



Islam: Cult or Culture?

THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Featuring Lecturer Dr. Umar Abd-Allah (Chicago)
and Photographer Peter Sanders (London)

Thursday, November 15th at 7:00 PM
UT's University Center Auditorium

Hosted by the Muslim Student Association (www.msaknoxville.org)

Osama Bin Laden. Holy War. Oppression of Women. Backwardness.

The first thoughts of many when they hear the word *Islam*. This stereotype is a vandalized image of a rich tradition that began more than 1400 years ago. The spiritual diversity of more than one billion people unfairly placed under one journalistic label.

A faith that began with a small group of believers in Arabia miraculously spread, in only a few brief decades, to inspire brilliant civilizations that extended from the borders of France to the gates of China. While Europe lay dormant in its Dark Ages, the Muslim world flourished in its Golden Age—launching higher mathematics with the invention of algebra, building architectural wonders, and reviving the works of ancient Greek philosophers. It was, in fact, the Muslims who sparked the European Renaissance. Yet even at the height of its glory, the Muslim empire was one of unparalleled religious tolerance. Christians, Jews, and followers of other faiths lived peacefully within its borders, an ideal still cherished by most of the world's Muslims.

By allowing cult-like and violent extremists to represent Islam, there is a tendency in America today to view all Muslims negatively and deny their many contributions to humanity. To help remedy these misconceptions, this event offers a one-evening panorama of Islam and the rich diversity of its followers. Dr. Umar Abd-Allah, an American Muslim scholar and historian, will present a virtual tour of Muslim history and civilization. Complementing the lecture will be a breath-taking slide show by photographer Peter Sanders, a British Muslim and one of the world's most-renowned visual chroniclers of Islamic culture. In portraying a holistic Image of Islam and Muslims, we hope to give the audience a glimpse of Islam's forgotten legacy.



Dr. Umar Abd-Allah was born in 1948 to a Protestant family. Early in 1970, he became Muslim while studying English literature at Cornell University. He then changed his field and transferred to the University of Chicago, where he received with honors his doctorate in 1978 in Islamic and Arabic Studies. He taught at the Universities of Windsor, Temple, and Michigan from 1977 until 1982, when he left to teach Arabic in Spain. In 1984, he was appointed to the Department of Islamic Studies at King Abdul-Aziz University in Saudi Arabia and taught there until 2000. Dr. Abd-Allah has studied with several Islamic scholars, written and published in Arabic and English, and is fluent in many languages. He returned to Chicago in 2000 to work as general director of the new Nawawi Foundation. He now teaches in Chicago and conducts research in Islamic and cognate fields.

Peter Sanders was born in London in 1946. He launched his professional career in photography during the mid-1960s by photographing most of the major music stars, among them Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and the Rolling Stones. Like many others of his generation, Sanders made a spiritual pilgrimage to India in 1970. His enthusiasm for religion introduced him to Islam, the beauty of which impressed him deeply. Upon returning to England, Sanders became a Muslim. His ensuing travels have taken him across the Muslim World including Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. He says that photography is a divine gift: "Its a wonderful process; you learn so much about yourself by doing it. Often when I'm taking pictures, it seems as if I'm chasing a moment, like a beautiful bird that keeps escaping me."

