

AL-MAHDI INSTITUTE

April 2010

Prepared by; Management

Introduction

This is a monthly progress report, for the period between 01/April/2010 to 30/April/2010.

The Educational Department

- ***Teaching***

The educational department has undertaken numerous activities for the year 2010. Some of these have to be initiated whilst others have to be completed. The following is a list of the department's activities and its progress;

- 1. M.A. program***

Classes have now fully resumed from Monday the 19th of May. The Institute is now preparing for end of semester examinations.

The Recruitment process for new students has begun. Flyers and adverts are being placed in the news paper and other mediums of advertising such as cable television etc. The Institute has also now developed and introduced an optional online moodle system for students and staff. The web-based program allow the lectures to upload their teaching materials for students to access online, the program is called **MOODLE**. The program have been introduced to the instructors, we are in the process introducing the program to the students.

- 1a. New full time students***

The Institute for the new Academic Year 2010-2011 has enrolled a new student onto its MA Program. The name of the new student is Malaika Kazmi.

- 2. External students***

Dr Ian Williams has been actively working on a joint course module with the Queens Foundation. This module is on course for delivery from March 2011. This module has almost been completed and is now being sent to the Academic Board of Queens Foundation.

The PhD student from Durham University started classes on Monday; she has been studying Arabic Grammar, Ulum al Quran and Ulum al Hadith under the supervision of Sheik Muhammad, it has been decided that due to the distance that she has to travel it is better that we tutor her via Skype. The situation has now been assessed and we will continue with this method of delivery until the end of the semester.

3. Evening classes

As well as our full time course, we have started a series of evening classes where students/public can attend at the institute, or follow the discussions and lectures online through our website. The daytime and evening courses are as follow;

- Spirituality by Shk. Arif
- Tafseer of the Holy Qur'an by Sh. Arif
- Logic leading to Metaphysics by Sh. Arif
- Irfan by Sh. Arif
- Nahj al-Balaghah in English & Persian languages by Dr. Fanaei
- Intermediate courses on Legal Theory and Methodology by Sh. Muhammad (In Arabic)
- Logic by Shk. Muhammad.(In Arabic)



- **Concluded;** A series of Urdu lectures by Syd Sajjad Hussain Naqvi were given last month for a period of 4 weeks. These lectures were given in Urdu language and included discussions on: The '*ummah* of Ghadir, issues of khilafah, burial of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) and occasion of the wafat of Lady Fatima al-Zahra' ('a.s). These lectures have been recorded and added to our media library.

4. Online lecturing.

- a. Spirituality; Mondays 7.30 pm delivered by Shk. Arif
- b. Tafseer al-Quran; Tuesdays 7.30 pm, delivered by shaykh Arif

Attended by over 30 students in- class/online

- c. Philosophy; Tuesdays 8.30 pm delivered by shaykh Arif

Attended by 16 in-class/online students

- d. Nahj al-Balaghah in Persian; Wednesdays 7.30 pm delivered by Dr. Fanaei (to start 19/05/10)

- e. Intermediate courses on Legal Theory and Methodology; Thursdays 7.30pm delivered by Sh. Muhammad (In Arabic)

- f. Logic; Thursdays 8.30pm by Shk. Muhammad. (In Arabic)

Attended by 6 in-class/online students

PhD scholarship program

The lecturing by the students are as follow;

Hashim Bata; Introduction to Islamic sciences (first year students)

Riaz Walji; Introduction to Islamic Sciences (first year students)

Ali Issa Mallah; Islamic jurisprudence (Third and fourth year students)

As well as teaching, the students are working on numerous other tasks as listed in the scholarship agreement, such as writing articles and administrative work.

Shazim Husayn, a new scholarship student, will be researching 3 papers as part of the scholarship agreement. *Please look under research and publication for more details

Validation progress

Meeting officials; University of Middlesex

Validation forms have been submitted to the University of Middlesex and they have returned them to us requesting additional information. The additional information requested have been submitted and we are awaiting the universities response.

Meeting with Various Universities for Collaborative Work

Durham Governance Initiative and Shia Studies Programme at Durham University are planning to hold a 4 day residential conference from June 13th till June 16th encompassing 3 separate events.

- 1- Du'a workshop (6 participants) 9:00-12:00 on Monday June 14th
- 2- 'Allame Tabatabaie Lecture (A Key note Speaker) 14:00-15:00 on Monday June 14th
- 3- Seminary Conference (up to 20 speakers) 15:30-17:30 on Monday 14th and all sessions on Tuesday 15th and morning Sessions of Wednesday 16th June


The main aim of holding these 3 separate events in a 4 day residential conference is to maximise the overall audience for all events and reduce the hassle of travelling to Durham for each individual event. Each event will have its own poster and title and will be held completely separately. The only commonality will be the venue and hospitality arrangements which the participants of the other events will have the chance to attend.

The Du'a workshop will be held based on Al-Mahdi's initial agreement with Durham's Shia Studies Programme as a joint venture. There are already potential speakers for the event from Iran and we have also agreed with the Theology Department in Durham that they will contribute 2 Christian speakers to the event.

We are delighted to announce that Sheikh Arif has agreed to attend our Seminary conference as a prominent Shia scholar. Ayatollah Mohaghegh Damad will present the first Tabatabaie Lecture Series.

Educational seminars, workshops and conferences

The Al-Mahdi Institute organized a seminar on Tuesday 20 April 2010. The seminar was entitled *Taqiyya* in Islam, and was held at the Al-Mahdi Institute.

 Al-Mahdi Institute presents...

a seminar on *Taqiyya* in Islam

Is there a difference between *Taqiyya* and Deception?

Featuring discussion by
DR Revd. Toby Howarth on:


'*Taqiyya*, trust and the noble lie'

Tuesday 20 April at 11:00

Al-Mahdi Institute, Birmingham B12 9AE

For more information email: hashim_bata@hotmail.com
or call: 0787 773 5950

532 Moseley Road, Birmingham, B12 9AE



**AL-MAHDI
INSTITUTE**
www.almahdi.edu

Seminar report:

On Tuesday 20 April 2010, the Al-Mahdi Institute held a seminar entitled taqiyya in Islam. The purpose of this seminar was to answer the important question of whether there is a difference between the Islamic concept of taqiyya (concealing or disguising one's beliefs) and deception.

Dr Revd Toby Howarth whose presentation was entitled "taqiyya, trust and the noble lie" delivered the Seminar. Toby works in the Anglican Diocese of Birmingham, lecturing Islamic studies at Crowther Hall in Selly Oak, he is also a vicar of St

Christopher's Church, and is the Bishop's Inter Faith Adviser. Toby has established a very special relationship with the Al-Mahdi Institute and has previously presented seminars, workshops and conferences held by the Institute.

Toby in his presentation explained his experience in working with non-Muslims. He stated that one of the main concerns of non-Muslims is the Islamic conception of taqiyya, and proclaimed that it is this concept that has caused many non-Muslims to distrust Muslims, in particular Shiite Muslims who hold the concept of taqiyya as a fundamental part of their belief. He focused on the current political climate and pointed towards some interesting accounts of Evangelical Christians who hold the belief that Americas President Obama is a Muslim and is hiding it from the world as he is in taqiyya. Moreover, he also pointed out that some people he met hold the view that Iran is producing nuclear weapons but is hiding it from the world as it too is in taqiyya.

Nonetheless, after explaining the real understanding of taqiyya in the Islamic tradition, the main bulk of Toby's discussion was on whether it is ethical to lie in extraneous circumstances. Being a Christian, Toby pointed out the fact that a number of prominent Christian theologians have like Muslims, also suggested that when a person is faced with a life and death situation, it is permissible for him to lie. Thus, in essence Toby pointed out that the Christians also have a similar understating to that of taqiyya.

It became apparent from this seminar that there is a lack serious of comprehensive works in English language that explain what is meant by the Islamic conception of taqiyya, in particular in the Shiite tradition. This seems to be the reason why there are many negative conations attached to it.

There was an overall attendance of 15 people at the seminar, and the general feedback received from the participants was that the subject chosen was extremely interesting and that the quality of the speaker was very good. Furthermore, almost every participant confirmed that they would recommend this seminar to a friend or a colleague.

The video of the seminar on taqiyya in Islam is available on the following link:

http://almahdi.edu/index.php?option=com_hwdvideoshare&task=viewvideo&Itemid=110&video_id=209

PHOTOS:



Future Events:

The Al-Mahdi institute will be holding a seminar on 11 May 2010 at the Al-Mahdi Institute entitled *The Arabic Language*. Professor Charles Burnett, from the University of London: The Warburg Institute will present the seminar on “Arabic Learning in the Intercultural Transmission of Science in the Middle Ages”. Updates and reports will follow in May’s report.

Culture Interfaith and Communities

University Of Minnesota

Dr Williams a lecturer at AMI and Sheikh Mahmood of AMI both lectured to approximately 04 undergraduate students of the University Of Minnesota at the Al-Mahdi Institute In addition the students were taken on a visit to local mosque to observe Friday prayers.

Department of Communities and Local Government

The institute is working on the policy advisory board of the Training for Faith Leaders project directed by the Department of Communities and Local Government; we are working on editing the research document, the areas relating to Shia Islamic Studies. The purpose of this to make sure that there is a Shia voice on national policy.

Department of Children, Schools and Family and The Department for International Development

The Principal members of the senior advisory and curriculum board for Islam and Citizenship Education being directed by the Department of Children, Schools and Family and The Department for International Development. The purpose of this to make sure that there is a Shia voice on national educational policy. We are constantly reviewing the curriculum that is being produced.

Friends of the Earth

We are at present together with The Friends of the earth developing training courses to promote awareness of the Environment to faith communities. The Committee is now seeking ways to take this forward into communities.

West Midlands Fire Service

The Institute has arranged community awareness course for the West Midlands Fire Service. There were ten members in attendance. The course was conducted by our instructors, Dr Ian and Shazim with other volunteers.

Director's Activities

Teaching

Shaykh Arif conducts lectures in three different programs that are running at al-Mahdi Institute.

Program one; Advanced classes

The Institute is running an advanced classes program, the program constitute of three modules;

- Philosophy
- Usul al-Fiqh
- Fiqh

The advance classes are delivered by shaykh Arif, these classes are attended by students who have completed the four year MA program.

Program two; MA program

As well as the advance program, Shaykh Arif delivers lectures to the first year students in Irfan and Ethics.

Program three; Evening classes

Tafseer al-Qur'an, Philosophy and Irfan are delivered by shaykh Arif online and in class as part of the evening program.

Interviews

The Quran Academy interviewed the director on his views on the nature of the Quranic teachings as a part of a documentary of the Quran. The documentary is due to be edited and posted online by the academy. The director was later approached by the academy to do recordings of a series of ten talks on the Quran for them.

The director was interviewed live on television by doctor Warsi on the theme of natural evils and the role of God. The director was later asked to do ten further live interviews on similar themes

The director sat as a main guest speaker on two televised panel discussion dealing with the issue of rights of partners within a marital setup in the contemporary European western context

Consultation

Members of the youth body of Birmingham met with the director to look into ways of increasing services provided by the institute to the youths of the community

Meetings

The director met with some of the Shia community leadership to form a team comprising members of different Shia communities lead by al-Mahdi Institute that could look into matters of dispute resolution.

The director met with agha Murtaza Puya over the idea of creating a multi-faith centre under the name of “house of Abraham” which would serve as a common space for people of Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic traditions to gather for worship. It was decided that a full proposal would be drafted as a starting point.

Community

The Director delivered the following;

- Two Friday sermons at the Birmingham Mosque to a capacity audience discussing the need of integrating morality into daily life and positive engagement within the wider community.
- A series of talks at Birmingham Mosques and various other centers in the U.K. as a part of an ongoing community outreach program of the al-Mahdi Institute
- A series of talks on spirituality to communities outside Birmingham

- A talk to the Sunday Madressah- As level students- on themes of religious philosophy.

Research, Publications and Translations

Research

Shazim Husayn- as mentioned under the scholarship program- will be researching the following;

1. An article consisting on 10,000 words. To be concluded by November 2010
2. Two articles consisting of 4,000 word each. First article to be concluded by August 2010, second article to be concluded by December 2010.

The institute is in the process of advancing its research department. Our aim is to complete one research paper a month, to research this aim we are in the process of commissioning various researches to research a monthly paper each. The research papers will consist of 4000 word each, and will be available online for the public to access.

Newsletter

The next newsletter will be out in the first week of July '10. This will coincide with the wiladah of our 1st Imam. Therefore we are trying to set our theme which will either be based on the life of our Imam or to include articles on the months of Sha'ban and the importance of the Holy month of Ramadan.

Publications

- “Complete Manual of short Ziyarat & Salutations”

The book has been completed and sent to the printers.

- Syria Book

This book is not a project of the Al-Mahdi Institute and has not been prepared by us but is being edited by members of the staff. Work on it is still in progress.

Translations

Kitab Al Tawhid is nearing completion; there are approximately 45,000 words to be completed which should be finished within two months.

I.T. Department

- The website is regularly updated as and when required.
- Tafseer and Mantiq sessions of Shk. Arif are being broadcast live every week and uploaded on the website
- Staff task sheets and end of month reports are regularly uploaded on the website
- Media Library:
 - a. Audio and video files of the Tafseer sessions with Shk. Arif have been recorded are uploaded on a weekly basis
 - b. Conference on Islam and Human rights was recorded and put on the website.
 - c. Muharram and Arba'in lectures (1431) of Shk. Arif were sent to us by Peterborough and Milton Keynes Jamaats and have been put on the website.
- The e-learning system has been set up. It is a complete new separate website which when installed is like an empty page therefore I have been working on the ground-work for it and all the sections and categories had to be created. Since it is in the initial stages only one module has been put in so far to show what it will look like. The rest of the materials still require to be uploaded. This can be viewed at: <http://www.almahdi.edu/elearning>.
- Logins have been made for teachers to upload their teaching materials. Training will be given to them to enable them to do so.
- I have also worked on the component of restricting users to access certain pages on our website such as the trustees page.
- Events being held at the AMI are regularly updated and subscribers to our site are notified in due time. We have had many more subscriptions to our site in the month of April.
- I have been working with Br. Salmaan Ebrahim on our new website. 85% of it has been completed.

- Please find attached the analysis of visits to our site for the month of Mar '10. Our site is being accessed from 60 countries around the world.
- A new version of the calendar was installed on our website.
- A new series of Urdu lectures by Syd Sajjad Hussain Naqvi was initiated in the beginning of this month for a period of 4 weeks. These lectures are given in Urdu language and include discussions on: The 'ummah of Ghadir, issues of khilafah, burial of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) and issue of Fadak. These lectures have been recorded and will be added to our media library.

The Library

- The new **web-based** library program 'KOHA' was installed and they have provided us with a login. However this is limited as they are still trying to find away to finish the migration process to enable smooth and complete migration of data without loosing any of the data. After talking to the persons involved in the 'KOHA' program, they advised that they are trying to contact the company who build the program to seek support and advice from them on how to migrate without loosing any data. There was no date set on how long it would take until they get an answer back. So a suggestion was raised witch is , if they are able to find out how much data would be lost and what kind of data then we might think of start the migration and any lost data will be manually input instead of waiting not knowing how long it would take. In that way it would save them time and us time and money.
- Books are ordered on a regular basis, and there is a focus on purchasing books in English because of the demand from the students and others. Cataloguing is in progress.
- The rearranging of the books and shelves started, by putting new Section Guides and placing books in different order, to make the search for books easier for the students and others.
- A new language course for Arabic and Persian languages have been bought for the students and uploaded on the computers in the Institute for their use.
- We had a previous subscription with Oxford Journals for an online and print version of the Journal of Islamic Studies. Since these are now included in Jstor we have unsubscribed. However as we still require the print copies for the library we are subscribing annually to these on a personal basis rather than the

Institutional as this proves much cheaper (as in both cases we only receive one copy).

- Students have been given access to both our e-resources (Jstor and Questia). They will be required to login and use the facilities. However to avoid misuse and that only our existing students benefit from these facilities; the password will be changed annually.

Projected plans for the Library

Since we will now have a web-based program. Records of all students will be stored electronically rather than the manual system which has been the norm to date. (the existing program did not support this facility nor the ones mentioned below)

The following are some of the projected plans with the introduction of the new web-based program.

- To provide the students with library cards.
- The library catalogue to be available to everyone using our site.
- To scan and digitalize our books and upload them but only to be accessed by users who register with us. Available resources will be provided as links. As we have some invaluable resources in our library which are unavailable anymore; Universities are willing to buy the links to these books as and when we upload them. As Scanning of the books is a time consuming project books will either be scanned at the institute gradually or particular companies (depending on costs incurred) contacted to do the scanning for us in bulk in keeping with copyright restrictions.

The P.R Department

- **‘Al-Mahdi Blog’** is an initiative taken where people can air and express their views and share thoughts. It is open to everyone of the public. It is not moderated as such but monitored regularly. It was dormant for a while but has now been revived. It functions as a notice board as well with selected and interesting issues which may be of interest to Muslims and Shi’as in particular.
- **‘Friends of Al-Mahdi’** is a forum which is by invitation only at the moment and hosted on the NING platform. The invitation at the moment is open to all Shia’s globally. It is intended that the invitations at a later stage will be extended to others. Currently the numbers of members are around 500 and it is

hoped that in the future the number will reach 10.000. This is a place where discussion, exchange of views and thoughts of various individuals can take place globally. Members can personalise their individual pages and also interact with other members, somewhat similar to Facebook. This is an excellent platform for the Institute to be able to build relations with people world-wide and have a voice to reach them with. The possibilities for this 'Community' are vast with promising potential needed to be explored.

- **Al-Mahdi Alumni** is a fairly new initiative and is as the name suggests a place for former and current students to interact and exchange views, thoughts and ideas. It is also a forum for where individuals may follow each others progress during and after studies at Al-Mahdi. During the years 100's of students have attended the Institute, and the effort is continuing to attempt to involve as many students as possible to be a part of the Alumni and thus share their valuable experiences enriching the Institute.
- **Association of Ulama** is a new and exciting project taken by the Institute to provide a central focal point for Shia Ulama, Zakireen and Scholars around the world and particularly in the West. A gap has been identified in this very important field. The Endeavour will be to invite scholars and provide a platform where various scholars will be able to share their views, experiences and thoughts from different places and communities globally. From the Institute alone we have scholars and speakers that have visited many different parts of the world. This venture will seek to enrich and enhance the possibilities for speakers and scholars around the world by drawing from the vast pool of their experiences.

The above initiatives have been revived and are in their embryonic stage at the moment. Plans and discussions are being undertaken on how to best further elaborate and expand them, such as set up, whether they should have their own individual websites or not, membership etc. It is thought that all of them will be linked from the main Al-Mahdi Website, profiling them as Al-Mahdi initiatives.