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Jul. 31, 2003. 01:00 AM

Three weddings and a funeral

[RAHEEL RAZA, ARIANE MAHDAVI, NATASHA FATAH AND ATIQUE AZAD](#)

At a Muslim wedding in Markham last week, about 350 guests faced an embarrassing situation. The self-proclaimed Imam (leader) who was invited by the hosts to say a few words got totally carried away and gave a long, offensive monologue.

First, he publicly denounced non-Muslims for lacking family values. He then asked the groom thrice if he wanted to escape. Furthermore, he informed the bride, she doesn't have the right to step outside the house or give anything to her family without her husband's permission. He reinforced these "rules" by mentioning hellfire and brimstone.

There was no talk of love, respect and consideration between the couple. The guests were stunned, the couple looked shocked and a few people stood up in protest but no one contradicted the speaker. Obviously they had no idea what to do.

Upon inquiring how a balanced, educated family could allow someone to spew such vitriol, the hosts confessed that their agreement with the speaker had been for him to repeat the marriage sermon of Prophet Muhammad as done traditionally at Muslim weddings (which is short and simple, highlighting the sanctity and beauty of marriage). They had no clue that he would indulge in histrionics.

Muslim marriages do not necessitate a sermon to be recited as part of the religious ceremony. The requirement is for *Aqd* which is solemnization of the contract through offering and acceptance with full and free consent of the parties concerned, two witnesses and a gift from the groom to the bride.

A respected community member may be invited to say a few words, which could range from relevant verses of the Qur'an to Sufi poetry. A public celebration to bless the union is considered to be Sunnah (practice of the Prophet) and this celebration can be as festive as the family wishes it to be. Weddings are not meant to be dark and dreary as some dysfunctional mullahs indicate, when they pose themselves as reformers, exhorting misogynist theories supported by useless traditions and ranting about "Western corruption."

It seems that they have taken it upon themselves to use occasions like weddings and funerals, to endorse personal views. Recently at a funeral in Toronto, the Imam who was asked to pray for the soul of the departed blasted the Supreme Court of Canada for 30 minutes, on the issue of same-sex marriages! Wrong time, wrong place.

However, misuse of power by religious leaders is not unique to the Muslim

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community. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, a family has filed a lawsuit against their local Catholic church over a funeral mass in which the priest allegedly said their relative was a "lukewarm" Catholic and was going to hell. Religious exploitation seems to have taken the world by storm.

At a second wedding in Toronto, the Imam lectured women about their marital duties, interpreted in the most conservative framework, with no mention that Prophet Mohammad's wife Khadija, a successful businesswoman, had sent a proposal of marriage to him. He then informed the guests that they shouldn't befriend Jews and Christians and proceeded to point out the faults of the "infidels" until the young bride burst into tears and told him that most of her friends present at the event were Jews and Christians.

So much for joy.

Our only hope as a thriving and contributing Canadian Muslim community lies in removing the power of those who distort the faith. Some young Muslims took the initiative of doing just that at a wedding last week.

The bride and her brother organized the reception, informing the parents that their only contribution would be one of their credit cards. There was no sermon, and the occasion reflected the best of both worlds. The families of the bride and groom are quite traditional, so a simple religious ceremony had been performed earlier at a mosque with immediate family in attendance.

Later, family and friends were invited to a mixed reception where hijab and henna mingled with halters and high heels to the strains of traditional music.

Friends and families blessed the couple in an atmosphere filled with joy — finally a Muslim-Canadian wedding with some feeling.

***Raheel Raza, and Natasha Fatah** hail from Pakistan; **Atique Azad** from Bangladesh; and **Ariane Mahdavi** from Iran. They are members of the Muslim Canadian Congress.*

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