

Servants of the people

Meet the officials of the World Community of Islam in the West

By Joe Walker

HARLEM, N.Y. — College graduate, All-American athlete and Army Captain are three of the background credentials of Imam Ali Rashed of Malcolm Shabazz Mosque No. 7. However, to the countless people he has touched and affected in one way or another, it is his humanity and guidance that tells the most about him.

Chief Imam Wallace D. Muhammad of the World Community of Islam in the West (WCIW) called Imam Rashed an "outstanding" and "hard-battling" minister, in a recent national radio broadcast. "He went in Cleveland like a bulldozer and performed miracles," cited the Chief Imam, referring to Rashed's tenure as WCIW Imam in that Midwestern city.

"When" Chief Imam Muhammad continued, "Ali Rashed went into New York, he said, "Whatever the problems are, I'm going to get something moving, and he did..."

Confronted by economic deficits, mismanagement and other problems in Muslim enterprises in New York City, Imam Rashed—known for his sound reason and judgment—has thrown all his energy and expertise into correcting the situation. This has led Chief Imam Muhammad to predict that "Mosque No. 7 would bloom again" as a top Mosque in the U.S.

A SOLID FOUNDATION

Rashed was born in Los Angeles, Calif., the oldest of four children of a very religious (Baptist) family. His father had migrated from Oklahoma and was a "self-taught man with many trades"—artist, mechanic and electrician. His mother, from Georgia, was a good homemaker.

A man strong in body and mind; Rashed is complemented by his wife, Jamilah (which means "beautiful"), a 17-year-old son, and 16-year-old daughter.

He attended Jefferson High School in Los Angeles; East L.A. Jr. College (where he won All-American football honors); Oregon University; and California State University (where he was an All-American candidate in football). He has a B.A. degree in health education and business.

A superb athlete, he received football scholarship offers from 11 universities; and opted for quarterback in a day when Bilalians were barred from playing that position. In baseball, he also excelled as an outfielder, third baseman, catcher and pitcher, and received two pro offers.

"Growing up on the East Side of L.A.



Imam Ali Rashed

by the railroad tracks, there was poverty and hardship all around us," Ali Rashed recollected. "My family grew food and raised chickens in the back yard to help feed the household.

"I remember my father working around the clock—24 hours a day—to earn a few dollars to get some food. I remember my mother buying 'seconds' at the market and canning fruits for the winter. When our lights and gas were turned off, we had to chop wood—in the city—and put it in the fireplace to cook over.

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

"Everyday I saw or encountered racism and prejudice. At that time there were no Bilalians as major league sports figures, and no Bilalians in politics. There was nothing at all except this 'continuous' dream of everyone to get an education so they could get a job. The situation of oppression and racism was very graphic in my mind.

"As a young boy the tremendous struggle of our people for survival and advancement gripped me very deeply," indicated Rashed.

"As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to do something for my people," asserted Ali, who sought answers to the problems of "second-class citizenship" enveloping all Bilalians.

Personally he aspired for and achieved excellence in his studies, on the athletic field and with jobs. But he also used his leadership qualities to arouse and motivate his peers to greater development "to prove that we were as good as others."

As an Army Captain, Rashed was on the front line in combat in the Korean War—receiving two Silver and two Bronze Stars. But he learned even more lessons.

"I learned that the things we were supposedly fighting for were hypocritical. Even on the battlefield there was prejudice shown to us and racism ran through Army ranks and against the Koreans and Chinese on the other side," he recalled.

A TIMELY DISCOVERY

"Before I went overseas I was of the impression that Caucasians ruled the whole world," he admitted. "Over

there I saw that there were other countries being ruled by their own people, who were non-Caucasian, and I began to study history and learn that their cultures went back thousands of years."

When he returned to the U.S. he found conditions "worse than they were when we left." Bilalian veterans couldn't get jobs and most of the Caucasians who used to live in his neighborhood had moved to better housing leaving Bilalians and Hispanics behind.

With his wife he started a legal stenographer business and a public relations firm. Rashed also worked as a juvenile counselor for the City of Los Angeles, striving "to turn youngsters away from a life of crime." In his spare time, he spent numerous volunteer hours helping to raise children's horizons.

His eyes were to be opened wide and his motivation challenged further by his introduction to Islam in 1954. He went to hear Malcolm X teach and on the spot embraced Islam.

"From that moment on I began to move and teach Islam. I jumped into it 100 per cent.," he enthusiastically said.

He became one of the top salesmen of the L.A. Herald-Dispatch, Pittsburgh Courier and Amsterdam News, papers that at that time carried a column by the Honorable Master Elijah Muhammad (may peace be upon him), and brought practically everybody he knew to the Mosque to learn the teachings of the Master.

BENEFICIAL POPULARITY

Because of his popularity as a football and baseball star, his business, his growing up there, his reputation as one who loved his own people and helped them in every way possible, Rashed was able to introduce Islam to a countless number of persons and bring many of them into the ranks of the then Nation of Islam.

It was a toss-up between his becoming a minister or a captain of the Fruit of Islam. John Shabazz was elected minister and Rashed was chosen captain by the L.A. Mosque's believers.

Rashed then embarked on an expansive organizing campaign, playing an instrumental role in the establishment of Mosques in every sizable California city and in a total of 17 Western states. This is an achievement which still stands as a landmark in the growth of Islam in the United States.

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