

In the Name of Allah, The Most Merciful, The Most Beneficent

A year learning the language of Qur'an

Thamina Hashmi, Glasgow

Awarded in 2004 - 2005

After graduating from university and wondering what on earth I was going to do, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to study Arabic - in the west of Wales of all places! My place was facilitated by a grant from the ISB&YM Support Fund that helps students to go away and study the deen.

Bags packed, awaiting the day when I would make my move down to the European Institute of Human Sciences, things were a bit tense. I had never lived away from home before, but all fears were brushed aside by the fact that I was going to be studying the language of the Words of my Lord, Allah swt and the language I hope to be speaking in the next life, if I am admitted to Jannah.

The course was a mix of Arabic language, Tajweed, Seerah and Calligraphy and each of our teachers was a different nationality, subhanallah!

A month into the course and Arabic was becoming second nature to us, especially because most of the students from other courses and the teachers didn't speak much English. Time started to go by quicker and quicker; Ramadhan came and we were blessed by the sounds of many talented recitors of Qur'an who were studying alongside us at the Institute.

One of the unique things about the Institute was the sheer diversity of backgrounds that people came from. The 65 students who were there represented around 13 different countries and between us could speak about 15 different languages! But one thing that brought us all together was the love for the deen and the yearning to study Arabic and the Islamic Sciences.

A year is not really enough time to master a language, but because we were surrounded by those who were speaking Arabic on a daily basis, picking it up was not a problem. By the end of the year, we could hold conversations, write essays on topical issues and read many a book on Islam. But perhaps the biggest achievement was that reading the Qur'an, things were beginning to make more sense to us, rather than just words slipping off our tongues, alhamdulillah.

Exam time came very quickly and soon it was time to say our salaam to all the new friends we had made over the year. After all the hard times when we remembered the families we had left behind, the times when we had disagreements, each felt that he or she had gained something so valuable that these issues seemed worthless anyway.

One who treads the path of knowledge is on the path of Allah until he returns. Indeed it is very noble and honourable to be of those who seek knowledge of Islam. I would

encourage more sisters to seriously consider following this path, as the mothers of the future generation, we need to be educated and clued up in matters of this life and the next. I am planning to pass on what I know to the sisters in my area in order that as many people benefit from my experience as possible, and also to further my studies in the deen, inshaAllah.

I pray that Allah blesses more brothers and sisters to go away to study the deen and come back to benefit the people of UK with what they have gained, to begin reliving the spirit of the Islamic civilisation as it was in its days of glory, ameen!

Anyone interested in joining the European Institute of Human Sciences to complete a course in Arabic or Islamic sciences, should contact them at the following address:
EIHS, Highmead Foundation, Llanybydder, SA40 9UL, Tel: 01570 480 612

MEF Team comments: Masha'Allah, Sister Thamina Hashmi, scored 93%, 99% and 95% in Arabic Language, Tajweed and Seerah respectively at her end of year examinations.

Reflection on a year in Markfield...

Marya M. Chaudhry , Glasgow

Awarded in 2004 - 2005

It seems like a whole lifetime ago since I first arrived in Markfield to start an MA in Islamic Studies. Although I had been familiar with Markfield for many years, this was different – I was actually going to spend an entire year living there, with people I had never met and in an environment which was opposite to the busy life I left behind in Glasgow.

Apprehensively I began the year with the sole aim of learning more about my *Deen*. I was looking for something which was academic and *alhumdullilah* I found that there. The course is designed to challenge your mind and to deal with contemporary issues through diverse courses such as Islam and Pluralism, Muslim Political Thought and Activism, Islam, Women and Feminism and Major Trends in Islamic Thought. It is a far cry from the image of a 'parrot-fashion' traditional, boxed type of Islamic learning. Although the course does not mirror this image in any way it deals with the foundations of Islam *via* courses on *Fiqh*, *Uloom al-Quran* and *Usul al-Hadith*. Students now have the choice of pursuing three different degrees, namely an MA in Islamic Studies, Community Studies or Management, Banking and Finance as well as Mphil and Phd degrees. It is a highly challenging, demanding and thought-provoking course which is delivered by some of the best teachers in their respective fields.

Having stayed on site I had the chance to meet people from different walks of life, which is an enriching experience in itself! Apart from that I also developed relationships with sisters from all over the world which have now turned into lifelong friendships. The

students are truly international, though there are less 'home' students which is unfortunate as there is such a unique and beneficial institute within our grasp. So, I would recommend that those amongst us with the time and the means should take advantage of such a fantastic opportunity.

A pre-conceived image of Markfield led me to believe I would have many long and boring hours to live through. Unlike home I could not meet friends, attend circles and stay busy, as I would have liked but I soon realized that the reality was very different. Between writing essays, delivering presentations, reading and day-to-day chores the days were quickly filled. The quiet and serene surroundings of Markfield is ideal for reflection and studying the *Deen*. The library, publications, the Islamic Foundation research units and the staff members all of whom are experts in their fields proved to be extremely useful. There is a hive of activity at the Islamic Foundation which takes place almost weekly which adds to the learning experience. Particularly for sisters wishing to go away and study Islam this place is ideal as there is accommodation for sisters on site and it is a very safe and habitable environment.

Overall I personally benefited immensely from the whole experience. The course has provided me with a good foundation to go on and explore new avenues. The influence of the teachers is another aspect which has deeply benefited me. It is very true that the best Islam is taught through example, and not always through books. Lastly interaction with a wide variety of people has broadened my mind and allowed me to experience new things.

Like everything in life there are two sides to the coin. No doubt there are many improvements which the Institute can make, and being so new will inevitably lead to certain teething problems. These are issues which exist in all places and require a little extra patience. The silver lining however, is the fact that it is an institute which has the potential to develop future leaders in this country who are equipped to take up the intellectual challenge in mainstream society.

One of the highlights for me in the year was the chance to interview Professor Khurshid Ahmad. During the interview I asked him about the direction of Islamic Movement work in the UK and he made a powerful statement which had an impact on me and it is with this that I end.

'There are many challenges and every challenge is an opportunity, not a shackle'.

MEF Team comments: Masha'Allah, Sister Marya Chaudhry, received a 1st class Masters degree in Islamic Studies, from Markfield.

MA in Islamic Studies at Markfield Institute of Higher Education

Sr Henrietta, London

Awarded in 2005 - 2006

When I clicked on the “send “button, I felt immensely relieved. It was my last assignment, my MA thesis on Turkey and human rights in the European Union. It was the end of a two-year course at Markfield. It was two long years of commuting, early hours on the train and late arrivals to London St. Pancras. Ending it was not only a relief but the feeling of pleasure and success. I have done it and if all goes well, I will be graduating in November this year. I have worked on earning my MA degree just before a new arrival to our family expected in December.

My second year at Markfield was less challenging than the first one and I took it that way. I was familiar with the set up and the syllabus. I knew what to expect from the lectures and the lecturers. Unlike last year, I did not spend enough nights there to make friends with my classmates. Nevertheless, I was determined to indulge in the subjects I was doing and took my learning to a deeper level. In the first year I focused on developing factual knowledge, while the second year was about to change me and the way I think about Islam.

My writing has become more critical and I developed a sense of critical understanding of Islam. I have learnt how to assess what is acceptable and what is not. I know where to look for authentic sources and how to present them. With this came my certainty that it has been a greatly rewarding journey and there is not a bit I regret doing. Apart from a few difficulties I am grateful for this course. It has taught me to be proud of myself, to appreciate knowledge one can accumulate and it has also pointed me to a new direction. This course also brought me in touch with an exceptional teacher who I worked with, with great pleasure and enthusiasm. I will always remember his teachings and guidance he gave me on how to become an academic and a critical researcher.

Islam has always been a learning process for me, which is immense and boundless. Whatever you learn will point you to God and His infinite bounties. Whatever knowledge we acquire enriches our personality and character that can be used for the cause of Islam. Knowledge is a very powerful tool and we should always look for opportunities to enhance it.

I started becoming active in ISB and found great pleasure in it. However, after finishing this course I feel activism without sound knowledge appears to be empty. For me, these two years were a real struggle but I learnt from this hardship that more of our sisters should try to sacrifice their time and pursue scholarship. ISB desperately needs more people with traditional scholarly knowledge and inspiration not only for the membership but also for the wider public. I encourage you all to undertake an MA course such as this to improve yourselves and society.

I would like to thank ISB for supporting me financially over the last two years. May Allah reward them well.

Arabic – a beautiful language

Akhlaq, Manchester

Awarded in 2005 - 2006

After receiving a generous grant from ISB's MEF fund I traveled to Cairo to begin my eagerly anticipated studies in Arabic language and grammar. The change in environment and hot and humid temperatures were quickly forgotten as my studies began with an intensive 5 hours a day tutorial sessions for 5 days a week. Waking everyday to a fajr azan announced by some of the *best* reciters in the world was an amazing and refreshing feeling; this whole experience was truly a blessing for me. Walking into any mosque to find qualified teachers in tajweed willing to teach (provided you could filter out the ammiyah) was exhilarating.

Everyday lessons in grammar, *balagha* and conversational Arabic are drawn out of situational relating to Arab life and culture. The institute I enrolled in really looked after me and provided me with all the help I needed and all of my teachers were masha'Allah more than qualified to teach and nurture budding linguists.

My plans to stay for a year in Cairo gave me access to scholars and teachers very easily and being able to have lessons on aajrumiyah and other classical grammar texts balanced by contemporary teaching methods were well received.

Egypt for me was full of surprises; the most memorable of all was meeting a leading thinker and revivalist who frequently attended the local mosque!

Spending Ramadhan in the same mosques that our Mashaikh used to lead in was really inspirational. The melodies of Shiekh Abdul Basit and Sheikh Hosiery still ring though the voices of the newer imams in a lot of the mosques of Cairo. The youngsters trying to retain the old styles but also adding a new and fresh flavor to their Qira'ah.

But the highlight of the year was doing Layla tul qadr in masjid Amr al Aas mosque. The biggest and the first mosque in Africa. The mosque of the highly respected Shiekh Jibreel. The duaa for the completion of the quran that night was the best I had ever heard. The sounds of a thousand believers with their hands held high in supplication, in chorus with the most rhythmic and poetical duaa's I had ever heard really left a mark on my heart and mind. That night left me feeling a warmth for Cairo I had not felt before. Alhumdulillah with the grace of God I will stay for another year to further study Arabic grammar and rhetoric and other sciences. I again thank and pray for all the brothers and sisters who have supported from ISB and urge all those wanting to study the deen to please take that step and experience the warmth of knowledge that Egypt has to offer.