

REFLECTIONS – INTERFAITH BOOK CLUB

Being a part of the Interfaith Book Club at the Islamic Center of Boston (Wayland), offers me the opportunity to come together with others of the Abrahamic faiths to discuss issues that are important in our lives. We are able to talk about the conflicts that are creating a separation between people of different faiths throughout the world in Israel, Palestine and the Middle East. Together we are able to share with one another the tenets of our faiths and to speak with honesty and ask questions without concern that we are being judgmental.

Through these monthly meetings we deepen our understanding that we are three faiths with one GOD, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We are able to discover how much we share in common, tear down the barriers that exist between us and develop a deeper understanding and respect for one another.

Joan B. Gay
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Framingham

In the spring of 2008 I first joined the Interfaith Book Group started by Shaheen Akhtar of the Islamic Center of Boston, and immediately noticed the wide variety of Faith Traditions represented in that small library: Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist, Unitarian, Congregational, Jewish and of course Muslim. Some of us had in fact journeyed from one tradition to another: for example, Protestant to Muslim, and Quaker to Jewish. But all of us seemed intrigued by one common focus of the people gathered in that room: the **importance** of religion in our lives.

The book, **What's Right with Islam** by Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, gave many of us a new understanding of how Islam is being practiced in the West, and how many key Muslim concepts are the same as the US Constitution's, like equality, justice and the pursuit of happiness. We immediately determined how often Islam was indeed similar to the other Abrahamic religions in their rituals and stories – and how, for example, because of Islam's deep reverence for **other** religious leaders, various prophets like Moses and Jesus are always honored by Muslims!

Articulating how Islam and other traditions are **different** was also an important discussion. And in one of our earliest Book Group meetings, I am happy to report that we arrived at a critical and perhaps revolutionary insight:

“Your religion is a very **serious**,
Very **personal choice**.”

Why revolutionary? If... all people within a diverse religious group could appreciate the **seriousness** of the other person's spiritual practice, **mutual respect** would be the foundation of our discourse. If... people within such a group or

community could apprehend how highly personal and idiosyncratic the other's choice of religion must be, then mutual respect for how the other person cultivates her/his relationship with God (and what could be more unknowable or mysterious?!) would be the baseline for our discussions amongst, as my Muslim friends say, all of us "as sisters and brothers."

Rob Woods
Temple Beth El, Sudbury

I've been attending the Interfaith Book Group for over three years, now. I'm a Jewish member, whose faith community is the synagogue B'nai Or of Boston, which meets in Newton Center. In the Interfaith Book Group I've learned so much about the faiths and practices of Christians and Muslims, as well as some differing perspectives of some fellow Jews. One thing that has helped is our starting each formal session with a special non-denominational, but by no means bland, prayer that we read together. We have, over the course of our wide-ranging discussions, developed a deep sense of respect for the sincerity of the group members. And, by listening carefully before jumping in to comment, we have been able to develop deeper connections. I always look forward to the monthly meeting - it's one of the high points of the month for me.

David Grinstein
Waltham

Dear Shaheen,
Thank you for being an inspirational force and creating the *Interfaith Reading Group* in Wayland, MA. I look forward to these monthly meetings held on Sunday either at Temple Shir Tikva or the Islamic Center. To be able to sit with others from a variety of different religious backgrounds and perspectives enriches me. Listening, commenting and sharing enhance my knowledge. My appreciation of the diversity and complexity of religious beliefs has been expanded. Also, my understanding has been furthered that these systems, despite their structural and implementable differences, all represent an identical attempt of all human beings to find meaning, relevance and comfort in the challenge of being alive. Keep on working to bring peace, love, compassion and understanding into the lives of people across what too often proves to be interfaith boundaries.

Judith Rosenberg
Newton