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- Home
- Business
- Opinion
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Lifestyle
- Features
- Farm & Garden
- Home & Family
- Food
- Sudoku
- Classifieds
- Employment
- Job Fetch
- Top Jobs
- Real Estate
- Obituaries
- Archives
- Communities
- Forums
- NIE
- Photography
- Customer Service
- Subscriptions
- Services
- History
- Contact Us

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Smaller Text | Normal Text | Larger Text

A call for dialogue

Published on September 3, 2006

If one were to believe morning news and the pictures of the recent events in the Middle East, one would have to conclude that we are at the dawn of a clash of religions and civilizations.--

The three Middle Eastern and monotheistic religions have been used to advocate hate, when they can be used to advocate love and co-existence. We can make a historic decision to succeed in our dialogue efforts -- if not internationally, at least here in our beautiful county.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam each claims the same historical legacy within the prophetic tradition, although each may interpret specific historical and prophetic events differently. While each of the three religions has dogma unique to itself, the core is essentially similar.

In Judaism, the word shalom is derived from the word shalem, which means complete, and perfection; therefore peace in Judaism means perfection and completion. Perfections of three levels of relationships to which one aspires: between man and himself, between man and his fellow man, and between the nation of Israel and all other nations.

In Christianity, one would read how Jesus manifested unconditional love for all people. He gave himself to save sinners. He called his disciples to love their enemies, to rely only on faith. Above all, Jesus called on one to judge himself before judging others and to criticize oneself before criticizing others.

The very word Islam from the Arabic Silm includes peace according to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad. Peace is one of the prerequisites of Islam. Islam states that a Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand all people are safe. One of the attributes of God described in the Qur'an is As-salaam, which means peace and security. When war breaks out, the Qur'an teaches that peace and reconciliation

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are the best of all actions. --

One would have to conclude that peace, reconciliation and dialogue are an expression of faith. Peace-building and reconciliation are values we all have to commit ourselves to and encourage because reality demands them and because our religious traditions require them. --

It is true that ignorance, religious extremism, terrorism, and fears generated from past encounters have widened the gap between us and created a sense of mistrust and rejection. The Arab-Israeli conflict and its consequences, the tragic attacks of Sept. 11, the implications of the war in Iraq, and irresponsible statements by politicians and religious leaders have led us to the path of bitterness and alienation. --

There is another path we can model, the path of love, reconciliation and dialogue which streams from our religious commitment to a God of love.

Yet, the fruits of religious convictions and our love of God are not achieved in a vacuum. They are achieved and found in the context of human relationships. Indeed, we cannot understand love except as we see it striving on behalf of all its enemies. --

All of us Americans, in general, and committed Jews, Christians and Muslims, in particular, must find within their own traditions sound reasons to value other faiths without compromising their own. We should not tolerate voices of divisiveness. We must use Sept. 11 to explore the best in each of us. So let us all choose to be united with all of our differences for the best of this nation and all of humanity.

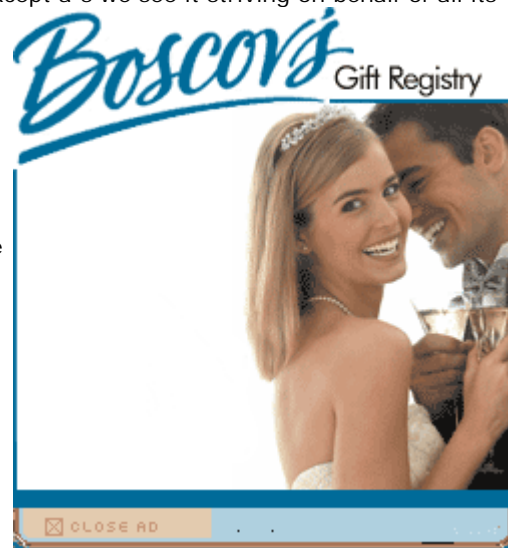
The major burden, however, falls on all religious communities. Our communities, guided by wise leadership, need to overcome longstanding prejudices and resentments. Each tradition has sacred teachings that can be enlisted to build bridges of respect and reconciliation. Wise religious leadership consists of identifying those teachings and educating all peoples in that spirit.

Let today's events inspire us to find a common forum with a common action for the common good of all. Let dialogue become a part of our culture.

--

Imam Yahya Hendi is the spiritual leader

of the Islamic Society of Frederick.



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