

Servants of the people

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

By Munir Um'rani

CHICAGO — "Enter without knocking," reads the sign on the door leading to Dr. Na'im Akbar's small, gold-carpeted, yellow-walled office at 637 East 79th above what was once Temple No. 2 Clothing Store.

The sign seems out of place especially since it's on an office door in a building located on one of the toughest streets on Chicago's South Side. Yet, it compliments the friendly "come on in, I'll be with you in a minute" that emanates from the small inner office.

"Pull up a chair and make yourself comfortable," the widely traveled Imam admonished, resuming a conversation with a party, who, by the nature of the exchange, was seeking advice on a social problem.

"The Honorable W.D. Muhammad has the answer to the problem you are trying to solve," the highly respected scholar tells the caller in a serious, but pleasant manner.

"You don't have to be a member of the World Community of Islam in the West to use his teachings for the betterment of society."

It is from this tiny office that Dr. Akbar does much of his work when he is not speaking before college, civic and social groups or relaxing in his comfortable South Side apartment with his recent bride Renee.

CREDITABLE MEMENTOS

On the walls are several awards, art pieces and other mementos of extensive travel and professional accomplishment. Two bookshelves contain several dozen books and cassette tapes — most on religion and psychology.

The cassettes are mostly recorded lectures of Chief Imam Muhammad, a warm and unimposing man whose picture is prominently displayed on Akbar's desk.

"So you want to know something about my roots and the forces that shaped my life?" the former Morehouse College psychology professor asked, while glancing at his watch.

It was 6:15 p.m. and the 32-year-old Imam was scheduled to teach an Imam's class at 7 o'clock in the Sister Clara Muhammad Secondary and Elementary School library.

This is just one of Akbar's functions which also includes instructing Youth Imams in his capacity as a special aide to Chief Imam Muhammad.



Imam Na'im Akbar Special aide to Imam W. D. Muhammad

A native of Tallahassee, Fla., Akbar said his southern background plus the teachings of the Honorable Master Elijah Muhammad, and now the Honorable W.D. Muhammad were major forces in his development.

"I came from a close-knit family in a close-knit family," Akbar said, adding that there is "something about the South that you don't get in the North.

"The North is not as hospitable as the South; it's a different world," he said.

An only child, Akbar said his initial contact with the North came when he graduated from Florida A and M University's Demonstration School and enrolled at Eastern Michigan University at Ypsilanti (Mich.). He transferred to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in his Sophomore year.

"I spent nine years there and I couldn't wait to get back South," Akbar interjected, "I wanted to work and be in a Bilalian environment."

The noted Ph.D. said that prior to enrolling at East Michigan University, the only contact he had with

Caucasians was across the counter in Tallahassee.

OPTS FOR MOREHOUSE

Turning down job offers from several prestigious eastern universities, Akbar applied for a position at Morehouse College in Atlanta and was accepted. He had spent nine years in what he characterized as a cold and hostile environment, and emerged as a "so-called nationalist.

"Morehouse didn't know what they were in for," the articulate Imam said with a slight grin. What Morehouse was in for was its first "full-time, radicalized Ph.D. in psychology.

"I was Morehouse's first full-time Bilalian faculty member in the Psychology Department," the highly regarded scholar recalled, nothing that "for 10 years the department had been run and staffed by Caucasians.

"I wanted all the Caucasian professors out and I supported the theory that a Bilalian school provided a unique offering for Bilalian students which Morehouse was not doing. They prided themselves on

being the Harvard of the South," he said.

When the slightly built professor left Morehouse — after serving with distinction as chairman of the Psychology Department — a community psychology specialty certificate had been established.

"That's something that's not offered in very many Caucasian schools," he said, adding that the certificate meant that a graduate was equipped to work in a mental health facility, narcotics program, or some other related institution.

This radical view to psychology and education resulted in problems for the controversial professor whose "approach frightened the administration."

But fortunately, Dr. Akbar said, the administration "respected my position and my credentials although they could not capitulate to them. You have to remember the Morehouse was a mainstream institution," he added.

EXTRACURRICULAR "MUST"

Part of the controversy stemmed from the practice of extolling the accomplishments of the Nation of Islam and requiring his students to attend Mosque No. 15 in Atlanta once a month.

"I found myself expounding the philosophy and the programs of the Nation of Islam," Akbar, who originally considered pediatrics as a career, said.

"As a matter of fact" he added, that was part of my radical expression. I would say, "Look at the Nation — they have their own Black schools, their own Black businesses, and they show what Black people can do when they come together and work as a unit."

A board member of the Black Child Development Institute and the Association of Black Psychologists, Akbar said he required his students to attend the mosque but wouldn't attend himself — at least not that often.

"I wouldn't go myself but I was requiring my students to go," he said sheepishly. "They couldn't complete course unless they attended the Mosque and reported back to me."

Responsible for interpreting the Honorable W.D. Muhammad's teachings for his fellow Imams, Akbar said the students — "and especially my peers" — started backing him into a corner and asking me "why wasn't I in the Nation since I defended it so?"

"I was espousing the philosophy of the Nation but I didn't want to accept

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