

Hasan Askari shares how he found proof of God



Hasan Askari (background) speaks with Caleb Carter at Hasan's home in Columbia on April 30. Hasan is Caleb's mentor, and the two regularly discuss religion, career and other life issues.

CHALLENGING GOD'S EXISTENCE

It is a mild Saturday morning in February when we meet at Hasan Askari's Columbia home to talk about Islam. He is over 6 feet tall, lean, almost like a stick figure, with salt-and-pepper hair and a trim beard. He wears light brown slacks and a black collarless button-down shirt wrapped tight around his neck. The shadows under his eyes betray the few — if any — hours of sleep. He flew in late from Bethesda, Md., where he does research on strokes at the National Institutes of Health. He commutes about twice a month to spend the weekend with his family.

He sketches the world's religions in my notebook.

"Everybody has a religion, because everybody traverses a path in their life," he says. "This path might be based on faith or it might be based on a rejection of faith."

Over the next two hours, he morphs into Hasan Askari the scholar, the mentor, the doctor, the historian, the believer, the conversation partner, a volcano that erupts every time he opens his mouth. Religion, politics or family — nothing is off-limits. His life is the journey of a Pakistani man who, as a teenager, began questioning the faith he was born into, souring relations with his parents. In college, he split his time between medical studies and trying to prove or disprove the existence of God. Without God, he says, there was no point in following any religion. His proof of God and his choice of Islam are based on logic, and explained in drawings and diagrams. His interpretation is uncommon even among Muslims, few of whom would dare to overtly challenge the existence of God.

Hasan, whose name means pious or handsome, is a humble man. He admits

he doesn't possess the ultimate truth, but the best possible version found on his journey. Everything remains open to questioning.

"If you can bring a better argument, I will yield," he says. "And I would expect the same from you."

Below is his quest to find God, as recorded in our conversations over the past three months.

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Here is Hasan's story, as told to Cristian Lupsa.

Igrew up in Pakistan during the 1960s and 1970s when socialism was the dominant political ideology. My father, mother and the rest of the family would go to the mosque, listen to the sermons and participate in the celebrations. They were religious at the mosque, ►►►