

From Understanding Comes Appreciation
Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation
Reston, Virginia

An interfaith Conversation Among
Jews, Christians, Muslims
Sunday, March 17, 2002

A Muslim's Perspective

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*Salam (Peace) Sudan is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit cultural foundation, advocating, since 1982, a genuine universal culture of peace, dignity, and democracy, human, and cultural rights for all in the 21st century. It strives to achieve this through cross-cultural, inter-faith and development-focused research, reflection and education, using state-of-the-art technology and communication. It seeks to contribute to international peace and security by facilitating a compassionate dialogue of cultures, civilizations and religions.

1. Islam's Origins

- 7th century Arabia: Jahiliya-worship of idols-burying young girls alive.
- Muhammad receives Allah's (God) word through the Revelation of the Qur'an in 612 A.D.
- Persecution by Quraysh in Mecca and Muhammad's Hijra (immigration) with his companions as persecuted refugees to Medina in 622 A.D.
- Holy war, victory over Quraysh, holy peace, and the victorious return to Mecca.
- By 630 Islam dominated almost the whole of Arabia laying the foundation for a new Arab polity that enabled Muslims to govern a huge empire for over a thousand years.

2. Islam's Basic Beliefs

Islam's 5 pillars are:

- To bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and that he was sent by Allah to teach His religion.
- To establish *Salat* (prayer) [that is to perform it correctly with sincerity and humility].
- To pay *Zakat* (a fixed proportion of a Muslim's income, wealth to be paid yearly for the benefit of the poor in the Muslim community).
- To observe *Saum* (fasting) during the month of Ramadan by avoiding food, drink, and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk.
- To perform *Hajj* (make pilgrimage to the house of Allah, the Sacred Mosque of Mecca, originally built by Abraham) if he/she is able to make the journey.

Islam's 6 pillars of Iman (faith) are to believe in:

- Allah (God) and the sole Creator who is the All-hearer and All-seer
- His angels
- His books
- His Messengers (all Prophets sent to mankind, the first being Noah and the last, Muhammad)
- The Final Day of Judgment
- Allah's decree (*Qadar*) both the good and the evil thereof

Islam and Revelation:

The Qur'an and the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad emphasized a Muslim's inclusive belief in all Revelation from Noah to Muhammad.

3. Islam's Basic Values

- Islam has a holistic approach to the wellbeing of a Muslim's spiritual, moral, and physical values
- Peace
- Sanctity of human life
- Sanctity of property
- Respect for an protection of minorities
- Right to liberty
- Excellence
- Sacrifice
- Mercy
- Truth
- Beauty
- Justice
- Humility
- Brotherhood/sisterhood
- Respect for human dignity
- Compassion and solidarity with the poor, the homeless and those in need

4. How those values are expressed in daily life (worship, prayer, community, etc.):

Muslim's are supposed to and, like their brothers and sister in other traditions, most strive, with various degrees of success and failure, to live up to those values in their families, workplaces, communities and in their relations with all people. The closest they achieve this is during the *Hajj* where the global Muslim *umma* (community) is united in its focus on worshipping Allah and where even negative intentions are forbidden and can spoil the effort.

5. How Islam would describe a "just" society (i.e. democracy, theocracy):

- A just society is one where the rule of law enshrines and protects all the above values
- A society where the rule of law is respectful of Divine Revelations
- A society that protects its most vulnerable
- A society that is God-centered and spiritually, morally, and materially balanced
- A society where people in power practice it, understanding Divine law, and in response to it, rather than in response to their narrow interests, whims, and egos.
- A society of the middle, not of extremes

SALAM...SUDAN FOUNDATION

“When people’s awareness is raised about that is positive in other cultures, religions and civilizations—understanding becomes possible and cooperation becomes natural.”

Hashim El-Tinay, Founder and President

WHAT IS SALAM SUDAN FOUNDATION?

Slam (Peace) Sudan is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit cultural foundation, dedicated to promoting a genuine universal culture of peace, dignity, and democracy, human, and cultural rights for all in the 21st century.

We strive to achieve this through cross-cultural, inter-religious and development-focused research, reflection, dialogue and education using state-of-the-art methods of technology and communication. Our emphasis is on that which unites us, endeavoring with mercy, respect and love to comprehend our diversity.

VISION:

Contribute to the global effort against all violence and terror by facilitating a compassionate dialogue of cultures, civilizations and religions.

OBJECTIVES:

- Collaborate to raise awareness about Africa and the Middle East in the U.S. and about the U.S. and the West in Africa and the Middle East through research, presentations, conferences and joint civil society initiatives.
- Contribute to a renewed African and Middle Eastern Policy Initiative, aiming at qualitatively improving the relationship between Africa, the Middle East, the U.S. and the West by promoting policy debates and public education activities.
- Establish a more enlightened agenda for international policies for peace, security, democracy, and prosperity for all.

Salam...Sudan Foundation urges all Americans, particularly the nation’s spiritual, intellectual, political, business, and community leaders, to join us as partners as we work to build a bridge of solid and enlightened understanding and genuine cooperation and partnership between the United States of America, the West and the rest.

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Sunday, March 17, 2002

7:00 p.m.

Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation

1441 Wiehle Avenue

Reston, Virginia 20190

703-437-7733

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 we come to the painful realization that our faith communities do not know enough about one another. To begin understanding each other's traditions, we have assembled a panel of highly qualified speakers from three Abrahamic religions to discuss what unites us and what divides us.

Our speakers are: **Michael L. Feshbach**, Senior Rabbi at Temple Shalom, a Reform Jewish Congregation in Chevy Chase, MD; **Father John Langan**, S.J., Ph.D., the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Professor of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University; **David Aikman**, Senior Fellow with the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.; and **Hashim El-Tinay**, Founder and President of the Salam Sudan Foundation in Washington, D.C..

The free event, which is open to the public, is sponsored by the Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, Shoresim Jewish Community, and St. Thomas a Becket Catholic Church.

To our speakers, we offer the following additional information to help you in preparing your participation:

Format of the program. Our moderator/facilitator for the evening is Rabbi Rosalind A. Gold, who has guided the NVHC community for the past 20 years. The first hour of the program will be devoted to prepared remarks by each of our speakers. For the sake of time, we respectfully request that you limit your prepared remarks to 15 minutes. Following that formal portion of the program, we will break for refreshments in the Social Hall. When we reconvene, you will be asked to respond to questions from the audience. When they arrive, audience members will be given cards on which to write their questions, which they will submit during the refreshment break. Rabbi Gold will read the questions and direct them to the appropriate person(s) for response. We expect this Q&A portion of the evening to be 45 minutes and one hour.

Order of speakers. We ask that you each speak for 15 minutes according to the following schedule: Rabbi Feshbach; Father Langan; Mr. El-Tinay; Mr. Aikman.

Speaking points. Because time is limited, we ask that you focus your prepared remarks on a number of points of what we hope will illuminate concepts that unite our faith communities.

- Brief overview of your faith's origins
- Summary of your faith's basic beliefs/ how it perceives Revelation
- Summary of your faith's basic values
- How those values are expressed in daily life (i.e. worship, prayer, community, etc.)
- How your faith would describe a "just" society (i.e. democracy, theocracy)

Q&A points. The open-ended nature of this portion of the program will be undoubtedly open the conversation to topics beyond those in the prepared remarks. Topics that you might expect to hear include:

- How your faith regards other faiths/non-believers
- Your faith's approach to interfaith marriage
- Your faith's opinion regarding the legitimacy of the State of Israel
- The teachings of your religious schools as they pertain to other faiths