

N.S.W. SUMMIT ON ALCOHOL ABUSE 2003

**ADDRESS BY MR AHMED ABDO
28 AUGUST 2003**

SPOKESPERSON, ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF NSW

MADAM CHAIR - GOOD MORNING. AS BOTH A YOUNG PERSON AND AN AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM, I FEEL PRIVILEGED TO ADDRESS THIS HISTORIC SUMMIT TODAY.

THE FIRST LANGUAGE I SPOKE WAS ARABIC. LOOKING AT THE ETYMOLOGY OF ALCOHOL, ARAB SCHOLARS SAY IT IS DERIVED FROM THE ARABIC AL-KOHL WHICH MEANS "BLACK POWDER OR PAINT FOR EYELIDS." FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, THE EYELID PAINT MOST WIDELY USED BY ARAB WOMEN HAS BEEN CALLED ETHMID; IT IS A FINE BLACK POWDER PULVERIZED FROM MOUNTAIN STONES.

ANOTHER GROUP SAY THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ALCOHOL DERIVES FROM ANOTHER WORD: AL-GHOL. THE OLD ARABIC DICTIONARIES DEFINE AL-KOL (AL-GHOL) AS A GENIE OR SPIRIT THAT MAY TAKE AWAY THE MIND. THIS LAST

STATEMENT FITS WELL WITH ALCOHOL - IT DOES TAKE AWAY THE MIND.

HISTORICALLY DURING THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD, IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA, BREWING OF ALCOHOL FROM DATES, GRAPES AND HONEY WAS GENERALLY POPULAR. DRINKING OF WINE WAS CLEARLY IDENTIFIED AS A TROUBLESOME SOCIAL EVIL AND SUCCESSFULLY DEALT WITH.

EVEN AFTER FOURTEEN HUNDRED YEARS, ISLAM HAS SUCCESSFULLY MADE ITS FOLLOWERS TO ABSTAIN FROM ALCOHOL, AND PROHIBITION OF ALCOHOL STANDS OUT AS EXTRAORDINARY AND ALMOST DISTINCTIVE IN HUMAN HISTORY.

AN ANCIENT PERSIAN LEGEND SAYS THAT JAMSHID, A GRAPE-LOVING KING, STORED RIPE GRAPES GROWN IN SHIRAZ IN FARS PROVINCE IN A CELLAR SO HE COULD ENJOY GRAPES ALL YEAR LONG.

ONE DAY HE SENT HIS SLAVES TO FETCH HIM SOME GRAPES. WHEN THEY DID NOT RETURN HE DECIDED TO GO TO THE

CELLAR HIMSELF ONLY TO FIND THAT THE CARBON DIOXIDE GAS EMANATING FROM SOME BRUISED FERMENTING GRAPES HAD KNOCKED THEM OUT.

THE KING ORDERED THE JARS BE LABELED AS "POISON". ONE OF THE KING'S REJECTED AND DISTRESSED MISTRESSES DECIDED TO END HER LIFE BY DRINKING THIS POISONED POTION, ONLY TO LEAVE THE CELLAR SINGING AND DANCING IN HIGH SPIRITS.

THE KING REALIZED THAT THIS FRUITY LIQUID HAD THE WONDERFUL AND MYSTERIOUS POWER TO MAKE SAD PEOPLE HAPPY.

ACCORDING TO THE QUR'AN, WINE WAS A "DEVICE OF THE DEVIL", HENCE FORBIDDEN BUT IT ALSO STATES:

“AND FROM THE FRUITS OF DATE-PALMS AND GRAPES, YOU DERIVE WHOLESOME DRINK OR STRONG DRINK (THIS WAS BEFORE THE ORDER OF THE PROHIBITION OF THE ALCOHOLIC DRINKS) AND ALSO GOOD NOURISHMENT (AS FOOD). VERILY IN THIS ALSO IS A SIGN FOR THOSE WHO ARE WISE.” (QURAN 16:67)

AFTER THIS VERSE, SOME MUSLIMS STARTED TO WONDER ABOUT THE CORRECTNESS OF CONSUMING ALCOHOL. REVEALED A FEW YEARS LATER, WAS THIS VERSE:

"THEY ASK THEE CONCERNING WINE AND GAMBLING, SAY: "IN THEM IS GREAT SIN, AND SOME PROFIT, FOR MEN; BUT THE SIN IS GREATER THAN THE PROFIT..."(2:219)

THE THIRD MENTION OF ALCOHOL BY ALLAH (SWT) IN THE QUR'AN OCCURRED AS FOLLOWS:

"O YE WHO BELIEVE! APPROACH NOT PRAYERS WITH A MIND BEFOGGED, UNTIL YE CAN UNDERSTAND ALL THAT YE SAY, ..." (4:43)

A PRACTICING MUSLIM WILL NOT TOUCH ALCOHOL OUT OF FEAR OF GOD. THOSE WHO DO USUALLY FEEL MUCH GUILT ON BREAKING A QUR'ANIC INJUNCTION. MANY DRINKERS WILL CEASE THIS ACTIVITY DURING RAMADAN.

SOMETIMES, EXCESSIVE DRINKERS FIND THEMSELVES SO CHANGED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF HAJJ (PILGRIMAGE) THAT THEY NEVER DRINK AGAIN.

IN A TRUE ISLAMIC STATE, A PERSON IS NOT LIKELY TO EVER REACH THE POINT OF PHYSICAL DEPENDENCE ON ALCOHOL.

FRIENDS, FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS WILL NOT JUST LOOK AWAY WHILE A PERSON DESTROYS HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY.

MUSLIMS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE VERY INVOLVED IN CORRECTING WRONGS THAT THEY SEE. ISLAM IS A VERY COMMUNITY-ORIENTED FAITH.

THERE IS NO PLACE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL TO DO WHAT HE WANTS TO DO, IF IT HURTS OTHERS. AND BY HURTING YOURSELF THROUGH DRINKING, YOU INADVERTENTLY HURT OTHERS.

**FINALLY, WE NEED TO CREATE AWARENESS THAT NOT
DRINKING IS AN ACCEPTABLE, 'COOL' THING TO DO.**

THANKYOU.