



A Culture of Peace Between Religions

By [Rabbi David Zaslow, May 6, 2019](#)

Whoever first said that “familiarity breeds contempt” was wrong. I suggest that familiarity breeds empathy and respect. Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, an Islamic scholar, visited our synagogue in March and gave a talk on the unique relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. As an Israeli Muslim he was able to share with us his work bringing people together through his organization, The Abrahamic Reunion. The day after the talk in Ashland we went to the Rogue Valley Manor where he was hosted by Father Joel Garavagila-Maiorano, the Manor’s wonderful Director of Pastoral Services.

When the massacre of Jews in Pittsburgh occurred six months ago the Havurah held a vigil the night of the tragedy. I invited members of the various faith communities to come to show solidarity with the Jewish community. The first person to tell me he would attend and speak was Imam Magdy Zaky, the spiritual leader of the Masjid Al Tawheed mosque in Talent.

When the mosque in New Zealand was attacked a few weeks ago and fifty Muslims were slaughtered, Imam Zaky was getting calls from his community that they were afraid to come to the Mosque for Friday prayers. What did the Imam do? He called the Jewish community to come and show support for his community in their time of need. Rabbi Julie Benioff and I along with members of Temple Emek Shalom and the Havurah Synagogue came to the mosque. The attendance of so many Jews brought comfort to our Muslim friends. It felt like reunion between brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of Isaac and Ishmael.

The following Friday I brought two of our bar mitzvah students to the mosque to experience their inspiring prayers. Imam Magdy finished his sermon and handed me the microphone to say a few words. Many of the people in attendance were from Middle Eastern nations like Egypt, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq and I guess that some had never met a Jewish person before, let alone witnessed a rabbi speaking words of peace at one of their prayer services. It felt as if God was using us to build a culture of peace between our religions.

Just before Passover last month I had the honor of leading a model seder at the Catholic Church in Central Point. Father Fredy Bonilla, from Columbia, hosted me leading the ceremony for 120

Catholics. This was the fourth year that I've led the model seder there, but the first time I met their new priest. Here too it felt as if the Holy One was inspiring us to create a culture of peace between our faiths.

On the other hand at the recent production of the play *The Good German*, produced by Livia Genise, a few well known local white supremacists were outside the theater handing out flyers promoting the lie that the Holocaust never happened. The lesson is that our work to build a culture of peace in Ashland and the Valley is not a simple task. It means we each need to foster peace in whatever parts of the community we belong to: our religious institutions, the arts and theater worlds, in our businesses, at the University, and in our social justice groups.

I suggest that all the various people who are vulnerable to acts of bigotry and hatred need to proudly affirm our alliance with one another even if we have differences on some issues. The word *shalom* in Hebrew does not just mean "peace." Its deeper meaning is "wholeness." The truth is that none of us can be fully whole without each other.

When the Havurah held our vigil to honor the massacre in Pittsburgh, the local Jewish community felt a deep sense of comfort from all our non-Jewish neighbors. Familiarity breeds relationship. Familiarity breeds respect. Just last week after the synagogue shooting in Poway the Masjid Al Tawheed mosque sent a beautiful bouquet of flowers to my synagogue with a card saying "in solidarity." That's building a culture of peace!

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