

INTERCEDE

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Masters of Memory: the Boys of the Madrassahs

by a CMM affiliate

The sound begins to filter out just past dawn. At first an indistinct murmuring, the din grows as the morning lengthens and the grounds of a sunbaked school are revealed. As noon approaches, a skin of dust hangs in the air, and the jumble of sound has taken on a pace to match its volume, flowing from surrounding classrooms.

Inside these bare rooms, the source of the cacophony bellows out. The rooms, monuments to austerity, are unadorned — nothing must distract from the task at hand. Young boys to young men, grade-schoolers to teens, are engaged in a rote battle with repetition. Before each lies an open Qur'an, and their eyes are transfixed on the verses before them. They are trying, desperately straining, to be masters over memory.

Theirs is a grim persistence aimed at a stark task — memorizing the Qur'an in its entirety — 114 chapters, 6,200 verses, and approximately 78,000 words.

The Qur'anic chants rise up in a discordant mass; each voice seemingly competing with the next. The students are not reciting in unison, and each one is sounding off with a different pitch, rhythm, volume, and

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? –Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



Since the World Trade Tower attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Islamic schools in Pakistan known as madrassahs have drawn increasing interest, especially when it became known that several Taliban leaders and Al Qaeda members had developed radical political views at madrassahs – many of which were built and partially financed by donors in the Persian Gulf states.

Madrassahs are found in many Muslim countries, but there are at least 10,000 in Pakistan alone, most of which are not registered with the government.

From time to time *Intercede* tries to shine a light on factors that have contributed to the rise of radical Islam. The author of our lead article has done an excellent job of zeroing in on one of the root causes – the radical indoctrination of young Muslims.

I believe if you read this article it will do two things: (1) Impress upon you the serious nature of radical Islam, and (2) Help equip you to be a more effective intercessor.

CMM Ministry Venues. Many of our readers have requested me to regularly share some of the ministry venues where CMM personnel have taught and trained those who want to prepare to reach Muslims with the good news of Jesus Christ. Here are a few recent ministry opportunities:

Indonesia. A *Muslim Evangelism Training School* was conducted with 25 church planters and pastors in attendance. Courses taught were (1) Introduction to Islam and (2) Reaching Muslim Women.

Nigeria. The second annual *Institute of Islamic Studies* convened with over 20 students. Courses taught were (1) Theological Issues and (2) Approaches to Islam.

Ukraine. A *Light for the Nations* missionary training school with over 30 students convened for six weeks. CMM personnel taught courses on Approaches to Reaching Muslims.

Philippines. The longest tenured CMM-affiliated *Institute of Islamic Studies* (in its eleventh year)



convened for eight weeks, with a total of 31 students. Courses included: (1) Contextualization (2) Practical Issues (3) Introduction to Islam.

El Salvador. The third annual *Institute of Islamic Studies* convened with more than 20 Latin American students. A Latin American missionary to Chad assisted in the teaching. Courses were (1) Introduction to Islam and (2) Practical Issues in Reaching Muslims.

CMM personnel have also had recent ministry in Thailand, Malaysia and Turkey. In the next few weeks, staff members will minister in Romania, Kenya, Brazil, and the Middle East. Please pray that each of us will experience a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Ramadan. In 2008, Ramadan begins approximately on September 1 and ends on September 30. By praying during Ramadan, we are not conforming to the Muslim practices of fasting and prayer. Rather, we are identifying with them by praying for them during a significant period in their spiritual lives when they are more open to being touched by God. Please visit CMM's website at <www.CMMequip.org> for a printable copy of our 30 Day Ramadan Prayer Focus on Muslims.



Muslim World News



Jordan

COURT ANNULS CHRISTIAN CONVERT'S MARRIAGE

A Jordanian Islamic law court has annulled the marriage of a former Muslim because of his conversion to Christianity. The North Amman Sharia Court dissolved the marriage of Mohammad Abbad, on trial for apostasy, or leaving Islam. The 40-year-old convert fled Jordan with his wife and two young children after another Christian convert's relatives attacked Abbad's family and his father demanded custody of Abbad's children. "Marriage depends on the creed [religion], and the apostate has no creed," a court document stated. Jordan's penal code does not outlaw apostasy, and the country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, as does the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that was given force of law in June 2006. But Islam, Jordan's official religion, forbids conversion to another faith. — *Compass*

Algeria

CHRISTIANS SENTENCED FOR SPREADING FAITH

A court in western Algeria convicted two Muslim converts to Christianity for illegally spreading their faith. The court in Tissemsilt, handed Rachid Muhammad Essaghir, 37, and Djallal Dhamani six-month suspended sentences and 100,000-dinar (\$1,660) fines. The men were found guilty of "distributing documents to shake the faith of Muslims." The case has received publicity following a wave of trials this year against Algerian Christians for evangelism and illegally practicing their faith. Essaghir has now moved from Tiaret to the coastal city of Oran with his wife and one-year-old daughter after police shut down his Internet cafe in April. Essaghir said this was an excuse to harass him for his work as an evangelist, as many Internet cafes in Algeria function without such permission. — *Compass*

Pakistan

KIDNAPPED, ALLEGEDLY FORCED TO CONVERT

A Christian father in Pakistan is in a legal battle with kidnapers for custody of his pre-teen daughters, who allegedly have been forced to convert to Islam. A judge in the Punjab province ordered an investigation into the kidnapping of Saba Younis, 12, and Aneela Younis, 10, who went missing on June 26 in the town of Chowk Munda. The kidnapers filed for custody of the girls, stating that the sisters had converted to Islam and their father no longer had jurisdiction over them. When the father, Younis Masih, was summoned to testify, police initially refused to file a case, telling Masih to "remain silent" as the girls had embraced Islam. Ashfaq Fateh, a Christian advocate, asserted that the kidnapping was a religious matter. "Being weaker and belonging to the Christian community, the girls were kidnapped," he said. — *Compass*

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verse. Thus, the lesson becomes a maddening heap of utterances — making memorization all the more difficult.

To the Western eye and ear, the scene is surreal; almost Dickensian in its archaic nature. However, across many parts of the Muslim world, Qur'anic learning of this sort daily occurs at madrassahs or Islamic schools. The madrassahs range in degree of rigor, but all are focused on a curriculum anchored on Islam and memorization of the Qur'an. Their unabashed goal is the propagation of Islamic theology.

Madrassahs have spread across the Muslim world: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Mali, Tanzania and others have felt their reach. The schools appeal to the underprivileged and have little problem drawing in students. Providing food, accommodation, clothing, and in the narrowest sense — an education, madrassahs have become magnets for destitute families with few options for their children. Frequently funded by Saudi Arabia, or Persian Gulf countries, madrassahs are frequently involved in ideological indoctrination.

Typical madrassah enrollment ranges from 50 to several hundred students. The majority of madrassahs are in non-Arabic speaking countries, and this gives way to a sharp irony — the Qur'an is an Arabic text. The great mass of youth reciting Qur'anic chapters or suras, literally often cannot comprehend the words they repeat. They may have a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic, or Arabic script, but cannot translate the suras they deliver.

With little argument, the flagship location for Islamic madrassahs is Pakistan. The public education system in Pakistan is in a perpetual state of rot, and this has enabled madrassahs to thrive. Pakistan's madrassah system has become a parallel route of education. State regulations are a farce, and official records only guess at the number of students enrolled. In 2002, Mahmood Ghazi, minister of reli-



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gious affairs, determined that Pakistan had 1.7 million students in 10,000 madrassahs. Regardless of the accuracy of Ghazi's estimate, the sheer volume of children is staggering.

In 1999, when President Pervez Musharraf seized power, he spoke of mandatory registration and the introduction of moderate curriculums for madrassahs. However, with Pakistan spending less than 3 percent of its gross national output on public education, his words have proved shallow

The popularity of Pakistani madrassahs continues to surge. Families compete to get children into the most prestigious ones, and applicants are often turned away. A great deal of boys will enroll as six-year-olds, and remain until their mid-teens. For the few who show promise, they will advance from Qur'anic memorization toward readings of the *Hadith* (sayings of Muhammad) and *Sira* (biographies of Muhammad). A select few may then go on to become imams or teachers.

Pakistani madrassahs adhere to a Deobandist strain of fundamentalist Islam. The Deobandis have a rigid interpretation of Islam, not dissimilar to the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia. Radicalization does occur in the madrassahs — but the degree is very difficult to gauge. Probably close to 15 percent of Pakistani madrassahs have affiliations with extremist groups, but the majority manage to operate without much foreign influence or money. However, the pool of students contains a tiny, but significant amount of foreigners from Afghanistan, China, Chechnya, Great Britain, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, South Africa, the United States, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Without records and registration an exact figure is impossible, but may be close to 2,000.

Just how radical the madrassahs are remains an open question. Still, the students are fed a diet of anti-Western sentiment, and political matters inevitably mesh with daily learning. This volatile mix of inflam-

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matory politics and militant Islam is best evidenced in Pakistan's North-West Province, home to the most notoriously anti-Western madrassah in Pakistan — Haqqania. Perched precariously close to the Afghan border, Haqqania's most infamous alumnus is Mullah Omar, the fugitive Taliban leader. Close to 2,500 students attend Haqqania, and it boasts many other Taliban graduates, in addition to Mullah Omar.

the causes of history. And each morning, the drone of ceaseless chants will pour through unadorned halls, and into the spartan courtyards of thousands of madrassahs. Some of the more proficient pupils will master the Qur'an's text within two to five years. Others will struggle a bit longer — bound by a quest, a pursuit of memory. But it is a hollow quest, lacking spiritual sustenance, and devoid of a savior.



Haqqania receives financing from Pakistani donations and foreign contributions. It neither wants nor seeks assistance and validation from Pakistani authorities.

For an untold number of boys in the madrassah system, the daily rote memorization of the Qur'an will continue. There will be no dose of a science lesson; no attempt at a mathematical puzzle; and no inquiry into

As this multitude of youth grapples with empty recitation, please pray earnestly for them. Pray that despite isolation, they would receive a revelation of the love of Jesus Christ. Pray it might be through a dream or vision, a radio broadcast, or a Muslim background believer.

Will you pray for the boys of the madrassahs?





JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, September 5, 2008. Please pray

...for God to work a miracle in the lives of Indonesia's 180 million Muslims.
...for the Gorani Muslims of Kosovo. Pray for Christian witness to this tiny minority of 11,000.
...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Yemen. Pray for a genuine move of the Lord in this closed country.

Friday, September 12, 2008. Please pray

...for Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), whenever possible, to remain within their families and communities as witnesses of the love and grace of God.
...for the burgeoning Church in Iran. Pray that despite governmental oppression, the gospel will thrive in Iran.
...that God will continue to raise up expatriate Christian workers to reach Muslims in the Arabian Gulf.

Friday, September 19, 2008. Please pray

...for the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach over a million boys attending Islamic madrassahs in Pakistan.
...for government leaders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Pray that the UAE might continue to be a small window for the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach Muslims.
...for Sufi Muslims in Bangladesh. Pray that through Christian witness, dreams, and visions, Sufis would receive a true revelation of Jesus Christ.

Friday, September 26, 2008. Please pray

...for political rulers across the Muslim world. Pray that through divine intervention, windows of opportunity would open, allowing millions of Muslims to truly have an opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ.
...for secret believers in Libya. Many risk betrayal or death from their own families and kin.
...for 3,000,000 million Muslims living in Moscow, Russia.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. –1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, October 3, 2008. Please pray

...for Muslims in Syria. Pray that the Lord would continue to use MBBs to reach Muslims with the love of Christ.

...for an estimated 1.5 million Muslim widows in Afghanistan.

...for expatriate Christian workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to gain opportunities to witness about Jesus. Approximately 80 percent of the UAE population is made up of foreign workers.

Friday, October 10, 2008. Please pray

...for MBBs living under tremendous physical danger in Gaza.

...for the Uighur Muslims in Northwest China. Pray for the few Christian workers reaching out to an often neglected minority.

...for continued successful witness to Muslims through print, television, radio, and Internet ministries.

Friday, October 17, 2008. Please pray

...for indigenous Christian pastors across the Muslim world. Many toil under a heavy burden of danger, meager pay, and neglect. Pray that God would embolden these invaluable laborers.

...for Muslims in Bangladesh. Sharia and a shift toward radicalism are contributing to a volatile political climate.

...for Christians in Indonesia. Villagers and churches continue to be attacked at an alarming rate.

Friday, October 24, 2008. Please pray

...for increased Christian witness to Muslims in Australia, Europe, and the United States. May opportunities for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard by Muslims abound.

...for the millions of Muslims attending mosques today. Pray the Lord would reveal his love to them in miraculous ways.

...for Muslims across North Africa. Pray that the gospel would reach the hearts of so many hungry people.

Friday, October 31, 2008. Please pray

...for Christian teachers working in secondary schools in Muslim countries. Pray that doors will open for them to share the love of Jesus Christ.

...for thousands of Muslims in Latin America. Pray that the Latin American Church will seize the opportunity for ministry to Muslims.

...for MBBs across the Muslim world desperately searching for discipleship and fellowship.