

Popular imam visits Cambridge mosque

MIRKO PETRICEVIC

CAMBRIDGE (May 19, 2007)

An American imam is visiting a Cambridge mosque today to spread a message of compassion demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad.

News reports often portray Muslims as people without compassion, who kill innocent people to advance their own agenda, Imam Zaid Shakir said in a telephone interview yesterday.

"That is in total contradiction of the values that the Prophet introduced, peace be upon him," Shakir said.

"As Muslims, especially Muslims here in the West, how do we represent that standard and how do we reflect those ethical values?"

Shakir is a popular speaker at events where young Muslims gather, said Masood Darr, one of the organizers of today's event.

"Very straight-talking. Sharp shooter," Darr said, describing Shakir's speaking style.

The talk is one stop on a six-venue tour organized by a newly-formed group of Canadian-born Muslims, Darr said.

The group, called North American Spiritual Revival (NASR), is composed of about 15 people from across southwestern Ontario.

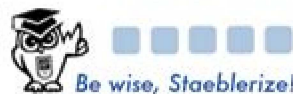
Shakir was born Ricky Mitchell in Berkeley, Calif. He accepted Islam in his 20s while serving in the United States Air Force. According to his website (www.zaidshakir.com) he has earned university degrees in international relations and political science. Shakir also spent about seven years studying Islam in the Middle Eastern countries including Egypt, Morocco and Syria.

He currently teaches at an Islamic seminary in California.



DAVID COOPER, TORONTO STAR

Imam Zaid Shakir is the featured speaker on a tour organized by a group of Canadian-born Muslims. He speaks in Cambridge today.



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Although he is 50, Shakir still appeals to young people partly because of his speaking style and partly because he was born and raised in the West, Darr said.

Shakir's message is fairly liberal, yet true to the faith, Darr added.

"A lot of people who would seem liberal aren't educated in terms of what's accepted (in Islam) and what's not," Darr said. "(Shakir) has got the education to back what he believes and what he talks about."

Darr said his group wants to hold more events that are open to people of all religions. It wants to become a model for promoting multiculturalism and multi-faith harmony.

"We want friendship. Bonds between Jewish people, Christians, Muslims," he said. "We all live here in Canada. This is our home. We love everything that Canada has to offer and we just want to make it a better place."

Shakir will be speaking at the Islamic Centre of Cambridge, corner of Dunbar Road and International Village Drive, at 2 p.m. today. Admission is free.

Shakir will also be speaking in Toronto tonight and at two events tomorrow in Halton and Hamilton.

For details visit the North American Spiritual Revival website at: www.naspiritualrevival.com

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