

## **Acculturation Panel Discussion**

### **Program**

1. 1<sup>st</sup> round: Define current status
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> round: Describe a hypothetical family with their issues. Seek advice from experts.
3. 3<sup>rd</sup> round (time permitting): summation and Open floor for discussions and questions.

### **1<sup>st</sup> round questions:**

Mr. Fakheri:

- Discuss the misconceptions that Iranians have of Americans, their culture and their values (such as level of family commitment).
- How do Iranians treat each other in organizational settings? What keeps us from working together (back-stabbing, too many cooks in the kitchen).

Rabbi Wolpe:

- It seems that Iranians tend to keep themselves apart from other members of the congregation. What obstacles, if any, have you had in bringing everyone together at your congregation?

Mr. Bushman:

- How do other students view Iranians? How does the faculty view them?
- What is your opinion about the level of parental involvement in an Iranian student's life?

Mrs. Shafa:

- If you could be a fly on the wall, what would an American Banker/Loan officer's initial reaction be to an Iranian business person's request for a loan? How would the fact that she or he is Iranian affect the decision process?

Rabbi Malekan:

- In your opinion, have we become more religious in the U.S. than we were 30 years ago in Iran? If so, why?
- How has this affected the way we relate to the mainstream culture?

Dr. Soumekh:

- What are the preconceived notions that Iranians have about Americans when it comes to dating and marriage?
- What are the psychological costs to family members when there is a mixed marriage?
- What are the costs or gains in limiting ourselves in marriage to Iranians only?

Mr. Nazarian:

- In your dealing with American business people, what response do you get when they know that you are Iranian? Is it favorable or not?
- Why have Iranians made less progress in the corporate world?

Dr Moradi:

- In our society, when we have physical pain in our heart we go to see a Cardiologist. But when we have emotional pain in our heart we are reluctant to

visit a mental health professional. Is there more of a stigma about therapy in the Iranian society than the American society, if so why?

- Sometimes I hear people say: “all a therapist does is sit there listen to me. How can that help me?” Can you tell us how therapy works?

### **2<sup>nd</sup> round questions:**

We will introduce the hypothetical family:

The husband and wife were married in Iran 22 years ago. They moved to the US 16 years ago, when their children were 1 and 4 years old.

#### **Scenario 1: Mr. Bushman and Dr. Moradi**

**Mr. Bushman:** The 17 year old son, previously a good student, is suddenly getting C's and D's in school. He is sleeping a lot and loses his temper easily. Recently, he was caught smoking pot in school. You want to dismiss him from school. You have a meeting with his parents. They tend to blame his new American friends. The son complains that his parents are overbearing and put too much pressure on him to perform. What is your reaction to that?

**Dr. Moradi:** Mr. Bushman recommends that the family see a therapist. He sends them to you. What would you tell them?

#### **Scenario 2: Mr. Fakheri and Dr. Soumekh:**

The daughter, 20 years old, attends college, lives at home and has an American boyfriend. The family is going to a large family gathering, and she wants to bring her boyfriend along. The parents disagree strongly and deep inside want her to marry an Iranian. They are extremely worried that her reputation would get

tarnished if seen in the community with her American boyfriend. The daughter is not yet ready to get married and feels she should have the right to have relationships with men before marriage.

**Mr. Fakheri:** the parents call you for advice. They want you to convince her not to do invite her boyfriend to the gathering. What would you tell them?

**Dr. Soumekh:** The daughter brings her parents into your office. She is hoping you will convince the parents to let her bring him.

### **Scenario 3: Rabbi Wolpe and Rabbi Malekan:**

This couple has been married for 22 years. The husband has gradually become more observant than his wife and the differences between their religious practices have now become a problem ( i.e. the husband insisting on a Kosher home, for Shabbat to be kept by this wife and children, ...) The husband wants to go to an Iranian Orthodox synagogue, but the wife and kids do not want to attend the same synagogue. They are willing to go to an American synagogue, but the father insists on going to his Temple.

**Rabbi Wolpe:** what should the family do? Why do you think is happening? Do you feel the same phenomenon happening in an American family play itself out any differently?

**Rabbi Malekan:** How much of this dilemma can be attributed to acculturation issues. How would you recommend the family should resolve this issue? Why do you feel the father has come to espouse such strong religious values after his move to the US?

**Scenario 4: Mr. Nazarian and Mrs. Shafa:**

**Mrs. Shafa:** The father wants to get a loan and start a new business. He has lost a few other businesses he started due to legal problems with taxes. The family is in a difficult financial state and the father is heavily blamed by his family for having wasted the family nest egg through unwise and imprudent business practices. He comes to you for advice. Are there any business practices used by Iranians that you think stand in the way of their success? How is “business success” defined differently by Iranian versus other business communities?

**Mr. Nazarian:** Please give us your advice to this father who wants to try yet again to start a new business. How would you go about teaching him how business is done in the US? How, in your opinion, is “business success” defined differently by Iranian versus other business communities?

**Scenario 5: Dr. Moradi:**

**Dr. Moradi:** As each family member gets more embroiled in his/her personal and collective family problems, they decide to come see you together. How would you sum up this family’s dynamics and how much of their challenges can be blamed on concerns raised by acculturation?

**3<sup>rd</sup> round:** (time permitting)

To all panelists:

As far as acculturation is concerned, what does the future hold for this family? If we were to speculate about the coming decade, what major obstacles would they face and which concerns facing them today may be alleviated with time?