

## True Parents' example In an Age of Radicalization - Restoring God's lost children

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*True Parents and elder member Pak Bo-hi with Grand Mufti Ahmed Kuftaro (1915–2004) of Syria, with whom True Parents had a warm, heart-felt relationship*

True Parents have taken up the massive mission of restoring all of God's lost children, from every cultural background and geographical location, including even spiritual hell. Though we shouldn't be surprised, many of us might still be in awe of the way that True Father and True Mother embrace people from cultures and with belief systems so different from their own. In these modern times, and in our competitive societies, where vilifying "the other," seems so commonplace, True Parents have shown respect and demonstrated love and care for people of every type. Indeed, they have treated "the other" as kin, as loved ones.

Unconsciously, humans tend to categorize people of various groups as "the other," not "one of us," and then to criticize and belittle them. We malign various groups -- people of other races, people with other political opinions, people of other cultures, people in rural areas, people in urban areas... In recent times, we have seen a terrible backlash. We have seen the worst possible outcome when people are made to feel that they do not fit in. Ultimately, vilifying people stirs up an ugly cloud of emotions that rises into the air, where it fills the atmosphere we all breathe and where it threatens to blot out the sun.

### **Tragic circumstances**

On December 6, 2014, officers with the Metropolitan Police covering London's Heathrow Airport pulled a teen-aged boy off a plane that was on the tarmac about to take to the skies bound for Turkey, where police suspected that young person would have crossed over into Syria to join the terrorist organization ISIS. Forty kilometers (25 miles) away, on the same day, a fifteen-year-old girl, Sharmeena Begum, did exactly that after boarding her flight to Istanbul from London's Gatwick Airport. Police determined that their choosing to leave on the same day was coincidence.

Sharmeena loved music, shopping and popular television shows. She dreamed of becoming a doctor. Yet Sharmeena's teen-aged life had fallen into painful but non-lethal chaos in the months before she left her London home for the last time, unlike the chaos that would surround her like a "lake of fire" in Syria.

Sharmeena had been born in England of parents from Bangladesh. She lived with her mother, her uncle and grandmother. Her father, Mohammad Uddin, moved to England to join them when Sharmeena was eight years old.

In 2013, her mother, Shahnaz Begum, learned that she had lung cancer. She lived only six months after that. She never told Sharmeena. Shahnaz's doctor explained the circumstances to Sharmeena two months before her mother's death, which occurred in January 2014. Sharmeena's father remarried in September of the same year. Sharmeena's world was falling apart. Though never before overtly religious, she sought

comfort in her religion. It seems likely that outside the East London Mosque, in her online pursuits, those with hidden military objectives began to influence her. A *New York Times* article, "Jihad and Girl Power" describes Sharmeena arguing with a teacher in class and defending ISIS. Sharmeena told her grandmother she wanted to open her own bank account and got her passport and some of the condolence money relatives in Bangladesh had sent after her mother had died.

She had what she needed.

The day after Mr. Uddin's daughter disappeared, her three best friends came to visit him. He questioned the girls about what had happened to his daughter, but they said they knew nothing -- only that she would move away from them sometimes when she received calls from some female caller. Mohammad Uddin, distraught and feeling that he hadn't done enough to protect his daughter, visited her school and warned them that her daughter's friends might also be targets of radicalization.

The school informed the police. Police officers visited the school to question the girls. They gave letters for the girls to take home to their parents but these likely went into some convenient trash bin.

The parents never saw them. On February 17, 2015, Amira Abase (fifteen); Shamima Begum (fifteen and unrelated to Sharmeena) and Kadiza Sultana (sixteen years old) -- three exemplary students in a private school -- flew from Gatwick Airport to Istanbul, Turkey, before crossing over into Syria. Each girl later contacted her parents and told them she was safe but would not be coming home.

On August 11, 2016, iTv News, which had been following Kadiza Sultana's family, who were in contact with Kadiza and arranging some means of escape to extract her from Syria, announced that they had received information that Kadiza had died in a Russian airstrike. iTv News has no means of confirming this, but the contact the family had had with Kadiza ceased.



*True Parents had a warm relationship with Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009) a religious and political leader of Indonesia. Pictured here, during a fraught time as president of Indonesia (1999–2001), when he visited True Parents to celebrate True Father's eightieth birthday*

### **A shock to the parents**

Few experiences in life can disquiet a person as intensely as learning that a friend or loved one has undergone a sudden, drastic change of personality or outlook on life. Yet it happens. Someone you thought you knew, in what seems an instant, goes from that person to a near total stranger. It is as if you are walking along a rocky ledge that winds around a high mountain, as a confident, experienced climber, and with each step, your foot presses down on solid rock, step after step after step, until suddenly -- it's gone -- and you are tumbling through the air, simultaneously experiencing a chorus of fears and that roaring question: What happened?

Amira Abase's father: She was normal; nothing you could see from her movements -- no sign that she was strained more than any other normal day. She was the same, actually.

Vice News: Did she say goodbye in a normal way?

Mr. Abase: Yeah, normal way. What she said was, Daddy, I'm in a hurry. That's all she said.

Vice News: Before Tuesday, had she started showing an interest in Syria? Had she been talking about humanitarian problems in Syria?

Mr. Abase: Not at all. Not at all. She was doing her schoolwork, because she's taking her GCSE this year. There was no sign to suspect her at all.

Vice News: Had she taken an interest in politics and international affairs? Had she talked much about the problems in the Middle East?

Mr. Abase: Not with us; maybe with her friends... We don't know really.

Vice News: Now, she disappeared on Tuesday and you... She didn't come home on Tuesday.

Mr. Abase: She didn't come home. She sent me a text message at 11:00, 11:10, something like that.

She said, Daddy, her place is a little bit far and I'll pray my midday prayer and I'll get back. Don't worry.

Vice News: But she didn't come home.

Mr. Abase: She didn't come home, and we reported to the police before midnight, and they told us the next day she is in Istanbul. We are depressed. It is very stressful.



*Our members, too, relate to, love and care for people of other faiths. At a time when young Muslims may feel marginalized and their isolation may lead to violent jihadists taking advantage of them during a vulnerable time, following True Parents' example may even save innocent lives*

### **Looking behind the curtain**

Last October, the Canadian chapters of WFWP and UPF held their joint annual conference. The focus of the conference was "disaffected youth"; that is, young people who have undergone a process that turned them indifferent or hostile toward the very life they had been living. Presentations covered urban gangs, school violence, broader violence in society, and radicalization.

One person who gave a presentation, Meriem Rebbani-Gosselin, had focused her 2014 Master's thesis on (mass) school shootings -- a violent phenomenon perpetrated by desperately troubled males.

In the Ontario Legislature Building, where the conference took place that day, she spoke about the obverse, the radicalization process of desperately troubled young Muslim women, just like those teen-aged girls in London. Ms. Rebbani-Gosselin is now with the Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV) a UN organization based in Montreal in the province of Quebec. A report of the study she described, "Women and Violent Radicalization," is available on the center's web site. "The study is from thirteen interviews ranging from one hour to eight hours per participant. Not all thirteen had gone to Syria, thankfully; a few went. [To learn about] those who are in Syria currently, we spoke to their friends and families," she said. "Reports on radicalization look at women usually as innocent victims, people who are going to Syria just to become brides of jihadists, of combatants. This is definitely not the case with the women I've met and I've spoken with," she said. "Agency is important.... Looking back, they see it was a mistake to try to join in Syria. (They were arrested at the airport.) But they still felt the steps -- to reach the conclusion to go to Syria -- they took on their own and that they had their own agency." The larger report shows how Muslims may not feel they fit in; some have trouble identifying as Quebecers. Part of radicalization is convincing them that they will fit in well in an entirely Muslim peer group, where they do not stand out.



One reason that Muslim women are exceptional is that in the West, more often than for men, their clothing marks them as Muslims. Among other findings, a 2016 thesis, "The Stigmatization of the Hijab: Using Interviews to Unravel the Discourse of Account-Making regarding the Hijab," concluded, "Unveiled Muslim college women revealed that it was easier to abstain from religious discrimination on campus by keeping their religious identity and practice private."

### **Recruiters, "grooming"**

A cameraman for SkyTv shot film of what looked like an unkempt office space. His lens caught a few people walking in what seemed a cramped room. The narrator intoned, "Our cameraman risked his life to film these exclusive pictures." It was clear he was not aiming the camera but surreptitiously filming random passing figures and a few slate gray desks and a couple of computer monitors. The narrator got to the point, "This is the nerve center of the Islamic State's transnational grooming operation, a social media phenomenon spanning the globe, urging the vulnerable to take up jihad and to travel to Syria." He went on to explain that the recruiters work in shifts according to what country they are from, so their targets can receive phone calls or WhatsApp or Facebook messages at convenient times.

### **Reaching the vulnerable**

What could possibly persuade anyone of his or her own free will to go to al-Raqqah, the Syrian capital of the Islamic State? ISIS uses a great deal of propaganda to convince vulnerable young people that ISIS's "caliphate" is a paradise. One video shows happy families celebrating Ramadan at an amusement park, riding on the Ferris wheel and other rides, eating sumptuous food, happy couples holding hands and laughing children running free. This is hardly representative of life in a Syrian war zone.

"Groomers" who find a means to contact young people online, dupe those who feel alienated in the wider society into making the worst mistake of their lives by "pouring poison in their ears." They tell those who feel Islam is essential to their identity that they must leave their homes to be truly Muslim. They use a story in the Koran about hijra, the migration Muhammad and his followers made from Mecca to Medina. In a peaceful life of faith, this might symbolize a spiritual quest. A Frenchman accused of kidnapping his baby daughter and taking her with him to Syria explained the radical definition. "In our religion, there's a command called hijra -- it's an obligation for all Muslims not to live in a non-Muslim country." Young people who experienced feeling humiliated just for being Muslims have bought airline tickets based on this evil-intentioned advice. The groomers' appeal may not always be so ideological. One girl was simply convinced to come to Syria to help the suffering children. This worked on her. She may have imagined she would be helping orphans whose parents had been killed or whose homes had been destroyed. Instead, she babysits the children of fighters so that they are free to make orphans of other children. She wants to get out of Syria, but to date has been unable to.

### **True Parents' warm embrace**

True Parents have demonstrated complete openhearted love for people of other faiths. Our members' efforts to help create harmony among people of other faiths in these times seem vital.

True Father, in his capacity as the founder of the Inter-religious and International Federation for World Peace (the forerunner to UPF), said, "Conflicts arise for many reasons, but one of the primary factors contributing to their emergence is the deep-rooted disharmony that exists among the world's religions. Therefore, when we witness the many global tragedies occurring around us, we should recognize how critically important it is that religions come together, dialogue with one another and learn to embrace one another.... The human ideal to achieve oneness of mind and body can be realized only when people completely possess God's true love. The biblical verse, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," illustrates this point. Peacemakers are persons whose mind and body are in unity centering on the true love of God."