

but when they came home they resumed their life as if nothing had happened.

By the time I was 9 or 10 I started to wonder what was going on. What was the point of people's belief in Islam? They would go out, do all the religious activities and then would come back and the same life would continue. The same corruption would continue.

Socialism was very much part of my family, so my father was socially oriented. The problem was that what they were preaching in the mosques did not reflect on the society, which became more intolerant and dogmatic.

At home, I saw propagation of a socialist ideology based on negation of God and a proclamation of faith in Islam, which revolves around God. So I told myself: "This is not going to work."

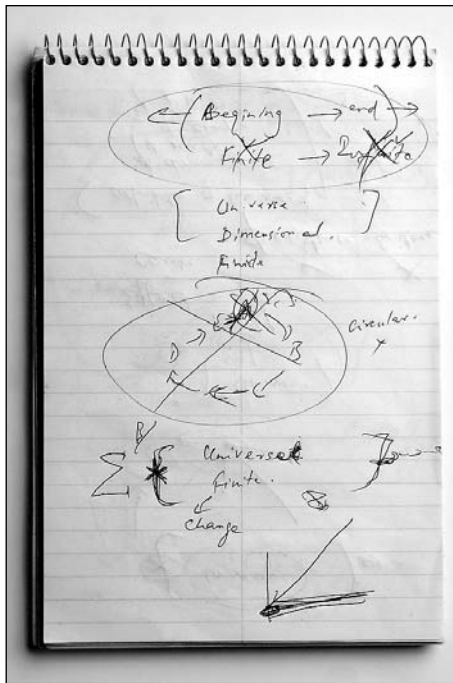
At 16, I asked my dad what the point of the religion was. If it was the right way to go, I should have seen some impact on his life.

"There is a clear dichotomy between what you are saying and what you are doing," I told him. "Either the foundations of religion make sense or they are senseless — which would give me no reason to adhere to them."

This clash led me to question the core of their beliefs, and it did not sit well with them. The premise of any religion has to be God. If there is no God, forget about the rest. There were questions they couldn't answer for me: Do you believe in God? Why? If it's a fact, I need proof. If God created everybody, then who created God?

That was the beginning of my troubles. I wasn't an only child, but I was the only one who did this. Because I was young, I was probably more blunt and confrontational in my approach to my elders. Thinking back, I could have done it better — asked the same questions but in a more respectful way.

After high school, my parents were moving out of Pakistan, and I was about to enter medical school. During that time



Hasan Askari uses the techniques of logic to prove and diagram the existence of God. To him, God is an infinite entity that created the universe. Hasan says that because the universe is a finite entity, it couldn't have created itself.

I also had an accident, getting hit by a field hockey ball. I became paralyzed on my left side. By then, my parents had already left and I was under emotional stress, alone for the first time. Everything happened at once during that period, when I also started letter writing to my future wife. We fell in love writing letters. So I was crazy to begin with, and then I got crazier when I fell in love.

I never hid my love for Farhat from my parents and told them not to seek anyone for me because I had already made a choice. That went badly, maybe because they thought she wasn't right for me. They asked how I could fall in love with someone who I only met in letters.

Five years later, I showed up at Farhat's door and told her parents, "I'm here to get married."

"You must be out of your mind," they

said. "No," I replied. "I'm here to get married."

Within a week we got married and went to Pakistan. My mom came, took care of affairs and was very generous. Things improved, but the ideological differences remained.

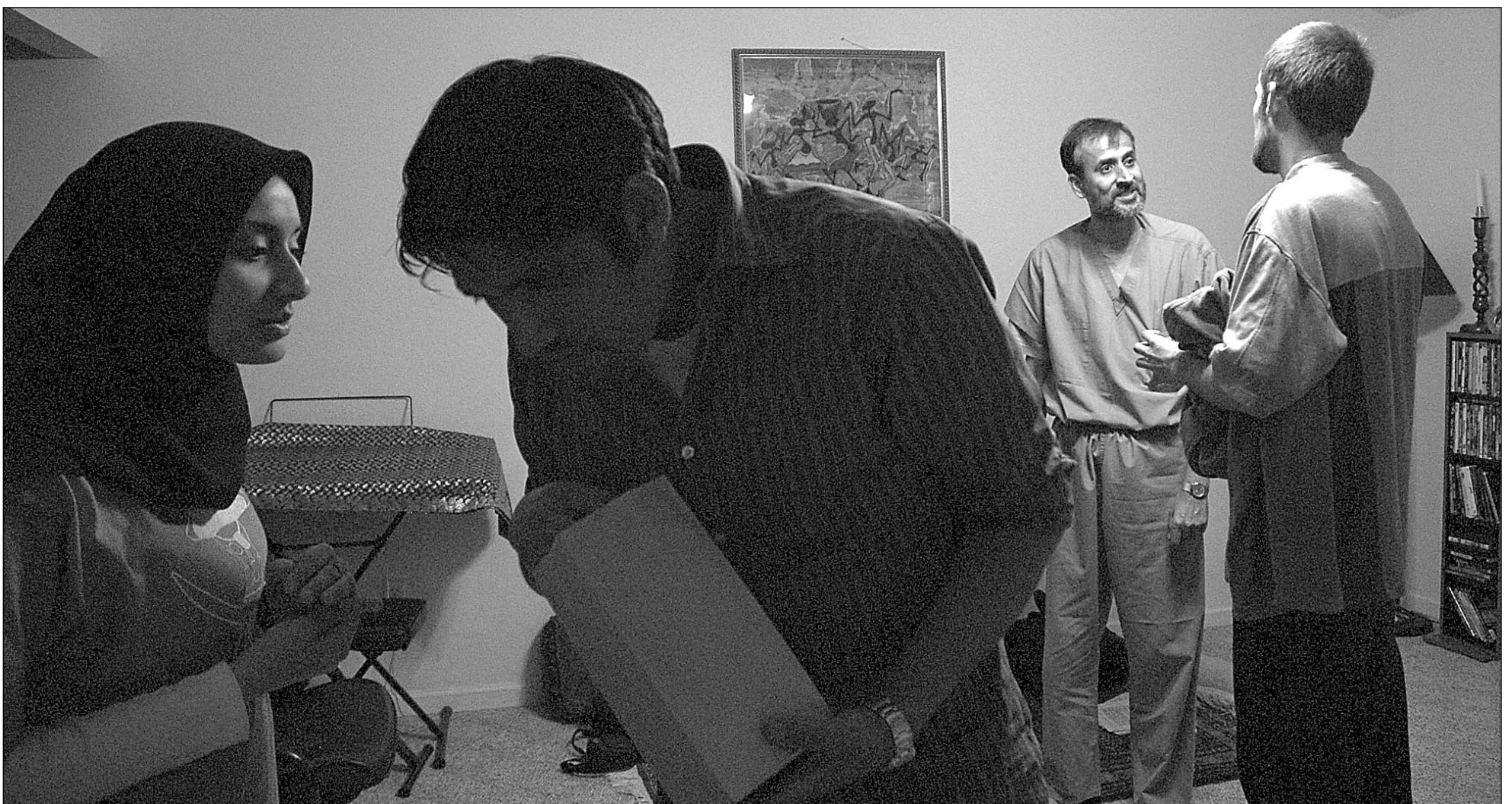
So my quest for answers started the summer my parents left. I began by studying the premise of God and the premise of no God. The premise of no God would be a material explanation of the universe, where matter is the only thing that can be proven.

This can be found in two systems: mechanical materialism, which leads to capitalism, and dialectic materialism, which leads to communism and socialism. The two never added up because they left the main question unanswered: What started it all?

This is how I answered the question of God. There are general concepts we use when we compare things, two of the most important being opposition and contradiction. Opposition is like having night and day at the same time in different spaces. Contradiction is mutually exclusive, which means when one thing is present, the other cannot be present — if you're here, you can't be anywhere else. To the best of one's ability to understand, we live in a material universe which exhibits constant change, a process with a beginning and end. The universe can be finite or infinite; it can't be both because it would be a contradiction. We know the universe has dimensions — they may be ever expanding but there is always a boundary. That means it's finite.

At the same time, you can't say the process of change is infinite because you can't have an infinite process in a finite realm. That is also a contradiction. So if the universe is finite and the process of change is finite, then obviously the question is what started it all? There has to be a conceptual start point.

The universe cannot have created >>>



At the end of an evening discussion, Hasan gives advice to Caleb, right, while Hasan's daughter, Fatima, 18, talks with Ajaz Abbas, a family friend. Hasan has a doctorate in philosophy and a medical degree in neurology. He served as a volunteer medic with the United Nations in the late 1980s to early 1990s and periodically helped U.N. teams in Afghanistan and the Middle East. He now works for the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.