

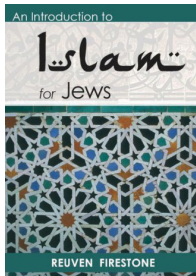
Rabbi Teaches AAi Seminar Helping Jews Understand Muslims



Devotion to God, a heart for justice, and adherence to scriptural commands — including dietary restrictions — are just a few commonalities shared by Jews and Muslims worldwide. They also share the challenges of living as a religious minority in the United States.

Starting next year, Rabbi Reuven Firestone of Los Angeles-based Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion plans to unveil an intensive new seminar that will allow fellow Jews to learn more about their Muslim neighbors. Synagogues will be able to host the seminar, which eventually will be video recorded and accessible online, similar to AAi's Loving Muslim Neighbors seminar now available to Christians.

Firestone is Professor of Medieval Judaism and Islam at HUC and author of several books on Jewish-Muslim relations, including *An Introduction to Islam for Jews* and *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims*. He lectures internationally on Jewish-Muslim relations, and serves as co-director of the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement at the University of Southern California. Work on his AAi seminar is underway and slated for availability in 2014. ●



From left, Rabbi Joshua Berkenwald, Pastor Larry Albright, and Imam Mubasher Ahmad “trialogue” about what the Bible and Qur’an say about compassion.

Triologue: Rabbi, Pastor and Imam discuss... Serving Humanity

by Jonathan Partridge

When it comes to the topic of compassion, Jews, Christians, and Muslims largely believe the same thing, attendees discovered at an Abrahamic Religions Triologue called together by AAi and hosted at Congregation Sinai in San Jose on Oct. 20.

More than 150 people filled the Conservative synagogue to hear a rabbi, pastor, and imam share what the Bible and Qur’an say about serving those in need. Each speaker stressed the need for action above words, noting that their faith groups often were far from perfect in carrying out these commands.

“We all have the responsibility to encourage one another and our people to move from not just saying the right thing and maybe praying the right thing, but also doing the right thing,” said Rev. Larry Albright, worship pastor at San Jose’s Lincoln Glen Church, conveying the views of all speakers that night. Albright, who spoke on perspectives he gained from the Mennonite tradition, joined Rabbi Joshua Berkenwald of Congregation Sinai and Imam Mubasher Ahmad of Baitul Basir Mosque in Milpitas.

The Rev. D. Andrew Kille, chair of the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council, moderated the event. Berkenwald opened the discussion, saying “a concern for the other” has been a central theme within Judaism from the very beginning. He noted that the Torah had 36 verses dealing with treatment of the orphan, the widow and the stranger, representing those who are

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San Jose Jews, Christians and Muslims Unite to Serve Three Part Harmony

by Loureen Murphy

In February, three San Jose faith communities—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—united to listen and learn from one another. From that new place of friendship, they worked side-by-side, blending their efforts to serve the needy.

Congregation Sinai, under the leadership of Rabbi Joshua Berkenwald, hosted the three groups for a time of orientation and meal preparation. Hosting was a natural choice, says the rabbi, because his faith community participates monthly in different social action projects. Sinai members also enjoy interacting with those of other faiths who share their values of feeding the hungry and helping the less fortunate.

Different generations also contributed to the harmonious fusion of souls—teens comprised about half of Congregation Sinai's contingent. Muslim and Christian youth joined as well, along with others decades older. Together they devoted themselves to friendship building, food preparation, and serving the needy.

Planners of the tri-faith event were careful to ensure the menu and its preparation were both kosher and halal (see pages 3 and 5 for details).

Yasmin Vanya of the South Bay Islamic Association served as an event coordinator, helping weave together many practical aspects of the gathering, including grocery shopping. "I got a list from the rabbi of kosher things I could buy," Vanya said. "He even told me where to get kosher bread, and what kosher symbols to look for on various food labels."

Then, under the supervision of Congregation Sinai chefs, a mixed group of helpers prepared lasagna and side dishes to satisfy homeless guests and volunteers at Cityteam Men's Recovery Center. Christian and Muslim volunteers quickly learned which utensils and areas of the synagogue kitchen were appropriate for meal preparation.

Cutting, cooking, and conversation filled much of the afternoon, but not all. Because the orientation and meal preparation coincided with

Muslim afternoon prayers, Rabbi Berkenwald set apart an area of the synagogue for Muslims to kneel and pray. This open-hearted hospitality set the tone for the entire time together.

Before dinner was served, prayers of thanksgiving in Hebrew and English joined those recited in Arabic by Fatma Elashmawi of South Bay Islamic Association.

"I'm a firm believer that we should not pretend we're all the same ... so I asked Pastor Albright and Yasmin to recite a blessing meaningful to their tradition," Rabbi Berkenwald explained. "That way we're really sharing. We carried it out, and I think it was a successful part of the program."

Pastor Larry Albright of Lincoln Glen Church prayed on behalf of the Christian participants. He agreed that when each group prays aloud, "it honors all present." With sensitivity to those of other faiths, "everyone is praying to the God of Abraham," so everyone connects. It also serves a primary goal: "building bridges of peace," he said.

Conversations among the three Silicon Valley faith communities continue, as does compassionate collaboration. Congregation Sinai hosted "Serving Humanity and its Challenges: An Abrahamic Religions Dialogue" on Oct. 20 (see page 1). Participating faith communities then put their words into practice the following week with another meal service event at Cityteam. ●

Enjoy a 3-minute video of this event at www.abrahamicalliance.org/aai/arcs-video



What is Kosher?

by Rabbi Simcha Green



The Jewish religion calls for the observance of dietary laws as per the words found in Torah. These are known as the laws of Kosher. The basic

elements of this law as observed by Orthodox Jews is as follows.

Meat-only animals that have both split hooves and chew their cud are considered kosher. A pig indeed has split hooves, but does not chew its cud; therefore, pork in any form is not kosher.

A kosher animal is “killed” quickly with an extremely sharp knife with no nicks at all, cutting the jugular vein in one swift motion. The animal is then checked to ascertain that there is no internal disease or malformation. The next step is to remove blood by first soaking in cold water, and then placing coarse salt on the meat to draw out the blood. The final step is another wash to remove the surface blood. The meat is now *kosher* (fit to be eaten).

Poultry is considered meat, so the above instructions apply. Non-scavenger birds such as chicken and turkey are considered kosher when prepared in the above manner.

However, no dairy product can come in contact with kosher meat. Kosher meat cannot be cooked in an oven, pot, or any vessel in which non-kosher meat or dairy has been prepared. Milk from kosher animals is deemed both kosher and dairy. Dairy products such as cottage cheese, ice cream, yogurt, and so on, are acceptable only if no non-kosher ingredient is used in their production.

Fruit and vegetables are always kosher if there are no bugs in them, with the exception of grape products, for which special laws apply. Water is always kosher.

Jews today are fortunate that many companies sell meat that has been prepared in this manner, and supermarkets often carry such foods. Many organizations supervise the production of kosher products, easily identified by official symbols that appear on food packaging. Even popular candies and cookies certify their products as kosher (cf. www.kosherquest.org/symbols.php).

When dining out, a Jew observing kosher laws dines in a restaurant that identifies itself as kosher, rather than one that serves “kosher style” food.

What is Halal?

by Nadim Rahman

Halal, by definition, is any object or action that is lawful and permissible. This term covers not only food and drink, but all aspects of daily life. Regarding food, it specifies what is allowed and forbidden, and how it must be prepared. For meat, halal requires that slaughter be performed while invoking the name of God; the animal must be slaughtered while conscious; and blood from its veins must be drained. Processed foods that contain animal byproducts, as well as non-food items such as cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, must also be halal. Pork, blood, already dead animals, and those sacrificed to foreign gods are prohibited. Consumption of shellfish and other bottom crawlers, while permissible, is discouraged.

Some explain that halal meat protects us from the harmful effects of blood that must be drained from the meat. The deeper emphasis of this requirement is found in the Holy Qur’an, which prohibits animals from being killed by strangling or by a violent blow. Pain is supposed to be minimized for the animal, so the responsibility of the Muslim is increased. Eating, as everything else in Muslim daily life, is an act of worship. These requirements and restrictions are supposed to promote purity and integrity in life. They therefore include connotations of cleanliness, compassion, and self-restraint.

In the United States, especially in California, halal meat is readily available at most Pakistani or Middle Eastern grocery stores and restaurants, but generally it’s much easier to find kosher products at stores. Qur’an 5:5 states that “all good things have been made lawful for you, and the food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them.” Therefore, many Muslims consider kosher meat or meat eaten by Christians to be permissible for Muslims, except for that specifically forbidden by the Qur’an. When the origin of permissible meat is unknown, most conservative Muslims tend to avoid it. Others believe that meat becomes halal when the name of God is invoked over it. Muslims are called to remember God before consuming anything, including vegetables and fruit. When there is absolutely no other food available, then non-halal food is also permissible.





Meet a Member:

by Loureen Murphy

Pastor Larry Albright

Pastor Larry Albright has participated in more than a dozen service events with Abrahamamic Alliance International. He's always engaged in friendly conversation, with his beaming smile putting others at ease. I asked Larry how his service with AAi has impacted his life.

Loureen: How did you first learn about AAi and its mission?

Larry: When Rod Cardoza and his family started attending our church, I got acquainted with them through the children's choir I direct. As I got to know Rod, I began to see the great vision he has for peace among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I wanted in.

LM: What was your first step on the journey?

LA: I took his Loving Muslim Neighbors seminar on Thursday nights. Afterwards, I saw a whole other world of involvement with people.

LM: What happened next?

LA: My wife and I, along with other folks from our church, attended an

AAi event at the Pacifica Institute. Eventually, I made several Muslim friends. I didn't have any before.

LM: How did that come about?

LA: I got involved in planning an AAi service event. During one of our planning meetings, I mentioned that I play basketball. One of the Muslim men asked if he could join me, and of course, I said yes. The friendship kept developing, and his family had us over for *iftar* dinner during Ramadan. We've participated together in several service projects now, and I always look forward to spending time together.

LM: Your leadership also helped open the door for the seminar to be hosted at your church. How have the seminar, new friendships, and these service projects affected your sense of who God is?

LA: First, he is a loving God who is reaching out to all, regardless of theological background. He continues to initiate and reach out to us. It has broadened my view of how profound God's love really is. He is the God for us all, reaching out to us through his Word. It also made me feel I have a lot of room to grow because it exposed a huge area where I've had questions. In the end, I've experienced the greatness of God more deeply in my life.

LM: It sounds like these experiences have really opened you up. What else have you learned?

LA: To Muslims, their faith is everything. I see their devotion to prayer and wonder, do we have the same devotion? I wonder where that same passion is in our own circles.

LM: What would you say to others who are intrigued by the work of AAi?

LA: God is opening many doors for all of us right now, as we break down stereotypes and work together for peace. It's wonderful to collaborate in building peace by serving those in need together. It's a great way forward. ●

Larry at a Glance

Home: San Jose, Calif.

Faith Community: Christian

Work: Worship Pastor, Lincoln Glen Church

Favorite Sports Team: Los Angeles Dodgers

Latest Adventure: Participating in a Triologue panel discussion at a local synagogue with a Jewish rabbi and Muslim imam.

"It's wonderful to collaborate in building peace by serving those in need together." —Larry



Peace is Not the Same as Love

by Rabbi Simcha Green

The three Abrahamic faiths all seek peace for mankind, yet it is obvious that achieving this goal of peace is not an easy task. Let me share with you the Jewish concept.

The Bible begins in the very first verse by teaching us how to achieve peace. The text says that God created the heavens. The Hebrew word for heavens here is *shamayim*. It is a word consisting of two Hebrew terms: *aish*, which means fire, and *mayim*, which means water. Herein the Bible is teaching that the Creator took two elements that cannot usually coexist and merged them together peacefully. We know that normally either fire evaporates water or water extinguishes fire. So the message is clear: while achieving peace is not easy, it is certainly possible, according to the Holy Text.

Henry Kissinger loves to tell this story about his first visit as Secretary of State to China. He was impressed by many things on that visit, but the most memorable was his trip to the zoo. There, in one cage, were both a lion and a lamb. Throughout the remainder of his stay, he could not get that image out of his mind. He was so impressed that on his way to the airport for his return to the USA, Kissinger asked to be taken once again to the zoo. Once there, he inquired how it was possible to have these two “enemy animals” together in one cage. The Chinese responded, “Now you see how brilliant a people we are.” But Kissinger persisted in asking the secret of such a success.

Finally, they shared it with him, saying, “Every five minutes, we put in a new lamb.”

Abrahamic Alliance International is dedicated to the proposition that we can, that we must, succeed in bringing peace to the world, not just the image of it as in Kissinger’s tale. We are not necessarily asked to love one another equally, but we are surely challenged by our mutual faiths to seek peace, to pursue peace.

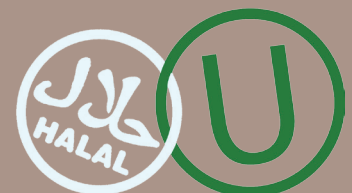
“AAi is dedicated to the proposition that we can, that we must, succeed in bringing peace to the world.”

The Bible and the Qur’an call us to understand that we, too, can achieve this difficult task. The rewards are great, but the time is short. The concept of an alliance is that we all work together toward a common goal. The first step toward a successful alliance is understanding the ways and customs of the other without prejudgement.

So let us learn from one another. Let us also learn *with* one another. And because the Bible and Qur’an also call us to compassionately serve the poor, suffering, and marginalized, let us learn from one another while serving them together. Then we will experience a foretaste of the new world to come, a world whose beauty can be likened unto that first day when God reconciled fire with water to create the heavens and the earth. ●

Kosher & Halal Symbols

	Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (“OU”) www.oukosher.org
	Chicago Rabbinical Council (cRc) www.crcweb.org
	KOF-K Kosher www.kof-k.org
	Triangle-K www.trianglek.org
	Star-K Kosher www.star-k.org
	Star-D Kosher Certification
	The Organized Kashrut Laboratories www.ok.org
	The Kashruth Council of Canada www.cor.ca
	Muslim Consumer Group
	The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) www.ifanca.org
	Halal Food Council halalfoodcouncilusa.com
	Generic halal symbol



Turkish Muslims Open Homes for Ramadan

by Jonathan Partridge

Muslims were not the only people to celebrate the breaking of the fast during Ramadan this year. Jews, Christians, and others in the Bay Area and Southern California also commemorated the occasion with members of Pacifica Institute, a Turkish-American Muslim community, who opened their homes during the holy month. Pacifica members extended the invitation “to gather communities of different faith traditions where we can sit down, discuss and find solutions for our daily problems in society,” explained Mahmut Altun, the Northern California Pacifica Institute director, who hosted an *iftar* in his home.

Members of the institute have opened their homes to non-Muslims to celebrate *iftar*—or the nightly breaking of fast during Ramadan—since the inception of Pacifica Institute in 2003, representatives said. “It started when we invited a few families over during Ramadan, and they turned out to be successful and very friendly,” Altun recalled.

This year, most of Pacifica

Institute’s members were involved in the outreach efforts, said Mehmet Sen of Pacifica Institute Silicon Valley. The gatherings contribute to cultural understanding and help educate non-Muslims about Ramadan, Sen said. “These kinds of things are really good for us,” he affirmed.

In addition to gatherings at members’ homes, the Pacifica Institute hosted larger, more formal *iftars* that included various community and faith leaders. That included an Aug. 1 dinner in Sunnyvale with talks by Pastor Robert McKee of St. Luke’s Lutheran Church and Rev. D. Andrew Kille of the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council. A June 26 dinner included participation from Jewish members of Keddem Congregation of Palo Alto. These events attracted several civic leaders as well, including the mayors of San Jose and Milpitas, 24th District State Assemblyman Rich Gordon, Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith, and Santa Clara County Deputy Fire Chief John Justice.

In Irvine, the Pacifica Institute hosted an *iftar* on July 26 that

simultaneously served as a Friday evening Shabbat service hosted by Rabbi Arnold Rachlis of University Synagogue. After breaking fast together, Muslim and Jewish attendees joined hands while singing prayers from a Jewish prayerbook.

According to Sen, community *iftars* provide a good opportunity for conversation, and allow members to mingle with folks they might not meet on an everyday basis. *Iftars* also provide an occasion for busy people to renew friendships over a tasty meal, so Sen invited all Christian and Jewish volunteers with whom Pacifica Institute members had served over the years at AAi events. “We are always delighted to see our volunteers invite each other to community events after serving together,” said Rod Cardoza, executive director of Abrahamic Alliance International, “especially when opening their homes during holiday celebrations.”

Steve Herrera, a deacon at Church of the Transfiguration in San Jose, said he enjoyed having a traditional Turkish *iftar* meal at the Altun family’s house during Ramadan. Herrera, who attended the gathering with his wife and with a Jewish friend, was struck by the Altun family’s hospitality. It simply felt like a gathering of friends, he said.

Altun, who said that one purpose of Ramadan is to “be more helpful and (share) what you have with others,” added that Pacifica Institute members plan to continue hosting non-Muslims during Ramadan in the future. “The positive feedback we get from guests and hosts encourages us to do more,” he said. ●

The Pacifica Institute, a Los Angeles-based organization, follows the principles of cross-cultural awareness and dialogue promoted by Turkish spiritual leader Fethullah Gülen. It has chapters throughout California and Nevada.



Pacifica Institute members gather with Jews during a joint *iftar* and Shabbat service on July 26 at University Synagogue in Irvine.

marginalized in society. “Ritual is meaningless if it does not inspire us to serve others,” said Berkenwald.

Albright spoke next, recalling that many churches he’s attended focused on right believing rather than right action. He was thankful to have found the Mennonite Church, which also labors to promote peace. Albright referenced Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25, which states God will judge people based on whether they looked after the needy in society, particularly the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the prisoner, and those who need clothes. He also cited James 2:20, declaring “faith without works is dead.”

“Offering prayer to God and offering one’s possessions to serve others are two fundamental principles of Islam, and both are closely connected to each other,” said Imam Ahmad. He cited Qur’an 2:177, which states that someone is not righteous for praying toward the east or the west, but based on whether he or she believed in God and his message and has cared for the orphans, needy, and wayfarer. Other Qur’anic verses emphasize visiting sick and grief-stricken families, providing medical help, removing illiteracy, and treating animals and the environment well because they are created by God, Ahmad said.

Though all speakers said acts of compassion were an essential component to their faith, they stressed this was easier said than done. For instance, while Leviticus 19:18 commands us to “love your neighbor as yourself,” it is not always clear who one’s neighbor is, Berkenwald said. To preserve a Jewish way of life, it’s necessary to separate oneself at times, particularly during times of persecution, he said. During these times, one’s neighbor is often defined as a fellow Jew. At other times, one’s neighbor is defined as “one’s fellow



From left, Salma Javed of Baitul Basir Mosque and Cathy Kincl of Lincoln Glen Church enjoy a time of conversation following the Oct. 20 Trialogue at Congregation Sinai.

human being.” “All human beings regardless of their religion, skin color, ethnicity or gender are fundamentally equal and contain a divine spark,” Berkenwald said. “To harm another person is to harm God.”

Albright talked about the inner struggles many people face, such as remaining content in a world that promotes materialism. Ahmad noted the cultural challenges of looking after one’s neighbor in the United States, as people often do not know their next-door neighbors.

Attendees kept the conversation going after the event, dining on kosher and halal refreshments while forging new friendships.

Aftab Jamil of Baitul Basir Mosque noted that this Trialogue was different from other forums in which differences between groups are emphasized. He was amazed to discover that Muslims and Jews even use almost identical terminology, as the Hebrew *tzedekah* and Arabic *sadaqah* both refer to acts of charity. Congregation Sinai member Hal Hubris noted that the messages presented by Berkenwald, Albright, and Ahmad were “almost interchangeable.”

Some attendees hoped the event

could serve as a springboard for future activities. Amberlie Ridnour, outreach director at Community Church of God in San Jose, exchanged contact information with Jamil after the event, hoping to plan a future event with Baitul Basir Mosque.

Berkenwald, who said during the presentation that some synagogue members were nervous about hosting the event, was pleased with the turnout. He noted that the Trialogue was to end at 9 PM, but people were conversing until well after 10 PM.

“We serve the poor together under the umbrella of peace, changing the world one friendship at a time.”

Congregation Sinai, Lincoln Glen Church, and Baitul Basir Mosque put the Trialogue’s message into action the following week,

when they united at a soup kitchen in San Jose to serve over 200 meals to the homeless. Representatives from the three congregations all indicated a desire to conduct similar events together with AAi in the future. “We serve the poor together under the umbrella of peace, changing the world one friendship at a time,” Albright said during the Trialogue. “My encouragement is to continue to serve humanity together.”

Watch complete Trialogue online at abrahamicalliance.org/aai/trialogue

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Help us unite Jews, Christians, and Muslims to serve communities, build peace, and save lives.



OlivA is the newsletter of Abrahamic Alliance International, aiming to reveal the bountiful harvest of charity and righteousness (Hebrew תְּדָקָה *tzedakah*, Arabic صدقة *sadaqah*) produced by a growing movement of Jews, Christians, and Muslims uniting to serve communities, build peace and save lives.

Editor in ChiefRod Cardoza
 Editorial Director....Loureen Murphy
 Senior Editor.....Rabbi Simcha Aaron Green
 Associate Editor....Jonathan Partridge
 Design.....Alicia Deguchi

About AAi

Abrahamic Alliance International is a faith-based, nonprofit organization uniting Jews, Christians, and Muslims for active peacebuilding and poverty relief. AAi builds peace by uniting Jews, Christians, and Muslims to serve the poor, suffering, and marginalized together in a context of compassion.

Interested in attending or hosting a Loving Neighbors Seminar?

Contact AAi at info@abrahamicalliance.org or call +1(408)728-8943



Something I Learned about Muslims...

“There’s more understanding than fear for me now.”

— Eric Lo, Intern, Regeneration Church, Oakland, Calif. after attending AAi’s Loving Muslim Neighbors seminar