

Tuesday, 2 October 2007

## Fast Food — Iftaar in Milton Keynes



Last Friday I was in MK sharing in a **Ramadan Iftaar** (Evening fast breaking celebration meal) with Muslim friends, hosted by MK College. It was a large celebration, with representatives from local government, police, MP's, and the MK Jewish community (memories of a fabulous seder shared with Tsvi and Sarah at their synagogue this year). The evening was a great fusion of formal event and family party. I was able to contribute a few words of greeting, and to reflect on the spiritual discipline of fasting — something common to all Abrahamic faiths (and others).

The main after dinner event was a presentation by **Dr Kamal Bechkoum**, from Derby University, on the practice of Ramadan, and its Quranic and social reality. Dr Kamal is in the middle, and on the right, the cockleshell hero of the whole evening — **Anouar Kassim** Community campaigner whose organisational skills, gentle manner as host and sense of fun made the whole evening pure joy.



Jesus didn't say "if you fast" but "when you fast." People from Bible times would be amazed at our self-indulgence, as they'd see it, and how little we use the strength that comes from the community to help us to fast. I was profoundly impressed by the way observant Muslims use this discipline to focus (as a means towards taqwa, or awareness of God) and support each other doing it.

**In modern Britain it sometimes seems all that matters is feeding your face, endless stuffing yourself in every way — yet everyone is so unhappy!** In one of his essays, George Orwell talks about a mean trick he played on a wasp on a plate eating jam. He cut it in two, and yet it just pumped away for the next ten minutes regardless, eating the jam. Surely God made us for something better than this.

Dr Bechkoum also told us about the positive disciplines of fasting — small random acts of kindness and the discovery that the people are, in fact, pineapples — weird/ spiky on the outside, but with sweetness within.

Many thanks for a wonderful learning opportunity. There's so much rubbish stereotyping of Islam in the media, mostly born of ignorance. I was, frankly, astonished at a Buckingham University do earlier this year by the sheer historical and general ignorance of one particular person's questions after my presentation. It was a public lecture, and I do not believe he can have been an educated man, but I felt embarrassed and ashamed all the same.

What I suggest we all do is go spend real time together and find out what **we're really like, warts and all. If we really believe, we should have the confidence to trust God, and that should resource us to struggle with prejudice and falsehood, in ourselves and in our society.** There's gold in them there pineapples!