

Religion

ESSAYS ON FAITH

Cheering team gives friend a final

By Mahmood Jawaid

IT WAS one of those summer Sunday mornings; I checked my e-mail after reading the Sunday Gazette-Mail. There was an e-mail of the type I always dread to receive. It was titled "Inna Lillah wa Inna Elaihay Rajeoon (We are all from God and to Him do we return)." During my school days, every once in a while my parents would inform me that so-and-so cousin of my grandfather or grandmother died. We would grieve, read the Quran and to Him do we return. During my school days, every once in a while my parents would inform me that so-and-so cousin of my grandfather or grandmother died. We would grieve, read the Quran and to Him do we return.

Once I started working, every once in a while I would get the news that so-and-so uncle or aunt of mine died. As usual we grieved, dusted off and read the Quran and went back to our normal routine. Now that I am approaching retirement age, I still get the same kind of news, except now it is about my friends and cousins. The e-mail was about a friend of mine who had passed away the previous night, and the funeral was that afternoon.

We, like adherents of other faiths, believe that our deceased will go straight to paradise. But we take this belief to its logical end. We conduct the funeral within twenty-four hours. After all, why should we keep the deceased waiting for the beautiful abode every-

body is dying to go to? So what if some of us miss the funeral? Which is more important, my last viewing of the deceased or the deceased entering paradise ASAP? Besides, we are all reminded at the beginning of each obligatory prayer, which occurs five times a day, to pray as if this is our last prayer. By the extension of this logic, when we are parting from each other, we assume that it could be our last meeting together.

I got ready for the funeral and arrived at the mosque. The casket was already there. It was the same old casket that had been used in all the previous funerals. The body was wrapped in a couple of white cotton sheets. Since my friend was going to paradise in a couple of hours, where he would be adorned in fine silk clothes, would be reclining on a raised carpeted throne encrusted with gold and precious stones in a grove of cool shade and would be drinking hangover-free wine sealed with musk, we did not waste any money on his clothing or the casket. The funeral prayer was very short. It took no more than three minutes. Once again it was based on the same logic. Why keep my friend waiting? We did not even waste time in eulogizing him. Why would he care what we thought of him when he was looking forward to meeting beautiful, pearly-eyed houris; we used to talk quite a lot about them. So after a

quick prayer, we proceeded to the cemetery. But that is where the rub was.

After laying the casket next to the grave, a couple of us went down inside the grave and made sure everything was clean and there were no bugs around. With no doctors around, we did not want him to be bitten by bugs. We then lifted the body out of the casket and gently placed it on the earthly floor of the grave. We tilted the head with the help of some stones to face towards Mecca, where all the Muslims long to go at least once in their lifetime.

Now the hard part began. My friend had to cross one more hurdle before he would be granted entry to paradise. He had to answer three questions: Who is your God; what is your religion; and who is your Prophet? His entry to paradise depended upon answering all the three questions correctly. The right answers for us Muslims are Allah (Arabic for God), Islam and Muhammad. I am sure God has different sets of questions and answers for people of other faiths; otherwise Paradise will be a lonely place indeed.

In order to make sure that my friend passed the test with flying colors, the imam (priest) told him in detail what the questions would be and what the correct answers were. I was wondering why we did not leave a cheat sheet with him, just in case he forgot the answers. Anyway, after telling

him all the answers, we laid a concrete box with false bottom over his body. We all took turns to shovel the dirt on top. We all wanted a piece of the action. In case I flunk the test when I die, my friend might remember me shoveling dirt into his grave to hasten his entry into paradise and might give me a lift there.

Once we had covered the grave with dirt, we read the Quranic verses for about half an hour. Since the questions were going to be in Arabic, we wanted him to get familiar with the Arabic sound. My friend tried four times to learn Arabic, but Arabic is not French. Even our Arab brothers have problem mastering Arabic grammar. We knew from our school days that tests were something we never looked forward to. Nervousness already set in just thinking about them. My friend must already have been nervous about the test. His nervousness must have been compounded by the fact that the test was going to be in a language he could not grasp. On top of that, he must be cowering just thinking about what will happen if he flunked the test. After all, who would want to spend eternity in a place other than paradise? We were trying to calm my friend's nerve down by reading the Quran. We were hoping that, when the angels woke him up by calling his name in Arabic, my friend would not get up in a panic

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By Manya A. Brachear
Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO — Barrington High

Retiring priest his life as he

By Jim Sullinger
McClatchy Newspapers

KANSAS CITY, MO

push to paradise

and bump his head on the concrete ceiling. Then he would be dead for good — actually for bad, since he would then not be going to paradise. If he had done his homework right, he would not even have to pay attention to the questions. All he had to do was to say “Allah” after the first question, “Islam” after the second and “Muhammad” after the third. The angels do not know anything about cheating, so they do not scramble the questions.

Once we finished reading the Quranic verses, we moved back about forty steps in a manner similar to an infantry's tactical retreat. It was then that two angels were supposed to descend into his grave and start the questioning. Once again, to give him the final push, we regrouped in phalanx formation and started yelling the answers. We were hoping that he heard the answers and answered the questions correctly. And again, I was wondering why we did not use a bullhorn instead of yelling, or even leave a cell phone in his grave with the speaker on. We were behaving more like cheerleaders, except that most of the cheerers were hairy men. Even though there were some women in the ranks, they were all clad in long black clothes. We were cheering a team that consisted of only one man who was lying dead about six feet under the ground and facing two mighty angels.

It should have taken no more than a couple of minutes to answer the three questions. But we did not want to take any chances. What if he got stuck? What if he was dumb-founded? We kept on yelling the answers for about half an hour. He had to be really dumb, if he, with all this help, could not ace the test. In that case he did not deserve to go to paradise. I know, except for learning Arabic, my friend was pretty smart. He should not have had any problem passing the test. After half an hour of yelling, our voices became hoarse so we gave up. We had done the best we could to give my friend the final push to paradise. We then headed back to the mosque and ate a nice meal prepared by my friend's family. It was their way to show appreciation for us helping my friend pass the test, hopefully. I pray that he made it to paradise because I will need a mighty heave from him when I die.

Jawaid is the author of “Secrets of Angels, Demons, Satan, and Jinns — Decoding Their Nature through Quran and Science,” and “Atom to Adam — How, When and Where in the Light of Quran, Bible and Science (A Study of Human Origin),” both published by InstantPublishers.com (<http://instantpublisher.com>) and “Lessons from the Qur'an,” published by Ta-Ha Publishers (www.taha.co.uk). These books are available from Amazon.com (www.amazon.com) and Ta-Ha Publishers (www.taha.co.uk), respectively.

He also is an engineer who lives in Cross Lanes.

est is ready for ride of e cycles to fight poverty

one long ride of 50 to 80 miles.

On Sunday, Ruhl completed his final Mass as pastor of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church.

Eleven members of the Cycling for Change team are from the Kansas City area. The