim community in Winnipeg and there was a mosque being constructed in St. Vital.

AA: What was our community like in those days and what was your involvement?

Jameel: My early involvement with the Muslim was as a member of the congregation. It was not until the mid-1980's that I started to more actively participate in the community. In 1984, the Muslims from Trinidad formed the Trinidad Muslim Group of which I am currently the spiritual advisor and president. It was also in the mid-1980's that I started to attend prayer at the mosque more frequently with my two children. At that time, the Muslim community was rapidly growing into a cultural mosaic and began experiencing growing pains. The growing pains were primarily focused on group polarization and cultural differences regarding the practice of Islam. This resulted in heated arguments in the mosque and at general body meetings. In the interim, it was also difficult to attract and

retain an Imam, a condition that persisted until, alhamdulillah, the arrival of our current Imam, Sheik Hosnee. During those turbulent years, my children, being exposed to the continual bickering in the mosque. would ask if this is what the religion of Islam taught and condoned. I had to reassure them that it did not and what they were witnessing was in fact anti-Islamic. I had to reaffirm in their minds that Islam stood for peace and unity and recount the prophet Muhammad's, peace be upon him, farewell sermon in Arafat when he said "No one is better than another except in righteousness".

AA: You have been in this community for a long time. You must have some history with the creation of our new centre?

Jameel: In the late 1980's, the MIA executive body recognized that the Muslim community had grown considerably and was steadily increasing. The old existing mosque had become inadequate to accommodate the growth. A larger mosque with other supporting facilities was needed to sustain the community growth. In the early 1990's the process was put in motion to build such a facility. I was asked to help with locating a site for the facility and alhamdulillah, I got the current site on which the Grand Mosque now stands.

AA. Speaking of history, tell me a little more about our history in Winnipeg?

Jameel: When I look back at the history of the Muslim community in Winnipeg from the late 1960's to the present, I see marked progress. We have an Imam that is exceptional in his craft. There are a few established places for Jumma prayer and social gathering throughout Winnipeg. There is a concerted effort being made to propagate Islam through formal education, seminars/workshops, public forums and enlightening kutbas. However, there is still the appearance of fractionation and polarization within the community. I have coined the following similitude that I think reflects our Muslim community: the community is like a box of Smarties candy. Each coloured candy represents the people of a country e.g. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Trinidad etc. We all profess to follow Islam, the religion perfected by Allah. The chocolate at the centre of each candy represents the perfected Islam. The candy shell around the chocolate represents the cultural beliefs and religious practices of a country. The candy shell over time has imprisoned the chocolate to form a version of Islam. Every candy in totality now represents a different version of Islam. This is primarily responsible in the Muslim community for the loose unity not the strong Tawheed unity that is Islam. What is needed is for each candy to shed its hard shell and let the chocolate pure and sweet caress our palates with the perfected Islam. This would only happen if every Muslim has the strong resolve to unite under the leadership of the Imam.

AA. You have the final word. What would you like to share?

Jameel: As a community we still have a long way to go. The Grand Mosque and support facilities need to be completed. This can only happen if we all come together and work as a strong unit with humility, patience and tolerance. Remember the old adages 'united we stand and divided we fall' and 'a chain is only strong as its weakest link'. I pray to Allah for our guidance, peace and unity.