In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Conference continued

Amir Kia spoke next on the theme of patience. We must have patience with our families and with those around us. All we can do is resort to patience with those with different beliefs. We know that the heavens and the earth are about to shatter at the thought that God has begotten a son, but we must realize that the heavens and earth were created for those who truly believe that they might have a second chance. They are all very small and rare. If we have patience with differing beliefs, shouldn't we have patience with one another? We are too small to allow little things to divide us. We must keep our level of energy up by supporting each other.

Gurnai Singh entailed his talk, "God controls everything." There are two categories of control—one for man, another for everything else. Man should use his brain to communicate, although the majority simply accept what they're told. Gurnai then gave data on the moon, as representative of the rest of the universe. Especially interesting was the fact that because of their positions in the solar system, the sun and the moon appear to be the same size during an eclipse the moon can totally block the sun. Closer or farther away, the sun wouldn't work. "The sun and the Moon are perfectly calculated." [55:5]

Hereafter, the talk was continued on another topic. The problem was then solved: 1) Identify the problem; 2) suggest solutions; 3) work out the solutions; 4) have the right attitude.

David Watts talked about the mathematical structure of the Quran—that numbers are alive and submitting. He was very excited by the mathematical seminar preceding the conference, and he relayed a personal discovery involving sura 2, verses 21 and 22.

Edip Yüksel talked about critical thinking. He explained how critical thinking starts with asking questions and develops in a free environment. He said our understanding of the Quran is diverse because of our backgrounds, whether or not the reader understands the subtle messages, making the communication sometimes difficult amongst ourselves. He suggested that the conference should be used to communicate and discuss our problems, and that we should not take things personally. He warned the community saying that we are not immune from isolating the messenger, and also that this comment will likely reflect history. He was also concerned about what he considered someone's playing with numbers and suggested that we should develop a criterion to identify "glass" from "diamonds."

Mahmoud Abdi's talk was perhaps the high point of the conference. Inviting audience participation, Mahmoud read wonderful verses from the Quran in praise of God, and asked questions from the Quran. Everyone enjoyed the "zikr" (commemoration). He called this "interactive Zikr." It was straightforward, concise, and uplifting.

Reports on the conference and the presentations will be continued in the coming issues, God willing.

Learning to Communicate: Another of God's Gifts

Perhaps one of the least appreciated, and most taken for granted gifts which God, Most Gracious, has provided us with is the gift of language. Until very recently there was almost unanimous agreement among specialists in the field that children's ability to learn to communicate was just a simple learning process and that there was nothing mysterious, innate or extraordinary about it. It was believed that young children learn to speak their mother tongue the same way, for example, that they learn to tie their shoeaces; by observing, imitating, practicing, being corrected and adjusting their performance to match adult performance. This of course does not happen and every test hypothesis, change hypothesis. Of the second interesting fact about language acquisition is that the system of language development must contend with the fact that children come to possess roughly the same result. In some cultures children are never addressed by adults, in other cultures they interact verbally with adults on a regular basis. The point is that despite these cultural differences in the area of children's language acquisition, these studies revealed a number of aspects of the language learning process in children that simply could not be explained by the prevailing theory that acquisition of language was just another routine learning process. Here are some of those puzzles that called into question the traditional "learning by imitation" view of language development.

1. All children learn the basic structure and vocabulary of their mother tongue in a fairly brief period of time. Scientists agree that this is a tremendous task to achieve, and that in accomplishing it, the child masters a complex, rule governed system. Yet studies also show that children with an IQ as low as 50 are able to master this complex task, albeit more slowly than children with normal (above 70) IQ levels. If language acquisition were really a normal learning process, the child would certainly need a much higher IQ and surely those who do not have it would be unable to learn their mother tongue. This of course does not happen and every test hypothesis, change hypothesis. Of the second interesting fact about language acquisition is that the system of language development must contend with the fact that children come to possess roughly the same result. In some cultures children are never addressed by adults, in other cultures they interact verbally with adults on a regular basis. The point is that despite these cultural differences in the area of children's language acquisition, these studies revealed a number of aspects of the language learning process in children that simply could not be explained by the prevailing theory that acquisition of language was just another routine learning process. Here are some of those puzzles that called into question the traditional "learning by imitation" view of language development.

2. The second interesting fact about language acquisition is that the system of knowledge that children come to possess as adult speakers is "undeveloped" in the input on which the learning takes place. This is sometimes called the "logical problem" of child language acquisition. How do we come to know so much based on such impoverished input? For example, children come to learn not only what is a possible sentence in their language but what is not. are "other" between the ages of 2-5 and the ability seems to change in late childhood. If it indeed were a normal learning process we should be able to learn a new language as adults almost as easily as we were children and once again this is simply not the case. This suggests that there is a critical period for the development of human communication, just as there is for other genetically determined systems of knowledge in the animal kingdom.

4. Children learn language under greatly varying circumstances and yet with roughly the same result. In some cultures children are never addressed by adults, in other cultures they interact verbally with adults on a regular basis. The point is that despite these cultural differences in terms of children's verbal interaction, the child will learn the language of the community into which he or she is born. If first language acquisition takes place between the ages of 2-5 and the ability seems to change in late childhood. If it indeed were a normal learning process we should be able to learn a new language as adults almost as easily as we were children and once again this is simply not the case. This suggests that there is a critical period for the development of human communication, just as there is for other genetically determined systems of knowledge in the animal kingdom.
Chomsky raised the standard for linguistics when he insisted that it meet the criterion of "explanatory adequacy." That is, the theory must not only describe the facts of language but explain how all children learn the particular variety of human language that they are exposed to without the observed conditions of language acquisition. Chomsky's theory of the language organ in the brain is sometimes referred to as the "universal grammar" and is based on the idea that children are born with a "hardwired" universal grammar which the child uses to learn their mother tongue quickly and effortlessly. This universal grammar comes to this world with a tacit knowledge of some extent specialized for the job of language acquisition. Some have come to this world with a tacit knowledge of some extent specialized for the job of language acquisition.