

SUGGESTED MEETING THEMES

Introduction

What follows in this section is an extensive, though not exhaustive, list of suggested meeting themes. These have been designed for all levels of chapter membership, from a group's first meeting through the first year and a half of meetings or even longer. Often, particularly in the beginning of a chapter's existence, sisters will find that they have so many questions to ask but aren't sure where to start. This can also be someone's first experience with facilitated discussion of this kind. What follows in this section of the guide are curricula that can be followed at chapter meetings. Feel empowered to use these suggested themes, or to create your own. Ask chapter members for input as to which topics they might want to discuss and take a vote so everyone knows what theme will be the subject of the each chapter meeting. In time, you'll find chapter members' natural curiosity guiding the discussions you have, but this guide will be here as a resource when you need it.

Have a fantastic discussion topic or themes from one of your chapter meetings? Send us an email! We'd love to hear about it and share your ideas with other chapters.

WHO WE ARE- UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF JUDAISM AND ISLAM

PURPOSE

The goal of this session is for participants to develop a basic understanding of both faith groups and to begin to look for commonalities and to respect differences.

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To begin to learn and to ask questions. This is about listening to one another with a strong desire to learn about each other's faith.

PROCESS

Since facilitating personal encounters is very difficult, this lesson includes more explicit instructions on how to run the session than subsequent lessons will have. Have hard copies available for women to read during the meeting.

FOR GROUP TO READ TOGETHER

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

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."

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

DIALOGUE

While we normally think of Islam as a religion, what does the passage suggest about other ways of thinking of Islam?

For Jewish participants: How does this description of Islam change your perception of what Islam is?

What do you think Islam’s five pillars of faith say about the priorities of the religion?

What questions do you have about the origins of Islam and its core beliefs?

FOR GROUP TO READ TOGETHER

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 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.³

DIALOGUE

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?

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?

What questions do you have about the origins of Judaism and its core beliefs?

SHARING PERSONAL NARRATIVES: LISTENING AND TALKING FROM THE HEART

<https://sosspeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Sharing-Personal-Narratives.pdf>

Objective: To understand different perspectives on a highly charged topic through respectful sharing of personal stories.

Introduction:

This methodology was developed by Rabbi Justus Baird, Dean of the Auburn Seminary in Manhattan, and tested by two chapters of the Sisterhood in Princeton and Highland Park, NJ from September-December 2016.

Sisters share their personal experiences related to an issue and gain insight into the beliefs and values of sisters who may have a very different perspective. Consistent with Sisterhood values, the activity focuses on listening and understanding, rather than debating or trying to convince others to adopt a different point of view.

It is intended for Sisterhood chapters that have developed strong relationships marked by deep trust and respect, over the course of at least one year, and have expressed a desire to deepen their relationships by engaging in conversations that have the potential trigger strong or conflicting feelings.

Topics for this process might include: the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; racism; terrorism; modesty and dress; same-sex marriage or homosexuality; abortion; belief in God; feminism and patriarchy; body image; and group identities (am I an American first or a Jew/Muslim first?)

Time Required: 90-120 minutes

Methodology:

At the meeting prior:

1. Select a topic as a departure point for personal stories. Since not everyone will have a personal story on the topic, the issue should be generalized (e.g. “women’s roles in our faith communities vs. patriarchy). Related stories are welcomed.
2. Select a moderator from the group. Helpful moderator skills include the ability to: (a) listen deeply; (b) keep track of time; (c) help group stay focused on personal experiences; and, (d) manage group discussion so all members are heard.

At the meeting:

1. The Moderator role is to:
 - a. Place two chairs in the center of the room for a storyteller/ listener pair, with the remaining chairs in an outer circle. The moderator also places a “pressure valve” object in the center of the circle (e.g. stone, feather).

- b. Explain the activity objective to the group and remind them of the topic.
- c. Invite someone to be the first storyteller and asks someone from the other faith group to be the active listener. (A Jewish member listens to a Muslim member's story, and a Muslim member listens to a Jewish member's story.)
- d. Ask the storyteller to share her personal experiences related to the topic (2-3 minutes). It's important to clearly state that the purpose is to share specific incidents in her life, not to expound upon her views of "right or wrong". For example, if the topic is homosexuality, encourage the storyteller to focus on her experiences interacting with LGBTQ people, her feelings talking about homosexuality, and how her life experiences have shaped her views.
- e. Invite the listener to give a brief summary of the story, and then complete the sentence, "Given what I've heard, I imagine you might have felt _____," completing the sentence with a short list of feelings or emotions. "Do I have that right?"
- f. Invite the storyteller to respond to the listener's summary.
- g. Invite up to three members of the group to share a moment in the story that they connected with most. "I connected most with the part in your story when.... because...." These validating responses should be focused on connecting with the story and not on making a point or counterpoint.
- h. Explain that if anyone in the group is feeling too uncomfortable to continue, she may choose to pick up the "pressure valve" object or leave the room. In such a moment, the moderator should pause the process, invite reflection and support, and discern the best path forward. That path might include waiting for a few minutes for one or more people to process, asking for a member of the group to sit with the person who is unable to continue, or ending the process altogether.
- i. Invite another storyteller/listener pair into the center of the circle to repeat the process. Continue for as many pairs as time permits.

If there is time after everyone present has shared a story, the moderator may invite reflective discussion about what it was like to hear the stories. If there wasn't time for everyone to participate as a speaker and listener pair, the moderator can ask if the group would like to stay later or continue the process at the next group meeting. If there is time and interest, the moderator may choose to share a personal narrative.

The Sisterhood thanks Rabbi Justus Baird, Dean of the Auburn Seminary in Manhattan for his guidance and wisdom developing this process.

IDENTIFYING OUR JOURNEY

PURPOSE

Stimulate discussion providing an emotional understanding of each participant

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- To share in the understanding of each woman's expectations of belonging to the Sisterhood
- To provide an introduction to each woman's goals

PROCESS Welcome by host Welcome Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to introduce each person to the group

- Explain that this meeting will help to ground everyone in the focus of what the Sisterhood should achieve
- Have each woman bring several magazines, tape or glue, scissors and paper to the meeting
- After an introduction, have the women make a collage by cutting out pictures from magazines to tell each woman's story of the journey they want to take through the Sisterhood

DEBRIEF

What does their collage communicate?

Explain the steps of your journey and what the end point is?

How easy will it be to get there?

Do you anticipate any challenges?

DEEP LISTENING

Listening is a critical skill that can all too often be taken for granted. There are many techniques designed to enhance our ability to listen effectively. We are unlikely, however, to employ them unless we recognize how complicated listening is, and how flawed our assumptions can be based on our inaccurate and incomplete interpretations of messages. Sometimes we assume what we think we heard is what was actually said. People communicate not just data or facts, but emotion and intent, and it is the totality of what is being communicated that we must listen for to truly understand the speaker.

PURPOSE

To challenge our assumptions and heighten our insight into the listening process. Directions

1. Introduce the Session:

Pass out small cards and pens

Assign participants a number (count off) to print on their card that is big and easy to read. Have the participants find a partner and designate one partner as an “A,” the other as a “B”.

2. Sharing in Pairs: Have the A’s tell the B’s a true story from their lives.

The story should be only sixty to ninety seconds long. It may be from any period or aspect of their lives (e.g., something that happened this week, something that happened in childhood).

- The B’s should LISTEN ONLY. They should not interrupt or ask questions.
- When the A’s finish, have the B’s tell a story.
- Have the partners exchange cards. Each person now has the card with the number of the story just heard.

3. Sharing in New Pairs:

- Each person now tells the new partner the story that she or he just heard, in the first person (i.e., “I took the goldfish...”), as accurately as possible, as if it is her or his story. Stress that each participant is to attempt to tell the story exactly as they heard it. (Note to facilitator: Do not tell the participants that they will have to repeat their partner’s story until this point.)
- When both participants have told their stories, ask them to exchange cards.

4. Sharing in New Pairs: Have everyone find another new partner.

- This time, ask people to make sure that they are not paired with someone who has a card with a number they have already seen. This process ensures that people will not get their own story back or hear the same story more than once.

- Again, have the participants exchange stories (as above) and swap cards.

5. Large Group Discussion: Have the participants form a circle and one by one tell the story that they just heard. Debrief the exercise, using the following tips:

Have the participants share randomly, rather than going around the circle. This will enhance their ability to stay present and be receptive.

Ask people to listen to the stories without commenting or “claiming” their own story, until all of the stories have been told. The impulse may be strong to correct the stories in the moment, but the flow will be smoother and the debriefing richer if the participants can wait until everyone has spoken.

DEBRIEF

Debrief the story-telling experience using some of the following questions:

1. How many of you felt your story remained accurate?
2. Did anyone not recognize her story?
3. Did you listen differently once you knew you were going to have to repeat the story you heard?
4. How did it feel to have your story repeated in its current form?
5. How did it feel to tell someone else’s story?
6. What kinds of things can we listen for? (e.g., information and facts, emotions, the intent or point of the story) Which were the easiest to discern? Which were the most important? How do they relate to each other? Which are the most “real”?
7. What kind of things did we change in our telling? Why? (e.g., we forgot some details; we wanted to make connections to close gaps in logic; in telling the story as our own, we inadvertently or deliberately made it more personal, for example, we changed the gender of key people)
8. What did we “make up” that we were sure we heard?
9. How did the tellers interact with the listeners who were silent?
10. Did you change the story based on the non-verbal cues of the listener? Why or why not?
11. Why bother listening if no one truly gets it right?

12. How is it we are able to function in the workplace when we misunderstand one another so easily?

13. What should we do with this information to improve the effectiveness of our listening?

INFLUENCES ON MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY: TELLING MY STORY

PURPOSE

To reflect on and share the sources and values of our own religious tradition or spiritual path, and to increase our awareness of the diversity and richness of that path.

To practice extending to one another a respectful, open ear and holding authentic conversations, as well as to increase our understanding and trust and build relationships.

PROCESS

1. Introduce the Session: Start with a brief dialogue session.

- How can we listen so that others can speak about their religious identity without fear or defensiveness?
- How can we speak about our own teachings and practices so that others do not feel we are trying to convert them?
- How can we remain centered in our beliefs while listening to others who are centered in theirs?
- What are some of the risks and difficulties that the group can identify?
- What principles of interaction would the group like to adopt to make this exercise comfortable for everyone? (See Section Two.)

2. Materials needed: Large sheets of newsprint or other paper, markers, paints, crayons or other art supplies; paper and pens for writing; easels, chart paper, and markers for capturing key points of small group or large group discussion

3. Allow quiet time and working space for participants to draw or write the answers to some of following questions of their choosing before they are shared with the full chapter in group dialogue:

- Visualize the spiritual story of your life as a river or another image that appeals to you (perhaps as a mountain, a road, a journey, a tree, or other image).
- What were its beginnings? What sources nurtured you along the path or fed its roots (e.g., teachers, parents, spiritual mentors, community experiences)?
- Have you followed a single path, or have there been multiple branches? Has it changed course?
- Has it been smooth or perhaps bumpy or turbulent? What difficult places have needed to be cut through or crossed over? Describe the easy and hard places, dams or rockslides, still places, steep or rushing times, floods, droughts, turbulence, warmth, or coldness.

- How large is the river? Is it narrow or wide? Is it deep or shallow?
- What is the river's relationship to its surroundings? Is it solitary or in company? Who are or have been companions and co-travelers along the way?
- What is happening for you right now in your story? What changes or growing edges? New intentions? Sketch in or describe a possible future.
- Looking back over your spiritual journey, what values did you keep or change over time? Can you identify one value that has been close to you the entire journey?

DEBRIEF

After each person has had time to reflect and answer the questions (30 minutes), ask everyone to regroup and to share their own river story. This is done by sharing their river and the answers to the aforementioned questions

SADAQA AND TZEDAKAH- Giving to Others

PURPOSE

The goal of this session is for participants to develop a basic understanding of the role of sadaqa and tzedakah in our faith as well as in our personal lives

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To begin to learn and to ask questions. 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 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.

PROCESS

Since facilitating personal encounters is very difficult, this lesson includes more explicit instructions on how to run the session than subsequent lessons will have. Have copies available for all of the women to read during the meeting and to then engage in dialogue.

FOR GROUP PARTICIPATION AND DISCUSSION

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.³

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.

³ As indicated in the introduction, all Qur'anic quotes are from Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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?

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 you 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.

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)

Sadaqa/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.⁴

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.⁵

DIALOGUE

⁴ Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path.

⁵ Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time (New York: UAHC Press, 1998), 85.

According to these passages, what are the differences between tzedakah, 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? Why? How do tzedakah and sadaqa go beyond giving money?

How can/do you incorporate these different aspects of giving 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 524.⁶

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 charity; and guiding somebody on the road is regarded as charity.” Abu Huraira, Volume 4, Book 52, Hadith 4:141

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.⁷

DIALOGUE

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?

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

⁶ 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.

⁷ Samuel Cohen, *Judaism, A Way of Life*, (New York: UAHC Press, 1962).

deed is charitable?

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?

Based on the previous discussion, how are the Jewish and Muslims conceptions of charity versus good deeds similar? How do they differ?

CONFRONTING INJUSTICE

PURPOSE

Show how Islamic and Jewish scriptures provide evidence on the need to confront injustice

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To establish that caring for the other is of paramount importance for both faiths To expose participants to text To demonstrate the commonalities based on the commitment of both faiths for social justice and caring for the “other”

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Welcome Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to study text to demonstrate the necessity to stand up to injustice and to protect the stranger

Pass out text for participants to read and have a different person read each one.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

“None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself” [Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim]

Hillel Maxim

“What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your neighbors”

From the Torah

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” [Exodus 22:21]

“It is to share your bread with the hungry; And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.” [Isaiah 58:7]

From the Qur’an and Sunnah:

“Those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying “Our Sustainer is God!” For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques-in [all of] which God’s name is abundantly extolled-would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succor him who succours His cause: for, verily, God is most powerful, almighty.” [The Qur’an, Surrah Al- Hajj, 22:40]

Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] on People of the Book:

“He who wrongs a Jew or Christian will have myself as his accuser on the Day of Judgment.”
[Al- Bukhari]

From the Constitution of Madinah that Prophet Muhammad created to regulate the relationship between people of the Book around Madinah, where Islam was growing: *“Whoever judges the signatories of this scripture would be entitled to our help and would not be subject to any injustice, nor should the Muslims cooperate against them. The children of Ouf (a Jewish tribe) are a community of believers. The people of the scriptures are allowed to follow their religion as much as the Muslims are allowed to follow theirs, and so are their allies except the one who commits injustice or sin, for he does not harm but himself...The signatories of the document are entitled to mutual advice, sincerity and assistance rather than fighting each other...”*

DIALOGUE

- Which of these do you relate most to? Why?
- How familiar do you think the public is with these texts?
- What can be done to communicate the shared principle of caring for the other?

GETTING RID OF THE “OTHER”

PURPOSE

Increase the awareness of feelings of the “other” in our daily life

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To establish that caring for the other is of critical To expose participants to how easy it is for all of us to fall into the “other” trap To demonstrate how a change in mindset is critical

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism

- Explain story telling and how this is the key to full dialogue and communication
- Explain the connections between interfaith dialogue and sharing our stories of religious pluralism. Tied into this story is the belief that dialogue is about listening and speaking. In listening to and taking in the story of another we are participating in an act of compassion.

DIALOGUE

- What is the story that most represents when you felt like the “other”?
- What impact did this have on you?
- What is the story that most represents when you felt that someone else was the “other”?
- What triggered this?
- How can you rewrite this story to make these feelings absent?

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN OUR LIVES

PURPOSE

To understand how our faith influences our decisions

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To understand how we each define “faith” and to learn from each other how faith has influenced our beliefs and practice

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism

- Explain that we are a faith based organization yet, so many have different opinions as to the role that faith plays in their life
- This meeting will allow us to each learn from one another the role that faith plays in our life and how faith has shaped who we are today.

DIALOGUE

- What role does your faith play in your life?
- How often do you stop to think about faith?
- What is the biggest influence that your faith has on your everyday life?
- How does faith factor into making everyday decisions? Are there moments when you are more conscious of your faith than others? What are they?
- What is an example of a time when your faith had a big influence on an important life decision?
- What is the biggest challenge that you have had in being guided by your faith?
- What values, rituals, and practices are central to your living of your the teachings of your tradition?
- What do you do to ensure that you continue to be guided by your faith?

SHARING OUR STORIES

PURPOSE

Introduce personal narratives, or story telling, and increase comfort levels with incorporating into communication

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- To understand the role of personal stories/narratives in our lives
- To expose participants to the approach of story telling
- To reinforce the significance of personal narratives to identity formation, to strengthen one's personal identity, sense of belonging to a community, and to focus on mutual commonalities and shared values

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host Welcome and introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism

- Explain story telling and how this is the key to full dialogue and communication
- Explain the connections between interfaith dialogue and sharing our stories of religious pluralism. Tied into this story is the belief that dialogue is about listening and speaking. In listening to and taking in the story of another we are participating in an act of compassion.

DIALOGUE

- What is the story that most represents what your faith means to you?
- Tell a story that has transformed your life
- How can each of your personal narratives be intertwined to form the narrative of our new community?

TRADITIONS

PURPOSE

To reflect on traditions in the context of how our life today

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To understand how traditions have shaped our approach to faith

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of family influence on our personal faith practice

Bring in a photo of your family (this can include your family from when you were a child and your family today)

DIALOGUE

- How much influence has your family had on the way you live your life today?
- Who in your family has had the greatest influence?
- How has this evolved over time?
- What family practices/traditions, if any, have had the greatest impact on you, and why?
- What practices/traditions, if any, from when you were growing up, or your family, have you incorporated into your personal faith practices?
- Are there any practice/traditions that you have embraced that have influenced your family and their personal faith practices?
- Have you created any new practices that you want to pass on to others as new traditions? What are the significance of these?

BRINGING UP CHILDREN TO MAINTAIN CULTURE/FAITH PRACTICES WHILE LIVING IN A DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT

PURPOSE

To share our stories and learn from one another as to what we have done to maintain our cultural authenticity

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

The struggle to maintain our cultural authenticity living in a diverse society

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism

- Explain story telling and how this is the key to full dialogue and communication
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DIALOGUE

- What do you and/or what has your family done to keep your children within our respective cultures and faiths while living in a diverse environment?
- What did your family do, if anything, as you were growing up to help you maintain your respective cultural and faith practices? Did you find this easy or a challenge? Did you learn anything from how others were handling this?
- Do you think it has gotten more difficult for the youth within your faith community of today?
- What is your story as to how you were able to maintain your culture and/or your faith practices living in a diverse environment?
- What advice would you give to others? Should there be a focus on maintaining cultural practices/faith practices? Should we allow our children to figure it out on their own and to find their own comfort zone?

FREEDOM OF CHOICE OF EXPRESSION

PURPOSE

To gain insights on our personal experiences regarding freedom of choice of expression

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To share personal stories about what influences our appearance

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism

- Explain story-telling and how this is the key to full dialogue and communication.
- Explain the connections between interfaith dialogue and sharing stories of religious pluralism. Tied into this story is the belief that dialogue is about listening and speaking. In listening to and taking in the story of another, we are participating in an act of compassion.
- It would be interesting to mention the Burkini ban that took place in France during the summer of 2016 for perspective and a starting point for dialogue. Suggest that you watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jwj4HR8nqyA> and share the blog: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/manal-omar/ourchoicenotyours-the-burkini-ban_b_11997242.html

DIALOGUE

- How would you describe your look—the way you dress?
- Who and what has influenced how you currently dress?
- How has your look-your style of dress evolved over time?
- What significance does modesty play in your everyday life?
- What role would you like modesty to play in your everyday life?
- How much do you consciously think about your appearance? How does this vary by your surroundings (who you are with, where you are, type of event, etc.)?
- How have you arrived at the dress practice that you follow?
- How, if at all, has your faith practices influenced your personal practice of modesty?
- What is the one thing that you would like others to know about your regarding your decisions as to how you dress?

NAVIGATING DAILY LIFE WITHIN THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

PURPOSE

Understanding how we feel as women of faith within the political environment.

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To express our feelings in terms of belonging or being marginalized as a result of political rhetoric and action

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, and explanation that this is an opportunity to share our stories regarding the impact of the political environment on our feelings (sense of belonging, feeling like an outcast, feeling proud, feeling scared, etc.) Please note that as a nonprofit organization (a 501c3), we are not permitted to take any political action in the name of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. Therefore, the Sisterhood does not take any political position.

DIALOGUE

- What role does your practice of faith play in the current political or societal environment? How do you feel about this?
- How, if at all, has this affected you, your family, your friends and your faith community?
- What have you done and what can you do to respond to the political/societal climate?
- What have you seen others do that you consider to be effective?
- In what ways, if at all, does religion reinforce political legitimacy? How do you feel about this? What can be done to combat this?
- What else can you do as a woman of faith to respond to your feelings resulting from the political environment?

APPRECIATING OUR CONNECTEDNESS

PURPOSE

To enhance the values of inclusivity inherent in our faith traditions

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To encourage the women to examine, identify, and celebrate their individual as well as collective values of inclusivity, pluralism, unity, etc. and gain new information and insight on the positive sources of each religion.

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Members are encouraged to think about their beliefs and attitudes that bring inclusivity or encourage pluralism, in relations to other faith beliefs of other members in the group. Also each member is asked to bring an item or something that represent such values in their faith.

DIALOGUE

What values, beliefs, and rituals in my faith encourage me to reach out to other faith groups?
What positive features, characteristics, or beliefs does your faith attribute, teach or imply about the other faith group in the room? What are the rituals or stories that support such perceptions?

How are such religious beliefs or norms expressed in your daily live?

ART AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING

PURPOSE

To explore how we can use expressive art to deepen communication and understanding.

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To encourage the women to learn about each other through creativity and the sharing of working together on an art project

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host

Gather art supplies — these can be inexpensive children’s art supplies or a variety of materials, for example, clay, sticks, stones, colored paper and glue, berries, or beads. Paper can be scraps or reused office paper. Ask the group to select a theme for the activity. Some examples of themes are: personal spiritual experiences, religious teachers or teachings, metaphors (light, darkness), symbols, our story of creation or origin, how our lives reflect our understandings, our understanding of our relationship with the sacred, how different traditions use the hands in prayer. Divide the chapter into smaller groups of 2 or 4.

DIALOGUE

- Allow time for centering and reflection, and for getting comfortable with the idea that no one needs to be ‘an artist’ to do this exercise. Ask the teams to work with the materials in any manner they feel comfortable, to communicate through color, shape, design, collage, or other forms.
- Gallery Walk: When all are ready, gather around each work in turn, and ask each team to share on what they have created

WHY I LOVE BEING A JEWISH OR MUSLIM WOMAN

PURPOSE

To practice speaking about, and listening to, the teachings and perspectives of our sisters' religious and spiritual traditions with respect, openness, and appreciation.

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To learn to listen with compassion and to build respect of each person's personal story.

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host. Ask each person to think of an experience they have had of open, respectful communication across religious boundaries, and ask them to share it with the group.

DIALOGUE

- Complete the phrase: "Why I love to be a _____" with whatever word or phrase most clearly describes their spiritual or religious identity, expression, path, or practice.
- What would you like others to teach about your faith as you live it?
- What key differences do you have from others in your tradition or in other traditions?
- How would you like others to speak and act around you in relation to your faith?
- What would you suggest that we do next time to create more trust, more understanding, and more creativity in our interfaith dialogue in this group?

OTHER THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

PURPOSE

Introduce ANY ONE of these themes for dialogue

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

- To understand the role/impact of that theme in our lives
- To expose participants to the different understandings of practice and belief
- To reinforce the significance of personal narratives to identity formation, to strengthen one's personal identity, sense of belonging to a community, and to focus on mutual commonalities and shared values

PROCESS

Welcome by co-leaders and host Welcome /Introduction, sharing of good and welfare, purpose is to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism

- Explain the theme and how everyone is entitled to their own opinion
- Reinforce our goal of learning from each other and expanding our horizons. In listening to and taking in the story of another we are participating in an act of compassion.

CHOOSE ANY ONE TOPIC:

1. Discovery of the sacred/divine/formless/God/enlightenment/superior power How and where do you encounter the sacred/divine/formless/God? What sorts of experiences have you discovered to be part of this journey of encounter? Do you experience a call or movement to or yearning for intimacy with "God" or with the someone or some entity beyond ordinary human experience? In light of this, are you called to a specific spiritual path?

2. Prophets/sages/ancestors/saints Are such persons important in guiding you toward becoming who you are called to be? Do any such persons within the religious tradition offer inspiration for living life, care for the world, creating relationships of justice, peace? How do you relate to these prophets/sages/ancestors or spirits?

3. Revelation

What is the role, if any, of revelation in the embrace of your religious tradition? What are, for you, the main beliefs in your religious tradition? What do you experience as the basis for your beliefs? Are there intermediaries for revelation and for the interpretation of revelation?

4. Meaning of human life

What is the "creation story" – the story of how the world and all life began – in your religious

tradition? What does this story say to you about the meaning of human life? What does it say about how human life is to be lived? What is it that you sense humans hope for? What limitations do you find humans face as they strive/journey to attain that for which they hope?

5. Writings/oral traditions

What are the main scriptures or texts spoken of in your religious tradition? What importance do they have in your life? What is your ongoing relationship to the writings and oral traditions? How have your interpretations of these writings and oral traditions changed or matured over time?

6. Wrongdoing

What is your understanding of wrongdoing? If sin is a concept in your religious tradition, share your own understanding of it. What do you believe wrongdoing or sin is in relation to God/the sacred...? How do you see wrongdoing or sin in relation to yourself or others? How do you understand sin in relation to societal realities? How is one forgiven in light of sin or evil for which one is responsible?

7. Full life cycle-spend EACH MEETING ON ONE LIFE CYCLE COMPONENT: Pregnancy, Birth, Preschool, Commitment Ceremonies, Puberty, Engagement, Marriage, Divorce, OR Death What is the significance of each (XXX-for example pregnancy) for you as a member of your religious tradition? What specific practices/rituals do you follow? What is the meaning/background behind these practices/rituals? How do you participate in this? How did you learn of these practices?

8. Hope

What in your religious tradition gives and sustains your hope in the face of personal loss, oppression or rejection? And in the midst of chaos and evil in the world? To whom or what do you turn when you are overwhelmed? As a member of your religious tradition, what do you see as positive or hopeful in the world? How is the acknowledgement of a transcendent reality (sacred/divine/formless/God/superior power) related to movement toward a better situation for all people and all creation?

9. Role in the world

What is your experience of the world? What is your analysis of the state of the world in the light of your experience? What is your personal response to your experience and analysis? Do you believe that the actions of individuals matter? How do you regard the most vulnerable persons in your society and throughout the world? What is your relationship with them? How do you hope to ultimately attain salvation/paradise/enlightenment/nirvana...? What does your religious tradition promise you? What further personal growth do you hope for?

10. Community and relationships

With whom do you share community? What religious beliefs and/or practices contribute to the formation and sustaining of your community? Do you see your religious group as community? In

what sense? When differences or splits occur in your community or among communities, how are they reconciled? Do you see your community as separate from the world or as part of the whole? How do you perceive your religious community in relation to communities of other religions?

11. Structure and leadership in the faith/religious community

How is your community of believers organized? What and who “holds together the experience” of the people of your religious tradition as community and as a faith tradition (i.e. holding common beliefs, worship traditions, et cetera.) Who exercises power? What kind of power do they have? What is your role in your faith community? What is the significance of your role?

