

Reciting Quran from memory a rite of passage

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Depending on what part of the world they come from, they may celebrate when a child begins reading the Quran, or when a girl decides to start wearing a headscarf or hijab.

"In America, the ceremony is highlighted even more, being here, not in a majority Muslim culture, and still achieving this goal," says Faizan Haq, who teaches Islamic cultural history at the State University of New York at Buffalo and is on the board of directors of the Washington-based National Council of Pakistani Americans.

"America has many cultural distractions, which is why Muslim parents here have to take a more active role involving their children in the faith," says Fareez Ahmed, a 21-year-old graduate of George Washington University. Ahmed finished school early to spend his fourth year memorizing the Quran, and now he's in Bangladesh to perfect his recitation with other students.

Islam experts say reciting the Quran from memory in one sitting would take about 15 hours.

In America, Ahmed would memorize the Quran three

hours a day and review for another five or six hours. "I had half-days on Sundays because I couldn't concentrate when football was on," he says in an e-mail.

For his Ameen, he hopes to have a backyard party with speakers and a translation in English projected onto screens as he recites a few passages.

"The practice is definitely increasing," he says. He has five students to teach when he returns to the United States. "Especially with the current international situation, it's really important to know what the Quran really says about certain issues, and having those verses memorized helps a great deal."

At Taha's Ameen at the local mosque, he got presents

including binoculars and puzzles and was given a feast with friends and family. The meal was topped with traditional sweets, though some American kids now insist on pizza as well.

Faizan Haq says Ameen has not yet bred its own accessories like greeting cards, but he's noticed a new toy industry catering to Muslim American children. In one game, a child who presses on a Quranic verse is provided with a translation. "I bought one for my niece," he says.

The translation is key. Many Muslims in the United States learn to recite the Quran in Arabic before learning what it means.

Taha's 5-year-old sister, Iman, is almost halfway through her first reading of

the book, and she's started memorizing it as well. Bolder than Taha, she stands and recites a short passage while holding her mother's hand. But she can't explain what she's saying.

"She doesn't understand it," says her father, Abdul Haq, an engineer at General Electric. "We don't speak Arabic. Just saying the Quran is an act of worship."

Classes about the meaning of the passages will come as the children get older. But for now, it's a snowy day outside the family's upstate New York home, and Taha and Iman plan to go sledding.

On the Net:
Council on American-Islamic Relations: <http://www.cair-net.org/>
National Council of Pakistani Americans: <http://www.ncpa.info/>

Timothy useful to God

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him, he allowed Christ to cleanse him from his sinful ways and transform him into a vessel of gold, becoming useful to his Master for good works.

Paul also told Timothy that by working at the task of developing a strong character, Timothy would find himself approved by God. The trials of life and of ministry would test Timothy, but if he

applied himself diligently to developing strong character through obedience to God's commands, he would pass the test and be proven to belong to God. This advice also applies to us Christians today.



Our Father never tempts us, but He allows us to encounter certain tests in order for us to learn to choose Him and grow in our faith.

What's going on at your church or mosque? Put it on our calendar.
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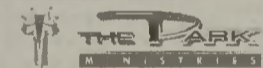

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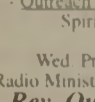

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