

THE SULTAN AND THE SAINT



National PBS Broadcast Viewing Party

December 26th, 2017 • PBS
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<https://www.SultanAndTheSaintFilm.com>

A Quick Guide to Starting an Interfaith Dialogue

Islam and Christianity are the two largest religions in the world. Both faiths share a common patriarch in the prophet Abraham, a central belief in a monotheistic God and their teachings emphasize charity, devotion to God, service and mercy.

While the similarities far outweigh the differences between Islam and Christianity – the core theological difference revolves around Jesus Christ, peace be upon him. For Christians, Jesus walked the earth as the incarnate form of God. For Muslims, Jesus is a prophet — a messenger of God — and a messiah who will return at the end of the world but he is not the son of God. Muslims believe that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was the last prophet and he recorded the word of God verbatim in the Qur'an.

The legacy of the crusades, a two hundred year conflict and war, often colors the relation between Muslims and Christians in the present. UPF's *The Sultan and the Saint* film helps Muslims, Christians and others to harness difference for creating better understanding. This *Quick Guide to Interfaith Dialogue* will help you to identify the common sources of morality and coexistence in Islam and Christianity and find ways to work towards peace and justice.

Sources of Coexistence in Islam and Christianity

Islam:

Say: 'People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as Lords, apart from God.' And if they turn their backs, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'

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Qur'an 3:64

Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

Qur'an 2:62

And truly among the People of the Book are those who believe in God and that which has been sent down unto you, and that which has been sent down unto them, humble before God, not selling God's signs for a paltry price. It is they who shall have their reward with their Lord. Truly God is swift in reckoning.

Qur'an 3:199

Christianity:

Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, 'In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.'

Acts 10:34-35

Every one of us will have to give an account of himself before God. Therefore, we must no longer pass judgment on one another. Instead you should resolve to put no stumbling block or hindrance in your brother's way.

St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 14 – Verses 12- 13

We must never forget that [Muslims] 'profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day.' In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential for all involved, not only so that they can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity, but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands, and shed

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light on shared beliefs. We Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition.”

His Holiness Pope Francis

Pre-Film Resources

It's a good idea to have a faith leader or lay leader read a prayer prior to the film screening.

A Joint Prayer for Christians and Muslims

This prayer was composed by Jordan Denari Duffner, and is adapted from an earlier version published online in *Sojourners*. It is intended for use by Christians and Muslims, who can pray it together. It incorporates teachings from both Islamic and Christian traditions, and affirms the common values shared by those who recite it.

Merciful and Compassionate God,¹

Who created humanity in all its wonderful diversity:²

Help us to be peacemakers³

And inspire us to repel evil with good.⁴

¹ Exodus 34:6, Psalms 103:8, Qur'an 1:1

² Qur'an 30: 22, Qur'an 5:48

³ Qur'an 30: 22, Qur'an 5:48

⁴ Qur'an 41:34

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JUBILEE
OF MERCY

Help us to love our neighbors,⁵

To welcome the stranger,⁶

And to turn enemies into friends.⁷

Guide as one community

As we strive on the path of justice, peace, and understanding.

Amen.

Did You Know?

The Importance of Mercy in Islam and Christianity

Pope Francis has declared this year to be a "Jubilee of Mercy" from December 8, 2015 – November 20, 2016. This designation as an "Extraordinary Jubilee" sets it apart from the ordinary cycle of jubilees, or holy years, which are called every 25 years in the Catholic Church. By calling for a holy year outside of the normal cycle, a particular theme is highlighted: mercy.

Islam places a huge emphasis on the theme of mercy, for example the opening verse of the Qur'an; "The Opening" begins with, "In the name of God, the infinitely compassionate and merciful". The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: "He who does not show mercy (to others) will not be shown mercy (by Allah)."

⁵ Mark 12:31

⁶ Leviticus 19:34

⁷ Qur'an 41:34

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Pre-Screening Exercise

Before screening *The Sultan and the Saint*, start with an intro, get-to-know-you exercise by turning to your neighbor, preferably someone you don't know, and ideally from another faith background than your own. If you have small groups, pair up one-to-one and begin with an introduction. If you have one large group, pair people up on-to-one and start by sharing (in no more than 2 minutes).

- 1.) Where are you from?
- 2.) Where are you now?
- 3.) Where are you going in the future?

Principles of Dialogue

As you prepare to engage in a dialogue following the film, remember to keep emphasis on forming "I statements" or statements that start with "I think", or "I feel". I statements are perspectives that stress your own individual experience first and foremost. As you proceed in your dialogue, affirm the following principles and ask if your group would like to add additional principles:

- Everyone has a right to pass.
- Everyone has part of the truth.
- Each person needs to speak her/his truth and listen to the other's truth in order for us to come to a greater truth.
- Openness to the truth in others is essential to promoting nonviolence because it creates a climate of trust.
- Acting out of truth, love, and justice frees or engages a force that is greater than any other force.

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Post Film Dialogue Questions

The following dialogue questions are bracketed in larger themes raised in the film. Spend between 5 – 7 minutes per question. If you have 30 minutes for your dialogue, you may only be able to identify one theme area to discuss. It is up to you or the main facilitator of your group to choose which questions to ask.

Whatever themes you choose, it is recommended to end with the *Building Take-Away* section.

Faith exchange vs. debate

- Francis and al-Kamil engaged in a faith exchange, not a debate. Why do you think they were able to communicate on the basis of their faith?
- What is the difference between a faith exchange and a debate in your own words?

Personal transformation in a societal context of violence and prejudice

- What are some of the ways that Francis and al-Kamil changed as a result of their encounter?
- Do you think that promoting peace starts with personal transformation? Why?
- What are ways that personal transformation can take place today in the context of Islamophobia?
- Can you think of some examples of personal transformation in your own life that was inspired by your encounter with cultural or religious difference?

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Words matter. Dehumanizing rhetoric towards the other

- What are some ways that myths or stereotypes are broken down?
- Can you think of an example, in your own experience, of overcoming a stereotype?
- What are some of the ways that dehumanizing rhetoric was escalated in the crusades?
- Given what we learned about the human brain in the film, what are some ways that we can counteract the tendency to categorize the other as outside of our own group?

Harnessing differences for peace

- Francis and al-Kamil managed to harness their theological differences and even their exclusivist truth claims to promote a new vision of coexistence. How do you think they were able to manage this difference?
- Are differences a road block to promoting peace, or can they be a source of strength?
- Have you harnessed difference to promote a relationship with someone from a different background? Share a story.
- What is the role of prayer in promoting peace

Conclusion

Building Take Away: Bridging... from Dialogue to Action

- Of all the points raised in the film, what is the one big idea that you are left with?

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- What sort of commitments to peacemaking do you want to make after sharing in this dialogue?
- How can we realize vision in our larger community?
- What concrete steps can we take together to live out the legacy of Francis and al-Kamil?

When time is up, notify all of the small groups that they need to come back together for ten to twenty minutes, depending on the size of your group. If you have one large group, you will want to leave more time for closing reflections to conclude the program.