

N E W S L E T T E R 2 0 0 7

Meeting the
Educational

Needs of the
Youngest Generation
in 2007

The ISA
Report

The Address of
the President

Creating a
New World

Introduction

Selected
Essays 2008

we are delighted to bring you the third IIS Alumni Newsletter showcasing the talents and activities of our diverse alumni body. 2007 has proven to be an eventful and productive year for the Alumni Relations Unit at the IIS and the individual Chapter Groups in which we have reached out to increasing numbers of alumni across the globe.

This year, the Alumni Relations Unit saw the departure of the Alumni Relations Co-ordinator, Selina Kassam Ramji, who has worked in alumni relations at the IIS since its inception. Selina has moved to the IIS Department of Community Relations where she has taken up the post of Education Co-ordinator. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Selina for all the work she has undertaken in years past and express our hope that she remains an active member of the IIS Alumni Association. In November, Nazneen Sachedina joined the unit as our new Alumni Relations Officer. Nazneen is looking forward to all the opportunities and challenges this position will afford her, and the chance to build a strong relationship with the alumni body globally.

The Chapter Groups have had a busy year with the elections, annual meetings

fellowship – at the U.S. Mission to UNESCO. There, she works on the education portfolio and is a member of the U.S. delegation at the 34th General Conference of UNESCO.



(**200**) has started her PhD at the University of Sussex, U.K. Her work will focus on the treatment of

violence against women in the justice system of post-Soviet Tajikistan. The criminal justice system has undergone changes in Tajikistan and Zuhail's project will explore whether and how gender-based crimes are incorporated in the system. The study will also investigate a broader question regarding gender equality in Tajikistan through an analysis of the process of the 'humanisation' of the justice system which has taken place in this area and how state reforms, if at all, relate to women's equality.



(**1-3**) has worked for the Aga Khan Foundation, Canada (AKFC) since 2002. Until early 2007, she was AKFC's Donor

Relations Coordinator, working with significant donors and multi-year campaigns. She also acted as liaison with institutional partners such as AKU, IIS and AKF. Farida is now with the Programmes Management department where she is in charge of compiling and cataloguing

resource materials accumulated over the last 20 years. One recent highlight has been researching, evaluating and implementing the software platform for catalogue development.



(**1-3**) is a faculty member at the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development (AKU-

IED), and was recently awarded the prestigious "Outstanding Teacher Award for Sustained Excellence in Scholarship of Teaching" on the eve of AKU's 20th Convocation at Karachi on 16th November 2007.

Dr. Khaki joined the Aga Khan University in 1998 as a faculty member. He completed his PhD in Education from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. With three Masters Degrees in addition to a PhD, Dr. Khaki is currently engaged at AKU-IED in teaching at various levels, including PhD and MEd. He also serves as a national Board member for ITREB Pakistan.



(**200**) has developed a pilot DVD project for the IIS, entitled *Virtual Fatimid Cairo*. The DVD supplements

the *Ta'lim* publication, *Everyday life in the Fatimid Times*, for Primary Five, with reconstructions of Cairo and Fustat.

It features 14 houses and 4 mosques and, through animation and virtual 'walk-throughs' allows the viewer to explore these spaces.

Farhad lives in Calgary and works as an

Over the last year, the Asian Chapter Group has focused on building a strong foundation for interaction amongst the alumni and for strengthening their relationship with their alma mater. Our objectives have been to establish strong knowledge and research networks, to enhance the involvement of alumni in Ismaili institutions, and to work together as a group to discuss issues affecting Ismailis and the larger Muslim Ummah in the developing world with a view to develop innovative ways in which to address them. This has involved ongoing virtual discussions, sharing of research, knowledge and best practices with reference to the ITREBs and other relevant institutions. The value of such a group has been tremendous in terms of experience and cross-cutting knowledge in various areas.

Case Group Annual Meeting : With representation from alumni from over 15 countries, the Asian Chapter Group held its second annual meeting in Mombasa, Kenya in May 2007. The three day meeting was not only a time to meet and network with other alumni and local Ismaili leadership, but also an opportunity for alumni to present their current and ongoing work and to hold discussions on a variety of contemporary themes. The keynote speaker was Dr. Moncef Benabdeljelil, Assistant Professor at AKU-ISMC. In addition to the formal business of the meeting, the gathering included a tour of Mombasa's old town, including a visit to the Aga Khan Academy, presentations to the Ismaili community and ITREB, and time for alumni to relax and enjoy the wonderful environment of Mombasa. The next annual meeting is planned for Dubai in 2008.

Future Plans : Looking to the future, the Asian Chapter has three key goals. The first is to build the country-specific local groups in India, Pakistan, Syria and

Tajikistan through a series of local events, including social functions, lecture series, and presentations to the local Ismaili communities. The second is to share and build on the corpus of knowledge and research that exists among the alumni. The third is to facilitate the involvement of alumni with the community and its institutions by working with local leadership to identify opportunities and projects.

Pedestal: Raana Gani
(Class of 1983)
Secretary: Faana Khan
(Class of 1997)

2007 has witnessed higher levels of participation and infrastructure strengthening for the North American Chapter Group. We maintained our focus on the following three key objectives: (a) Strengthening bonds between alumni by providing opportunities for contact and networking; (b) Continuing Education for alumni; and (c) Increasing involvement of alumni in Aga Khan Development Network and other Ismaili community institutions.

Case Group Annual Meeting : The North American Chapter group held their annual meeting in Toronto in March. The day was devoted to presentations from alumni showcasing both their research as well as their professional achievements. Alumni were fascinated by the creative efforts of their peers and suggested that an even larger amount of time be devoted to such matters in future meetings.

Institutional leadership from the National Council and ITREB was invited to witness the resource base represented by the alumni body. Candid dialogue took place between the alumni and the leadership with a view to better understand both the opportunities and the impediments to greater involvement of

alumni in various community institutions.
Local Branches : Local branches of the IIS Alumni Association have now been established for Eastern Canada, Western Canada, and Texas. The branches meet locally, once every eight weeks. The branches have provided a sound framework for ongoing alumni networking, lively debates based on research by individual members, and follow up discussions on IIS seminars. Local branches are also beginning to connect with and contribute to local, national and international institutions. Alumni in



North American Chapter Group, Toronto, March 2007

individually to find out how they wished to get involved in ITREB USA's activities. Significant effort was also put into working with the IIS alumni and newly formed Human Resource departments to encourage each alumnus to fill out an online profile to allow the matching of their skill sets with those needed by various AKDN and other Ismaili community institutions.

Golden Jubilee of His Highness the Aga Khan's accession to the Imamate. For example, Texas alumni were involved in training guides for the International Historic Cities Exhibition held in Houston in October 2007. Calgary alumni are involved in putting together the curriculum for the Ismaili Heritage Visits programme for Ismaili youth and young adults.

P e d e : H a V a
(Class of 1984)

S e a : R a a P a
(Class of 1991)

Growth in 2007

V a S e c e I :
Alumni in North America have actively served as faculty, speakers and facilitators for various programmes such as the *College Program on Islam* (which provides a detailed overview of Islam to university students and young adults), Al-Ummah Camps, Talim al-Islam, QUEST (Adult Religious Education), Teacher Education, and other initiatives of ITREBs. Alumni also continue to serve on ITREBs' boards as members and institutional staff.

In addition, many alumni have also served in outreach capacities, speaking at various churches, schools and professional seminars. Some alumni have undertaken an internship or travelled internationally to serve the institutions in a voluntary capacity. Examples include a Texan alumnus who ran capacity-development seminars for the staff of ITREC in Khorog, Tajikistan, and a Vancouver alumnus who served as Education Manager for the International Professional Teacher Educators Programme (PTEP) training episodes in Toronto and Karachi.

Alumni are also beginning to get involved in programmes to commemorate the

After the elections in June 2007, Nacim Pak and Shah Hussain were appointed as the new President and Secretary, respectively, of the European Chapter Group (ECG). In July, they invited the alumni to a focus group meeting to share their views and expectations. It was an exciting session attended by 14 alumni who brought up various ideas, suggestions and concerns for discussion. These could be divided roughly into three areas: general issues about the Alumni Association, identified needs, and proposed projects and activities. This was a useful exercise in trying to identify the needs and aspirations of the members so that they could be addressed in planning activities for the year.

C a e G A a M e e : The Annual General Meeting of the Chapter Group was held on 19th May this year

and attended by 35 alumni. One of our alumni, Mr Alnoor Merchant, Keeper of the Ismaili Collection at the IIS Library, gave the alumni a sneak preview of its magnificent artefacts collection, with an in-depth analysis and exposition of some of the materials that made up the *Spirit and Life Exhibition* prior to its launch in London on 12th July.

O e P a e a d P e c : This year's Meet and Greet was held in October at the Holiday Inn Camden Lock. Over 80 GPISH and STEP students from the IIS as well as ISMC students and alumni attended this event. The participants had an opportunity to interact with each other during various activities, drinks and dinner, and the evening was rounded off with dancing.

In November, a number of the ECG members attended the London premiere of *Rumi: Unveil the Sun*. This play, about the encounter between Rumi and Shams Tabriz, is part of the various international events commemorating the 800th birthday of Rumi, which is why 2007 has been designated by UNESCO as the International Year of Rumi.

One of the activities that the alumni had proposed during the focus groups was the cataloguing of alumni and student research. The ECG is now looking into collecting and archiving this material. This may include creating an archive of various published and unpublished research reports, fieldwork documentation and photographs. Mr Rafiq Rahim Ajani, an alumnus currently pursuing his PhD studies at Exeter University will lead this project.

P e d e : N a c P a
(Class of 2002)

S e a : S a H a
(Class of 2004)

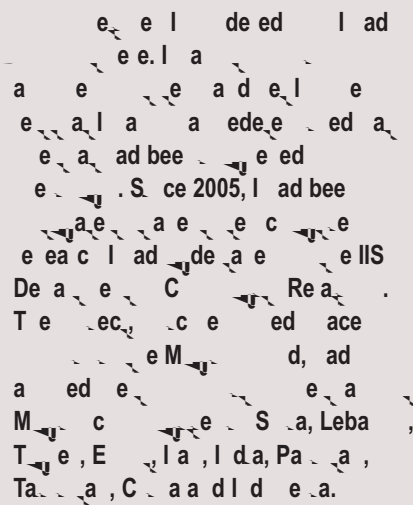
European Chapter Group, London, September 2007





The challenges were numerous; in addition to being in the field on my own for long stretches of time, issues of language, food, security, comfort and a heightened sense of the 'eternal now' became amplified. In my four years, that most of these could be handled without strenuous effort. The one thing that was central to all of these mini-adventures was the innocent hospitality that inhabitants of many of these countries and members of these communities extended to guests. After only a few minutes, not only was a hand of generosity extended, it was done with the purest of hearts. Sometimes commonalities helped; that I was a Muslim or a male; sometimes it was by identifying where I had come from; Canada or the UK; a guest having travelled such a long way blessed a village and a community more often than it burdened it. Sometimes, the commonalities were less obvious.

One sunny afternoon, after an intense search for the türbe of Pir Sayyid Hasan Hüsameddin in Istanbul's Kasimpapa district, I stumbled upon a non-descript building on a side-street. This was the asitane – the headquarters – of the Halveti Ubbaki tariqa of Sufis. The guardian of the shrine, the türbedar was an elderly man with a coral tasbeeh and a white hat, along with a bushy beard whose hue fell somewhere in between the two. I paid my respects to the interred grand shaykh, his family, and others who had been fortunate enough to be buried so close to him. My less than rudimentary Turkish failed me in trying to address the türbedar, a man I later learned was named Mustafa. Despite this, two hours passed in which frustrations were set aside, and through both our innate creativity and the larger symbols we shared as human beings, we managed to have a conversation that sat outside formal language in which secrets were shared and information exchanged.



The sign on the guesthouse in Chitral's main city read "Take nothing but pictures and leave nothing but footprints." I thought it was a good mantra and one that I had tried to follow thus far, even though I wasn't aware of this particular bumper-sticker worthy slogan.

Language was always a challenge. Communication required much more imaginative means in the field. In some

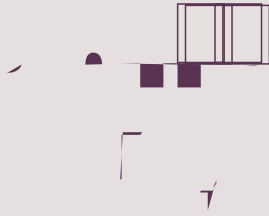
countries, the language used on the streets changed every few hours you journeyed. In Pakistan, for example, it was not only Urdu whose sounds and inflections dominated conversations, but also Baluchi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Saraiki and Pashtu the further up your finger glided on the map. In its northern reaches, entirely different linguistic families emerged: Khoar, Shina, Burushaski, Balti and Wakhi. While sometimes an interpreter was useful, other times, the language of language had designs of its own.

After several days in Lanzhou, the capital of China's northcentral Gansu province, I became more acquainted with the city's Hui Muslim population. On one of those early days in the city, I had made plans to visit the khanqah and mosque of the Jahriyya Sufis late one evening, hours after 'isha prayers had already ended. The imam of the mosque kindly offered me and my interpreter, Mr Chen, some green tea. Mr Chen, an educated university lecturer in engineering and the sciences, was also introduced to Islam and its Chinese articulations through our interviews and visits to various mosques and tombs in the region. While I asked questions through Mr Chen to the imam, in English, they conversed in Chinese. I found that there was as much to explain to Mr Chen as there was that the imam had to explain to me. I also discovered that Mr Zhang, the imam, had studied in Qom and to my delight, spoke both Persian and Arabic. Due to his thick accent, however, I wasn't able to penetrate the words behind his sounds in either of those languages. What ensued was a comical but practical solution: I addressed him in Arabic and he wrote his responses, also in Arabic, on paper for me to read.

Sometimes, however, understanding cultural nuances proved to be much more difficult and had difficult consequences. One could not ignore the headscarves that women in Iran wear in public. This was despite the fact that their coverage waxed and waned depending on prevailing trend in the society. Complementing this was the manteau, the fitted urban cloak and equally necessary fashion accessory which although covered the body, changed in style and proclivity as often as the Paris catwalk.

In the late afternoon, our taxi driver, Mehdi, pulled into one of the smaller Iranian villages in South Khurasan at about the same time as several men were returning from the barley fields astride their donkeys. Several curious villagers were whiling their time away and sharing with each other stories of their day on the raised cement patio of the village's first house that seemed to be strategically positioned to greet us when we arrived. As I had done in earlier villages, I introduced myself and extended my hand in friendship and respect to all who were present. All was well until I came to a middle-aged woman, who caught between two models of decorum – honour and graciousness of the east and familiarity and politesse of the west – extended her right pinky which I shook hesitantly, not wanting to further offend her.

The respect that people have for that which precedes is equally fascinating. In the heart of Indonesia, on the island of Java, the most populous Muslim landmass in the world, I was reminded of this the first time I encountered Simar, 'the advisor' in the Indonesian version of the Ramayana epic. At the house of a master



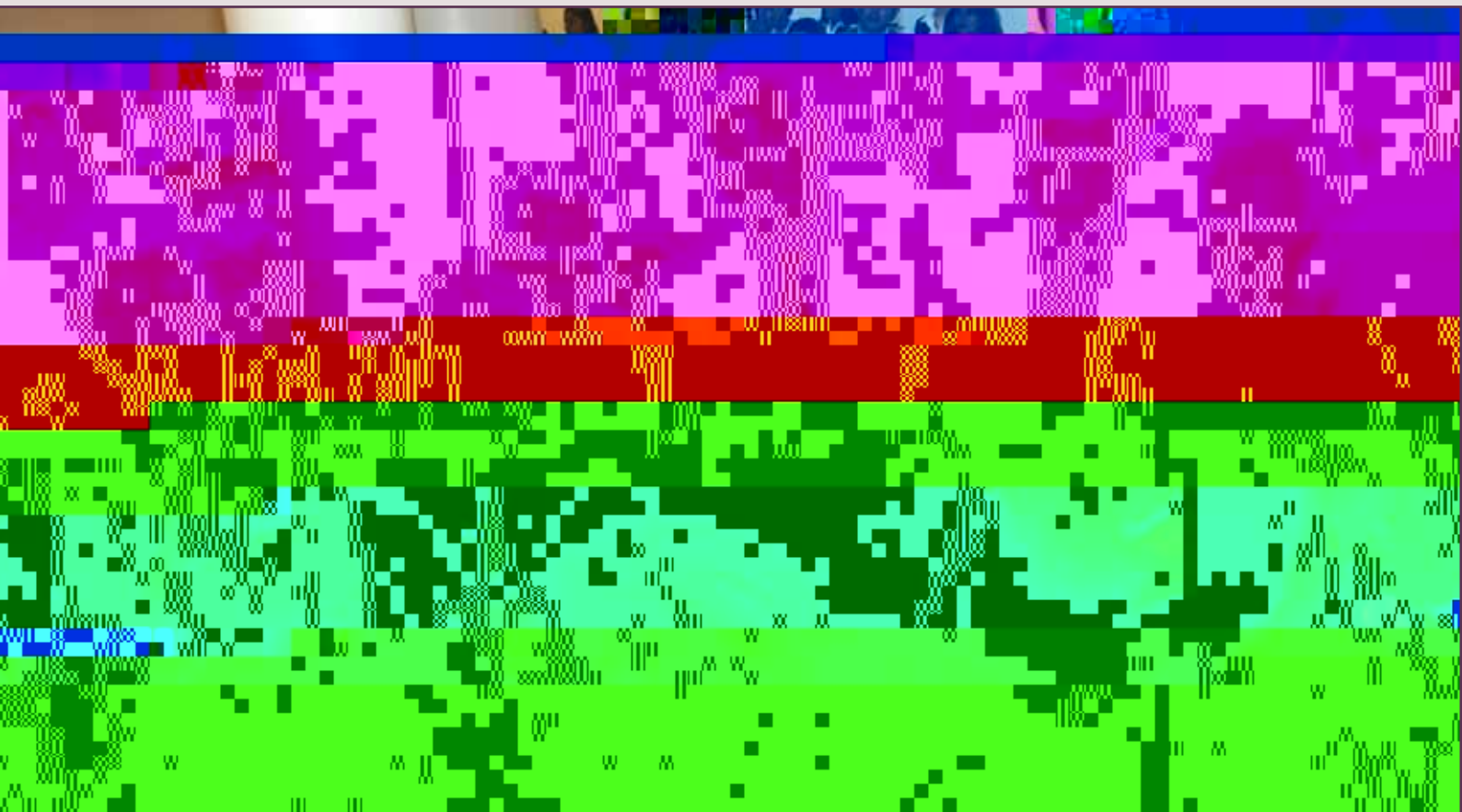
Renewing Old Friendships and Creating New Memories

Jasmin Mamani (Class of 2000)



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Alumni Reception, London, September 2007



The full-day session on 'Muslim Modernities' was inspiring and intellectually stimulating. Like a master mariner, Dr. Ayn Sajoo directed us through the seas of contemporary literature written by the foremost intellectuals and scholars, debating the idea of modernity and discussing multiple and plural modernities in societies around the world. Dr. Sajoo facilitated the critical examination of the works of Richard Dawkins, Amartya Sen, Charles Taylor, Samuel Huntington, Ali Abdul Raziq, Sayyid Qutub and Karen Armstrong.

The concept of modernity was explored within the context of intellectual thought, art and the global condition. In contrast to the notion of a single modernity that denies the richness of human identity, Dr. Sajoo stated that plural modernities create ethical space for identity and social change - but resist the "anything goes" attitude of relativism.

The workshop that followed, consolidated the concepts by applying them in practical situations. Dr. Sajoo examined various development efforts of the Aga Khan Development Network, as a means of situating the work of these institutions within the ethical vision of His Highness the Aga Khan. He illustrated the commitment of these institutions to harness the inherent pluralism of humanity to engage communities in creating their own spaces for civil society and to have a place for their own aspirations to flourish; creating an ethos that was reminiscent of our earlier discussion on multiple modernities.

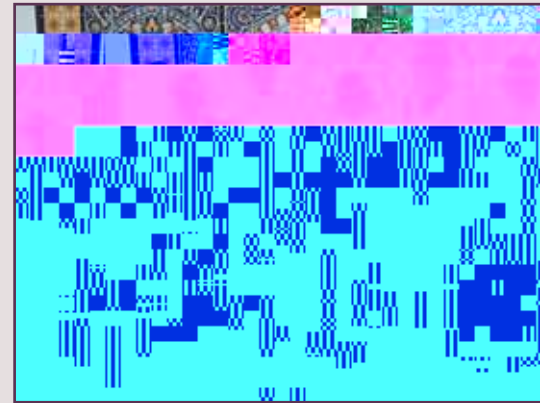
It is events such as these that make it so special to be an IIS Alumnus: to be invited to a reunion which not only brings us back to the place where it all started, but also ensures that we continue to move forward in the intellectual study of our faith; we continue to search and learn. There is a tie that binds all of us that is much greater than simply being graduates of the same institution. It is this tie that brings us back time and time again.



Alumni Reception, London, September 2007



Alumni Reunion, London, September 2007



Alumni Reception, London, September 2007

Graduation of GPISH Class of 2007, London, September 2007





Alumni reception, London, September 2007

Reflection from Alumni

(1)

As expected, the reunion of IIS Alumni in September 2007 was an interesting educational exercise, enveloped with structured social activities. The highlight of the reunion was the graduation ceremony for the GPISH Class of 2007 where we had the opportunity to meet with Prince Rahim, Prince Hussain and Princess Khaliya – it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. While on the one hand Dr. Aziz Esmail and Dr. Aryn Sajoo took care of our mental nourishment with their intellectual discourses on 8th and 9th September, on the other the Alumni Relations Co-ordinator and her team made sure that our stay in London was comfortable. These reunions are not only memorable and inspiring, they also empower participants with the knowledge of contemporary areas of learning.

(200)

Knowledge can only be utilised effectively when it is updated. It is like a tree which needs to be watered on a regular basis. No water, no fruit. Without updating knowledge, there is no difference between knowledge or the lack thereof. It is in such a context that I found the Alumni Reunion meaningful and fruitful. The Alumni Reunion 2007 was remarkable because it was not only a process of updating knowledge but it reflected a cultural diversity within Ismaili traditions where we shared our knowledge and experience. It appeared to me as a collection of fruits from different trees from different parts of the world in a global garden.

(1 - 3)

The Alumni reunion is a unique opportunity for all the alumni to meet and to share knowledge and expertise in our respective areas of study and professions. Not only did 100 or so alumni travel far and wide to attend, but this reunion was marked by the presence of Prince Rahim, Prince Hussain and Princess Khaliya. I believe that all the alumni were deeply touched by their presence. Each one of them met us in an informal environment, showed interest in what we were doing and, at times, shared their thoughts and laughter with us. In 2003, we were honoured with the presence of His Highness the Aga Khan himself. We are indeed grateful to him and his family for honouring us. Their presence shows the importance they give to the alumni as well as their aspirations and expectations of us.

This reunion opened with an illuminating talk by Dr. Aziz Esmail and an intellectually stimulating session on multiple modernities by Dr. Amin Sajoo. Both sessions were captivating, enlightening, and relevant. This was indeed a special event in the lives of all the alumni who were present. We are extremely grateful to the IIS for honouring us in this way.

(1)

Communities are fragile. Now and again they need the injection of *Communitas*. Over time, the IIS, through its Alumni reunions, particularly those that integrate the social and the intellectual, has been successful in creating and sustaining the community of its graduates. The September reunion, the latest in the line of such endeavours, both renewed long standing friendships and provided new academic discourse for the group. Its high point was the generation of momentum for achieving something big - like being the vanguard for enhancing cultural life in the Ismaili communities. Over lunch and coffee, I observed many alumni conversing about transforming this enthusiasm into practice within their local contexts. This may be the beginning of responding to the perennial challenge of connecting global thinking with local actions.



ring

Rece e e e a d ged e
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e ec a c ce c c e e ea a
Pe e a e ed a e e d d g b e e
a e c e He e l a e
a e a e e A d (e a ed) ad ...

You desire minarets?
Look to the horizon: there are enough all around

Instead, won't you sense for a moment
The inspired peace
In this newfound oasis
Of ancient Cairo

Here, in sharp contrast to desert brown,
Carpet is set solid, in grass-green
Dome comes suspended, in sky-blue
Walls float to dazzle, without frontier
Windows are made of opportunity

Here, in cool distinction from the trodden trek,
Corridors are fluid
Qibla? Why, that was already in place
When your heart took
Its awe-inspiring first-beat
In mother's womb

Here, if you feel the present peace,
Bow toward her in thanks
While bearing in mind
Whatsoever is good in you
Has its root in your father

By proof of your existence
They have already earned eternal rest
Albeit they never do...

Alnoor B. Kassam
(Class of 1991)

Walking the grounds at Wash U campus,
every tree aflame in hues of orange,
gold and red
Stately thrones on carpets of gold leaf
Each a version of the glorious divine
throne (arsh)
Each inviting Your presence

A sudden gust of wind,
A shower of gold leaves overhead,
I submit gratitude for the
blessings that fell on me,
the blessings of the Fall season

I stoop to fold one leaf into my breast pocket
a prayer that I may behold you one day with mine
own eyes,
laughing, resplendent,
a royal presence on the arsh*.

**arsh - divine throne mentioned in the Quran*

Hanif Virani
(Class of 1983)

