

On-line match beats arranged marriage

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involve parents helping to choose a mate for their children, said Aminah McCloud, professor of Islamic studies at DePaul University.

Naseeb is one example of how that tradition has evolved in the United States, said Ahmar Masood, Sheikh's fiancé.

"It may actually allow for more people to connect on their own, versus only arranged marriage," said Masood, a 26-year-old Reston, Virginia information technology consultant. "It definitely gives a little more control to the younger generation in how to meet people."

Others, like Geillan Aly, a 27-year-old New York City graduate student, are attracted to the high-tech format.

"I'm comfortable online," said Aly, who turned to Naseeb as an alternative to the prospective spouses her mother invites to tea. "I can see who I'm talking to without having to sit there and waste two hours of getting-to-know-you chitchat."

More than 45,000 Muslims have joined Naseeb.com since it went online last fall, some searching for a spouse, others looking to make friends. Silicon Valley entrepreneur Monis Rahman said he founded Naseeb, which means "destiny" in Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Malaysian, Indonesian, Turkish and Hindi, in response to a desire for community that arose after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"A lot of the perceptions of mainstream America around Muslims were largely negative and, as an American Muslim, I think it caused Muslims to look inward in many ways," Rahman said. "We also felt the need to organize, and a natural need to kind of mingle with our own, basically for the support sys-

tem."

About 84 percent of Naseeb's users are in North America and the United Kingdom, and most are invited to join by a friend. Once online, they create a profile that includes links to their friends' profiles, and so on, for up to four degrees of separation.

Connecting with people who are friends of friends is especially important in Muslim culture, which frowns upon sharing personal information with strangers.

"You know that everyone in there can be verified through someone else," says Saleemah Abdulhafur, chief operating officer at Azizah, an Atlanta, Georgia-based lifestyle magazine, for American Muslim women. "You know that you don't have any perverts, or someone who's already married, or someone who is completely unconnected."

Naseeb is often compared to Friendster, but it does have distinct cultural differences. For instance, Aly said Naseeb rejected a picture she tried to post of herself wearing a

bathing suit while surfing, though Friendster did not.

Naseeb also offers a religious compatibility quiz that allows users to display their responses to questions such as how frequently they pray, whether it is inappropriate to have dancing or music at weddings and how they'd react if alcohol was served at a company party.

For Sheikh and Masood, Naseeb offered the chance to reconnect. The two met five years ago at a birthday party, but after they graduated he from Purdue University, she from Rutgers they lost touch.

When she saw him listed on Naseeb as friend of a friend, Sheikh invited Masood to join her online circle. They began exchanging e-mails, then talking on the phone.

Last month, the two went on a ski and snowboarding trip with friends. As Sheikh snowboarded to the bottom of a snow-covered mountain, a group of friends gathered. Masood read a poem he'd written for Sheikh, then asked her to marry him.

The wedding is set for this

summer. Sheikh's parents, who gave their blessing to Masood before he proposed, are delighted.

"Marriage is a big responsibility for them," Sheikh said. "They don't feel like they've finished their job as a parent until they've married their daughter off."

On the Net:
<http://www.naseeb.com>

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Wednesday, Rev. Dekota McCullough
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Thursday & Friday, Dr. Carolyn Showell
First Apostolic Church, Baltimore, MD

Women's Day Sunday March 14th

Guest Speaker: Dr. Carolyn Showell

Ministers' Wives Conference Saturday March 20th 8:00am

Guest Speaker: Mrs. Delores Hickerson
Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Canonsburg, PA

Leading Lady Service Honoring Minister Kim Alexander

Sunday March 21st 6:00pm
Guest Speaker: Co-Pastor Susie Owens
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