

The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.



Anousheh, Irshad and Wafa Women of the East Thriving in the West

By
John C. Snider © 2006

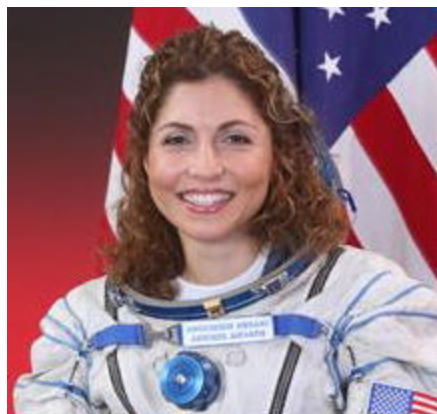
(This essay is adapted from a presentation given at the December 2006 FORum.)

We in Western Civilization beat ourselves up a lot. We agonize over our long history of atrocity, war, and bigotry. When cultural conflicts occur, we are often as quick to point the finger at ourselves as at our opponents.

But this capacity for self-critique—our introspective nature, our willingness to debate, assess, and *change*—is what has made the West not just the dominant culture on the planet, but also, in my opinion, the best. We sometimes forget that from the furnaces of atrocity, war, and bigotry have emerged the fires of enlightenment, tolerance, freedom, justice, prosperity, and scientific progress.

How often do we hear the claim that we are now *too* inclusive, that we are in danger from immigrants from foreign lands, with their foreign ideas? It is a valid issue for debate. Nonetheless, I want to introduce you to three women whose origins are not Western, but for whom the West has provided an environment in which to thrive.

Meet Anousheh Ansari



Anousheh Ansari is the world's first female space tourist and only the fourth person so far to buy a trip into space. She just paid the Russians \$20 million to ride in a Soyuz space capsule and visit the International Space Station. She kept a blog of her experience. Here is an excerpt from her entry discussing launch day, September 18, 2006:

I never thought it would be this smooth inside the

capsule... It was like an airplane takeoff—then the Gs started but very mild. I think we hit about 2 or 2.5 Gs max... then the separation and the Nose Fairing ejected. Still very smooth. A ray of light filled the capsule and warmed my heart. I think I was laughing out loud. The joy in my heart was indescribable...

The separation of final stage was the most noticeable to me and then

Weightlessness...

Anousheh's journey to space did not begin on September 18, 2006. It actually began when she was a teenager, in 1984, when her parents decided to uproot the family from their native Iran, which was still in the early years of the Islamic Revolution.

When Anousheh arrived in America, she did not speak English. Nonetheless, she came up to speed quickly, earning a degree in electrical engineering and computer science from George Mason University and a master's degree from George Washington University. Upon graduation, she began working for MCI, where she met her soon-to-be husband, Hamid Ansari. In 1994 Anousheh, Hamid, and her brother-in-law cashed in their retirement savings and founded Telecom Technologies. Their investment paid off. In 2000, they sold the company for \$550 million! Some have criticized Anousheh for spending \$20 million on a cosmic joyride. But her trip to the ISS is just part of a larger investment in making commercial spaceflight a reality. The Ansari family investment firm, called Prodea, is a member in a partnership aimed at developing suborbital spacecraft for global commercial use.

Ever hear of the X-Prize? It was a \$10 million contest that challenged private companies to launch a reusable manned spacecraft capable of carrying three people to 100,000 feet—the edge of space—and to do so *twice* within two weeks. Such a craft would demonstrate the feasibility of conducting commercially viable tourist/thrill-seeker adventures. And it would represent just one step in a journey that will eventually make access to orbital space a possibility for everyday people and create wider economic opportunities. The X-Prize was renamed the *Ansari X-Prize* on the strength of the Ansari family's contribution toward the \$10 million pot, which, incidentally, was claimed in 2004 by *SpaceShipOne*, piloted by aviation pioneer Burt Rutan, and funded by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. (Oh, to be rich!)

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Anousheh, Irshad and Wafa (continued from page 1)

Meet Irshad Manji



Now let us turn our attention from 2006, near-Earth orbit, to Uganda, August 1972. Idi Amin was just beginning his tyrannical reign over the former British colony. Claiming to have been commanded by God in a dream, Amin ordered Uganda's 50,000 Asians, mostly Indians, to leave the country within 90 days. Those that did not leave were either murdered or forced into the countryside. Among those who fled Uganda was the Manji family, with their four-year-old daughter Irshad.

The Manjis eventually settled near Vancouver, Canada, but ironically, Irshad's father turned out to be a despot that Idi Amin might envy. Taking advantage of a local offer of free daycare (which turned out to be *Christian* daycare), Irshad's Muslim father was appalled when his little girl began bringing home Western, Christian ideas. In response, he enrolled her in a madrasah, an Islamic school where Irshad was stunned to discover all sorts of unpleasant facts, such as the prohibition against women leading prayer (a prohibition Irshad noticed did not exist at the Christian preschool she had been attending).

This precocious girl challenged her Islamic teachers repeatedly, arguing with them and questioning them, and was so persistent she was eventually kicked out of the school. She so angered her father on one occasion that he chased her around the house with a butcher knife, and she was forced to flee through her bedroom window and sleep on the roof!

Some have called Irshad Manji "Osama bin Laden's worst nightmare". Why? Because she is a thoroughly Westernized woman, highly educated, headstrong, and a lesbian to boot. Worst of all, she has spoken out against fundamentalist Islam, and the direction the Muslim world has taken over the last few decades.

Irshad still clings to her Islamic heritage, but she wants to reform the Muslim world. She wants Muslims to be Muslims in much the same way Jews are Jewish or Christians are Christians these days; that is to say,

she wants Islam to become a religion of tolerant debate, where people are free to disagree and not be declared infidels or apostates (the current penalty for which is death).

Irshad has laid out her case brilliantly and with good humor in *The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*. In this book, she argues for something called *ijtihad*, a tradition of critical thinking that enabled Islamic culture to reach enviable heights during Europe's Dark Ages, but which fell out of favor and was replaced by the harsh, hidebound style of Islam we all know and love, a style she attributes to Arab Bedouin culture.

Irshad, who first came to prominence in Canada hosting the gay-centric show *Q-TV*, has traveled all over the world, including to Israel, to share her message of hope. She now lives under constant death threats from her co-religionists.

Meet Wafa Sultan



Finally, let us go from the frigid reaches of Canada to the hot, dry deserts of Syria. Syria is among the most "progressive" countries in the Middle East. Their government is not overtly theocratic, and is moderately Western. Nonetheless, the CIA fact book describes it as a "republic under an authoritarian, military-dominated regime."

While Syria's government is more or less secular, its culture is not. The same Islamic fanaticism that infects much of the Arab/Muslim world also infects Syria.

In 1979, a medical professor at the University of Aleppo was assassinated before the eyes of his students, by machine gun wielding members of the Muslim Brotherhood, for the crime of belonging to the wrong Islamic sect. Said Wafa, who was one of the students present: "*They shot hundreds of bullets into him, shouting, 'God is great!' At that point, I lost my trust in their god and began to question all our teachings. It was the turning point of my life, and it has led me to this present point. I had to leave. I had to look for another god.*"

It would take ten years after that terrifying event before Wafa, her husband, and their children were relocated to Los Angeles, California. Despite her training as a psychiatrist, Wafa took

About the name "The Eudaimonist"

A eudaimonist (pronounced "yoo-DIE-mon-ist") is one who believes that the highest ethical goal is individual happiness and personal well-being. The term is derived from the ancient Greek word *eudaimonia*, which means, roughly, "well-being."

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Fellowship of Reason, Inc.**Mission Statement**

The Fellowship of Reason® is dedicated to the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc. is a Georgia nonprofit corporation and a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation

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FOR Merchandise

The mug you have to have.

FOR coffee. FOR tea. FOR a friend.

Mugs are \$6 each or 2 for \$10.



FOR Polo Shirts and T-shirts are also available. Members Price is \$25 for Polo Shirts and \$15 for T-Shirts.

Prices include domestic shipping, inquire for international shipping.

Contact us at any FOR function (see page 9)

Questions? info@fellowshipofreason.com.



Anousheh, Irshad and Wafa (continued from page 2)

on menial jobs before finally realizing her dream of being a writer, by working for Arab-language newspapers in America. Her columns were openly critical of Islam and Islamic culture. Her outspokenness eventually brought her to the attention of the Arabic news network Al-Jazeera. In February 2006, she appeared via satellite on a talk show (ironically titled *The Opposite Direction*) to debate both the host and a Muslim academic on the “clash of civilizations”. A five-minute video excerpt from this TV appearance spread across the internet like wildfire, turning Wafa Sultan into an unlikely hero for freethinkers, women, and progressive Muslims. In a scathing monologue, she attacked what she sees as the backwardness, violence and anti-Semitism of 21st century Islam:

“The clash we are witnessing around the world is not a clash of religions, or a clash of civilizations. It is a clash between two opposites, between two eras. It is a clash between a mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages and another mentality that belongs to the 21st century. It is a clash between civilization and backwardness, between the civilized and the primitive, between barbarity and rationality. It is a clash between freedom and oppression, between democracy and dictatorship. It is a clash between human rights, on the one hand, and the violation of these rights, on other hand. It is a clash between those who treat women like beasts, and those who treat them like human beings. What we see today is not a clash of civilizations. Civilizations do not clash, but compete.”

When the opposing guest tried to derail the debate with the ad hominem question, “Are you a heretic?” Wafa easily deflected him by replying, “You can say whatever you like. I am a secular human being who does not believe in

the supernatural.” She also called for tolerance and respect for religious freedom, adding: “Brother, you can believe in stones, as long as you don’t throw them at me.”

How do you say, “You go, girl” in Arabic?

Most of Wafa Sultan’s family refuses to speak to her, even on the telephone. Like Irshad Manji, she lives under threat of violent reprisal from her (formerly) fellow Muslims. She is reportedly working on a book about her experiences and her journey toward rationalism.

These three women came from the far corners of the world: Anousheh Ansari, Irshad Manji, and Wafa Sultan, one Arab, one Indian (or African, depending on how you count these things), and one Persian. All three have flourished precisely because they either chose to come to the West, or were lucky enough to have been brought here. And we are all the better for their having contributed to our society.

I challenge you to consider what would have happened to these women had they remained in their native lands. How many Anoushehs are there in Iran today, who would never dream of going into space? How many Irshads are there in the Islamic world today, who dare not explore their true sexuality—much less declare it—and who live in the shadow of men who would kill them if they could read their thoughts? How many Wafas are there in Syria today, who dare not speak the truth as they see it, for fear of the fist, or the assassin’s bullet?

While the West may not have given these three extraordinary women their courage, it certainly has provided a milieu in which their courage has been rewarded. To quote Wafa Sultan:

Anousheh, Irshad and Wafa (continued from page 3)

"I've never said that America is the eternal city of Plato, but I did say it was the eternal city of Wafa Sultan. The idealism of American society was enough to allow me to realize my humanity."

Learn more about Anousheh, Irshad, and Wafa:

Anousheh Ansari Official Website
www.anoushehansari.com

Irshad Manji Official Website
www.muslim-refusenik.com

MEMRI TV (home of the famous Wafa Sultan/Al-Jazeera clip)
www.memritv.org
(Click on Search and type "Wafa Sultan")

About the author: John C. "Chris" Snider is a past President, past member of the Board of Trustees, charter member and Webmaster of the Fellowship of Reason. He currently works as a technical writer and online publisher. He lives in Roswell, Georgia with Allison, his lovely and intelligent wife.



John C. Snider
Read more of Mr. Snider's work at
his web site:
www.scifidimensions.com

"I've never said that America is the eternal city of Plato, but I did say it was the eternal city of Wafa Sultan. The idealism of American society was enough to allow me to realize my humanity."

Wafa Sultan



Regular membership:

\$35 per year

Contributing membership:

\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:

\$700

Meaning of Membership

In order to enjoy the benefits of the Fellowship of Reason, you need not be a member. All of our activities are free and open to the public. A number of non-members regularly participate with us and are most heartily welcome.

Why then become a member of the Fellowship of Reason?

The Fellowship of Reason exists by virtue of the generosity of its members and friends. People you know contribute money, property, services, and time in order that the value we all enjoy continues to exist. The services by performers at FORum, by executive committee members, by hosts and hostesses, and by planners of events are vital to the existence of FOR. Those volunteer services are, in fact, FOR.

Membership is, simply, a clear statement that you wish the Fellowship of Reason to continue to exist. Membership is not the only way to make this statement. Some non-members are generous contributors of money, property, and services. In fact, we all benefit by the mere attendance of non-members at FOR events.

If you want FOR to continue to exist, won't you clearly say so by becoming a member today?

Classic Film Appreciation Course

Classic Film Appreciation Course
By Steve Whiteman

Throughout 2007 FOR member **Steve Whiteman** will teach a free course in the appreciation of classic film and associated early and mid-20th century popular culture. The course is full, but seats may become available to see individual films.

For more information, or to receive e-mail, contact Steve at classic.film@yahoo.com

The movies will be acknowledged classics, the majority from Hollywood's Golden Age—the 1930s and 1940s—and the rest from other eras or other countries. The program usually will include a cartoon or a short subject, coming attractions, the feature film, and commentary on the careers of key personnel, filmmaking techniques, and relevant history and popular culture. Discussion will follow the commentary.

First and Second Saturdays in 2007
Doors open 6:45 p.m. program starts at
7:30 p.m.

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about
Fellowship of Reason call:

Martin at 770-471-9800

Liberty Tax (and speaking of personal mission)



Teresa, Martin, Dan, Nick, and Alexander celebrate Dan's new Liberty Tax franchise.



FOR's mission is to promote personal flourishing through reason.

February 2007

February 2007							March 2007						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28				25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sat/Sun
			February 1 7:30pm Induction Course (Steve Butterbaugh's house)	2 Wendell B. bd	3 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's h
					4 12:30pm FORum (NWUUC)
5	6 7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	7 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	8	9 Alan C. bd	10 Michael N. bd
					11 11:00am Nonfiction Book Club 7:00pm Classic Film
					12 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)
12	13 7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	14 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	15 7:30pm Induction Course (Steve Butterbaugh's house)	16	17 7:30pm Potluck (Steve Butterbaugh)
					18 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)
19	20 7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	21 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	22 8:00pm FOR pub	23 Ellen bd	24 1:30pm FOR Opera (Hollywood 24)
					25 6:30pm Movie Night (John's
					26 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)
26	27	28 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)			

March 2007

March 2007							April 2007						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
4	5	6	7	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11	12	13	14	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
							29	30					

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sat/Sun
			March 1	2	3
			7:30pm Induction Course (Steve Butterbaugh's house)		7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's h
					4
					Scott C. bd
					12:30pm FORum (NWUUC)
5	6	7	8	9	10
	7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)			11:00am Nonfiction Book Club (Allison's house)
					7:00pm Classic Film
					11
					8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)
12	13	14	15	16	17
	7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	7:30pm Induction Course (Steve Butterbaugh's house)		7:30pm Potluck (Volunteer)
					18
					8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)
19	20	21	22	23	24
	7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	Toni B. bd 8:00pm FOR pub		1:30pm FOR Opera (Hollywood 24)
					6:30pm Movie Night (John's
					25
					8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)
26	27	28	29	30	31
		7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	7:30pm Induction Course (Steve Butterbaugh's house)		

Events

For detailed info on all upcoming events, visit <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/calendar.htm>

FOR Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, at the Flying Biscuit on McClendon Avenue. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit follows at 9 a.m. Walkers and joggers welcome!

Martin Cowen coordinator: 770-471-9800.

Philosophy Club: 1st/ 3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

Philosophy tapes are played to a small private group of friends in a private home on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at John and Beth's house. For book selections and more information, go to www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm

Beth Holley coordinator: 404-754-7519

Non-Fiction Book Club: 2nd Saturday 11 a.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet 11 a.m. on the 2nd Saturday of every month at Chris and Allison's house. For book selections and more information go to:

www.fellowshipofreason.com/nonfiction.htm

Allison Byrd coordinator: 404-372-4089

FOR Symphony: Thursday, May 1, 2007, in Symphony Hall. This is the fifth of six concerts (Stage 1) in the 2006-2007 ASO Concert Season.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 770-471-9800

Potluck: 3rd Saturday, 7:30 p.m.

Our next Potluck is Saturday, February 17, 2007, at Steve Butterbaugh's house at 7:30 p.m. Remember, it is potluck, so bring something good to eat and drink to share.

Pub Night: 4th Thursday, 8 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Thursday of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation. FOR's next pub night is Thursday, February 22, 2006 at 8 p.m.

Scott Carper coordinator: 404-964-6697

*Join us for our
101st
consecutive
monthly FORum:*

1st Sunday at 1 p.m.
(Meet, Greet at 12:30)

March 4, 2007

Birthdays

February 2	Wendell B.
February 5	Michael N.
February 9	Alan C.
February 10	Reginald G.
February 23	Ellen L.

March 4	Scott C.
March 22	Toni B.

Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: _____

Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!



Fellowship of Reason

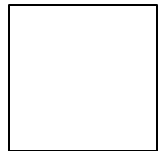
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