

BREAKING THE FAST TOGETHER

A dinner and dialogue to break the fast during Ramadan
with members of the Muslim Community

MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY
University of British Columbia

Monday October 25, 2004

Presented by
The Canadian Unity Council and UBC Museum of Anthropology

EVENT REPORT

The Canadian Unity Council



Le Conseil de l'unité canadienne

MUSEUM of
Anthropology
at the University of
British Columbia



A NOTE ON THE CUC AND THE MOA

The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia is world-renowned for its collections, research, teaching, public programs, and community connections. It is also acclaimed for its spectacular architecture and unique setting on the cliffs of Point Grey. The mission of the Museum of Anthropology is to investigate, preserve, and present objects and expressions of human creativity in order to promote understanding of and respect for world cultures.

For further information, consult MOA's web portal at www.moa.ubc.ca

The Canadian Unity Council (CUC) is a charitable, national, non-governmental, non-partisan organisation devoted to promoting greater knowledge and appreciation of Canada through a variety of educational and exchange programs. Its mission is to promote knowledge of Canada and foster citizens' participation in public affairs with the goal of enhancing the political, economic and social unity of this diverse country. The CUC opened a regional office for British Columbia and the Yukon in October of 2001.

For further information, consult CUC's web portal at www.cucweb.ca

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Breaking the Fast Together

PRESENTED BY THE CANADIAN UNITY COUNCIL
AND
UBC MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the evening of 25th October, 2004 more than ninety citizens came together to break the fast on an evening during Ramadan at UBC's Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver. The occasion was organized jointly by the Canadian Unity Council and the Museum of Anthropology of the University of British Columbia.

About half the participants were non-Muslims of varied faith and cultural traditions. The other remaining participants were Muslims from equally diverse Islamic communities of Greater Vancouver. The participants joined in a four hour long program that included Qur'anic recitation, speeches and group dialogues during the dinner. They listened to the *Adhan* or call to prayer and communally broke the fast with water and dates at the precisely prescribed time at sunset.

A Musqueam prayer by Debra Sparrow reminded the audience that they were meeting on Musqueam traditional territory where the Museum of Anthropology stands. Later a prayer by the Reverend Dr. Robert Burrows underlined the interdenominational make up of the meeting. The participants listened to childhood memories of a Dr. Hanna Kassis, Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies at UBC and they listened to breaking of the fast sonnets of poet Daniel Moore which were read by Seemi Ghazi, lecturer of Classical Arabic at UBC. A gift of non-perishable food items assembled for donation to the Kettle Friendship Society by the participants was a gesture representing the significance of Ramadan and the breaking of the fast, or *Iftaar*, and for the building of a united and diverse Canadian civil society.

The final session of the evening consisted of presentations by twelve rapporteurs – one from each table. These reports indicated that the dialogues were about sharing of personal stories and responding to queries on some basic facts about Islam. The rapporteurs, who represented over ninety discussants, reflected on the openness of Muslims and non-Muslims alike towards appreciation of each other's faith and cultural traditions. The event forged relationships during the four hours of the dinner-table dialogue and contributed to learning and living in a pluralistic society.

FULL REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS¹

RAMADAN

“The fast is meant to teach discipline, self-restraint, and generosity...

One of the benefits of Ramadan is an increased compassion for those who lack the necessities of life and awareness of how it feels to be hungry and needy. It is also a month of self-purification and reflection, meant to create a renewed focus on spirituality amidst our busy lives.”

*Excerpt from “The essence of Ramadan for Muslims” in the Vancouver Sun – October 15, 2004
by Tabera Kassamali, Academy of Learning Islam, Richmond*

Citizens of Vancouver from diverse faith and community backgrounds met at the Museum of Anthropology on the evening of 25th October 2004 to celebrate the breaking of the fast during one evening of the holy month of Ramadan. The evening was organized by Canadian Unity Council (CUC) regional office for British-Columbia and the Yukon in partnership with UBC’s Museum of Anthropology. The Canadian Unity Council planned this function following a similar one in Calgary in the fall of 2001. There were two parallel functions held on the same evening organized by the CUC, one in Calgary and the other in Toronto. The Museum of Anthropology viewed *Breaking the Fast Together: a Dinner Table Dialogue* as an intercommunity activity following the successful “Spirit of Islam” exhibition that resulted after three years of collaboration with the members of the Muslim community of Vancouver.

Breaking the Fast Together was an evening of listening and sharing with some time for prayers and reflection. Approximately half of the participants were Muslims of various persuasions and cultures within Islam. Guests began to arrive as soon as the doors opened at 5 pm. Diversity of ethnic and faith backgrounds was apparent in the presence of members of the Jewish and Christian communities as well as a variety of individuals who adhere to no particular faith.

In the reception area there was a table marked ‘donation’ with two large baskets of food and sweets besides which the guests placed parcels of food that they had brought along with them. This donation was marked for a Vancouver charity called the Kettle Friendship Society, which assists

¹ This report was drafted by Sultan Somjee and edited by Gisèle Yasmeen. Thanks to Wendy Cooper for formatting.

clients facing mental health challenges. The Food donation was symbolic of a tradition that many Muslims world wide follow during Ramadan. *Iftaar* food is offered to those in need before one partakes in one's own family dinner at the time of breaking of the fast. Visibility of the donation table during the four hours of the evening event and the fact that it was the participants, both Muslims and non Muslims, who contributed to the collection of the food for charity, had two immediate effects. One was the feeling of involvement in the event and the second learning together in a simple and practical way about Islam which encourages sharing of what one can afford with those in need. This was a collective multi-faith contribution and at the same time a public gesture that signified the event itself: unity and concern for other citizens.

The Kettle Friendship Society

The Kettle Friendship Society began 25 years ago providing support and services to mental health consumers in Vancouver. The Kettle's mandate is to provide an open door drop-in. The Society is a complimentary service to the mental health teams and other organizations in the city. Fifty per cent of The Kettle's members use no community services at all and fear the stigma of the mental illness diagnosis. Many are compromised with poor nutrition, Hepatitis C and HIV.

The Kettle is a cost-effective alternative to over-burdened hospital and mental health facilities. It costs over \$350 per day to provide hospitalization for mental health patients. In contrast the Kettle provides support and services daily for only \$50 per user.



THE EVENT FORMAT

The event was organized with short addresses in the beginning, an hour for group conversations at the dinner tables and finally, presentations of group dialogues that took place at the twelve tables. Seemi Ghazi's readings from Ramadan Sonnets and a personal narrative about a childhood memory of a day in the month of Ramadan by Professor Hanna Kassis served as keynote addresses for the evening and provided "food for thought" and discussion.

The four hour long evening agenda was planned in two parts at two different spaces at the Museum of Anthropology. The first was in the Great Hall and the second in the Lower Lobby.

This report follows the two part arrangements in sequence as they happened in the Great Hall and the Lower Lobby of the museum.

OPENING CEREMONIES IN THE GREAT HALL

The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was Jill Baird, Curator of Education and Public Programs at the Museum of Anthropology and co-chair of the Advisory Committee for Breaking of the Fast Together. She began by providing background on the rationale for the gathering. She also acknowledged the past director of the Museum of Anthropology, Dr. Michael Ames for his support of this collaboration with CUC and members of the Muslim community of Greater Vancouver.

Jill Baird said that some of the ideas that explained the purpose of the event were common concerns



and respect for difference and a firm belief in the role of education as a critical instrument for developing and sustaining a civil society. The late Paolo Freire, a great Brazilian educator, stressed the importance of education as a primary instrument for developing a democratic society. She mentioned Governor General Adrienne Clarkson who had said Canada's challenge for the 21st

century would be how we deal with difference. She also referred to the Lafontaine-Baldwin lecture by Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin who had stated that the one problem that dominated history was how we deal with those who were different from us.

"We all want to create and preserve legacies that will make the world a better place"

Jill Baird, Co-Chair, Breaking the Fast Together

Jill Baird asked a question central to Canadian identity: "How can we better manage difference?" The method was straightforward - bring people together in a unity of purpose to study, represent, and celebrate our differences. "We do this through participatory engagements or working partnerships. Tonight we do this in the form of a dinner and dialogue".

MC Jill Baird then introduced the next speakers:

In his welcome address, Dr Anthony Shelton, the new Director of Museum of Anthropology, paid tribute to past MOA directors Ruth Phillips and Michael Ames. He acknowledged the chairs and the staff of the two partner institutions for organizing the event and welcomed the participants to the dialogue that was for the building of "a richly textured civilization" for the generations to come.



Dr Anthony Shelton explained how today "museums are fashioning new significant models based on collaboration, mutual respect, and commonly shared core values". He commented on the role of museums in the post colonial era and an increasingly globalised world in fostering the evolution of creative traditions and multiculturalism while also learning to represent "this rich canopy" in the 21st. century when cultural literacy is of utmost importance.

In his closing remarks the MOA Director added that UBC's Museum of Anthropology had always been a place of dialogue between peoples and that MOA's staff are engaged in fashioning and encouraging this dialogue.

A Musqueam prayer was offered by Debra Sparrow. She outlined the shared traditions of First Nations and others in the belief in a Creator. She remarked on the event as a "building of bridges" between peoples. She honoured the spirits of the ancestors and of all the prophets because all people



pray to the same Great Spirit. Better understanding of each other honours God and the ancestors and the sharing of food is a universal tradition enabling communities to live in harmony.

Imam Hassan Mirkazemi from the Shia Community of BC then recited a verse from the Qur'an in Arabic which was followed by a translation by Michael Symons. The verse (183) was from the second *sura* of the Holy Qur'an prescribing fasting as obligatory to all Muslims.

A welcome address on behalf of the CUC was given by Farouk Verjee who was the Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee and past governor of Canadian Unity Council. In his speech Mr Verjee honoured the First nations and their rich and ancient heritage. He said that Canadian Unity Council's goal was to promote citizen's participation in public affairs and knowledge of the diversity of Canada. Due to the recent



unfortunate events, Muslims had a special responsibility to better inform their fellow citizens on the faith of Islam as distinct from the politics of the Muslim world. In his speech Mr Verjee acknowledged the work put in by the Director of CUC BC/Yukon, Gisèle Yasmeen, her assistant Wendy Cooper and Jill Baird and her colleagues Karen Benbassat and Salma Mawani at the museum. He also recognized the presence of all the Governors of CUC.

Imam Zijad Delic gave a short prelude to the meditative time before the official fast-breaking time. He explained that the moments preceding the *Adhan*, or call to prayer, was for supplication and that coming together for prayers and sharing of the meal was in the spirit of making a better future and a better country together.

At 6.08 pm the call to payer, was recited by a member of the Advisory Committee, Mr Farouk Elesseily, in the tradition of a *muezzin*. Participants heard the call to prayer from a distance and were invited to break the fast with Muslim participants by drinking water and eating a few dates.

Prayers were offered in the Ceramics Gallery with non-Muslims present as observers. For many this was the first time that they witnessed such prayers first hand.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES, DINNER AND DIALOGUE

The second part of the event after the *Maghrib* prayer was in the Lower Lobby of the MOA where 12 tables were set up each seating eight people. MC Jill Baird gave an introduction to the next speakers. Rev. Burrows said a non denominational grace. This was followed by the two keynote speakers.

Seemi Ghazi, lecturer in Arabic Literature at UBC, was the first speaker. She read five moving sonnets on Ramadan entitled *The Inevitable; Adam's Indelible Imprint; Inestimable Water; When the Sun goes down and Jealous Lover*². Metaphors and images written by poet Daniel Abd al Hayy Moore for each day of fasting added to the sense of a tradition and in that were evoked feelings that are universally associated with Ramadan in the Muslim world. Referring to the Muslim prayers that the participants had witnessed in the Ceramics Gallery that evening, Seemi Ghazi said that to bow was the most important moment in the prayer because in that posture the heart was above the head that is our mind.



Professor Hanna Kassis gave a touching and spontaneously delivered account of memories of his childhood days during Ramadan. It was a narration of one day from sunrise to the calm of the day as sunset approached and the fast is broken. His memories were of interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Middle-East at this time of year with emphasis on the aesthetic dimensions of the fasting period and the rekindling of ties with family and friends.

Professor Kassis described the moments of restraint during Ramadan, for example, how mothers of his friends and other women must have felt as they prepared the meal for their families while fasting themselves. In graphic images, Professor Kassis talked of colourful



² For full text see the appendices.

lanterns on the minaret, lit at the moment of the breaking of the fast; of the happiness in the hearts that prevailed at the setting of the sun and the joyful sounds that filled the air. He also mentioned the importance for Muslims to feed the poor and the hungry.

Professor Kassis drew of the difference at a personal level in his family between himself and his scientist brother as a way to reflect on the differences within the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities. “My brother and I are quite different in our interests and professional pursuits,” he recounted. “I cannot understand a thing about his field, neither he mine. Our tastes are different but our values are the same. I can either choose to shun my brother because we are different, or have brotherly love for him because, in spite of our differences, we are brothers. The choice is obvious.”

REPORTING BACK FROM THE DIALOGUES

“Overall, I feel that every person at our table benefited tremendously from the event. We were able to share ideas, feelings and laughter” concluded Ali Amir Pirbhai - rapporteur



Gisèle Yasmeen, the Director of BC/Yukon Canadian Unity Council, gave a summary of dialogue objectives and the process. She reminded the group about the discussion guidelines, the importance of the “Ice-Breaker”³ exercise and the need to record the discussion.

Each rapporteur’s report was different and in that reflected on the diversity of the dialogues that took place during dinner. Some reported on the questions that were asked about Ramadan. Generally the twelve presentations by both Muslim and non-Muslim rapporteurs showed there was a genuine interest by non-Muslims to learn about Ramadan and Islam and by Muslims to share their practice and values of faith. The reports indicate that the participants had an opportunity to ask some very fundamental questions on the customs and cultures in Muslim families of Vancouver. One person had not heard about Ramadan before this event and wanted to know more. They often shared humour and laughter. The discussions were not based on politics or theology but on everyday

³ See the Appendix for information on the ice-breaker exercise.

life and also touched on what the participants had observed about Islam mainly from the media. For example, someone wanted know why Muslims ‘bow so much while praying’. In a way the presentations were in themselves twelve examples of styles and content of sharing and exchanging of information and reflections underlying deeper concerns. A selection of these examples of discussion topics, questions that were asked and some quotations are given below.

Table 1

In her report Maryam Abbasi, the rapporteur, gave the gist of the discussions at the table. She said that the acceptance of pluralism and respect for differences in beliefs was contained in spirit of various religions. The same spiritual joy comes from going to the church, mosque or synagogue. It is good to be inclusive of all faiths. Quoting from Dalai Lama she said that to have exposure to many religions was good for the soul. In fact all religions carry the same message of love, harmony and justice. Hence, the sharing of religious experiences helps us to grow spiritually.

Table 2

Rapporteur David Fushtey talked of Ramadan as a time for austerity and community. It was also a time for sharing ‘heart-warming’ stories from earlier memories of preparing food while also fasting and about the smells and tastes which follow the breaking of the fast. These were the days for family and friends and extended community to be together. The *Iftaar* meal is like the “table of Abraham” where all are welcome to share, irrespective of faith. Ramadan is a month of comfort but also of contemplation and joy. “There is also the technology of Ramadan”. TV is now part of the memories. One mother of a five-year old child noted that her child would check the Internet for the phases of the moon and timing of Ramadan fasting. And there is a literacy of Ramadan as well.

The Muslim Women in Da’wah thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this event. It was very well organized and enjoyed by all. We look forward to future events. Thank you all for the efforts put into this event.

Khadija Saidi

The following paragraph by David Fushtey brings home the meaning and the prevailing ambience at the event:

“At the table there was a soft-spoken, learned gentleman, who was a leader in British Columbia on cross-cultural studies and on the Middle East. He seemed to reflect values and humility of many at the event. He was a Palestinian Christian in his mid-70s, who studies religions and languages. Sitting beside him was an exuberant young man in his mid-20s. He was an Arabic-speaking Canadian Jew who had also studied in Israel. Also sitting at the table was a Canadian Anglican from the prairies who writes thoughtful and probing features for the written media”

Table 3

Dr Martin Brokenleg reported that Table 3 was an “incredibly social table”. Ramadan is a family time when the members spend a lot of time with each other during the evening meal time unlike other days. At times the group digressed to discussing current events such as who was going to win the American elections. They talked about ethnic restaurants in Vancouver and also discussed general differences among Muslim people.

Table 4

Deborah Foster was the rapporteur at this table. The group compared and contrasted fasting traditions of Jews, Christians and Muslims. This table focused on how women as mothers and wives working inside and outside the homes managed during the busy month of Ramadan. The answer from Muslim participants was that they involved the family and planned the month’s activities well in advance.

Table 5

At this table the participants dialogued in French. Saïda Ouchaou, the rapporteur, gave three quotations that reflected on the discussions: 1) “When you travel, you see that there are very few real differences among people” – a translation of a Gujarati proverb; 2) “In France, Muslim families listen to the radio to hear the prayer for the breaking of the fast during Ramadan” according to one participant’s recollections; and 3) “We can have our differences but when we share together at the dinner table, the differences disappear” contributed by a third table participant.

Table 6

Rapporteur John Halani said that his table featured a discussion on French colonialism in North Africa which is largely Muslim. The group also talked about Muslims who maintain conservative practices compared to those with more liberal views. There is a wide spectrum of Muslim cultures worldwide. He noted that no one religion is superior than another. Two important principles of

relationship building are confidence and compassion. The group also touched on the current debate about the introduction of *Shariah* law in certain parts of Canada.

Table 7

Rapporteur Danielle da Cruz said that Muslims believe in all the prophets of the Bible. There are many branches within Islam. Fasting is a time for family to get together and for charity.

Table 8

Itrath Syed spoke of a discussion at their table that focused first on different fasting traditions in different countries. They also discussed power structures in different countries and the importance of education.

Table 9

Rapporteur Patrick Kelly began by saying that young people have the solutions we were looking for – the older generation simply has to listen. Ramadan is a time to remember all the things that God has given us and to be good to all. It's a special time when the family comes together.



Table 10

At Table 10 there were three Christians and two Muslims, two of whom were imams. Dr. Godwin Eni was the rapporteur. The report was presented in terms of questions. What is Ramadan and why do Muslims fast and what is the significance of it? Interestingly there were questions on prayer postures such as: Why do Muslims bow and kneel repeatedly during prayers? There was also a discussion on how can Canadians understand each other better given different religions, beliefs and cultures. The rapporteur summarized the table dialogue in these words:

“It is not so much that we believe in one thing or the other, or that we follow different paths to achieve the same spiritual goal. What we need is a seat at the common table of humanity for all beliefs regardless of chosen path, and to accommodate our differences through continuous dialogue”.

Table 11

Anndraya Luui, the rapporteur, reported that there was a discussion at her table on multiculturalism in Canada and on ‘how to fast’. It was not the fast but the intention to fast and the integrity of the

one who fasts that was important. She also talked about how evocative were the Ramadan Sonnets in term of describing the ‘sense and texture of food’ such as dates, the ‘material from God’.



I just wanted to take off my hat to you and your team for last night's event. It was one of the most enjoyable evenings I have been to in a long while and you all did a superb job in planning and implementing the evening. From the opening remarks / ceremonies to the dinner and conversation (and the delicious food), as well as the show stopping presentations by Seemi and Hanna, I really think you made a very strong impression on everyone there. I made some great contacts and thoroughly enjoyed the table I was at. I'm sure some serious thought went into planning out each table's guests. Again, my sincere congratulations on a fabulous evening.

- Farrab Jinha-Devji, Principal, Elite Public Relations Inc.

Table 12

Ali Amir Pirbhai was the rapporteur at this table. There were many short and precise questions asked on the practice of Islam. These questions included: How do Muslims balance their day-to-day and religious obligations during Ramadan? At what age must children start fasting? Can Muslims marry non-Muslims? Why are dates used to open the fast? These questions led to a discussion on the spiritual and physical benefits of fasting, contexts of some traditions in history and comparisons with non-Muslim traditions of fasting were drawn during the discussion. Some non-Muslim members at the table talked about their prior exposure to Ramadan. There was a large spectrum in terms of prior knowledge – one person had never heard about Ramadan prior to that evening whereas another person was very familiar with the principles and beliefs because she had Muslim friends. “Overall, I feel that every person at our table benefited tremendously from the event. We were able to share ideas, feelings and laughter” concluded the rapporteur.

VOTE OF THANKS

Finally Dr Roslyn Kunin gave a vote of thanks. She first acknowledged the event taking place on Musqueam territory and thanked the two keynote speakers, Hanna Kassis and Seemi Ghazi, for their thoughtful presentations.

Professor Kunin thanked the staff of the CUC and MOA and all the members of the Advisory Committee. Special thanks were given the HSBC Bank Canada for their generous financial contribution and to Hakim Halloo also for his generous donation to offset part of the costs of videotaping the event. Farouk Ellesseily was thanked for the gift of sweet dates for breaking the fast and Canadian Choice Wholesalers for the two large food baskets displayed at the donation table. Professor Kunin thanked Esther Benbassat for delivering the food donation to The Kettle Friendship Society the next day and explained briefly how the Society provides meals at a very minimum fraction of the cost to mental health patients.

Professor Kunin also thanked Maurya Restaurant for catering that evening.

After the vote of thanks MC Jill Baird called upon the co-chair of the Advisory Committee, Farouk Verjee, and closed the event at precisely 9 pm with a note of appreciation to all the participants for attending this special Ramadan evening at the Museum of Anthropology.

This is a special thank you for inviting me to your wonderful program.

Also, thank you for allowing my daughter to be there. She really had a nice time. Now that I think about it, it was a blessing that she came along because this is the age at which we need to start to building bridges to make our world a better place to live.

Once again, thank you very much and keep up the good work.

- Asgar Husain

APPENDICES

FIVE OF THE RAMADAN SONNETS BY DANIEL ABD AL HAYY MOORE

THE INEVITABLE

It's like practicing for death. No food or drink
during daylight hours no matter
what, in the
heat of summer or
cold of winter,
and no way out of it but through
sickness, pregnancy, menstruation, madness or
travel.
So that

it's something that comes
inevitably each year, like it or not, whether or not
you've got a knack for it, and
some do, and love to fast, and
thrive on it, but
I do not, yet

each year it makes its visit, and year after
year it builds up to be a
sweet thing,

which makes it like death, the way it's
always on the
horizon, and an
absolute obligation, which must be

why Muslims often die well. They've had a
lifetime of Ramadans tenderizing them
for The Inevitable. And The

Inevitable surely comes.

ADAM'S INDELIBLE IMPRINTS

And we're beaten on the ground of our
own physical being
like someone taking the
end of a plank and
beating it in a rock,

we're beaten on the earth by our own
earthiness of being born, we're

beaten against the curved sides of
Father Noah's boat, against the
prison where beautiful
Joseph languished, against the
stake Abraham was tied to, against the
Ka'ba where the
blackened stone of light is kissed as we
swiftly pass by it to melt
back into the circling herd of
similar hungry selves, beaten
like old clothes, washed in the
downstream and then
stamped on by our

own feet which have
Adam's indelible imprint. The

fast beats us with our own
slaves on the
hard rock of
physicality, it

takes us to the edge and makes us
look down,

it takes us to where there is
no escape and closes in, it

is the release of no release on a
day that does
end.

even an eagle leaps into
no sure space,
hovers on an updraft

INESTIMABLE WATER

What is it that
once each year one fifth of the
earth's population fasts during the
daylight hours?

The globe turning in its usual solitary orbit
basking in the sun on one side, its
backside bathed in darkness, and

one out of five people among its trees and
telephone poles
refrains from eating, drinking or lovemaking

from the Moment of dawn to the
setting of the sun, marked,

as in Morocco, by the boom of cannons,

or the call to prayer and a glass of
water and some dates, or

unknown expectations in deep desert wastes

or tables mounded with piles of sweets, peeled
fruit, frothy
juices, nuts, things rolled in
sugar, or

as it was my first Ramadan in
Berkeley, California just become
Muslim. flew back from two
weeks in Hawaii. just in
time to start fasting, alone, not quite
sure of the procedure, and I
performed the *Tarawih* prayers standing with a
Qur'an in my hands reading out the
English, and the

rest of the people in the house left me alone,
so used to my good-time living, suddenly
cut off from the fiesta, not
eating or drinking, the
strange one who lives
up in the attic and
starves himself for

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN

When the sun goes down
the flood begins. Lettuce leaves open like
orchids
in spot lit clarity,
bread flowers, fruits mature and drop.
Grass green as emerald
flows with the
currents of the sea.

This ovoid earth
turns through dark and light,
its flesh drowsing
or aching awake with the
cool night or the
hot day. It fasts and then

feeds on fresh breezes and
deep tropical
currents of the sea.

The garden we planted next to the house with
seedlings already started in little green plastic
boxes
is pushing up and out by that
cunning combination of
sunlight and water that warms and
soaks the soil seeds live in, in their
green slow-motion rhythm
parallel with the curling
currents of the sea.

And when we fast during daylight hours, we turn
the whole thing upside-down. so that
day becomes night,
but we walk through the
visions of our sleep and
interact with
other wide-awake sleeper
going along their
rounds ill tile humdrum currents of the
social sea.

And when the sun goes down
the earth opens up for us,
day begins, we break our
fast, and
enjoy the feast
most flowingly,
the table is spread, dishes are
piled with glistening dates, water-glasses
beckon refreshingly. The

night is on a slow barge down a
long river on its
gradual way to join the glimmering
currents of the sea.

JEALOUS LOVER

The fast is also like
being so racked with love
you can't eat. Tossed and
wrenched and high and dry with
single-minded devotion and expectation that no
single

bite or sip can pass our lips, our
eyes are parched, throat dry,
head gone elsewhere almost entirely, and

only with extreme concentration can we
perform our usual tasks with anything
like normality.

It sweeps us off our feet. It's
bigger than we are, It goes
off with all our thoughts.

It's a jealous lover.



That was a wonderful event last night and Bob and I felt privileged to attend it. Beautiful setting, and marvelously orchestrated... .. Thank you so much for including us – we enjoyed the people, the food, the conversation – and learned a great deal.

- Joan Burrows

LIST OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Print

Perry, Malcolm - Events Column *The Vancouver Sun* Saturday, October 23, 2004 p B4

Johnson, Chris - "Muslims and Jews share food together with Unity Council" *The Vancouver Sun* Tuesday, October 26th, 2004 p B2

Ouchaou, Saïda - "Leçon de partage sur fond le Ramadan" *L'Express du Pacifique* Monday, November 8th, 2004 p 7

Television

CITYPULSE TONIGHT (CITY-VAN), Vancouver, 25 Oct 2004, 11:02PM, Length: 00:01:00, Ref# 411F5B-9 - Anchor/Roger Petersen: Reach: 22,000

PROGRAM

5:30	Master of Ceremonies	Jill Baird – Event Co-Chair Curator of Education and Public Programs, MOA
	Welcome to MOA	Anthony Shelton Director, MOA
	Musqueam Prayer	Debra Sparrow Musqueam Nation
	Qu’ranic Recitation	Hassan Mirkazemi Shia Community of BC
	English Translation of Qu’ranic Recitation	Michael Symons Az-Zahraa Islamic Centre
	CUC Welcome and background on event	Farouk Verjee - Event Co-Chair Past Governor – CUC
6:00	Introductory explanation of breaking the fast	Imam Zijad Delic Richmond Mosque
6:08	Adhan Call to Prayer	Farouk Elesseily BC Muslim Association
	~ Breaking of the Fast ~	
6:30	Dinner and non denominational grace	Rev. Dr. R. Burrows
	Introduction of guest speakers and keynote addresses	Jill Baird Master of Ceremonies
7:00	Summary of dialogue objectives and process	Gisèle Yasmeen Director – BC/Yukon Canadian Unity Council
8:15	Report back from tables	
8:45	Vote of thanks, wrap up and closing remarks	Roslyn Kunin CUC Governor
9:00	Adjourn	

EVALUATION FORM RESULTS

Evaluation Forms Received: 52

QUESTIONS	AVERAGE RESULT
1) Was the gathering organized in an efficient way? (1 = not efficient, 10 = extremely efficient)	9.27
2) Did you find the content of the event valuable? (1 = not at all, 10 = extremely valuable)	8.90
3) How would you rate the quality of the speakers? (1 = very low quality, 10 = extremely high)	8.80
4) Would you be interested in attending similar events in the future? (1 = not interested at all, 10 = very interested)	9.39

5) What did you like about this event? (open-ended comments)

Fantastic event – the religious ceremonies and sharing of the members from the Muslim community.

J'ai apprécié qu'il se produise durant une période agitée autour des musulmans de part le monde. Touts confessions confondues dans un événement comme celui-là ne peut qu'être fortement applaudie.

Mixture of people, round tables good for discussion, learned great deal.

What I really liked was that I had the opportunity to really know the meaning of fasting. I was lucky enough to sit on a table where the Muslims seated with me taught me the true meaning of "Breaking the Fast Together".

The friendliness of the people.

Bringing everyone together.

Meeting people of different cultures and faiths.

Excellent gathering of persons from different backgrounds and religions. Food was also excellent.

Events like this help break down the barriers, very helpful in bringing the community together and remove the misunderstandings.

Meeting some great people!! Learning about Ramadan and Muslim traditions, teachings and beliefs. An excellent event.

Excellent choice of venue & speakers. I definitely enjoyed the fact that politics was avoided – it has been frustrating hearing the same viewpoints and problems heard time and time again. My table specifically developed an excellent rapport. Great food.

Meeting new people, sharing ideas, learning about Ramadan and other aspects of Muslim culture and life.

Open, easy, willing.

Clear explanation of all Ramadan related practices. A good insight of Islam. Understanding of assumptions.

Coming together of such diverse people in our community. An opportunity to listen, to share with others.

I liked the opportunity to share wisdom. I really liked the mix of speakers with the time to speak at our table.

Every religion are together and are together nice and friendly.

I saw everybody was here that's every good. I hope see again.

Mixed seating allowed for diversities to be enriched and enhanced.

I learned a lot about Muslims.

Participation from everyone.

The seating of the diners. A very interesting concept. Was nice to meet other community members.

I have never attended an event like this before. It was extremely well organized and the speakers were fabulous! I especially enjoyed the Musqueam Prayer by Debra Sparrow and Hanna Kassis' short speech. Dinner was exceptional!

Bringing people of different backgrounds together as Canadians.

Involvement of different faiths.

To share experience in different religion and culture.

Everyone was well received by organizers.

The interaction with different people of various faith groups.

Very well organized and good diverse group of people, all with great spirit and a willingness to listen and learn.

Knowing different people which are not prejudice.

The food was excellent and the idea of breaking everyone into groups of strangers so that they'll know one another was novel and enlightening. Food really brings people together especially when we're fasting.

Meeting a group of very interesting people.

The people!

Getting together, to know each other, in short building community which is so necessary in Vancouver.

Learning about all the religions and about Ramadan.

I like the presence of so many different faiths. I like the presence of member of the Jewish tradition – especially after the ugly comments made recently by one East Van cleric. I'd like to see younger people speaking as representatives of Islam, not just the older generation.

Coming together and sharing our experiences.

Dialogue with people of different backgrounds.

The variety of backgrounds and experience among the people at our table.

The heartfelt sharing of ideas. Fellowship.

Mixed tables, conversation, variety of backgrounds, great food, very good speakers.

The opportunity to dialogue and share the different aspects of Islam

Interfaith dialogue, common beliefs exist more than differences.

Great concept, great exercise in diversity, a great opportunity.

The overwhelming sense of tolerance and a desire to understand. Great location.

Dialogue between us all. Respect for all.

The people. The place. The food. The organization.

The opportunity to talk and listen.

Diversity, sharing.

I met new people and we were able to exchange openly ideas, feelings and have the opportunity to learn and share.

The variety of different persons at the table.

6) How could this event have been improved?

This question generated fewer responses than question #6. Fourteen of fifty-two evaluation forms left this question blank. Many other people responded by saying that the event could not have been improved because it was a very good event already. This question also generates several productive

comments on how the event could have been improved. The following is a collection of those suggestions, quoted directly from the evaluation forms:

“Have youth attending the event” - DD

“Discuter autour d’une table moins grande car les gens ne parlent pas très forts” - SO

“Clearer P.A. system – better at end of dinner but much lost in first open session!” - JB

“A little warmer eating dinner” - LB

“Better heating”

“Maybe the event be bigger” - JH

“Advertise the event outcome in the media that will encourage other to hold similar events”

“More events like this. Very important and valuable”

“I would have liked both speakers to elaborate on their subjects”

“Shortened slightly, more young people, more members of diverse faiths/beliefs”

“We had a great deal of difficulty getting to UBC before 6 pm” - BE

“Keynote speakers focusing on philosophy of fasting a little bit more” - MJ

“Perhaps there could have been an open forum discussion (following the table discussions) with a larger group” - SB

“Maybe a keynote speaker with one topic to cover in detail” AM

“Let Muslim youth speak about their experiences in Canadian milieu”

“By bringing in people from a more diverse culture background”

“It was difficult to hear others in the same table due to noises from all over”

“It was very cold in the back where we were seated! Also, would have liked to see more facilitation of discussion – great conversation but not focused on anything specific. Also at time hard due to the age discrepancy”

“Repeat it frequently until we learn more” - AA

“A small point, really but it’s quite chilly near the back of the museum” - MS

“Better microphones are needed!!” - DKY

“Completely different sound system!” - MB

“Advertisement of the event” - LS

“I think you should have Imam Fode Drame of Masjid al Haqq to be present and speak – you could also invite Rabbi David Mivasair. Caterers should not make so much noise!! It’s hard to hear. Also – it was cold.”

“A better P.A. system (or improved microphones!!)”

“I don’t know. Future consideration – how about a youth exchange putting a muslim youth into a Christian family for a week then versa vice? Like going to a different country for a week.” - AS

“Warmer – temperature-wise” - DB

“Annual event. <none of it>.”

“It could be very valuable to send fasting instructions with the invite, so that those who wish can participate.”

“Difficult to hear table conversation simply because of so many people talking.”

GUIDELINES FOR THE RAPPORTEURS

Dialogue here for our purpose means both being together as citizens and thinking together to support team talk while also learning from each other. Dialogue is not a debate or to prove a point right or wrong. Nor is this event planned as an inter-religious congress.

- Please introduce yourselves and identify yourselves as a rapporteur. Make sure all table participants introduce themselves.
- Create a comfortable climate for everyone (Muslim and non-Muslim) to participate in a warm and friendly way.
- Encourage your table to be respectful of differences including language and social communication etiquettes. Encourage all to contribute and be heard.
- Guide your group to talk about their personal and everyday experiences. Avoid politics and academic discussions on religious texts.
- Build on positive and shared experiences of the moment as well
- Note key points during the one hour at the dinner table for CUC-MOA to include in the report which will be circulated to all the participants
- Write three short quotes from the conversation to present to all the guests at the end of the dinner. These may be amusing quotes or quotes that surprised some or all at your table. The quotes can be sentences or questions. Something that we can go home with a smile and a thought. And this will be your table’s gift for the day.

ICE-BREAKER – FOOD FOR THOUGHT: “DID YOU KNOW?”

- 1 Some statistics on Muslims in BC, Canada and the World. In 2001 there were approximately 1.2 billion Muslims all over the world. There are about 56,000 Muslims currently living in B.C. who account for roughly 10% of the Muslim population of Canada (close to 580,000 in 2001 according to Statistics Canada).

	Africa	Asia	Europe	Latin America	North America	Oceania	World
Muslim Population	329,869,000	858,018,000	31,883,000	1,732,000	4,587,000	313,000	1,226,403,000

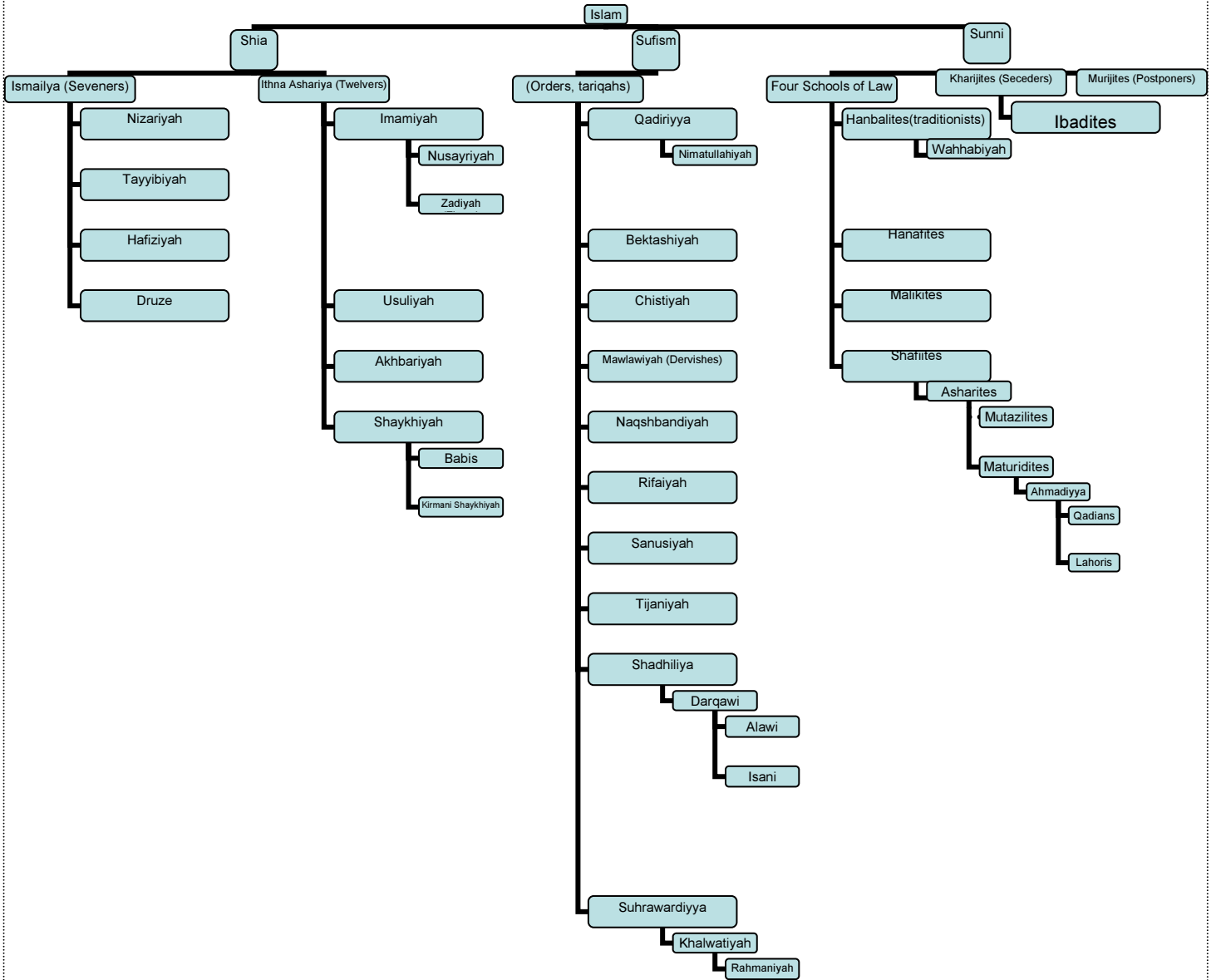
“Asia” includes the former Soviet Central Asian states and “Europe” includes all of Russia extending eastward to Vladivostock, the Sea of Japan, and the Bering Strait. (Karen J. Sparks, *Encyclopaedia of Britannica Book of the Year*, 2003, p 306)

- 2 Only about 15% of the world’s Muslims speak Arabic as their mother tongue. The world’s most populated Muslim country is Indonesia with approximately 220 million inhabitants in the year 2004.
- 3 Muslim parents often name their children after Jesus and Moses. There are many Muslims called Issa and Moussa perhaps more than there are Christians and Jews with these names.
- 4 One of the two most important Muslim holy-days refers to the time of Abraham (Ibrahim). Eid-al-Fitre is celebrated to mark the sacrifice of his son that Abraham was prepared to make for the love of God.
- 5 Muslims are a diverse group of people from both a geographical and ethnic standpoint, as well as in terms of interpretations of the faith (see diagram on the back of this page which is only one way to depict different *tariqas* or teachings). Hence, Muslims belong to different political parties and do not vote as a block and it is inappropriate and inaccurate to make generalizations about Islam and all Muslims, which is quite common in the mass media.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS SPURRED ON BY THE KEYNOTE ADDRESSES:

1. Why is fasting (abstaining from drink and food) a common practice among people of various backgrounds?
2. Which religions tend to practice fasting as a way of devotion?
3. How does fasting differ in various traditions?
4. What are the social and spiritual benefits of fasting?
5. Some topics will arise spontaneously at each table – encourage this!
6. Thoughts for follow-up events?

Different Branches of Islam



Reference: "Islam." The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion

Vol. 1. New York: The American Academy Religion, 1995.

APPRECIATION

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Jill Baird (Co-Chair)	Curator of Education and Public Programs, MOA
Anne Bhanu Chopra	Equity Ombudsperson, Law Society of BC (LSBC)
Farouk Ellesseily	Chairman, Board of Trustees BCMA & Educ. Dir MCF
Seemi Ghazi	Lecturer of Classical Arabic at UBC
John Halani	President, Greater Vancouver Citizenship Council
Daud Ismail	President, BC Muslim Association
Aziz Khaki	Vice Chairman, Muslim Canadian Federation
Roslyn Kunin	Governor, CUC – BC
Jim Matkin	President, CUC – BC
Salma Mawani	Museum of Anthropology
Malik Talib	President, Ismaili Council for British Columbia
Asif Tejani	Representative, Shia Muslim Community of BC
Farouk Verjee (Co-Chair)	Past Governor (1998-2003) – CUC – BC
Gisèle Yasmeen	Director, Canadian Unity Council – BC/Yukon
Project Staff:	
Karen Benbassat	Museum of Anthropology
Wendy Cooper	Administrative Assistant, CUC BC/Yukon
Sultan Somjee	Ethnographer & Consultant to CUC BC