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المجلس الكندي للنساء المسلمات

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF MUSLIM WOMEN
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES FEMMES MUSULMANES

IN THE NAME OF GOD

The Canadian Council of Muslim Women is a national non-profit organization established to assist Muslim women in participating effectively in Canadian Society and to promote mutual understanding between Canadian Muslim women and women of other faiths.



"And as for the believers, both men and women - they are close to one another (are protectors and friends of one another): they enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, render the purifying dues and pay heed to God and His Apostle. It is they upon whom God will bestow His grace: surely God is almighty, wise.

Quran 9:71

1999 CONFERENCE:

Insha Allaha, we will have our national conference on the weekend of October 29, 1999 in Toronto.

*The Conference theme is **Muslim Women in Canada: Our Rights and Freedoms in the 21st Century.***

We are pleased and honoured to have 2 renowned scholars and authors as our key speakers. Drs. Riffat Hassan and Abdullahi an Na'im will speak on the difference and similarities between universal human rights, and Quranic rights. We expect to hear about how these can be made congruent, so that Muslim women are treated equally under both paradigms.

*We know these scholars will enlighten and empower us. We will develop a Position Paper on **Claiming Our Rights as Canadians and as Muslims.***

The workshops will address needs identified by women and will result in specific outcomes. One workshop will address issues of our rights; another will be on Violence Against Women, specifically Female Genital Mutilation; a consultative workshop on the development of a media kit as well as an Information Handbook on Islam and Muslim women. Both these products will assist us in outreach and public education.

The Media Kit is the work of the well known Toronto journalist Raheel Raza. The kit will be a practical guide allowing us to combat negative, stereotyping of Islam and Muslim women.

The Information Handbook is being written by McGill University students, Valerie Ann Pocock and Alan Guenther. The contents will be on Islam, Pillars and Practices, demography of Muslims in Canada, Muslim women, a Glossary of Terms and some recommended books. This will be useful for non Muslims, Boards of Education, social service agencies and the media.

The youth are planning a skit of readings which will describe the issues facing them. This will be followed by a panel discussion. We intend to video tape the session and Chapter youth delegates have made a commitment to hold workshops in their local communities for youth.

We will be honouring the women who shared their personal stories in our publication, At My Mother's Feet, during the Saturday evening dinner. Please join us in thanking them for being role models for all of us.

We thank the Department of Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, Women's Program for funding our projects of the conference.

Please come to this worthwhile conference and we ask that each woman bring a friend and a male relative so that there is greater understanding that "women's issues" affect the whole family and community. "Women's Issues" are not a sideline nor are they "anti" anybody or anything.

Example of the Writings of Riffat Hassan and Abdullahi an Na'im.

*Riffat Hassan
From Book "After Patriarchy"
The Islamic Tradition: Sources & Interpretation*

Pg. 39

"Before engaging in any meaningful discussion of a post-patriarchal Islam, I consider it necessary to clarify what I mean by the Islam Tradition, since much confusion surrounds the use of this term. The Islamic tradition - like other major religious traditions - does not consist of, or derive from, a single source. Most Muslims if questioned about its sources are likely to refer to more than one of the following: The Qur'an (the Book of Revelation believed by Muslims to be the Word of God); Sunnah the practical traditions of the Prophet Muhammad); Hadith (the sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad); Fiqh (Jurisprudence) or Madahib (Schools of Law); and the Shariah (the code of life that regulates all aspects of Muslim life). While all these "sources" have contributed to what is cumulatively referred to as the Islamic tradition, it is important to note that they do not form a coherent or consistent body of teachings or precepts from which a universally agreed upon set of Islamic norms can be derived. Many examples can be cited of inconsistency between various sources of the Islamic tradition, and also of inner inconsistency within some, for example, the Hadith literature. In view of this fact it is inappropriate, particularly in a scholarly work, to speak of the Islamic tradition as if it were unitary or monolithic. Its various components need to be identified and examined separately before one can attempt to make any sort of generalization on behalf of the Islamic tradition in general.

Of the various sources of the Islamic tradition - at least insofar as it is understood theoretically or normatively - the two most important are the Qur'an and the Hadith. Of these two, undoubtedly, the Qur'an is the more important. In fact, the Qur'an is regarded by virtually all Muslims as the primary source of Islam, having absolute authority since it is believed to be God's unadulterated message conveyed through the agency of Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, who then transmitted it to others without change or error. However, since the early days of Islam, the Hadith literature has been the lens through which the words of the Qur'an have been seen and interpreted.

Before mentioning the importance of the hadith literature to the Islamic tradition, it is necessary to point out that every aspect of this literature is surrounded by controversy. In particular, the question of the authenticity of individual ahadith (plural of hadith), as well as of the Hadith literature as a whole, has occupied the attention of many scholars of Islam since the time of Ash-Shafi'i (died in 809). As stated by Fazlur Rahman in his book, Islam, "a very large proportion of the hadiths were judged to be spurious and forged by classical Muslim scholars themselves" (Rahman, 70). This fact has generated much skepticism regarding the Hadith literature in general among "moderate" Muslims. Though few of them are willing to go as far as Ghulam Ahmad Parwez, leader of the Tulu' e Islam or the Dawn of Islam movement in Pakistan, who rejects the Hadith literature virtually in toto, many of them are likely to be in agreement with the following observations of Moulvi Cheragh Ali, an important Indian Muslim scholar, who wrote in the nineteenth century:

The vast flood of tradition soon formed a chaotic sea. Truth, error, fact, and fable mingled together in an undistinguishable confusion. Every religious, social, and political system was defended when necessary, to please a Khalif or an Ameer to serve his purpose, to support all manner of lies and absurdities or to satisfy the passion, caprice, or arbitrary will of the despots, leaving out of consideration the creation of any standards for test ... I am seldom inclined to

quote traditions having little or no belief in their genuineness, as generally they are as generally they are inauthentic, unsupported and one-sided (quote in Guillaume, 97).

*Though valid grounds exist for regarding the Hadith literature with caution, if not skepticism, Fazlur Rahman is right in saying that "if the hadith literature as a whole is cast away, the basis for the historicity of the Qur'an is removed with one stroke" (Rahman, 73). Furthermore, as pointed out by Alfred Guillaume in his book, *The Traditions of Islam*:*

The Hadith literature as we now have it provides us with apostolic precept and example covering the whole duty of man: it is the basis of that developed system of law, theology, and custom which is Islam (Guillaume, 15).

However skeptical we are with regard to the ultimate historical value of the traditions, it is hard to overrate their importance in the formation of the life of the Islamic races throughout the centuries. If we cannot accept them at their face value, they are of inestimable value as a mirror of the events which preceded the consolidation of Islam into a system (Guillaume, 12-13)."

Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam: In Summation

Pg. 59

The foregoing account provides much evidence for arguing that the patriarchal assumptions and attitudes that are deeply entrenched and universally present in Muslim culture have had serious negative implications - both theoretical and practical - for Muslim women throughout Muslim history up until the present time. At the same time, it has been amply demonstrated that the Qur'an, which to Muslims in general is the most authoritative source of Islam, does not discriminate against women despite the sad and bitter fact of history that the cumulative (Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, Bedouin, and other) biases that existed in the Arab-Islamic culture of the early centuries of Islam infiltrated the Islamic tradition, largely through the Hadith literature, and undermined the intent of the Qur'an to liberate women from the status of chattel or inferior creatures and make them free and equal to men. Not only does the Qur'an emphasize that righteousness is identical in the case of man or woman, but it affirms, clearly and consistently, women's equality with men and their fundamental right to actualize the human potential that they share equally with men. In fact, when seen through a non-patriarchal lens, the Qur'an goes beyond egalitarianism. It exhibits particular solicitude toward women as also toward other classes of disadvantaged person. It also provides particular safeguards for protecting women's special sexual/biological functions such as carrying, delivering, suckling, and rearing offspring.

In view of what women in the major religious traditions of the world have suffered in the name or interest of patriarchal values or systems and structures of thought and conduct, it is hardly surprising that many feminist theologians consider the rejection of patriarchy a prerequisite for the liberation of women from various forms of injustice. However, when patriarchy is seen as indissolubly linked with the "core" of a religious tradition - for instance, with God in the context of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - then the rejection of the one generally involves the rejection of the other. This is why a number of feminist theologians have in the post-patriarchal phase of their thinking gone beyond their religious traditions altogether. Rejecting God, who is identified by them with maleness, they have also, oftentimes, rejected men-women relationships and childbearing, seeing both heterosexual marriage and childbearing as patriarchal institutions used to enslave and exploit women

However, to me, patriarchy is not integral to the Islam embodied in the Qur'an nor is God thought of as male by Muslims in general. Rejection of patriarchy does not, therefore, have to lead to rejection of God in whom a Muslim's faith is grounded. Here it needs to be pointed out that being a Muslim is dependent essentially only upon one belief: belief in God, universal creator and sustainer who sends revelation for the guidance of humanity. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has remarked insightfully, "A true Muslim .. is not a man who believes in Islam - especially Islam in history; but one who believes in God and is committed to the revelation through His Prophet" (Smith, 146).

God, who speaks through the Qur'an, is characterized by justice, and it is stated with the utmost clarity in the Qur'an that God can never be guilty of zulm (unfairness, tyranny, oppression, or wrongdoing). Hence, the Qur'an, as God's Word, cannot be made the source of human injustice, and the injustice to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be regarded as God-derived. Historically, as this essay has shown, some of the passages in the Qur'an have been interpreted in such a way that they appear to support what seems - from a twentieth-century Muslim feminist perspective to - be unjust ways of thinking and behaving.

However, given the incredible richness of the Arabic language, in which virtually every word has multiple meanings and nuances, it is possible - and necessary - to reinterpret these passages differently so that their import or implication is not contrary to the justice of God."

Abdullahi an Na'im

From the Book Towards an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law

"Sharia & Basic Human Rights Concerns"

"In accordance with the fundamental purpose of this book - to enable Muslims to exercise their right to self-determination without violating the rights of others to the same - this chapter will attempt to identify areas of conflict between shari'a [Islamic law] and universal standards of human rights and seek a reconciliation and positive relationship between the two systems. The hypothesis of this chapter, like that of the preceding chapters, is that if they implement historical shari'a, Muslims cannot exercise their right to self-determination without violating the rights of others. It is possible, however, to achieve a balance within the framework of Islam as a whole by developing appropriate principles of modern Islamic public law. ..."

Pg. 223

"There is a common normative principle shared by all the major cultural traditions which, if construed in an enlightened manner, is capable of sustaining universal standards of human rights. That is the principle that one should treat other people as he or she wishes to be treated by them. This golden rule, referred to earlier as the principle of reciprocity, is shared by all the major religious traditions of the world. Moreover, the moral and logical force of this simple proposition can easily be appreciated by all human beings or whatever cultural tradition or philosophical persuasion."

Pg. 224

"The problem with using the principle of reciprocity in this context is the tendency of cultural, and particularly religious, traditions to restrict the application of the principle of other members of its cultural or religious tradition, if not a certain group within the given tradition. The historical conception of the principle of reciprocity under shari'a did not apply to women and non-Muslims to the same extent that is applied to Muslim men. In other words, by granting women and non-Muslims, a lower status and sanctioning discriminatory treatment against them, shari'a denies women and non-Muslims the same degree of honour and human dignity it guarantees to Muslim men ..."

Pg. 225

"In content and substance, I submit that universal human rights are based on the two primary forces that motivate all human behaviour, the will to live and the will to be free. Through the will to live, human beings have always striven to secure this food, shelter, health, and all other means for the preservation of life. Moreover, people have always striven to improve the quality of their lives through the development and manipulation of available physical resources and through political struggle to achieve the fair and equitable distribution of wealth and power among the members of the particular community. At one level, the will to be free overlaps with the will to live, in that it is the will to be free from physical constraints and to be secure in food, shelter, health, and other necessities of a good life. At another level, the will to be free exceeds the will to live in that it is the driving force behind the pursuit of spiritual, moral, and artistic well-being and excellence.

The right to seek the satisfaction of the legitimate claims of these two forces is granted by every cultural tradition to its own members and must therefore, in accordance with the principle of reciprocity, be granted to the members of other traditions. This is, in my view, the basis of the universality of certain minimum human rights. By applying this simple criterion, we can identify those rights, claims, and entitlements that ought to be protected as human rights even if they are not identified as such by any formal document..."

Pg. 226

"Slavery is one of the most serious impediments on the will to live and the will to be free. Although it has been practiced by every major human civilization throughout history, slavery, in the sense of institutionalized and legal ownership of human beings as chattel, has finally come to be universally condemned and outlawed by both domestic and international law. More effort is needed to eradicate all shades and forms of economic exploitation and degradation reminiscent of slavery. In the present context, however, we are concerned with slavery as a legal institution.

The abolition of slavery may well be the first example of the acceptance of an international human right as a limitation on domestic jurisdiction. In other words, the antislavery movement established a precedent for recognizing the principle that the violation of a universal human right by one country is the legitimate concern of other countries. As a result of this movement, a series of international agreements was concluded, culminating in one of the most widely ratified conventions condemning and prohibiting slavery under international law. Moreover, several major international treaties have since reiterated the prohibition of slavery and required signatory states to outlaw and eliminate its practice in their domestic jurisdictions.

Another early example of international cooperation in the field of human rights is the movement to eliminate the persecution of and discrimination against religious minorities. Besides the moral abhorrence of such practices, persecution and discrimination on grounds of religion were

perceived to be among the major causes of international conflict and war. Consequently, a number of international treaties declared such persecution and discrimination a violation of human rights.

A third area of emerging universal human rights, as defined above, is the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of gender. Although this right did not receive international attention as early as the other two rights, it has now come to be recognized as a universal human right under a variety of international conventions.

The principle of nondiscrimination does not preclude all differential treatment on grounds such as race, gender, or religion. In this respect, I would agree with the proposition that one has to judge the nature of differential treatment in light of its purpose. "If the purpose of this effect is to nullify or impair the enjoyment of human rights on an equal footing, the practice is discriminatory." In this way, one would accept action that has the purpose or effect of enhancing rather than impairing the enjoyment of human rights on an equal footing. It is not necessary to go into these issues in detail in this context. What is being affirmed here is that discrimination on grounds such as gender and religion violates human rights..."

Pg. 228

"As will be suggested at the end of this chapter, the only effective approach to achieve sufficient reform of shari'a in relation to universal human rights is to cite sources in the Qur'an and sunna which are inconsistent with universal human rights and explain them in historical context, while citing those sources which are supportive of human rights as the basis of the legally applicable principles and rules of Islamic law today."

Media Liaison

As many of you recall, Raheel Raza, acted as our media consultant at the 1998 Conference and did a great job publicizing the conference.

She has kindly agreed to be our formal media liaison not just at the conference but with the Media Kit and throughout the year.

We know Raheel will be a great asset for CCMW, in promoting its work on behalf of women.

Publications

We are proud to present the completion of 2 of our projects to be published by Quarry Press.

The books will be on sale at the Conference.

At My Mother's Feet: Conversations with Canadian Muslim Women.

North American Muslim women have been relegated to the back stage of history and society, recognized, if at all, for how they helped their husbands. This series of conversations with Muslim women shows them instead as 20th-century pioneers whose vision and determination, despite enormous negative forces from within their own ethnic community and beyond, helped to create the first Muslim social institutions in North America and inspired a new generation of women to move ahead with pride in their religion and culture. Lila Fahlman recounts her efforts to found the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and to save the oldest mosque in North America from demolition; Maryam Bhaba reports on her effort to establish, on her own, the first camp for Bosnian refugees in Croatia. These and other moving first-person stories of hardship, struggle, and spiritual growth counter the current preoccupation of the media with portraying these women as victims of their faith.

Twice nominated for a Gemini Award for television journalism, Sadia Zaman has been awarded the prestigious Southam Fellowship. Currently on staff at Vision TV, she has worked as a reporter with CBC and TV Ontario. She lives in Toronto. Sponsored by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women.

144 pages, 6 x 9 inches, 15 b/w photos

1-55082-2630-2 \$14.95 CDA/USA \$11.95 October 1999

Reading Rights: A Woman's Guide to the Law in Canada

A good, accurate, very useful handbook for the non-specialist." – Phil Rankin, Lawyer, Secretary of the BC Immigration Section of the Canadian Bar Association.

Surprisingly, no convenient guide to Canadian laws that grant and protect rights and freedoms for women has ever been written until now. Designed for new and established residents of Canada, *Reading Rights* explains women's rights and responsibilities at work, within the family, and as

citizens of the nation, demonstrating how women can make their own informed legal decisions and when they should solicit advice from a lawyer.

In simple, non-legal language, illustrated with humorous cartoons, this book gives answers to a host of questions: "What should I do in the case of abuse, sexual harassment, or racial discrimination? What are my rights to child custody and property in the event of a separation or divorce from my spouse? How do equality rights affect my job?" Includes copies of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Rahat Kurd is a free-lance writer from Vancouver with a special interest in culture and politics. She has created resource materials for many Canadian non-profit organizations, and doodles cartoons when lost for words. Sponsored by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women.

80 pages, 6 x 9 inches, cartoon illustrations

1-55082-262-4 \$12.95 CDA/USA \$9.95 October 1999

A Role Model

One of the notable women in our history is Sukayna, the daughter of Husayn who was the grandson of the Prophet.

From the book by Fatima Mernissi: The Veil and The Male Elite. Pages 191 - 193.

Story of Sukayna

"Some women tried to resist the changes imposed on them after the death of the Prophet. They claimed the right to go out barza (unveiled), a word which they added to the Lisan al-'Arab dictionary: "A barza woman is one who does not hide her face and does not lower her head." And the dictionary adds that a barza woman is one who "is seen by people and who receives visitors at home" – men, obviously. A barza woman is also a woman who has "sound judgement." A barz man or woman is someone "known for their 'aql [reasoning]." Who are they, these Muslim women who have resisted the hijab? The most famous was Sukayna, one of the great-granddaughters of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima, the wife of 'Ali, the famous 'Ali, the ill-fated fourth orthodox caliph who abandoned power to Mu'awiya and was assassinated by the first Muslim political terrorist. His sons' fates were as tragic as his own, and Sukayna was present at the killing of her father at Karbala. That tragedy partly explains her revolt against political, oppressive, despotic Islam and against everything that hinders the individual's freedom – including the hijab.

Sukayna was born in year 49 of the Hejira (about AD 671). She was celebrated for her beauty, for what the Arabs call beauty – an explosive mixture of physical attractiveness, critical intelligence, and caustic wit. The most powerful men debated with her; caliphs and princes proposed marriage to her, which she disdained for political reasons. Nevertheless, she ended marrying five, some say six, husbands. She quarreled with some of them, made passionate declarations of love to others, brought one to court for infidelity, and never pledged ta'a (obedience, the key principle of Muslim marriage) to any of them. In her marriage contracts she stipulated that she would not obey her husband, but would do as she pleased, and that she did not acknowledge that her husband had the right to practice polygyny. All this was the result of her interest in political affairs and poetry. She continued to receive visits from poets and, despite her several marriages, to attend the meetings of the Qurashi tribal council, the equivalent of today's democratic municipal councils. Her personality has fascinated the historians, who have devoted pages and pages, sometimes whole biographies, to her. Her character was deeply affected by history's harsh reality – particularly the killing of her father, Husayn Ibn 'Ali, at Karbala, one of the most outrageous massacres in Muslim political history. Husayn was a man of peace who had declared to Mu'awiya in a written contract his decision to renounce the caliphate, provided he be allowed to live in safety with his family. A poet, he celebrated the women he adored: Rabab, his wife, and Sukayna, his daughter. After the death of Mu'awiya, when he refused to swear allegiance to Mu'awiya's son, Husayn was killed at Karbala in the midst of his family, including Sukayna. It happened on the Day of Ashura (the Day of Atonement), October 10, AD 680. All her life Sukayna harboured feelings of contempt, which she never hesitated to express, for the Umayyad dynasty and its bloody methods. She attacked the dynasty in the mosques and insulted its governors and representatives every time she had the opportunity, even arranging occasions for this purpose.

She made one of her husbands sign a marriage contract that officially specified her right to nushuz, that rebellion against marital control that so tormented the fuqaha. She claimed the right to be nashiz, and paraded it, like her beauty and her talent, to assert the importance and vitality of women in the Arab tradition. Admiring and respectful, the historians delight in evoking her family dramas – for instance, the case that she brought against one of her husbands who had violated the rule of monogamy that she had imposed on him in the marriage contract. Dumbfounded by the conditions in the contract, the judge nevertheless was obliged to hear the case, with his own wife attending this trial of the century and the caliph sending an emissary to keep him au courant with the course of the trial.

You can imagine my surprise when I was accused of lying at a conference in Penang, Malaysia in

1984, where I presented Sukayna as a type of traditional Muslim woman for us to think about. My accuser, a Pakistani, editor of an Islamic journal in London, interrupted me, shouting to the audience: "Sukayna died at the age of six!" Trying to snatch the microphone away from me in a vindictive rage, he kept repeating: "She died at Karbala with her father! She died at Karbala!" Then smugly assuming the role of qadi, he demanded that I name the sources where I found my version of Sukayna's history. I furnished him a list on the spot – in Arabic obviously. He looked at it with disdain and told me it was very scanty. In fact, it contained the names of Ibn Qutayba, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, Ibn 'Asakir, al-Zamakshari, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn al-Ma'ad, al-Isbahani, al-Dhahabi, Al-Safadi, Al-Washaa, al-Bukhari – in short, the great names of Muslim historiography".

News Item

Cairo Times, 19 March - April 1998

Khalil Abdul Karim, a scholar and a lawyer in Egypt, promotes a liberal, apolitical interpretation of Islam.

He was a member of Muslim Brotherhood and claims that the blend of social justice and liberal Islam that he advocates is closer to the original spirit of the movement of Banna.

He argues, in his books, that there is no such thing as an Islamic government and that the Shariah is a moral code not a legal system. His books are very popular but have been banned by Al Azhar.

Afghan Issue

A group of American women initiated a letter writing campaign to the U.S. State Department, against the treatment of women by the Taliban.

Please contact them at their website: <http://www.feminist.org>

Follow Up of the Cairo Conference on Population and Development

Many countries have adopted policies and strategies to address gender equality, reproductive health, employment and violence vs women.

In Africa, 15 states have banned the practice of FGM. They include Senegal, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

From U.N. Population Fund Report 1998

National Clearing House on Family Violence is a resource centre for information and free publications.

Postal Address is Health Canada

Jeanne Mance Building

Tunney's Pasture

Ottawa, ON K1A 1B4

Phone: 1-800-267-1291

website is: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn>

SOME LEARNING FROM THE GEESE:

In the fall, when you see geese heading south for the winter...flying along in V formation...you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way:

As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in V formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater flying range, than if each bird flew on its own.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front.

If we have as much sense as a goose we will stay in formation with those who are headed the same way we are.

When the head goose gets tired it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies Point.

It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs with people or with geese flying south.

Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

What do we say when we honk from behind?

Finally...and this is important...when a goose gets sick or is wounded by gunshots and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or until it dies and only then do they launch out on their own or with another formation to catch up with their group.

If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by each other like that.

Source unknown.

Annual General Meeting

Will be held on Sunday, after the Conference.

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Please write, phone or e-mail us.

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