

Imam delivers message with humour

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Overcoming misconceptions of Islam can be accomplished through patience, goodness and learning from the ignorance of others.

That was message Imam Zaid Shakir delivered on Saturday to a crowd of roughly 300 at the Islamic Centre of Cambridge.

The Islamic scholar, who is among the most popular and respected Muslim leaders in the West, came to Cambridge to speak about ethics in Islam.

Shakir, an American Muslim, converted to the faith while serving in the U.S. air force in 1977.

His religious studies have led him overseas, where he learned Arabic and studied with other top Muslim scholars. But it's his understanding of the challenges facing North American Muslims that has made this 50-year-old popular with youth.

"There's less of a generation gap between him and us," said Momina Mir, 23, after Shakir's address. "He connects to the younger generation."

He does so by switching effortlessly from Arabic to English and quoting the Koran as though each verse is a melody.

He tells jokes and puts on accents while still delivering powerful spiritual lessons.

At one point on Saturday, Shakir got the crowd laughing with a joke about a hijab resembling a psychedelic flag.

"Sometimes these things are heavy themes, so if you don't break it up it can be overwhelming to people," he said in an interview.

Despite his entertaining touch, the message Shakir delivers is a serious one. And it resonates with the people who listen to him.

"There's animosity towards Islam after Sept. 11," he told the crowd.

That creates a test for some Muslims. It's nothing new, and nothing that past generations haven't faced, he said.

"Some people say it's had to be a Muslim now. When would