
How Shall I Know Islam?

Worship Theme for February, 2017

Unitarian Church of Edmonton



We ♥ our Muslim neighbors

Opening Words

The Everything Seed. It existed before the sun, the moon, and the planets. It gave rise to all of these. And all things in the universe, from the smallest child to the greatest galaxy, carry a little of that very fine seed inside of them. - Carole Martignacco

Introduction

“Islam: a religion of peace” George W. Bush. You, he said that, just after 9-11. And yet we are constantly assaulted by media that demonizes this second largest faith in the world. It is incumbent on us to learn more about the actual religion, and to learn about the perverters of this beautiful and simple faith who wreak terror on the world (as do twisted Christians, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists, by the way).

Services for February

February 5th “The Everything Seed: A Story Begins” Chorealis and Harmonia, February 12th “Exploring Islam” Rev. Audrey Brooks with speaker, Salima Versi., February 19th “Islam: Religion of Peace” Rev. Brian J. Kiely, February 26th “Islam: Fanatics Reality and Hopeful Future” Rev. Brian J. Kiely

A MUSLIM PRAYER FOR PEACE

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful.

Praise be to the Lord of the Universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations, that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other. If the enemy incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace, and trust in God, for the Lord is the one that heareth and knoweth all things. And the servants of God, Most Gracious are those who walk on the Earth in humility, and when we address them, we say “PEACE.”

—Based on the Koran, 49:13, 8:61

Reflection Questions- For private reflection or conversation.

How much do I know about the faith of Islam? How much contact do I have with Muslim individuals? How do I respond when I hear the words Muslim or Islam? Do I feel fear? Hope? Warm feelings? If I hear friends, family or neighbours speak negatively about Muslims how do I react? How do I wish to react?



Reflection Jessica Vasquez Torres

Source of Wisdom who is known by many names;
The Prophet Mohammed asks: What actions are most excellent?
To gladden the heart of a human being;
To feed the hungry;
To help the afflicted;
To lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful;
To remove the wrongs of the injured;
Let us not forget.

TO SERVE THE PEOPLE

By Saadi Shirazi

To worship God is nothing other than to serve the people.
It does not need rosaries, prayer carpets, or robes.
All peoples are members of the same body, created from one essence.
If fate brings suffering to one member
The others cannot stay at rest.

Spiritual Gems of Islam, Rev. Anthony Makar

We begin with a remarkable story about George de Benneville, who in later years would become a leading prophet of Universalism in America. But our story takes place long before that, when he was a much younger man and travelling the world. In his own words, he says,

Being arrived at Algiers, as I walked upon deck I saw some Moors [an antique way of saying "Muslims"] who brought some refreshments to sell. One of them slipped down and tore a piece out of one of his legs. Two of his companions, having lain him on the deck, each of them kissed the wound, shedding tears upon it, then turned towards the rising of the sun, they cried in such a manner that I was much moved with anger at their making such a noise and ordered my waiter to bring them before me. Upon demanding the reason of their noise, they perceived that I was angry, asked my pardon, and told me the cause was owing to one

of their brothers having hurt his leg by a fall and that they kissed the wound in order to sympathize with him, and likewise shed tears upon it and took part with him; and as tears were saltish, they [were] a good remedy to heal the same; and the reason of their turning towards the sun's rising was to invoke him who created the sun to have compassion upon their poor brother, and prayed he would please to heal him. Upon that I was so convinced, and moved within, that I thought my heart would break, and that my life was about to leave me. My eyes were filled with tears, and I felt such an internal condemnation, that I was obliged to cry out and say, "Are these Heathens? No; I confess before God they are Christians, and I myself am a Heathen!"

Picture it. The young George de Benneville, sitting there at his table on the deck of a ship in port at Algiers, and he sees people who are completely Other to him. He is a Christian, and he knows God loves him. But those strange Muslims? Noisy. Bothering him. Going to hell. But then the remarkable exchange takes place. The Muslims explain their noise, their tears, their turning towards the sun's rising, and suddenly it dawns upon the young George de Benneville that he does not have exclusive rights to being human and being good. ...

That's what I call a spiritual gem of Islam. ..But there's another takeaway from the story. How so many people today can be just like the young George De Benneville in their snap-judgment dismissal of Islam. Muslims are noisy. Muslims are Other. "Waiter, bring them before me!" we say imperiously, so we can interrogate Them.

One way this tendency to "Other" manifests is in the anxiety around what to do with figures like Osama bin Laden and suicide bombers when you are trying to appreciate what is positive and good about the faith. Such destructive figures loom large in our imaginations. It feels we can't get to the good stuff unless, first of all, we put the bad in some kind of decontamination zone.

Well, all I will say is that, in appreciating the good things about Christianity, few to no one feels any anxiety about having to first explain the Ku Klux Klan. It's because we know that Christianity and Christians are only human.

From Islam to Unitarian Universalism Hafidha Acuay

I did not begin to seriously question the religion I was taught until I reached my late teens. I was a devout believer... I had a beautiful childhood, and my adolescence, while plagued by loneliness and a depression I kept hidden from everyone, was innocent and full of dreams. But in young adulthood, as I became exposed to more and more Muslims, and to the rise of a strict interpretation of Islam known as Wahhabism, an uneasiness developed in my heart.

For most of my life, I had loved God and feared Him as the Qur'an repeatedly commands. I spoke to Him directly and believed that He was aware of all. I was raised in a practicing Muslim family, and my parents held moderate views. Raised in American society, they were aware of the realities of living among non-Muslims... My father wore a beard to cover his face, but asked my mother to stop wearing the face veil after they married because of the amount of negative attention it attracted. We watched television, listened to Motown music, and took photographs.

We were also very observant, following all dietary laws, praying profusely, and regularly giving charity, even when we could have used it ourselves. From my parents I heard about “crazy” Muslims who committed violence in the streets because they had come into Islam with all of their pre-Islamic rage and ignorance; oppressive Muslims who viewed their wives and daughters as property; wealthier Muslims who looked down on American converts and believed that the whiter one’s skin, the better one was. I had heard about all of these things and more, but had rarely seen them with my own eyes. As a young adult I began to come into contact with some of what my parents had cautioned me about.

...For a long time, leaving Islam was not an option. So far as I knew, no one had ever left Islam who was not wicked... Still, I came up against ugliness that belied the beautiful aspects of Islam I had been taught by my parents. I had dreamed that I would be Muslim until and beyond my last breath, but the dream was fading. From time to time I would meet wonderful Muslims truly embodying their faith, but most of these people stayed away from the Muslim “community.” Something was seriously wrong with that picture...I lost my faith.



...As a child I was absolutely certain that Islam was the *sirat al-mustaqim*, the straight path to success in this life and the next. I prayed to Allah fervently and loved listening to accounts of the prophets, the companions, and the afterlife. My faith in Allah was firm throughout my adolescence, but it was during this time that non-Islamic ideals probably took root in me.

...In the years since I’ve become involved as a Unitarian Universalist, I’ve created a new life for myself. Coworkers have remarked that I am “completely different.” I used to avoid eye contact and was so soft-spoken that I was always asked to repeat what I’d just said. Although I was taught to have pride in myself as a Muslim woman, it did not look like pride to others; they read my modesty and bashfulness as repression. Today, even my parents are happy; this is how I know they love me. My mother told me that she and my father were proud of the person I had become. To have this acceptance from my Muslim parents is a true gift; I have seen even my non-Muslim friends fight for unconditional love from their parents.

But I have to be intentional about not repeating the same patterns as a UU that I fell into as a Muslim, getting so caught up in administrative duties and maintaining an institution that I forget to ask myself the questions that caused me so much agony as a Muslim. I became a UU in order to draw those questions out, but too often I find myself not exploring them in full. ...I have given up any hope of being “normal.” Being a UU doesn’t solve my problems, but it allows me to practice living with hope. Unitarian Universalism is a religion that can change. Its past is not the mold for the future. Its texts can be expanded. When I feel at odds with the company I keep, I can speak up. Possibility is always present; the future is open to us. That is a faith I can embrace.