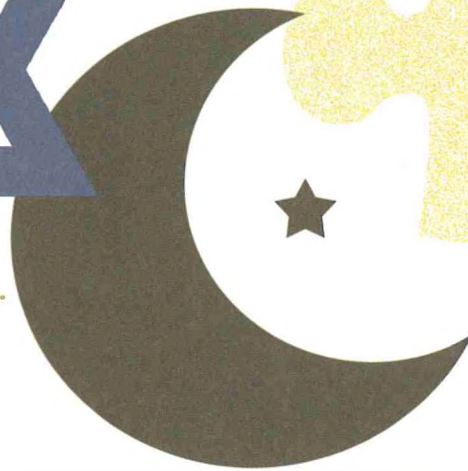


CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM

JEWS AND MUSLIMS IN CONVERSATION



A dialogue curriculum prepared in partnership by the Union for Reform Judaism and the Islamic Society of North America.



UNION FOR
REFORM JUDAISM

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ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

This guide was prepared in a richly collaborative process between Jewish and Muslim partners. We are grateful to all those who provided advice and assistance. Particular thanks are due to Hadia Mubarak, a doctoral student at Georgetown University; to Naomi Greenspan and Debra Eichenbaum, Program Associates for the Commission on Interreligious Affairs of Reform Judaism, who were the principal shepherds of this process; and to Rabbi David Saperstein for his careful reading and invaluable dedication to this process.

This document is a work in progress; our plan is that it will be revised after feedback is received from our pilot congregations. We have made every possible effort to appropriately cite all resources used in this document. If we have inadvertently overlooked a source, or failed to cite it properly, please call it to our attention and we will be pleased to correct it in future editions.

We hope that the spirit of collaboration and friendship that characterized our work on this guide will mark its use as well.

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"Our agenda is long and difficult. There is nothing simple or easy about the project that we are about to undertake. But, interconnected since the time of Abraham, thrust into each other's lives by history and fate, and living in a global world, what choice do we really have? Surely here, in this land, we cannot permit fanaticism to grow or prejudice to harden. Surely here, in America, as Muslim and Jew, we have a unique opportunity to reclaim our common heritage and to find a new way and a common path. Brothers and sisters, let us begin."

-Rabbi Eric Yoffie at the Islamic Society of North America Convention August 31, 2007

Interconnected since the time of Abraham, we Jews and Muslims share much in common: ancient monotheistic faiths, cultural similarities and, as minority religions in North America, experiences with assimilation and discrimination. Having said that, there also exists profound ignorance between Jews and Muslims. Jews are not well educated about Islam, and Muslims are not well educated about Judaism.

In our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, we can ill afford to segregate ourselves within our mosques and synagogues. Rather, we must educate ourselves and each other, thus taking a necessary first step toward global understanding and religious harmony.

In the pages that follow, you will find 11 lessons that the Union for Reform Judaism, in concert with the staff of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), has created to achieve this goal. I am proud that the Union is working with ISNA to conquer the mutual ignorance that exists among our adherents and I am deeply touched by the commitment of our synagogues, clergy, and lay leaders to participate in *The Children of Abraham: Jews and Muslims in Conversation*. Let these lessons serve as a springboard for ongoing cooperation and dialogue to which we can all be committed.

There are many tough issues that we need to address—terrorism, Israel, the plight of the Palestinians, and human rights, among others—and this will not be an easy task. But neither is that a reason to desist. Instead, the challenge should serve as a catalyst, an impetus to do more and to more fully commit ourselves to this dialogue. Let us agree, on the one hand, to approach these issues with humility; on the other hand, let us also agree that we will assert our convictions with passion, even as we remain respectful of our disagreements.

We know from experience that if this endeavor is to succeed, it must not be one-sided. As Jews, we will share our faith with Muslims, and Muslims, in turn, will share their faith with us. As a community we must see each other as partners, equal in weight and stature, in this venture. This means we must share equally the costs of the program, the responsibilities of facilitation, the hosting of dialogue sessions and above all, commitment to its success. It is my sincere hope that as we learn about each other's belief and practices and as we tackle the tough issues that lie before us, we will learn to see one another as human beings created in the image of God.

The leadership and staff of the Union are deeply committed to the success of this program. If, as you prepare to dialogue with your local Muslim community, we can provide assistance, including helping you find a mosque to work with, please do not hesitate to contact the Commission on Interreligious Affairs of Reform Judaism at 202-387-2800 or by email at interreligious@urj.org. We wish you much success as you take on this sacred endeavor.

Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie
President, Union for Reform Judaism





Judaism and Islam share a similar tradition that even if the trumpet to signal the end of time is blown and you are holding a seedling in your hand, then you should plant it. There is no doubt that countless generations of our ancestors – Jews and Muslims – believed that they would live to witness the end of the world. Plagues, famine, war and other calamities created a deep sense of betrayal in the ability of human beings to ensure their own security. Still, humanity carried on. Despite unbearable and countless tragic losses, we continued to work for a better future – for our children and our grandchildren.

Our faith traditions do not require us to be idealistic or even optimistic (although those can be healthy attitudes); rather, our traditions require us to work for a better future despite our frustration and pessimism. But faith also requires the expectation of holy surprises. With our limited imaginations and unlimited egos, we confidently assert what can or cannot be – only to be proven wrong again and again. Thus, in the first place, faith requires us to imagine the possibility that the majority of American Muslim and Jewish communities can develop respectful, productive relationships.

There are good reasons for the engagement of American Jews and Muslims at this point in our history. On the one hand, religion seems to have a particularly strong role in our society. On the other hand, perhaps there has never been a time in American history when “religion” has been so widely seen as a negative force. Conflicts among religious groups have contributed to a general loss of confidence in religion. Many young people wonder why they should bother with ancient traditions that create antagonism, when diversity is such an important part of their lives. We need to prove that affirming our differences can be done in an atmosphere of respect, and that we can even move beyond mutual respect to play a positive collective role in society.

There are those who see the empowerment of American Muslims and American Jews as a zero-sum game. This perspective is not only ethically problematic, it is, I believe, simply wrong. The reality is that each of us is a small religious minority in a society in which we must regularly assert our rights against the majority. This does not mean that the majority is always hostile to our assertion of rights. However, these rights that have been hard-won by generations of Americans have not been uncontested. Prejudice is highly mutable: it passes easily from Jew to Muslim to Black to Arab. If our communities contribute to the production of mutual stereotypes and if we justify discrimination against the other, we are sowing the seeds of our own destruction.

One Muslim scholar has characterized many of the statements that faith communities make about others as “false witness” (*qawl al-zur*). Thus, beyond the pragmatic need to encourage a culture of respect for religious diversity and rights, we are ethically bound to speak the truth about each other. We can no longer rely on rumors, innuendo, medieval apologetics and sweeping generalizations. We need to get the truth about each other from each other.

The Islamic Society of North America was honored to have Rabbi Eric Yoffie speak at our annual convention in Chicago in 2007. As President of ISNA, I was proud that our community was so receptive to Rabbi Yoffie’s address and to this project that was to follow. Many of our members have been engaged in dialogue with members of the Jewish community at the local level. Many more have considered this engagement important, but have lacked the support to move forward. The American Muslim community is limited in its institutional resources – we do not yet have enough American born and educated religious leaders, education specialists and administrators, much



less seminaries and research institutions, to meet other, more established religious communities on equal terms. What we do not lack, however, are Muslims all over America with a sincere desire to contribute positively to a vibrant, pluralistic and just American society. I hope that this guide will help Jewish and Muslim communities begin or continue to engage in the important work of mutual understanding and, hopefully, productive engagement.

Ingrid Mattson, Ph.D.,
President, The Islamic Society of North America

What Makes Dialogue Different

By Rabbi Jan Katzew, Director of Lifelong Jewish Learning at the Union for Reform Judaism

Dialogue may be entirely unfamiliar to the participants in this process. They may be well acquainted with dispute and debate. In both of these forums, there is a goal, that is, to win. In a discussion, the goal is to air views of all types, including perspectives that clash and conflict. A dialogue is qualitatively different. It is a non zero-sum activity. There is no winner, unless everyone can be considered a winner. There is no attempt to score points for one side or the other. Indeed, a dialogue is an effort to find convergence or shared meaning, in which two partners find common cause. This does not mean that differences are ignored or obscured. Instead, differences are acknowledged as a given. Since the dialogue form is unusual, especially in a Jewish-Muslim context, it is important to make the rules of engagement explicit. People need to resist the urge to engage in dispute or debate. Listening is arguably the most important skill in dialogue, closely followed by questioning for understanding.

Dialogue is an art that is both tentative and tolerant. Ideally, there is no "other" in the room, only brothers and sisters, who share an ancestral heritage and a rich history in which there have been periods of symbiosis and cultural efflorescence, as well as economic strife, political and military conflict and religious oppression. Dialogue cannot rewrite history, but it can make history, and there are examples of Jewish-Christian dialogue that exemplify and amplify the point. We are barely two generations from *Nostra Aetate*, the ground-breaking document that shook the religious landscape and out of which emerged unprecedented opportunities for Christian-Jewish interaction that could be mutually respectful, affirming and coalition building. The trajectory of dialogue between Jewish and Christians provides a hopeful context for dialogue between Jews and Muslims. Nevertheless, the potential for dialogue between Jews and Muslims depends on taking risks and creating a reservoir of good will from which both can drink and find refreshing.

Refreshments are elemental to the dialogue atmosphere. Food and drink that have been approved by all involved are vital components in creating a welcoming, informal context for relaxed conversation.

Dialogue is not conducted on a *tabula rasa*. People have predispositions and prejudices. In the case of Jewish-Muslim dialogue it is reasonable to assume that in addition to ignorance, there is also fear. It is desirable to clarify the goals of dialogue for all who are participating: to listen, to question, to learn, to explore, and ultimately to search together for a common language and perhaps a shared vision. Dialogue requires openness, a willingness to have one's opinion changed, to become, in part, a different person as a result of a conversation.

Dialogue is difficult in general and Jewish-Muslim dialogue may be especially difficult for some people. We certainly know that some alternatives to dialogue have severe, even dire consequences (e.g., fear, war, prejudice) and we are witness to them in the Middle East as well as in North America. Dialogue is not a magical cure to enmity, but dialogue can build bridges between people and communities, and have a humanizing effect that can yield healthy relationships, including friendships.

In the course of a dialogue process, no one is entirely in control. As a facilitator, you are trying to assess the degree to which trust is building, listening is occurring and learning is happening. However, unlike a class in Judaism or Islam, there is no written exam. The goal of dialogue transcends objective knowledge. It is possible to know a great deal about Islam and/or Judaism and still retain the same attitudes towards either or both communities they represent. The goal of dialogue is at least as affective as it is cognitive; you are aiming for hearts, or even souls, at least as much as minds. Therefore, even though the document suggests a regular rhythm of read and discuss, you may want to vary the method of interaction and include *chevrutot* (dyads), small group interaction based on shared questions or experiences.

Music, drama, refreshments, and storytelling are among the alternative modes that are entirely appropriate for dialogue. Do not treat the document as a blueprint or script. Rather it is a suggested trajectory, a vector that reflects an overall direction for the interaction of two groups in search of shared meaning, that is, a dialogue. It may be valuable for the facilitators to



meet before and after each session to reflect on what occurred, to consider what was planned and unplanned, and then to check in with people who participated. This labor-intensive strategy makes it manifestly clear that as facilitators you are listeners and learners and arguably, above all, you are committed to the longitudinal process. Dialogue is a marathon, not a sprint. You may hit a wall, and it will take courage and perseverance to work through it. However, the prize is worth the price.

Principles for Interreligious Dialogue

(Adapted from Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20/1:1-4.)

1. Enter into dialogue so that **you** can learn and grow; not to change the other.
2. Be conscious of the need to allow people the space to enter the discussion. Some people are less assertive about offering their thoughts, but will be encouraged to do so if more outspoken persons avoid dominating the exchange.
3. Be honest and sincere, even if that means revealing discomforts with your own tradition or that of the other. Assume that everyone else is being equally honest and sincere.
4. Everyone must be permitted to define their own religious experience and identity, and this must be respected by others.
5. Proselytizing or seeking to "convert" the conversation partner is not permitted in an interreligious dialogue setting. Participants should feel free to express their own faith traditions and beliefs, but not try to persuade others to assent to them.
6. Don't feel that you are the spokesperson for your entire faith tradition or that you ought somehow to know everything there is to know about it. Admit any confusion or uncertainty you might have if a puzzling question arises.
7. Don't assume in advance where points of agreement or disagreement will exist.
8. Everyone should be willing to be self-critical.
9. All should strive to experience the other's faith "from within" and be prepared to view themselves differently as a result of an "outside" perspective.
10. Trust is a must.

A Note about Texts

All English translations of the Hebrew Scriptures are from The Jewish Publication Society's *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* and all Qur'an translations are from Ahmed Ali's *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*.

Many academic resources were used to create this guide. When we directly quote another author's writing, that passage will be indented & will conclude with a footnote that provides proper attribution.

A Note Regarding Gender Neutral Language

There is a growing consensus in Reform and other liberal Jewish Movements to move towards gender neutral language in both sacred texts (including references to God) and in scholarly conversations on religion. This is an issue that has not yet come as demonstrably to the Muslim community. Therefore, in this document Jewish texts have been adapted to be gender neutral. We have retained gender distinctions when quoting from translations of Muslim classical texts. This approach was adopted in consultation with both Jewish and Muslim religious leaders and experts to reflect the attitudes and trends in our respective communities.

Lesson 1

Introduction



It is our hope that through this encounter and conversation, Jews and Muslims might better learn to see each other as bearers of traditions worthy of study and understanding, to appreciate similarities and respect differences. This new era of engagement and hope can help in the ongoing process of eclipsing enmity and promoting understanding, but only if the real work is done in our houses of worship and in our homes.

*The goal of this session is for participants to get to know one another and develop a basic understanding of the other's religion. The session itself should be conducted in an informal setting that will allow comfortable interactions to take place among participants. By getting to know each other on a personal level, participants can begin to see one another as individuals rather than just as "Muslims" or "Jews;" this will begin the process of breaking down stereotypes. Since facilitating personal encounters is very difficult, this lesson includes more explicit instructions on how to run the session than subsequent lessons will have. ****Prior to the session participants should be asked to bring along one item that for them symbolizes their religion.*****

Introductions

Participants split into groups of four with two members of each faith group. They should take 10-15 minutes to get to know one another and then introduce their partner to the larger group. Pairs should discuss and share the following questions:

- What religious values are most important to you?
- Why are you interested in Muslim-Jewish dialogue?
- What item did you bring with you that represents your religion? How does this item capture the meaning of your religion to you?

Goal Setting

After the introductions, participants should spend a few minutes, as a large group, enumerating their goals for this dialogue. These goals should be compiled and kept for reference throughout the entire dialogue:

- What are your individual goals and motives for participating in this dialogue?
- What do you hope to be able to take away from this dialogue?
- What do you hope the benefits to your community will be in participating in this dialogue?
- What are some ground-rules that we all need to obey during this dialogue to make it successful?



Who Are We? – Understanding the Basics of Judaism and Islam

Islam

When Islam is understood as a way of life that is not confined to one cultural reality and one that assumes the cultural contours of the different regions or countries where Muslims live, it is easier to highlight and appreciate Islam as a truly global tradition. As Dr. Ahmet Karamustafa, Professor of History and Religious Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, has said: "Not only is Islam not inextricably attached to specific geographic locales (Judaic, Chinese, and Hindu traditions, for instance, have largely been so attached), but it is genuinely adaptable to most, if not all, human communities anywhere on the globe. To put it in other words, the emphasis on Islam's globality enables us to acknowledge and cherish its transcultural, transethnic, transracial, transnational, in short, its truly humanistic dimensions." While Muslims believe that God sent previous Messengers to specific peoples for specific times, Muslims believe God made Islam a religion for all peoples and all times, since no other Messenger will come after the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)¹.

Beyond being a religious tradition, Islam also represents a civilizational tradition, simultaneously in and above specific cultures. Dr. Karamustafa has also said: "As an ongoing civilizational discourse, Islam is an interactive and inclusive tradition: it interacts with the cultures it comes into contact with and, where it takes root, reshapes and reforms cultures inclusively from within. As a result, there are numerous different Islamic cultures on the globe, and they are all equally Islamic, equal partners in the making and remaking of the Islamic civilizational tradition."²

A monotheistic religion, Islam has six "articles of belief": to believe in one God, God's angels, God's revealed scriptures (Torah, Psalms, New Testament, etc), God's Messengers (Abraham, Moses, Noah, etc), the Day of Judgment, and fate. While the six pillars of *iman* or belief sum up what Muslims believe, the five pillars of faith in Islam sum up the devotional obligations that all Muslims are required to fulfill. These pillars of Islam are:

- 1) To testify that there is only one God and that Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is God's Messenger;
- 2) To perform five daily prayers;
- 3) To pay the annual *zakat* (2.5% of one's annual wealth for the poor);
- 4) To fast during the month of Ramadan;
- 5) To perform the *hajj* (pilgrimage) once in a lifetime.

Discussion:

1. While we normally think of Islam as a religion, what does the passage suggest about other ways of thinking of Islam?
2. For Jewish participants: How does this description of Islam change your perception of what Islam is?
3. What do you think Islam's five pillars of faith say about the priorities of the religion?
4. What questions do you have about the origins of Islam and its core beliefs?

Judaism

The word "Judaism" has two distinct and equally legitimate meanings. Sometimes it denotes a full civilization: the total actualities, past and present, of the historic group of human beings known as the Jewish people. In this

1 Traditionally, Muslims say the phrase "Peace Be Upon Him" after invoking the name of the Prophet Muhammad. In all further occurrences in this document this phrase will be abbreviated as "P.B.U.H."

2 Karamustafa. "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress."

significance, it embraces secular as well as sacred elements; for example, the long songs of medieval Hebrew poets, the folk music and dance of Eastern European Jewries, social institutions of all sorts, and much else.

Just as properly, "Judaism" may stand for something more limited: the spiritual aspect of that civilization; i.e. religion. The Jewish religion, however, even when isolated from the rest of the civilization, is far from being simple and homogeneous. No less than seven strands weave together to make it up:

1. A doctrine concerning God, the universe, and humanity;
2. A morality for the individual and society;
3. A regimen of rite, custom, and ceremony;
4. A body of law (Halakah);
5. A sacred literature (Torah);
6. Institutions for which the foregoing find expression;
7. The people, Israel—central strand out of which and about which the other are spun.¹

Discussion:

1. Judaism contains both secular and sacred aspects. For Muslims: which do you think of most when you think of Judaism? Which parts do you connect with more as a Jew?
2. How are Judaism and Islam similar or different in regards to the description given? How might understanding the religions in this new framework change the way you approach members of the other faith?
3. What questions do you have about the origins of Judaism and its core beliefs?

Why Are We Here? – The Need for Muslim-Jewish Dialogue

Shared history

The vagaries of history are such that those who are bitter adversaries at one time may have been amicable partners at another. The history of Jews and Muslims presents such a challenging picture. Whatever may be the political problems confronting them at the present time, one should not forget the long history which they have shared. In the past, their reciprocal relationships have been positive and negative in both physical and spiritual terms. Certain religious and cultural developments for each would not have occurred without the existence of the other. One might suggest, for example, that parts of the Qur'an, the primary text of Islam, reflect certain concepts that are found in Jewish scriptures. Once Islam had developed, spreading first through the Arab peoples and then through others, the relationship between the Jewish people and emerging peoples of Islam would undergo great changes depending upon political as well as religious factors.²

For the classical period (during the first few centuries following the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE), Arabic remained the universal language...Non-Arab Muslims and non-Muslims alike, if they learned the Arabic language, could and did participate in most aspects of Muslim culture. Jews, Christians and others made substantial contributions to the development of the new civilization that often transcended religious as well as political and geographic differences.³

³ Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism*. (Florida: Harvest Books, 1965).

⁴ Leonard Kravitz, "Philosophical Developments in Islam and Judaism," in *Shalom/Salaam: A Resource for Jewish-Muslim Dialogue*, ed. by Gary Bretton-Granatoor and Andrea Weiss (New York: UAHC Press, 1993).

⁵ Sydney Nettleson Fisher and William Ochsenswald, *The Middle East: A History*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

Discussion:

1. What is the historic dynamic of the Muslim-Jewish relationship?
2. How does this differ from their relationship today?
3. Does the relationship of the past serve as a replicable example for Muslims and Jews today? How so? Or why not?

Common values

Although there are a range of views presented in the Qur'an, below are some that exhibit common values that Jews and Muslims share.

In the Qur'an, Muslims are continually reminded of their relationship with the "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitab*). The People of the Book are those who have received an earlier revelation from God; the term is understood by most to refer to Christians and Jews. Muslims view Islam as a continuation of the monotheistic faith brought by Abraham:

"Tell them: 'My Lord has directed me to a path that is straight, a supreme law, the creed of Abraham the upright who was not an idolater.' Tell them: 'My service and sacrifice, my life and my death, are all for God, the Creator and Lord of all the worlds. No equal has He: this am I commanded and I am the first to submit [of the Muslims].'"
(6:161-163)⁶

Jews and Christians in specific are believed to be descendants of a true monotheistic faith revealed by God through David, Moses and Jesus, as well as other messengers. Of God's revelation to Jews, the Qur'an states, ⁷

"Surely We sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the Prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment for those of Jewry, as did the masters and rabbis, following that portions of God's book as they were given to keep and were witness to." (5:44)

There is an understanding in the Qur'an of a peaceful co-existence that comes from a common revelation and a common God. "And argue not with the People of the Book unless it be in [a way] that is better, except with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to God do we surrender" (29:46).

"Tell them: 'O people of the Book, let us come to an agreement on that which is common between us: that we worship none but God and make non God's equal, and that none of us take any others for Lord apart from God.' If they turn away, tell them: 'Bear witness that we submit to God.'" (3:64).

Discussion:

1. What is the basic common value shared between Muslims and Jews?
2. What other shared values do we hold?
3. How do these commonalities unite us? What is our obligation to work together to uphold these values?

⁶ Transmitted by Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
⁷ Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Today's Conflict

Despite the many common values that exist between Jews and Muslims, a tension often exists between the two communities, especially in relation to international political developments. The prosperity and security of the American Jewish and Muslim communities renders the United States a uniquely-suited locus for positive Jewish-Muslim engagement. The U.S., along with Western Europe, presents the rare historical phenomenon of Jews and Muslims living as fellow minorities in a relatively secure Christian [majority] country... There are clear differences between the two communities, and the most contentious debates occur over U.S. foreign policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Although the inter-communal competitions in Washington, D.C. will likely continue, there is a strategic benefit available to both communities if we form alliances with one another in pursuit of the shared vision of two states living side-by-side in peace and security. In order to do this, we must understand one another's stories and perspectives.⁸

This testimonial comes from an Israeli's experience participating in a woman's dialogue group

I first felt our commonality splitting apart when a Palestinian woman talked about a family vacation. On the plane back, her young daughter had played with a young Jewish boy. "Such a beautiful, friendly little boy," she said. "It made me sad to think that someday, he might be a soldier who humiliates elderly Palestinians at military checkpoints."

Some of the Jewish women have sons in the army. Some of us have husbands, brothers, and friends who serve in the army. What was she saying about them? About me?

Didn't she understand, I wanted to shout, that it makes me sad to think that her beautiful little girl might turn into a suicide terrorist? Didn't she understand, I wanted to scream, that by resorting to one-sided perspectives, she was dragging us into the political fray that we had tried to avoid? Didn't she realize, I wanted to cry, that unless we all took responsibility, we might all lose everything that is dear and precious to us?

I said nothing. None of the Jewish women said anything, even though, it became apparent later, they had the same thoughts and feelings. I think that I didn't say what I thought because, pushed by events around us, we had regressed to seeing each other in stereotypic, collective terms.

I felt torn – I wanted to meet with my friends, but also didn't want to meet with Palestinians. As a Jew, facing increasing anti-Semitism, I felt politically and existentially alone. The Palestinians, I now know, felt disrespected, humiliated, helpless, enraged. It seemed to me that we were back to the very basic questions: did we Jews recognize the Palestinian people's right to independence? Did the Palestinians recognize the State of Israel's right to exist?⁹

This testimonial comes from a Palestinian's experience participating in a woman's dialogue group

The most difficult times are when my kids come home from school and ask, "So why did the Jews do that to us?" It is not easy to separate between politics and religion in this country. We have to explain that such behavior is not Judaism and Jews are humans and humans make mistakes. But it is incomprehensible to them and they come back and they ask me the same questions. *Every time there is a suicide bombing they ask if it's ok, and of course it is not. My children do not watch the news very much because I think it is the worst thing for them, but they hear about things at school, and then especially they ask about death and are we going to die.

⁸ Raquel Ukeles. "Locating the Silent Muslim Majority: Policy Recommendations for Improving Jewish-Muslim Relations in the United States." In *Mosaica Research Center for Religion, State, and Society*. Edited by Dr. Aviad HaCohen (Jerusalem, 2003).

⁹ Etta Gibson, *Women of the Book: A Jerusalem Collage* (Jerusalem: Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, 2005).

It is a question of how much we can protect them. As much as we try we cannot really provide protection in this country, even more so than in other countries. The mortality rate among Palestinian children is very high, from shrapnel and gunshots, homes collapsing, demolitions...How do you make them understand that it is wrong and it is not supposed to happen, but then they ask "Are you able to protect me" and I can't. I cannot assure my child that I can provide complete protection.

Especially troubling is that sometimes they hear something and it is very different from what we try to teach them. Usually, mainly, it is about killing and death. It dominates everything in the country. There is so much spilled blood, it looks like the norm and it's not supposed to be the norm, but how do you explain that to a child?¹⁰

Discussion:

1. Why is it important to continue dialogue despite such huge disagreements over the political situation? What are these disagreements?
2. How did you react to these testimonials?
3. As people of faith living in North America, what is our role in working towards a peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East?

Lesson 2

The Torah and the Qur'an - Text Study

*Both Judaism and Islam form the basis of their religious beliefs on a holy text. Traditionally, Jews believe the Torah was given to Moses at Mount Sinai somewhere around the 14th century BCE. For Muslims, the Qur'an is believed to be the word of God as spoken to the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) through the angel Jibril (Gabriel) in the 7th century C.E. The goal of this session is to learn about the role of the Qur'an and the Torah in the Islamic and Jewish traditions. It also includes an in-depth study of texts from the Qur'an and the Torah. ****If the session is held at a synagogue, you may want to go to the sanctuary to view the Torah or a book version of the Torah. Likewise, if an English translation of the Qur'an is available, participants may want to see it. *****

What is the Qur'an?

The Qur'an is the definitive Scripture for multitudes of mankind. Like the Bible in Christianity, the Dhammapada in Buddhism, or the Book of Mormon for the Latter-day Saints Church, familiarity with it is a primary requisite of inter-religious concern in the world today.

Muslims believe the Qur'an is the eternal, uncreated and literal word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad as a guide for humankind (Qur'an, 2:185). It consists of 114 chapters and 6,000 verses, which were revealed over a period of 22 years. Like the Torah and Evangel or Gospel, the Qur'an is based on a preexisting heavenly tablet, which is the source of all Scripture.

Received by Muslims in its Arabic form as the actual word or speech of God, the Qur'an is memorized as the ground plan of all knowledge. So held in Muslim veneration and custody, it is the most decisive of the world's Scriptures in the regulation of law and life. Its authority holds sway over vast populations in numerous lands, and has endured for fourteen centuries.¹¹

Liturgically, it is the most rehearsed and recited of all the Scriptures. Muslims are encouraged to read the Qur'an on a daily basis. A significant portion of the five daily prayers consists of reciting the Qur'an. Parents will often send young children to study and memorize the Qur'an at a young age. To have an individual who is a *hafiz* or has memorized the entire Qur'an in its original Arabic form is a source of great pride for family members.

Discussion:

1. What status is the Qur'an given in the Muslim community?
2. For those who adhere to the principles of the Qur'an, how does this Scripture play an all-encompassing role on one's life?
3. Does this description strike you as an accurate representation of the Qur'an? Does it accurately reflect either your preconceived notions of the text and/or your personal relationship with the scripture?

What is the Torah?

The Torah is the primary document of Judaism, and according to Jewish tradition it was revealed to Moses by God. When people refer to the Torah, they are referring to the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Study of Torah stands at the center of Jewish life, and the encounter with Scripture is integral to Jewish worship. . . . Equally important for Jews, though, is the study of the *Tanakh* [Bible] and its commentaries. The *Tanakh* includes not only the Torah, but also the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). Indeed, in Judaism, study itself is an essential form of worship that shapes the inner character of both the individual and the community. By learning to enter into debate with commentators who are both ancient and contemporary, Jews fulfill an essential sacred obligation. This disciplined encounter with the Torah provides the platform on which ritual practice, ethical deliberation and moral action are built. Thus we read in Mishna Pesah 1:1, a subsection of the Jewish Talmud:

These are things the benefit of which a person enjoys in this world, while the reward is reserved for them in the world to come: honoring father and mother, righteous deeds, and bringing peace between a person and their fellow. But the study of Torah is equal to them all [because it leads to them all].

Studying the biblical text along with its commentaries is an invitation to join in the discussion (or the argument, since one commentator will often disagree vociferously with another) and, in the process, to become an interpreter oneself!¹²

Discussion:

1. What is the status of the Torah in the Jewish community?
2. How does debate play a role in understanding the Torah?
3. How is this description of the Torah similar to or different from your prior conception of it?
4. How is this description of the Torah similar to or different from the conception of the Qur'an?

Hearing the Qur'an and the Torah

The Islamic tradition places a heavy emphasis on the oral character of the Qur'an, which actually means "recitation." From the onset of the Qur'an's revelation to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.), its primary mode of transmission has been oral, although scribes documented the Qur'an during the life of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and it was compiled into one book soon after the Prophet's death. Companions of the Prophet committed the entire Qur'an to memory, as portions of it were revealed to the Prophet.

Today, crowds fill stadiums and auditoriums throughout the Islamic world for public Qur'an recitation contests. Chanting of the Qur'an is an art form. Reciters or chanters are in an esteem comparable with that of opera stars in the West...recordings of the Qur'an are enjoyed for their aesthetic as well as their religious value.¹³

Like the Qur'an, for centuries the Torah was handed down in oral form from one generation to the next. Although scholars disagree as to exactly when the oral Torah was codified in its current written form, it is generally agreed upon that this occurred during the Persian Period after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and before the arrival of the Greeks in 333 BCE. Although today the Torah is codified in its written form, its oral recitation remains a central part of the prayer service in Judaism with a section read aloud each week. During this public recitation, the Torah, like the Qur'an, has special melodies that are sung.

¹² Amy Grossblat Pessah, Kenneth Meyers and Christopher Leighton. "How Do Jews and Christians Read the Bible?" in *Irreconcilable Differences?: A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians* edited by David Sandmel, Rosann Catalano and Christopher Leighton (Oxford: Westview Press, 2001).

¹³ Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

Activity – Demonstration of Prayer

If the session is occurring at a synagogue, take a group field trip to the sanctuary. Take out a Torah to show the participants. If the session is occurring at a mosque or Islamic community center, go to the prayer room and show the participants around.

Ask a Muslim participant and a Jewish participant each to demonstrate how they pray and where they use sacred texts. If possible, ask a Muslim participant to recite a few verses from the Qur'an and a Jewish participant to chant some verses from the Torah. After they finish, allow time for participants to ask questions about anything they didn't understand or comment on anything they found interesting.

Discussion:

1. What are your reactions to hearing the Qur'an/Torah?
2. How are the sounds similar? How are they different?
3. What emotions does listening to Scriptures elicit for you?

The role of the Scriptures in your life

Both Judaism and Islam are based on a holy text. While these are the fundamental bases of the religions, for each individual believer they hold a different meaning and level of importance. Through the discovery of what the Qur'an and the Torah mean to one another, we may also come to realize the role that they play in our own lives.

Discussion:

1. How do you view the Torah? The Qur'an?
2. What importance does it hold in your life?
3. What is your perception of the other's holy book? How has it changed after this discussion?
4. What questions do you have about the Torah and the Qur'an?

Text study of passages from the Qur'an and Torah

Surah 87: "The Most High"

In the Name of God the Compassionate the Caring

Holy be the name of your Lord most high

Who created then gave form

Who determined then gave guidance

Who made the meadow pasture grow

Then turned it to a darkened flood-swept remnant

We will make you recite. You will not forget except what the will of God allows

He will know what is declared and what is hidden
He will ease you to the life of ease
So render good counsel if good counsel will ease
Those who know awe will be brought to remember
He who is hard in wrong will turn away
He will be put to the fire
Neither dying in it nor living
He who makes himself pure will flourish
Who remembers the name of his Lord and performs the prayer

But no. They prefer the lower life
Better is the life ultimate, the life that endures
As is set down in the scrolls of the ancients
The scrolls of Ibrahim and Musa¹⁴

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I commanded you this day, to love the Eternal your God, to walk in God's ways, and to keep God's commandments, God's laws, and God's rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Eternal your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—by loving the Eternal your God, heeding God's commands, and holding fast to [God]. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the Eternal swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.¹⁵

Discussion:

1. What is God's role as described in the passages? What is the individual's role?
2. What are the implications of this for how one behaves?
3. How do these answers differ in the Qur'an and Torah passages?

Both the Jewish and Muslim traditions place a strong emphasis on helping those less fortunate. This concept is based on the idea that our own good fortune is given to us from God and we, therefore, are obligated to share with those who do not

¹⁴ Michael Anthony Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2006).

¹⁵ As indicated in the introduction, all biblical quotes are from The Jewish Publication Society, *Tanakh: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

Lesson 3

Tzedakah and Zakat

have. This can take the form of either giving money or giving time. These two avenues of contributing to the community are shared by both religions, allowing Muslims and Jews to work together to create a more just society.

Qur'anic and Biblical Texts on "Charity"

Qur'an 2:177

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God, and the Last Day, and the angels, and revelation, and (God's) messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him for your relatives, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who seek assistance, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage; to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts that you have made; and to be firm and patient in distress, in adversity, and throughout all times of peril. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing.¹⁶

Qur'an 2:274

Those who spend their wealth in charity by night and day, secretly and openly, they will have their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear or to regret.

Qur'an 76:8-9

(The righteous) feed the poor, the orphan and the captive for the love of God, saying: 'We feed you for the sake of God alone; we seek from you neither reward nor thanks.

Discussion:

1. According to the passages from the Qur'an, what type of person gives to the poor and why should one give? What does this say about the importance of charity in the Muslim tradition?
2. In the first verse, giving to charity is listed among many other acts of righteousness. How does charity relate to these other practices of faith? Is it equal to them in importance? How is it the same as the other ones and how is it different? Can it be seen as an overarching category into which the others fall?
3. According to the texts, should one give to charity for the sake of the individual in need or for God? Do you agree with this reason to give? How might this change how a Muslim gives to charity?

¹⁶
2001).

As indicated in the introduction, all Qur'anic quotes are from Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

Deuteronomy 15:4-11

There shall be no needy among you – since the Eternal your God will bless you in the land that the Eternal your God is giving you as a hereditary portion.... If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that the Eternal your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need...Give readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Eternal your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kin in your land.

Exodus 23:10-11

Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.

Discussion:

The first Biblical verse declares that "there shall be no needy among you," but then goes on to describe what to do "if there is a needy person among you" and says that "there will never cease to be needy ones in your land." How can you resolve this apparent contradiction? Consider the following commentary (which is based on classical Jewish commentaries) as one possible solution to the contradiction.

"There shall be no needy among you." Should Israel be faithful to the law of God, there will be no poor to borrow among them, and the law concerning the cancellation of debts will find no application.

"There will never cease to be needy ones in your land." Though they were promised that if they kept God's commandments there would be no needy among them, it is here taken for granted that not for all time will all people lead such an ideal life. Poverty must, therefore, be regarded as an existing evil at some place or at some period.

(Fisch, Rabbi Dr. S. *The Soncino Chumash*. Ed. Rev. Dr. A Cohen. Soncino Press)

Zakat and Tzedakah

Zakat

Derived from the Arabic root word Z-K-W, the word *zakat* literally means purification, increase and growth. The Qur'an promises to multiply the wealth of those who spend for Allah's sake seven times over. The meaning reflects the Islamic philosophy that one purifies and increases his or her wealth by donating a portion of it to the needy through *zakat* or *sadaqa*.

Two terms are used. *Sadaqa* is a broad term conveying "sincere giving." Within *sadaqa* is the concept of *zakat*. *Zakat* does not mean charity. *Zakat* is not voluntary, unlike charity, but is an obligation upon every Muslim who has earned a minimum level of wealth. The third pillar of Islam, *zakat* is the duty to give 2.5% of one's accumulated wealth and assets – not just one's income – to those in need.

Just as the performance of the *salat* (prayer) is both an individual and a communal obligation, so payment of the

zakat instills a sense of communal identity and responsibility. As all Muslims share equally in their obligation to worship God, so they are all duty bound to attend to the social welfare of the community by redressing economic inequalities through payment of an alms tax or poor tithe.¹

Tzedakah

Tzedakah and Charity

The Hebrew word *tzedakah* contains the same root letters as *tzedek*, "righteousness," and is most accurately translated as "righteous giving." It is commonly translated, inaccurately, as "charity." The Jewish concept of *tzedakah* is obligatory giving. It is about contributing to the common good and helping fellow human beings.

Tzedakah is a social obligation incumbent upon everyone. If we were to depend on everyone to have giving hearts, we would first have to work to change attitudes and feelings, and then hope that those feelings would lead to sufficient giving. Judaism is very practical and very clear about our ethical obligations in this realm, as though saying: "Give 10% of your net income to those in need. It would be nice if you did it joyfully. But do it."

Biblical ethics are permeated with laws assuring protections of the poor. The obligation to alleviate poverty required both individual *Tzedakah* and a communal governmental response. By early Talmudic times, at least four communal funds (plus communal schools for boys) were required in every sizeable community. These included a daily food distribution program, a clothing fund, a burial fund, and a communal money fund. By the Middle Ages, these had grown into a veritable bureaucracy of communal social welfare institutions. *Tzedakah* in Jewish history functioned as a system of taxation, not a voluntary philanthropic enterprise.²

Discussion:

1. According to these passages, what are the differences between *tzedakah* and *zakat* and charity? How do the implications of these terms affect how you give to others? Do you think it is better to give out of emotion or obligation?
2. How does *tzedakah* and *sadaqa* go beyond giving money? How can you incorporate these different aspects of *tzedakah* into your life?

Charity versus Good Deeds

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) said: "Every Muslim has to give in charity." The people then asked: "(But what) if someone has nothing to give, what should he do?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns)." The people further asked: "If he cannot find even that?" He replied: "He should help the needy who appeal for help." Then the people asked: "If he cannot do (even) that?" The Prophet said finally: "Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and that will be regarded as charitable deeds."

Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 2, *Hadith* 524³

The Prophet said, "Charity is obligatory everyday on every joint of a human being. If one helps a person in matters concerning his riding animal by helping him to ride it or by lifting his luggage on to it, all this will be regarded charity. A good word, and every step one takes to offer the compulsory Congregational prayer, is regarded as

17 Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

18 Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time* (New York: UAHC Press, 1998), 85.

19 *Hadith* are oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad. *Hadith* collections are regarded as important tools for determining the Sunnah, or Muslim way of life, by all traditional schools of jurisprudence.

charity; and guiding somebody on the road is regarded as charity."

Abu Huraira, Volume 4, Book 52, Number 141

The rabbis distinguished between *tzedakah* and *gemilut hasadim* [acts of loving kindness]. "In three respects loving kindness exceeds charity. Charity represents giving of alms; loving kindness is both alms and personal service. Charity is meant for the poor, loving kindness is for the rich as well as for the poor; charity aims to help the living; loving kindness is shown to both the living and the dead." Benevolence in the fullest sense of the term comprised feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, tending the sick, burying the dead, comforting the mourner, ransoming the captive, educating the orphan, and providing a dowry for the needy bride. While the practice of charity fills the world with love, its true value depends upon the loving spirit which prompts it.²⁰

Discussion:

1. What does Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) opinion of non-financial means of fulfilling charity suggest about a hierarchy of how one contributes to charity? Do you think there should be a hierarchy?
2. How can performing good deeds and staying away from evil be understood as charitable work? What does this say about the effects of our actions? What are some examples of when a good deed is charitable?
3. In the Jewish tradition, what is the difference between charity and acts of loving kindness? Is one better than the other or do they complement one another? How so?
4. Based on the previous discussion, how are the Jewish and Muslims conceptions of charity versus good deeds similar? How do they differ?

Fear of Giving Charity

The following is an excerpt of *Scared to Donate: An Examination of the Effects of Designating Muslim Charities as Terrorist Organizations on the First Amendment Rights of Muslim Donors* by Kathryn Ruff, published by New York University School of Law's *Journal of Legislation and Public Policy*:

Since President George W. Bush declared a "war on terrorism," his administration has engaged in an aggressive campaign to eradicate sources of funding for terrorist organizations. In the process, the government has investigated mosques and Islamic religious organizations, required Muslim citizens to submit to intrusive "voluntary" interviews about possible terrorist ties, and blacklisted twenty-seven Muslim charities for providing financial aid to terrorist groups...

Although this process of "blacklisting" Muslim charities successfully cuts off monetary support to terrorist groups, it has had a profound chilling effect on Muslim religious exercise. Not only are donor opportunities limited to those organizations not yet under investigation, but many Muslims are now scared to donate to religious charities for fear of being branded a terrorist. This chilling effect significantly interferes with the practice of annual charitable giving, known as *zakat*, one of the five pillars of Islam and a fundamental element of the Muslim faith...

Zakat is supposed to be given to those who need it most, especially widows and orphans, the homeless, and the dispossessed. For this reason, American Muslims have traditionally made donations to Muslim charities that send money overseas to help other Muslims in war-torn and impoverished areas...while Muslims are permitted to donate to non-Muslim charities on a voluntary basis, they must give first priority to the needs of Muslims around the world when distributing *zakat* contributions...Because of the religious obligation to help the people most in need, "giving money to American Muslim mosques, schools and advocacy groups [is] a 'remote second choice' to donating to poor and suffering Muslims overseas."...

The heightened scrutiny of Islamic charities since September 11, 2001, has not only reduced the amount of donations to corrupt organizations that ultimately fund terrorist activities, but has also reduced the amount of donations to Muslim organizations working in good faith to eliminate human suffering around the world...

While newspaper commentary has focused on the personal fears of Muslim donors, some of the legal scholarship surrounding the terrorist designations and government asset-blocking only cursorily notes that after September 11, 2001, Muslim charities experienced large drops in donations and that many Muslims became fearful of giving...

While some of those fears are grounded in the possibility of actually funding terrorism, a greater reason for the drop in religious donations is that many Muslims are afraid of becoming targets of law enforcement and branded as terrorists due to their connections with a charity that comes under investigation. Charity leaders have recognized that since September 11, 2001, many American Muslims feel that whatever their actions, they are perceived as having bad intentions and that an overall climate of fear has kept donors from making their annual charitable contributions.²¹

Discussion:

1. What is your reaction toward the treatment of Muslim charities post 9/11?
2. As a Muslim-American, do you ever fear giving money to charity? Do you worry if your chosen charity would be viewed with suspicion by others? Have your methods of donating to charity changed since 9/11?

Activity

Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 586

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) once had several coins that he asked his wife to distribute in charity. But due to the Prophet's illness at the time, she did not have an opportunity to give out the coins. When the Prophet learned of this, he asked for the coins, placed them in his hand, and then said: "What would God's Prophet think if he were to meet God, who is Great and Glorious, while (still) possessing these?"

Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 589

The Prophet also said: "Give charity without delay, for it stands in the way of calamity."

According to the Jewish Medieval Rabbi and Philosopher Maimonides, there are eight degrees in the giving of *Tzedakah*. They are (from lowest to highest):

- One who gives grudgingly, reluctantly or with regret.
- One who gives less than should be given, but gives graciously.
- One who gives correctly, but only after being asked.
- One who gives before being asked.
- One who gives without knowing who receives the gift, although the receiver knows who has given.
- One who gives without making him or herself known.

²¹ Kathryn Ruff, "Scared to Donate: An Examination of the Effects of Designating Muslim Charities as Terrorist Organizations on the First Amendment Rights of Muslim Donors" [electronic version]. *New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy*. 23 March 2006 (447-502). http://www.law.nyu.edu/journals/legislation/articles/current_issue/NYL109.pdf

- One who gives before being asked.
- One who gives without knowing who receives the gift, although the receiver knows who has given.
- One who gives without making him or herself known.
- One who gives without knowing who receives the gift, and the receiver doesn't know who has given.
- One who helps another to support him or herself through a gift, a loan or by finding him or her a job, because in this way the receiver is helped to become self-supporting.

As a community of Muslims and Jews, we have the religious obligation to provide for those in need. As these sayings of the Prophet indicate, the time to act on this value is now. Whether this be through financial means or through community service, we can come together through our joint mission to create a better world.

Brainstorm ideas of how together you can reach out to help those in need in your community. This may involve a fundraiser to donate money to a charitable cause or could involve hands-on community service. Create an action plan to follow through with one of these ideas.

*****This can serve as an ongoing project with your Synagogue and Mosque to maintain your relationship and build a stronger connection between your members.*****

Lesson 4

Abraham, Isma'il and Isaac



Muslims and Jews share a common ancestor in the figure of Abraham. Abraham plays an essential role in the formation of both faith communities. But while bringing these communities together in one ancestor, the story of Abraham can also be quite divisive as each religion vies for the unique status as the favored children of Abraham and brings to mind ideas such as "chosenness." In studying the story of Abraham, it is particularly interesting to look at the moment in which he is tested to take his son and sacrifice him to God. Considered to be Isaac in the Torah and Isma'il in the Qur'an, the identity of the son is highly contested. In studying these traditions together, we can come to a greater understanding of one another's traditions, learning both where we come together and where we may disagree.

The Binding of Abraham's Son in the Torah and the Qur'an

Genesis 22:1-17

After these things, God tested Abraham, saying to him, "Abraham!" And he said "Here I am." [God] said, "Take your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac, and go forth to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt-offering, on one of the mountains that I will show you." Abraham rose early, saddled his donkey, chopped wood for the burnt-offering, took Isaac his son and his two lads, and set out for the place that God had spoken of to him. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Abraham said to his servant lads, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder. We will worship and return to you." Abraham then took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; in his own hand he held the firestone and the knife. And the two of them went on together. Isaac then said to Abraham his father, "Father!" He answered: "Here I am, my son." And Isaac said, "Here is the firestone and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?" Abraham replied, "God will see to the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. They came to the place that God had shown him. There Abraham built the altar and arranged the wood and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. Abraham now reached out and took the knife to slay his son, but out of heaven an angel of the Eternal called to him, saying, "Abraham! Abraham!" He replied: "Here I am." [The angel] then said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad; do nothing to him; for now I know that you are one who fears God, as you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me. Abraham lifted his eyes: he could see a ram [just] after it was caught by its horns in a thicket. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt-offering in place of his son. Abraham named that place Adonai-Yir'eh; to this day people say: "On the mount of the Eternal, [God] will be seen." Then out of heaven an angel of the Eternal called to Abraham a second time, saying, "By Myself I swear, says the Eternal One, that because you did this thing, and did not withhold your son, your only one, I will bless you greatly, and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore, and your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their foes.

Qur'an 37: 99-113

He said: "I am going away to my Lord who will show me the way." (And he prayed) "O my Lord, grant me a righteous son." So We gave him the good news of a clement son. When he was old enough to go about with him,

he said: "O my son, I dreamt that I was sacrificing you. Consider, what do you think? He replied: "Father, do as you are commanded. If God pleases you will find me firm." When they submitted to the will of God, and (Abraham) laid (his son) down prostrate on his temple, we called out: "O Abraham, You have fulfilled your dream." Thus do we reward those who do good. That was indeed a trying test. So we ransomed him for a great sacrifice and left (his hallowed memory) for posterity. Peace be on Abraham. That is how we reward those who do good. He is truly among our faithful servants. That is how we reward those who do good. He is truly among our faithful servants. So we gave him the good news of Isaac, apostle, who is among the righteous. And we blessed him and Isaac. Among their descendants are some who do good, but some who wrong themselves.

Understanding the Text Further – Islam

An anonymously transmitted interpretation of the Qur'anic story about the Sacrifice of Isma'il:

And throughout his century of prophet-hood and service of God, as Ibrahim grew older, his desire to have a son grew stronger. The Prophet Ibrahim desperately longed for a son but his wife Hajar was barren. "O my Lord! Grant me a righteous son!" (37:100) was his call to Allah.

Against every expectation, Allah fulfilled his promise of making Ibrahim the seed of a great line of Prophets, the root of the great universal religions. "So we gave him the good news of a forbearing boy" (37:101). For Ibrahim, Ismail was not just a son for a sonless father; he was the end of a life of waiting, the reward of a century of suffering, the fruit of his life, the hope after despair and the young boy of an old father. But Allah decided that it was not to remain so. Ibrahim was to be tried once more. Ibrahim had a vision in which he was commanded by Allah to slaughter his only son.

It is not possible to convey in words what it must have meant for Ibrahim to be commanded by Allah (ta'ala) to sacrifice his only son Ismail. The magnitude of the pain does not allow the imagination to enclose it.

Who should Ibrahim choose?
 Love of God or Love of self?
 Prophet-hood or Fatherhood?
 Loyalty to God or loyalty to family?
 Faith or Emotion?
 ...And finally, God or Ismail?
 What should Ibrahim choose?

Ibrahim chose the Love of God over the Love of self, Prophet-hood over Fatherhood, Loyalty to God over Loyalty to family, Truth over Reality, Consciousness over Instinct, Responsibility over Pleasure, Duty over Right, *Tawheed* [monotheism] over *Shirk* [polytheism]...Ibrahim chose God and gave up Ismail.

Ibrahim said to Ismail: "O my Son, I see in a vision that I offer you in sacrifice. Now see what is your view?" (37:102)

But Ismail had also faith. He submitted to Allah's will. Realizing his father's distress, Ismail gave him these comforting words: "O my father! Do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah so wills, patient and constant" (37:102). The choice of Ibrahim was sacrifice. That of Ismail was self-sacrifice: Martyrdom.

He laid Ismail on the ground, putting his face away from him to give strength to his crushed soul and paralyzed hand. And so he slaughtered Ismail. But, by Allah's grace, the knife did not cut. This means that from the very beginning God did not want Ismail to be slaughtered. He wanted Ibrahim to be the slaughterer of Ismail. When he became so, the slaughter became useless.²²

The near sacrifice of Isma'il by Abraham has led to the Muslim holiday of Id al-Adha which takes place immediately following the Pilgrimage to Mecca. The following passage describes the rituals and significance of Id al-Adha:

The pilgrimage ends with the Feast of Sacrifice (Id al-Adha), known in Muslim piety as the Great Feast. It commemorates God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismail (Isaac in Jewish and Christian traditions). The pilgrims ritually enact Abraham's rejection of Satan's temptations to ignore God's command by again casting stones at the devil, here represented by a pillar. Afterwards, they sacrifice animals (sheep, goats, cattle, or camels), as Abraham was finally permitted to substitute a ram for his son. The animal sacrifice also symbolizes that, like Abraham, the pilgrims are willing to sacrifice that which is most important to them. (One needs to recall the importance of these animals as a sign of a family's wealth and as essential for survival.) While some meat is consumed, most is supposed to be distributed to the poor and needy... The Feast of Sacrifice is a worldwide Muslim celebration that lasts for three days, a time for rejoicing, prayer, and visiting with family and friends.²³

Understanding the Text Further – Judaism

Jewish scholars have commented on the "Binding of Isaac" throughout the ages, attempting to understand the intricacies of the Biblical story.

When God asks Abraham to take his son as an offering, the Jewish sages, in the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 89b, imagined a dialogue between God and Abraham.

"Take your son."
"I have two sons."
"Your only son."
"Each is an only son to his mother."
"Whom you love."
"I love them both."
"Isaac"

The Rambam, a 13th century Spanish rabbi, discusses the binding of Isaac as a test.

And God tried Abraham. The matter of "trial," in my opinion, is as follows: Since a person's deeds are at their absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them, on the part of one who is tried it is called "a trial." But on the part of the One, blessed be Adonai, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from the potential into actuality so that they may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone.

Know further that God tries the righteous, for knowing that the righteous will do God's will, the Eternal desires to make them even more upright, and so God commands them to undertake a test, but God does not try the wicked, who would not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.²⁴

The Sforno, a 15th century Italian commentator, further develops the idea of making "the potential into actuality."

Nissah et Avraham: *Tested Abraham*. (God's) intention was that he (Abraham) should translate his love and reverence (of God) from the potential to the actual. In this manner he would be similar to his Creator, Who is good to this world in actuality, for the purpose of man's existence to imitate his Creator as far as possible, as the

23 Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 92.

24 Rabbi Dr. Charles Chavel, ed, *Rambam: Commentary on the Torah* (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1971), 275.

(Torah) testifies, in saying *na'aseh adam b'tzalmenu c'dmutenu*, *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (Genesis 1:26).²⁵

Modern scholars have also grappled with the significance of the binding of Isaac in light of Jewish challenges today and throughout history.

A God who asks us what the text appears to ask is not the true God but one whom we fashion in our own image. We often believe that God wants us to sacrifice our children to an imagined demand. But then it is not God who is cruel but we: it is we who all too frequently are prepared to immolate our offspring to satisfy our own concept of duty and who will restrain our compassion before our own sense of righteousness. The history of humanity is replete with misdeeds committed in the name of religion.²⁶

Or as another modern scholar observed:

There is no reference to this episode anywhere else in the Bible. Nor does it feature very prominently in post-biblical Jewish literature until the third century CE. Some biblical scholars, Jews included, have read the story as a protest against human sacrifice, the significant point being that the angel intervenes to prevent the murder as an obscene act that God, unlike the pagan deities, hates and could never really have intended.

But in traditional Jewish thought the *Akedah* is used as a paradigm for Jewish martyrdom; the Jewish people are ready at all times to give up life itself for the sake of the sanctification of the divine name (*Kiddush Ha-Shem*)...

On the judgment day of Rosh Hashanah at the beginning of the year, the Eternal is entreated to show mercy to God's people in the merit of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. A prayer of the day reads: "Remember unto us, O Eternal our God, the covenant and the loving-kindness and the oath which Thou swore unto Abraham our father on Mount Moriah; and consider the binding with which Abraham our father bound his son Isaac on the altar, how he suppressed his compassion in order to perform Thy will with a perfect heart. So may Thy compassion overbear Thine anger against us; in Thy great goodness may Thy great wrath turn aside from Thy people, Thy city [Jerusalem], and Thine inheritance."²⁷

Discussion:

1. How does Abraham's grappling with his vision to sacrifice his son convey his values as a father, a believer, and a righteous person? What does his thought process, as portrayed in the Genesis passage, reveal about the difficult decision he was forced to make? In what ways can you empathize with his struggle? If you really believed that God called you to do this, would you have made the same decision?
2. What modern day lessons are we able to learn from the sacrifice of Ismail? Do you agree with the moral posed in the Qur'anic passage? Why or why not?
3. Ask a participant to explain the practice of *Id al-Adha*. How do these practices symbolize the values of Islam as portrayed in the sacrifice story?
4. What does the passage from the Talmud indicate about Abraham's care for both of his sons? Since this was before the rise of Islam why might such a conversation have been envisioned by the rabbis of that time?

25 Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz ed, *Sforno Commentary on the Torah* (New York: Mesorah Publications Ltd, 1997), 108.

26 Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991).

27 Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

5. Discuss the various interpretations presented here on the binding of Isaac. What do these interpretations teach about the Jewish concept of righteousness, God, and Jewish self-image? Which interpretation speaks to you most? What additional lessons might you extrapolate from the story of the binding of Isaac?

6. How do the lessons from this story differ in Islam and Judaism? How are they similar? How are these lessons able to inform and complement one another?

Lesson 5

Jerusalem



A comprehensive Muslim-Jewish dialogue would not be complete without at least touching on the Middle East. While there will be issues we agree and disagree on politically, it is important to put these differences in context and to understand the religious significance of the land, and specifically the city of Jerusalem. After all, Jerusalem is perhaps the only city in the world that is considered historically and spiritually significant to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. In looking at this historical and religious framework, we can gain greater respect for one another and the importance that this region plays in each of our traditions.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a deeply emotional issue for individuals on both sides. With religious, political and historical implications, discussions of the conflict will bring up competing narratives and deeply embedded prejudices or preconceived notions of the "other." Both sides have validity in their political, moral and religious claims. Yet, despite the numerous tensions on issues such as refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, the security barriers and terrorism, there is still common ground between our two communities that needs to be explored if we are to find a way out of the cycle of violence and mistrust.

In November 2007, leading up to the 2007 Annapolis peace talks, the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land came to Washington, D.C. Consisting of religious leaders from Israel and Palestine (the two chief rabbis, the patriarchs of all the major Christian faith groups, and a range of prominent Muslim leaders), they have been working for a year to set out a vision of promoting peace, tolerance, and coexistence. Below is a communiqué issued by the group on their trip to Washington, D.C.:

All of us believe in one Creator and Guide of the Universe. We believe that the essence of religion is to worship Him and respect the life and dignity of all human beings, regardless of religion, nationality and gender.

We accordingly commit ourselves to using our positions of leadership, and the influence of our good offices, to advance these sacred values, to prevent religion from being used as a source of conflict, and instead serve the goals of just and comprehensive peace and reconciliation.

Our respective Holy Places have become a major element in our conflict. We lament that this is the case, as our respective attachments to our holy places should not be a cause of bloodshed, let alone be sites of violence or other expressions of hatred. Holy places must remain dedicated to prayer and worship only, places where believers have free access and put themselves in the presence of the Creator. Holy places are there for believers to draw inspiration to strengthen their acceptance and love of the Almighty and all His creatures, from all religions and all nationalities.

Accordingly each religious community should treat the Holy Sites of the other faiths in a manner that respects their integrity and independence and avoids any act of desecration, aggression or harm.

We, believers from three religions, have been placed in this land, Jews, Christians and Muslims. It is our responsibility

to find the right way to live together in peace rather than to fight and kill one other. Palestinians yearn for the end to occupation and for what they see as their inalienable rights. Israelis long for the day when they can live in personal and national security. Together we must find ways of reaching these goals.

Toward these ends we are actively working to:

1. Establish "hot line" procedures of rapid communication among ourselves in order to address and advise government officials regarding issues of protection of and access to Holy Sites before such issues become cause for conflict.
2. Establish mechanisms to monitor media for derogatory representations of any religion, and issue statements in response to such representations.
3. Together reflect on the future of Jerusalem, support the designation of the Old City of Jerusalem as a World Heritage Site, work to secure open access to the Old City for all communities, and seek a common vision for this city which all of us regard as holy.
4. Promote education for mutual respect and acceptance in schools and in the media. We will sponsor a conference for Israeli and Palestinian educators, academics and ministers of education on "The Role of Religion in Educating for Peace: Principles and Practices."
5. Demonstrate through our relations that differences can and should be addressed through dialogue rather than through violence, and strive to bring this message to our respective communities and political leaders that they may embrace this approach accordingly.
6. Provide ongoing consultation to our government leaders, and through the example of our work together remind them that the interests of one community can only be served by also respecting and valuing the humanity and interests of all other communities.²⁸

Discussion:

1. How do you relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Do you feel a strong religious connection to the land?
2. As people of faith, what role can you play in helping to bring about reconciliation? Do you think the work of groups such as the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land can assist in this process? How can you amplify their efforts?
3. In your opinion, how central a role does the issue of Jerusalem play in the perpetuation of this conflict?

The Significance of Jerusalem in Islam

The city of Jerusalem is known in Arabic as "*Al-Quds*" or "*Baitul-Maqdis*" ("The Noble, Sacred Place") [and] is known as the land of many prophets, peace be upon them all. Muslims revere all of the "Biblical" prophets, such as Abraham and Jesus - peace be upon them all. They all taught the Oneness of God. One writer describes that "*the sanctification of the connection between Mecca and Jerusalem is like a blessed tree, watered by the strivings and yearnings and self-sacrifice of Prophets, saints, soldiers, artisans, women, and people of all walks of life and nationalities who revered Jerusalem as the Holy City of God and as a symbol of human submission to the One Creator*"²⁹

Muslim veneration of Jerusalem from the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was based on its association with holy people known from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Jerusalem was the first "Qibla" for Muslims - the place

28 Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land Communiqué [7 November 2007] http://www.cmep.org/Statements/2007Nov7_HolyLandCouncil.htm.

29 Sari Nusseibeh, *Monotheism in Two Sacred Sanctuaries* [30 November 2007] <http://www.kokaniz.com/masjidalquds.html>.

toward which Muslims turned in prayer. It is recognized in the Qur'an as the place where King David lived, and where the Temples of the Jews had been.³⁰ It was many years into the Islamic mission (16 months after the *Hij'rah*) that Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was instructed to change the Qibla from Jerusalem to Mecca (Qur'an 2:142-144). It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) said, "*There are only three mosques to which you should embark on a journey: the Sacred Mosque (Mecca, Saudi Arabia), this mosque of mine (Madina, Saudi Arabia), and the Furthest Mosque (al-Aqsa, Jerusalem).*"

It is Jerusalem that Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) visited during his night journey and ascension (called "*Israa and Miraa*j"). In one evening, the angel Gabriel miraculously took the Prophet from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to the Furthest Mosque (Al-Aqsa) in Jerusalem. He was then taken up to the heavens to be shown the signs of God. The Prophet met with previous prophets and led them in prayer. He was then taken back to Mecca. The whole experience (which Muslim commentators take literally and Muslims believe as a miracle) lasted a few hours of a night. The event of *Israa* and *Miraa*j is mentioned in the Qur'an, in the first verse of Chapter 17 entitled 'The Children of Israel.'

"Glory to God, Who did take His servant for a journey by night, from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless - in order that We might show him some of Our signs. For He is the One who hears and knows all things." (17:1)

This night journey further reinforced the link between Mecca and Jerusalem as holy cities, and serves as an example of every Muslim's deep devotion and spiritual connection with Jerusalem.

The Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) Night Journey gave Jerusalem significance as one of the holy places in Islam. The special status this city has played in Islamic tradition can be better understood by looking at the following text.

It is narrated on the authority of Abu al-Darda who quoted the Prophet as saying: 'Each prayer in *al-Masjid al Haram* in Mecca equals one hundred thousand prayers elsewhere, each prayer in my mosque (in Madina) equals one thousand prayers elsewhere, and each prayer in *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (in Jerusalem) equals five hundred prayers elsewhere'.³¹

Throughout history, there have been periods of Muslim control over Jerusalem. The following passage describes Jerusalem under one such period of Muslim rule.

Jerusalem came under Islamic rule during the reign of the second Caliph Umar (may God be pleased with him) in the year 638. It was a peaceful conquest. The ruling patriarch of the city, whose name was Sophronius, offered the keys of the city to the Caliph himself.

Upon entering the blessed city, the Caliph asked about the location of the mosque of David (*al-Masjid al-Aqsa*) and the blessed Rock from where the Prophet went in *Miraj*.

The site was a desolate place at that time. Romans had destroyed the so-called Second Temple in the year 70 CE and no non-Christian or Christian ruler of that city after that ever tried to build any place of worship there.

According to historians, it was a garbage dump, a dunghill for the people of Jerusalem. Umar, upon learning this was the site of the *Masjid* of Jerusalem and the place from where the *Miraj* took place, cleaned the place with his own hands and put his forehead in prayer on that ground.

The *Masjid al-Aqsa* was later built in that area.

30 Ghada Hashem Talhami, "The Modern History of Islamic Jerusalem: Academic Myths and Propaganda" [electronic version]. Middle East Policy. VII, 2, February 2000. http://www.meppc.org/journal_vol7/talhami.pdf.

31 Transmitted by Ibn Majah. *Sunan Ibn Majah bi Sharh Abi al-Husayn al-Sindi*, Vol.2.

In 691 CE the Dome of Rock and a more elaborate mosque were constructed. Those were, perhaps, the first most expensive and expansive sacred monuments built in the history of Islam...

Muslim rulers and philanthropists built many hospitals, schools, and religious centers in and around the city. They purchased land in and around the city and dedicated it as a Waqf (endowment) for religious purposes. [According to Muslims] the whole city is virtually Waqf land that is non-salable and nontransferable.

Many Muslim scholars also migrated and settled in the city. The Al-Aqsa Masjid was a great seat of learning. Thousands of pious people and scholars included provisions in their wills to be buried in Jerusalem. There are thousands, perhaps millions of Muslims' graves in the city of Jerusalem.

Muslims also recognized the rights of Christians and Jews who hold the city dear to their hearts and sacred in their faiths.

Under Islamic rule they were given permission to settle there. When the Caliph Umar made the treaty with the Christian Patriarch Sophronius it was agreed, at the request of the Christian patriarch, that "No Jews will live with them in Aelia (Jerusalem)."

But later, due to Muslim tolerance, this rule was relaxed and Jews were allowed to come and settle in the city.

After the re-conquest of Jerusalem by Salahuddin in the time of the Crusades, Jews were again permitted by Muslims to come back and live in the city. The Crusaders during their 90-year rule (1099-1187) had banned both Jews and Muslims from that city.³²

Discussion:

1. What does it mean for the "precincts" of the Al-Aqsa Mosque to be "blessed?" Do you believe that a place can be blessed? In your opinion, what makes a place "holy" or "blessed"?
2. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad met and prayed with previous prophets such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus while at Bayt al-Muqaddas. What do you think is the significance of these individuals being in Jerusalem? What does it mean for them to be "commissioned with Unity (of God)"?
3. Discuss some of the reasons suggested by the texts for why Muhammad made the Night Journey to Bayt al-Muqaddas. What do these reasons suggest about the status of Jerusalem in Islamic thought?
4. What do the texts suggest about the importance of pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Bayt al-Muqaddas?
5. What is your personal and spiritual connection to Jerusalem? How does your tradition influence this connection?

The Significance of Jerusalem in Judaism

Jerusalem appears in the Hebrew Bible 669 times and Zion (which refers to Jerusalem) is mentioned 154 times. The following are some of these many passages that make reference to Jerusalem.

II Samuel 5:4-10: Jerusalem becomes the capital

David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years... David captured the stronghold of Zion; it is now the City of David... David also fortified the surrounding area, from the Millo inward. David kept growing stronger for the Eternal, God of Hosts, was with him.

II Samuel 6:12, 15: Jerusalem becomes the religious capital as well as the political capital

When David was told that the Eternal had blessed Obed-Edom and all his family because of the Ark of God, David went and had the Ark of God brought up from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David, with rejoicing... And so David and the whole House of Israel brought up the Ark of the Eternal with shouting and blasts of the shofar.

1 Kings 6:1-2, 11: David's son Solomon builds the Temple

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left the land of Egypt, in the month of Ziv – that is, the second month – in the fourth year of his reign over Israel, Solomon began to build the House of the Eternal. The house which King Solomon built for Adonai was 60 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high... Then the word of God came to Solomon, "With regard to this House you are building – if you follow my laws and observe my commandments, I will fulfill you the promise that I gave your father David: I will abide among the children of Israel, and I will never forsake My people Israel.

Psalms 122:1-9: Rejoicing upon going to Jerusalem

I rejoiced when you said to me, "We are going to the House of the Eternal"
Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem,
Jerusalem built up, a city knit together,
To which tribes would make pilgrimage, the tribes of Adonai.
There the thrones of judgment stood, thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem; "May those who love you be at peace.
May there be well being in your ramparts, peace in your citadels.
For the sake of my kin and friends, I pray for your well being;
For the sake of the house of the Eternal our God, I seek your good."

Psalms 137:1-8: The Temple is destroyed

By the river of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, and we thought of Zion.
There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'
How can we sing a song of the Eternal on alien soil?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither;
Let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you,
If I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.
Remember, O Adonai, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall;
How they cried, 'Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!'
Fair Babylon, you predator, a blessing on those who repay you in kind for what you have inflicted on us.

In the days to come, the Mount of the Eternal's House shall stand firm above the mountains and tower above the hills; and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. And the many peoples shall go and say: "Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Eternal, to the House of God of Jacob; that God may instruct us in the ways of Adonai, and that we may walk in God's paths." For instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Eternal from Jerusalem.

Discussion:

1. During the time of the Temple (before 70 CE), Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year on the pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot, as seen in Deuteronomy 16:16-17. What special significance does this give to Jerusalem?
2. As seen in the passages from Samuel and Kings, Jerusalem gains increasing importance for the Israelites as it is made the political and religious capital of their kingdom. What is the role of God throughout this process? How does Jerusalem become a holy city to the Jewish people? Does this also influence the status of the city in Islam?
3. When Jerusalem is destroyed, the Temple burned, and most of the Jewish people exiled from the land, how do they respond? How does the loss of Jerusalem change them as a people?

Since the time of the destruction of the Temple, the importance of Jerusalem in Judaism has been conveyed through its traditional prayers and practices.

Jews pray facing Jerusalem and the theme of returning to Jerusalem appears throughout the daily services. A passage from the central part of the traditional prayer service, the Amidah, appears below:

And to Jerusalem, your city, may you return in compassion, and may you rest within it, as you have spoken. May you rebuild it soon in our days as an eternal structure, and may you speedily establish the throne of (King) David within it. Blessed are you God, the builder of Jerusalem... May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in compassion. Blessed are you God, who restores the Eternal One's presence to Zion.

More recently, the North American Reform prayer book has changed this prayer to read:

And turn in compassion to Jerusalem, Your city. May there be peace in her gates, quietness in the hearts of her inhabitants. Let Your Torah go forth from Zion and Your word from Jerusalem. Blessed is Adonai, who gives peace to Jerusalem.

Tisha B'Av, the 9th day of the month of Av, is a national day of mourning and fasting that commemorates the loss of the First and Second Temples and the destruction of Jerusalem.

At Jewish weddings the groom breaks a glass with the heel of his shoe symbolically to remember the destruction of Jerusalem. Likewise, there are those who will leave a small portion of their home unfinished or unpainted as a remembrance of the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem.

On several major Jewish holidays, such as Yom Kippur and Passover, there is a Jewish tradition to recite the words, "L'shanah habaa b'Yerushalayim" or "Next year in Jerusalem."

Discussion:

1. What do these traditions indicate about the centrality of Jerusalem to Jewish identity and practice?
2. What values do the changes in the Reform liturgy reflect? What may have been the purpose behind it?

Activity - Working Together for Peace in Jerusalem

Having just studied the significance of Jerusalem in each of our traditions, we can now come to a greater respect for the importance of this city for both of our faith communities. The future of Jerusalem affects both Muslims and Jews very deeply. Together we must hope and pray for peace in Jerusalem, a city that holds profound religious significance for all the Children of Abraham.

Research organizations that promote peace and coexistence in Israel/Palestine (a list of suggestions is provided on the following pages). Choose one to work with more closely and possibly support financially.

Peace and Co-existence Organizations

Abraham Fund Initiative - <http://www.abrahamfund.org/main/siteNew/?langId=1>

The Abraham Fund Initiative works to advance coexistence, equality and cooperation among Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens by creating and operating large-scale initiatives, cultivating strategic grassroots projects and conducting public education and advocacy that promote its vision of shared citizenship and opportunity for all of Israel's citizens.

All For Peace Radio - www.allforpeace.org

Israeli and Palestinian peace activists have launched a new version of the "Voice of Peace" radio station with the aim of promoting peace and co-existence. Broadcasts in Hebrew, Arabic, and English are accompanied by music from the original "Voice of Peace" shows.

Bitterlemons.org – "Israel-Palestinian Crossfire" - www.bitterlemons.org

A website that presents Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints on prominent issues of concern. Although it focuses on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and peace process, other related regional issues are also discussed.

B'Tselem – www.btselem.org

The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories maps "facts on the ground," and offers regularly updated assessments of the situation in which Palestinians live on a day to day basis.

Center for Middle East Peace & Economic Cooperation - www.centerpeace.org

The Center for Middle East Peace & Economic Cooperation encourages all relevant parties – Israel, the Palestinians, Arab countries, the United States, Europe, etc. – to reach a just and comprehensive peace that will bring an end to the Israeli-Arab conflict. With this mission in mind, the Center's activities include travel in the region, diplomatic exchanges, and conferences featuring Middle Eastern and other relevant international leaders seeking peace.

The Center for Jewish-Arab Economic Development - www.cjaed.org.il/

The Center for Jewish-Arab Economic Development is an organization that works to strengthen the economy in the Arab sector in Israel and to build business partnerships between Jews and Palestinians both within Israel and across the Green Line.

Givat Haviva - www.givathaviva.org.il/english/

The Givat Haviva Institute educates and acts to promote the values of equality and human dignity between Israelis and Palestinians. The overriding goals of the organization are to educate for peace, democracy, coexistence and social solidarity; to resist racism and all forms of discrimination; and to foster greater understanding between different groups in Israeli society and among nations.

Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education - www.handinhand12.org/

Founded in 1997, the Hand in Hand Center works to build peace between Jews and Arabs in Israel through development of bilingual and multi-cultural schools.

Hope Flowers School - www.mideastweb.org/hopeflowers/

The Hope Flowers School is a Palestinian school in El Khader, south of Bethlehem, dedicated to education for coexistence, peace, non-violence and democracy. Hope Flowers represents a flowering of hope for peaceful relations between Palestinians and Israelis.

Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel - www.icci.co.il/

The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) is an umbrella organization of over 70 Jewish, Muslim and Christian institutions actively working towards interreligious and intercultural understanding in Israel and the region.

Ir Amim: For an Equitable and Stable Jerusalem with an Agreed Political Future - <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/eng/>

Ir Amim is an Israeli non-profit non partisan organization whose mission is to engage on those issues which impact Israeli-Palestinian relations in Jerusalem and which affect the political future of the city. Ir Amim seeks to render Jerusalem a more viable and equitable city, while generating and promoting a more politically sustainable future.

Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information - www.ipcri.org

IPCRI is a joint institution of Israelis and Palestinians dedicated to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on the basis of "two-states for two people." IPCRI seeks to serve as an intellectual platform for Israelis and Palestinians (and others) to create and develop new concepts and ideas that enrich the political and public discourse in order to influence decision makers and to challenge the current political reality.

Just Vision - www.justvision.org

Just Vision is a nonprofit organization that informs local and international audiences about under-reported Palestinian and Israeli joint civilian efforts to resolve the conflict nonviolently. Using media and educational tools, they raise awareness in order to encourage civic participation in grassroots peace building.

Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam – www.nswas.com

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is a village in Israel that was established jointly by Jews and Palestinian Arabs of Israeli citizenship to engage in educational work for peace, equality and understanding between the two peoples.

Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between People – www.rapprochement.org

This community center in Beit Sahour sponsors dialogues aimed at developing mutual understanding, educating for peace, and animating public participation in building a just and lasting peace in the region.

The Parents' Circle - <http://www.theparentscircle.com/>

The Parents' Circle is an organization founded by parents who have lost children to the violence in the Middle East. The organization consists of several hundred bereaved families who have worked to spearhead the reconciliation process between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Peres Center for Peace - www.peres-center.org/pages/aboutus.asp

The Peres Center for Peace promotes Shimon Peres' vision of a Middle East where people of the region work together to build peace through socio-economic cooperation and people-to-people relations.

Rabbis for Human Rights – www.rhr.israel.net

Advocating on behalf of human rights from a religious perspective, Rabbis for Human Rights received an award from the Knesset for its work in nurturing interfaith understanding and promoting the peace process.

Seeds of Peace – www.seedsofpeace.org/

Seeds of Peace is dedicated to empowering young leaders from regions of conflict with the leadership skills required to advance reconciliation and coexistence. They have focused primarily on bringing Arab and Israeli teenagers together before fear, mistrust and prejudice blind them from seeing the human face of their enemy.

Sikkuy: The Association for the Advancement of Civil Equality in Israel - www.sikkuy.org.il/english/home.html

Sikkuy is a Jewish-Arab advocacy organization that develops and implements projects to advance civic equality between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel in government budgets, resource allocation, hiring policy, land usage, etc.

Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research - www.tau.ac.il/peace

The Tami Steinmetz Center, housed at Tel Aviv University, was founded to promote systematic research and thinking on issues connected with peacemaking processes and conflict resolution.

Lesson 6

Unity and Diversity within the Community

Both Judaism and Islam embrace a powerful concept of a worldwide community. This idea is expressed in Islam as the umma (or community) and in Judaism as k'lal yisrael (all of the Jewish people). At the same time, however, there is also a great deal of diversity within this unified religious body. In this session, we will explore both the unifying aspects of our communities, as well as the vast cultural differences in which we find ourselves and express our religious identities. This model of unity among diversity can serve as a model for us as Muslims and Jews.

Umma and K'lal Yisrael

The following passage outlines the concept of *umma* in Islam.

Islam brought peoples from all tribes, nations, ethnic groups and races into a new grouping, based only on faith in the one living God. This grouping was called the *umma* of Islam. The Qur'an speaks to Muslims in inspiring tones, saying: "You are the best community (*umma*) that has been raised up for humankind" (Chapter 3, verse 110). The force of this new entity in religious history was proved during the first centuries of Islam when people of all cultures and languages became part of the *umma*. A partial list of people who united religiously under the inspiration of Islam includes the Spanish, Slavs, Berbers, Syrians, Turks, Chinese, Phoenicians, Copts, Ethiopians, Persians, Indians, East Indians, and Sudanese, in addition to the Arabs. During the first century of Islam, conflict arose between the Arab and non-Arab elements in the community, but as the religion grew, racial and ethnic distinctions lost their importance. One of the most admirable features of the Islamic system is its relative freedom from racial prejudice... It should be noted again that Islamic unity is very practical. Islam holds no doctrine of unity, or mystery of unity. The practice of the *umma* simply serves to cement the worldwide community together.

The practice of *salat*, or ritual prayer, is a uniting rite. Whether Muslims find themselves in Damascus or in Tokyo, in San Francisco or in Nairobi, they fit in easily with the way prayer is performed. Variations in the gestures and words are so slight as to be inconsequential. The unifying capacity of Islamic prayer is enhanced by the use of a single liturgical language. Prayers are universally recited in Arabic... Also recited in the *salat* is the creed, or *shahada*..., another feature that unites all Muslims. Even geography takes on a unifying focus in Islam – the *qibla*, or direction of Mecca, toward which worshipers face when they pray...

One other element, perhaps the most subtle and pervading, is the example of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). That example of behavior and attitude, known as the *sunna* of the Prophet, was observed, reported and recorded by early Muslims... The normative example of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is revered everywhere and affects literally everything that Muslims do, from intimate details of personal hygiene to ways of doing business. In many respects the centrality of the Prophet in Islamic life justifies the often-heard expression that the *umma* is the *umma* of the Prophet.³³

The following verses from the Qur'an and *Hadith* further comment on the idea of a universal Islamic community.

Qur'an 3:104

Let there arise from among you a community (of people) inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; they are the ones who will be successful.

Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 1, *Hadith* 468

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) said: "(The relationship between one faithful believer and another) is like the bricks of a wall, re-enforcing each other."

Al-Tirmidhi, *Hadith* 1361

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) said in his last sermon: "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black, nor a black has any superiority over a white - except by piety and good action."

The following passages outline the concept of *K'lal Yisrael* in Judaism – both in a traditional context and in a modern context. The traditional interpretations of *k'lal yisrael*, all of the community of Israel, rely on rabbinic interpretations of the Torah:

Leviticus Rabbah 4:6

Hezekiah taught: It is said, Israel is a scattered sheep (Jer. L, 17). Why are Israel likened to a sheep? Just as with a lamb, when it is hurt on the head or on any other limb, all its limbs feel it, even so is it with Israel: if [only one] of them sins, all of them feel it. It is said, Shall one man sin, and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation? (Num. XVI, 22). R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: This may be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a borer and began boring beneath his own place. His fellow travelers said to him: 'What are you doing?' Said he to them: 'What does that matter to you, am I not boring under my own place?' Said they: 'Because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all.' Even so did Job say, And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself (Job XIX, 4), and his friends said, He adds transgression unto his sin, he extends it among us.' [They said to him:] 'You extend your sins among us.'

Pirke Avot 2:4

Do not separate yourself from the community.

Ta'anit 11a

When the community is in trouble do not say, "I will go home and eat and drink and all will be well with me."...Rather, involve yourself in the community's distress as was demonstrated by Moses (Exodus 27:12). In this way Moses said, "Since Israel is in trouble, I will share their burden." Anyone who shares a community's distress will be rewarded and will witness the community's consolation.

Babylonian Talmud, Shavuot 39a

All Israel is responsible one for the other.

Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 11a

He who does not join the community in times of danger and trouble will never enjoy the Divine blessing.

The following passage suggests one modern understanding of the concept of *k'lal yisrael* in Judaism as interpreted by Solomon Schechter, an early 20th century scholar and founder of the Conservative Jewish Movement in America. In this passage Schechter interprets *k'lal yisrael* as signifying the collective conscience of the entire Jewish people:

The Talmud, that wonderful mine of religious ideas from which it would be just as easy to draw up a manual for the most orthodox or to extract a vade-mecum [a reference book] handbook for the most skeptical, supports the view that it is not the mere revealed Bible that is of first importance to the Jew, but the Bible as it repeats itself in history, in other words, as it is interpreted by tradition. Liberty was always given to the great teachers of every generation to make modifications and innovations in harmony with the spirit of existing institutions. The norm as well as the sanction of Judaism is the practice actually in vogue. Its consecration is the consecration of general use. It was probably with a view to this communion that the later mystics introduced a short prayer to be said before the performance of any religious ceremony, in which, among other things, the speaker professes his readiness to act *in the name of all Israel* [*k'lal Yisrael*].

Self-exclusion from the general community of Israel is implied by the evil son, who asks in the Passover Haggadah: "What does this service mean to you?" He excludes himself by not saying *to us*. A Jew may be barred from *K'lal Yisrael* by improper conduct.³⁴

Discussion:

1. Do you feel a part of a universal Muslim or Jewish community? How so or why not? What commonalities with other members of your religious community do you find unifying? How does this sense of community affect your identity as a Muslim or as a Jew?
2. How are the concepts of *umma* and *k'lal yisrael* similar? How are they different? Which aspects of community described in these texts resonate most with your own sense of community?

Diversity in Judaism and Islam

While both Judaism and Islam have a concept of a universal community and an ideal in which every member of the faith cares for one another with respect and appreciation, we also see divisions within each religious tradition.

Judaism

Diversity within the Jewish community exists both in the cultural and religious spheres. One of the main ethnic distinctions is between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. These terms are used in different ways. More broadly, Ashkenazic Jews are understood to include those who come from most European and Eastern European countries while Sephardic Jews are those from the Mediterranean basin (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Turkey, North Africa, and the Middle East). More technically,

34 Philip Birnbaum. *A Book of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co, 1975).

Ashkenazic Jews are those from Germany and Eastern Europe and Sephardic Jews are those from Spain and Portugal who, after the late 15th century expulsions, spread through the Mediterranean basin. The latter contrast to Mizrahi Jews, a term referring specifically to those from Persia and the Middle East. With recent historic events such as the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, many of these Jews have since migrated to either North America or Israel, where the majority of Jews reside. In addition to these two major Jewish population centers, there are also smaller diaspora Jewish communities scattered throughout the world, including Jewish communities on every continent. Below is some brief information about one of the lesser-known Jewish communities in the world, the Jews of India.

Jews of India

Living in harmony with their Indian neighbors for two thousand years, [the Bene Israel] were free to practice Judaism and develop as a community. The Bene Israel were fully absorbed into Indian society, yet still retained a separate sense of identity...

They adopted Marathi, the local language, as their mother tongue and became physically indistinguishable to outsiders from the local population. Within village society, the Bene Israel were clearly differentiated from others because of their adherence to Judaism. Tradition recounts that the holy books were lost in the shipwreck which brought them to India, and the Bene Israel forgot all the Hebrew prayers except the "Shema Yisrael..." ("Hear, O Israel...")³⁵. However, they observed the Shabbat, celebrated the major festivals, circumcised their sons and performed most of the prescribed offerings mentioned in the Bible.

The Bene Israel population steadily increased from 6,000 in the 1830s to 10,000 by the turn of the century. At their peak in India in 1948, they numbered 20,000 but by 1961 this number had declined to 16,000 as the result of emigration to Israel... Today, there are less than 5,000 Jews in India...

More than twenty synagogues and prayer halls have been built in India... In 2001, only a handful of these are able to maintain a regular service on Saturdays and in the villages outside Bombay several beautiful synagogues remain shut... In recent years, there have been several visiting Rabbis sent to Bombay...

The Bene Israel adhere to their own traditions and rites. In the marriage ceremony, for example, the bride is dressed in a white sari and goes to meet the groom as he sings the special Bene Israel "groom song" from the podium (bimah) of the synagogue...

The Bene Israel in India today represents a small, struggling community, surviving through the efforts of Jewish organizations like AJDC (American Jewish Distribution Committee)... Owing to large-scale emigration, communal activity has declined and Bene Israel newspapers and periodicals, once prolific, are now published infrequently...

The Bene Israel who remain in India can be divided into two sub-groups: those who stay because of their overriding attachment to India, and those who will emigrate to Israel and reunite with their families and the majority of their community.³⁶

Diversity of Religious Denominations within Judaism Today

In addition to these historic cultural and geographic divisions, distinct religious movements have also developed as a response to modernity. The passage below further describes the development and ideology of these religious movements, now the dominant forms of religious expression in the North American Jewish community: Reform Judaism, Orthodox and neo-Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism, and Reconstructionist Judaism.

Confined in the ghetto, European Jewry, constituting by far the largest segment of Jewry [during the Middle Ages], cultivated its own traditional way of life until the Western world and its culture was opened to the Jews after the

35 The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) is considered the most important prayer in Judaism and is traditionally recited twice daily – once in the morning and once in the evening. It articulates the central monotheistic message of Judaism.

36 Shalva Weil, *The Bene Israel of India*, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora Online Database of Jewish Communities, <http://www.bh.org.il/communities/Archive/Benelsrael.asp> (30 November 2007).

French Revolution and the subsequent Jewish Emancipation.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) movement had as its aim certainly not the disavowal of traditional Judaism but the encouragement of the new science and learning among the Jews, an openness to Western ideas and norms that might result in a rationalist approach to the tradition, and a general widening of Jewish horizons...

The Haskalah paved the way for the emergence of the Reform movement in early nineteenth-century Germany, a movement that posed the severest threat to the traditional way of Jewish life. It was in Germany, in the first instance, that the Jew who had recently emerged from the ghetto to take his place in Western society experienced the tension between the traditional way of life and the allure of the new ways... The Reformers understood Judaism as "ethical monotheism," with its institutions not as divine laws but as a human means of furthering this ideal until it became the religion of all mankind...

The [traditionalists] treated Reform as rank heresy, as no more than a religion of convenience, which, if followed, would lead Jews altogether out of Judaism. The Reformers retorted that, on the contrary, the danger to Jewish survival was occasioned by the Orthodox who, through their obscurantism, failed to see that the new challenge facing Judaism had to be faced consciously in the present as Judaism had faced, albeit unconsciously, similar changes in the past.

From Germany the Reform movement spread, becoming particularly active in the New World, where the most influential American Jews, led by German Reform rabbis, adopted Reform wholeheartedly. Since World War II, however, in many Reform circles, a greater awareness of traditional values has become evident. Some Reform rabbis have argued for a greater appreciation of halakhah, which, they maintain, possesses its own wisdom and insight...

The reaction to Reform by Orthodox took two different forms. In the first, the Orthodox denied that the West had anything of real value to teach the Jews. Only in external matters of little ultimate consequence was the Jew obliged to conform to Western mores. Spiritual needs could be catered for entirely adequately by the rich tradition Jews had inherited. The Hasidic movement, which arose in eastern Europe in the eighteenth century, went its own way, in any event, concerned solely with the joy of drawing nearer to God...

A different response to Reform was that of neo-Orthodoxy... [which] advocated total loyalty to the Torah in its traditional formulation, but recognized that the Jew could gain much from an appreciation of the values of Western civilization. For neo-Orthodoxy, there was no need for the believing Jews either to opt out of Western culture, as the other traditionalists advocated, or to surrender any practices of the Torah, which, for neo-Orthodox were divinely ordained and hence immutable...

A third religious movement, Conservative Judaism... seeks a balance between Orthodoxy and Reform, taking issue with Orthodoxy in its theory and with Reform in its practice. Conservative Judaism affirms the validity of traditional observances, accepting the authority of halakhah, yet more open to change than Orthodoxy.... The Torah, on this view, has now to be seen not as a single entity revealed by God at one time in its entirety, but as the product of the historical experiences of the Jewish people over the ages in their loving quest for God. In the Conservative view, Jewish observances are binding on the Jew because they are the means by which he gives expression to his religious life...

An offshoot of Conservative Judaism in the U.S.A. is Reconstructionism, which, as its name implies, seeks to structure afresh Jewish life so as to embrace other aspects of Judaism as well as the religious. In the expression of its founder, Mordechai Kaplan, Judaism is not only a religion but a religious civilization. Reconstructionism generally has a naturalistic view of religion itself in which God is not a person but the "power that makes for salvation."³⁷

Discussion:

Discuss the development of the religious denominations. How were these movements influenced by the surrounding culture and practices? How did they each balance the tension between religion and modernity differently?

Islam

Similar to the divisions within Judaism, the practices of Muslims can be characterized both by religious and cultural factors.

Islam allows room for divergence of opinion. The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is quoted as saying, "Differences in my community are a mercy." The capacity to accommodate different opinions and tendencies and even to find in them a source of enrichment is one of the strengths of Islam.... Even as the world created by the one God is of indescribable variety, so the community issuing from faith in that God is of remarkable complexity in its composition and its points of view... Muslims have differed over political, social, ethical, economic, legal, philosophical and theological matters.³⁸

One of the more well-known demarcations within the Muslim community is that between Sunnis and Shi'a. Within these communities there are additional divisions that we will not delve into in this chapter. While most of the practices of Sunni and Shi'a remain the same, the following passages from two authors describe the two groups' varying beliefs, and explain the political division between them dating back to the first century of Islam.

On the face of it, there is one monolithic Islamic faith; in essence each Muslim believes in the Islamic ideal. But, in practice, political and historical factors have helped to create differences within the community. These are essentially of a social and cultural nature and draw heavily on the difference in Sunni and Shi'a thought on the nature of God's justice ... The differences between [the Sunni and the Shi'a] at the core are minimal and lie in custom and practice...

The Shi'a concentration has been in Iran, southern Iraq and South Asia... Shi'a belief revolves round the figure of Ali. A cousin of the Prophet... he was also [his] son-in-law. He was the last of the four early caliphs who succeeded the Prophet as the rulers of Islam. Ali's charisma, comprising personal chivalry and wisdom, is undisputed... The Shi'as believe that the Prophet chose Ali as his successor and that he therefore should have been the first caliph... not only because he rightly deserved the appointment but because he was also the Prophet's son-in-law. If Ali had been the first Caliph, his son Hussain would then have been caliph in place of Yazid, the very man who ordered Hussain's death at Karbala. The events at Karbala are of deep significance to Shi'as. After both his [Hussain] father and his elder brother, Hassan, had been assassinated, Hussain led his family and followers against the caliph Yazid's army at Karbala in 680, but they faced impossible odds. About seventy men were slaughtered on the battlefield by an army of thousands, and after that battle Hussain's body was beheaded. The motif of martyrdom is crucial to Shi'as, who believe that, starting with Ali himself, all except one of the twelve imams (that is, Ali and his direct descendants) were martyred. Loyalty to the *ahl al-bayt* – the family of the Prophet, or, Ali and his descendants – is at the core of the sect. Indeed, the word Shi'a derives from 'partisans' or group of supporters of Ali.

Shi'as believe that each new leader of the community should have been chosen by the previous Imam and they believe he should have been a descendant of the Prophet and thus of Ali. For the Sunnis the caliphs held mainly

political power. For the Shi'as their religious authority is far more important. They could therefore regard Ali's son Hassan as their Imam even when he had no political influence... In particular the death, and the manner in which it took place, of Hussain and his followers at Karbala have helped shape Shi'a world-view. The need to stand up against all odds on a matter of principle, the readiness to martyrdom, total passion, disregard for death and acceptance of tragedy are familiar aspects of the Shi'a. It is termed by scholars the 'Karbala paradigm'...³⁹

One of the differences between Shi'as and Sunnis is the Shi'a doctrine of imamate as distinct from the Sunni concept of caliphate..., [a difference which] has led to major political consequences. The caliph was the selected or elected successor of the Prophet. However, he succeeded to political and military leadership but not the Prophet's religious authority. In contrast, Shi'a leadership of the Muslim community is vested in the Imam (leader), who, although not a prophet, is the divinely inspired, sinless, infallible, religio-political leader. His descent is traced directly from the Prophet and Ali, the first Imam, and his authority thus sanctified... This consecration of religious authority is unique to the Shi'a and not accepted by the Sunni. For a Sunni the religious authority required to interpret Islam lays in the consensus (*ijma*) or collective judgment of the community, that is, the consensus of the *ulema*, the traditional religious scholars...

Sunni and Shi'a have developed divergent interpretations of history. For a Sunni, early Islamic success and power were signs of God's guidance and rewards to a faithful community as well as validation of Muslim beliefs and claims. For a Shi'a, history was the enactment of the struggle and sacrifice of an oppressed and disinherited minority community endeavoring to restore God's rule on earth over the entire community...⁴⁰

Discussion:

1. Why do you think Muhammad said, "Differences in my community are a mercy?" Do you agree with this idea that diversity is a positive element of society?
2. Discuss the difference between a Sunni and a Shi'a. How have their different historical experiences shaped their world views and religious outlooks? How do you imagine their different understandings of issues such as religious authority influence their religious, cultural and political beliefs and practices?
3. What are the factors that unify the Jewish movements despite their differences in theology and practice? Does the existence of many forms of Jewish religious expression affect the reality of *k'lal yisrael*, a single unified Jewish community?

Sufism

Sufis, also known as the mystics of Islam, can be found throughout the Muslim community. From the 13th to the 18th centuries, Sufi orders were well established throughout the Muslim world and their prevalence largely contributed to the spread of Islam in new regions. Many major Islamic scholars and legal specialists were also members of Sufi orders. Sufis generally practiced mysticism in addition to the universal religious observances of all Muslims. They are known for special practices such as wearing rough clothing, fasting, participating in vigils, and withdrawing from human company in silence. Sufism has had a great influence on the lives of Muslims and it was not until the modern period that Sufis came under attack by other Muslims as a scapegoat for the apparent weakness of Islam in regards to the west. The following passage describes Sufism in greater detail:

Sufism is Islam's tolerant, mystical and universal philosophy. Its message of *sulh-i-kul*, peace with all, has endeared it to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It appeals to all Muslim sects and social classes.... Sufis see

39 Fisher, *The Middle East: A History*.

40 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 2001).

the unity of God, *tawhid*, in everything and everyone... its origin is unimpeachable, tracing back to the Prophet himself. The Sufi must first master the *shariah*, the true path of Islam, before venturing on to the *tariqah*, the Sufi way.

Sufi masters are central figures for their disciples in helping to unravel the mysteries and ideas of Sufism. The first and primary function of a Sufi master is what may be called "ego-busting," that is to diminish the individual ego in order to establish the supremacy of God... [In Sufism], many layers of meaning lie beneath the surface. The idea is first to deconstruct and then to construct the seeker of truth before the *tariqah* can be understood. These esoteric practices allow Sufis to endure hard times, even times of persecution. One such practice is the ritual of *dhikr*, mention of the name of God. Each of the ninety-nine names⁴¹ is known to contain a special quality. Pronouncing and repeating the name in a special manner produces a spiritual state in the believer...

The following prayer sums up the spirit of Sufism. It is from the Naqshbandi order associated with Bahauddin Naqshband, the saint of Bukhara, who lived in the fourteenth century... The universal strands of Islam are clearly visible; it could be the prayer of any religion anywhere in the world:

*Oh my God, how gentle art thou with him who has transgressed against thee: how near art thou to him who seeks thee, how tender to him who petitions thee, how kindly to him who hopes in thee.
Who is he who asks of thee and thou dost deny him or who sought refuge in thee and thou dost betray him and drew near to thee and thou dost hold him aloof? And fled unto thee and thou dost repulse him?*

The all-pervading and tolerant spirit of Sufis is not surprising when we consider their source of inspiration. Although the Prophet is their ultimate model, other spiritual figures – which include Abraham, Moses and Jesus – also mold them. This is enunciated in 'The Eight Qualities of the Sufi' by the well-known Sufi master, Junaid of Baghdad:

*In Sufism, eight qualities must be exercised. The Sufi has:
Liberality such as that of Abraham;
Acceptance of his lot, as Ismail accepted'
Patience, as possessed by Job;
Capacity to communicate by symbolism, as in the case of Zachariah;
Estrangement from his own people, which was the case of John;
Woolen garb like the shepherd's mantle of Moses;
Journeying, like the traveling of Jesus;
Humility, as Muhammad had humility of spirit.⁴²
(Shah 1990:246)*

Sufi spiritual journeys in search of the one God can be best understood through their parables. The following passage tells the story of one such parable written by the 13th century Persian poet Attar in *Parliaments of Birds*:

The story begins with a gathering of birds of all kinds who are troubled because they have no king. Guided and urged on by the excitable Hoopoe bird, which has impeccable mystical credentials based on a cameo appearance in the Qur'an, the birds set out together in search of their ruler. The Hoopoe offers good news at the start. The birds can be assured that they do, indeed, have a king. His title is the *Simurgh* and he is the epitome of wisdom, beauty and perfection – the only worthy object of love, in fact. He once dropped a feather in China and ever since he has been an object of intense longing to birds throughout the world.

But there is also bad news. The Simurgh's dwelling is inaccessible, no one knows how to get there, and no one

41 The 99 Names of God (also known as the 99 Attributes of God) are the names of God that Muslims believe were revealed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Although there are more than 99 names mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, Muslims believe that there is an elite group of names which number 99.

42 Ahmed, *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World*.

has the capacity to find him. Despite this sobering warning the birds are overcome by longing to find their king, and they determine to set out together on the journey, with the indomitable Hoopoe as their guide. Before they depart, the Hoopoe warns that the journey will be long and difficult, passing through seven valleys: the valleys of the quest, of love, of understanding, of detachment, of pure unity, of astonishment, and finally the valley of poverty and nothingness. At this distressing report a number of the birds succumb to despair and die on the spot. Those who survive the shock set out on the arduous quest.

For years they travel. Many die of starvation, thirst, and fatigue along the way, so that in the end only thirty birds, a sadly torn and tattered band, complete the journey and arrive on the threshold of the Simurgh's dwelling. There they are crushed by despair. They realize at last that their quest has been futile, for the majesty of the Simurgh is too great to endure... These deterrents turn out only to be tests, however, and the birds pass the examination, resolving, like moths around a candle, to suffer annihilation rather than abandon the object of their desire. Finally, ushered into the dwelling of Simurgh, they come to the end of their quest. "And perceiving both at once, themselves and him," Attar recounts, "they realized that they and the Simurgh were one and the same being. No one in the world had ever heard of anything equal to it." The Simurgh then reveals to them the secret of the unity and plurality of all beings. "The sun of my majesty is a mirror," he tells them. "He who sees himself therein sees his soul and his body, and sees them completely. Since you have come as thirty birds, *si-murgh*, you will see thirty birds in this mirror..." The birds then pass away, surrendering themselves completely to contemplation of the Simurgh.⁴³

Discussion:

Discuss Attar's parable. What is the significance of this story? What themes does it depict about God and faith? How does it reflect Sufi thought and beliefs?

In addition to these historical categorizations of the Muslim community, it is also important to understand the ethnic and cultural diversity that exists within Islam today. In many ways, the American Muslim community, comprised of immigrants from all over the world as well as American-born Muslims and converts, is an amalgam of this worldwide Muslim diversity. (This is similar to the American Jewish community, comprised of descendants of immigrants from scores of countries across the globe.) The following passage, describing the American Muslim community, highlights this diversity and provides greater insight into the intricacies of this community.

Most American Muslims are not Arab, and most Americans of Arab descent are Christian, not Muslim. People of South Asian descent – those with roots in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan – make up 34 percent of American Muslims, according to the polling organization Zogby International. Arab-Americans constitute only 26 percent, while another 20 percent are native-born American blacks, most of whom are converts. The remaining 20 percent come from Africa, Iran, Turkey, and elsewhere...

In America, Muslims do not think and act alike any more than Christians do. That said, all observant Muslims acknowledge Islam's "five pillars"... Sunni and Shi'a are found in the United States in roughly their global proportions: 85 percent Sunni and 15 percent Shiite. Sufism is also present in the United States...

Although there is a broad consensus that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the country and the world, no one has provable numbers on just how many American Muslims there are... On the basis of all the evidence, a very crude range of three million to six million seems reasonable. (Today, most academic estimates put the number of Muslim Americans at 6-7 million). Rapid growth of the Muslim population is expected to continue, fueled mainly by immigration and high birthrates and, to a lesser extent, by conversion, overwhelmingly by African-Americans...

American Muslims, like Americans generally, live mostly in cities and suburbs. Large concentrations are found in New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. But they also turn up in the Appalachian foothills and rural Idaho... Often the presence of several hundred Muslims in an out-of-the-way town can be explained by proximity to a large state university. Many of these schools have recruited foreign graduate students, including Muslims, since the 1960s...

In New York, Muslims are typecast as cab drivers; in Detroit, as owners of grocery stores and gas stations. The overall economic reality is very different. Surveys show that the majority of American Muslims are employed in technical, white-collar, and professional fields. These include information technology, corporate management, medicine, and education. An astounding 59 percent of Muslim adults in the United States have college degrees. That compares with only 27 percent of all Americans adults... Four out of five [Muslims] are registered to vote. Relative prosperity, high levels of education, and political participation are indications of a minority population successfully integrating into the larger society. By comparison, immigrant Muslims in countries such as Britain, France, Holland, and Spain have remained poorer, less well educated, and socially marginalized...

There are an estimated thirteen hundred mosques in America and several hundred Islamic religious schools. These institutions vary in religious approach and political ideology. But on the whole, Muslim houses of worship tend to be highly conservative compared with the larger culture... almost all Muslim congregations separate sexes during prayer... Most observant Muslims view the Qur'an as the literal word of God... Many Muslim preachers dwell on ideals that would be familiar to members of other faiths, such as treating the neighbors as you have them treat you...

In the United States, a Saudi-underwritten construction boom has produced scores of mosques and Islamic centers... One Saudi charity official based in the United States estimated in October 2001 that fully half the mosques and Islamic schools in the country had received Saudi money. Saudi religious organizations have funded the training of hundreds and maybe thousands of Muslims clerics and teachers sent to America. And Saudi publishers inundate American mosques with books and pamphlets... The breadth and degree of this influence are hotly debated.⁴⁴

In May 2007 the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released an extensive survey documenting the attitudes and opinions of the American Muslim community. In preparing the survey, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, the Pew Research Center conducted more than 55,000 interviews to obtain a national sample of 1,050 Muslims living in the United States. As the survey documents, the American Muslim community is far from monolithic, encompassing Muslims who are linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse. Despite these differences, however, the community is decidedly American in their outlook, values, and attitudes and is largely assimilated, happy with their lives, and moderate with respect to many of the issues that have divided Muslims and Westerners around the world. Some of the major findings of the Pew Forum's poll include:

- The Muslim American community is largely an immigrant community. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of American Muslims are foreign born, with 39% of this population having immigrated to the United States after 1990. Immigrants have come in large numbers to the United States from Arab countries, Pakistan, and South Asia. Among native-born Muslims, roughly half are African American (20% of U.S. Muslims overall), many of whom are converts to Islam.
- Muslim Americans have a generally positive view of the larger society of which they are a part, with most believing that their communities are excellent or good places to live. By nearly two to one (63%-32%) Muslim Americans do not see a conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society.
- 71% of Muslim Americans agree that most people who want to get ahead in the U.S. can make it if they are willing to work hard.

- While Muslim Americans generally hold positive views of American society, 53% nonetheless believe that life for Muslims in America has gotten more difficult since 9/11, with 54% of respondents believing that the U.S. government singles Muslims out for extra surveillance as part of its anti-terrorism efforts.
- A quarter of Muslim Americans say they have been the victim of discrimination in the United States, while 73% say they have never experienced discrimination while living in this country. Far more native-born Muslims than Muslim immigrants say they have been a victim of discrimination (41% vs. 18%).
- Muslim Americans are far more likely than Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere to say that a way can be found for the state of Israel to exist so that the rights of the Palestinians are addressed. In this regard, the views of Muslim Americans resemble those of the general public in the United States.⁴⁵

Discussion:

1. How is the American Muslim community both a reflection of the larger Muslim world as well as a unique community? In what ways has this community drawn on the traditions (good and bad) of the Muslim world and in what ways has it asserted its own identity?
2. How can the way the American Muslim community deals with their diversity serve as an example to the larger Muslim world? What does this diversity highlight about the possibility of different streams of Islam to live peacefully together?
3. What did you find most surprising about the Pew findings?

Activity

Top 10 Worldwide Jewish Populations⁴⁶:

1. Israel – 5,313,800
2. USA – 5,275,000
3. France – 491,500
4. Canada – 373,500
5. Britain – 297,000
6. Russia – 228,000
7. Argentina – 184,500
8. Germany – 118,000
9. Australia – 103,000
10. Brazil – 96,500

Top 10 Worldwide Muslim Populations⁴⁷:

- Indonesia – 215,998,410
- Pakistan – 160,829,453
- India – 146,777,167
- Bangladesh – 130,123,606
- Egypt – 74,153,787
- Turkey – 70,273,130
- Iran – 67,314,664
- Nigeria – 65,929,866
- China – 52,558,949
- Ethiopia – 35,519,541

Hang a map of the world in the front of the room. Use the map to point out the major concentrations of Jewish and Muslim populations in the world. Then, using string and push-pins, ask some of the participants to trace their family's geographic lineage – starting the string where your family is originally from and ending it where you currently live. Allow participants to share why their families decided to move to America and when they decided to move to America.

⁴⁵ Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* [22 May 2007] <http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>.

⁴⁶ *American Jewish Yearbook*, 2006 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2006).

⁴⁷ Institute of Islamic Information and Education, "Muslim Population Statistics: Population of Muslims in Every Country of the World Where Statistics are Known" (2 September 2006) <http://www.iiie.net/node/65> (30 November 2007).



Lesson 7

Avodah and Salat - Worship and Prayer

*Like many other people of faith, Muslims and Jews place an emphasis on praising, thanking, and worshipping God. In this session, participants will explore prayer from the Jewish and Muslim perspectives. After exploring many of the common themes of prayer, there will be an opportunity to study some of the specific prayers that Jews and Muslims recite. **** It is highly recommended that you supplement this session by attending Muslim and Jewish worship services.*****

Prayer in everyday life

Prayer is an important aspect of professing religious conviction for many people of faith. Traditionally Jews pray three times a day and Muslims five times a day. By exploring the role prayer plays in our personal lives and in the life of the community, we can begin to understand this principal mechanism of connecting with God. Through discovering our common understanding of prayer, we gain a deeper appreciation of our mutual purpose in serving God.

Discussion:

1. How do you connect to prayer? Praying alone or in a group? Reciting set texts or speaking from your heart? Chanting texts or singing?
2. What importance does prayer hold in your life?
3. How does worshipping with a community change your prayer experience?
4. What is your perception of prayer in the Jewish or Muslim tradition? Are these accurate representations of prayer?

The role of prayer in Islam

Muslims are people of prayer. Five times a day, Muslims pray to God in gratitude for Allah's blessings and in recognition of one's ultimate meeting with God. As the five prayers are prescribed during set times, Muslims must stop whatever activity they might be engaged in and pray during the established times for prayer. This underscores the purpose of prayer – to let go of all worldly distractions and focus on the One God to whom all will return. At dawn, at noon, at mid-afternoon, at sunset and in the night, members of the worldwide community are called to prostrate themselves before Allah in acts of humble obedience, in the desire to experience God's presence, and in communion with the One they call the Merciful...Someone once asked the Prophet, "Which (human) deed is most precious to God?" He replied, "Prayer performed at the proper time."⁴⁸

The five times of *salat* each day do not exhaust Muslims' opportunities for prayer. Living as they do in the intense consciousness of God's power and presence, many find occasions for calling upon God by praise and supplication in the various circumstances of everyday life. Not constrained by time, optional prayer is called by a different name than ritual prayer. Models for this type of prayer are often drawn from the *hadith*, which preserve

a large number of the Prophet's own supplications and expressions of praise. Voluntary prayer requires no set time, but finds its natural setting in the ongoing flow of daily events, whether ordinary or extraordinary. Some of the moments that call forth this kind of prayer are awakening in the morning, leaving the house, entering the mosque, finishing the ritual prayer, going to the market, dressing, reflecting on debts to pay, seeing the new moon, observing the phenomena of wind, rain and thunder, hearing of someone's death, feeling angry or fearful, and suffering distress, pain or grief.⁴⁹

Discussion:

1. Traditional Muslims pray five times a day. For those Muslims who observe this practice, how does your prayer affect your daily experiences? How do you reconcile this practice with the expectation of daily prayers?
2. According to this passage, what purpose does prayer serve for Muslims? Does prayer serve this purpose for you?
3. In your opinion, why might prayer be the most precious deed to God?

The role of prayer in Judaism

The Hebrew word for prayer is *tefilah*. In biblical times, sacrifice was the prescribed form of ritual when communicating with God. Prayer was spontaneous, and was not instituted as a formal ritual until it replaced sacrifice after the destruction of the second Temple (70 CE). After many of the Jewish people were exiled from Israel by the Romans, prayer was oral rather than written, and was not yet canonized in the Hebrew prayer book, the *siddur*. The earliest *siddur* was compiled in the late 6th century and included the prayers for daily, Sabbath and holiday services.

Jews pray three times daily: *shacharit* in the morning, *mincha* in the afternoon, and *ma'ariv* in the evening, and have additional prayers for the Sabbath and holidays. An individual can pray anywhere, but it is preferable to pray in a *minyan*, a quorum of ten. (In Orthodox and more traditional Conservative circles, a *minyan* is required for prayer to be said aloud by a group and is limited to a quorum of ten men. In Reform, Reconstructionist and most Conservative Jewish synagogues, men and women are treated equally in terms of comprising a *minyan* or leading services.) Where there is a *minyan*, prayers are led by the *chazzan*, or cantor, and the congregants follow, recite and repeat prayers. There are three categories of Jewish prayer: praising God, thanking God and beseeching God. Formal prayer services are generally held in a synagogue (*beit kneset*), but can be held anywhere.

Although Jewish tradition has mandated the recitation of prayers at these fixed times, there are additional prayers that are entirely independent of time constraints – including prayers said during meals, prayers said when washing one's hands, and prayers said for thanksgiving.⁵⁰ The practice of most Reform and Conservative Jews has been focused on Shabbat and holiday prayer.

Praying in the Jewish tradition provides a bridge between each person and God. It's an affirmation of love and faith; it's also a way of conveying anger and protest. Many prayers praise God, but too much praise is considered hypocritical. Prayers are formalized, but they are also personal and emotional. And prayer is for everyone – even God.⁵¹

Discussion:

1. What purpose does prayer serve for Jews? How is this similar and different from the Muslim conception of prayer?

49 Adaptation of Speight, *God is One – The Way of Islam*, pg 33, 36-37.

50 Joseph Gaer, *Our Jewish Heritage* (Chatsworth: Wilshire Book Company, 1969).

51 Francine Klagsbrun, *Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1986), pg 437.

2. What are some of the contradictions of prayer in Judaism? Do you feel such contradictions in your prayer?
3. What might this passage mean by saying that prayer is even for God? Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

What we pray for

If a person sees shooting stars, earthquakes, thunderstorms, and lightning they should say, "Blessed be the Eternal whose strength and might fill the world."

If they see mountains, hills, seas, rivers, and deserts, they should say, "Blessed be God who brought about creation."...

For rain or for good tidings, a person should say, "Blessed be the Eternal who is good and does good." For evil tidings should say, "Blessed be the true judge."...

To cry over what has passed is to utter a prayer in vain... If a person returns from a journey and hears cries coming from their town and says, "May it be God's will that those do not come from my house," that is a vain prayer.

(Mishnah, Tractate *Brachot*, chapter 9, paragraphs 2-3)

Hadith: Praise God in all Circumstances

When the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) saw something good and pleasing, he would say: "Praise be to God with Whose blessings all good deeds are perfected." And when he saw something unpleasant, he would say: "Praise and thanks be to God in all circumstances."

(*Fiqh-us-Sunnah*, Volume 4, Number 125A)

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) once went out when the leaves were falling from the trees. He took hold of a branch and said: "Verily, when a servant of God prays seeking only His pleasure, his sins fall away just as the leaves have fallen from this tree."

(*Al-Tirmidhi*, *Hadith* 199)

Discussion:

1. Describe what you pray for in the worship service of your tradition. How similar are the Jewish and Muslim traditions?
2. What purpose may the prayers cited here serve?
3. What events in your life inspire prayer? How do these compare to the events listed in these passages?
4. How does engaging in praise of God, whether you do it throughout the day or more sporadically, influence your perception of the world?

Prayer as a spiritual experience

Being Jewish has always meant to live in community wherever and whenever possible. For this reason, Jewish tradition has accorded communal worship a place of special importance. Though private prayer three times a day remained an obligation, joining with the community if at all possible with a *minyan* (ten adult males) was deemed preferable. Tradition even reserved special parts of the service for occasions when a *minyan* was present. Chief

among these are the reading of Torah from the scroll and the recitation of the Mourner's *Kaddish*.⁵²

This communal experience is a necessary prerequisite to attain a degree of spiritual security, since one cannot rely upon one's own resources. One needs an atmosphere in which the concern for the spirit is shared by a community. We are in need of students and scholars, masters, and specialists. But we need also the company of witnesses, of human beings engaged in worship, so that for a moment we can sense the truth that life is meaningless without an attachment to God...⁵³

Discussion:

For you, is prayer more meaningful as an individual or communal experience?

Prayer Times – Five Times Daily

As discussed earlier, Muslim prayers are held five times a day. The following story gives an explanation of why this is done:

One of the crucial events in Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) life, we are told, was his renowned Night Journey to Heaven. During a certain night in the month of Ramadan, he was spirited on a wondrous white steed with wings to Jerusalem and upward from there through the seven heavens to the presence of God, who instructed him that Muslims were to pray fifty times each day. On his way back to earth, he stopped in the sixth heaven, where he reported his instruction to Moses, who was incredulous. "Fifty times a day!" he said in effect. "...That will never work. Go back and negotiate." [According to one narration, Moses said, 'Your followers cannot bear fifty prayers a day, and by God, I have tested people before you, and I have tried my best with B'nai Israel. Go back to your Lord and ask for a reduction to lessen your followers' burden.'] Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) did so and returned with the number reduced to forty, but Moses was not satisfied. "I know these people," he said. "Go back." The routine was repeated four more times, with the number reduced successively to thirty, twenty, ten, and then five. Even this last figure struck Moses as excessive. "Your people are not capable of observing five daily prayers," he said. I have tested men before your time and have labored most earnestly to prevail over the [sons of] Isra'il, so go back to your Lord and ask Him to make things lighter for your people." This time, however, Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) refused. "I have asked my Lord till I am ashamed, but now I am satisfied and I submit." The number remained fixed at five.

The times of the five prayers are likewise stipulated: on arising, when the sun reaches the zenith, its mid-decline, sunset, and before retiring.⁵⁴

Direction of Prayer

To illustrate the importance of Jerusalem and the site of the old Temple, Jews turn in the direction of Jerusalem when they pray. When in Jerusalem they turn toward the Temple Mount. The front of the sanctuary, where the Ark holding the Torah scrolls is located, is situated so that when the congregation rises they are facing in the proper direction (in North America, the direction is eastward).

The Muslim prayer direction, known as the *qibla*, faces Mecca, which houses the *Ka'ba* – the first house of God on earth, according to Islam. Most mosques contain a niche in the wall indicating the *qibla*. Originally, Muslims faced Jerusalem but

52 Michael Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut, eds., *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents* (New York: URJ Press, 2000).

53 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Vocation of the Cantor," *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Schocken, 1966).

54 Huston Smith, *Islam: A Concise Introduction*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

early in Islamic history, during the life of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.), the direction of prayer was changed to face Mecca.

The fact that all Muslims and Jews in the world are to rise as a community and face the same direction when they pray – toward Mecca for Muslims and Jerusalem for Jews – is symbolic of each faith's unity.

Discussion:

When you pray, are your thoughts directed toward one location? If so, how does this affect the way you feel about prayer?

Text study of Muslim and Jewish prayers

In both Islam and Judaism, a formal call to prayer is recited to announce the prayer time. The texts of these appear below.

Muslim Call to Prayer:

God is Greatest (two times)
God is Greatest (two times)
I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship but God (two times)
I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (two times)
Hasten to the Prayer (two times)
Hasten to real success (two times)
God is Greatest (two times)
There is nothing worthy of worship but God.

Jewish Call to Prayer:

Leader: Praise Adonai to whom praise is due!
Congregation: Praised be Adonai to whom praise is due, now and forever!

Discussion:

1. What does it mean to be called to worship? Why do you think such calls are necessary in the context of a prayer service?
2. How do these texts differ and how are they similar?

The following Muslim prayer, *al-qunt*, is customarily said as the very last unit of prayer during *witr*, the last set of prayers each night:

O Lord, guide me among those You have guided,
And preserve me among those You have preserved,
And take me for a friend among those whom You have taken for friends,
Bless me in that which You have bestowed upon me,
Guard me from the evil of that which You have ordained,
For behold, it is You who ordained, and none ordain against You,
Indeed, never is he abashed whom You take for a friend.
Our Lord blessed and exalted are You.

This Jewish prayer is likewise recited as part of the daily prayer liturgy:

Grant, O God, that we lie down in peace, and raise us up, O Guardian, to life renewed. Spread over us the shelter of your peace. Guide us with Your good counsel; for Your Name's sake, be our help. Shield us and shelter us beneath the shadow of Your wings. Defend us against enemies, illness, war, famine, and sorrow. Distance us from wrongdoing. For You, God, are gracious and merciful. Guard our going and coming, to life and to peace, now and forever.

Discussion:

1. How are these prayers similar and how are they different? Pay attention to their themes, language, requests, fears, and conception of God.
2. Both passages make reference to the evils in the world and ask for God's protection from them. Is it something that you find resonance with as something to pray for?
3. What qualities of God are described in each of the texts? Do they portray similar ideas about God?
4. How does prayer in general, and these prayers in particular, reflect the relationship between God and people as understood by Muslims and Jews?

Activity

As a group, brainstorm ways in which you can further educate yourselves and your communities about the traditions of Judaism and Islam. In particular, consider arranging a time for the Jewish participants to come and experience Muslim prayer services and for the Muslim participants to come and experience Jewish prayer services or plan a joint interfaith service in which both communities can participate.

Lesson 8

Difficult Texts



Our religions espouse many values to which we relate on a moral and ethical level as human beings. In studying charity in the earlier session (lesson #3), it is easy to see common threads in our obligations to help the poor. Yet, in our sacred texts, there are also verses and themes that have raised ethical challenges to our scholars over the ages and may well do so for us today. We focus on some of the texts dealing with how we regard the "other," those who differ from our beliefs. In studying and interpreting these difficult texts from each of our traditions, we can come to a deeper appreciation of the challenges we must face as Muslims and as Jews.

Difficult Texts in Judaism

Consider the particularly harsh treatment that biblical passages instruct the Israelites to use in dealing with the Amalekites and the "seven nations," the peoples who originally inhabited Canaan. The Amalekites were a nomadic tribe during biblical times. Traditionally seen as Israel's sworn enemy, the Amalekites were said to be committed to Israel's destruction – such enmity would supposedly last in perpetuity.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt – how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the Eternal your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Eternal is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

1 Samuel 15:2-3

Thus said the Eternal: I am exacting the penalty for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made upon them on the road, on their way up from Egypt. Now go, attack Amalek, and proscribe all that belongs to him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses!

As to the seven nations, the Torah in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 instructs:

When the Eternal your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and God dislodges many nations before you – the Hittites, the Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you – and the Eternal your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter.

Discussion:

1. What are the implications of these passages for how Jews treat other nations and people? Is there a balance between the instructions "do not forget" and "attack...spare no one" for how we act toward others, even those who may have caused us harm?

2. The passages depict a retributive God set on destroying Amalek for the harm Amalek caused the Israelites. Do you picture God in this way? If not, how would you describe God differently? How do you reconcile this passage with your notion of God?

3. During the Jewish holiday of Purim, celebrating the rescue of the Jewish people at the hands of Haman (whom the tradition suggested was an Amalekite) who sought to exterminate the Jews, it is customary to make noise whenever Haman's name is mentioned so that his name will be blotted out. What does it mean for you to "blot out the memory of Amalek?" How is this similar to or different from what is suggested in the texts?

Understanding the Texts

Throughout history, the Amalekites became a symbol of those who sought to destroy the Jewish people (from Haman to the Roman Empire to Hitler) and the command to remember them is understood as a warning against complacency in the face of efforts to destroy the Jews. Yet scholars throughout history were uncomfortable with the implications of the commandment to destroy Amalek, including women and children. These mandates were in tension with other biblical mandates e.g. "If your enemy falls, do not exult; If he trips, let your heart not rejoice, Lest the Eternal see it and be displeased, and avert God's wrath from him" (Proverbs 24:17-18 see also Talmud Avot 4:19). Struggling with how to understand this passage in light of their moral values, many reinterpreted the text to convey a more conciliatory approach.

Limitations on the Commandment

They point out that even in the Bible, King David killed only those Amalekites who attacked Israel (I Samuel 30:1-17). In early rabbinic commentary, Joshua is said to have treated the bodies of the defeated Amalekites with distinctive respect (Metchulta 181).

Since the time of Maimonides, the great Medieval Jewish scholar who lived in the Muslim world his entire life, scholars have argued that the commandments to obliterate these people are no longer applicable since we no longer know who the seven nations or the Amalekites are.⁵⁵

Battling our Evil Inclination

The deeper meaning of remembering Amalek is this. Even if a person's clinging to God is so great, and his heart burns like fire to serve God, he should be extremely careful to give no room for the evil "Amalek" that lurks within. The spark of the evil inclination is buried in every human heart. No matter how high a level of spirituality a person thinks he has attained, our lustful urges can be awakened suddenly by that inclination. We must be extremely careful at all times to blot out the memory of this "inner Amalek" from our hearts.⁵⁶

A Call to Social Action

Why are we given this paradoxical commandment to remember and to erase the memory of Amalek? The Torah is full of stories about Israel's enemies, yet we are given this special commandment about Amalek. Traditional commentators agree that the reason for this law is that Amalek was singularly merciless because he attacked when the Israelites were tired and hungry, and, what is more, attacked the stragglers, those weakest and most defenseless. We must also acknowledge that Israel was not entirely blameless; they left their stragglers unprotected and open to attack. Thus Amalek represents the evil that is done specifically to those who are

55 Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah*. Laws Concerning Kings 5:4.

56 Rabbi Daniel A. Ornstein, Torah Sparks: Parashat Ki Tetze [17 September 2005] http://www.uscj.org/Ki_Tetze_57656812.html.

vulnerable, either through direct abuse or through neglect, and it is this evil that we are to blot out. We can take steps to erase this evil from the world by engaging in social action... When we lift up the needy, provide equal resources to women and men, and bear witness to persecution everywhere, then we can begin to eradicate the evil of oppressing the powerless. And only then will Amalek's name become a distant memory, and, we pray, one day be forgotten altogether.⁵⁷

Discussion:

1. How do these texts understand or reinterpret the Biblical passages calling for the destruction of Amalek? What are the implications of these reinterpretations for how Jews treat others?
2. What does it mean to blot out the memory of the "inner Amalek?" How can you incorporate this value into your life?
3. How do you understand Sarah Wolf's analysis on a call to social action, that this provides a paradigm for an effective way of ridding the world of evil?

Difficult Texts in Islam

Read the following passages from the Qur'an that speak to the use of force in dealing with non-Muslims.

Qur'an 2:190-193

Fight those in the way of God who fight you, but do not be aggressive, for God does not like aggressors. And fight those (who fight you) wheresoever you find them, and expel them from the place they had turned you out from. Oppression is worse than killing. Do not fight them by the Holy Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do, then slay them: such is the requital for the unbelievers. But if they desist, God is forgiving and kind. Fight them till sedition comes to end, and the law of God (prevails). If they desist, then cease to be hostile, except against those who oppress.

Qur'an 4:89

They wish you to become disbelievers as they are, so that you should become like them. Therefore hold them not as friends until they go out of their homes in the way of God. If they do not, seize them wherever they are and do away with them. Do not make them your allies.

Qur'an 9:29

Fight those people of the Book who do not believe in God or the Last Day, those who forbid not what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and those who do not accept the Religion of Truth until they pay the "jizya" tax with willing submission.

Qur'an 47:4

So when you clash with the unbelievers, smite their necks until you overpower them, then hold them in bondage. Then either free them graciously or after taking a ransom, until war shall have come to end. If God had pleased, He could have punished them (Himself) but He wills to test some of you through some others. He will not allow the deeds of those who are killed in the cause of God to go to waste.

⁵⁷ Wolf, Sarah, "Remembering to Forget: Shabbat Zachor," 10 Minutes of Torah (Union for Reform Judaism, March 20 2006) <http://tmt.urj.net/archives/5jewishworld/031006.htm>.

O you who believe, fight those of the unbelievers near you and let them see how harsh you can be. Know that Allah is with the righteous.

Discussion:

1. What are the implications of these passages for how Muslims treat non-believers? Why might the Qur'an characterize the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in this manner?
2. What reason does the text suggest for why God does not fight the non-believers Himself? How is this similar to or different from the Jewish depiction of God?

Understanding the Texts – Reading the Qur'an Intra-Textually

The Qur'an, like any other scripture, must be read intra-textually – meaning, understanding the Qur'an by referring to other parts of the Qur'an that deal with the same topic. The Qur'an itself criticizes those who read the Qur'an in a de-contextualized, selective and piecemeal manner. Referring to the book given to Moses, God says, "They distort the words of the Scripture out of context and forget a good part of the Message that was sent them" (Qur'an, 5:13). Classical exegetes' primary method of interpretation was to interpret the Qur'an by the Qur'an (*tafsir al-Qur'an bil Qur'an*). Believing that the Qur'an is its own best interpreter, Muslims scholars derive meaning from a verse only by comparing it to other verses that deal with the same issue or subject and only by understanding the context of the verse.

Hence, when reading the Qur'an as a whole, it becomes clear that the Qur'an sets out a policy of justice, fairness, and mercy toward non-Muslims. The allegation that the Qur'an advocates indiscriminate or perpetual warfare against non-Muslims quickly falls apart when compared to all the verses in the Qur'an that speak of non-Muslims. Among them are "God does not forbid from being kind and equitable to those who have not made war on your religion nor driven you from your homes. God loves those who are equitable" (60:8) and "If they [enemy forces] incline toward peace, then you should so incline and place your trust in God (2:190)." So while there are those in the Muslim world who interpret these passages and others as a call to attack non-Muslims, most religious scholars have rejected such an approach, instead interpreting the Qur'anic text to find a peaceful meaning.

Understanding the Context

The first 13 years of the prophet-hood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) were at his hometown of Mecca, where he and his fellow Muslims were severely persecuted by pagans. During that time, Muslims were not ordered to fight back, but bear the persecutions. Finally, Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) emigrated with his fellow Muslims (known as *Sahabah*) to the city of Madina, about 400 kilometers away.

This emigration, known as the *hij'rah*, marked the beginning of an Islamic society in Madina, in which the Prophet became the head of a large community. The community grew and became an increasing threat to the dominance of Mecca in the region. The continuing religious conflict between the polytheists of Mecca and Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and his followers in Madina soon became a political and military one as well. A number of battles ensued, and Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) received a series of revelations related to warring. Some authorized fighting in defense; others appeared to be much more aggressive.

Sometimes a series of connected verses seems to reflect different positions on fighting. Qur'an 2:190, for example, calls for fighting in defense: "Fight in the way of God those who fight against you, but do not initiate hostilities, for God does not

love aggressors." The following verses, however, continue with: "And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out of the places from which they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter...but if they desist, then God is forgiving, merciful."

This kind of complexity has allowed for a wide range of interpretation among Muslim scholars, all based on the authority of divine scripture. Even when virtually all commentators allow for war only in defense, the meaning of defense can be quite broad. There are those who allow warring only when attacked by an enemy attempting to destroy the community. Others have interpreted defense in a far more liberal manner, even in such a way that would be understood by many non-Muslims as initiation of hostilities.

The "bottom line" is that Islam emerged in an environment in which fighting was necessary for survival. This historical context is not so different from that of the Torah, where the Israelites were required to fight neighboring communities in order to survive as an independent religious community. Both the Torah and the Qur'an therefore contain passages that allow warring, while both traditions also aspire to a time when humanity will live together without war.

Jihad

Few words are as politically loaded as the term *jihad*. The word *Jihad* comes from the root Arabic word "*Jahad*," which means to struggle or to strive. It is understood by Muslims as a positive, noble and laudatory act, and there are many forms of *jihad*. "*Jihad* of the tongue" is the struggle to refrain from gossip or verbal attack on others. "*Jihad* of the hand" is striving to do good. There is also "*Jihad* of the sword," which is understood to be the struggle in defense of Islam. Muslims universally accept all these forms of *jihad*. The question, once again, is one of interpretation. Is a public insult of Islam grounds to engage in violence as a form of *jihad* in defense of Islam? In our current geo-political situation, some would exploit religious ideas in order to further political and even military goals.

Many Muslims insist that exploitation of the term should not be allowed to corrupt the original or the commonly understood meaning of the word within Islam – to strive for the highest possible goals, to struggle against injustice and to practice self-denial and self-control to achieve the moral purity to which all devout Muslims aspire. As to holy war:

The concept of "holy war," which many non-Muslims have come to equate with the word *jihad*, is foreign to a true understanding of Islam... The Arabic term for "the holy war," as has been pointed out by scholars, would be *al-harab al-muqaddas*, which neither appears in the Qur'an nor the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hadith*). Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) wars were defensive wars against groups who sought to eradicate Islam and the Muslims.⁵⁸

Further, the majority of mainstream Muslim scholars contend that even if a particular non-Muslim nation or people attacks a Muslim nation or people, that does not give Muslims a green light to forgo the Islamic ethics of war: One cannot fight non-combatants or innocent civilians, and one cannot attack innocent populations, women, children or religious clerics (of the other faith). One cannot destroy property or vegetation. Muslims are obliged to hold the upper moral ground regardless of the "enemy's" aggression toward them. In verse 8:5, God says, "Do not let the hatred of a nation toward you make you swerve towards injustice. Be just, that is closer to piety." Thus, the road to piety is justice.

...The meaning of outward *jihad* in the traditional Islamic context is an exertion to preserve one's religion or homeland from attack in the traditional Islamic context. As for inward *jihad*, it means to battle the negative tendencies within the soul, tendencies that prevent us from living a life of sanctity and reaching the perfection God has meant for us...Of course, one meaning of *jihad* is to struggle to protect Islam and its borders, but the term has much a wider usage and meaning for Muslims.

First, every religious act, such as performing the *salah* regularly day in and day out for a whole lifetime or fasting

58 Javeed Akhter, *Does Islam Promote Violence?* [posted 9 September 2006, cited 30 November 2007]. Available from www.islamicity.com.

for fourteen hours in a hot climate, requires *jihad*; in fact, the whole of life may be said to be a constant *jihad* between our carnal and passionate soul and the demands of the immortal spirit within us. It was in reference to this profounder meaning of *jihad* that the Prophet said to his companions after a major battle in which the very existence of the early Islamic community was at stake, 'Verily ye have returned from the lesser *jihad* to the greater *jihad*.' And when one of the companions asked what the greater *jihad* was, he answered, 'to battle against your passionate souls (*nafs*).' Islam, therefore, sees *jihad* as vigilance against all that distracts us from God and exertion to do His Will within ourselves as well as preserving and reestablishing the order and harmony that He has willed for Islamic society and the world about us.⁵⁹

Regardless of the call by many Muslims that *jihad* be understood in its Qur'anic context, contemporary fundamentalist Muslims and non-Muslim critics alike have arrogated the word and have crafted it to refer exclusively to the use of armed violence (including terrorism) to defeat forces seen as inimical to Muslim values and interests. These forces are usually non-Muslims but can sometimes be Muslims who differ from the thinking of those willing to use violence. The fact that some terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda have labeled their efforts as *jihad* and that the popular media uses the term commonly in this sense, all add fuel to this misperception of *jihad*'s meaning..

Although acceptance of suicide bombings and terrorism in the name of Islam is not the norm, the tactics still garner support, as documented in research published by the Pew Research Center in 2007. On the whole, support for suicide bombings and similar extreme terrorist tactics has fallen since 2002. In Lebanon for example, the proportion of Muslims who say "suicide attacks are often or sometimes justified" fell from 74% in 2002 to 39% in 2005. Although this trend is encouraging, 70% of Palestinians believe "suicide bombings against civilians can be often or sometimes justified."⁶⁰ In the United States, this number stands at 8%.⁶¹

Relatedly, in November 2007 the Fiqh Council of North America issued a *Fatwa* on the use of violence in Muslim thought. It reads:

In the spirit of this Season of Thanksgiving, a uniquely American holiday, the Fiqh Council of North America states its unequivocal and unqualified condemnation of the destruction and violence committed against innocent men and women.

This condemnation of violence is deeply rooted in true Islamic values based on the Qur'anic instructions which consider the unjust killing of a single person equivalent to the killing of all humanity (Qur'an 5:32). There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism.

Targeting civilians' life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is prohibited in Islam – *haram* – and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not "martyrs."

In giving thanks for America and for American people and in the light of the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, we, the Fiqh Council of North America, clearly, without hesitation, strongly issue this *Fatwa*:

1. All acts of terrorism are forbidden in Islam.
2. It is forbidden for a Muslim to cooperate or associate with any individual or group that is involved in any act of terrorism or violence.
3. It is the duty of Muslims to report to enforcement authorities any threat which is designed to place a human being in harm's way, bringing them before a competent court of law and in accordance with due process.

59 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), pg 34, 96-97.

60 Pew Research Center, *47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey* [24 July 2007] <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/257.pdf>.

61 Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*.

We pray for the defeat of extremism, terrorism and injustice. We pray for the safety of our country, the United States and its people. We pray for the safety and security of all inhabitants of this globe. We pray that interfaith harmony and cooperation prevail both in the United States and everywhere in the world.⁶²

Discussion:

1. How do these passages change your initial understanding of the Qur'anic verses?
What are the implications of these reinterpretations for how Muslims treat other nations and people?
2. When the Fatwa was issued, it received comparatively little media attention. This is a source of deep frustration to Muslim leaders who speak out clearly against distortions of Islam only to find the press is not interested. So too the statement of the Council of Religious Institutions in November 2007 and the public letter of 138 prominent Muslim scholars in September 2007. What can/should be done to draw attention to these important statements?

Calls for Peace in Judaism and Islam

Reading these difficult texts in context we see them balanced with our common emphasis on the goal of peace.

Isaiah 2:3-4

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war.

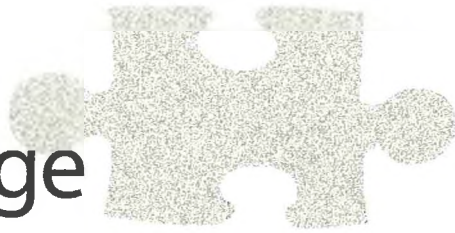
Qur'an 19:60-63

Accept those who repent and believe, and work righteousness: for these will enter the Garden and will not be wronged in the least, Gardens of Eternity, those which (God) Most Gracious has promised to His servants in the Unseen: for His promise must (necessarily) come to pass. They will not there hear any vain discourse, but only salutations of Peace. And they will have therein their sustenance, morning and evening. Such is the Garden which We give as an inheritance to those of Our servants who guard against Evil.

62 Figh Council of North America, *Fatwa* [30 November 2007] www.bridgestocommonground.org/fatwa.

Lesson 9

Pilgrimage



One of the five pillars of Islam, incumbent upon all Muslims who are physically and financially able, is to make a pilgrimage, or hajj (literally "to set out for a place"), to Mecca. Historically Jews also made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year during the holidays of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. In exploring these traditions and the importance they hold for Muslims and Jews today, we can come to a greater understanding of the importance of these practices for Jews and Muslims.

Pilgrimage (Hajj) in the Qur'an

The following passages from the Qur'an detail this Islamic duty.

Surat Al-Baqara 2:197

The pilgrimage shall take place in the months appointed for it. And whoever undertakes the pilgrimage in those [months] shall, while on pilgrimage, abstain from lewd speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling; and whatever good you may do, God is aware of it. And make provision for yourselves - but, verily, the best of all provisions is God-consciousness: remain, then, conscious of Me, O you who are endowed with insight!

Surat Al-Hajj 22:27-29

Hence, [O Muhammad (P.B.U.H.),] proclaim thou unto all people the [duty of] pilgrimage: they will come unto thee on foot and on every [kind of] fast mount, coming from every far-away point [on earth], so that they might experience much that shall be of benefit to them, and that they might extol the name of God on the days appointed [for sacrifice], over whatever heads of cattle He may have provided for them [to this end]: eat, then, thereof, and feed the unfortunate poor. Thereafter let them bring to an end their state of self-denial, and let them fulfill the vows which they [may] have made, and let them walk [once again] around the Most Ancient Temple.

Pilgrimage in the Torah

During the times of the Temple, Jews also made a pilgrimage. On the three Pilgrimage Festivals of Passover (commemorating the exodus to freedom of the Jewish slaves in Egypt), Shavuot (commemorating the giving of the law at Mount Sinai), and Sukkot (commemorating the booths in which the children of Israel dwelled during the Exodus), Jews would gather in Jerusalem for worship.

Leviticus 23: 4, 44

These are the set times of the Eternal, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time... So Moses declared to the Israelites the set times of the Eternal.

Three times a year – on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths – all your males shall appear before the Eternal your God in the place that [God] will choose. They shall not appear before the Eternal empty-handed, but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the Eternal your God has bestowed upon you.

Discussion:

1. Both Islam and Judaism appoint given times in the year as holy days. What is the significance of having such occasions? How do you understand the obligation to go somewhere (Mecca or Jerusalem) to celebrate these holidays?
2. What does it mean in Deuteronomy to “not appear before the Eternal empty-handed, but each with his own gift?”

Islamic Pilgrimage

History

Hajj and its rites were first ordained by God in the time of the Prophet Ibrahim [Abraham] and he was the one who was entrusted by God to build the *Kaba* - the House of God - along with his son Ismail [Ishmael] at Makkah...

After building the *Kaba*, Prophet Ibrahim would come to Mecca to perform *hajj* every year, and after his death, this practice was continued by his son. However, gradually with the passage of time, both the form and the goal of the *hajj* rites were changed. As idolatry spread throughout Arabia, the *Kaba* lost its purity and idols were placed inside it. Its walls became covered with poems and paintings...

The people had totally abandoned the teachings of their forefather and leader Prophet Ibrahim. The House that he had made pure for the worship of God alone had been totally desecrated by the pagans and the rites which he had established were completely distorted by them. This sad state of affairs continued for nearly two and a half thousand years. But then after this long period, the time came for the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim to be answered...

A man by the name of Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah was born in the very city in which Prophet Ibrahim had made this supplication centuries earlier. For twenty-three years, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) spread the message of *Tawheed* [true monotheism] - the same message that Prophet Ibrahim and all the other Prophets came with - and established the law of God upon the land.

...Not only did the Prophet rid the *Kaba* of all its impurities [by removing the idols], but he also reinstated all the rites of *hajj* which were established by God's Permission, in the time of Prophet Ibrahim. Specific injunctions in the Qur'an were revealed in order to eliminate all the false rites which had become rampant in the pre-Islamic period. All indecent and shameful acts were strictly banned...

In this way, all the pre-Islamic practices, which were based on ignorance, were abolished and *hajj* was once more made a model of piety, fear of God, purity, simplicity and austerity... Now, there is the remembrance of God at every step and every action and every sacrifice was devoted to Allah alone. It was this kind of *hajj* that was worthy of the reward of paradise, as the Prophet said: "The reward for an accepted *hajj* is nothing less than paradise."⁶³

Ritual

The pilgrimage takes place during the twelfth month, *Dhul Hijja*, of the Muslim lunar calendar and is a requirement of every adult Muslim, male and female, who is physically and financially able. As with prayer, the pilgrimage requires ritual purification, symbolized by the wearing of white garments. Men shave their heads, or have a symbolic tuft of hair cut, and don two seamless white sheets. Women may wear simple, national dress; however, many don a long white dress and head covering. Neither jewelry nor perfume is permitted; sexual activity and hunting are prohibited as well. These and other measures underscore the unity and equality of all believers as well as the total attention and devotion required. As the pilgrims near Mecca they shout, "I am here, O God, I am here!" As they enter Mecca, they proceed to the Grand Mosque, where the *Kaba* is located. Moving in a counterclockwise direction, they circle the *Kaba* seven times. During the following days, a variety of ritual action or ceremonies take place – praying at the spot where Abraham, the patriarch and father of monotheism, stood; running between Safa and Marwa in commemoration of Hagar's frantic search for water for her son, Ismail; stoning the devil, three stone pillars that symbolize evil. An essential part of the pilgrimage is a visit to the Plain of Arafat, where, from noon to sunset, pilgrims stand before God in repentance, seeking forgiveness for themselves and all Muslims throughout the world. It was here, from a hill called the Mount of Mercy, that the prophet during his Farewell Pilgrimage preached his last sermon or message. Once again, the preacher repeats Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) call for peace and harmony among believers. Standing together on the Plain of Arafat, Muslims experience the underlying unity and equality of a worldwide Muslim community that transcends national, racial, economic, and sexual differences.

The pilgrimage ends with the Feast of Sacrifice (*Id al-Adha*), known in Muslim piety as the Great Feast. It commemorates God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismail (Isaac in Jewish and Christian traditions). The pilgrims ritually enact Abraham's rejection of Satan's temptation to ignore God's command by casting stones at the devil, here represented by a pillar. Afterwards, they sacrifice animals (sheep, goats, cattle, or camels), as Abraham was finally permitted to substitute a ram for his son. The animal sacrifices also symbolize that, like Abraham, the pilgrims are willing to sacrifice that which is most important to them. (One needs to recall the importance of these animals as a sign of a family's wealth and as essential for survival). While some meat is consumed, most is supposed to be distributed to the poor and needy. The Feast of Sacrifice is a worldwide Muslim celebration that lasts for three days, a time for rejoicing, prayer, and visiting with family and friends.⁶⁴

Meaning

No person can prepare himself to undertake this journey until and unless he has love of God in his heart as well as fear of God, and feels strongly that the *Fard* (obligation) ordained by God is incumbent on him.

Therefore, whosoever sets out for *hajj* parting from his family and relatives for a long period, allowing his business to suffer, spending money and bearing the rigors of the travel, he furnishes by his act of devotion a proof of the fact that there is in his heart fear of God and love for Allah as also a sense of duty.

When the pilgrim gets ready for the journey with this holy intention...He does penance for past sins, seeks forgiveness from people whom he might have wronged...

Then, as he steps out to begin the journey, the more he proceeds toward the House of God, the more keen he becomes to do good deeds. He is careful to see that nobody is harmed by him, while he tries to render whatever service or help he can to others.

His own nature desists from abuse, indecency, dishonesty, squabbles and bickering because he is proceeding on the path of God...

The process entails sacrifice of time, sacrifice of money, sacrifice of comfort, sacrifice of several worldly relations and sacrifice of many corporeal desires and pleasures.

And all this simply for the sake of God, with no selfish end...

[You] will be unable to appreciate fully the benefits of *hajj* unless you keep in view the fact that each and every Muslim does not perform *hajj* individually but that only one single period has been fixed for *hajj* for the Muslims of the whole world, and, therefore, [hundreds of thousands] of Muslims jointly perform it...⁶⁵

Discussion:

1. For the Jewish participants: What new ideas or practices have you learned about *hajj*? Which aspects of the *hajj* do you find most interesting? What parts seem very foreign to you? In what ways does the idea of the *hajj* resonate with you religiously?
2. For the Muslim participants: If you have completed the *hajj* please share your experiences with the group. What impact did it have on your life? What was the most religiously moving experience while you were on the *hajj*? How were you able to bring back the experience to your community?

Jewish Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage during the time of the Temple

The pilgrimage festivals created an opportunity for the Jewish community to reaffirm their communal commitment to the covenant with God, strengthen the self-identification of the nation as a religious community, and entrench the sanctity of Jerusalem and the place where the Temple stood in the religious consciousness of the people. These festivals are at their core a community-building experience. Some scholars even claim that this requirement to travel to Jerusalem and stay there throughout the length of the holiday was strongly endorsed by the nascent biblical-era "business" community of Jerusalem, which benefited from the regular influx of pilgrims seeking food, lodging, and animals for sacrifice.

Historical texts and archeological evidence indicate that in late antiquity, during the Hellenistic and Roman eras, the pilgrimage festivals were a profoundly significant social and religious institution, bringing Jews from all over the ancient world of the Mediterranean to Jerusalem. Thousands upon thousands of Jews made these pilgrimages throughout the year and supported a vast commercial enterprise including the raising of animals for sacrifices, a lively animal market, a complex banking community to enable pilgrims to exchange currencies, and hundreds of inns and taverns to lodge the travelers.

While there are no verifiable numbers of yearly pilgrims, by the end of the first century BCE, King Herod the Great, the Roman-appointed ruler of the vassal kingdom of Judea, apparently responded to the pilgrimage needs of the city and built a vast esplanade, or courtyard, surrounding the Temple. This dramatically increased the space of the Temple environs making it possible for thousands more pilgrims to attend religious ceremonies in the sacred precincts of the Temple... An ancient rabbinic memory of this era of glory for the Temple claims that even when the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims crowded onto the Temple courtyard for these festivals, no one ever lacked for space or complained about the crowd.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Syed Abul Ala Maududi, *The Inner Dimensions of Hajj: Excerpts from the Fundamentals of Islam* [30 November 2007] <http://www.soundvision.com/info/hajj/inner.asp>.

⁶⁶ Rabbi Daniel Kohn, *Pilgrimage Festivals: The Major Holidays Mentioned in the Torah* [30 November 2007] http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/About_Jewish_Holidays/Overview_Types_of_Holidays/Pilgrimage.htm.

Modern-day Pilgrimage

After the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. at the conclusion of the failed Great Revolt of the Jews against the Roman Empire, the pilgrimage festivals continued to be celebrated, but primarily as synagogue-based worship services. For the past 2000 years, since the cessation of the pilgrimages to the actual Temple in Jerusalem, these holidays have retained the title of "pilgrimage" festivals. Prayers have replaced the animal sacrifices, and the historical and agricultural themes of the festivals have become the dominant aspects of the holidays wherever they are celebrated throughout the Diaspora. In Israel itself, many people continue to make what many consider to be a pilgrimage to the Western Wall [the remnant of the Temple and the holiest site in Judaism], feeling that in so doing, they are following in the footsteps of our ancestors in Temple times.⁶⁷

We are a people with a long memory of our roots in the Land of Israel, a people that reminds itself on a regular basis of the hope of "next year in Jerusalem." Within this sacred land, our prophets called out for justice, peace and mercy, and our ancient sages developed the Judaism that we practice in our homes and congregations. The language of Israel, Hebrew, is the language of our sacred texts; the holidays of our holy calendar are derived from the agricultural and geographic climates of the Land of Israel. Judaism without Israel would be like a tree with no roots or branches. It was for this reason that our sacred Bible commanded that we *go up to the land* on a regular basis in holy pilgrimage in order to reconnect to the land of our people's physical and spiritual birth.⁶⁸

Discussion:

1. How has the practice of Jewish pilgrimage changed from Temple times until today? In what ways has this impacted modern Jewish life and the Jewish connection to Jerusalem?
2. Jewish participants who have gone on a trip to Jerusalem should share their experiences with the group. What impact did it have on your life? What was the most religiously moving experience while you were there? Did it feel like a pilgrimage to you? How were you able to bring back the experience to your community?
3. The traditional pilgrimages (the *haji* and the biblical holidays) were both an individual and a communal experience. What significance does this have?

Activity

Ask a Muslim participant and a Jewish participant to share their stories and experiences with pilgrimage: going on the *haji* for a Muslim and taking a trip to Jerusalem for a Jew. Ask them to share pictures or video footage from their trip. For the Muslim volunteer, ask them to bring in the *ihram*, the clothing item that Muslims are required to wear during the *haji*, to show the participants

67 *Ibid.*

68 Union for Reform Judaism, *Resolution Encouraging Pilgrimage to Israel among Reform Jews* [December 2004] <http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=8525>.



Lesson 10

Religious Tolerance



Each of our communities is committed to building a strong sense of religious identity in its own adherents. We are dedicated to our own form of religious expression and find meaning and purpose in serving God in this way. At the same time, however, we are also able to make room to recognize and appreciate the religious practices and traditions of others. In this session we will take a closer look at Jewish and Islamic perspectives on other religions and the sources of religious tolerance in our traditions.

What is Tolerance?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines tolerance as follows.

1.1 Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

1.2 Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States.

1.3 Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments.

1.4 Consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others.

Discussion:

1. How would you define tolerance? Do you agree or disagree with the stipulations set forth in this definition? What would you add or take out from here?

2. How does tolerance differ from acceptance? Must you agree with someone to be tolerant of them? Is there space for respectful differences of opinion? Explain.

Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Islam

The Qur'an itself and the Prophetic tradition (*hadith*) mandate a degree of religious pluralism and tolerance.

Qur'an 2:62

Those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Qur'an 2:256

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things.

Prophetic Tradition:

"As for one who oppresses a protected non-Muslim or belittles or burdens him above his capability or takes anything from him against his will, I will be his disputant on the Day of Resurrection" (*Sunnan Abu Dawud*, 447, no. 3052).

Qur'an 3:84

Say: "We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will (in Islam)."

Qur'an 5:48

...If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute;

Qur'an 49:13

O mankind! We created you from a male and female, and formed you into nations and tribes that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).

The Qur'an however also has problematic texts which promote religious intolerance against those of different faiths.

Qur'an 3:110

You are the best community that has been brought forth for humankind. You command the right and forbid the evil, and you believe in God. If the People of the Book had believed, it would have been good for them. Some of them are believers, but most are licentious and sinful.

Qur'an 2:65-66

And you know of those of you who transgressed the Sabbath, to whom We said, Be apes, slinking away! We made it a warning example to their own and to those [coming] afterwards, and an admonition to the pious.

Qur'an 5:59-60

Say: O People of the Book! Do you blame us only for believing in God and in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down before? Most of you are degenerate. Say: Shall I tell you of a worse (case) than that in the retribution of God? Those whom God has cursed and against whom He is angry, among whom He has made apes and pigs and servants of *Takhut*. They are in the worst position and further astray from the even road.

Discussion:

1. How is it that the same faith can espouse such different views on religious tolerance? How can you internally reconcile these beliefs?
2. Jews and Christians were generally known as *Ahl al-Kitab*, or People of the Book, because of their adherence to the previously revealed scriptures. How do these passages describe this special status? What was the status of Christians and Jews as compared to Muslims?
3. Taken as a whole, what do all these texts suggest about religious tolerance in Islam? Should it be seen as a negative or positive aspect of society?

The call for religious tolerance in the Qur'an was further developed throughout Muslim history. Non-Muslims living under Islamic rule paid a poll tax, known as the *jizya*, in exchange for protection and exemption from military service. They had legal citizenship in the Muslim world and could be represented and represent themselves in Muslim courts of law, and they could serve as legal witnesses. On the other hand, they were considered *dhimmi*⁶⁹, and sometimes in history were forced to bear restrictions that gave them second-class status. Although not always the case, as evidenced by historical accounts of Jews and Christians living under Muslim rule during the Golden Age of Spain (15th-17th centuries), they were generally not allowed to build new synagogues and were required to receive government permission to repair existing ones. They could not bear arms or ride horses, and they were required by law to wear distinctive clothing that would distinguish them from Muslims. Given the treatment of religious minorities in the Christian world, the system under the Muslims was a significant improvement, but it did not reach the level of tolerance or pluralism that we would expect in democratic Western states today.

The full text of the Madina Constitution, also known as the Charter of Madina, can be found in the Appendix. Allow participants to read through the document paying particular attention to points 16-18, 30, and 34 which deal with the treatment of Jews under Muslim rule.

The rights conferred upon non-Muslims by Islam were enforced to varying degrees throughout Muslim history. As can be seen in the two examples below, there were periods in which Jews prospered under Islam's rule of religious tolerance and other times where the Jewish community was not treated as well.

⁶⁹ Jews, Christians, and other religious groups were granted *dhimmi* status under Muslim law. *Dhimmiyah*, which literally means "protection," was a classification whereby people of other faiths were allowed to practice their religion and had a degree of communal autonomy subject to certain conditions including taxation and prohibitions against bearing arms and giving court testimonies.

Dhimmi: An example of repressive measures against the dhimmi:

In that year (235/850), al-Mutawakkil ordered that the Christians and all the rest of the *ahl al-dhimma* be made to wear honey-colored *taylasans* [head coverings] and the *zunnar* belts. They were to ride saddles with wooden stirrups, and two balls were to be attached to the rears of their saddles. He required them to attach two buttons on their *qalansuwas* – those of them that wore this cap. And it was to be a different color than the *qalansuwa* worn by Muslims. He further required them to affix two patches on the exterior of their slaves' garments... Whosoever of them wears a turban, its color was likewise to be honey-colored. If any of their women went out veiled, they had to be enveloped in a honey colored *inzar* [outer wrap]...

He gave orders that any of their houses of worship built after the advent of Islam were to be destroyed and that one-tenth of their homes be confiscated. If the place was spacious enough, it was to be converted into a mosque. If it was not suitable for a mosque, it was to be made an open space. He commanded that wooden images of devils be nailed to the doors of their homes to distinguish them from the homes of Muslims. He forbade their being employed in the government offices or in any official business whereby they might have authority over Muslims. He prohibited their children studying in Muslim schools. Nor was any Muslim permitted to teach them. He forbade them to display crosses on their Palm Sundays, and he prohibited any Jewish chanting in the streets. He gave orders that their graves should be made level with the ground so as not to resemble the graves of Muslims. And he wrote to all his governors regarding this [al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al Rusul wa'l-Muluk*, vol 3 ed. M.J. de Goeje et al.].⁷⁰

It is generally believed that al-Mutawakkil's stringent decree, restating the *dhimmi* restrictions, correlated with his repression of the Muslim Mu'tazilites whose unorthodox doctrines about the Qur'an had gained official recognition under Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (813-833). With the return to orthodox teaching under al-Mutawakkil came a return to orthodox policy regarding non-Muslims, the unbelievers par-excellence, which took the form of a renewal of these severe 'Umayyad stipulations.⁷¹

The Golden Age of Spanish Jewry: An example of more expansive rights and opportunities:

It is during ['Abd al-Rahman III's] reign that we see the sudden development of a flourishing, creative, and highly independent Jewish community in Spain. This sudden efflorescence of Andalusian Jewry was in no small measure linked to the rise of a remarkable physician, diplomat, and statesman, Hasday b. Shaprut (905-75). He was a county physician and trusted advisor to the caliphs 'Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II (961-76)... As was customary for a courtier or man of rank (wealth in such cases is a corollary), Hasday was a patron of the arts and sciences... [The] collapse of the Cordova Caliphate in 1009, when Islamic Spain was divided into numerous principalities of the so-called Party Kings (that is, Arab, Berb, Salv, and so forth)... offered Jews an extraordinary opportunity for government service, and there arose a relatively significant class of Jewish courtiers... No office, except that of ruler, seemed to be out of reach of a talented and ambitious Jew. In the Berber kingdom of Granada, the viziership of state was held by the Jew Samuel b. Naghrela for over three decades...

One of his (Rabbi Hanokh b. Moses) outstanding disciples was R. Samuel ha-Levi the Nagid b. Joseph, surnamed Ibn Naghrela, of the community of Cordova. Besides being a great scholar and a highly cultured person, R. Samuel was highly versed in Arabic literature and style and maintained himself in very modest circumstances as a spice-merchant until the time when war broke out in Spain... R. Samuel fled to Malaga, where he occupied a shop as a spice merchant. Since his shop happened to adjoin the courtyard of Ibn al'Arif – who was the Katib of King Habbus b. Maksan, the Berber king of Granada – the Katib's maidservant would ask him to write letters for her to her master, the Vizier Abu 'l-Qasim b. al-'Arif. When the latter received the letters, he was astounded by the learning they reflected... he inquired among the people of his household: "Who wrote the letters

70 Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

71 Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

which I received from you?" They replied: "A certain Jew of the community of Cordova, who lives next door to your courtyard, used to do the writing for us." The Katib thereupon ordered that R. Samuel ha-Levi be brought to him at once and said to him: "It does not become you to spend your time in a shop. Henceforth you are to stay at my side." He thus became the scribe and counselor of the King... after the death of the Katib, King Habbus brought R. Samuel ha-Levi to his palace and made him Katib and counselor. Thus he entered the King's Palace in 1019/20" [Abraham Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, ed. and trans. Gerson D. Cohen].⁷²

Discussion:

1. As you look at the privileges and prohibitions placed on Jews according to the Covenant of Medina, why do you think some of these rights and obligations were included in the Covenant? Why might the author have suggested that the Jews may have accepted the covenant for political reasons?
2. How do the decrees of al-Mutawakkil regarding the *dhimmi* compare with those outlined by the Prophet in his covenant with the Jews in Medina? What does the fact that al-Mutawakkil had to order such rulings suggest about their enforcement prior to his rule?
3. In what way did outside pressures lead to the stricter adherence to the *dhimmi* limitations?
4. Considering the prestigious status of Hasday b. Shaprut and Samuel b. Naghrela, how did their lives differ from the stipulations set forth in the Pact of 'Umar? How do these examples change your prior conception of minority religions under Islamic rule?

Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Judaism

The following passages from the Torah provide insight into the Jewish perspective on religious tolerance.

Genesis 17:1-7

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Eternal appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shadai – walk along before Me and be pure of heart, and I will set a covenant between us, and multiply you exceedingly." Abram fell on his face. God spoke with him, saying, "As for Me, here is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of peoples. No longer are you to be called Abram, your name is to be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a multitude of nations. I am making you exceedingly fruitful, and turning you into nations; rulers shall come forth from you. I will establish My covenant with you and with your descendents after you."

1 Kings 8: 41-43

Or if a foreigner who is not of Your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name – for they shall hear about Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm – when the foreigner comes to pray toward this House, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode and grant all that the foreigner asks You for.

Leviticus 19:33-34

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Eternal your God

72 Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook*

Micah 4:3-5

...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war. But every person shall sit under his or her grapevine or fig tree; with no one to disturb them. For it was the Eternal of hosts who spoke. Though all the peoples walk each in the names of its gods, we will walk in the name of the Eternal our God forever and ever."

Similar to Islamic tradition, Judaism also contains overtones of religious intolerance.

Exodus 34:11-17

Mark well what I command you this day. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Beware of making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land against which you are advancing, lest they be a snare in your midst. No, you must tear down their altars, smash their pillars, and cut down their sacred posts; for you must not worship any other god, because the Eternal, whose name is Impassioned, is an impassioned God. You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after their gods and will cause your sons to lust after their gods.

Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:2

Rabbi Eliezer says: No Gentile (non-Jew) has a part in the world to come, as it says (Ps. 9:18): *The evil ones will return to Sheol, all the nations who forget God. The evil ones will return to Sheol* refers to the evil among Israel. Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: "If Scripture had said, *The evil ones will return to Sheol, all the nations* and then was silent, I would agree with you. But Scripture also has *who forget God*. Thus there are righteous among the Gentiles who have a part in the world to come."

Discussion:

1. Abraham, generally seen by Jews as the founding father of their religion, is referred to as "the father of a multitude of nations." While this was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, now that you have participated in these discussions, what message does our common link to Abraham say to you about tolerance for each other and about religious tolerance in general?
2. The passage from Kings was a piece of Solomon's prayer during the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. What is the significance of his request? Why do you think he may have made such a request during the dedication of the Temple, a time for the Jewish community to celebrate their own worship of God? What does this reveal about Solomon's attitude toward non-Jews?
3. What does the passage from Micah suggest about religious tolerance?
4. Should we, and if so can we, reconcile the competing notions of religious tolerance present in the Jewish tradition? Is the call in Tosefta Sanhedrin that "no gentile has a part in the world to come" reconcilable with the commandment in 1 Kings 8: 41-43 to "grant all that the foreigner asks you for"?

Noahide Laws

The treatment of other religious traditions was formalized in Judaism with the "Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah," or the Noahide Laws. According to this tradition, God made a covenant with Noah and all of humanity after the flood that destroyed the world.

Genesis 9:8-11

God then said to Noah and his sons who were with him, "As for Me, I am going to establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living being in your care – the birds, the beasts, and all the land animals in your care – all who have gone out of the ark, all earth's animals. I am establishing My covenant with you; never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a

The descendants of Noah were commanded with seven precepts: to establish laws (and the prohibitions of) blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, bloodshed, theft, and eating the blood of a living animal.

Maimonides, The Law of Kings 8:11

Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these Seven Commandments and is precise in their observance is considered one of the pious of the nations of the world and will merit a share in the World to Come.

Discussion:

1. How does the Noahide Covenant represent a partnership between God and people? Do you think these are fair stipulations for such a relationship?
2. Of the seven commandments included in the Noahide Laws, which were you most surprised to see included? What others might you expect to be there?
3. What are the implications of the Noahide Laws for how Jews view other religions? What are the implications of Muslim and Jewish views on treating some religious groups differently than others? For example, both traditions view those who accept the One God differently than those who engage in idolatry worship.

Understanding the Noahide Laws

As Jeffrey Spitzer has explained:

The prohibition against idolatry refers specifically to idolatrous worship, and not to beliefs. In later generations, Jews had to determine whether the prevailing religious cultures in which they lived were idolatrous. Since Islam is strictly monotheistic, Muslims have always been considered Noahides. Since the later Middle Ages, Jews have acknowledged that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was not the same as idolatry, and they were also recognized as Noahides. (As discussed above, Islam came to similar conclusions about Jews and Muslims.)

The prohibition against theft includes kidnapping, cheating an employee or an employer, and a variety of similar acts.

The prohibition against illicit sexuality includes six particular prohibitions, derived from a single verse prohibiting sexual relationships with one's mother, with one's father's wife, with another man's wife, with one's sister from the same mother, in a male homosexual union, and with an animal ... ["So it is that a man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24)]

Eating flesh from a living animal is how the rabbis understood "But flesh whose lifeblood is [still] in it you may not eat" (Genesis 9:4)...

According to the medieval philosopher and codifier Maimonides, the legal system which Noahides are required to set up is specifically to establish punishments for infractions of the other six Noahide laws (Laws of Kings 9:14).

Nahmanides, a medieval Bible commentator, understands the obligation more broadly: "In my opinion, the law which the Noahides were to establish according to their seven commandments is not only to establish courts in each town, but that they were also commanded concerning theft, abuse, usury, labor relations, damages, loans, business, and the like, just as Israel was commanded to set up laws in these matters (Nahmanides, Commentary to Genesis 34:13)..."

The Noahide laws bear a striking resemblance to a separate rabbinic tradition that describes the commandments that would have been derived logically even if God had not included them in the Torah: "My rules alone shall you observe, and faithfully follow My laws" (Lev. 18:4): These are the items which are written in the Torah which, had they not been written should logically have been written, such as the [prohibitions against] robbery, illicit sexuality, idolatry, cursing God, and bloodshed" (Sifra, Ahare Mot, section 140). The overlap here of five of the seven laws enumerated for Noahides indicates that they may have been understood as a sort of universal, natural morality.

Indeed, based on the Talmudic discussion, Maimonides states: "Six items were commanded to Adam: concerning idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, illicit sexuality, theft, and laws...God added to Noah, the law of not eating from the flesh of a live animal" (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 9:1). The association of these laws with Adam implies that they were established as part of the creation of the natural world.⁷³

Discussion:

1. How did Jewish tradition interpret and apply the details of the Noahide commandments? Do you think their interpretations made them easier or more difficult to follow?
2. Do you agree that the Noahide Commandments are a part of the "universal, natural morality"? Why or why not?
3. While for most of history Jews did not have the authority to enforce the Noahide Laws, Jewish scholars throughout the ages have debated the theoretical dilemma of whether these rules should be required of non-Jews living under Jewish rule. Based on the previous discussions of the Noahide Laws, do you think they should be enforced? Why or why not? If so, should this responsibility of enforcement fall on individual Jews or on the Jewish courts?

Activity

Now that you have studied some of the challenging ethical dimensions that both Judaism and Islam present, work together to draft a joint interfaith prayer/supplication for peace. Encourage your synagogue or mosque to incorporate the creative prayer at some appropriate service or occasion.

⁷³ Jeffrey Spitzer, *The Noahide Laws: Seven Commandments which, According to Jewish Tradition, are Incumbent Upon All of Humankind* [30 November 2007] http://www.myjewishlearning.com/ideas_belief/Jews_NonJews/NJ_Legal_TO/NJ_Noahide_Jeff.htm.

Lesson 11

Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism

As Muslims and Jews, we have both experienced prejudice and intolerance because of our faith. The Jewish community has faced a history of persecution and hatred as a minority faith in the wider culture. Even though Muslims make up a sizable portion of the world population, within America and other places throughout the world, they have found themselves under attack as a minority community. In dealing with such prejudice and hatred, it is important to be able to understand the experiences of one another and come together to fight against the parallel evils of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

Prejudice and Stereotypes

Before delving into the specifics of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, it is helpful to reflect first on some psychological underpinnings of prejudice and stereotyping.

Prejudice is an ever-present phenomenon because human beings are social animals. We are born into a social unit called a family, and grow up in other social units in school, groups of friends, the families that we ourselves establish, and the professional and business groups in which we conduct our lives. Overriding all this is the fact that major parts of our sense of self are embedded in the groups to which we belong. Our identities are composed of building blocks that are group memberships. We define ourselves in terms of the national, religious and professional groups to which we belong... Thus, our sense of ourselves is not an isolated "me," but a "me" connected to others in a variety of ways.

Group membership means dividing the social world into two major elements: the "we" and the "not we," or "them." This distinction in itself is ample grounds for the statement that stereotypes and prejudice are permanently with us. Only if we accept this position as realistic will we be able to proceed to the next step and consider ways to fight stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination...

The term stereotype, and the systematic consideration of stereotypes as guides to interpersonal perceptions and behavior, was coined in 1929 by the journalist Walter Lippman. Stereotypes can be viewed as whole pictures based on incomplete information. We carry an endless list of such pictures, beginning with stereotypes that we hold for certain professions or social groups, or for men and women.

Yet, these pictures are based on very inadequate information. We have never met the people, know nothing about them, yet we seem to know everything about them. What is the origin of this tendency to stereotype others? One explanation is that stereotypes are adaptive mechanisms. They help us deal with a very complex and overcrowded world. In order to be able to adapt to the world, we classify objects into meaningful categories. We do the same with the "social objects" we encounter, categorizing people based on their group memberships. Thus, from this perspective, stereotyping is not always bad; it is a convenient mechanism for organizing knowledge about a complex and ever-changing world.

The stereotype as a convenient cognitive mechanism turns into a "social problem" when it becomes prejudice. Thus, if a stereotype is a whole picture based on inadequate information, prejudice is a negative picture based on inadequate information. Prejudice is indeed a social disease. It refers to a situation whereby we not only decide that Jews are pushy and argumentative, but we also draw the behavioral conclusion and do not allow them to join the clubs to which we belong. We not only decide that a family whom we have never met is a danger because

they are Arab, but we also do not want them to be our neighbors. We not only view a woman employee as less able than her male counterpart, but we also decide to promote the man and not the woman. Thus, prejudice is especially dangerous because it is closely linked to discrimination.⁷⁴

Discussion:

1. How can prejudice and stereotypes be both positive and negative? Do you agree with this assessment?
2. Do you identify yourself more as a Muslim American or an American Muslim? A Jewish American or an American Jew? What is the difference in your mind and do you believe how you identify on this question influences your perception of others?

Understanding Anti-Semitism

The following definition and explanation of anti-Semitism is taken from the Anti-Defamation League's website.

[Anti-Semitism is] the belief of behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.

Hostility toward Jews dates to ancient times, perhaps to the beginning of Jewish history. From the days of the Bible until the Roman Empire, Jews were criticized and sometimes punished for their efforts to remain a separate social and religious group - one that refused to adopt the values and the way of life of the non-Jewish societies in which they lived.

The rise of Christianity greatly increased hatred of Jews. They became seen not merely as outsiders but as a people who rejected Jesus and crucified him—despite the fact that the Roman authorities ordered and carried out the crucifixion. By the high middle ages (11th–14th centuries), Jews were widely persecuted as barely human “Christ-killers” and “Devils.” Forced to live in all-Jewish ghettos, they were accused of poisoning rivers and wells during times of disease. Some were tortured and executed for supposedly abducting and killing Christian children to drink their blood or to use to it in baking matzoh, a charge known as the “blood libel.” A large number were forced to convert to Christianity to avoid death, torture, or expulsion, though many secretly practiced Judaism after their conversions. (In recent times, the Catholic church and other Christian churches have rejected these anti-Semitic falsehoods.)

In the 18th century, as the influence of Christianity began to lessen during the Enlightenment - which celebrated the rights and possibilities of men and women to a far greater extent than ever before - religiously based hatred of Jewishness gave way to non-religious criticism: Judaism was attacked as an outdated belief that blocked human progress...

In response to the decline of Christian belief and the growing number of Jews beginning to join the mainstream of European society (a trend known as “assimilation”), anti-Semites turned to the new “racial science,” an attempt, since discredited, by various scientists and writers to “prove” the supremacy of non-Jewish whites. The opponents of Jews argued that Jewishness was not a religion but a racial category, and that the Jewish “race” was biologically inferior.

The belief in a Jewish race would later become Germany's justification for seeking to kill every Jewish person in lands Germany occupied during World War II, whether the person practiced Judaism or not. In fact, even the children or grandchildren of those who had converted to Christianity were murdered as members of the Jewish race. The Holocaust, as this systematic mass extermination between 1939 -1945 is known, resulted in the death of six million Jews -- more than a third of the world's Jewish population....

In the half-century since World War II, public anti-Semitism has become much less frequent in the Western world. While stereotypes about Jews remain common, Jews face little physical danger. The hatred of Jewishness and the conspiracy beliefs of past eras are for the most part shared only by tiny numbers of those on the fringes of society (although as the World Trade Center and Oklahoma bombings showed, even a handful of extremists can carry out acts of great violence). There are exceptions, of course: disagreement over policy toward the State of Israel has created opportunities in which the expression "Zionist" - support for Israel as the Jewish homeland - is often used as an anti-Semitic code word for "Jew" in mainstream debate. Holocaust denial and other recent re-writings of history - such as the false claim that Jews controlled the Atlantic slave trade - lie about the events of the past in order to make Jews seem underhanded and evil...Nazi-like language is regularly expressed by the media and governments in the countries that oppose Israel and the West. And as dozens and dozens of terrorist incidents have demonstrated, there are many in Middle Eastern countries willing to act on these beliefs.⁷⁵

Understanding Islamophobia

Islamophobia usage may well be defined as "alienation, discrimination, harassment, and violence rooted in misinformed and stereotyped representations of Islam and its adherents."⁷⁶ The Runnymede Trust, an organization dedicated to promoting a successful multi-ethnic Britain, has identified eight components that define Islamophobia. This definition, from the 1997 document "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All," has been widely accepted.

- 1) Islam seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.
- 2) Islam seen as separate and other – (a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them.
- 3) Islam seen as inferior to the West – barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist.
- 4) Islam seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in 'a clash of civilizations.'
- 5) Islam seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage.
- 6) Criticisms made by Islam of the West rejected out of hand.
- 7) Hostility towards Islam used to justify discriminatory practices toward Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
- 8) Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and 'normal.'⁷⁷

According to a March 9, 2006 *Washington Post* article describing a *Washington Post*-ABC poll:

The poll found that nearly half of Americans—46 percent—have a negative view of Islam, seven percentage points higher than in the tense months after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, when Muslims were often targeted for violence...

According to the poll, the proportion of Americans who believe that Islam helps to stoke violence against non-Muslims has more than doubled since the attacks, from 14 percent in January 2002 to 33 percent today...

The survey also found that one in three Americans have heard prejudiced comments about Muslims lately. In a separate question, slightly more (43 percent) reported having heard negative remarks about Arabs. One in four Americans admitted to harboring prejudice toward Muslims, the same proportion that expressed some personal bias against Arabs...

Americans who said they understood Islam were more likely to see the religion overall as peaceful and respectful. But they were no less likely to say it harbors harmful extremists, and they were also no less likely to have prejudiced feelings against Muslims.⁷⁸

75 Anti-Defamation League, *Anti-Semitism* [30 November 2007] <http://www.adl.org/hate-patrol/antisemitism.asp>.

76 Abdus Sattar Ghazali, *How to tackle the rising Islamophobia in US?* [15 March 2006] http://www.amp-onea.ghazali.net/html/rising_islamophobia.html.

77 *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All – Summary* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997) <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf>.

78 Claudia Deane and Darryl Fears, "Negative Perception of Islam Increasing: Poll Numbers in U.S. Higher than in 2001," *The Washington Post* [9 March 2006] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/08/AR2006030802221.html>.

The results of the poll are in great measure an outgrowth of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam feelings arising since 9/11. Some in the print and electronic media along with politicians, religious leaders and the government policies have reinforced Islamophobia.

As an article on the poll published in the *American Muslim Perspective Online Magazine* observed:

American Muslims have responded to the challenge with a massive outreach campaign to remove this negative image. American Muslim groups have repeatedly condemned terrorism of any kind. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) "Not in the Name of Islam" public service announcement campaign, a fatwa against terrorism by the North American Muslim religious leaders and an online petition drive rejecting violence in the name of Islam are but a few examples...However, the latest polls affirm that so far the intensive Muslim outreach campaign has produced little or no positive results. Why? Because there is no ease in the Islamophobia drive by media, some politicians and the establishment. Now Islamophobia is not only more widespread but also considerably more mainstream and respectable.⁷⁹

Discussion:

1. Discuss the development of anti-Semitism throughout history. What factors have led to anti-Semitism? How has it changed over time? How do you think anti-Semitism has affected Jewish self-identity?
2. Discuss the characteristics of Islamophobia presented here. Do you agree with this description? If not, what would you add to or take away from the list?
3. Discuss the factors that have led to the increased presence of Islamophobia. Which of these factors do you believe is most responsible? What else would you include?
4. What features of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are similar? How are they different? How can the parallels between these two forms of prejudice help us to combat them?

Islamophobia and anti-Semitism: Case Studies

Below you will find several examples of situations in which people acted on their prejudices and fears and targeted people because of their faith. Discuss the examples below and decide how you would respond to such a situation. How has your increased knowledge of Judaism or Islam affected your reaction to these situations? Do you think we have a responsibility to one another to speak out on these issues? Why or why not?

1. On November 20, 2006, a group of six imams, on their way home from a conference of the North American Imams Federation, were removed from an airplane by security personnel at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport because of "suspicious activity." Officials have said that passengers raised concerns about the imams through a note passed to the flight attendant. The imams were questioned by authorities for several hours and later released, but the airline refused to allow the imams to take another flight (they eventually made arrangements on their own on another airline). Before boarding the flight, the imams had performed their normal evening prayers. They felt that they were removed for no apparent reason other than following their religious practices and were humiliated by being handcuffed and removed from the plane in front of the passengers. While security is certainly the most important thing on such flights, members of the Muslim community have argued that

the situation was triggered by prejudice and ignorance, not a threat to passenger safety.⁸⁰

2. On July 28, 2006, Naveed Afzal Haq entered the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle building and shot six women, including one fatally. In choosing his target, Haq is said to have researched "something Jewish" on the internet. Just before 4 PM on the day of the attack Haq, armed with two large-caliber semi-automatic pistols, a knife, and extra ammunition, entered the building by holding a 14-year-old girl at gunpoint and forcing her to use the intercom to gain entry into the office. Haq then began shooting employees in the building and shouting "I'm a Muslim American; I'm angry at Israel." He walked through the building shooting into offices as he passed by, hitting several women's abdomens and chests. When one of the women, who was shot in the arm, called 911, Haq shouted that he was going to take her hostage and then went on to say that as a Muslim this was his personal statement against the Jews and the Bush administration for giving money to the Jews. He also said, "These are Jews. I'm tired of getting pushed around, and our people getting pushed around by the situation in the Middle East" and demanded that the U.S. military get out of Iraq. While on the phone with a 911 dispatcher, Haq eventually calmed down and surrendered. He was taken into custody by police and charged with aggravated murder and five counts of attempted murder among other felonies.⁸¹
3. On November 1, 2006 a Pakistani man, Shahid Amber, was attacked by a group of Jewish teenagers in Brooklyn. Standing outside and eating ice cream at the time, witnesses saw him surrounded by the group of teenagers who asked him if he was a Muslim. Before punching him in the face with brass knuckles, the boys spat in his face and shouted, "You Muslim terrorist... get out of our country." The teenagers punched Amber four to five times while someone held his hands back. Amber was hospitalized, where he was given 15 stitches on his broken nose and received reconstructive surgery for his injuries. The teenagers were arrested and charged with gang assault, menacing, harassment, criminal possession of a weapon and a hate crime. Following the incident, Amber's mother said, "No more this country safe for Muslims... no more." The incident took place in a neighborhood mixed with racial, ethnic, and religious communities where tensions generally do not exist.⁸²
4. Ilan Halimi, a young French Jew of Moroccan descent, was kidnapped on January 21, 2006, by a gang of immigrant youth called the "Barbarians." Twenty-three years old at the time, Halimi was lured by an attractive young woman to an apartment block in the Parisian suburbs. There, he was taken hostage by the gang and held for 20 days. Over the course of these nearly three weeks, Halimi was tortured with burns and knives in order to try to extract a ransom from his family. Gang members later confessed that they had targeted several Jews, including Halimi, because they believed that all Jews were wealthy and it would therefore be easy to obtain the desired ransom money. On February 13, Halimi was found naked and handcuffed near a railroad track with burns from acid covering nearly 80% of his body and with multiple stab wounds. On the way to the hospital, he died from his wounds. During subsequent arrests police found literature that espoused anti-Jewish rhetoric in the possession of one of the suspects. Police have also found that the gang subculture has a "poisonous mentality that designates Jews as enemies along with other 'outsiders.'"⁸³

80 Associated Press, "Six Muslim Imams Removed from Plane," *CBS News* [21 November 2006] http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/21/national/main2202120.shtml?source=RSS&tr=HOME_2202120.

81 Mike Carter, Jennifer Sullivan, and Cheryl Phillips, "Community Responds with Sorrow, Unity," *The Seattle Times* [30 July 2006] http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2003162640_investigation30m.html.

82 Jeff Pegues, "Brooklyn Attack Victim Speaks Out," *ABC Eyewitness News* [1 November 2006] <http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=local&id=4719041>.

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Combating Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a socialist,
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a trade unionist,
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me –
and there was no one left to speak out for me.

-Pastor Martin Niemöller

Martin Niemöller was an early supporter of Hitler, but by 1934 had come to oppose the Nazis. It was largely his high connections to influential and wealthy German businessmen that saved him until 1937, after which he was imprisoned at Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. Niemöller survived the war and became a leading voice of penance and reconciliation, addressing the dangers of political apathy and speaking out against hate and prejudice regardless of who it was directed against. As the poem indicates, hate against one person or group has the potential to turn into hatred toward others, making us all vulnerable to its negative effects. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Supporting Moderate Religious Voices

How can we help support the moderate religious voices in our respective communities? As complicated as this is domestically, it is even more complicated internationally. If American Muslims publicly side with Reform Jews arguing for religious equality in Israel, or support the efforts of religious "doves" in Israel on the peace process issues against religious "hawks" or hardliners, it may undermine the very people they wish to help. And when non-Muslims (particularly Western non-Muslims) publicly express or support moderate Muslim voices in the Muslim world, it may discredit those they seek to help in the hearts and minds of the masses – exactly those we most hope the moderates can persuade. As Rabbi David Saperstein said in a speech at Harvard University in October 2007:

The battle against fundamentalism cannot be won by forces from without but only from within each of our respective faith groups. The fascinating challenge for us as partners is: How can we help each other and how can we work together? Whenever one faith group gives its stamp of approval or support to tolerant and moderate expressions of religious thinking, it risks undermining those it seeks to help in the hearts and minds of the very people we would like them to win over. When such support can be tied by fundamentalists to Western colonialism and the cultural and economic imperialism that many feel is representative of the worst aspects of globalism, it can discredit those we seek to support and undermine their influence on their public. This is a difficult challenge for us, particularly when many of these struggles sit atop the crossroads of the clash of civilizations between political, economic and cultural powers in which religion is often seen as a surrogate for these other struggles for influence and legitimacy.

Neither we in the religious communities nor democratic political leaders have been very sophisticated in our approach to seeking ways to help legitimize more moderate forms of religious expression. There are things we can do beyond – and more effective than – just publicly celebrating moderate voices. Here in the United States we can fight the cultural bias that asserts that the more fundamentalist one is, the more religiously authentic and legitimate they are. It is asserted by fundamentalists, too often affirmed by the media and through cultural

representations, and too often acquiesced in by the theologically liberal segments of our respective religious communities. Two generations ago, in the generations of Reinhold Niebuhr, Stephen Wise, Abraham Heschel, and Martin Luther King, that was not the case and it need not be so today.

Internationally, the mix of religion and geopolitics makes the stakes even higher and the challenges more difficult. But we do know a number of factors that can make a difference in strengthening moderate religious leaders and institutions: consistently calling extremism for what it is; putting a human face on the violence done in the name of religion; ensuring the existence of non-violent effective political options to achieve political goals (the Israel-Palestinian conflict leaps to mind) encouraging allies and intermediaries not directly associated with "Western religions" to expand financial support to moderate religious voices, theologians, and civic leaders; providing technological training and internet infrastructure; lifting up best practices; and strengthening civil society structures (independent courts, newspapers, labor unions etc). Just one example, after 9/11 what would have been the long-term impact if, from international sources and other Muslim countries, the Pakistani government had been given resources to build a school system to compete with the madrassas?

Activity

As a group, brainstorm ideas to combat such acts of hatred in your community. Think both proactively, about measures that can be taken to create a more open and accepting atmosphere, as well as reactively, about responding to hate crimes when they do occur. Develop an action plan that can be carried out jointly by the Jewish and Muslim community as an ongoing project.

For resources on this topic:

The Anti-Defamation League – http://www.adl.org/combating_hate/

The Muslim Public Affairs Council - <http://www.mpac.org/hate-crime-prevention/>

International Council of Christians and Jews - <http://www.iccj.org/en/index.php>

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms⁸⁴

Aliyah

Hebrew for "ascent;" used in connection with one who is called up to the Torah, or who immigrates ("makes aliyah") to settle in the Land of Israel.

Arab

A member of a complexly defined ethnic group who identifies as such on the basis of either genealogical or linguistic grounds.

Ashkenazi/Ashkenazic

From the biblical word associated with Germany; refers to Jews who trace their roots to the Germanic and Eastern European lands.

Ayatollah

"Sign of God," title of a high-ranking Shi'a religious leader.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Literally means the son/daughter of the commandments. At the age of 13 (traditionally 12 for girls), Jewish children become obligated to observe the commandments. The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony formally marks the assumption of that obligation, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services, to count in a minyan, to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts and to marry.

Beit Knesset

House of meeting. Often used in reference to a synagogue.

Bimah

The raised platform at the front of the sanctuary upon which rests the ark in which the Torah is kept.

Caliph

For Sunni Muslims, successor of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) as leader of the Islamic community.

Chazzan

Hebrew for "cantor." In early America, the chazzan not only chanted the prayers but frequently functioned as the minister of the congregation as well.

Dawah

"Call to Islam," propagation of the faith; more broadly, social welfare and missionary activities.

Dhimmi

"Protected" or covenanted people, who hold a kind of second-class citizenship; non-Muslim citizen who is subject to poll tax.

Diaspora

The lands of the Jews outside of Israel.

- Faqih**
Islamic legal expert; Islamic jurisprudence.
- Fatwa**
Formal legal opinion or decision of a mufti on a matter of Islamic law.
- Gemara**
Commentaries on the Mishnah; the Mishnah and Gemara together are the Talmud.
- Hadith**
Narrative report of the Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) sayings and actions.
- Haftarah**
Literally "conclusion;" refers to the reading from the biblical Prophets that follows the Torah-reading on Sabbaths and holidays.
- Halakhah**
Jewish law, used to denote those sections of rabbinic literature which deal with the Jewish legal tradition.
- Hanif**
Qur'anic term for a pure or true monotheist; used for Abraham and for those in pre-Islamic Arabia who before the revelation of the Qur'an remained monotheists despite the paganism and polytheism of their times.
- Haram**
Arabic term for a prohibited or unlawful activity.
- Hijab**
Veil or head covering worn by Muslim women in public.
- Hij'rah**
Emigration of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) from Mecca to Madina in A.D. 622 where he established rule of a Muslim community-state.
- Ijma**
Consensus or agreement of the community, a source of Islamic law.
- Imam**
Muslim prayer leader.
- Iman**
"Faith," religious belief or conviction in the fundamental doctrines of Islam.
- Islam**
In Arabic, submission or surrender to the will of God.
- Jihad**
"Strive, effort, struggle" to follow and defend Islam.

Kaba

Cube-shaped shrine located in the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the focal point for daily prayer and the pilgrimage.

Kabbalah

Jewish mysticism.

Kashrut/Kosher

Literally, "lawfulness;" the term refers to the system of Jewish dietary laws that governs when food is "kosher" – fit to be eaten by observant Jews.

Kippah

Head covering, skullcap; known in Yiddish as *yarmulke*. While customs vary, Jewish tradition views the covering of the head by men as a sign of humility before God, and as an identifying marker of Judaism.

K'lal Yisrael

The entire community of Israel; the Jewish people.

Mazel Tov

The Hebrew term meaning good luck, generally used like "congratulations."

Midrash

Jewish interpretive literature. Can refer to one particular rabbinic interpretation or to the whole expansive body of texts.

Mishnah

An early written compilation of Jewish oral tradition, which serves as the basis of the Talmud.

Mitzvah

Hebrew for "commandments." According to Jewish tradition there are 613 commandments: 365 negative and 248 affirmative. In common parlance, the term *mitzvah* often refers merely to a "good deed" or an act of charity.

Motzi

Blessing recited before meals in the Jewish tradition; the prayer is specifically said prior to the breaking & sharing of bread.

Mufti

Specialist on Islamic law competent to deliver a *fatwa* or legal interpretation/brief.

Mullah

A local Muslim religious leader.

Purdah

Seclusion and covering of Muslim women in public.

Qibla

Direction of the Kaba at Mecca, which Muslims face when performing their daily prayers (*salat*).

Qur'an

The central religious text of Islam. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is God's final revelation to humanity and is the literal word of God as revealed to Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) over a period of 23 years.

Rabbi

A religious teacher and person authorized to make decisions on issues of Jewish law and who leads religious ceremonies.

Reform Judaism

The largest denomination of North American Jews, Reform Judaism affirms the central tenets of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - even as it acknowledges the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices. Reform Jews accept the Torah as the foundation of Jewish life containing God's ongoing revelation to the Jewish people and the record of the Jewish people's ongoing relationship with God. Reform Jews see the Torah as God-inspired but written by men and women striving to record their understanding of the Jewish people's encounters with the Divine, a living document that enables Jews to confront the timeless and timely challenges of our everyday lives. *Tikkun olam* — repairing the world — is a hallmark of Reform Judaism as its adherents strive to bring peace, freedom, and justice to all people.

Salat

Official prayer or worship observed five times a day.

Sephardi/Sephardic

From the biblical name associated with Spain. Refers to Jews who trace their roots back to the Iberian peninsula.

Shabbat

Hebrew for "Sabbath;" the Jewish day of rest and spiritual enrichment.

Shahadah

Islamic confession or profession of faith: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet/Messenger."

Shariah

"Path"; Islamic law.

Shaykh

Head of a tribe of Sufi order; term applied to a ruler, religious teacher, or tribal leader.

Shema

Judaism's preeminent expression of monotheism and core expression of belief and commitment, beginning with the words "Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one."

Siddur

Hebrew for "prayer book," from a word meaning to "order" or "arrange."

Sultan

Ruler, military commander in medieval Islamic states.

Tallit

Prayer shawl. Traditionally, men wear the rectangular fringed tallit over their shoulders during morning prayers.

Talmud

The foundational document of Rabbinic Judaism. The Talmud is a vast compilation of Jewish oral law divided into six orders and sixty-three tractates.

Tawhid

In Islam, the unity of God (absolute monotheism), Allah's absolute sovereignty over the universe.

Tikkun Olam

In Hebrew, "repairing the world." It has come to connote social action and the pursuit of social justice.

Torah

Refers narrowly to the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch) and broadly to the whole body of Jewish learning and literature, written and oral.

Tzedakah

Righteous giving. The obligation of Jews to give 10 percent of their net income to those in need.

Ummah

Islamic community, refers to the worldwide Muslim community.

Zakat

Annual alms tithe of 2 ½ percent levied on wealth and distributed to the poor.

Appendix 2: Full Text of the Charter of Madina/The Madina Constitution⁸⁵

1. This is a document from Muhammad the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), governing relations between the Believers i.e. Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who followed them and worked hard with them. They form one nation—Ummah.
2. The Quraysh Mohajireen will continue to pay blood money, according to their present custom.
3. In case of war with any body they will redeem their prisoners with kindness and justice common among Believers. (Not according to pre-Islamic nations where the rich and the poor were treated differently).
4. The Bani Awf will decide the blood money, within themselves, according to their existing custom.
5. In case of war with anybody all parties other than Muslims will redeem their prisoners with kindness and justice according to practice among Believers and not in accordance with pre-Islamic notions.
6. The Bani Saeeda, the Bani Harith, the Bani Jusham and the Bani Najjar will be governed on the lines of the above (principles).
7. The Bani Amr, Bani Awf, Bani Al-Nabeet, and Bani Al-Aws will be governed in the same manner.
8. Believers will not fail to redeem their prisoners, they will pay blood money on their behalf. It will be a common responsibility of the Ummat and not of the family of the prisoners to pay blood money.
9. A Believer will not make the freedman of another Believer as his ally against the wishes of the other Believers.
10. The Believers, who fear Allah, will oppose the rebellious elements and those that encourage injustice or sin, or enmity or corruption among Believers.
11. If anyone is guilty of any such act all the Believers will oppose him even if he be the son of any one of them.
12. A Believer will not kill another Believer, for the sake of an un-Believer. (i.e. even though the un-Believer is his close relative).
13. No Believer will help an un-Believer against a Believer.
14. Protection (when given) in the Name of Allah will be common. The weakest among Believers may give protection (In the Name of Allah) and it will be binding on all Believers.

15. Believers are all friends to each other to the exclusion of all others.
16. Those Jews who follow the Believers will be helped and will be treated with equality. (Social, legal and economic equality is promised to all loyal citizens of the State).
17. No Jew will be wronged for being a Jew.
18. The enemies of the Jews who follow us will not be helped.
19. The peace of the Believers (of the State of Madina) cannot be divided. (it is either peace or war for all. It cannot be that a part of the population is at war with the outsiders and a part is at peace).
20. No separate peace will be made by anyone in Madina when Believers are fighting in the Path of Allah.
21. Conditions of peace and war and the accompanying ease or hardships must be fair and equitable to all citizens alike.
22. When going out on expeditions a rider must take his fellow member of the Army-share his ride.
23. The Believers must avenge the blood of one another when fighting in the Path of Allah (This clause was to remind those in front of whom there may be less severe fighting that the cause was common to all. This also meant that although each battle appeared a separate entity it was in fact a part of the War, which affected all Muslims equally).
24. The Believers (because they fear Allah) are better in showing steadfastness and as a result receive guidance from Allah in this respect. Others must also aspire to come up to the same standard of steadfastness.
25. No un-Believer will be permitted to take the property of the Quraysh (the enemy) under his protection. Enemy property must be surrendered to the State.
26. No un-Believer will intervene in favor of a Quraysh, (because the Quraysh having declared war are the enemy).
27. If any un-believer kills a Believer, without good cause, he shall be killed in return, unless the next of kin are satisfied (as it creates law and order problems and weakens the defense of the State). All Believers shall be against such a wrong-doer. No Believer will be allowed to shelter such a man.

28. When you differ on anything (regarding this Document) the matter shall be referred to Allah and Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace).
29. The Jews will contribute towards the war when fighting alongside the Believers.
30. The Jews of Bani Awf will be treated as one community with the Believers. The Jews have their religion. This will also apply to their freedmen. The exception will be those who act unjustly and sinfully. By so doing they wrong themselves and their families.
31. The same applies to Jews of Bani Al-Najjar, Bani Al Harith, Bani Saeeda, Bani Jusham, Bani Al Aws, Thaalba, and the Jaffna, (a clan of the Bani Thaalba) and the Bani Al Shutayba.
32. Loyalty gives protection against treachery. (loyal people are protected by their friends against treachery. As long as a person remains loyal to the State he is not likely to succumb to the ideas of being treacherous. He protects himself against weakness).
33. The freedmen of Thaalba will be afforded the same status as Thaalba themselves. This status is for fair dealings and full justice as a right and equal responsibility for military service.
34. Those in alliance with the Jews will be given the same treatment as the Jews.
35. No one (no tribe which is party to the Pact) shall go to war except with the permission of Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him). If any wrong has been done to any person or party it may be avenged.
36. Any one who kills another without warning (there being no just cause for it) amounts to his slaying himself and his household, unless the killing was done due to a wrong being done to him.
37. The Jews must bear their own expenses (in War) and the Muslims bear their expenses.
38. If anyone attacks anyone who is a party to this Pact the other must come to his help.
39. They (parties to this Pact) must seek mutual advice and consultation.
40. Loyalty gives protection against treachery. Those who avoid mutual consultation do so because of lack of sincerity and loyalty.
41. A man will not be made liable for misdeeds of his ally.

42. Anyone (any individual or party) who is wronged must be helped.
43. The Jews must pay (for war) with the Muslims. (this clause appears to be for occasions when Jews are not taking part in the war. Clause 37 deals with occasions when they are taking part in war).
44. Yathrib will be Sanctuary for the people of this Pact.
45. A stranger (individual) who has been given protection (by anyone party to this Pact) will be treated as his host (who has given him protection) while (he is) doing no harm and is not committing any crime. Those given protection but indulging in anti-state activities will be liable to punishment.
46. A woman will be given protection only with the consent of her family (Guardian). (a good precaution to avoid inter-tribal conflicts).
47. In case of any dispute or controversy, which may result in trouble the matter must be referred to Allah and Muhammed (P.B.U.H.), The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) of Allah will accept anything in this document, which is for (bringing about) piety and goodness.
48. Quraysh and their allies will not be given protection.
49. The parties to this Pact are bound to help each other in the event of an attack on Yathrib.
50. If they (the parties to the Pact other than the Muslims) are called upon to make and maintain peace (within the State) they must do so. If a similar demand (of making and maintaining peace) is made on the Muslims, it must be carried out, except when the Muslims are already engaged in a war in the Path of Allah. (so that no secret ally of the enemy can aid the enemy by calling upon Muslims to end hostilities under this clause).
51. Everyone (individual) will have his share (of treatment) in accordance with what party he belongs to. Individuals must benefit or suffer for the good or bad deed of the group they belong to. Without such a rule party affiliations and discipline cannot be maintained.
52. The Jews of al-Aws, including their freedmen, have the same standing, as other parties to the Pact, as long as they are loyal to the Pact. Loyalty is a protection against treachery.
53. Anyone who acts loyally or otherwise does it for his own good (or loss).
54. Allah approves this Document.
55. This document will not (be employed to) protect one who is unjust or commits a crime (against other parties of the

Pact).

56. Whether an individual goes out to fight (in accordance with the terms of this Pact) or remains in his home, he will be safe unless he has committed a crime or is a sinner. (i.e. No one will be punished in his individual capacity for not having gone out to fight in accordance with the terms of this Pact).
57. Allah is the Protector of the good people and those who fear Allah, and Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is the Messenger of Allah (He guarantees protection for those who are good and fear Allah).

Appendix 3: Listing of American Organizations Promoting Interreligious Dialogue between Jews and Muslims

Abraham's Vision

www.abrahamsvision.org

Abraham's Vision is a conflict transformation organization that explores group and individual identities through experiential and political education. Examining social relations within and between the Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, and Palestinian communities, they empower participants to practice just alternatives to the status quo.

Auburn Seminary for Multifaith Education

<http://www.auburnsem.org/multifaith/about.asp?nsectionid=4&pageid=1>

Drawing people from a wide spectrum of religious traditions, the Center gives participants - both devout and secular - an opportunity to learn with dynamic teachers, engage sacred texts, discuss challenging issues, and experience the thriving ritual life in New York City. Working with groups including attorneys and judges, healthcare professionals, business executives, women, and young leaders, the Center sponsors forums where leaders gain insight into a range of religious perspectives and reach out across traditional boundaries to turn ethical convictions into social action.

Boston Dialogue Foundation

<http://www.bostondialogue.org/>

The Boston Dialogue Foundation is a non-profit organization that was founded in April 2000 by a group of volunteers comprising business people, academics and students. One of the goals of the Boston Dialogue Foundation is to organize various religious, cultural and social activities, and conferences among all types of religious and ethnic groups to support and advance the harmony and cooperation among religions and faith traditions.

Buxton Initiative

www.buxtoninitiative.org

The Buxton Initiative is a nonprofit organization seeking to build bridges between Abrahamic faith communities through friendship and dialogue.

Center for Jewish Muslim Relations

<http://www.jewishmuslim.org/>

The Center for Jewish Muslim Relations hopes to move relations between Muslims and Jews beyond political conflict. The Center's primary goal is to foster a common agenda on how to maintain strong religious and social identities in the pluralistic society of the United States and remove stigmatizing and negative stereotypes of the other.

Children of Abraham

<http://children-of-abraham.org/>

The Children of Abraham is a non-profit organization working to restore a more comprehensive relationship between these two ancient peoples and honor their common heritage, reaffirming the essential principles that lie at the heart of both of their faiths.

Common Ground

www.cg.org

Common Ground is a center for inquiry, study, and dialogue. Their primary concern is the human quest for understanding and the human pursuit of significance. While their endeavor began with the study of world religions and the commitment to interfaith dialogue, their range of program offerings has been greatly expanded over the past several years.

Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions

www.cpwr.net

The mission of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions is to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its other guiding institutions in order to achieve a peaceful, just and sustainable world.

Face to Face, Faith to Faith

<http://www.s-c-g.org/facetoface/>

Face to Face - Faith to Faith is a multifaith youth leadership program founded by Auburn Theological Seminary, a leader in multifaith programming, and Seeking Common Ground, a grassroots peace organization with programs for young people. The program goal is to inform participants about how their own religion calls them to engage in public and world issues; nurture an advanced understanding of other religions, cultures and people; and increase their ability to collaborate along lines of religion, culture, class and ethnicity to make a better world.

Faith Beyond Walls

www.faithbeyondwalls.org

Faith Beyond Walls—founded in 1999 by Interfaith Partnership of Metropolitan St. Louis and the St. Louis Clergy Coalition along with St. Louis 2004—creates opportunities for faith communities to have a meaningful and measurable impact on their quality of life.

The Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington

<http://www.ifcmw.org/>

The Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington brings together 11 historic faith communities to advance justice, nurture understanding and build community. IFC members are the Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jain, Jewish, Latter-day Saints, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Sikh and Zoroastrian faith communities.

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)

www.ifyc.org

There are millions of religious young people in the world interacting with greater frequency. That interaction tends either toward conflict or cooperation. Where so many of these interactions tend toward conflict, the Interfaith Youth Core aims to introduce a new relationship, one that is about mutual respect and religious pluralism. Instead of focusing a dialogue on political or theological differences, they build relationships on the values that religions share, such as hospitality and caring for the Earth, and how different religious groups can live out those values together to contribute to the betterment of their communities. The Interfaith Youth Core is creating these relationships across the world by inspiring, networking, and resourcing young people, who are the leaders of this movement. IFYC provides young people and the institutions that support them with leadership training, project resources and a connection to a broader movement.

New Ground Project

<http://www.newgroundproject.org/>

New Ground is a joint Progressive Jewish Alliance and Muslim Public Affairs Council program that engages diverse groups of Muslims and Jews in an innovative community-building process of intra- and inter-faith education and reflection, leadership training and civic engagement. The program utilizes a creative and dynamic new approach to Muslim-Jewish community-building, and is the result of extensive research of previous Muslim-Jewish dialogue efforts conducted in Los Angeles and throughout the country.

North American Interfaith Network (NAIN)

www.nain.org

The North American Interfaith Network is a nonprofit association of interfaith organizations and agencies in Canada, Mexico and the United States. NAIN's programs seek to build communication and mutual understanding among interfaith organizations and diverse religious groups throughout North America. Through its annual conference, newsletter, Web site, member organizations, board and supportive participants, NAIN offers networking opportunities to people of many religious traditions and numerous interfaith organizations. NAIN affirms humanity's diverse and historic spiritual resources, bringing these to bear on contemporary global, national, regional and local issues.

Religions for Peace USA

<http://www.rfpusa.org/>

Religions for Peace - USA gathers representatives of religious communities in the U.S.; promotes multi-religious cooperation for peace and justice; builds on the spiritual, human, and institutional resources of its communities; enhances mutual understanding; and acts for the common good.

Reuniting the Children of Abraham

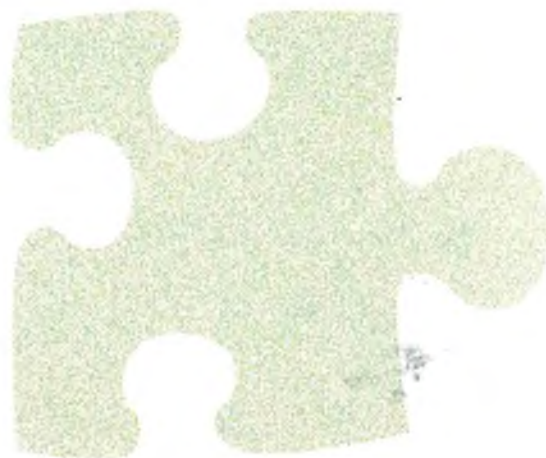
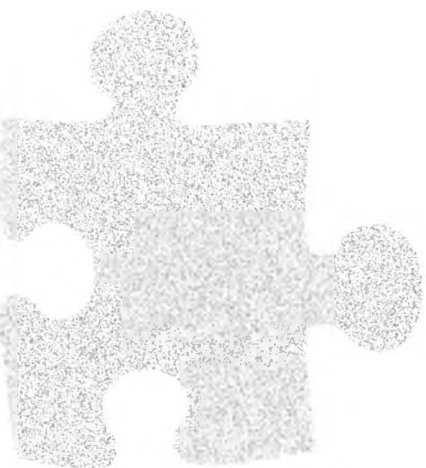
www.thechildrenofabrahamproject.org

Reuniting the Children of Abraham is a multi-media toolkit for peace. The first part of the tool kit is a Power Point presentation developed with The University of Michigan of the shared historical roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and how prejudice and stereotyping contribute to violence in our world. The second part is a documentary presented by a facilitator of the inspiring story of how Christian, Muslim and Jewish teens replaced ignorance, fear and hate with understanding through a four-step healing process. The documentary is followed by interactive dialogue with audiences on the PowerPoint and documentary. Also included in the tool kit are support materials on how to organize a community event and information regarding the opportunity to engage in additional workshops.

United Religions Initiative

www.uri.org

United Religions Initiative (URI) was founded in 2000 by an extraordinary global community committed to promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation and to ending religiously motivated violence. Today the URI includes thousands of members in more than 65 countries representing more than 100 religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.



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