



PAN-AFRICAN NEWS



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Message from President PAAMA UK: New Year, New Resolutions!

My Dear Members of PAAMA UK!

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullah.

May the Lord of mankind open unto you all the gates of His mercy and may He so ordain that you are always accompanied by the supplication of His angels.

At the stroke of the midnight hour on New Year's Eve, nations across the world euphorically celebrated the arrival of the New Year with magnificent firework displays across major cities. Sadly, for many this only occasioned a pretext to drink, socialise and engage in merry-making. As Ahmadi Muslims, however, the dawn of this new year is an opportunity for us to render thanks and praise to Allah, the Almighty, for His countless blessings in the years gone and to beseech Him to bestow on us even greater bounties and shelter us under the vast mantle of His impenetrable protection in the years to come.

Alhamdulillah, 2014 was a blessed year in which Allah showered His immense grace upon the Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK. For my part, I am obliged to you all for your continued prayers, support, co-operation and obedience.

While for many the New Year will give rise to trite resolutions about eating, drinking or shopping less, for us Ahmadi Muslims the birth of the New Year should be marked by much more loftier concerns. We should resolve more than ever before to become more righteous, more sincere in our devotion and more eager in our response to the call of duty. We should resolve more than ever before to abide by the Ten Conditions of Bai'at as prescribed by the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him). We should resolve more

than ever before to obey all the dictates and directives of our Beloved Huzur (aba). The dawn of each year should remind us that we are on this earth only for a finite time and should draw our attention to the following Divine exhortation of the Holy Qur'an:



"By the testimony of time, surely, man is in a state of loss, Except those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to accept truth, and exhort one another to be steadfast."
(Al-Asr, 103:2-4)

It is my sincere hope and prayer that all members of the Pan-African Association take heed of this Heavenly guidance and that through humble prostrations before the Almighty we are able to stand tallest amongst the servants of Islam and Ahmadiyyat.

May our Lord make 2015 the year of our true spiritual awakening and may He enable us to become more devoted and dedicated to Khilafat than ever before. Ameen.

A very happy and blessed New Year to you all!

Wassalam.

Yours humbly,
Tommy Kallon.
President Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK

Quotation from the Holy Qur'an

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East or the West, but *truly* righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Book and the Prophets, and spends his money for love of Him, on the kindred and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and those who ask for *charity*, and for *ransoming* the captives; and who observes Prayer and pays the Zakat; and those who fulfil their promise when they have made one, and the patient in poverty and afflictions and *the steadfast* in time of war; it is these who have proved truthful and it is these who are truly God-fearing. (Al-Baqarah, 2:178)

لَيْسَ الْبَرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وَجْهَكُمْ قَبْلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبَرَّ مَنْ أَمَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلِئَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّنَ وَأَتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حِحٍهِ ذُوِي الْقُرْبَى وَالْيَتَامَى وَالْمُسْكِنِينَ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّلَّيْلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَأَتَى الزَّكُوْةَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبُسْرَاءِ وَالصَّرَاءِ وَجِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقِيُّونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

Actions are judged by motives (Bukhari, Kitabun Niyyat)

Through his manners and good conduct, the believer can attain the status of a person who frequently fasts and prays at night. (Abu Dawud)

The most beloved servants of Allah are those who have the best manners. (Al-Hakim)

Indeed truthfulness is righteousness, and indeed righteousness leads to Paradise. (Saheeh Muslim)

Writings of the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him)

"In the Holy Qur'an more emphasis has been laid on virtue and righteousness than on any other commandment. The reason for this is that righteousness bestows the strength to resist all vice and urges progress towards all good. Righteousness is in all circumstances a charm that guarantees security and is a citadel for safeguarding against all harm. A righteous person can avoid many vain and harmful contentions that often lead other people to ruin. They sow the seed of dissension among the people through their hasty actions and suspicions and lay themselves open to objection." (Ayyamus Solh, Ruhani Khazain Vol. 14, p.105)

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Summary of FRIDAY SERMON

22 May 2009

[The Editorial Team takes full responsibility for any errors or inaccuracies in this summary. A more comprehensive summary is available online at www.alislam.org]

Huzur recited verse 33 of Surah Najm and highlighted taqwa as the basis for attaining closeness to Allah. There are certain conditions which every human being should endeavour to fulfil in order to attain such closeness to Allah, primary among which is the effort for one to attain purification from Allah. Huzur however reiterated that despite our efforts as humans to attain purification as per the commandments and teachings of Islam, we should always bear in mind that Allah in His divine mercy is the sole conferrer of such a status. We therefore have to be humble in our pursuit for taqwa and remember that no matter how much we endeavour to achieve closeness to Allah, we should never in any circumstances accredit our efforts for attaining purification, but rather give all accreditation to Allah to Whom it is due. According to the Promised Messiah (upon whom be peace) we are commanded to purify ourselves but may not claim that we have been purified. The Promised Messiah also teaches that one should indulge in "spiritual exercise, prayer and keep company of the truthful", and according to Huzur, the writings of the Promised Messiah (upon whom be peace) is the epitome of "the company of the truthful" in this day and age.

Allah is fully aware of our motives behind every action, whether it is apparent or not and therefore knows the righteous from the wrongdoers. We should bear in mind that even Islamic practices like fasting and embarking on Hajj are rewarded by Allah only if they are purely undertaken for His sake and nothing else. In this regard, Allah purifies whoever He considers righteous based on the obedience of His commandments and the avoidance of what He has forbidden.

Despite man's efforts and achievements in the acquisition of knowledge over the centuries in order to have a better understanding of the various aspects of life, this cannot be compared to Allah's all-encompassing knowledge about the world and beyond. Even though Allah embodies such absolute knowledge about every single aspect of human life, known and unknown to man, He has given human beings the option to choose to live a righteous life or to live otherwise. Allah has on several occasions warned man about the wrath of His punishments for defying His commandments, but being ever so merciful He grants us the grace of His forgiveness. As indicated in the Holy Qur'an (53:33), Allah extends His extensive forgiveness for the minor slips of whosoever abides by taqwa and keeps his/her motives clear. As humans, we inevitably commit sin under certain circumstances due to our weak nature, and such circumstances can only be considered as minor sins if they are temporary and followed by true repentance. However, we should bear in mind that even though the Holy Qur'an makes mention of major and minor sins, there is no clear cut difference between the two, for any sin that is not totally shunned is a major sin. Therefore it is vital for one to strive to attain the fear of God, as this disinclines one from sin and such a state ascertains purification from Allah.

One of the major sins that people tend to down play is anger, which has been identified as one of the most grievous sins that can impede ones purity, especially when it cannot be controlled. Allah in the Holy Qur'an describes the believers as: 'those who put their trust in their Lord and who eschew the more grievous sins and indecencies, and, when they are wroth, they forgive.' (Al-Shura, 42:37,38).

Maulana Abdul Wahab Adam Commemorative Event

The Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (PAAMA) UK held a special Maulana Abdul Wahab Commemorative Event at Masjid Fazl on 7th September 2014.

The programme started with Tilawat by Basit Binsu Sahib and English translation by Subur Tahir Sahib. This was followed by Urdu poem written by Maulana Ataul Mujeeb Rashed Sahib about the late Maulana Abdul Wahab Adam Sahib entitled "Resplendent Jewel" which was recited by Salman Shah Sahib with its English translation presented by Zafar Bhunnoo Sahib.

After a Welcome Address by PAAMA President, Tommy Kallon Sahib, Maulana Ataul Mujeeb Rashed Sahib, Imam of the London Mosque, highlighted the many services rendered by Maulana Abdul Wahab Adam Sahib in Pakistan and the UK. This was followed by a very insightful and candid account of the family life of Maulana Abdul Wahab Adam Sahib delivered by his son, Hassan Wahab Sahib. Maulana Muhammad bin Salih, Acting Amir and Missionary In-charge Ghana, then shared an inspiring recollection on the remarkable services rendered by Maulana Abdul Wahab Adam Sahib in Ghana. The Concluding Address was delivered by Rafiq Ahmad Hayat Sahib, Amir UK, who chaired the proceedings.

Following Zuhr and Asr prayers, Huzur Aqdas (ata) graced the occasion with his august presence for lunch.

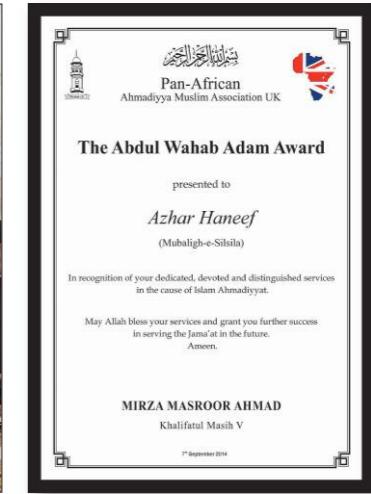
As part of the Maulana Abdul Wahab Adam Commemorative Event, the Pan-African Association, with the blessed approval of Hadhrat Ameerul Mumineen, launched a new merit award called "The Abdul Wahab Adam Award". As directed by Huzur Aqdas this award recognises missionaries of African origin who have served the Jama'at with distinction and credit.

The distinguished servants of the Jama'at who had the honour of being presented with this award in its inaugural year by Huzur Aqdas (ata) are as follows:

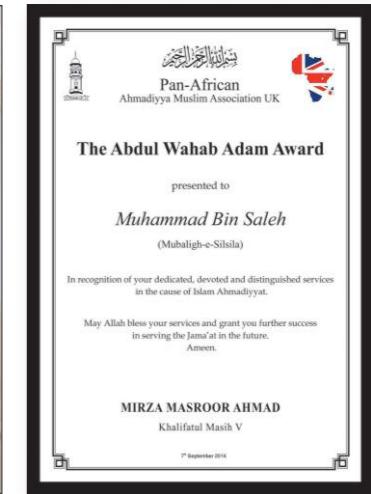
- **Maulana Muhammad Bin Salih Sahib** who trained as a missionary at Jamia Ahmadiyya Pakistan and has served the Jama'at in Ghana in various capacities as a missionary and Naib Amir. He also served as the first Missionary who opened the Zimbabwean mission. He is currently serving as the Acting Amir and Missionary In-charge of Ghana.
- **Maulana Azhar Haneef Sahib** who trained as a missionary at Jamia Ahmadiyya Pakistan and has served the Jama'at in the USA in various capacities including Missionary. He is currently serving as Naib Amir USA.
- **Maulana Ibrahim bin Yakub Sahib** who trained as a missionary at Jamia Ahmadiyya Pakistan and has served in various capacities as a missionary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. He is currently serving as the Amir and Missionary In-charge Trinidad and Tobago.
- **Maulana Bakri Abedi Kaluta Sahib** who trained as a missionary at Jamia Ahmadiyya Pakistan and has served in various capacities including Regional Missionary and Principal of Jamia Ahmadiyya in Tanzania. He is currently the In-charge of Swahili Desk, Tanzania.
- **Maulana Abdul Ghaffar Sahib** who trained as a missionary at Jamia Ahmadiyya Pakistan and has served the Jama'at in Ghana, Tuvalu and the United Kingdom in various capacities including Imam of the Baitul Futuh Mosque in London as a missionary. He is currently serving as a Regional Missionary in the United Kingdom.

After the presentation of the awards by Huzur Aqdas (ata), he led all in silent prayers before lunch was served.

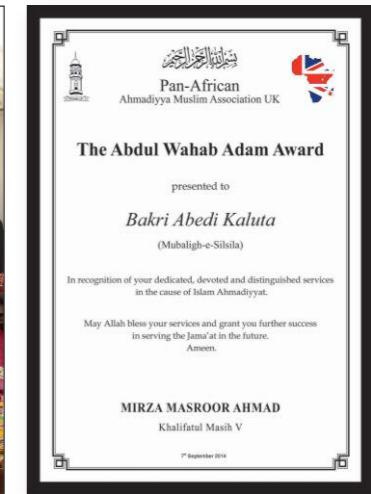
May Allah bless these humble endeavours and grant all recipients of the Abdul Wahab Adam Award further success in serving the Jama'at in future. Ameen.



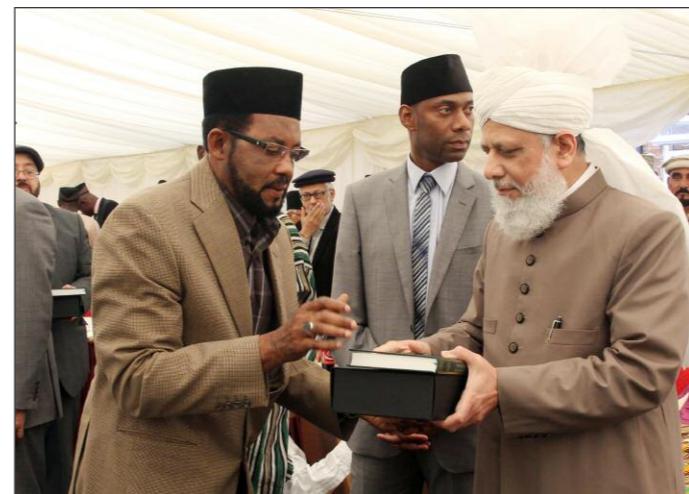
Azhar Haneef Sahib



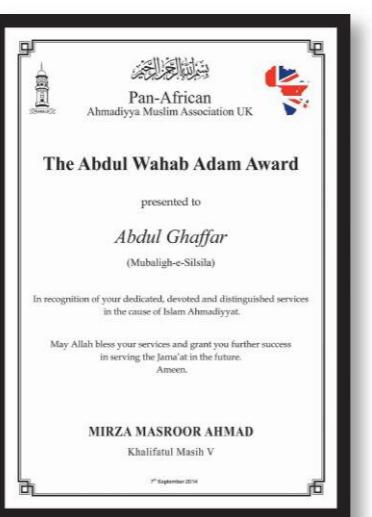
Muhammad Bin Saleh Sahib



Bakri Abedi Kaluta Sahib



Ibrahim bin Yakub Sahib



Abdul Ghaffar Sahib



There is none worthy of worship except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah



Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association Midlands Region UK

CONFERENCE OF WORLD RELIGIONS, FAITH FOUNDERS AND COMMUNITIES

LOVE FOR ALL HATRED FOR NONE
www.paama.org.uk, www.alsilam.org

A well-attended Midlands Pan-African Interfaith Peace Conference was held at the Darul Barakat Mosque in Birmingham on 15th November 2014. The event was organised by Midlands PAAMA under the supervision of the Regional President, Toby Ephram Sahib, and his Regional Executive. It was graced by the Amir UK, Rafiq Hayat Sahib; President PAAMA UK, Tommy Kallon Sahib, Regional Amir Midlands, Dr Muhammad Ashraf, and the Regional Missionary Midlands, Maulana Abdul Ghaffar Sahib. Other dignitaries included the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, MEP West Midlands and representatives from the Royal Navy.

By the grace of Allah, the Conference was well attended with over 200 participants, including 140 guests. In addition to the speeches, an exhibition of the Jama'at's activities, including books, posters and pictures of the Khulafa and Humanity First were displayed.

Tommy Kallon Sahib gave the welcome address and drew attention to the current state of affairs with unrest and disharmony the world over. He stressed the importance of conferences such as these to determine what role religion can play in establishing peace through the promotion of charity and goodwill, absolute morality, good neighbourliness, and, above all, true brotherhood.

Guest speakers included Superintendent Richard Baker of the West Midlands Police who commented on the significance of this event, saying that it affords people the opportunity to address issues pertaining to peace and work towards solutions. The charity "Stop Hate UK" operates a 24-hr help line which encourages members of the public to report hate crimes in confidence. They were represented by Claire Tabert who urged participants to double their efforts to reduce hate crimes in order to build a more cohesive society in UK. Bishop Basil Richards of the Church of God of Prophecy quoted Martin Luther King, among others, stating, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." Mr. Dave Whipp

of the Buddhist Temple, stressed that showing respect to one another is one of the most important elements of peace. Arvinder Jain, representing Jainism, expressed his belief that peace could be achieved by paying attention to our words and actions and to make sure we relegate violence to the background. Dr. Yadav Umesh of the Arya Samaj maintained that there are five main components to establishing peace: truth, non-violence, love, respect and prayers. The Rev. Anderson Denis quoted Mother Teresa saying, "Peace begins with a smile and it enlightens the environment; it makes our approach to one another easier, loving and sharing."

The Keynote Address was delivered by Rafiq Hayat Sahib, Amir UK. He commented that all the speakers at the conference seem to share the same views when it comes to religion, world peace and community cohesion. However, our dreams for global peace presently seems beyond our reach because our worldly and religious leaders have become consistently inconsistent.

Referring to the misuse of religion for political ends, Amir Sahib stated categorically that the Holy Qur'an does not give permission, under any circumstances, for extremism or terrorism. Incorrect teachings or wrong interpretation of the Word of God and self-aggrandisement for power and money, have "buried" the peaceful and tolerant teachings of Islam and other religions completely. He drew a clear example from the IS(Islamic State)'s wrong and unacceptable ambitions of turning all countries or nations into an Islamic State. He reminded participants of the Qur'anic injunction which says that, "there should not be any compulsion in religion."

Amir Sahib further explained that the Divinely established institution of Khilafat in Ahmadiyya is unique and far removed from the kind of leadership advocated by the IS. He challenged participants to do their homework by finding out why IS is growing with alarming propensity. He suggested that Russia, the West, or Middle Eastern countries may be behind the

supplying of weapons to these notorious groups. Simply put, this secret trade of weapons culminating in mass destruction are decisions taken by our politicians. He urged participants to question political leaders for endangering global peace.

Additionally, Amir Sahib suggested solutions to establishing community cohesion and global peace, advising that people should mend their ways and establish a genuine relationship with their Creator. They should aim to reduce the gap between man and his Creator and to revive the religion of Islam as

demonstrated by Islam Ahmadiyya. Along the same line, they must be champions and proponents of justice, be it social, economic or political. Piety, righteousness and fear of God should become the hallmark of our lives. Finally, Amir Sahib reminded participants that loyalty to one's country is part of faith.

The conference concluded with silent prayers led by Amir Sahib, after which gifts were presented to distinguished guests and speakers by Amir Sahib and Tommy Kallon Sahib. A complementary dinner was then served to all.



Pan-African Association holds 'Introduction to Islam' and Q&A Session

The Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (PAAMA) UK held a highly successful Tabligh Question and Answer Session on 30th November 2014 at Baitul Futuh. As part of PAAMA's efforts to promote a better understanding of Islam and engender interfaith dialogue, the event was billed as an Introduction to Islam and was followed by a lively Question and Answer Session with guests. Revered Maulana Ataul Mujeeb Rashed Sahib, Imam of the London Mosque, Missionary In-charge UK and Naib Amir UK, presided over the session and responded to a wide array of questions.

As per tradition, the programme commenced with Tilawat by Muhammad Mbaye Sahib and English translation by Abdou Rahman Cham Sahib. PAAMA President, Tommy Kallon Sahib, then gave a brief welcome address explaining the purpose of the event which he maintained was to present the attendees with an opportunity to learn about the true tenets and teachings of Islam as expounded and practiced by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Tommy Kallon Sahib then introduced Respected Imam Sahib as an Islamic scholar par excellence and an acclaimed speaker and writer.

Taking to the podium, Respected Imam Rashed Sahib gave a brief discourse on the basic tenets and teachings of Islam. In particular, Imam Sahib elaborated on the three sources of guidance in Islam which he explained were the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah and the Ahadith.

Imam Sahib's speech was followed by an insightful Question and Answer Session. The interest was palpable and the volume of questions substantial. However, due to time constraints, not every question could be answered on the day and Imam Sahib suggested that a follow up meeting be arranged so that the remaining 28 questions could be heard and responded to. Ibrahim Asante Sahib, PAAMA External Affairs Secretary, acknowledged and read out the names of all those whose questions were not taken on the day.

Silent prayers led by Respected Imam Rashed Sahib were followed by a meal served to all. By and large the event was an overwhelming success with PAAMA members travelling far and wide to attend and bring guests to the event. Alhamdolillah.



FEATURE ARTICLE

The Living God

By Tommy Kallon

The attributes of Allah are immanent and transcendental. They encapsulate all that is beautiful, sublime, praiseworthy, exalted and pre-eminent in Allah. They metaphorically describe Allah as resembling human beings yet at the same time reveal His grandeur, majesty and remoteness.

We read in the Holy Qur'an:

Allahu - Laa illaaha illaa Huwa Al Hayyul Qayyum...

Allah - There is no god but He, the Ever-Living, Self-Subsisting...
(Al-Baqarah, 2:256)

The juxtaposition of Allah's attribute of Al Hayy, that is, the Ever-Living, alongside the declaration of His Unity which is the central pillar of Islam is not coincidental and not without purpose. It not only exposes a correlation between the Singleness of Allah and His attribute of Al-Hayy but also depicts how lofty and paramount is this attribute. It implies that, like His Unity, nothing and no one compares to Allah in His attribute of Al Hayy. He alone is living through eternity with nothing co-existing eternally with Him.

Allah's attribute of Al Hayy intimates to us many subtle messages of good cheer. It highlights the fact that Our God alone is the source of all life and thus that everything in the universe is alive because of Him. It impresses upon our hearts the reality that

our God is Ever-Living – alive today as He was alive before – and that He indeed listens to our supplications when we pray to Him. It informs us that our God speaks even now as He used to speak before and gives us hope of achieving communion with Him. It tells us that neither slumber nor sleep can overtake our God and gives us all reason to repose our trust in Him as our ever-vigilant Guardian and Protector.

At the time of one's demise it bestows contentment upon the departing soul that, although he suffers separation from his dear ones, he is to be united with his Maker and Master Who is Ever-Living and is not subject to death. Likewise, upon the bereaved it confers the satisfaction that notwithstanding their loss, death is not the end for their loved one as his soul lives on in the presence and loving care of Al-Hayy, the Ever-Living God.

In summary, the concept of an Ever-Living God, Whose attributes like Him are eternal and everlasting, Whose attributes are not and never will be in cessation or suspension, indicates His worthiness to be worshipped to the exclusion of all other false deities. The concept of an Ever-Living God attracts our beings, captivates our souls, endears our hearts, stimulates our yearning and compels us to His worship. Would that the whole world would come to recognise and realise the living proofs of Allah, Al Hayy – the Living God. May He so ordain. Ameen.

UPCOMING EVENTS

31st January 2015
National Tabligh Conference

8th February 2015
Bangladesh Jalsa

14th February 2015
Office Bearers Refresher Course

28th February 2015
National Waqfe Nau Ijtema

14th March 2015
National Peace Conference

28th March 2015
Lajna Tabligh Forum

6-12th April 2015
National Talim & Tarbiyyat Class

2nd May 2015
IAAAE Symposium

10th May 2015
Lajna National Meena Bazaar

PLEASE NOTE: Jalsa dates for 2015 have changed: Confirmed dates are: **Fri 21st Aug, Sat 22nd Aug & Sun 23rd Aug**



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
Pan-African
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK



Resolution of Condolence

The National Executive of the Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK resolves to record its deepest condolences on the sad demise of Sheikh Ahmad Sanni Sahib of Nigeria at the age of 82. *Innaa lillaahi wa innaa ilaihi raaji'oon*.

The son of one of the pioneer Ahmadis in Nigeria, Sheikh Ahmad Sanni Sahib was himself a devoted and dedicated Ahmadi who served Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Nigeria over many years including as President of the Iwo Branch.

He bequeathed the Jama'at a large progeny including 14 children and several grandchildren all raised and imbibed with the fear of Allah. Among his children is the current Sadr Lajna Imaillah Nigeria.

As the father-in-law of our Respected Head of Lajna, Mrs Faosat Sanni, his death represents a sad loss to the entire PAAMA family.

By means of this resolution, therefore, and on behalf of all members of the Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association United Kingdom, we **HEREBY**:

1. Convey our condolences to Dr and Mrs Sanni and all the family of Sheikh Ahmad Sanni Sahib;
2. Pray that Allah is pleased to bless his homecoming and immerse him into His mercy and forgiveness;
3. Supplicate for the patience and steadfastness of the bereaved family that they may find solace in the acceptance of the decree of Allah in true Islamic spirit.

This Resolution of Condolence is passed at the National Executive Meeting of 28th September 2014.

Somy Kallon

Signed by the President for, and on behalf of, the National Executive of the Pan-African Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK.



LAJNA SECTION

Observance of Prayer is the best way one can be grateful to Allah, the Exalted

The following is an excerpt from an Address by Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih V, to the Lajna Imaillah members of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community on the occasion of the UK Annual Convention on 26th July 2008.

It is now obligatory on Ahmadi women to carry out their responsibilities fully as a sign of gratitude to Allah the Exalted. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah the Exalted has pointed to believing men and believing women towards their duties. Some of these commandments are only addressed to women, while others are addressed to men and women both. Some commandments are only for 'believers' (Mumineen). These encompass both men and women. Thus it is essential for an Ahmadi woman to abide by the commandments in the Holy Qur'an. Every Ahmadi woman should be mindful of this.

The first thing that is obligatory on you, an Ahmadi woman, is to pay attention to Prayers as a mark of gratitude. Allah the Exalted states that the purpose of the creation of mankind is to worship Him. It is not enjoined that men should observe Prayers and women should not. In fact, women are directed to observe Prayers in the same way as men are.

Observance of Prayer is the best way one can be grateful to Allah the Exalted. It is these Prayers that will also bring your next generations close to Allah the

Exalted and make them recognise their God. It is these Prayers that will save you in this world and the hereafter. It is the supplications you make and your alms-giving that protect you from many troubles and problems that men can inflict upon you. Thus, pay a great deal of attention to this matter.

Among the Sahabiyyaat (female Companions) of the Holy Prophet (saw), there were many who outshone men in acts of worship of God. Similarly Allah the Exalted granted the Promised Messiah (as) with righteous women who excelled in the worship of God.

The basic point is that in order to form a direct relationship with God you must continue to raise the standards of your worship. This is crucial. Then it is also compulsory to act upon the other commandments of Allah the Exalted given in the Holy Qur'an. Every Ahmadi woman should understand that it is her obligation to pay attention to Prayers, and to recite, understand and act upon the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. In fact, if women reflect on the Holy Qur'an and act upon its teachings, they can play a better role in the progress of the Community because the children they will be nurturing in their laps will also be imbued with the same hue as them. Thus you must pay great attention to this.

(Quoted from *The Review of Religions*, March 2009 edition)

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

It's all about YOU

By Hibbah Araba Saeed, Public Health Nutritionist

Perception of ideal body weight differs within different population groups, cultures and generations. An accurate perception about body weight is believed to influence healthy weight-related behaviours. In the UK and many other high-income countries, thinness is the dominant cultural preference. In Africa however, women with larger body sizes are portrayed by the community as a symbol of health, wealth, sexuality, attractiveness as well as the absence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Therefore, African women and men tend to prefer larger body sizes. This preference for a larger body weight is gradually changing among the younger African generation and among Africans living in high-income countries.

Why is overweight/obesity a problem?

Obesity is described as an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat that can impair health of humans. In England alone, obesity-related illnesses cost the NHS approximately £4.2 billion per year. Overweight and/or obesity may predispose one to various conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, stroke, gall bladder diseases, sleep apnea (unexpected cessation in breathing whilst sleeping), osteoporosis, etc.

The prevalence of overweight and obesity differ across different ethnic populations. In the UK, research has shown that obesity prevalence in women appears to be higher (38%) among Black African, Black Carribbeans (32%) and Pakistani (28%) groups when compared to women in the general population (23%). Chinese women had the lowest prevalence of obesity (7.6%).

How do I know if I am overweight/obese?

Body mass index (BMI) is one of the commonest ways. It is the ratio of the weight in kilograms to the square of height in metres of an individual. According to the World Health Organisation, normal BMI is between 18.5 to 24.99, so that anything below 18.5 would be underweight, and above 25 would be overweight, while over 30 would be considered obese. This is calculated by dividing weight (in kg) by height (in metres) squared. For example: If Mrs. X weighs 80kg and her height is 1.65m. Her BMI is $80/(1.65)^2 = 29.4$; indicating overweight.

What is the importance of weight loss?

Doing regular physical activity to reduce weight, however small the weight change, can improve health. For instance, reduce blood pressure in hypertensive individuals and reduce blood sugar in diabetics. Slight improvement in eating habits can also help maintain healthy weight.

A dietary guideline can be used for meal and snack planning. A healthy diet should include the following:

- *Whole grain (unpolished foods):* whole wheat bread; brown rice; whole maize porridge.
- *Fruits and vegetables:* Dark green vegetables such as spinach, cocoyam leaves. Fruits such as oranges, bananas, water melon, pineapple, pawpaw. Limit the intake of fruit juices.
- Avoid foods high in fats; choose fish over meat. Instead of frying foods, bake, steam, grill and boil.
- The amount of food eaten during a meal is important for healthy eating. Eating large amounts of low fat foods may increase your calories and make you gain weight. Use smaller plates and reduce amount of food.

Have an active life

Physical activity is any activity that gets you moving and it's a way to a healthier lifestyle. Regular physical activity and healthy eating are important to good health and provide the following benefits: Regulate weight by making you feel energetic; reduce some body fat thereby lowering your risk for heart disease even if you are overweight; reduce your stress level.

Do moderate activity for about 30 minutes in a day, possibly in 10 minutes bouts; use the stairs instead of the lift. Park your car some distance away and walk.

Set goals

In setting your goals, rather than focusing on attaining a certain target weight, focus on improving your health through healthy eating and increased activity. In addition, set other goals that relate to healthy life style like reducing your cholesterol level. Cholesterol is a type of fat that may be associated with risk of heart diseases. You can know your cholesterol level by doing a simple laboratory test at the hospital.

Be realistic

Your goals for healthy lifestyle should be realistic. Try new foods, fruits and vegetables you haven't had before. If you see a new recipe on television or a newspaper article concerning a healthy diet you can try it out at home. Add variety to your diet by choosing foods from all the food groups. Reduce fat and sugar in your foods/recipes and increase the amounts of fiber.

Balance what you eat with physical activity. Plan ahead to do physical exercise like walking, jogging and general cleaning. These would help you to avoid gaining extra weight.

Eat everything in moderation. It takes 20 minutes for your brain to send the signal that you have had enough to eat, so eat slowly. To control the amount you eat, serve your snacks on a plate, rather than eating straight out of the bag and also use smaller plates when eating.