

Serving the Community

By Malik S. Hakim

CHICAGO — It was a peaceful evening during the fall of 1976. Gathered in a tea shop in Mecca, Arabia were three men: an East Indian magazine editor; a Caucasian college professor from Austin, Texas; and a Bilalian born in Hampton, Virginia.

Only one characteristic transcended their diverse backgrounds: they were all Muslims who highly respected the work of a leader barely known a few years ago but now the focus of global attention — Chief Imam Wallace D. Muhammad.

The editor spoke enthusiastically about how his periodical, *Impact*, purports to highlight the Chief Imam's contributions. His companions agreed that would be a worthy project.

As a follower of the Honorable W.D. Muhammad the Bilalian felt most keenly the urgency of spreading his leader's message to wider audiences.

The man, Imam Karriem Abdel Aziz, later recounted to *Bilalian News* this unique experience as indicative of the expanding world attention centering on the leadership of the World Community of Islam in the West, (W.C.I.W.)

Between the 1976 trip to the Mideast and his introduction to Islam in 1960 stretched an entire "lifetime" of experiences.

"In high school," he recalled, "I was challenged by a brother named Horace Smith to attend the Muhammad Mosque (Temple) in New York City. I pretended to know something about Islam, but I really didn't know that much. I'd heard something about Malcolm and this fanatical group of people who search you."

CONVINCING VIGOR

That particular Sunday he expected to hear Minister Malcolm, but when he arrived at the Temple a young brother from Philadelphia was teaching. He hammered home his theme with such vigor and so convincingly that, the Imam remembers, "When he finished and asked for acceptances, I was afraid to do anything but accept." The speaker was none other than Minister Wallace D. Muhammad.

Larry, as Aziz was known then, did not immediately enter the temple, however. He went into the Army where he found that he really did want to join the Nation of Islam.

"It was in the service, where I served as an MP," he related, "that I had time to read and reflect. One book, 'Inside Africa,' by John Gunther, talked about the Muslim countries there. Another volume, Louis Lomax' 'The Negro Revolt,' discussed the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, and made a strong impression on my mind.

"I asked Allah to help me to get out of the service because I was saying 'yes, sir' and 'no, sir' and soldiering, and I felt that if I could do this for the Caucasian, then I could certainly do it



Imam Karriem Abdel Aziz

"I THANK ALLAH for the opportunity to broaden myself and to see how other peoples live," said Imam Karriem Abdel Aziz of trips he's taken in the last year to Belize, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, Turkey, Algeria and Saudi Arabia.

for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad."

IMPRESSIVE FAMILY UNITY

As soon as he left the military in 1962, Larry journeyed to the Detroit Temple where he studied under Minister Wilfred, Malcolm's older brother, then on to the New York temple. What struck him most in those days was the family unity of the believers.

"I saw young brothers together with their wives and children, practicing cleanliness and mutual respect," he remembers. From the start the young Muslim wanted to be a minister. He got busy selling *Muhammad Speaks* and soon became a top salesman.

"I had a special spot in Greenwich Village," he recalled, "where I sold thousands of papers to Caucasians and Bilalians."

He soon attracted the attention of Minister Malcolm who had shrewdly

spurred M.S. sales by making excellence in this category a prerequisite for rising through the ranks. In 1963, Larry was appointed assistant minister at a new temple in Queens, N.Y.

In 1964, Imam Aziz observed the separation of Malcolm from the Nation "was a challenge for the whole community, but Allah blessed us to come through it." He related that the most fruitful projects in which he participated in New York were large-scale community affairs.

"In June of '64 when the Master was coming to the city we labored day and night, putting up posters and placards to get the people to come out and hear him." After holding various posts under Captain Yusuf Shaf, Larry began working with Minister Louis Farrakhan: first as a minister in Newberg, then in Corona, and eventually as his direct aide.

"We liked to coordinate meetings which would draw thousands to Islam. In May of 1974 our 'Black Family Day' on Randall's Island attracted 50,000 to 70,000 citizens."

In 1975, the Chief Imam conferred an Arabic name upon Larry and entrusted him with the responsibility of administering the St. Louis Mosque.

"Under his guidance," the Imam reflected, "we were able to bridge the gap between the 1st Resurrection and the 2nd Resurrection."

Imam Aziz credits the smooth transition in large measure to "the strong respect for leaders and discipline which the Honorable Master Elijah Muhammad cultivated in us for 43 years. Even those who at first really didn't grasp the Chief Imam respected his leadership and grew into understanding his teachings."

With a wisdom far superior to that of his father, recounted Aziz, the Honorable W.D. Muhammad firmly grasped the reins "without losing a pulse in time."

SIGNIFICANT ASSIGNMENTS

In 1976, Imam Aziz was re-assigned to the Chicago Mosque where he currently works as a minister and administrator. His duties encompass maintaining communications with Imams throughout the United States as well as representing the Chief Imam on trips abroad.

"I thank Allah for the opportunity to broaden myself and to see how other peoples live," he said, referring to journeys which last year took him to Belize, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, Turkey, Algeria and Arabia.

In Guyana, "I saw by the way the citizens received and honored the Chief that he could unite the diverse religious communities."

At a world Islamic conference in Arabia, he recounted, Believers from countries as far flung as England and Japan voiced the hope that "as Islam spreads through this strong nation (the U.S.) it will provide America with a better appreciation of the roots of Islam, of the sincerity of a Muslim's heart. They view our success in the West as their success."

Surveying the positive transformations which the Honorable W.D. Muhammad has ushered in, Imam Aziz emphasized: "The Chief has taught us that the real 'you' is the inner person, the mind. He has rapidly accelerated the growth of the individual. He has actually pushed us out into the greater community, telling us, 'Your service is not just to Muslims because if you believe in God, then know that God is concerned with all of humanity.'"

In addition to being a hardworking aide to Chief Imam Muhammad, Imam Karriem Abdel Aziz is the proud father of seven daughters by his wife Maryum: Samamah, 16; Sayimah, 15; Saadah, 13; Medinah, 11; Nilah, 8; Lateefah, 7; and Maryum, 7.