

From DJ to deen

A familiar name on the Islamic lectures circuit is that of Sheikh Ahmed Haneef. Haneef is one of a growing number of scholars with style - his intimate knowledge of east and west, ineffable energy and sincere love of all things spiritual have placed him as a firm favourite with young Muslims everywhere.

Haneef, an Afro-Caribbean born in Trinidad in the 1950s, was raised a Roman Catholic. Haneef grew up during the 60s and 70s witnessing the political movements surrounding the Vietnam war and black power movement. Thoughts of injustice and disillusionment stayed with Haneef when at 17 he left the warm shores of Trinidad to study in Canada. There, he campaigned for reform to the high school curriculum which at that time selectively streamed black students into inferior programs.

Haneef's deep sense of frustration with world politics spurred him to read political science at university. There, he discovered Marxism and music; by day activist, by night DJ. "As one brother put it: combining the struggle with the right to party," he joked. However, this fascination was short lived: "I became disenchanted with Marxism because of its lack of a spiritual dimension. I began to research religion to find one that combined spiritual truth with the pursuit for social justice. In the process I found a Quran in the bookstore of my university which had a profound effect on me. I had found the religion I was looking for."

Haneef took his shahada (declaration of faith) four months later. "After about one year, when the Islamic Revolution was victorious, I became curious about Shism," he said. In 1980, Haneef became a Shia and in 1993, moved to Iran with his family to study at the religious seminary in Qom, Iran.

Today, Haneef continues to combine study with action and regularly lectures at masjids around the world, as well as hosting programs on channels such as PressTV. Propagating the spirit of Islam is an issue close to his heart, especially to those deprived of a religious and spiritual upbringing. "It is my hope to help cast the light of faith into

the world of others”, he said