

Masjid Tucson United Submitters International

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Conference *continued*

Amir Kia spoke next on the theme of patience. We must have patience with our families and with those around us. All we can do is resort to patience with those with different beliefs. We know that the heavens and the earth are about to shatter at the thought that God has begotten a son, but we must realize that the heavens and earth were created for those who truly believe so that they might have a second chance. The true believers are a very small minority. If we have patience with differing beliefs, shouldn't we have patience with one another? We are too small to allow little things to divide us. We must keep our level of energy up by supporting each other.

Gurnaib Singh entitled his talk, "God controls everything." There are two categories of control—one for man, another for everything else. Man should use his brain to verify the information he receives, although the majority simply accept what they're told. Gurnaib then gave data on the moon, as representative of the rest of the universe. Especially interesting was the fact that because of their positions in the solar system, the sun and the moon appear to be the same size, and during an eclipse the moon can totally block out the sun. Closer or farther away, this wouldn't work. "The sun and the moon are perfectly calculated." [55:5]

Emily Elkadi talked about cats, and passed on some fascinating facts. The purr sound which cats make is a mystery to man. "...you do not understand their glorification." [17:44] Cats were revered in ancient Egypt. But some cultures view them as representations of Satan, and they were frequently burned with witches. The physical makeup of the cat is interesting. They have excellent sense

of smell and acute hearing. Their ears have 19 muscles to move the ear all around. Their inner ear helps balance for climbing, jumping and landing upright after a fall. Their spines are very flexible for stretching and turning. Their eyes are 7 times more sensitive to light which allows them to see in very low light and a structure in the back of the eye reflects light back, which causes the appearance of the eye glowing in the dark.

Hajj Panel—questions: 1) Difficulty of getting a visa. The answer was to remember God is in control. If He wants you to go on Hajj, He will make things easy for you. 2) Animal sacrifice. You can buy a voucher which guarantees an animal sacrifice which will be canned or frozen and sent to the poor. Some feel strongly that you need to sacrifice your own animal. 22:36. It may come down to what feels right for the individual. 3) Prayer. Traditional Muslims tend to shorten and combine prayers, which end up with the correct number of *rak'as*. You may want to pray in your room as much as possible. 4) A pamphlet telling us what to do? The Saudi government has one which says you do not have to go to Medina.

Carl Skinner reported on a visit to Chris and Linda in England and a meeting there with Jehovah's witnesses. Carl was impressed with Chris' composure and his delivering the message in a simple manner—"a word to the wise is sufficient." God guides those who will to be guided 6:75-79. We only plant the seed; we can't make it grow. He reminded everyone to be humble, not arrogant, be able to say "I'm sorry." Keep calm in group discussions—Satan thrives on personal argument. He suggested striving for better dialogue within our communities, and more dialogue between communities. Four steps to problem solving: 1) identify

the problem; 2) suggest solutions; 3) work out the solutions; 4) have the right attitude.

Daud Watts talked about the mathematical structure to the Quran—that numbers are alive and submitting. He was very excited by the mathematical seminar preceding the conference, and he relayed a personal discovery involving sura 85, verses 21 and 22.

Edip Yuksel talked about critical thinking. He explained how critical thinking starts with asking questions and develops in a free environment. He said our understanding of the Quran is diverse because of our backgrounds, wishes, and agendas, making the communication sometimes difficult amongst ourselves. He suggested that the conference should be used to communicate and discuss our problems, and that we should not take things personally. He warned the community saying that we are not immune from idolizing the messenger, and also that this community will likely repeat history. He was also concerned about what he considered some people's playing with numbers, and suggested that we should develop a criterion to separate "glass" from "diamonds."

Mahmoud Abib's talk was perhaps the high point of the conference. Inviting audience participation, Mahmoud read wonderful verses from the Quran in praise of God, and asked questions from the Quran. Everyone enjoyed the "Zikr" (commemoration). He called this "Interactive Zikr." It was straightforward, concise, and uplifting.

Reports on the conference and the presentations will be continued in the coming issues, God willing.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

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Learning to Communicate: Another of God's Gifts

Perhaps one of the least appreciated, and most taken for granted gifts which God, Most Gracious, has provided us with is the gift of language. Until very recently there was almost unanimous agreement among specialists in the field that children's ability to learn to communicate was just a simple learning process and that there was nothing mysterious, innate or extraordinary about it. It was believed that young children learn to speak their mother tongue the same way, for example, that they learn to tie their shoelaces: by observing, imitating, practicing, being corrected and adjusting their performance to match adult performance.

Beginning in 1953, Noam Chomsky (MIT) and others did extensive studies in the area of children's language acquisition. These studies revealed a number of aspects of the language learning process in children that simply could not be explained by the prevailing theory that acquisition of language was just another routine learning process. Here are some of those puzzles that called into question the tradition "learning by imitation" view of language development:

1. All children learn the basic structure and vocabulary of their mother tongue in a fairly brief period of time. Scientists agree that this is a tremendous task to achieve, and that in accomplishing it, the child masters a complex, rule governed system. Yet studies also show that chil-

dren with an IQ as low as 50 are able to master this complex task, albeit more slowly than children with normal (above 70) IQ levels. If language acquisition were really a normal learning process, the child would certainly need a much higher IQ and surely those who do not have it would be unable to learn their mother tongue. This of course, does not happen and every child, except in special cases of mental illness, quickly learns to speak his or her mother tongue, seemingly effortlessly.

2. The second interesting fact about language acquisition is that the system of knowledge that children come to possess as adult speakers is "underspecified" in the input on which the learning takes place. This is sometimes called the 'logical problem' of child language acquisition. How do we come to know so much based on such impoverished input? For example, children come to learn not only what is a possible sentence in their language but also what is not. They are not provided with examples of what they can't say and yet the system of knowledge that they develop includes such knowledge.

3. Another fact that any theory of language acquisition must contend with is that the process proceeds largely without overt correction of ungrammaticality on the part of adult caregivers. Although, adults like to think that they "teach" their children language, the fact of the matter is that children are rarely corrected for ungrammatical utterances. Adult attention is instead focused on the truth value

of what is said or possibly word-choice. Even when overt grammatical correction does occur, it is more often than not ignored by children who continue to say it their way until their own mental grammar is modified to yield the adult-like utterance. The acquisition process seems to proceed along the lines of: hypothesis, test hypothesis, change hypothesis. Of course this process is not one that the child is consciously aware of or in control of.

4. Children learn language under greatly varying circumstances and yet with roughly the same result. In some cultures children are never addressed by adults, in some cultures they interact verbally with adults on a regular basis. The point is that despite these cultural differences in terms of children's verbal interaction, the child will learn the language of the community into which he or she is born.

5. First language acquisition takes place between the ages of 2-5 and the ability seems to change in late childhood. If it indeed were a normal learning process we should be able to learn a new language as adults almost as easily as when we were children and once again this is simply not the case. This suggests that there is a critical period for the development of human communication, just as there is for other genetically determined systems of knowledge in the animal kingdom.

continued on the next page

Learning *continued*

Chomsky raised the standard for linguistic theorizing when he insisted that it meet the criterion of "explanatory adequacy." That is, the theory must not only describe the facts of language but explain how all children learn the particular variety of human language that they are exposed to under the observed conditions of exposure to that language. Chomsky's theory is one of the theories which have been proposed to explain the logical problem of language acquisition. Some have compared his theories to Newton's theories in Physics. He proposed that we owe our gift of speech to a genetically programmed language organ in the brain often referred to as the LAD, or language acquisition device. The ability to learn language as a young child resides in genetically determined structure of the brain, it is in our DNA. He theorized that the language organ of the brain contains what he called a "hardwired" universal grammar which children use to learn their mother tongue quickly and effortlessly. This universal grammar is coded in our DNA, the same way, for example, that requirements for the elaborate structures which termites build are coded in their DNA. The child comes to this world with a tacit knowledge of the universal grammar, and needs only to learn whether their target language is the French version of universal grammar, the English version, the Arabic version, etc. The precise specification of what this universal grammar consists of is not a settled matter by any means; but it seems clear that one cannot explain the facts of children's language acquisition

without postulating a fairly elaborate, innate learning mechanism that is to at least some extent specialized for the job of "teaching" children the language of their communities.

There has been considerable discussion and debate concerning Chomsky's theory. No one has really been able to completely refute its essential points. It has continued to gain support among specialist in the field to the extent that it may be said all scientists agree at least to part of his proposal.

Professor Casti in "Paradigms Lost" (1989) devotes an entire chapter to the problem of language and language learning. After reviewing opposing views he concludes:

"On the matter of language acquisition, there is no doubt for me as to where to place my money, firmly with Chomsky and its claim for innateness and uniqueness. Without the benefit of some kind of preprogramming, it seems inconceivable to me that children could acquire the basics of virtually any language within their first few years of exposure, not to mention the capacity to generate sentences never before heard or spoken. The basic problem is to explain where this language capacity comes from if it is not basically inborn, and none of Chomsky's opponents have presented a case that even comes close to a viable alternative to innateness."

In the Quran we have the following verse: *Among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variation in your languages and your colors. In these there are signs for the knowledgeable.* [30:22]

Why are the variations in our languages signs from God Almighty? Perhaps the verse points to God's gift of speech (innate, inborn, coded in our DNA as has been proposed) and not just the simple fact of existence of variety of languages. In fact, by studying the variations that do exist between languages we can determine the limits of that variation and define the set of possible human languages. From this, we can then extract the universal principles and begin to understand more about the nature of the "universal grammar" and indeed, the human mind, God willing.

*Hussein Kowsari
with contributions from
Martha Schulte-Nafeh*

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Notes on the 9th Annual Conference

Continued from the August 1994 issue

There was one talk from Friday that went unreported in the August issue. Using the classification of natural numbers as primes, composites, twin primes, twin prime companions and their indeces, Dr. Ali Fazely was able to link numbers mentioned in the Quran, verse and sura numbers together with some of their indeces to show the *Ultimate Mathematics* that points out 1) That God has selected very special numbers to show His omnipotence. 2) That Numbers have truly submitted to God. 3) That God has preserved the Quran against corruption.

The first talk of the conference on Saturday (July 16, 1994) was given by Shahnaz Rahimtula. The theme of the talk was the human being's incompetence in ruling himself. There is certainly ample evidence all around us in this world of that incompetence and of the failure of political solutions to the problems that beset us. What then is the answer? How can we achieve the victory that is promised to the believers? Through submission and surrender and guidance from the one and only source of spiritual guidance, the Quran. Through the practice of the true Islam.

Before this, the book of Moses provided guidance and mercy. This too is a scripture that confirms, in Arabic, to warn those who transgressed, and to give good news to the righteous. [46:12]

Shahnaz ended her talk with a moving "singing" of a poem she wrote, in Urdu, praising God.

The next talk was truly a pleasure as it was given by a younger member of the community, Hanaan Sharif, and it is always nice to hear from that segment of our community. Hanaan's talk dealt with an issue that undoubtedly many young people and Moms have had to deal with - the predominant focus in the public school systems in Canada (and America) on Christian holidays, notably Christmas. Hanaan told of his struggle to try to get more of a balance in the schools' treatment of different religious groups' holidays. He ended his talk with a wish for the future that the true Islam become known and respected and that alternative activities be provided for children in

the public school system who do not celebrate Christmas.

Those of us who know Lydia and have heard her talks at the conferences throughout the years have come to expect to hear something from her about some of the other "critters" that God has created for us to share this earth with. This year Lydia chose to focus on "man's best friend," the dog. She reminded us of the many wonderful attributes of this animal, including its total submission to God, its faithfulness, and its instinct to protect man. The talk was full of interesting tidbits of information about the history of dogs and their relationship to man as well as references to both the Quranic and Biblical verses. Lydia points out that the reference to dogs seem not to serve any integral part in the scriptural story but rather seem to be God's way of showing us that they are good creations, not to be despised or reviled as they often are for purely cultural reasons. Lydia ended her talk with a suggestion that we reflect upon and find as much pleasure as possible in these remarkable creatures that God has blessed us with.

Among His proofs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the creatures He spreads in them. He is able to summon them, when He wills. [42:29]

Sarah Gamar is a new member of our family of submitters and we welcome her. In her talk Sarah began by calling on us all to appreciate the many wonders of God's creation that surround us that we often take for granted. Sarah told us the moving story of how she heard the message of worshiping God alone and how she came to learn of the Quran's miraculous numerical code based on the number 19. She told us about how since the time of her submission many questions have been answered for her that had not been answered in her traditional Muslim upbringing. Sarah has had to face many difficulties in standing up to that traditional upbringing. We pray to God to give her, and all of us, the strength to face the tests that we inevitably face once we make that all important decision to believe and trust in Almighty God. Sarah ended her talk with a prayer, that having been led out of the darkness, she will one day see a day on which her heart harbors no doubt whatsoever and attains cer-

tainty. We can certainly "ditto" that for all the submitters!

Gatut Adisoma shared with us some encouraging developments in Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, radical Muslims want to bring *Sharia* (traditional Islamic law) into secular law. However, the head of the ulema (traditional Muslim scholars) has brought some reason to the argument with his reminder that if secular law was consistent with *Sharia*, they would be required to kill millions of non-Muslim Indonesians simply because they converted from Islam. His comments have opened the people's eyes to the vicious nature of orthodox traditional Islam, which is nothing to do with true Islam.

There are similar developments in Malaysia where some states want to implement *Sharia* law as part of their secular law. Apparently in response, the Malaysian prime minister addressed a meeting of the ulema and suggested breaking the scholars' monopoly on the study of the Quran, and allowing a wider range of Quranic interpretation. Gatut ended with the hope that this is the dawn of a new awakening in the Muslim World.

Gatut then asked Linda Moore to share her experiences with believers from the same area of the world. Linda mentioned the problems faced by the Submitting couple in Singapore whose marriage was annulled by the ulema. (See SP of December, 1993 for details.) Then she spoke of her interaction with a group in Glasgow which publishes the *Signs* magazine. She also had a few copies of the paper published by the Submitters in Malaysia.

Milan Sulc challenged us all with the question of whether we are following the Quran alone, or idolizing Rashad Khalifa the man? There is one message, follow the Quran alone. The messenger would not have made any mistake in that message, but we must not take the message of false messengers giving another message. Milan sees mistakes made by the messenger as a test. If the Quran alone is not enough, we will follow the messenger's mistakes. He then quoted 10:28 and finished off with some mathematical correlations with Dr. Khalifa's name.

Continued

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