

HAYDERNAMEH

Volume 1, Issue 48

LUTON NEWS AND VIEWS

February 2006

This is the newsletter of Shaykh Fadhllalla's murids in the UK, now issued every two months (or so!) The editors are Julia Khadija Lafene and Sadiqa Lake (responsible for Luton news.)

If you have comments, suggestions and contributions, please contact Khadija on home@jlafene.plus.net or 02089041680

There is now a separate newsletter for young people, Crescent Moon, edited by Bushra Winter and Tariq.

Inside this issue:

Community News-	1-2
Success for ASK Facilitators Ladies' Qur'an	2
	2-3
The Meaning of Karbala	3-5
Our Spiritual Journey in the Light of the Divine Names	5-7
Karen Armstrong on 'Desert Island discs	7-8
Trip to Sinai	8-9

Bismillahi -rrahmani -rrahim

The owner of the Centre at 178 Biscot Rd, which is also the office of Stephen Maynard and Associates, will be selling the property, so they will have to find new offices and the Community has to decide whether we want another Centre.

A meeting was held on the 14th Jan to discuss this. Here is a brief summary of the discussion. The minutes have been posted on olivetree.

1. As from the end of March we will no longer have 178 Biscot Rd. as a centre, we need to reflect on the last 4 years and think of our future direction.
2. This need not be a negative change as it will open up new directions & opportunities for us. We have achieved increased gatheredness.
3. We have £3000 in the community funds -£200 per month are received in contributions & our outgoings are small.
4. There will be some expenses related to closing the Centre, and we need funds in reserve for a deposit if

we get another place.

5. Shahbaz Bhatti has offered his premises at Homecare and Health (Phoenix House) as an interim meeting place. For larger gatherings it would be possible to use Friends' House.
6.
 - IT WAS AGREED THAT specifications should be posted on olivetree
 - IT WAS ALSO AGREED to use Homecare and Health as an interim measure, but this should not relieve us of the responsibility of finding another place – we should have a commitment to a long-term solution.
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(Continued on page 2)

REGULAR EVENTS

* LUTON DHIKRS

Every Thursday 7.30 p.m at 178 Biscot Road, Luton.

* LONDON DHIKR CIRCLES

These are happening every now and then. If you want to be informed, send your e-mail address to Khadija home@jlafene.plus.net

* LONDON & LUTON LADIES' QUR'AN STUDY GROUPS – One group is meeting in Luton most Tuesdays 10.30 a.m.—contact Naseem London group will be once a month, – contact Khadija for details.

* YOGA—Every Monday at Homecare and Health, 5-6 p.m. The class deals with the spiritual aspects too.

(Continued from page 1)


ALSO AGREED

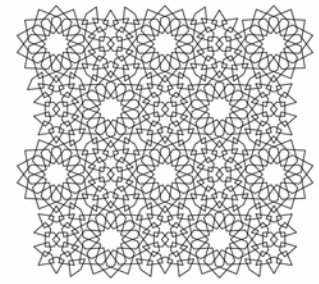
- 1) People to list their needs and what they're prepared to contribute. Mohammad Winter to collect these & put them on the discussion forum website (olive tree first)
- 2) We should try to be out of Shahbaz's premises in 6 months. Another meeting to be held in 3 months to review situation.
- 3) Community should contribute £150 per month to Shahbaz for use of his premises.

During the meeting we were also informed that a dedicated ASK Centre would be set up in the UK, but this was separate from any community Centre.



SUCCESS FOR ASK FACILITATORS!

Recently some of those who have gone through the Facilitator Training were given an assessment by their trainers, Haider, Hassan, Naseem, Abdullah and Sabnum. Haider set the paper which we were asked to do in one morning. Although we found it stressful, we felt grateful for the experience and to Haider and the trainers for their hard work and dedication. The professional way in which the assessment was conducted reflects the establishment of ASK as a well-run and credible organisation. All of us passed well. The main issue during the feedback was that facilitators should not get personally involved with their students. May Allah continue to inspire us so that we may  serve Him through this wonderful programme.

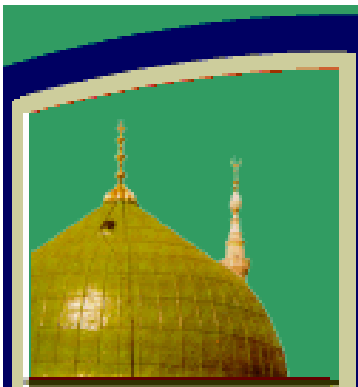


*“But no! I swear by the sunset
redness
And the night which drives it on,
And the moon when it grows full,
That you will certainly enter one
state after another.
But what is the matter with them
that they do not believe?
And when the Qur’an is recited to
them they do not prostrate?
Yes Certainly! Those who cover up
belie the truth
And Allah knows best what they
hide.!”
Sura 84 Al Inshiqaq*

Ladies’ Qur’an group in London 12/2/06 – Sura anNās

Alhamdulillah our group has started up again. Naseem and Munya are coming once a month to London and Fahima has generously offered her house as a venue. (contact Naseem or Khadija for details).

As before Munya gives us the benefit of her deep knowledge of Arabic, and Naseem expounds the inner meanings of the ayats following Shaykhna’s tafsir (Keys to Qur’an) and giving us experiential exercises so that we can apply the ayats to our lives. One really needs to attend the sessions to get the full learning experience, but I give a brief summary here.



This sura tells us that Allah is the Malik – Lord of all the realms of the mulk (physical realm), mala-kūt (realm of the Jinn) & Jabarūt (angelic realm) and One to be worshipped. We ask for his protec-

tion against the waswas (whisperings) of the Shaytan. These Shaytans are within our lower selves trying to get into our hearts and influence us. To understand how they affect us we need to understand the 7 stations of the self – the lowest being the most animalistic, and the highest being fully human, the station of enlightenment. The self at first thinks it is the soul, ignores the instructions of the soul and rebels; therefore it has to be trained, so that it learns to face the soul and be in submission to it. The soul contains the breath of Allah’s attributes and when the self moves towards its higher it lets the soul control it. As the Prophet (saw) said when asked about his shaytān, “I’ve got it, but it’s under my feet.”

We explored and discussed the need to be aware of the waswas coming from our lower self. In his tafsir Shaykhna describes nine rivers of whisperings and

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

the treatment for them. (Keys Vol V 296-300), for example, if you are aware that you are affected by the whispering of Amal (expectation), it can be blocked by remembrance of death, which can cut you off at any minute.

We cannot avoid the world and the lower self, but we can deal with it through our awareness. Whenever we are faced with a 'problem', it is fuelled by the waswas, and once we are aware of it, we can apply appropriate treatment. Make your relationship to Allah your priority and then things will fall into place. Each person is different and is tested in a different way. Allah reflects back to you what you put out. Consider how much you

are prepared to be humbled.

There is a story of an Imam who went to a Gnostic asking about the 7th level of the self. He said he knew 6 levels but not the 7th. The Gnostic would not tell him, but when he begged, he said, "go to the market and put a nosebag round your neck." The Imam could not do it, so he could not know the 7th level. If we have no fear of creation and no fear for provision and are willing to be debased, we are on the way to enlightenment.

Luton Ladies' Qur'an group

This is held every Tuesday at Naseem's. The group is continuing with their study of Qur'anic Prescriptions, Allah's commands.



THE MEANING OF KARBALA AND BEYOND

By Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri (Taken from Nuradeen Vol 5 #3, Fall 1985)

The form of our gathering tonight is to show allegiance to the message and the conduct of the Ahl ul-Bayt. In every aspect of life there is an outer form and an inner meaning. Form and meaning are always connected, but not always in the right balance. We are gathered, as many others around the world are gathered, to remember the meaning of Imam Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala. If we do not join the form of our commemoration with the meaning of Karbala, then we have disrupted the balance in existence. If we do not live what we teach, that teaching will become barren. If we do not adhere to the message of Islam in every way, that message will be distorted, and will end up being yet another religion far removed from the source. I would like to quote from the Qur'an to share with you the responsibility that is on our shoulders:

"Only Allah is your Guardian and His Messenger and those who believe, those who establish the prayer, give zakat and bow down (in prayer)." (Surat ul-Ma'idah: 55)

Many of you know the historical event about which this ayah was revealed in Medina. The event occurred in the Prophet's mosque during the time of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali. It was while Amir 'Ali, peace be upon him, was in prayer, in *ruku'*, that a man began to ask for *sadaqa* (charity). While still in *ruku'*, Amir 'Ali lifted his hand on which he wore a ring and held it toward the beggar.

What measure of man, so deeply absorbed in prayer, could, at the same time, be aware of the presence of a beggar seeking physical, material sustenance? Many commentaries have been

made on this ayah. Many have expounded on its overall meaning concerning how the two qualities of the inner and outer states were combined in Amir al-Mu'minin, the greatest of the believers in prayer, yet aware of what existed around him.

Amir 'Ali, peace be upon him, was a man of *tawhid*. He was in this world, but not of it, and was utterly cognizant of its totality. It was he who said: "You think you are a small universe, and in you is folded up the entire cosmos." Amir 'Ali was simultaneously in a state of prayer, yet aware of who was in front of him and who was not. This is the state of a man who is in total abandonment, and therefore in pure consciousness, unified with the entire creational reality. It is about Amir 'Ali that it is said: "It is he who gives drink and drinks, and is not distracted by his drunkenness. His joy in that state does not distract him from his companion, or from his Beloved, nor is he distracted by the cup." Nor was he distracted, like most of us are, by our lives, our troubles, our mission, or our good works. His drunkenness, or his joyfulness obeyed him - he was a fully awakened being. He was in the state of completeness. He is the man whom we try to emulate, to imitate, and to follow in the dust of his footsteps.

The culture of the Ahl ul-Bayt heralds for us the meaning of Islamic life. It is a complete model of reality. If we want to know aspects of reality, then we have no other option than to take on the path of those who have achieved it. This is the only step that anyone with sense and respect for himself will take. As charity begins at home, so each individual must begin with himself, to enter the party and join the caravan, to be as though he is amongst the Ahl ul-Bayt; to be in *taqwa*, in fearful awareness; to be aware of death at all times; to be willing to face the next life, joyfully, by the fact

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

that he has done his best, and there is nothing left but to see the face of Allah.

The affliction of Imam Husayn, peace be upon him, is the same as our affliction. With us, however, because our dedication to the path of Allah is not as complete as his, the affliction is not seen as sharply as in the case of Karbala. Nevertheless, we are at all times confronted by test and trial.

"Do men think that they will be left alone by saying we believe, and not be tried?" (Surat Ankabut:2)

The *fitna* (affliction) upon us is in order that we may sort out those lower aspects of the *nafs* (self) which must be left behind, so that the desired higher aspects become our habit, our tradition, and our way of life. Our affliction in this life is a positive situation in order that we may evolve toward that realm which will ultimately lead us to the final point of *tawhid*, seeing nothing other than the blessedness that comes to us from the One and Only Creator. The man of true Islam, a man of submission, sees only goodness in this life that comes to him from his Creator. If he dislikes anything, he sees it as coming from himself, from his ignorance. Thus, at all times, he is content with his knowledge, and he acts outwardly as courteously as possible.

Fitna is for the benefit of our evolution, our upbringing. If it occurs in a revolutionary manner, then our evolution comes about more rapidly. If it occurs as Karbala did, with every door and option closed, then the sincerity of our dependence on Allah is fully tested. At that time we should be in *hamd* (praise) and *shukr* (gratitude). It is only then that we are given the opportunity to say and truly mean, *la hawla wa la quwwata illa billahi 1-'Ali-l-'Azim* (no strength and no power but by Allah, the Exalted, the Great), because we cannot turn anywhere. We cannot depend on our neighbor, on our friends, or on anybody else, as was the case with Imam Husayn and the Ahl ul-Bayt.

We are constantly given opportunities to reach a point within us, experientially, that we may transcend the physical event of the moment. Not that every day, or every moment is Karbala, but we must go beyond Karbala itself; to be with the eternal martyr, he who took the name of destruction and turned it into the everlasting, whose death became the fruit of the perfect example for us to follow, to taste, in order to transcend to that realm which is the station of true abandonment.

We are aware of the conditions which led up to the events at Karbala. Karbala was a result of man's apathy, of the complacency and indifference of the Muslims of that time- They had reverted, after establishing Islam in their lives, to the habits of their old way of life. To know the state of the Muslims then, one need only look at the state of many of those in different parts of the Muslim world today.

What the *din* (life transaction) of Muhammad did was to transform that fibre of human behavior into a much higher level, the ultimate and only way that it is possible to exist, and that befits man in this life. In the *din*, one is given the opportunity to worship, moving into a state of adoration toward a higher state of *tawhid*, until one does not recognize that he is in constant *jihad* (striving, struggle). At that point, one is living his *jihad*; he is constantly in a state of inner revolt, and therefore is constantly evolving. His heart is turning - his heart is not attached. He is free, and yet constrained by his Creator. He is tethered, but that tether gives him his freedom: the freedom of no-choice. He has no choice in his abandonment. He does not have to ponder, or to think, before he acts. His is not a process of thought in time which is electromagnetically and biologically constricted. His actions are spontaneous, *fitri* (innate). His actions are by Allah, for Allah, to Allah, because he is a man who has moved into the station of the Khalifah of Allah.

Imam Hussein, peace be upon him, was born not on the third of Sha'ban when Islam was at its pinnacle, but on the tenth of Muharram in the 61st year of the Hijrah. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn was the occasion of his true birth, for it signified his life and his destiny. His martyrdom clearly revealed a man faced with no option as the events in the final days of his life unfolded. Yet, a mortal like all of us, Imam Husayn had to go through the form, with the possibility that something could strike compassion in the hearts of the enemy - the sight of a child dying of thirst, or of the helpless being attacked. Imam Husayn lived through every moment; he followed the entire model in its fullness until he realized the truth of the prophecy and the inevitability of his destiny. He continued on until he recognized that the *deen* of Muhammad was not going to be put back onto the straight path except through the blood that would be shed at Karbala. Then the ever-blossoming tree of Islam would begin to grow again.

On the last day of his life Imam Husayn addressed his small group of followers:

"Glory be to Allah, He Who created the world and made it a home that will pass away."

Everything in this world will pass away, nothing in this world will last. Imam Husayn spoke of the path and the true meaning of man's life, imploring his followers to submit to Allah. With his death only hours away, he tried to bring the message of truth through to them. There is only Allah; Allah was at the beginning, He will be at the end, and He is with us now if only we could see.

"I see you have embarked on an affair by which you have already brought the wrath of Allah upon you. He has turned His glorious face from you."

By this, Imam Husayn meant that they were already in

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

the Fire.

"Allah has brought upon you His *niqma* (vengeance), and He has taken away from you His *rahma* (compassion)."

It is up to us to seek the *rahma* of Allah, and to enter into the bounty and abundance of His mercy by truly abandoning ourselves.

"Glory be to the Lord, the Sustainer. You have professed your obedience and trust to the Prophet Muhammad, but now you rise. I see you have said one thing and you are acting upon another."

That is, they had professed allegiance to the Prophet, but now they are about to slaughter his family.

"Shaytan (that energy that can lead everyone to destruction) has taken over your hearts, and has made you forget the remembrance of Allah."

These are people who deny the truth, deny the absolute mercy of Allah after they have expressed or professed their trust and their *iman* (belief). Therefore, how far away they are by their injustice. We are all enjoined to follow the injunction of the Prophet, who said:

"People will still be well if they enjoin upon each other goodness and avoid that which is evil, and if they cooperate on any good deed, and be fearful of transgressing the bounds. If they do not follow this injunction, the baraka

(blessing) will leave them; the mercy, the conducive life will leave them. Some will end up controlling others and there will be no victory for them, either in this world or the next."

To follow this injunction we must truly live it; otherwise, it is hypocrisy. This world is a prison for the one who trusts in Allah and the life hereafter, and it is the garden for the one who denies Allah and the hereafter. The denier knows his time is limited and thus runs rampant, creating more sensation, more sensuality, more excitement, arrogance and show of power, because these are what he is investing in. The man of Allah recognizes that he is constricted and has only come to this life to die. What then is the point of accumulating anything?

Imam 'Ali shows us the garden of the believer and the Ahl ul-Bayt when he says:

"Leave covetness of this world, and in your life do not harbor greed and do not accumulate wealth, for you do not know for whom it is you are collecting."

Imam Husayn exemplified by his life and sacrifice, as does the true believer, contentment with the decree of Allah. The true believer is content that he has done his utmost. There is nothing more for him to do but await the blessed face of his Creator.



Our Spiritual Journey in the Light of the Divine Names

By Hajja Zainab Hussein Haeri

Allahu Ta'ala breathed His spirit on our human form, so that we may aspire to actualize His qualities through gaining knowledge of His Most Beautiful Names, *Asma al-Husna*.

As spiritual beings on this journey of life, we pass through its knowledge, its processes and its actions. I want to map out the mere skeleton of such a journey, through which we will surely encounter His Divine Names and their special application to every situation we go through in order to transform 'The Self'.

When we are attracted to pleasure and its distractions, we can choose to discipline ourselves by invoking certain Divine Names and acquire temperance. Acquiring this temperance, we naturally journey through resolve, hope, fear, piety, moderation, tranquility, spiritual poverty and self-restraint. Also, we try to avoid harm and pain to preserve ourselves and for this too, we can choose to discipline ourselves through acquiring courage and trust in Allahu Ta'ala.

Courage can be attained from assuming certain of His Divine Names. This can take us through the following seven stages: Compassion, Moral Reasonableness, Vigilance, Trust, Repentance and Patience.

Then, out of the wisdom of disciplining both our attraction to pleasure and our avoidance of harm and pain, we – hopefully with our diligence – develop belief in the One God and we journey through yet more stages for that: Aspiration, Self-Examination, Truthfulness, Contentment, Unity, Sincerity, and Remembrance.

For the invocation of the appropriate Divine Names to be consumed, imbibed and assimilated by us in the right manner – so that we as spiritual beings relate to each other with a sense of fairness and justice – we must necessarily take action.

One action is for us to awaken to acquiring noble character traits. This awakening will strengthen us, so that we are able to empty our hearts of everything other than Allah (getting rid of ego and negative traits) and instead, letting in Mercy – *ar-RAHMĀN* and Compassion – *ar-RAHĪM*.

Controlling our anger and desires, we manifest being sovereign over ourselves – *al-MALIK*. This cleansing of our hearts, from judging, stereotyping and discriminating against others, we manifest – *al-QUDDŪS*.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

This in turn will lead us to have a healthy view of others and thus we will be in Peace – *al-SALĀM*.

Finding the (*Salam*) in ourselves, we can relate to others without fear, because Allah – Who is the giver of faith – *al-MU'MIN*, becomes our refuge. We can guard ourselves against doing wrong to others thereby manifesting – *al-MUHAYMIN*.

We will not be driven from our friends, as indeed Allah is our Friend – *al-'Aziz*. Thus, we implement Allah's Will – He being the Compeller – *al-JABBĀR*, by effacing any egotism or pride – *al-MUTAKABBIR*, which may linger in our trying to assume noble character traits.

Having come this far in our effort to assume noble character traits as spiritual beings, we enter a more creative process in the sense that we are able to conceive of the possibilities inherent within things that Allah gave to them through their natural disposition, (*fitrat Allah*).

The Creator's Name – *al-KHALIQ*, manifest in us when we move to fostering relationships with others. If we shape these friendships to reflect a unique beauty, we then manifest – *al-MUSAWWIR* and the Maker of Perfect Harmony – *al-BĀRI*.

At this junction, we must begin to return to our 'True Self' and forgive those who may have wronged us. When manifesting this Divine Name – *al-GHAFFĀR*, we will no longer point out imperfections or faults of our fellow believers.

Then as spiritual beings having returned to our 'True Self' and in control of our behaviour and emotions, we manifest the quality of – *al-QAHHĀR*. We are then in control of our rational functions and we begin to bestow upon those in need, without thought of compensation, manifesting – *al-WAHHĀB*.

When seeking spiritual sustenance and nourishment – *al-RAZZĀQ* is manifested and our appeal is therefore to Allah, the Opener – *al-FATTĀH*. For Him to open our hearts to His Mercy and Generosity and to the Knower – *al-'ALĪM*, we appeal for knowledge that can only come from Him – Gnosis (*Irfan*). Acquiring gnosis, we move through both constriction – *al-QĀBID* and expansion – *al-BĀSIT*.

We then turn from the false – *al-KHĀFID* to praise Truthfulness – *al-RĀFĪ'*. When we elevate our friends to position of honour, we manifest – *al-MU'IZZ* while humbling ourselves, thus manifesting – *al-MUDHILL*. We may help in guiding others towards perfection in manifesting humbleness, since Allah – *al-SAMĪ'* Hears all (whether we speak aloud or are silent) and He Sees all – *al-BASĪR*.

On our spiritual journey, we are constantly strength-

ened by manifesting His Divine Names. Thus, we can counsel ourselves to the Truth. Thereby manifesting – *al-HAKAM* and placing all things in positions appropriate to them. By being just we manifest – *al-'ADL*, as well as relating to others with gentleness and delicacy of perception thus manifesting – *al-LATĪF*.

We manifest *al-Hakam*, *al-'Adl* and *al-Latif* in our interactions with others, the quality of being aware – *al-KHABĪR* emerges. This increased awareness leads us to recognize that we need to be forbearing – *al-HALĪM* and not to be hasty or reckless in our dealings with others. Thus, if we die to our 'False Self' and perfect our 'True Self' we strengthen our faith and thus become open to concealing the faults of others, manifesting – *al-GHAFŪR*.

In turn, when we are being thankful to Allah for His Blessings on others, we manifest – *al-SHAKŪR*. If we do that for Allah's sake alone, we manifest the quality of – *al-'ALA* the Highest. This conscious striving to attain personal perfection in thought and action is modelled in the Sunnah, the conduct of none other than our beloved Prophet Muhammad whose life and (*adab*) were the foremost model worthy of emulation.

We seek Allah's protection as we try to be protectors and preservers when we manifest – *al-HAFIDH*. When we seek to be maintainers of Allah's Will in our relationships with others we manifest – *al-MUQĪT* and when we do our daily account of deeds done or not, we manifest His Quality of – *al-HASĪB*.

We gain in spiritual power when we exhibit majesty, thus manifesting – *al-JALĪL*. This majesty entails being generous – *al-KARĪM* and vigilant – *al-RAQĪB*.

When responding to requests of others in need we manifest – *al-MUJĪB*, thereby gain extensive knowledge of the world and the self – *al-WĀSI'* and in turn become wise – *al-HAKĪM*. Then we are able to give unconditional love (which we need ourselves) to others, manifesting – *al-WADŪD*. This will bring about perfection in our moral qualities and manifest in us, the Glorious – *al-MAJĪD*.

When we bear witness to the seen and the unseen – *al-SHAHĪD* is manifested through us and we gain the power to sense what is Real, the Truth – *al-HAQQ*.

As spiritual beings we are essentially Allah's trustees of nature and the universe, so we manifest *al-WAKĪL* and as such we need to become strong – *al-QAWĪ* and firm *al-MATĪN*, within and without ourselves and become friends to Allah's friends for He is the ultimate Friend – *al-WALĪ*.

Now that we are strengthened enough to be able to avoid the negative, we lean to the Praiseworthy – *al-HAMĪD*. We do our reckoning of our wrongdoings – *al-*

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(Continued from page 6)

MUHSĪ, and seek an understanding of the Originator – *al-MUBDI'* and the Restorer – *al-MU'ID* and cleansing our hearts of worldly desires.

As spiritual beings, we manifest both the Life giver – *al-MUHYĪ* and the Slayer of our False Self – *al-MUMĪT*, but then becoming conscious of our True Living Self – *al-HAYY*.

At this point, we readily detach our hearts from anything other than Allah and manifest the Self-Existing – *al-QAYYŪM* and thus we express a richness of character – *al-MĀJID* – the Noble. This in turn will make us move towards unifying our inner and outer self – *al-WĀHID* – the Unique and *al-AHAD* – One. As a result, we become manifestly the Eternal – *al-SAMAD*.

Reaching this point on our journey, we realize that we are able to perfect our actions and direct our motivations towards assuming the noble character traits in our dealings with each other and then we manifest – *al-QĀDIR* and *al-MUQTADIR*, thus empowering ourselves.

We then pray to the Promoter – *al-MUQADDIM*, to advance us along with our friends on the path and we pray to the Postponer – *al-MU'AKHKHIR*, for us not to fall under the power of that Attribute. When we take this initiative we become in our devotions like the First – *al-AWWAL* and in reproaching others for their faults without first recognizing our own, the Last – *al-ĀKHIR*.

We have now reached the stage whereby with our powers of Reason we find the Manifest – *al-DHĀHIR* and our inner hidden qualities – *al-BĀTIN*, that have been transformed through this process of seeking the help of the Governor – *al-WĀLĪ*.

We appeal to Him to help control ourselves from going against His Commands and we confess our belief in the Exalted – *al-MUTA'ĀLĪ*, by doing good to others, manifesting the Source of all Goodness – *al-BARR*.

At the same time, we repent our past mistakes to the Repenter – *al-TAWWĀB*, Who accepts our repentance and our avenging of our own enemy within – *al-MUNTAQIM*. Doing this we erase or pardon

our wrongdoings to others and ourselves by calling on the Pardoner – *al-'AFŪW*.

Having relinquished our own will to become one with Allah's Will, we are now in the stage of Servant hood. This entails our seeking to know our 'Self' and therefore become conscious of Him.

We then manifest being clement – *al-RA'ŪF* – towards others, as we bear witness to Allah's Power – *MĀLIK al-MULK* – the King of Absolute Sovereignty. We then find certainty and faith in Allah's Majesty and Bounty– *DHŪ al-JALĀLI wa al-IKRĀM* – the Lord of Majesty and Generosity.

As spiritual travellers and Allah's servants we demand justice – *al-MUQSIT*, for others and for the similar and dissimilar to unite or gather in our relations with each other, manifesting – *al-JĀMI'*. We can and must then serve others as we have by now become spiritually rich, manifesting – *al-GHANĪ* – the Rich and the Enricher – *al-MUGHNĪ*.

Still we have to avoid the negative and harmful, thus we call on the Protector – *al-MĀNI'*, but at the same time realize that we grow through experiencing pain and hardship – *al-DĀRR* – as well as benefits and pleasure, since Allah's Will operates in the universe as – *al-NĀFI'*.

If we have gone through all the afore mentioned states and stages, it would be inconceivable that we not manifest an inner Light – *al-NŪR*. All the same, we recognize that all our knowledge, feelings and behaviour come from Allah's Light.

Thus, we move closer to being a guide, manifesting the Guide – *al-HĀDĪ* – and guide others, because this manifested quality of guidance will distinguish us from others though, we by no means are – *al-BADĪ'* – the Originator to Whom nothing is similar, neither in terms of essence, nor attributes nor actions.

From this point on we have to engage in work that is considered to be everlasting – *al-BĀQĪ*, because all we have returns to the Inheritor – *al-WĀRITH*. The Right in guidance and behaviour, we manifest – *al-RASHĪD* and we are patient, manifesting – *al-SABŪR*.



Karen Armstrong on 'Desert Island discs'

Karen Armstrong, the well known writer on Islam and other faiths, was recently interviewed on Radio 4, on the programme 'Desert Island Discs'. The interviewee has to imagine s/he is marooned on a desert island with only 8 records for company. They are also allowed one book and one luxury.

Karen entered a nunnery at the age of 17; she said: "I wanted to lose myself in this being we call God."

To her, there was too much concentration money and possessions in society (in the 50s) and women's lives consisted of too many domestic chores. She sought serenity in the nunnery but found it a tremendous struggle; as she put it, "We had to put ourselves to death." She found it very difficult to live a life of total restraint, chastity and uncritical acceptance of the au-

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

thority of a superior. In the nunnery, nuns were not allowed to cultivate friendship with each other, and if they had a problem they had to seek advice from a superior, not discuss it with a friend. She also found it impossible to meditate as she was ordered to do.

It seems that this total denial of the lower self is unhealthy. In our Sufi teachings we are told to accept the lower self and acknowledge its needs, but keep it 'under our feet'. Eventually Karen decided to leave the nunnery as the restrictive life was too hard for her. She became a teacher, writer and academic well-known for her works on Islam and spirituality. She says that you cannot cultivate a distorted image of a whole people- this plays into the hands of extremists. The violence that exists in many countries is endemic and has political and economic origins, but has been 'religicised', which makes it more difficult for compromise.

Her study of religions shows that all are valid and teach the same thing at base- compassion. As she says "dethroning ourselves, we recognise the Divine in the other... Egotism pervades everything we do.... I take myself out of 'clever Karen' and enter the minds of oth-

ers to understand their spirituality.. I am lifted momentarily beyond myself.. I think of myself as a kind of nun and study has become my prayer.. I am inside myself thinking constantly about God and my spirituality."

Karen's choice of music illustrated her spiritual level. She chose a Bach cello concerto because it expressed 'difficulty but serenity in moving forward'; a Mozart clarinet quintet because it expressed the 'breath vital to our lives, a serene, peaceful and expansive sound.' She also chose a female reciter of Qur'an Seemi Bush Ghazi reciting al Layl, breathtakingly beautiful! I have checked the BBC Website and this is a private recording; but there may be other recordings available.

On listening to her, I felt Karen was very close to us and our Path, and really wished that she was one of our fuqara!! Sadiqa has made a recording of the programme. It is not available on the web 'listen again' feature for copyright reasons.

Khadija



A VISIT TO SINAI

Ugh! February again! The most gloomy month in the year – still dark, cold and wet! Yes I know we need it to appreciate the wonder of spring which begins to emerge with the snowdrops, but it's good to get away to somewhere a bit warmer. At first we chose Luxor, but there was no convenient package, so when offered 'Taba Heights, Sinai', we took it. It sounded different from the Red Sea resort we went to last year. I checked the temperatures for late Jan/Feb. A nice 20 – 24 degrees in the day time, but could be cold at night. The guidebook also warned of desert temperatures. Well, it MUST be nicer than the UK at this time of year.

We arrived at night, so couldn't see the dramatic landscape which we discovered later. Taba airport is a small, new 'international' airport only about 50 km from the Israeli border. It's built on the desert plateau and the coach takes you down a series of bends through mountain gorges to the Gulf of Aqaba, where our hotel is situated. Thank God the developers have avoided the horrible high rise architectures and have created a really stunning set of buildings to match the stunning setting. The craggy mountains behind are ochre, rose red, verdigris and purple, depending on the rock and the time of day. At their foot is the dark blue sea, clear and unpolluted, with its coral reefs teeming with multi-coloured sea life. The hotel is built like an Egyptian village, with separate blocks painted



ochre and rust, joined by paths running among green gardens of scented plants- basil, orange, jasmine. Several blocks have domed roofs and ventilation shafts. There are three swimming pools, one for sporty people who like to swim lengths, and two sculptured with fountains, for those who like to laze on sunbeds. My environmental conscience was mollified when I found out that there was a sewage treatment plant which re-used water for watering plants. The main water supply came from an artesian well in the desert.

There were three other large hotels near ours, which I thought were enough for this beautiful coast. I heard tales of plans for 40 more - I hope not!! I know unemployment is high in Egypt- most of the hotel staff had come from the Nile area

to work in Sinai- but is tourism really the best way of providing jobs? The Bedouin, who are the original inhabitants of the area, are becoming less nomadic and more settled as they take up jobs connected with tourism, such as guides in the desert, but it looked to me as if most of the infrastructure had been developed for the benefit of tourists, rather than the local people. I saw Bedouin women walking to fetch water from some distance from their tents, while we, of course, had en suite bathrooms. This reminded me of someone who said when he drank or used water, he always remembered Imam Hussain's thirst (as)

Our room with its balcony was right on the beach, so we could sit and watch the lights of Aqaba and Saudi Arabia come on in the evening across the gulf. We had intended to visit Petra in Jordan, but the price of the excursion was

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

too high for only one day. Also the road trip would have involved going through Eilat in Israel and I did not want an Israeli stamp in my passport. We did visit the small town of Taba, about 6 miles from the hotel, which is right on the Israeli border. In our usual fashion we would go on to the main road and thumb a lift from whoever came along- sometimes we got a free ride, and sometimes we arranged payment. In this way we can enjoy meeting the locals and see things other tourists don't see. We met one driver who was obviously devoted to Allah and the Rasool, so I gave him my little card with Ayat Al-Kursi on it. He was delighted. At Taba we walked up to the Israeli border and chatted to the Egyptian police – there were huge barriers in place for security, but people are extremely friendly, especially when they find out we are Muslims.

We did take one excursion to St. Katherine's monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai. This is a great fort-like building in a spectacular chasm, inhabited by 23 Orthodox monks. On view to tourists are a charnel house full of skulls, the monastery church full of icons, the 'burning bush' where Allah is said to have spoken to the Prophet Musa(as), and a museum of relics. The public are not allowed into the main part of the monastery – the monks need their peace and quiet, I daresay! The place is very atmospheric, but spoiled by hordes of tourists (though I shouldn't complain, seeing I was one of them!)

We climbed a short way towards the mountain and were met by two Bedouin boys on camels, who bargained with us for a ride. My camel, Sambo, knelt at a command, and I managed to clamber on to the very uncomfortable saddle. He then lurched to his feet, while I clung on to the pommel, thankful that it was high enough to stop me sliding off. It's a bit like a cross between a roller coaster and a sailing dinghy and I tried to imagine the Prophet (saw) and his companions riding for miles across the desert. It always amazes me when a huge creature like a camel is totally controlled by a small boy!

We visited some other places by ourselves – Nuweiba, which is a ferry port for Hajjis travelling from

Egypt across to Jordan and thence to Saudi, and Dhabab, known as the hippy capital of the Red Sea, where you can see long-haired, tattooed types lounging around. There are also a lot of Russians and East Europeans escaping the below zero temperatures back home.

One day we walked up a canyon by ourselves and just where it narrowed we came across a Bedouin, a camel



and a red estate car. He informed us that the car belonged to his brother & we soon found out why it was there, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Further on the canyon was only about 5 feet wide & as he had told us, led to an oasis. The rock formations are extraordinary with strata of different shapes and colours. We also went to the very centre of Sinai to NakhI, a town with

absolutely nothing to recommend it! It was just a wide place in the desert, where lorries and coaches could stop for a time. But on walking round the small village, we came across an old fort half buried in sand, with a solitary tree struggling to survive within its walls. Near this was an old graveyard and a tomb inscribed with a date of 180 years ago. So there must have been a small oasis there. Now the water is piped from Suez over 100 miles away.

The main reason most people go to the Red Sea is to see the amazing corals and sea life. I am not able to dive, but caught glimpses of this undersea world standing on the hotel jetty. The water was so clear, you could see the multi coloured fish, eels and octopus moving sinuously through the strands of coral. We managed to swim in the sea though it was a little cold – slightly later in the year would have been better, but it was very bracing, just what we needed to counteract the effect of the hotel food and all those delicious deserts.

If you are stressed and frazzled by the world and need a good relaxing break, this is the place for you. There wasn't much evening entertainment, which for me is a plus, as there are no raucous disco noises to disturb the peace! Altogether a lovely trip.

Khadija



Alhamdulillah wa shukrulillah