

# Love Your Muslim Neighbor as Yourself

Participant Reader by  
Ben Daniel





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## **Session 1: “Islam 101:**

**In Which We Tell You Some of What You Need to Know About Islam.”**

*In this session we look at the basic tenets of Islam. We live in an era in which much of what passes as information about Islam is weed-like disinformation rooted in stereotype and watered by fear. We decided to weed out the tares of ignorance by doing what, for Christians, apparently is radical: we spoke to some actual Muslims and to Christian scholars whose intellectual garden-sheds are filled with the tools of fact-based knowledge. The product of these conversations is a harvest of reliable information about what your Muslim neighbors and coworkers believe and about how they live out their faith.*

## **Session 2: “Misconceptions about Islam:**

**In Which We Help You Adjust Your Malarky Filter.”**

*Again, we took the radical step of getting to know actual Muslims, and in our conversations we asked them to tell us about how American public discourse tends to misrepresent Islam. We are confident that you will like the people you meet as you join in this conversation.*

## **Session 3: “Islam in America:**

**In Which We Introduce You to People Who Love America and Pray Towards Mecca.”**

*Chief among the popular anti-Muslim stereotypes is the idea that Muslims are plotting to overthrow American society. In fact, most Muslims love the United States. This is true of Muslims living in countries where Islam is the predominant religion, and it is especially true in the United States, where Muslims, as a demographic, are among the most patriotic American citizens.*

## **Session 4: “Making Connections, Part 1: In Which Non-Muslims Make A Case.”**

**AND**

## **Session 5: “Making Connections, Part 2: In Which Muslims Have Their Say.”**

*We asked Non-Muslims and Muslims to talk to us about building relationships across the lines of faith, and while the answers were compatible—and even complementary—it was interesting to observe the ways in which Muslims and Christians spoke differently about interfaith cooperation. Christians tended take an intellectual approach starting with the mind; Muslims were more likely to approach the issue relationally, starting with the heart.*

**The Participant Reader** was written by Rev. Ben Daniel, author of *The Search for Truth about Islam: A Christian Pastor Separates Fact from Fiction*.

**The Jesus Fatwah** was conceived and produced by Rev. David Felten and Rev. Jeff Procter-Murphy, authors and co-creators of *Living the Questions*.



## Introduction

### Love your Muslim Neighbor as Yourself

In Arabic, the word “fatwah” simply means “opinion” and, in a religious context, a fatwah is a spiritually instructive opinion, usually given as the answer to a question about religious law. Jesus was a master of the art of fatwah. His opinions, revered by Christians and Muslims alike, remain among the most beautiful and powerful fatwahs ever issued. Jesus pronounced what is perhaps the most famous of his fatwahs when a lawyer asked Jesus to name the greatest of all the commandments. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

As with most fatwahs, Jesus didn’t invent his opinions about loving God or loving one’s neighbors. Rather, he found and quoted passages from his sacred text, the Jewish Torah. Many of Jesus’ contemporaries concurred with his most famous fatwah – and five centuries later Mohammad endorsed the Jesus fatwah when he said, “The most righteous person is the one who consents for other people what he consents for himself, and who dislikes for them what he dislikes for himself.”

Here at Living the Questions, our opinion—our fatwah—is this: Jesus meant it when he told us to love our neighbors. In an age of increasing Islamophobia, we believe it is especially important for Christians to love their Muslim neighbors, a process that begins when we learn who Muslims are and what Muslims actually believe. We’ve put this series together as a way of expressing faithfulness to the Jesus fatwah, and we’re happy you’ve joined us. As-Salaam-Alaikum!

-- David Felten & Jeff Procter-Murphy

**Note:** the English transliteration of the Arabic word, “fatwah,” can be spelled both with or without an “h” on the end. For the purposes of this study, we will be using “fatwah” instead of “fatwā.” Both are acceptable in English usage.



## Contributor Bios

**Naser Ahmad** is the of President of Ommana Foundation & CEO of NOMA Group of Companies. Ommana Foundation is a US-based Public Charity working internationally through its Community Uplift Centers with the goal of providing clean water, early childhood education, and vocational training for women. NOMA Group consists of companies that provide IT Consulting, Construction, Remodeling, Property Management & Real Estate Services.

**Muna Ali** is a Ph.D. candidate in sociocultural anthropology at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on Islam in America and on issues of identity, intra-community relations, and civic engagement among Muslim Americans.

**Sonya Brown** is currently a curate in the St Philip's parish, Leicester and was ordained deacon in July 2010. Previously to beginning training for ordination she worked as a Development Worker for the Southwark diocesan organisation Welcare. She enjoys living and learning in the very multifaith context of Leicester.

**Ben Daniel** is a Presbyterian minister in Oakland, California. He is a Huffington Post blogger and the author of *Neighbor: Christian Encounters with "Illegal" Immigration* and *The Search for Truth About Islam*.

**Mohammad H. Fadel** is Associate Professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on legal process in medieval Islamic law while at the University of Chicago.

**Aysha Hidayatullah** is Assistant Professor of Islamic studies at the University of San Francisco. Her research interests include feminist exegesis of the Qur'an; representations of women in early Islamic history; feminist methodologies in the study of Islam; and the pedagogy of Islamic studies.

**Azra Hussain** is the founder and president of the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Arizona, a non-profit, apolitical, educational organization founded in 1999. She trains speakers and facilitates educational and interfaith events for ISBA.

**Hans Küng** is a Swiss Catholic priest, theologian, and author. Since 1995 he has been President of the Foundation for a Global Ethic. He is author of many books, including *On Being a Christian* and *Islam: Past, Present and Future*.

**Brian McLaren** is a prominent Christian pastor, author, activist and speaker and leading figure in the emerging church movement. He is author of many books, including *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road? Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World* and *A New Kind of Christianity*.

**Zarinah Nadir** is an attorney in private practice and serves on the board of the Islamic Social Services Association-USA. For over fifteen years, she has been a dedicated grassroots community organizer particularly concerned with cultural sensitivity, youth empowerment, and women's rights.

**Rami Nashashibi** has served as the Executive Director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) since its incorporation as a nonprofit in January 1997. He has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago and has lectured across the United States, Europe, and Asia on a range of topics related to American Muslim identity, community activism and social justice issues, and is a recipient of several prestigious community service and organizing honors. His work with IMAN have been featured on many national and international media outlets including the BBC, PBS and the *Chicago Tribune*.

**Eboo Patel** was named by *US News & World Report* as one of America's Best Leaders of 2009, Eboo Patel is the founder and Executive Director of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a Chicago-based institution building the global interfaith youth movement. Author of the award-winning book *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim*, he is also a regular contributor to the Washington Post, National Public Radio and CNN. He holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University.

**Stephen Prothero** is a professor in the Department of Religion at Boston University and the author of numerous books, including *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World--and Why Their Differences Matter* and the New York Times bestseller *Religious Literacy: What Americans Need to Know*. He has commented on religion on dozens of National Public Radio programs, and on television on CNN, NBC, MSNBC, FOX, and PBS. He was also a guest on "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart, "The Colbert Report," and "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

**Alan Race** is dean of postgraduate studies at St. Philip's Centre and priest of St. Philip's Church, Leicester. He is author of *Interfaith Encounter*.

**Feisal Abdul Rauf** is an American Sufi imam, author, activist and public intellectual whose stated goal is to improve relations between the Muslim world and the West. Author of *What's Right with Islam Is What's Right with America*, Imam Rauf received national attention for his plans to build Park51, an Islamic Community Center, two blocks from Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan.

**Samir Selmanovic** is a Christian minister who is known particularly for his work in interfaith dialogue. He is the founder of "Faith House Manhattan," an interfaith community of Christians, Muslims, Jews and humanists/atheists. He also leads a Christian community named "Citylights", and serves on the Interfaith Relations Commission of the United States National Council on Churches. He is author of *It's Really All About God: Reflections of a Muslim Atheist Jewish Christian*.

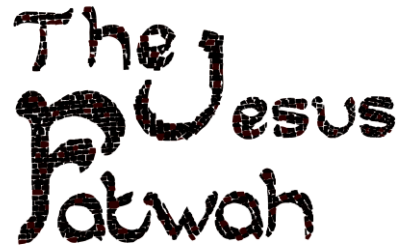
**Mark Toulouse** is Professor of the History of Christianity and Principal of Emmanuel College, Toronto, where he developed a Muslim Studies program. He completed his PhD at the University of Chicago.

*If I knew you and you knew me  
And each of us could clearly see,  
By that Inner Light divine,  
The meaning of your life and mine,  
I am sure that we would differ less,  
And clasp our hands in friendliness,  
If I knew you and you knew me.*

-- Howard Thurman







## 1. Islam 101

A simple internet search that inquires after basic information about Islam will yield countless websites containing terabytes of information. Much of this information will be of dubious merit, and some of it will be unmitigated malarkey. For the newcomer to the study of Islam, it is hard to know which information is useful and what is not. This introduction contains information on beliefs that all Muslims share; in the accompanying video, you will have the opportunity to meet Muslims and to hear them reflect on these most basic beliefs. Having read about these basic beliefs and having heard Muslims reflect upon how these beliefs bring their faith alive, you will be able better to judge the value of what you hear and read about the religion to which nearly a quarter of all humanity adheres.

To start at the very beginning (a very good place to start), a conversation around the basics of Islam must define and distinguish between two words: "Islam" and "Muslim." Both words are Arabic and are derived from a common root which can mean either "peace" or "submission." "Islam" is the name of a religion that originated in Arabia in the latter half of the sixth century of the Common Era; Islam's adherents are "Muslims." The adjective used to describe Islam is "Islamic," and "Muslim" is both an adjective and a noun.

### *Beliefs & Origins*

But what does Islam teach and what do Muslims believe? The honest answer is this: Muslims believe a lot of different things. There are roughly 1.5 billion Muslims alive today and a wide geographic and cultural diversity marks the lives of the world's vast Muslim community.

Every culture and every place in which Islam is practiced has had an impact on the ways in which Muslims live out their beliefs. Because of its worldwide success and its global appeal, Islam is a dynamic religion and for that reason it can be hard—if not impossible—to distill Islam's basic tenets into an introduction that is both comprehensive and concise. However, there *are* beliefs all Muslims hold in common, foundational doctrines upon which generations of Muslims have built the large, architecturally varied, sometimes mysterious (even to Muslims), and always interesting mansion that is the 21<sup>st</sup> century global House of Islam. An understanding of these foundational principles is essential to the work of exploring the whole Islamic edifice.



Muslims believe that in the year 610 CE, the Angel Gabriel began visiting and revealing a divine message to a devout and spiritually-minded man named Mohammad ibn 'Abdulah. Mohammad was a prominent businessman and civic leader in the Arabian City of Mecca. It is likely that Mohammad was illiterate so he did not write down what he heard from the angel. Instead, he committed the angelic messages to memory and was able to recall and to recite the heavenly words until his death in 632.

Among those who heard Mohammad's recitations of the angel's messages were literate believers able and willing to transcribe what was told them by the prophet. After Mohammad's death, faithful Muslims collected the written records of Mohammad's oral recitations and edited them into a single volume, called the Qur'an. Mohammad's followers also collected and edited— together with stories of Mohammad's life—many of Mohammad's sayings and teachings that were not the recitations of angelic messages. These writings are called the Hadith, and while they are important in the spiritual lives of Muslims, they do not hold the spiritual weight of the Qur'an, which Muslims believe to convey not just words about God, but something of God's very essence.

Besides holding in common the sacred story of God's revelations to Mohammad, Muslims also share six core doctrines.

## *Doctrines*

The first and most important doctrine common to all Muslims is a belief in one God. Islam is an Abrahamic faith, meaning Muslims worship the God of Abraham who also is the God of Judaism and Christianity. While Muslims believe that God has many attributes and names, Muslims usually speak of God by using the Arabic word "Allah," which, literally translated, means "The God." It is not only a word for God that predates the advent of Islam, Arabic speaking Christians and Jews continue to use the word "Allah" in reference to God to this day.

In addition to affirming their belief in one God, all Muslims believe in angels, which makes sense given the centrality of Gabriel in the story of Islam.

All Muslims believe God is revealed in the holy books of the Abrahamic faith. While the Qur'an is the book Muslims hold in highest esteem, they also accept the Jewish and Christian Bibles as being divinely inspired.

All Muslims believe in prophets. As mentioned above, Muslims understand Mohammad to be the greatest and last of the prophets, but Muslims also believe that in the centuries leading up to the establishment of Islam, God sent an untold number of prophets to instruct people in the ways of God. Numbered among the prophets are all of the prophets of the Jewish Bible, and Jesus, who is revered as being one of the greatest of God's prophets.

All Muslims believe in a judgment day and in the afterlife. Like traditional forms of Christianity, Islam is an apocalyptic religion, holding to a final judgment in the fullness of time; as with traditional forms of Christianity, Islam promises a heavenly home as a reward for the righteous.

All Muslims believe in the sovereignty of God.

## *The Five Pillars*

In addition to the theological tenets listed above, Muslims are united by the actions required of faithful Muslims. These religious duties are known as the Five Pillars of Islam.

The first pillar of Islam is the recitation of Islam's most basic belief: "there is no God but God, and Mohammad is the messenger of God." Muslims affirm this belief regularly, especially during times of corporate prayer, which leads to the second pillar of Islam.

The second pillar of Islam is the formal, ritual prayer that occurs five times daily. Like monastic Christians who observe daily offices of prayer, Muslims pray together at regular intervals throughout the day. When they observe the second pillar, Muslims stand shoulder to shoulder facing Mecca. Moving together, they prostrate themselves and kneel and stand in a manner choreographed by centuries of tradition.

The third pillar of Islam is charity. Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their net worth to those in need.

The fourth pillar is the requirement that Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, a month that commemorates the first set of revelations that eventually would become the Qur'an, adult Muslims who are medically able to do so must refrain from food and drink, and must abstain from sexual intimacy during daylight hours. It is a season of prayer and for deepening spiritual connection.

The fifth and final pillar of Islam is the Hajj, the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca. During the pilgrimage, Muslims visit sacred sights associated with the Qur'an's telling of stories about Ishmael and Hagar. Pilgrims also walk around a sacred stone called the Kaaba and they pray together in the desert. During the Hajj, pilgrims dress in identical clothing as a way of symbolizing the equality of all mortals before God.

## *A Great Diversity*

Every major religious tradition has core beliefs shared by all the religion's adherents, but every religious tradition also has historical divisions,

denominations, and divergent schools of thought that separate the faithful. Sometimes these divisions give rise to mutual animosity, especially when the various camps become associated with a particular ethnicity or political persuasion. Islam is no different.

The most important division among Muslims dates back to the first decades of the movement, when a violent debate erupted over how to choose a leader to succeed Mohammad after his death. The resulting division separated Islam into two major branches—the Shiite and the Sunni—a division that endures into the modern era. Currently, roughly 85 percent of Muslims are Sunni, and 15 percent are Shiite, who, though a minority globally, hold majority status in some predominantly Muslim countries, including Iran and Iraq.

Within the Shiite and Sunni branches of Islam, there are various schools of thought and there is a wide diversity of theological traditions. There also are splinter groups—the Nation of Islam will be most familiar to Americans—that fall outside the parameters of what most scholars consider, technically, to be Islam.

This great diversity of tradition and theology provides the curious student ample opportunity to learn, and to those interested in engaging in interfaith conversation with Muslims, the wide variety of ways people practice Islam can provide a good place to start the discussion.

-- Ben Daniel

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## **Discussion Questions** (pause DVD after each video segment)

### **Muslim Demographics**

1. What stood out for you in Muna Ali's overview of Muslim demographics?
2. How do the demographics compare to your perceptions of Muslim demographics prior to viewing this segment?

### **Basic Muslim Beliefs**

1. What element(s) of Islamic doctrine presented in the reading and video surprised you?

2. What traditional Muslim belief can you point to as similar to traditional Christian beliefs?
3. How are traditional Muslim beliefs different from traditional Christian beliefs?

### **The Five Pillars of Islam**

1. How has your understanding of Islamic practice changed by what you've heard in this segment?
2. How are the religious obligations of Islam similar or different to the religious obligations of your faith tradition?

### **The Qur'an and the Hadith**

1. What surprised you about the Qur'an?
2. Based on the information in this segment, how is the role of the Qur'an in Islam different than or the same as the role of sacred texts in your tradition?
3. In other traditions, what kind of sayings and non-canonical stories would be the equivalent of the Hadith?

### **The Mosque and the Madrassa**

1. How did this segment's presentation of the Mosque and the Madrassa differ from your understanding of how those institutions function in Islam?
2. Compare and contrast the Mosque with the equivalent space in Judaism and Christianity.
3. What do you imagine are the differences and similarities between the religious education of a Madrassa and the religious education imparted by faith-based schools in your tradition?

### **Muslim Values**

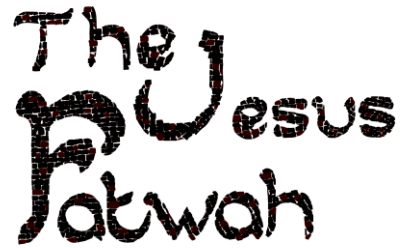
1. Share one way your understanding of Muslim values has changed by what you've read or heard in this session.
2. In what way(s) are Muslim values similar or different to the values of other faith traditions?
3. How are basic Muslim values similar or different than your own personal values?

### ***The Jesus Fatwah* Theme Question:**

What element or learning from this session do you think will be most significant in your everyday interactions with others?



## 2. Misconceptions about Islam



### Looking Back before Looking Ahead

The old city of Santiago de Compostela sits on the top of a hill in Galicia, in Northwest Spain. Because it is a cold and damp place with a climate similar to what one might expect in Seattle, moss grows on the walls of the medieval buildings, giving Santiago a slightly haunted vibe. When a late afternoon mist descends on the town and the wail of Galician bagpipes echoes off ancient stones, it's easy for a visitor to feel as if he or she has arrived on the border between the modern and civilized world, and has slipped, perhaps, into a liminal place where the line separating the physical and spiritual realms grows thin.

For more than a thousand years, Santiago de Compostela has been—behind Jerusalem and Rome—Christendom's third holiest city. Each year tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world come to Santiago, often walking long distances to visit a shrine dedicated to Saint James the Apostle, the brother of John the Evangelist. According to legend, a miraculous journey by sea transported the saint's remains from the Holy Land to Galicia, and a veneration of St. James—"Santiago" in the local tongue—dates back to Roman times, but the central role of Santiago in European spirituality began during the so-called "re-conquest" of Southern Spain<sup>i</sup> when St. James is said to have come to the aid of Christian soldiers, riding a white stallion, leading the armies of Christ into a victorious battle against Muslims at Clavijo in 844.<sup>ii</sup> The apostle's military acumen is a myth, but the "miracle" earned the apostle the title of "Matamoros" or "killer of moors." During Vatican-endorsed Crusades against Muslims in Spain and in the Holy Land and against Cathars in the south of France, Christian warriors visited Santiago de Compostela, seeking the blessings of heaven before waging war under the sign of the cross.

In the more than seven hundred years since the end of the crusades in the Holy Land, and more than 520 years since the end of the re-conquest of Spain, Santiago remains as popular as ever. More than 100,000 pilgrims visit Santiago each year, arriving in a city where Santiago Matamoros, St. James the killer of Muslims, is acclaimed. The image of St. James, astride his white stallion, drawn sword raised, ready to hack Muslim soldiers, while his horse tramples those same troops—is found all over the place, especially in the main church. There the patron saint of crusaders enjoys the place of greatest honor on the high altar

and in a side chapel, where the life size, and real-looking statue of the slayer of moors stands under the approving smiles of the busts of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

## *A History of Stereotypes*

Islamophobia, a modern word that refers to a fear of Islam and of Muslims, has been a part of Christian life—especially in Europe and among the descendants of European emigrants in the New World—for almost as long as Islam has been in existence, and it is almost certainly rooted in the anxiety felt by Europeans as they witnessed the rapid rise of Islamic empires between the seventh and eleventh centuries of the common era. Islamophobia helped to inspire the Crusades, it is present in Western European Art, literature and music (Mozart's opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* is a good example); Islamophobic tropes are found in the work of great European theologians such as John Calvin, and are parodied in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

And though it has never left us, Islamophobia experienced a resurgence in western society during the first Gulf War, and especially in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In response, the United States and her allies waged a global "war on terror," killing as many as 600,000 mostly innocent people<sup>iii</sup> (all the while asking why Muslims are so violent).

The latter-day manifestations of Islamophobia have a modern look and feel. They are propagated online and on cable television by a host of well-spoken (if not particularly well-informed) talking heads—all relying upon tropes and half truths about Islam that are ancient. The most common of these misconceptions are the ideas that Islam is a violent religion with aspirations for global domination and the notion that Muslim men are sexually deviant misogynists whose several, often under-aged, burka-clad wives must toil in uneducated squalor behind mud-wattle harem walls. These misconceptions come together for many Americans in the stereotype of the young and over-sexed Muslim man who longs to experience a martyr's death so that he can experience an eternity in paradise surrounded by several dozen virgins.

It is a fact that Americans, despite having ready access on the glowing screens of their smart phones to an almost infinite stream of information, often remain ignorant about a host of subjects. Despite their country's having spent more than a decade waging war in Afghanistan, most Americans cannot find the central Asian country on a map. Sadly, our knowledge of subjects like history and basic science is equally dismal. It should come as no surprise, then, that Americans, for the most part, are ignorant about Islam. Americans are stunningly numb on the subject of religion in general. A 2010 poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion in the Public Life found that an overwhelming number of Americans lack basic knowledge about their own religious traditions, and simply are ignorant about the faith of others.<sup>iv</sup>



What sets the American ignorance of Islam apart is that Americans have not allowed a lack of information to prevent the formation of strong opinions on the subject of Islam. Indeed, Americans have grown so attached to misconceptions about Islam, that in the United States, the pedaling of Islamophobia has become big business. In 2013, the Council on American Islamic Relations, a leading Muslim civil rights organization, released a study that identified donations of more than 119 million dollars between 2008 and 2011 to Islamophobia-generating media organizations.<sup>v</sup> It is a number that would make Santiago Matamoros swell with pride, for his spirit lives on in the misconceptions propagated on the Islamophobia industry's blogs, books and cable news outlets. It is left to people of good will, often without financial means or a media voice, to speak words of truth, common sense and peace.

By taking on *The Jesus Fatwah*, gentle reader, you are joining yourself to the company of the informed. Our hope is that, becoming informed, you will cast aside misconceptions about Islam and that the information you find in these videos and study guides will be a catalyst for your setting aside fear in the hope of a better world.

-- Ben Daniel

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## **Discussion Questions** (pause DVD after each video segment)

### **The Myth of Muslim Violence**

1. How has the myth of Muslim violence affected your understanding of Islam?
2. It can be argued that over time, other faith traditions have been as violent (or more violent) than Islam. How important is acknowledging that reality when making generalizations about Islam?
3. How have violence and misbehavior practiced in the name of your faith tradition created inaccurate stereotypes about your tradition?

### **Women in Islam**

1. Discuss one of the ways your beliefs about Muslim women may need to be revised.
2. How has your faith tradition dictated the roles women must play in the home, in the faith community, and in society – and how are they different from Islam?
3. How does Islamic feminism differ from feminism in your faith tradition?

### **Polygamy**

1. The speakers in this segment suggest that Muslim practices of polygamy come from a time and culture different than our own. What antiquated and—to modern people—offensive practices were allowed in your religious tradition?
2. At some point in their past, most religious traditions have embraced polygamy. How has your religious tradition dealt with and set aside polygamy (or has it)?

### **Shariah**

1. Although some harbor fears about the encroachment of Sharia into civil law, Islam expects its adherents to follow the laws of the country in which they are citizens. How might this reality affect the likelihood of Muslims advocating for Sharia law (in Oklahoma – or anywhere, for that matter)?
2. In a country like the United States, Constitutionally committed to a separation of “church and state,” to what extent should secular law accommodate the religious beliefs of any particular faith tradition?
3. For historical or cultural reasons, should a religion be given preference in matters of legal accommodation in our society?

## **Muslims are People, Too**

1. Why did you embrace your faith tradition?

2. How closely do you follow the theological dictates or moral obligations of your faith?

### ***The Jesus Fatwah Theme Question:***

What element or learning from this session do you think will be most significant in your everyday interactions with others?



### ***BONUS READING:***

**The Promise to St. Catherine** (written by Muhammad in 628 CE):

“This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them.

Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses.

Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray. Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants.

No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (end of the world).”

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> “Reconquest,” or “*reconquista*” is the commonly-used name for a series of wars through which Roman Catholics from northern Spain drove Muslims from southern Spain out of the Iberian peninsula. The term is problematic because prior to the reconquest, no part of southern Spain ever was governed by rulers who were both Christian and Spanish. The Muslims kingdoms and Caliphates of southern Spain displaced Arian Visigoth overlords who took Spain from pagan Romans who established themselves in the territory before the birth of Christ. Nonetheless, it is the word used by most historians, so it is used here, but not without a wistful desire for more accurate language.

<sup>ii</sup> Joseph F. O’Callaghan *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. p. 194

<sup>iii</sup> It is difficult to find an exact number of people killed in the War on Terror. However, the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, found that between 2003 and 2006 more than 600,000 individuals died as a result of violence in Iraq, which, at the time, was the principle front in the war (see “Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey” by Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta *et al.* 12 October 2006

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(06\)69491-9/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(06)69491-9/abstract)). A follow up study by John Hopkins, Al Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, and MIT confirmed *The Lancet’s* findings (see “The Human Cost of the War in Iraq A Mortality Study, 2002-2006” by Gilbert Burnham, Shannon Doocy *et al.* [http://web.mit.edu/CIS/pdf/Human\\_Cost\\_of\\_War.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/CIS/pdf/Human_Cost_of_War.pdf)). Eight years after the completion of *The Lancet’s* study, it’s hard not to imagine the human toll of the War on Terror is not significantly higher.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/US-Religious-Knowledge-An-Overview-of-the-Pew-Forum-Survey-Results-and-Implications.aspx>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.cair.com/press-center/press-releases/12149-cair-report-islamophobia-network-funded-with-119-million-2008-to-2011.html>

### 3. Islam in America



#### Prejudice and Civil Rights

At the heart of the Muslim experience of America lies a paradox. On the one hand, life for Muslims in America is hard. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (or CAIR), America's largest Muslim civil liberties organization (think Anti-Defamation League or NAACP, only Muslim) has documented a steady rise in reported civil rights abuses against Muslims between 1996, when fewer than a hundred reports of civil rights abuses were filed, and 2008 (the last year CAIR released numbers), when CAIR fielded more than 2,700 complaints. CAIR is not alone in reporting an uptick in abuses against Muslims. In 2009, the Federal Government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 803 reports of workplace discrimination against Muslims—a twenty percent increase over the previous year. The high rate of abuse suffered by American Muslims also has been noted by a wide range of civil and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and Human Rights Watch. In 2011, the Pew Center for People and the Press reported that 28 percent of Muslims report being looked at with suspicion, 22 percent say they have been called offensive names, 21 percent have been singled out for airport security, and 13 percent report being singled out for scrutiny by various law enforcement agencies.

It is an uncomfortable fact that the rise in civil rights abuses propagated against American Muslims correlates to a rise in fear of and prejudice towards Muslims in the wider American population. In 2003, 34 percent of Americans believed that Islam is a religion that encourages violence. Five years later that number had risen to 48 percent. By 2010, half of Americans harbored negative opinions about Islam.<sup>i</sup> A 2006 USA Today-Gallup Poll found that fewer than half of Americans believe Muslims are loyal to the United States, and that nearly a quarter of Americans would not want a Muslim neighbor. Almost a third of Americans would be nervous if they noticed a Muslim man flying with them on an airplane (18 percent would feel similarly nervous if the Muslim were a woman). Forty percent of Americans believe Muslims should be subjected to increased security in public places.<sup>ii</sup> Tragically, as animosity toward Islam has risen in the United States, so have reported incidents of hate crime targeting people of middle-eastern descent, as well as against South Asians—especially Sikhs—and against others who are mistaken for Muslims.

## *A History of Discrimination*

Many Americans assume that the rise in anti-Muslim sentiment documented by CAIR and by other human rights organizations is a recent development, but it is not. While the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror have acted as a catalyst in the explosion of Islamophobia in contemporary American culture, widespread anti-Muslim bias in America is not a new phenomenon. In fact, irrational fears around Islam have been a part of life in the United States since before there even was a United States.

In 17th century New England, prominent Calvinist preachers—most notable the father and son team of Increase and Cotton Mather—preached sermons peppered with anti-Muslim invective.<sup>iii</sup> Their anti-Islamic homiletics came at a time when Muslim pirates sailing out of North Africa's Barbary Coast were attacking British and North American shipping interests, often taking prisoners and holding them as slaves. These pirates sailed at the behest of North African states (their actions would likely be considered state-sponsored terrorism today), and the motivation for their piracy was both mercenary and political. But on the far side of the Atlantic, among fearful colonists living on North America's Atlantic seaboard, the maritime marauders were recast as religious fanatics with a lust for Christian blood.<sup>iv</sup>

In the eighteenth century the British Navy made peace with the Barbary pirates—thus securing the safety of colonial North American shipping interests—but fearful words about Islam continued to lace the sermons of many preachers of the first Great Awakening, including those of George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards, who preached frequently against the supposed sinfulness of Islam, often employing stereotypes still in use today—particularly those that exaggerate Muslims' tendencies to engage in violence and to subjugate women.

In 1784, after the newly-independent former-British colonies in North America lost the protections of the British Navy, American merchant ships once again fell prey to attacks from Barbary pirates, and as a result, the young nation declared war on the Barbary states in North Africa and engaged in its first overseas military campaign. The war in North Africa helped to establish the United States as a world power; it also helped solidify in the minds of Americans that Islam is a religion whose adherents are foreigners and enemies. It is a misconception that has continued, with varying degrees of intensity, into the modern era.

## *America, the Beautiful*

Now, back to the paradox: despite more than 300 years of smoldering Islamophobia, now burning dangerously hot thanks to the catalyst of post-9/11 fear, American Muslims never have had a higher opinion of life in America. In 2011, for example, a poll of American Muslim leaders found that 97 percent of

respondents believed Muslims should be actively involved in American life. In 2000, half of American Muslim leaders felt the United States was hostile toward Muslims. In 2011, that number had dropped to 25 percent. In 2000, 56 percent of American Muslims leaders believed society was immoral, by 2012, that percentage had dropped to 26.

But it's not just Muslim religious leaders who feel positive about life in America. The above-mentioned 2011 study by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press found that Muslim Americans are almost twice as likely as their non-Muslim counterparts to express satisfaction with the way things are going in the United States. Only 16 percent of American Muslims feel the general public is hostile toward them, and two thirds of Muslim Americans believe life is better in the United States than it is in most Muslim countries, and the reason for this American optimism is simple: Muslims value what America has to offer. Like everyone else in America, Muslims long to live in safety and to be governed by the rule of law. Muslims enjoy the educational and economic opportunities the United States has to offer, and Muslims, like Christians, see positive engagement in civil and community life as a religious obligation.

To embrace the flag and to live in the free republic for which it stands is a fond desire for most American Muslims. Perhaps this knowledge can ease the fears of those who lie awake at night worrying that prayers offered in the general direction of Mecca pose an existential threat to America's life and culture. If, as a people, we can set aside our fear, then maybe, at long last we can move past three centuries of fearfulness and the Muslims among us can finally enjoy the benefits of America without paradox.

-- Ben Daniel

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## **Discussion Questions** (pause DVD after each video segment)

### **The Fear-Mongers**

1. How have you been exposed to the work of those who disseminate a fear and hatred of Islam?
2. Against the constant drum-beat of misinformation and far-fetched claims, what is your response?



3. How has your own faith tradition been misrepresented in the press?

### **An American Faith**

1. In what ways are your beliefs about Islam's place in Western society being challenged or changed by new information?

2. How does your faith tradition encourage your participation in secular society?

3. What are the parallels between your faith tradition's challenge to improve your community and your country and that of Islam's?

### **An Inclusive Faith**

1. Discuss how your understanding of Islam's attitudes toward non-Muslims is being changed or challenged.

2. Over time, how has your faith tradition embraced or rejected those who don't share your beliefs?

3. Does your faith tradition value diversity? Why or why not?

### **Islam and the American Experiment**

1. Share how Muslims have contributed to your community.

2. In what ways have Muslims benefited from living in your community?

3. Discuss how your neighborhood might be affected if a new mosque were erected.

**The Jesus Fatwah Theme Question:**

What element or learning from this session do you think will be most significant in your everyday interactions with others?



**BONUS READING:**

**The Treaty of Tripoli**

(Submitted to the Senate by President John Adams, receiving unanimous ratification from the U.S. Senate on June 7, 1797, and signed by Adams, taking effect as the law on June 10, 1797.)

“As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen [Muslims]; and as the said States never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan [Mohammedan] nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.”

**Notes**

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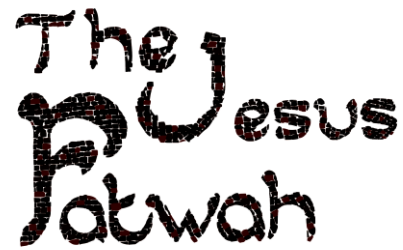
<sup>i</sup> Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* (London: Pluto Press. 2012), 39.

<sup>ii</sup> Lean, xi-xii

<sup>iii</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3-5.

<sup>iv</sup> Kidd, 20-22

## 4. Making Connections 1



### Adjusting our Malarkey Filter

This two-part video segment features, among others, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, a Kuwaiti-born American Imam and writer who, like his father before him, is a long-time leader in New York's Muslim community. For decades, Imam Abdul Rauf has been an outspoken advocate of interfaith understanding. He is perhaps most famous for his leadership in establishing a Muslim community center not far from Ground Zero in New York City. Initially called "Córdoba House," the community center—which, as of this writing, is partially open but still under construction—has come into existence despite fierce opposition from Americans opposed to an organized Muslim presence so close to the former site of the World Trade Center.

Those opposed to the community center give a variety of reasons for their opposition, chief among them is the fact that the community center, when complete, will have space for formal Muslim prayers. Because of the spiritual component designed into the planned center, Imam Abdul Rauf's detractors have dubbed the center, "The Ground Zero Mosque," and have interpreted its building as an expression of Islamic triumphalism—a celebration of the destruction wrought in the name of Islam at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. As evidence supporting this claim, those opposed to building the community center have pointed to the community center's original name: "Córdoba House." Among those offended by the decision to name the community center after the former capital of Muslim Spain was Newt Gingrich, erstwhile speaker of the House of Representatives and occasional aspirant for the presidency, who wrote:

"The proposed 'Cordoba House' overlooking the World Trade Center site — where a group of jihadists killed over 3000 Americans and destroyed one of our most famous landmarks — is a test of the timidity, passivity and historic ignorance of American elites. For example, most of them don't understand that 'Cordoba House' is a deliberately insulting term. It refers to Cordoba, Spain — the capital of Muslim conquerors who symbolized their victory over the Christian Spaniards by transforming a church there into the world's third-largest mosque complex.

Today, some of the Mosque's backers insist this term is being used to 'symbolize interfaith cooperation' when, in fact, every Islamist in the world recognizes Cordoba as a symbol of Islamic conquest. It is a sign of their contempt for Americans and their confidence in our historic ignorance that they would deliberately insult us this way...

America is experiencing an Islamist cultural-political offensive designed to undermine and destroy our civilization. Sadly, too many of our elites are the willing apologists for those who would destroy them if they could." <sup>1</sup>

Newt Gingrich's historical observations regarding Córdoba are unadulterated malarkey. Córdoba was never the Muslim capital of territory formerly held by Christian Spaniards. It was the capital of territory taken from the Visigoth empire, which took southern Spain from the Romans, who held southern Spain before the advent of Christianity (there would be no Christian Spanish rule in southern Spain until after Córdoba fell to Roman Catholic Spanish armies in the 13th century). Nor does his description of the Córdoba mosque tell the building's whole story (It is true that Muslims built a mosque on the site of a Visigoth church; it's also true that the Visigoth church was built on a pre-Christian pagan shrine, and it is true that the mosque in Córdoba has been used as a Roman Catholic cathedral for the last 800 years—roughly twice as long as the space was used as a mosque). Nor does any Muslim—"Islamist" or otherwise—think of Córdoba as anything but the place of enlightenment and relative tolerance that, according to any objective reading of history, it actually was.

What Newt Gingrich did get correct, however, was American fear of Islam—a fear he attempted to harness for political gain (he was getting ready for his unsuccessful presidential bid when he wrote these words). The Islamic center in New York was hardly unique in meeting opposition. All over America, proposals to build mosques are met with fierce resistance by Americans who believe the institutional presence of Muslims is a harbinger of imperial ambition on the part of those who dream of a worldwide Muslim caliphate, and who cannot envision an encounter between Islam and Christianity that is not marked by rivalry and conflict.

But if anyone among the world's 1.5 billion Muslims has a serious desire to conquer the world and the capacity to act on those dreams, it has not become apparent to any of the world's sober journalists or serious political scientists.

What, then, should be a proper and appropriate Christian response to the presence of Muslims in America?

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Daniel, *The Search for Truth About Islam*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, p. 90.

## Do Your Homework!

The most important thing is for non-Muslim Americans to adopt a willingness to learn about Islam, something you already are doing, gentle reader, by exploring "The Jesus Fatwah" to inform your knowledge of Islam. Keep learning. A list of good books and resources is included at the end of this study guide. It has been organized around the idea that, to learn about Islam, it is important for Christians to hear what Muslims have to say about Islam—because who will know more about Islam than Muslim writers and scholars? Hearing from Christian writers and scholars who understand the Christian mindset and who employ language readily accessible to Christians is also a priority.

*Not* included on the attached list of resources are the best-selling books and videos produced by those who profit by spreading fear about Islam—books by professional Islamophobes such as Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, and Daniel Pipes or the Clarion Project videos, *Obsession* and *The Third Jihad*. Much like Facebook postings by your bigoted fraternity brother or mass emailings from your eccentric aunt, such materials should be read and viewed through a filter of common sense. Ask: "if the world's 1.5 billion Muslims really held such vile intentions and evil opinions in common, could it really be kept a secret? If so significant a portion of the world population was really that bad, would not the world be a lot worse for it? And why is it that the portrayals of Islam promoted by professional Islamophobes is so unlike the Muslims I know?"

## Reaching Out to Muslims

Which leads us to the most important way to learn about Islam: non-Muslim Americans *must get to know American Muslims*. We must not be shy about this. Most Muslims want to know Christians, and like anyone else, Muslims enjoy talking about life and faith over a mug of coffee or a cup of tea. Christians who don't have the opportunity to interact with Muslims at work or in the neighborhood or within the family should encourage their pastors to reach out to a local imam, to organize social events and service projects that include members of both communities.

Here is something that Christians should know about Muslims: Muslims want to have good relations with Christians; indeed tolerance and mutual good will are integral to Muslim spirituality and self-understanding. In 2007, 300 of the world's top Muslim scholars and political leaders sent a letter to the Christian world. Entitled "A Common Word Between Us and You," (see [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)) it is a document that implores Christians and Muslims to find common cause in loving God and neighbor and it is rooted in a deep and historical commitment to the idea that Muslims and Christians and Jews worship the same God; Muslims honor the Jewish and Christian Bibles, Muslims revere Moses, Jesus and the Prophets, and most Muslims long to see those spiritual connections to Christianity and Islam manifested in positive relationships with their Christian friends and neighbors.

This is why so many Muslims remember Muslim Córdoba with such fondness. Relative to the rest of Europe, it was a place of tolerance and acceptance and of strong relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. For most Muslims, the history of Islamic Córdoba is not a matter of warm feelings and positive emotions. Rather, the interfaith goodwill that marked life in medieval Cordoba is remembered as a manifestation of a righteous society—a small taste of which most Muslims hope to recapture by establishing and maintaining positive relationships with Christians and Jews, especially in the United States.

## A Question of Honesty

Among the many difficulties that must be overcome as Christians reach out to Muslims is the misconception—promoted by Islamophobic purveyors of fear—that Muslims are permitted and even encouraged to lie to non-Muslims. The idea that Muslims are allowed and encouraged to lie is a misconception rooted in a misunderstanding of the concept of *taqiyya*, an Arabic word which, literally translated, means “precaution.” *Taqiyya* is a legal construct in which Muslims are permitted to lie about their faith when telling the truth would lead to death or serious harm. Historically, *taqiyya* is a concept that was used by Shiite Muslims as a way of avoiding persecution by their Sunni counterparts. There is, however, no legal permission in Islam to lie for the sake of lying or in order to make one’s faith seem more palatable to non-believers.

Accusations of *taqiyya* are most often bandied about when Muslims speak up and correct misinformation about Islam. Those seeking to discredit Muslims or cast suspicions on anything Muslims say use the argument that, “Of course they’re lying! The universal evil of Islam demands that they lie to non-Muslims!” Since the Muslim contributors to *The Jesus Fatwah* present Islam in an appealing manner, avoiding stereotypes and representing Islam as rational and peaceable, those committed to spreading Islamophobia have only one tired and threadbare argument: “They must be committing *taqiyya*!!”

So, when a faithful Muslim speaks about her faith you can be assured she is telling the truth to the best of her ability. Unless, for instance, you happen to be pointing a gun at her. Then all bets are off. Under the Islamic law of *taqiyya*, she’s allowed to say whatever it takes to save her life. But more to the point, if you are threatening her life, it’s not *her* morality that should concern you.

## A Future Together

While conducting interviews for *The Jesus Fatwah*, we asked Muslims and non-Muslims to reflect on the work of building interfaith understanding and cooperation. The responders shared in common the conviction that Muslims and non-Muslims need to learn about each other, but they approached that shared conviction in different ways. Our Muslim interviewees tended to focus on the importance of embracing an American diversity in which Muslims are seen as an

indispensable part of America's identity. Non-Muslims tended to focus on best practices for interfaith dialogue. Muslims spoke more from the heart while non-Muslims were more intellectual in their approach to the question of what a positive engagement between Christianity and Islam might look like. This may have more to do with who we chose to interview than with how Christians and Muslims around the world might reach out to one another, but to think and speak differently about common beliefs is to model faithfulness in divergent traditions.

We've divided the "Making Connections" video into two parts. The first session presents Muslims talking about interfaith cooperation and the second session presents non-Muslims addressing the same issue. We hope you will find it instructive to see how people of different traditions speak about a common belief.

-- Ben Daniel

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## **Discussion Questions** (pause DVD after each video segment)

### **The Way, the Truth and the Life**

1. How disappointed will you be if, upon your arrival in heaven, you are met at the pearly gates by a Muslim?
2. How comfortable are you with the idea that Islam is a valid pathway to God?
3. Describe one way in which the practice of your faith would cause a Muslim neighbor to be glad you are her neighbor?

### **Faithful Interfaith Understanding**

1. Stephen Prothero's approach to interfaith understanding emphasizes an appreciation for difference while Hans Küng's approach seeks to find common ground. Which approach (Prothero's or Küng's) do you find to be most helpful?
2. How can we learn from an appreciation of difference?



3. How can we learn from the process of finding commonalities?

### **Faithful Interfaith Action**

1. Were people in your faith community to protest the building of a mosque in your neighborhood, what would you do?

2. Hans Küng suggests that there must be peace between religions if there is to be peace between nations. Discuss.

3. What are the barriers to respectful interfaith listening and appreciation in your community?

### **Faithful Interfaith Appreciation**

1. What do you appreciate about Islam?

2. What would you like for Muslims to appreciate about your faith tradition?

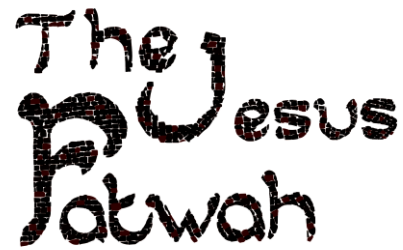
3. How does your faith tradition inform you as you seek to live in a way that is authentically human?

### ***The Jesus Fatwah* Theme Question:**

What element or learning from this session do you think will be most significant in your everyday interactions with others?



## 5. Making Connections 2



### “A Common Word Between Us and You”

Following is an excerpt from “A Common Word” ([www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)), a 2007 initiative from Muslim leaders encouraging dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Christians:

Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world’s population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world’s inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.

And to those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say that our very eternal souls are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony. God says in the Holy Qur’an: Lo! God enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed (Al Nahl, 16:90). Jesus Christ (عليه السلام) said: Blessed are the peacemakers ....(Matthew 5:9), and also: For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? (Matthew 16:26).

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.

## **Discussion Questions** (pause DVD after each video segment)

### **Diversity is Holy**

1. How have popular stereotypes around Islamic intolerance affected your perceptions of Islam?
2. To what extent is diversity valued in your faith tradition?
3. Historically, how has your faith tradition contributed to interfaith understanding and cooperation?

### **Overcoming “Otherness”**

1. How have you been able to (or how might you) overcome the feeling that Muslims are “other”?
2. What topic or question feels uncomfortable when asking a Muslim about his or her faith?
3. What topic or question about your faith would you not want to discuss with a Muslim?

### **Leaving the World a Better Place**

1. How does your faith tradition instruct you to leave the world a better place?

2. How does Feisal Abdul Rauf's description of the Cordoba Initiative compare to media accounts of the project, which call it the "Ground Zero Mosque"? Whose telling of the story seems more probable?

3. Eboo Patel's group of high school friends serves as his metaphor for what the world needs to aspire to. Do you agree? Disagree? (or are you just jealous that you weren't a part of his lunch group?)

### **Mercy and Love**

1. Have you ever had a chance to get to know someone from another faith tradition? If so, how has it helped to change your mind about that person (and their faith tradition)?

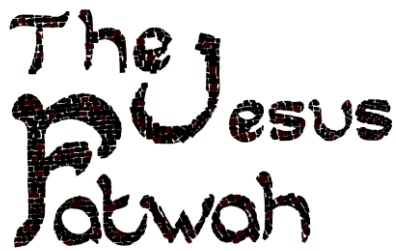
2. What is the role of mercy and of love in your faith tradition?

3. What does your faith tradition teach you about loving God and neighbor?

### ***The Jesus Fatwah Theme Question:***

What element or learning from this session do you think will be most significant in your everyday interactions with others?





session outline,  
general format, &  
session suggestions

## materials

- *The Jesus Fatwah* DVD
- DVD player and TV monitor (or computer, projector, and screen)
- Participant handouts printed from the Living the Questions website ([www.livingthequestions.com](http://www.livingthequestions.com) or [www.thejesusfatwah.com](http://www.thejesusfatwah.com))
- *OPTIONAL: Whiteboard or flipchart for discussion session.*
- BEFORE EACH SESSION, MAKE SURE TO TEST THE DVD (INCLUDING AUDIO) TO BE SURE THAT EVERYTHING WORKS!

## group size

There is no prescribed size for groups using *The Jesus Fatwah*. The optimal size is that which is most conducive to conversation. From sitting around a table to gathering in a living room, den, or classroom – do what's comfortable for your group. Keep in mind that conversation and open dialogue can get bogged down with too many participants. If a group is too big, several extroverted voices may tend to dominate discussion. Consider dividing even a group of seven or eight into smaller groups of three or four for discussion. Living the Questions groups are often most effective when movable chairs are set up in a circle so the larger group can quickly move into conversation groups of three or four and then just as quickly come back together for large group discussion.

## facilitator

The facilitator coordinates the flow of each session's conversation with questions and discussion. The facilitator is not expected (and should resist the temptation) to try to provide answers for the class. Asking open-ended questions tends to promote the best group conversation. The facilitator can be the same person each session or can be rotated among group members.

The facilitator can also help or be responsible for organizing the location of any orientation session, the gatherings, publicity, collecting supplies and materials, arranging for refreshments (if any), and recruiting participants.

# session format

**BEFORE BEGINNING ANY SESSION, MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAS THEIR OWN COPY OF:**

- INTRODUCTION
- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES
- PARTICIPANT GUIDE/QUESTIONS FOR EACH SESSION

(See [www.livingthequestions.com](http://www.livingthequestions.com) or [www.thejesusfatwah.com](http://www.thejesusfatwah.com) to download)

## **Schedule Options**

*The Jesus Fatwah* has been designed to be a flexible resource that can be utilized in a variety of settings and scheduling situations. Below are several options that would work in most situations:

**Option 1:** Limited amount of time (50 minutes to 1 hour) Ideal for a Sunday morning class or other situation where time is short.

- a. Review the reading material as a group. Prompt the participants for any comments regarding thoughts or questions raised in their reading. (10 minutes)
- b. Watch the DVD in its entirety. (approximately 25 minutes)
- c. Open the floor for observations and first impressions.
- d. Invite participants to discuss selected questions from the participant guide.
- e. Close with a prayer or other communal action (see below).

**Option 2:** Time to stretch out (1 ½ hours or more...) Designed for evening classes or weekday classes where longer discussions can be encouraged.

- a. Review the reading material as a group. Prompt the participants for any comments regarding thoughts or questions raised in their reading. (10+ minutes)
- b. Watch one segment of the DVD material.
- c. Pause the DVD (at the prompt on the screen). Participant guides have specific questions relating to each DVD chapter. Break into groups of three or four to discuss the questions. After giving participants a chance to be in conversation, come back together as a group to share any observations with the larger group. The facilitator can also encourage conversation in the larger group by asking questions like:

*What jumped out at you? What caught you by surprise? What idea or comment did you disagree with? Why? What comment caused you to breathe a sigh of relief? Why?*

- d. Following any comments, resume DVD to end of next chapter. Repeat item (c) above.
- e. After the DVD concludes, have the group divide into pairs or small groups to discuss the additional questions provided at the end of the participants guide.
- f. Come back together as a group to share conversations/questions/observations from the pairs/small groups.
- g. Close with a prayer or other communal activity (see below).

**Option 3:** Whatever works for you!

Some *Living the Questions* groups have spread the discussion out over months by discussing only one DVD segment (chapter) per meeting (taking weeks to complete just one session). Others have used multiple sessions over the course of a weekend retreat. Some have used LtQ sessions as the core of a series of summer worship services. Do what works best for you and let us know about your ideas and successes at [info@livingthequestions.com](mailto:info@livingthequestions.com) -- and don't forget to share your ideas with other users on our Facebook page!

**Option 4:** Go Deep!

Contact your local mosque or Islamic Speakers Bureau and arrange to meet with an established group or individuals from their faith community that are interested in interfaith dialogue. Organize a shared meal to discuss your faith traditions – or arrange to study *The Jesus Fatwah* together!

**Closing**

Depending on the tradition and comfort level of your group, your closing prayer or ritual act may include:

- 1) quiet time / meditation
- 2) contemplative prayer
- 3) intercessory prayer, etc.
- 4) passing of the peace

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***As people head out the door:***

*If the material has not already been handed out or emailed for the whole series, don't forget to hand out next week's material. Confirm location, responsibilities, etc. for the next gathering.*





## Suggested Reading

Along with the books and writings of our contributors, you may find these resources helpful in living *The Jesus Fatwah*:

### General introductions to Islam

*The Muslim Next Door: The Qur'an, the Media and that Veil Thing* by Sumbul Ali-Karamali. (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2008). *The Muslim Next Door* is a highly popular and very accessible book that introduces Islam while challenging stereotypes and toppling myths.

*The Search for Truth About Islam: A Christian Pastor Separates Fact from Fiction* by Ben Daniel (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013). Using a blend of travel writing, storytelling, academic research, common sense, and pastoral vibe, *The Search for Truth about Islam* presents Islam for a popular audience. *Library Journal* included *The Search for Truth About Islam* on its list of essential books for any library's Islam collection.

*What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* by John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). This an extremely handy book. Set up like a glossary, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* is a go-to book for quick and reliable answers about Islam.

*The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002). This is a beautifully-written book that presents Islam from a Shiite perspective.

### Books on the History of Islam

*Islam: a Short History* by Karen Armstrong (New York: The Modern Library, 2002). This concise, reliable, informative and readable book is written by one of the world's writers of religious history.

*Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* by Fred M. Donner (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). Read this book to help you sort out the confusing narrative that is Islam's first hundred years.

## Books About Islam in Southern Spain

*A Vanished World: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Spain* by Chris Lowney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

and

*Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* by María Rosa Menocal (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).

Both of these books introduce the reader to the fascinating subject of Islamic Spain and, in the process, dispel a long list of misconceptions about what life was like under generals, kings and Caliphs who ruled the southern parts of Medieval Spain.

## Contemporary Issues

*The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* by Nathan Lean (London: Pluto Press, 2012). This book sheds light on the disturbing world of professional Islamophobia in the United States.

*Scattered Pictures: Reflections of An American Muslim* by Imam Zaid Shakir (Hayward, CA: Zaytuna Institute, 2005). Imam Zaid Shakir is among America's most prominent Muslim Leaders. *Scattered Pictures* is a collection of Essays on a broad range of topics. This book is hard to find but it is well worth the search.

