

MEDIA CLIPS

**Foundation for Ethnic
Understanding in the News**

COMPILED FOR



PREPARED BY



WWW.RABINOWITZ-DORF.COM
(202) 265-3000

Weekend of Twinning (2008-2010)

Jews, Muslims Team Up for Talks at Temples, Mosques—Washington Post.....	4
Jewish and Muslims 'twin' for interfaith talks—USA Today	5
U.S. and Canadian Jews, Muslims seek dialogue—Reuters	6
Bridging the Muslim-Jewish divide—Jerusalem Post	7
Saudi King meets with group of prominent U.S. Jews in New York—Haaretz	8
Jews, Muslims seek better ties in `Twinning'—Religion News Service.....	9
Jews and Muslims build grassroots ties in a time of polarizing differences—New Orleans News	11
Shabbat interreligieux l'ASMF gagne son pari—Actualite Juive	16
Project aims to build better relations for Muslims, Jews—Boston Globe	14
Islamic-Jewish 'twinning' brings faiths together worldwide—Atlanta Jewish Constitution	16
Jews and Muslims are confronting prejudice together—The Daily Star.....	18
Le dialogue judéo-musulman est en route», entretien avec le rabbin Serfaty, président de l'Amitié Judéo-Musulmane de France--CRIF	20
À Ris-Orangis, juifs et musulmans disent non à l'esprit de chapelle—20 Minuten	22
Week-end d'amitiés judéo-musulmanes—Le Figaro. Fr	23
Jews and Muslims confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism together—Daily News, Egypt	24

Mission of European Imams and Rabbis to the United States (2009)

Rabbis, imams visit U.S. for dialogue—Washington Times	26
Shalom, and Salaam: European rabbis and imams pay a visit to Ellis Island—Tablet.....	28
EU interfaith delegation in White House to learn about dialogue—Haaretz	30
European rabbis, imams to promote understanding—YNet.....	31
European imams, rabbis visit 'The House that Ruth Built'—Jerusalem Post.....	32

House of Lords (2010)

Scholars at Cairo's Al-Azhar lift ban on dialogue with Jews—Jerusalem Post.....	34
Muslims support dialogue with Jews—United Press International.....	36
Al-Azhar invites Jews to inter-faith talks—Middle East Online	37
El Ezher, Yahudilerle diyalog yasağını kaldırdı El Ezher—Haber 7, Turkey.....	38
STUDIOSI ISLAMICI TOLGONO DIVIETO DIALOGO CON EBREI—ANSA, Italy	39
Juden und Muslime treffen EU-Ratspräsident Van Rompuy—KNA, Germany.....	40
Kairos Universität eröffnet Dialog mit dem Judentum—Die Welt, Germany	41
Jewish Chronicle Blog: Excellent news from al-Azhar—The Jewish Chronicle, UK.....	42
AK News: Cairo's Al-Azhar university lifts ban on dialogue with Jews—AK News, Iraw	43

OpEd (2010)

In post-9/11 world, chance to teach our children not to hate— USA Today 44

A Challenge for WTC Mosque Opponents:The rights of American Muslims are being questioned in other locations. Will Gingrich and Palin speak out on their behalf?—Wall Street Journal 46

The spiritual convergence of Rosh Hashanah, Eid al-Fitr and 9/11—Washington Post:On Faith 48

Jews and Muslims confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism together—Common Ground News Service..... 50

Juifs et musulmans : Ensemble pour faire face à l'islamophobie et à l'antisémitisme—Service de presse Common Ground 52

Public Serice Announcements (2008)

Backstage With Six Rabbis, Six Imams and No 'Kumbaya'—New York Times..... 54

We Are Children of Abraham (Ad)—New York Times..... 54

The Washington Post

Jews, Muslims Team Up for Talks at Temples, Mosques

November 22, 2008

By Associated Press

Jews and Muslims are meeting in 100 mosques or synagogues across North America through tomorrow in what organizers call a "Weekend of Twinning."

One synagogue and one mosque will team up, in at least 50 different pairings, to discuss their differences and what they have in common.

The project is being spearheaded by Rabbi Marc Schneier, whose Foundation for Ethnic Understanding also has produced a public-service announcement in which rabbis and imams denounce anti-Semitism and "Islamophobia."

Jews and Muslims trace their roots to the patriarch Abraham, Schneier said, so "not only do we share a common faith, but we share a common fate."



Jewish and Muslims 'twin' for interfaith talks

November 21, 2008

By Cathy Grossman

<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/religion/post/2008/11/58797426/1>

The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, headed up by Rabbi Marc Schneier of New York, has a new project starting today to foster better relations between Jews and Muslims.

For the first ever "Weekend of Twinning," 50 synagogues and 50 mosques, their rabbis and imams, from California to Washington, D.C., will hold three days of interfaith discussions, work-groups and panels to confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

Also tied in with the "twinning": A public service broadcast ad campaign (see it here) with six imams and six rabbis. The Faithful Dozen talk about "standing side by side, knowing that our words and our actions will determine our future."

The plan is to reach more than 100,000 people this weekend and pray they spread the word of interfaith understanding.

It will be interesting to see how well this works. I've always wondered whether interfaith programs, however ambitious or creative, tend to preach to the converted -- to reach only people already inclined to agree with the message.

Has your attitude toward believers who don't share your own faith ever been changed or your sympathies for their problems more engaged by your participation in an interfaith event?



U.S. and Canadian Jews, Muslims seek dialogue

November 21, 2008

By Ed Stoddard

<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2008/11/21/us-and-canadian-jews-muslims-seek-dialogue/>

Muslim and Jewish leaders across the United States and Canada plan to meet this weekend to discuss ways to fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

The meetings and panel discussions from Friday to Sunday — dubbed the Weekend of Twinning — are part of a broader movement of interfaith dialogue taking place against a global backdrop of tensions between religious groups.

Several of the rabbis and imams have broadcast a public service announcement on CNN appealing for interfaith understanding (see the video above) and published a full-page ad in the New York Times available here in PDF form.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and co-organizer of the weekend talks, told me in a brief telephone interview that “it was a realization among Muslims and Jews that as children of Abraham not only do we share a common faith but we share a common fate ... It is necessary for us to champion the causes and the concerns of the other.”

Asked how he rated Jewish-Muslim relations in America at the present, he replied: “Virtually non-existent” — a response that underscores the task ahead.

Many American Jews are politically liberal and strong supporters of Israel; many American Muslims feel they are regarded with intense suspicion in the wake of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks.

The talks, panels and seminars will be held in 50 mosques and synagogues across the United States and Canada. The Weekend of Twinning resulted from a resolution passed at the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis held last year in New York and hosted by The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding.

The Weekend of Twinning is co-sponsored by the Foundation of Ethic Understanding, Islamic Society of North America, World Jewish Congress and Muslim Public Affairs Council. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the largest Muslim group in North America, says the 50 mosques and 50 synagogues participating in the weekend represent over 100,000 Muslims and Jews.

How effective do you think campaigns like this are? Can Muslims and Jews in North America find the common ground so difficult to achieve in the Middle East?

THE JERUSALEM POST

Bridging the Muslim-Jewish divide

November 19, 2008

By Tom Tugend

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1226404774198&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull>

There was nothing unusual about some 20 devout Muslims from the King Fahad Mosque bowing and prostrating themselves as they recited the Isha, or night prayer.

Only the site was Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, and the worshipers were outnumbered by about 80 Jews watching the unfamiliar ritual.

At the same time, in another room of the Reform temple, Jewish congregants were participating in the Ma'ariv evening prayer, watched respectfully by a group of Muslims.

The separate but interwoven prayer sessions on Monday represented the beginning of a "twinning" movement that this weekend will bring together 50 synagogues and 50 mosques across the United States and Canada.

The twinning weekend, under the theme "Confronting Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism Together," is one indicator of earnest attempts by American Jews and Muslims to reach beyond the Middle East conflict to join hands in battling prejudices within and against their communities.

There are other signs as well.

In Los Angeles, a major university, a Jewish institution and an Islamic foundation jointly established a Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement.

And at the University of California, Irvine, usually pictured as a hotbed of Muslim-Jewish antagonism, student leaders of both faiths recently returned from a two-week trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Although past attempts at Jewish-Muslim dialogues generally have been short-lived in the face of Mideast flare-ups, Temple Emanuel Rabbi Laura Geller was optimistic that the twinning project would succeed because "for the first time, mosques and synagogues are giving their full backing."

The twinning project was launched a year ago when the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, led by Orthodox Rabbi Marc Schneier and hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, invited 13 Jewish and 13 Muslim spiritual leaders to a meeting.

"Our goal was to enlist 25 synagogues and 25 mosques, but we ended up with double the number," said Schneier, whose foundation has largely concentrated on Jewish-black relations.

"Both American Jews and Muslims are children of Abraham and citizens of the same country, and we share a common faith and destiny," he said. "Of course, we cannot ignore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's the elephant in the room, but I see the emergence of moderate, centrist Muslim voices, particularly in the United States, and we must do everything possible to encourage such voices."

HAARETZ.com

Saudi King meets with group of prominent U.S. Jews in New York

November 13, 2008

By Shlomo Shamir

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/saudi-king-meets-with-group-of-prominent-u-s-jews-in-new-york-1.257158>

Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz praises election of Obama, says U.S. 'sent powerful message to the world.'

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz met with a group of prominent American Jewish leaders in New York on Thursday. The meeting - which was attended by leading political and religious figures, among them Ronald Lauder, the head of the World Jewish Congress - was held as part of a United Nations-sponsored interfaith dialogue.

Also among the attendees were the head of Reform Movement, Rabbi Eric Yoffie; leading Orthodox Rabbi Marc Schneier; and former American Jewish Congress president Jack Rosen.

The two-hour meeting was also attended by 40 American religious leaders, including Christian clergy members and senior Muslim imams. In his remarks to the gathering, the Saudi monarch commented for the first time on Barack Obama's victory in the U.S. presidential elections. "The United States sent a powerful message to the world," Abdullah said. "The color of one's skin is not a barrier."

One of the representatives present at the meeting said it was apparent that the king sought to present himself as a religious leader while making an effort to steer clear of political issues. Abdullah sought to emphasize the role of religion and faith in God. "God does not tolerate man who rises against his peer," Abdullah, who organized the interfaith conference, said on Thursday. "One mustn't adhere to the laws of man but to the laws of God."



Jews, Muslims seek better ties in 'Twinning'

November 24, 2008

By Nicole Neroulis

The mistrust and misconceptions between North America's Jews and Muslims may run thick and deep, but leaders of a new nationwide interfaith initiative say the two sides have more to learn than fear from each other.

That was the message issued this weekend (Nov. 21-23) in more than 100 mosques and synagogues that signed up for a "Weekend of Twinning" in hopes of forming relationships to confront the dual threats of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

"For generations, there has been a series of misunderstandings by Jews and Muslims on what the other religious community believes and practices," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, head of the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which organized the events.

"These misperceptions and other societal and political factors have unfortunately led to tensions between our two communities."

The effort grew out of a resolution passed at the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis last year in New York, which was hosted by Schneier's organization. Kick-off events were held in California, Florida and New York, and Schneier hopes to make it an annual event, expanding to Europe next year.

The Diaspora communities may clash over the long-running Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but they can still find common ground at home, which could eventually contribute to better global relations, said Gustav Niebuhr, author of "Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America."

"Meeting and talking is a significant thing," said Niebuhr, a former New York Times religion reporter who now teaches at Syracuse University.

"It doesn't work for everybody, but it leads to some familiarity, and I think anything that goes toward busting stereotypes is a good thing."

America's emerging Muslim community can also learn from the success of the Jewish Diaspora, both in creating strong faith-based programs and in becoming integral parts of government and secular institutions, Niebuhr added.

Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America, who was raised Catholic and has a sister who converted to Judaism, said she encourages interfaith initiatives like the twinning weekend as "a source of wholeness and healing in the community."

Still, she said, many Muslim groups might not be capable of organizing these kinds of events regularly, given that some are currently struggling just to find and fund full-time staff, she added.

"There is a lot we still need to work on internally," she said.

"Each community should think about what is appropriate. Some might want to focus on women's programs, others on youth programs."

For her part, Mattson addressed Schneier's New York Synagogue about the distinctions between religious and cultural roles of women in traditional Islam, while Schneier's wife, Tobi, shared her perspective on the same issue in Orthodox Judaism.

The dual discussion garnered enthusiastic applause from the Manhattan congregation, which included about 200 Jews and two dozen Muslim guests.

"Wouldn't it be great to have something like this every month?" said Joan Lefkowitz, a state Supreme Court justice who had commuted from the suburbs for the event.

During the shared kosher meal after the worship service, Atik Zabinski, a Muslim convert raised in an atheist household, said he planned to attend several other twinning programs, excited by the opportunity to learn more about both his new religion and the faith of his Jewish ancestors.

"Talking is important, because otherwise, we tend to look at people as groups instead of as individuals, and then we lose track of their humanity," he said.

Ultimately, proponents of interfaith dialogue, particularly between Jews and Muslims, hope to help members of their communities realize that despite a few visible differences, they may not be so different after all.

"As children of Abraham, we share both a common faith and a common fate," said Imam Shamsi Ali of Manhattan's 96th Street Mosque. "We are not enemies. We have a very critical issue with the Middle East issue, but it's not the most critical issue."



Everything New Orleans

Jews and Muslims build grassroots ties in a time of polarizing differences

November 19, 2009

By Bruce Nolan

http://www.nola.com/religion/index.ssf/2009/11/jews_and_muslims_build_grassroots_ties_in_a_time_of_polarizing_differences.html

For a while in New Orleans Thursday, disparate Jewish and Muslim worlds with little prior contact met and introduced themselves to each other, chatted amiably, even shared a little humor.

It seemed a good beginning for members of Congregation Beth Israel, a small Orthodox congregation in Metairie, and Masjid Abu Bakr al Siddiq, a much larger Metairie Muslim community.

Led by two young men, Rabbi Uri Topolosky and Imam Omar Suleiman, a few representatives of both congregations met for the first time Thursday. They asked and answered questions about each others' traditions, briefly worked together on a Katrina rebuilding project and visited each others' places of worship — or in Beth Israel's case, the ruined and empty building in Lakeview the congregation used to occupy.

Joined by more members of their communities, they were to dine together at Casablanca in Metairie, one of the area's few kosher restaurants.

The encounter was shepherded by two interested visitors from New York: Rabbi Marc Schneier, founder of an enterprise called the Institute for Ethnic Understanding, and Imam Mohammed Shamsi Ali, head of New York City's largest mosque.

Originally founded to work at improving relations among Jews and African-Americans, after 9/11 the organization turned toward building Jewish-Muslim relations at home.

Ali, from Indonesia, has won a reputation as a moderate interested in building interfaith dialogue.

Across the country, the two explained, about 100 Jewish and Muslim congregations this week are involved in similar "twinning" explorations, an effort in building grassroots connections in a time of polarizing differences.

Schneier and Ali said they were at a similar effort in Chicago last weekend, and asked Topolosky if he would arrange a similar meeting involving a Muslim counterpart in New Orleans.

Although they had little prior contact, Topolosky and Suleiman share similarities.

Both are young — Topolosky, the elder, is only 31. Both came to their congregations after Hurricane Katrina. Both are sons of mothers who converted from Catholicism. Both seem open, gregarious, outward-looking, even as they are rooted in their traditions.

At a rebuilding project on Deers Street at midafternoon, both stopped to pray with their small groups: Topolosky, two members of his congregation and Schneier praying the Mincha service in Hebrew, while Suleiman, Ali and two companions separated themselves to offer the Muslim Asr prayer.

That done, Suleiman pulled on a black and gold Saints cap and rejoined the work party.

By that time, Suleiman and the New Yorkers, led by Topolosky, had already examined the ruined husk of Beth Israel's empty synagogue.

Topolosky explained that a verse from the Torah was once fixed above the main entry — the same verse, as it happened, that he and his wife, Dahlia, had selected to place on their wedding invitations.

"My wife and I, we did the same thing," with a verse from the Qu'ran Suleiman said.

And standing in the dead synagogue still littered with flood debris, Topolosky explained that there is a Jewish prayer of submission in the face of bewildering misfortune, "God is the true judge." That prompted Suleiman to offer an Islamic counterpart, from the Arabic: "God has decreed, and as he has written, so it happens." The day was no more than that: a tentative, exploratory beginning, to be taken as far as the participants wished. A day for finding little slivers of common ground.

There was a moment in the introductory conversations at Suleiman's masjid when Schneier, the rabbi from New York, spotted on the wall an architect's rendering of a large, new building built in the Moorish style.

He inquired, and Suleiman explained it was likeness of the much larger masjid the Muslim community hopes to build soon in Kenner.

Schneier nodded. "In every rabbi's study, we have the same picture," he said.

ACTU'COM

Shabbat interreligieux : l'AJMF gagne son pari

RAPPROCHEMENT ■ Dans le cadre de l'échange interreligieux initié durant le shabbat dernier par l'Association Judéo-Musulmane de France du Rabbin Michel Serfaty, vingt synagogues de France ont ouvert leurs portes à des délégations musulmanes. Ambiance.

Samedi 14 novembre, 11h30, lecture de la Haftara sous la conduite d'Elie Balmain, Président de la synagogue Buffault. Hervé Ben Kamla, vice-Président de l'association AJMF, accompagné du vice-Président de la Mosquée El Fath de la rue Polenceau et d'un membre de son Bureau traversent l'assemblée pour saluer le Rabbin Didier Weill. Aux premiers rangs, les trois invités assistent à un office célébrant le shabbat de deux bar-mitsvot. Impressionnés par une foule comparable à celle de Roch Hachana et la solennité de la chorale conviée pour l'occasion, les invités suivent avec déférence la cérémonie, guidés par des ouvrages bilingues.

Dans son sermon, le Rabbin Weill souhaite «la bienvenue à la délégation dans le cadre du rapprochement interreligieux», rappelant à la lumière de la Paracha l'hospitalité référentielle d'«Abraham-Ibrahim» et l'idée de «passerelle» incarnée par le patriarche. Cette dimension est partagée par Hervé Ben Kamla. «Nous souhaitons être une passerelle,

à l'image de ce que le Rabbin Weill a souhaité aux jeunes récipiendaires, à savoir que dans leur vie, ils devront toujours être des passerelles. Une passerelle au service de la fraternité et du bien-vivre en France pour tordre le cou au communautarisme».

Une délégation de Buffault à la mosquée El Fath

«Cette délégation de gens simples et peu protocolaires» selon le Rabbin Weill fut très impressionnée par la foule et la voix exceptionnelle du jeune bar-mitsva Michael Darmon, fils du hazan et ministre officiant de Buffault Philippe Darmon. «En raccompagnant, très émus, les membres de la délégation à leurs véhicules, ils m'ont confié dans des mots simples qu'ils avaient été touchés par une sorte de grâce. On sentait une présence, ont-ils dit». Interrogé sur les prières à caractère politique pour l'Etat d'Israël, les soldats de Tsahal et la libération de Guilad Shalit, celui qui est aussi un des douze membres

fondateurs de l'AJMF rappelle qu'il portait le portrait de Guilad Shalit pendant la cérémonie célébrant la libération d'Ingrid Bettancourt.

Il faut souligner que la communauté de Buffault, puisque c'est seulement dans celle-là que nous nous sommes rendus, a bien accueilli l'initiative. Elle a toutefois insisté sur l'idée d'une réciprocité impérative. Hervé ben Kamla attend ainsi un retour national dans les prochains jours. Sur le point d'embarquer pour Amman, le Rabbin Michel Serfaty rappelle que des passerelles ont également été jetées à l'étranger. «Sous les auspices du Recteur Dalil Boubakeur, de moi-même et de l'AJMF, nous avons réuni ce week-end vingt médecins juifs français et trente médecins musulmans marocains à Marrakech. L'initiative se poursuivra ensuite à Amman avec une association suisse présidée par le Professeur Stéphane Scheiner». Prochain rendez-vous : la délégation de Buffault à la mosquée El Fath. A suivre. ■

Véronique Ghidalia-Dubois

The Boston Globe

Project aims to build better relations for Muslims, Jews

November 6, 2010

By Lisa Wangsness

http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/11/06/project_aims_to_build_better_relations_for_muslims_jews/

Worshippers at Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, a synagogue in West Newton, and the Islamic Center of Boston in Wayland plan to spend this weekend getting to know one another as part of an international “twinning” project that aims to combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia by building relationships between Jews and Muslims.

Today, a group from the Islamic Center of Boston will observe part of a Shabbat service at Dorshei Tzedek, followed by a discussion over lunch. Tomorrow, Dorshei Tzedek members will visit the Islamic Center to see the 1 p.m. prayers, meet with worshippers, and learn more about Islam.

Now in its third year, the “Weekend of Twinning” will bring together 100 pairs of synagogues, mosques, and student groups in North America, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. This year’s event comes near the end of a year fraught with tension between Muslims and Jews in Boston and across the world over such issues as the proposed Islamic center near ground zero in New York, the recent interception in Britain and Dubai of explosive-laden packages addressed to Chicago synagogues; and, locally, ongoing controversy surrounding the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center in Roxbury.

“It just feels important in this general climate of so much anti-Muslim fear and suspicion to just try to humanize this, and make some connections, and learn a little bit about each other,” said Rabbi Toba Spitzer of Dorshei Tzedek.

Dr. Sepi Gilani, a surgeon who is organizing the twinning project for the Wayland mosque, said his congregation regularly opens its doors to students and other religious groups who want to know more about Islam, and participates in a variety of interfaith events with the synagogue just across the street, Temple Shir Tikva.

The twinning project seemed like another opportunity to build bridges, she said.

“There’s a lot to be said about the word ‘twinning,’ ” said Gilani, the mother of a pair of 16-year-olds. “We are all brothers and sisters if you go back far enough.”

David Lobron, a member of Dorshei Tzedek who is helping to organize the event, said he developed an interest in interfaith work when his family belonged to Temple Beth Shalom, in Cambridge, which he said participated in a number of educational events with the Islamic Society of Boston in Cambridge. He was struck, he said, by the “interesting moments of unexpected closeness.”

He said he has noticed that Muslims tend to have a better understanding of Jewish traditions than Jews do of Muslim ones. “Probably most Jewish people have not visited a mosque before,” he said. “The Muslims I’ve talked to, a lot of them have been to bar mitzvahs and things like that.”

Rabbi Marc Schneier, founder and president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York, which organizes the event along with the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of North America, said the idea for the project grew out of a summit of rabbis and imams in New York in 2007. The event's focus, he said, is "not leader-to-leader, it's people-to-people, congregation-to-congregation," he said.

The King Fahad Mosque in Culver City, Calif., is getting ready for its third twinning weekend with Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills, said Usman Madha, the mosque's director. The exercise spawned a lecture series held at both the mosque and the synagogue, and now children from both institutions' religious schools participate in regular community service activities together.

"It can't just be the kumbaya moment and the rah-rah-rah," Madha said. "It's lifelong work. The best thing that happened is our kids got together and are doing that work. They will be tomorrow's adults, and they will be carrying the message."



Islamic-Jewish 'twinning' brings faiths together worldwide

November 7, 2010

By Marcus K. Garner

<http://www.ajc.com/news/north-fulton/islamic-jewish-twinning-brings-730153.html>

Ariana Lewis had never met a Muslim before Sunday.

The Jewish teen got to interact with Muslims her age for the first time at her Sandy Springs synagogue, as part of an international interfaith outreach called a Weekend of Twinning.

"I didn't know we had so many similarities," said Lewis, 14, of Sandy Springs.

Friday through Sunday, more than 100 mosques and 100 synagogues in 22 countries joined together for a weekend of twinning -- pairing people of different faiths -- in an effort to bridge the gaps between Judaism and Islam and confront prejudice toward both.

"We really want to focus on our commonalities," said Asad Abdulla, a junior at Emory University and a member of the campus interfaith group, the Children of Abraham. "We have to dispel ignorance and share a mutual knowledge about one another."

The linking of youth from Congregation Or Hadash in Sandy Springs and the Roswell Community Masjid was one of five in Georgia, with twinings in Marietta, Buckhead, Decatur and Savannah.

Following a summer of increased anti-Muslim sentiments spawned from plans to build an Islamic community center near the site of the Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center tragedy, Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and an organizer for the Weekend of Twinning, said the world-wide activities are sorely needed.

"The targeting this summer of Muslim communities in New York, Tennessee and elsewhere demonstrate that we as a country have a long way to go until all men and women are accepted as equals," said Schneier, president of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and lead organizer of the Weekend of Twinning.

"I am proud to see so many join in on the Weekend of Twinning and rather than joining in the chorus of unacceptance choosing instead to confront Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and bigotry head-on."

In Sandy Springs on Sunday, Mona Khalef, 14, of Woodstock, was among the 30 high school and college students who paired up -- one Jew and one Muslim -- to discuss the things they loved about their faiths and the things that frightened them.

"I get nervous about wearing this," Khalef, a freshman at River Ridge High School, told David Micley as she motioned to her white hijab. "I'm scared when people come up to you and ask questions randomly, like 'are you planning to blow us up?'"

Micley, 22, an Emory senior and co-founder of the Children of Abraham, was taken aback by what he heard.

"I can't believe that her teachers haven't said something," he said when he spoke to the group. "That's a real problem that's not just in the schools, but in our society in general."

During the ice-breaking session at Or Hadash, Muhammad Elost, 17, a junior at Pope High School in Marietta, learned about one of his partner's favorite aspects of Judaism.

"He talked about these pancakes with potatoes in them," Elost told the group, referring to Cody Benbeniste's love of latkes. "We have similar foods to that. We have barrique."

Rabbi Analia Bortz pointed to the joint origin of both Jewish and Islamic faiths to illustrate their similarities.

"Who is really our father?" Bortz asked the group of youths.

"Abraham," the Jewish kids answered.

"Ibrahim," came the answer from Muslims, as the students sat in a circle at the auditorium of the Weber School.

"What is the first thing he does when people came to his tent?" Bortz asked.

"Offered them food," several students responded.

"So food, extremely important part of our traditions," Bortz said.

She and Roswell Community Masjid leader Bassem Fakoury pointed to other similarities Jews and Muslims share.

"Today is the first day the month of el-Hajj, which is translated to pilgrimage," Fakoury said, referring to the annual trip thousands of Muslims make each year to Mecca to reaffirm their faith. For the Jews faith, Hanukkah was "the recovery of our traditions," Bortz said.

Following the lunch and ice-breaker, students traveled to Big Tree Forest Preserve, about two miles away from Weber, and planted a dogwood tree together.

"Hopefully, this is the start of something," said Nisma Zbib, 16, an Alpharetta High School junior.

Ariana Lewis agreed.

"I want to do this again."



Jews and Muslims are confronting prejudice together

November 22, 2010

By Marc Schneir

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=121744#axzz16y8jwcM4

For generations, misunderstandings have existed between Jews and Muslims on what the other believes and practices. These misperceptions, as well as social and political factors, have unfortunately led to tensions between our two communities.

We are all the children of Abraham and like any sibling relationship it is vital for us both to remember our shared roots and support each other. The Weekend of Twinning is designed to foster and strengthen relationships between Jews and Muslims. This ground-breaking initiative joins together Jews and Muslims in their own communities at mosques and synagogues, as well as Muslim and Jewish students and young leadership groups.

Each year, participants pledge to work on an on-going basis to combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. In some communities, this program is the beginning of interreligious activities between Muslims and Jews that we hope will continue for generations to come.

The first Weekend of Twinning was held in November 2008 and spearheaded by The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) in cooperation with the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and the World Jewish Congress. The twinning program resulted from a resolution passed at the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis hosted by FFEU in New York in 2007. In addition, the Weekend of Twinning has the support of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and it mirrors his vision to promote the moderate voices and cooperation with other faith communities.

In July 2009, FFEU led a Mission of European Imams and Rabbis to the United States, co-sponsored by the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of North America. The imams and rabbis (28 in total) from France, the United Kingdom, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and Russia interacted with US political leaders and social advocates, and discussed how to improve interreligious relations in their own communities. The mission concluded with a commitment by the European imams and rabbis to take part in the 2009 Weekend of Twinning in their home countries.

In November 2009, the second annual Weekend of Twinning of Mosques and Synagogues culminated in 100 mosques and 100 synagogues joining together under the theme "Building a Common Agenda" to embrace social issues together as one community. The twinning in Europe was launched in Paris at an event sponsored by the Jewish-Muslim Friendship Society of France, and co-sponsored by the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF), the Consistoire, the Great Mosque of Paris and the European Jewish Fund.

As a result of the July mission of European imams and rabbis, participation in the 2009 Weekend of Twinning expanded to include twinned congregations from seven European countries – the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Netherlands. In France, where Muslim-Jewish tensions have been especially high, 19 mosques and 19 synagogues twinned with one another, reinforcing the notion that reconciliation between the two faith communities is possible.

This year, throughout November and December, more than 100 mosques and 100 synagogues in 22 countries on four continents will participate in the Weekend of Twinning. On October 31, the twinning kicked off with a worldwide virtual twinning event during which participants from around the world heard reports on Jewish-Muslim initiatives underway in various countries.

In further support of our outreach efforts, we are announcing the publication of a new book that I am co-authoring with Imam Shamsi Ali, spiritual leader of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the largest and most prestigious mosque in New York City. We will analyze difficult and controversial passages from the Torah and the Koran, and present the voice of moderation in reviewing these sacred texts. The book will be an invaluable resource in advancing Muslim-Jewish relations to communities worldwide.

In the past three years, thousands of Jews and Muslims from California, New York and Toronto, as well as London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and other European cities, have not only visited their respective houses of worship for the first time, but have also studied the Torah and Koran together, served meals side-by-side to poor and homeless people, and built meaningful friendships.

The Weekend of Twinning has time and time again shown us that Jews and Muslims can not only live together peacefully as neighbors, but also partner together to build a better community.



Le dialogue judéo-musulman est en route», entretien avec le rabbin Serfaty, président de l'Amitié Judéo-Musulmane de France

November 8, 2010

By Bernard Koch

http://www.crif.org/index.php?page=articles_display/detail&aid=22329&returnto=search/search&artyd=113

Du 5 au 7 novembre, pour la deuxième année consécutive, auront lieu en France, les "Journées Mondiales du Dialogue entre Juifs et Musulmans". Une initiative originale qui a fait ses preuves aux Etats-Unis, au Canada. Une centaine de lieux de culte et d'associations, juifs et musulmans participent à cette manifestation inter-culturelle et permettent aux fidèles de chaque communauté de parfaire leur connaissance mutuelle. Bernard Koch s'entretient avec Michel Serfaty, rabbin de Ris-Orangis et Président de l'Amitié Judéo-Musulmane de France qu'il a créée en 2005.

- Comment est née cette idée ? Quelle en est sa genèse ?

L'idée du week-end portes ouvertes mosquées-synagogues nous a été proposée par l'association américaine : Foundation for Ethnic understandings (F.F.E.U.) que préside le Rabbin Marc Schneier à N.Y. Lancée aux USA et au Canada, il y a 3 ans, elle a connu un réel succès dont les prolongements se traduisirent par de nombreuses activités réunissant juifs et musulmans de ces deux pays. En observant les résultats positifs de cette initiative, nous avons à notre tour décidé de la reprendre en France.

- Quel impact peuvent-elles avoir sur ce dialogue dont vous avez été l'un des tout premiers initiateurs à travers votre association Amitié Judéo-Musulmane de France ?

L'impact de cette initiative est évident : il consolide les relations tissées entre juifs et musulmans en France depuis que nous avons lancé les « Tours de France et d'Ile de France du bus de l'amitié ». De nouveaux adhérents se manifestent et cherchent des antennes locales plus proches pour matérialiser leur désir de créer d'authentiques sentiments d'amitié entre juifs et musulmans.

- Cette fois, l'initiative passe par le religieux, puisque les fidèles sont invités à se rendre visite et à dialoguer sur les lieux de culte... Pensez-vous que le religieux peut avoir plus de poids, plus de choses à dire, que le profane, pour promouvoir ce dialogue, et au-delà de ce dialogue, pour promouvoir le processus de paix ?

Judaïsme et Islam sont perçus en France davantage comme des religions malgré leurs apports culturels respectifs. Les manifestations d'hostilités entre juifs et musulmans s'expriment plus dans les sphères sociales pauvres qui se déclarent sous influence de quelques mosquées radicales. Les franges sociales juives et musulmanes issues de milieu aisés sont moins affectées par les comportements antisémites.

- Cette manifestation est l'occasion de faire le point sur ce dialogue dont vous êtes l'un des meilleurs observateurs, vous qui le vivez chaque jour sur le terrain et chaque année, avec votre bus à travers l'Hexagone. Où en est-il ? Percevez-vous une évolution, une avancée sur ce dialogue ?

Le dialogue judéo-musulman « est en route ». Il progresse lentement certes mais ce qu'il produit de ville en ville d'une année à l'autre par des activités de plus en plus nombreuses, des témoignages de solidarités depuis trois ans témoignent tous de cette avancée.

- Comment réagissent, selon vous, les communautés juives et musulmanes face à ce dialogue ?

De plus en plus de responsables juifs et musulmans se mobilisent et témoignent de l'intérêt pour leurs jeunes ou leurs fidèles, de rencontrer l'autre pour mieux le connaître, de créer des occasions de solidarités et montrer qu'ils peuvent marcher ensemble.

- Vous êtes Rabbín d'une communauté, Ris-Orangis dans l'Essonne. Comment le Rabbín que vous êtes voit-il l'avenir de ce dialogue qui n'est pas sans lien avec les événements au Proche-Orient ?

L'expérience de terrain des six tours de France et des six tours d'Ile de France, nous a donné l'occasion d'appréhender la place du dialogue par rapport aux événements du Moyen Orient. La plupart de nos concitoyens musulmans, près de 85 à 90%, ignorent tout du conflit israélo-palestinien et n'en rapportent que des clichés et des stéréotypes. Ils sont bien plus préoccupés par leur avenir, la formation, l'emploi, etc. C'est donc en les aidant à réussir leur intégration que nous opérons des changements de leur regard sur nous.

- Difficile de ne pas vous poser une question qui se réfère à l'actualité récente. Un massacre à Bagdad dans une Eglise, des colis piégés interceptés au Yémen et à Londres adressés à des lieux de culte juifs aux Etats-Unis. L'Islam une fois de plus stigmatisé. Quelle influence ont ces tragiques événements dans votre réflexion sur le dialogue qui vous est cher ?

La lutte contre l'islamisme et contre le terrorisme qui en est issu ne laisse pas indifférents nos concitoyens musulmans. Ils mesurent de plus en plus combien les valeurs de l'occident, celles qui placent l'homme au centre des priorités de l'existence, à l'inverse des visions des terroristes qui méprisent l'être humain au bénéfice de l'autorité dictatoriale de leur système politique, ont plus de chance d'aboutir à la paix.

- Comme vous le savez, il y a dans chaque communauté, d'importantes poches de résistance à ce dialogue entre Juifs et Musulmans. Des réticences et même une haine réciproque. Qu'est-ce que vous auriez envie de leur dire à ces « boudeurs », à ces réfractaires ? Peut-on encore les convaincre ?

Près de 100 ans pour voir le dialogue judéo-chrétien évoluer dans le bon sens, laisse penser que le dialogue judéo-musulman à peine naissant demande également de la patience, de l'écoute et de la détermination pour décourager les sceptiques des deux cotés. Je n'ai pas de doute que nous sommes en marche vers un mieux vivre ensemble et une meilleure compréhension.



A Ris-Orangis, juifs et musulmans disent non à l'esprit de chapelle

November 8, 2010

By Maxime Terracol

<http://www.20minutes.fr/article/619535/paris-a-ris-orangis-juifs-musulmans-disent-non-esprit-chapelle>

Ce week-end, synagogues et mosquées ont fait portes ouvertes. Depuis deux ans, l'Amitié Judéo-Musulmane de France (AJMF), à l'initiative de cette opération, encourage les rencontres entre islam et judaïsme. Le principe : des communautés juives et musulmanes s'invitent respectivement dans leurs lieux de culte.

Vendredi soir, mosquée de Ris-Orangis (Essonne). Au premier étage, une vingtaine de personnes sont réunies. « Salam aleikoum, vous êtes ici chez vous », lance tout sourire, Mohamed Touhami, le président de l'association culturelle musulmane. Face à lui, l'imam de la ville mais aussi Michel Serfaty, le rabbin de Ris-Orangis, et des fidèles des deux bords. Tous ont pris soin de laisser leurs chaussures à l'entrée. Autour d'un thé à la menthe, l'heure est à l'écoute mutuelle. Une habitude bien ancrée dans cette ville du sud-est parisien qui dénombre près de 300 familles juives et une communauté musulmane dix fois plus nombreuse. « Voilà 10 ans que nous construisons notre amitié. Chaque année, nous posons une petite brique. ça avance et tout ce que nous faisons n'est pas vain », explique Michel Serfaty, également coprésident de l'AJMF. « Un binôme, une famille, je vous dis », lâche-t-il. Il faut dire qu'ici, les religions cohabitent.

Des communautés toutes voisines

La synagogue, la mosquée et un centre protestant se partagent le même trottoir, rue Jean Moulin. Les catholiques, eux, sont à quelques encablures. « C'est simple, nous sommes voisins. Nous sommes frères, nés d'un même père et d'une même mère », souligne à son tour l'imam. « Abraham est notre père à tous », appuie une fidèle. Patrick Racimor, le président de la communauté israélite, l'illustre bien. « Quand on célèbre la semaine de la déportation, on invite nos amis musulmans. Et inversement, on peut participer à la fin du ramadan ». De petites attentions qui cimentent les relations. « Concrètement, on peut s'unir pour obtenir des carrés dans les cimetières. Et nos boucheries casher peuvent fournir les consommateurs musulmans », ajoute-t-il. La municipalité œuvre aussi dans ce sens. En 2000, Ris a signé conjointement un jumelage avec Salfeet (Cisjordanie) et Tel Mond (Israël). Tout un symbole. Hier, tous ont partagé un couscous casher à la synagogue en retour. Les femmes d'un côté, les hommes de l'autre. Mais la mixité n'est pas la priorité. « Nous voulons que les enfants des deux communautés se rencontrent pour mieux se découvrir », plaide Mohamed Touhami. Prochaine pierre à l'édifice donc : l'implication des plus jeunes

Un couscous commun réunit dimanche les membres des communautés juive et musulmane de Ris-Orangis, dans l'Essonne. Une communauté musulmane se rend dans une synagogue de la rue Buffault à Paris... Ce sont des manifestations emblématiques du week-end de l'amitié judéo-musulmane de France (AJMF) qui a débuté vendredi soir. Ces deux jours d'échange, à l'initiative du mouvement de l'amitié judéo-musulmane, se déroulent pour la deuxième année consécutive. Le principe : des communautés juives et musulmanes s'invitent respectivement dans leur lieu de culte pour partager, échanger et prier.

Cette année, une quarantaine de communautés en particulier en Ile-de-France sont concernées. Au total, une centaine de lieux de culte et d'associations - juifs et musulmans - participent à cette manifestation interculturelle et permettent aux fidèles de chaque communauté de parfaire leur connaissance mutuelle. Cette initiative vient des États-Unis et se déroule tant en Amérique du Nord qu'en Europe. Les promoteurs de ce mouvement martèlent qu'il n'y a aucun obstacle, contrairement aux préjugés, à ce que des musulmans se rendent dans une synagogue et vice versa.

Coprésident de l'AJMF, l'imam Mohammed Azzizi estime que «dans un monde où tout porte à accuser l'autre, des rencontres dans un esprit de vérité peuvent unir juifs et musulmans». Pas facile cependant dans certains quartiers où sur fond de conflit israélo-palestinien et de radicalisation de certains groupes, les scènes de violence ne sont pas rares. D'autant que dans certains quartiers sensibles, juifs et musulmans vivent moins près les uns des autres que par le passé.

Vertu apaisante

Des tensions qui existent également au niveau des institutions, quand l'Union des organisations islamiques de France, proche des Frères musulmans, a eu des mots très forts à l'encontre de «l'aliénation inconditionnelle des autorités juives de notre pays aux côtés de l'opresseur israélien». Une phrase que la communauté juive n'a pas oubliée.

Reste le rabbin Michel Serfaty, coprésident de l'AJMF, qui estime que sur le terrain, «souvent l'usage du quolibet et la présence des préjugés ne relèvent pas tant de l'idéologie que de l'habitude. Le fait de tendre la main et de dialoguer peut apaiser les tensions». Mais ce week-end n'est pas la seule action de l'AJMF : depuis six ans, le bus de l'association sillonne la France pour organiser des débats, susciter le dialogue ou encore projeter des courts-métrages sur les préjugés et les stéréotypes entre juifs et musulmans. Dans une ambiance parfois électrique : l'an dernier, à Nancy, les intervenants ont vu survenir des bandes de jeunes Turcs et Maghrébins très remontés et en colère. Mais les promoteurs de ce mouvement veulent croire à la vertu apaisante du bus de l'amitié judéo-musulmane, puisque ces jeunes ont fini par dialoguer et même, se souvient l'imam Azzizi, «prendre le thé.

Jews and Muslims confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism together

November 12, 2010

https://www.ffeu.org/press_room/111210egyptdn.htm

For generations, misunderstandings have existed between Jews and Muslims on what the other believes and practices. These misperceptions, as well as social and political factors, have unfortunately led to tensions between our two communities.

We are all the children of Abraham and like any sibling relationship it is vital for us both to remember our shared roots and support each other. The Weekend of Twinningism is designed to foster and strengthen relationships between Jews and Muslims. This groundbreaking initiative joins together Jews and Muslims in their own communities at mosques and synagogues, as well as Muslim and Jewish students and young leadership groups.

Each year, participants pledge to work on an ongoing basis to combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. In some communities, this program is the beginning of interreligious activities between Muslims and Jews that we hope will continue for generations to come.

The first Weekend of Twinningism was held in November 2008 and spearheaded by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) in cooperation with the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the World Jewish Congress. The twinning program resulted from a resolution passed at the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis hosted by FFEU in New York in 2007. In addition, the Weekend of Twinningism has the support of His Majesty, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and it mirrors his vision to promote the moderate voices and cooperation with other faith communities.

In July 2009, FFEU led a Mission of European Imams and Rabbis to the United States, co-sponsored by the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of North America. The imams and rabbis (28 in total) from France, Britain, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and Russia interacted with US political leaders and social advocates, and discussed how to improve interreligious relations in their own communities. The mission concluded with a commitment by the European imams and rabbis to take part in the 2009 Weekend of Twinningism in their home countries.

In November 2009, the second annual Weekend of Twinningism of Mosques and Synagogues culminated in 100 mosques and 100 synagogues joining together under the theme "Building a Common Agenda" to embrace social issues together as one community. The twinning in Europe was launched in Paris at an event sponsored by the Jewish-Muslim Friendship Society of France, and co-sponsored by the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF), the Consistoire, the Great Mosque of Paris and the European Jewish Fund.

As a result of the July mission of European imams and rabbis, participation in the 2009 Weekend of Twinningism expanded to include twinned congregations from seven European countries - Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Netherlands. In France, where Muslim-Jewish tensions have been especially high, 19 mosques and 19 synagogues twinned with one another, reinforcing the notion that reconciliation between the two faith communities is possible.

This year, throughout November and December, more than 100 mosques and 100 synagogues in 22 countries on four continents will participate in the Weekend of Twinning. On October 31, the twinning kicked off with a worldwide virtual twinning event during which participants from around the world heard reports on Jewish-Muslim initiatives underway in various countries.

In further support of our outreach efforts, we are announcing the publication of a new book that I am co-authoring with Imam Shamsi Ali, spiritual leader of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the largest and most prestigious mosque in New York City. We will analyze difficult and controversial passages from the Torah and the Quran, and present the voice of moderation in reviewing these sacred texts. The book will be an invaluable resource in advancing Muslim-Jewish relations to communities worldwide.

In the past three years, thousands of Jews and Muslims from California, New York and Toronto, as well as London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and other European cities, have not only visited their respective houses of worship for the first time, but have also studied the Torah and Quran together, served meals side-by-side to poor and homeless people, and built meaningful friendships.

The Weekend of Twinning has time and time again shown us that Jews and Muslims can not only live together peacefully as neighbors, but also partner together to build a better community.

Rabbi Marc Schneier is Vice President of the World Jewish Congress and President of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. This article was written for Common Ground News Service www.commongroundnews.org

The Washington Times

Rabbis, imams visit U.S. for dialogue

July 20, 2009

By Julia Duin

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jul/20/rabbis-imams-visiting-us-for-interfaith-dialogue/>

A group of 28 imams and rabbis from 10 European countries arrived in New York and Washington this week for whirlwind visits to interfaith centers to break new ground on Muslim-Jewish relations and combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in each other's communities.

They will receive instructions from teams of American rabbis and imams who will show the Europeans how American-style ecumenism works on the ground. It's the first visit of its kind to involve foreign Muslim and Jewish leaders coming to the U.S., where interreligious ties have a much longer history and track record of success.

"Our success in America has given us the faith and confidence to reach out to Europe," said Sayyid Mohammad Syeed, national director of interfaith and community alliances for the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), one of three hosts for the visit.

"We need them to witness firsthand what we are doing. I have been working toward this all my life."

The impetus for the five-day visit came after "exponential" growth of anti-Semitism among Muslims in Britain, France and elsewhere in Europe, said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FEEU) and chairman of the World Jewish Congress American Section.

"We want to help strengthen those in the Islamic world who are projecting this voice of moderation and to help them take their religion back from the cadre of extremists and fanatics in Islam," he said.

The Europeans' first meeting Monday is with Imam Mohammad Shamsi Ali, head of the Islamic Cultural Center, New York's largest mosque, who will talk about his contacts with the FEEU. Then it's on to the United Nations, where the delegation will hear from Muzammil Siddiqi, chairman of the Fiqh Council of North America, the continent's highest body of Islamic jurisprudence.

What follows is an afternoon of panels at the Islamic Cultural Center, each with a local rabbi teamed with an imam. The day wraps up at the new Yankee Stadium, where participants will watch the Yankees play the Baltimore Orioles.

On Tuesday, the Europeans will visit Ellis Island and ground zero and hear from Robert Jackson, the lone Muslim member of the New York City Council.

On Wednesday morning, the group takes a bus to Washington to tour the Holocaust museum. Rabbi Jack Moline, leader of Agudas Achim Congregation in Alexandria and vice chairman of the Interfaith Alliance advocacy group, and Imam Mohamed Magid of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, a mosque in Sterling, will speak on preventing future holocausts.

After a tour of the U.S. Capitol, the group will meet with Democratic Reps. Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Andre Carson of Indiana, both Muslims, along with two leaders of the unofficial Congressional Jewish Caucus, Democratic Reps. Jerrold Nadler of New York and Robert Wexler of Florida.

The delegation then attends a dinner hosted by the ISNA at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, where they will hear from Imam Yahya Hindi of Georgetown University and Rabbi Gerry Serotta, North American chairman of Rabbis for Human Rights.

On Thursday, the group will visit the White House to meet with Joshua Dubois, executive director of the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. After lunch at the Saudi Embassy, the group flies home.

"The great challenge of the 21st century in inter-religious dialogue is to find the path to narrow the gap between Muslims and Jews worldwide," said Mr. Schneier of FFEU. "The foundation, which I co-founded 20 years ago, is known for our work in black-Jewish relations. We own this issue nationwide."

ISNA also mounted an unprecedented outreach to American Christians and Jews at its annual conference earlier this month in Washington, sponsoring a private interfaith reception for 400 leaders from various religions and a separate speech by the Rev. Rick Warren, one of America's best-known evangelical pastors.

"Muslims feel proud to welcome people of other faiths," ISNA spokesman Mohamed Elsanousi said at the time.

Two years ago, the FFEU ventured into Muslim-Jewish relations, convening a summit of rabbis and imams in New York in November 2007. They combined forces for a public service announcement on CNN in early 2008 that denounced both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

On a weekend in November 2008, they "twinned" 50 mosques and synagogues in cities across the country to encourage mutual visits and partnerships. A second such weekend is planned this year for Nov. 13-15.

"We received calls from faith leaders in England, Sweden and Australia who want to take part in that," Mr. Schneier said. He organized this week's visit, which, he added, is costing the FFEU about \$150,000.

The rabbi said there have been breakthroughs, such as the "gratifying" response he got from Muslim leaders in May when four Muslim men were arrested for allegedly planning to bomb two New York synagogues.

"But I appreciate the fact this is a very long process," he said. "It took the Jewish people 40 years to reach their goal after they left Egypt."

Shalom, and Salaam: European rabbis and imams pay a visit to Ellis Island

July 22, 2009

By Allison Hoffman

<http://www.tabletmag.com/news-and-politics/11208/shalom-and-salaam/print/>

It was pouring rain yesterday morning when a delegation of European rabbis and imams, visiting New York and Washington on a four-day interfaith mission to the United States, arrived at the Coast Guard station in Lower Manhattan for a tour of Ellis Island. After a half-hour wait huddled beneath umbrellas outside the security shack—where officials conducted special ID checks on the imams—the group boarded their launch, jackets and trousers somewhere between damp and sodden. Some insisted on seeing the bright side, giving thanks to God for keeping the sun shining at least for their outing to Yankee Stadium the night before. “It adds an element of realism to it,” said Imam Shahid Hussain, of London’s Central Mosque, as he disembarked the boat. “Not everyone who immigrated here got to arrive in bright sunshine.”

Hussain was one of only a handful of imams making a return visit to the transit point for millions of European emigrés; most of the rabbis said they had been there before, either on previous official visits or as tourists. This trip was sponsored by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a New York-based non-profit headed by Rabbi Marc Schneier and chaired by hip-hop impresario Russell Simmons, who did not put in an appearance. It was intended to remind the Muslim delegates of American Jews’ experience as immigrants and outsiders; most of the imams had been recruited for their prior interfaith work by rabbis from their home countries, which included Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, and Switzerland. Organizers hoped the clergy would consider “twinning” programs between the synagogues and mosques upon their return home.

One of the participants translated from English into Arabic as a National Park Service docent led the group through the Ellis Island Chronicles, a series of rooms containing dioramas depicting the island’s development. Walter Ruby, a program organizer, interrupted to tell the group that his own mother, who fled Berlin via France and Portugal at 16, had been detained on the island for two weeks in 1941, while his grandmother searched New York for someone to sponsor their visas. “She celebrated Passover here,” Ruby said. “She figured it wasn’t so bad because at least she wasn’t going to be killed by the Nazis.” There was a wave of sympathetic laughter.

Imam Abdelali Mamoun, from the Clamart Mosque near Paris, seemed struck by the tale, and he asked Ruby, in broken English, about his mother’s journey to America. Mamoun, who was on his first trip to the United States, said he hadn’t heard the stories of European immigrants processed through Ellis Island before; what he did know about was how badly the colonial Europeans had treated the native Americans. “They put away the local people,” said Mamoun, who explained in voluble Arabic that he, as the son and grandson of French Algerians, identified more with the colonial story than the immigrant narrative. Muzammil Siddiqi, the director of the Islamic Society of Orange County, in Southern California, stepped in to translate, and he pointed out that Ellis Island did mean something to older Muslims in Detroit, whose grandparents made their way through the Ellis Island portal a century ago. By the time he arrived from India, to study at Harvard, he continued, that era was long gone. “When I came here 40 years ago, I just went to Logan Airport,” he said, shrugging.

The visiting rabbis also had a hard time feeling connected to a place they associated with the American experience. “Look, everyone in America is a part of this story—everyone in

America owns a piece to the tile on this floor,” said Rabbi Reuben Livingstone, of the Hampstead Garden Synagogue in London. “There is no place in Europe that can embody that.”

After a stop in the Great Hall to peer at photocopied ship manifests, the group made their way up to a balcony, where caterers had set up an elaborate buffet of kosher grilled chicken, roast vegetables, and salad. “Jewish food, it’s very nice!” commented one imam, surveying the determinedly non-ethnic spread. Over at the bar, a server poured from a selection of soda, sparkling water, and Snapple; a bottled of chilled Australian Chardonnay was produced. One of the rabbis inspected it, turning it over in his hands to see if it carried a hechsher. “Is it kosher?” asked Imam Mamoun, who was getting a refill of Coca-Cola. “I don’t think so, it doesn’t say,” the rabbi said mournfully, handing it back to the server.

The group moved into a reception room lined with the flags of all the nations represented to eat, a parade of speakers addressed questions of how Jews and Muslims could communicate over immigration issues; several closed with “Shalom, and salaam,” drawing murmurs of approval from the imams, many of whom spoke very little English. After the meal, it was time for prayers, or almost time. The rabbis determined it was too early for davening the afternoon mincha prayers and returned to their coffee and cakes. “It is always the halachic problem of when to daven mincha—can the Muslims daven with us, you know?” joked Rabbi Raphael Evers, of Amsterdam. The imams, meantime, cleared space on the balcony of the Great Hall and turned toward Mecca. The leader began calling the prayers, in a stentorian voice that echoed off the vast tiled arches and silenced the startled visitors below.

Then it was a rush back to the waterfront, in order to make a 2 o’clock meeting with Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The delegates boarded the Miss Liberty, toting gift bags filled with Ellis Island baseball caps and other goodies (though Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, was loyal to the Yanks, perching a navy-blue ballcap atop his head to keep the rain off). They smiled for photos on the deck, as the Statue of Liberty slipped behind their heads.

HAARETZ.com

EU interfaith delegation in White House to learn about dialogue

July 25, 2009

By Shlomo Shamir

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1102697.html>

An interfaith delegation, comprising European rabbis and imams, visited the White House on Thursday in a bid to rally American support for their campaign against anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and extremism.

The delegation completed a four-day tour of New York and Washington synagogues and mosques that culminated in the White House visit. In a presentation, Administration officials outlined President Barack Obama's social policy, including strategies to tackle faith-related bigotry.

The members said that they were inspired by an interfaith initiative that has been successfully implemented in America, in which weekend activities are organized for joint Jewish and Muslim crowds in synagogues and mosques. They said they were resolute to import it to their communities.

Marc Schneier, a prominent New York rabbi and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, is the person behind the visit. He said that its purpose was to learn from America's proven experience in interfaith dialogue and export the successful model to Europe.



European rabbis, imams to promote understanding

July 28, 2009

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3753330,00.html>

A delegation of over two dozen European imams and rabbis in a meeting late last week at the White House pledged participation in American-led efforts to combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

The declaration, signed by leading clerics from nine European nations came at the conclusion of a four-day interreligious mission to the United States that brought the group to the White House, State Department, Congress, United Nations, Ground Zero, US Memorial Holocaust Museum and even Yankee Stadium.

The mission was hosted by The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FEEU) in conjunction with the World Jewish Congress United States and the Islamic Society of North America.

As part of the declaration, the rabbis and imams endeavored to take part in the upcoming Weekend of Twinning of Mosques and Synagogues in North America and Europe, which will take place November 13-15, 2009. During the "Twinning," local mosques and synagogues will join together on a one-on-one basis to hold programs to promote unity and mutual understanding.

The Twinning programs will focus on a range of issues including fighting Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, combating poverty, ensuring fair treatment of immigrants and refugees, saving the environment and ways to bring together Muslim and Jewish youth.

Encouraging dialogue

The declaration additionally urges ongoing dialogue and cooperative projects between Muslims and Jews, and encourages members of both faiths to find commonalities in their religions, support human rights for all people and fight bigotry and assaults on houses of worship.

"Bringing together Muslims and Jews is among the greatest challenges facing our communities today," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. "By expanding to Europe what has already been a successful and groundbreaking twinning initiative in the United States, we together will combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism to promote mutual understanding and productive cooperation through dialogue."

Throughout the mission, the delegates were introduced to successful American-style interfaith initiatives that could also be implemented in their own countries to facilitate and encourage a dialogue with colleagues, and work to improve America's standing with Muslims abroad. The imams and rabbis come from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

July 25, 2009

By E.B. SOLOMONT

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1248277886779&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FPrinter>

During a trip to Yankee Stadium with a group of European imams and rabbis last week, their host, Rabbi Marc Schneier, was struck by the impact of the stadium's kosher food: All of his guests, with their varying dietary restrictions, could take part in the fare.

For Schneier, president and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, the scenario was a coming home of sorts. In 1998, as president of the New York Board of Rabbis, Schneier was instrumental in bringing kashrut to the stadium. "For me, it was doubly gratifying," he remarked after the game.

But the group was hardly in town for baseball.

On a mission to New York and Washington from July 20 to 23, more than a dozen rabbis and imams from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom took part in a program organized by Schneier to introduce his Muslim-Jewish interfaith program to Europe. The program "twins" imams and rabbis, with the goal of promoting cooperation.

On Thursday, as the conference wound down, participants signed a declaration to bring the program to Europe by seeking "to identify areas in which our communities can work together and create cooperate projects."

"We had a singular objective," Schneier said of the trip.

He said current Muslim-Jewish dialogue in Europe exists on a leadership level, and he outlined plans to foster relationships "on a much more massive, much more people-to-people scale."

The European clergy will formally kick off their partnership in November, during a conference that will match local mosques and synagogues, which ultimately will hold joint programs or otherwise work together to combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. In North America, the partnership began last November and includes 50 mosques and 50 synagogues across the US and Canada.

For participants, the trip was an opportunity to meet counterparts with whom they normally have little contact.

"In the US, there is much more cooperation between Muslims and Jews," said Geneva Chief Rabbi Izhak Dayan. The conference fostered "mutual respect" among participants and underscored shared goals, including fighting Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, he said. "Together with the Muslim community, we can preserve our religious rights."

In Geneva, Muslims and Jews had little in common, he said. "I can't say that we have a certain fraternity."

The program changed his perspective, though, and meeting a clergyman from his city's Muslim community was a particularly profound experience. "I discovered another man in front of me and we have a lot of points in common... To invite the Muslim community to the Jewish community. I think it will be something easy for us and we will do it," Dayan said.

The four-day mission to New York and Washington included stops at Ellis Island, Yankee Stadium, the United Nations, the State Department, Congress, the White House and the US Memorial Holocaust Museum. A particularly poignant stop was made at Ground Zero, where imams and rabbis offered prayers.

Sheikh Dr. Muhammad al-Hussaini, who came from the United Kingdom, said he was inspired to participate in the conference because "it's absolutely critical at this juncture that there are Muslim voices that are willing to stand firmly and practice in opposition to Islamic-inspired anti-Semitism."

Hussaini stressed that Muslim-Jewish dialogue benefited from being grounded in scripture. During the conference, he delivered a presentation addressing the importance of text in Muslim-Jewish relations.

"Hijacking of scripture is an essential part of what's going on in the battlegrounds of the Islamic world," he said. Scriptural reasoning, havruta style, "enables us in powerful ways to challenge extremist interpretations."

"Twinning" did not mean consensus, he said. "You don't always agree with your friends. This whole idea of building relationships rather than consensus is really important," he said.

Scholars at the oldest Islamic university in the world issued a proclamation on Tuesday that lifted an ancient ban on dialogue with Jews, *The Jerusalem Post* has learned.

The statement drafted by Sheikh Fawzi al-Zifzaf, chairman of the permanent committee for dialogue at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, was read during a gathering of senior faith and political leaders at Parliament in London.

"And the point of origin of this invitation is Islam itself [calling for] brotherhood and mutual understanding and the strengthening of bonds between Muslims and followers of the other religions, and the establishment of bridges of dialogue with scholarly institutions in Europe and America," Zifzaf wrote.

The event was hosted by the Children of Abraham charity and Al-Azhar Institute for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions.

The Egyptian Sunni institute, founded in 970 CE, has had open channels of communication with Catholics and Anglicans since the 1990s; however, until now, it has had no direct talks with Jewish scholars.

While the proclamation did not mention Judaism by name, a spokesman for the grand mufti of the UK and alumnus of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Prof. Mohamed Elsharkawy, told the *Post* on Wednesday that its message was aimed at a Jewish audience.

"You've got to understand there are extreme sensitivities," the spokesman said.

"I'm not at liberty to say how hard it was to draft the document. In the process, the people who have taken the document forward have done so at great risk and danger, and so they've done that very carefully. There already exists a dialogue with Christians, so anyone with two brain cells can add up to what is being said here."

Rabbi Marc Schneier, a vice president of the World Jewish Congress and advocate for improved relations between Jews and Muslims, gave a keynote address at the event on Tuesday, praising the effort by the Islamic clerics.

"This is a landmark decision, and Al-Azhar deserves praise for it," Schneier said. "Coming from the leading center of Islamic thinking in the world, it will be enormously helpful for all moderate forces within Islam. This declaration rightly emphasizes the importance of interfaith relations. Leaders from both sides should now seize the opportunity and take Jewish-Muslim relations to the next level. Both communities have a lot more in common, and more to give to the other side, than many people think."

The event at the House of Lords was held a week after it emerged that 40 Islamic schools in the UK used textbooks printed in Saudi Arabia that had anti-Semitic depictions of Jews. In his speech, Schneier raised the issue and asked Muslim leaders to take action preventing such incidents from occurring again.

“Declarations are very important, but Jewish and Islamic relations need to go beyond dialogue,” the New York-based rabbi said.

Saudi Ambassador to the US Adel A. al-Jubeir told Schneier he was embarrassed by this issue and that it did not represent his country in 2010.

The spokesman for Elsharkawy also condemned the incident. He said he hoped Tuesday’s announcement would pave the way for better ties between Jews and Muslims.

“The way that we’ve framed it, it’s a bit like dating,” the spokesman said of the declaration.

“We have texted the Jewish world, and we’re waiting for rabbis in Europe and the US to respond. Out of that response we are hoping that there might emerge regular, stable dialogue on the highest level.”

Muslims support dialogue with Jews

November 25, 2010

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2010/11/25/Muslims-support-dialogue-with-Jews/UPI-32311290689553/

Islamic scholars from a Cairo university have drafted a statement lifting a ban on dialogue with Jews, a report in The Jerusalem Post said.

The statement, drafted by Sheikh Fawzi-al-Zifzaf of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, was read at a gathering of religious and political leaders at Parliament in London, the report said. The event was hosted by the Children of Abraham charity and Al-Azhar Institute for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions.

"And the point of origin of this invitation is Islam itself (calling for) brotherhood and mutual understanding and the strengthening of bonds between Muslims and followers of other religions, and the establishment of bridges of dialogue with scholarly institutions in Europe and America," the statement said.

While the statement failed to mention Judaism in name, Sheikh Professor Mohamed Elsharkawy, a spokesman for Britain's Grand mufti, told the newspaper it was aimed at a Jewish audience.

"I am not at liberty to say how hard it was to draft the document. In the process, the people who have taken the document forward have done so at great risk and danger, and so they've done that very carefully. There already exists a dialogue with Christians, so anyone with two brain cells can add up to what is being said here," he said.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, a vice president of the World Jewish Congress who advocates dialogue between Jews and Muslims, called the statement a "landmark decision

The Egyptian Sunni Institute was founded in 970 C.E. and has maintained open dialogue with Catholics and Anglicans since the 1990s, but has never had direct talks with Jewish scholars, the Post said.

In a speech to an event in London Tuesday, New York Rabbi Marc Schneier - a vice-president of the World Jewish Congress and a pioneer in fostering closer Jewish-Muslim relations in North America and Europe - praised leaders of the Al-Azhar Al-Sharif University in Cairo, the oldest center of Islamic scholarship in the world, for opening up inter-religious dialogue to the Jews.

The 'Banu Ibrahim - Children of Abraham Declaration' was officially delivered at a gathering of senior faith and political leaders hosted by the charity Children of Abraham and the Al-Azhar Institute for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions at the House of Lords on Tuesday.

Rabbi Schneier declared: "This is a landmark decision, and Al-Azhar deserves praise for it. Coming from the leading centre of Islamic thinking in the world, it will be enormously helpful for all moderate forces within Islam. This declaration rightly emphasizes the importance of inter-faith relations. Leaders from both sides should now seize the opportunity and take Jewish-Muslim relations to the next level. Both communities have a lot more in common, and to give to the other side, than many people think."

With the support of the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of America, Rabbi Schneier's Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (www.ffeu.org) has spearheaded the annual twinning of mosques and synagogues in North America and Europe.

Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt was founded in 970 and is the leading centre of Sunni Islamic learning in the world. In June 2009, US President Barack Obama gave a widely-noted speech on relations between America and Islam there.

The 'Banu Ibrahim - Children of Abraham Declaration' was drafted by Sheikh Fawzi Al-Zifzaf, head of Al-Azhar's Permanent Committee for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions. It emphasizes that Islam is calling for "brotherhood and mutual understanding and the strengthening of bonds between Muslims and followers of the other religions, and the establishment of bridges of dialogue with scholarly institutions in Europe and America."

The text also calls for dialogue to "be founded upon equality, mutual respect and valuing of the opinions of one another."

While Al-Azhar's bilateral dialogue with the Vatican has been in place since the 1990s, its scholars have not officially engaged in talks with Jews until now.

The World Jewish Congress is the international organization representing Jewish communities in 92 countries around the world.

El Ezher, Yahudilerle diyalog yasağını kaldırdı El Ezher

November 25, 2010

<http://www.haber7.com/haber/20101125/El-Ezher-Yahudilerle-diyalog-yasagini-kaldirdi.php>

Mısır'daki El Ezher alimlerinin, Yahudiler ile diyalog yasağını kaldıran bir deklarasyon yayımladıkları belirtildi. "Beni İbrahim" (İbrahim Oğulları) adlı deklarasyon, Yahudiler ile diyalogun kapısını araladı. Jerusalem Post gazetesinin haberine göre, El Ezher Üniversitesi Daimi Diyalog Komitesi Başkanı Şeyh Fevzi El Zifzaf tarafından dikkatle hazırlanan "Beni İbrahim" (İbrahim Oğulları) adlı deklarasyon, Yahudiler ile diyalogun kapısını araladı.

Gazetenin haberinde, deklarasyonun salı günü Londra'da, Lordlar Kamarası'nda inanç aleminin temsilcileri ve siyasi liderlerin katıldığı dinlerarası diyalogla ilgili bir toplantıda okunduğu belirtildi.

Deklarasyon, özellikle İslam'ın, kardeşlik, karşılıklı anlayış ve Müslümanlar ile diğer dinlerin takipçileri arasındaki bağların kuvvetlendirilmesine yönelik çağrısına vurgu yapıyor. Deklarasyonda, Avrupa ve Amerika'da bilimsel kurumlar arasındaki diyalog köprüsünün kurulması öngörülüyor.

Söz konusu deklarasyonda, Yahudilikten isim verilerek bahsedilmediği belirtilirken, İngiltere'deki Müftülük sözcüsü ve El Ezher mezunlarından Şeyh Prof. Muhammed Eşşarkavi Jerusalem Post'a yaptığı açıklamada, mesajın Yahudilere yönelik olduğunu söyledi.

Sözcü, "bu konuda aşırı hassasiyet olduğunu", metni hazırlayanların büyük risk ve tehlike aldıklarını, bu nedenle deklarasyonun çok dikkatli bir şekilde kaleme alındığını ifade etti.

Eşşerkavi, deklarasyonun Müslümanlar ve Yahudiler arasında daha iyi ilişkiler kurulmasının önünü açacağına yönelik ümidini dile getirirken, "Bizim çerçevesini çizdiğimiz yol, bir tür flört gibi" ifadesini kullandı.

Sözcü Eşşerkavi, bu deklarasyonun ardından, Avrupa ve Amerika'daki hahamlardan cevap beklediklerini belirtti, ayrıca bu cevapların ötesinde "yüksek düzeyde düzenli ve istikrarlı bir diyalogun ortaya çıkabileceğine" yönelik umutlarını dile getirdi.

El Zifzaf'ın deklarasyonu, Yahudi kurumları temsilcilerince memnuniyetle karşılandı.

Dünya Yahudi Kongresi Başkan Yardımcısı ve Kuzey Amerika ile Avrupa'da İslam-Yahudi yakınlaşması çabalarının önde gelen isimlerinden Haham Marc Schneider, El Ezher alimlerinden övgüyle bahsetti. Schneider, El Ezher'in "dönüm noktası" niteliği taşıyan bu deklarasyon nedeniyle övgüyü hak ettiğini söyledi.

Schneider, önde gelen bir İslami düşünce merkezinin deklarasyonun, İslam içindeki tüm ılımlı güçlere muazzam katkıda bulunacağını belirtti. Haham Schneider ayrıca, bu deklarasyonun, dinlerarası diyalogun önemini vurguladığını ve her iki taraftan liderlerin bu fırsatı iyi değerlendirip, Müslüman-Yahudi ilişkilerini bir sonraki aşamaya çıkarmaları gerektiğini kaydetti.

Toplantının, İbrahim Oğulları Hayır Kurumu ile El Ezher Üniversitesi Dinlerarası Diyalog Enstitüsü'nce ortaklaşa düzenlendiği bildirildi. Jerusalem Post gazetesinin haberinde, El Ezher'in Vatikan ile 1990'lı yıllardan bu yana karşılıklı diyalog içinde bulunduğu, Yahudiler ile şimdiye kadar resmen görüşmelerin içinde yer almadığı ifade edildi.

November 25, 2010

<http://www.ansamed.info/it/palestina/news/MI.XAM42802.html>

Un gruppo di studiosi dell' Universita' Al Azhar, la piu' antica universita' islamica al mondo con sede al Cairo, ha emesso un proclama che implicitamente revoca un antico divieto al dialogo con gli ebrei.

Lo ha riferito oggi il quotidiano israeliano Jerusalem Post, secondo il quale il proclama e' stato redatto dallo Sceicco Fawzi al-Zifzaf, presidente del comitato permanente per il dialogo con altre fedi dell' universita' Al-Azhar ed e' stato letto nel corso di una riunione di leader politici e religiosi nel Parlamento britannico a Londra. L'evento e' stato ospitato da un'organizzazione di beneficenza ebraica, Children of Abraham, e dall'Istituto per il Dialogo con le Religioni Monoteiste di Al Azhar che ha gia' aperti canali di comunicazione con i cattolici e con gli anglicani da quasi vent'anni.

Nel proclama gli ebrei non sono espressamente menzionati ma secondo il portavoce del gran Mufti del Regno Unito e studioso di Al Azhar Sceicco Mohammed Elsharkawi, il messaggio che esso contiene e' chiaramente rivolto agli ebrei.

"Bisogna tener conto - ha detto - del fatto che si tratta di questioni molto delicate ... Non posso rivelare quanto difficile sia stato formulare il documento. Le persone che hanno portato avanti questo documento sono incorse in grandi rischi e percio' sono state molto caute. C'e' gia' un dialogo con i cristiani percio' chiunque abbia un briciolo di cervello puo' capire cio' che si e' voluto dire".

Il rabbino Marc Schneier, vice presidente del Congresso Ebraico Mondiale, ha affermato che "la decisione e' una pietra miliare per la quale Al Azhar merita di essere elogiata".



Juden und Muslime treffen EU-Ratspräsident Van Rompuy

December 2, 2010

https://www.ffeu.org/press_room/12210katholische.htm

Brüssel (KNA) Jüdische und muslimische Religionsführer aus Europa werden am Montag in Brüssel mit EU-Ratspräsident Herman Van Rompuy zusammentreffen. Die gemeinsam vom Jüdischen Weltkongress (WJC) und der «Foundation for Ethnic Understanding» veranstaltete Tagung solle Möglichkeiten ausloten, die Beziehungen zwischen beiden Religionen zu vertiefen, teilte der WJC am Mittwochabend mit.

Gute Beziehungen zwischen Muslimen und Juden seien entscheidend, wenn die kommende Generation eine bessere Zukunft haben sollte, so der Stiftungspräsident Rabbi Marc Schneier. Beide religiöse Minderheiten hätten mit den gleichen Herausforderungen zu kämpfen, etwa Antisemitismus und Islamfeindlichkeit. Beide gehörten aber auch zur europäischen Gesellschaft des 21. Jahrhunderts.

Die Al-Azhar Al-Sharif Universität in Kairo, das älteste Zentrum für Islamstudien der Welt, hat erstmals Vertreter des World Jewish Congress zum interreligiösen Dialog eingeladen. Das erklärte Rabbi Marc Schneier - Vize-Präsident des World Jewish Congress - in einer Rede in London. Die beiden Glaubensgemeinschaften, so Rabbi Schneier in London, hätten "viel mehr gemeinsam und einander vielmehr zu geben, als viele Menschen glauben". Rabbi Schneiers Foundation for Ethnic Understanding steht ein für Partnerschaften zwischen Moscheen und Synagogen vor allem in Nordamerika und Europa.



Jewish Chronicle Blog: Excellent news from al-Azhar

November 26, 2010

https://www.ffeu.org/press_room/112510jewishchronicleblog.htm

Scholars at one of the world's oldest universities, Cairo's al-Azhar, have opened the way to starting a dialogue with Jews. This lack of dialogue, instigated by al-Azhar it must be acknowledged, has been nothing short of scandalous. But, as Rabbi Marc Schneier, a vice-president of the World Jewish Congress and advocate for improved relations between Jews and Muslims, said during a keynote address at the House of Lords event on Tuesday:

“This is a landmark decision, and Al-Azhar deserves praise for it. Coming from the leading center of Islamic thinking in the world, it will be enormously helpful for all moderate forces within Islam. This declaration rightly emphasizes the importance of interfaith relations. Leaders from both sides should now seize the opportunity and take Jewish-Muslim relations to the next level. Both communities have a lot more in common, and more to give to the other side, than many people think.”

The event came a day after BBC's Panorama revealed the disgraceful of antisemitism and homophobia in Saudi-sponsored "weekend" schools in Britain. But Saudi Ambassador to the US Adel A. al-Jubeir told Schneier he was embarrassed by this issue and that it did not represent his country in 2010. The spokesman for [the grand mufti of the UK and alumnus of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Prof. Mohamed] Elsharkawy also condemned the [antisemitism]. He said he hoped Tuesday's announcement would pave the way for better ties between Jews and Muslims.

“The way that we've framed it, it's a bit like dating,” the spokesman said of the declaration. “We have texted the Jewish world, and we're waiting for rabbis in Europe and the US to respond. Out of that response we are hoping that there might emerge regular, stable dialogue on the highest level.”



AK News: Cairo's Al-Azhar university lifts ban on dialogue with Jews

November 25, 2010

https://www.ffeu.org/press_room/112410aknews.htm

The Jerusalem Post reported today that scholars from the world's oldest Islamic seat of learning issued a statement on Tuesday that lifts an ancient ban on dialogue with Jews. The statement, read during a gathering of religious and political leaders in London's Houses of Parliament, was drafted by the Egyptian university's chairman of the committee for dialogue, Sheikh Fawzi al-Zifzaf.

Sheikh Zifzaf wrote that the statement constituted an "invitation" which originated in Islam itself, calling for "brotherhood and mutual understanding and the strengthening of bonds between Muslims and followers of the other religions".

The event was hosted by the Children of Abraham charity and the al-Azhar Institute for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions.

The 1,040 year-old Egyptian Sunni university has held open dialogues with the Catholic and Anglican Churches since the 1990s but has not had any direct talks with Jewish scholars until now.

Although the statement does not mention Judaism as such, a spokesman for the U.K.'s Grand Mufti and al-Azhar graduate, Sheikh Mohamed Elsharkawy said that the proclamation was written under "great risk and danger", and so has been worded "very carefully".

"There already exists a dialogue with Christians, so anyone with two brain cells can add up to what is being said here," he said.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, Vice President of the World Jewish Congress praised al-Azhar's gesture, hailing it as a "landmark decision".

"Coming from the leading center of Islamic thinking in the world, it will be enormously helpful for all moderate forces within Islam."

"Leaders from both sides should now seize the opportunity and take Jewish-Muslim relations to the next level," Rabbi Schneier said.

Sheikh Mohamed Elsharkawy said he hoped that the statement would pave the way for improved relations between Muslims and Jews.

"The way that we've framed it, it's a bit like dating," he said, "We have texted the Jewish world, and we're waiting for rabbis in Europe and the US to respond. Out of that response we are hoping that there might emerge regular, stable dialogue on the highest level."



In post-9/11 world, chance to teach our children not to hate

By Russell Simmons

August 27, 2010

http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-08-27-column27_ST_N.htm

An entire generation of American children is growing up in the shadows of 9/11. They are facing the horror of that evil day, mourning our losses and moving ahead in a world that was instantly reshaped.

As we continue to struggle with aftermath of the 2001 attacks, in downtown Manhattan and all across the country, families have sought to emphasize with their children what I believe to be the very backbone of the American ideal: equality, pluralism and liberty for all. These are the things that make this country great – not our industrial output, not our cultural output, but the values upon which we founded our union, and with which we continue to strive to perfect it.

But in the fight against the Islamic center, the worst part of America has come to the surface. What are families to tell their children, now?

How do we explain to them that some would rather redefine American values entirely and would propose boundaries for certain Americans of faith and goodwill to worship their Creator?

Islam didn't attack America

The opponents of the Islamic center say they have this country's best interests at heart and that they're looking out for all Americans when they protest plans for a Muslim community center two blocks from the site of the former World Trade Center.

But American Muslims share the same constitutional rights as all other Americans, and they should not be judged by the heinous acts of others. Instead they should be judged by the content of their own characters.

As a nation, we now have the opportunity – indeed, the duty – to teach our children some basic truths: Islam didn't attack the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. Sick and twisted men did, hijacking not only four airplanes but also an entire religion. Today, it's our shared responsibility not to allow them to hijack the American value system as well.

We must remind our children that we live in a country founded by men and women who were persecuted for their faith, and that we've long known that the best path to finding freedom for ourselves is in finding freedom for others. We were formed as a pluralistic society, and this must mean that we welcome all religions. Trying to write Muslim Americans out of the American story not only goes against our history, it will diminish us all.

Reaching across religious boundaries

Years of cross-cultural and interfaith work with my partner Rabbi Marc Schneier have shown me how powerful it is to reach across our fears and expectations in order to share our knowledge and our dreams. When pastors quote the Quran, and imams invite pastors to pray together, both of their communities are made stronger. When imams work with rabbis to

counter anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and Muslim and Jewish communities "twin" in shared community service, both communities move closer to the divine. When we do these things, we build a better place for our children to grow up.

On the other hand, when we wrongly stereotype the approximately 1.6 billion Muslims around the world based on the acts of a handful of men, we teach our children that it is acceptable to tar the many with the sins of the few, and we condemn millions of Americans to misunderstanding. Today we can see the consequences of such behavior playing out across the country: protests against mosques – houses of worship and places of prayer – not just in New York but in California, Wisconsin and Tennessee. In New York, a Muslim cab driver was stabbed, and a mosque desecrated.

It's our responsibility, as we raise a generation of post-9/11 Americans, to teach our children the mutual tolerance and respect that informs our founding documents, and that inspired past generations to extend and expand the rights available to all Americans. As we are taught from Proverbs 22:6, we should "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." We should also remember the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children."

The decision to support or oppose the construction of the Islamic center is a nation-defining moment, testing the strength of our character, the essence of our freedoms, and our allegiance to our soul-stirring rhetoric. It's up to us whether we – and our children – will pass this test with grace and dignity.

A Challenge for WTC Mosque Opponents: The rights of American Muslims are being questioned in other locations. Will Gingrich and Palin speak out on their behalf?

August 27, 2010

By Russell Simmons

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703959704575453123857886644.html?mod=WSJ_Opinion_LEFTTopOpinion&mg=com-wsj

We hear a lot these days about how this famous conservative, or that one over there, has nothing against Islam.

We hear that the opponents of Cordoba House, a Muslim community center planned for a site two blocks from Ground Zero, don't question the right of American Muslims to worship where they choose—that, in fact, the Newt Gingriches and Sarah Palins of this country are all about tolerance and the Constitution. They're just asking for compassion for those grieving the losses of 9/11.

Well, I'm reminded of a passage with which both Mr. Gingrich and Ms. Palin should be familiar: "You shall know them by their fruits."

In the New Testament, Jesus warns against false prophets, explaining how to judge truth-tellers from snake oil salesmen: How do they act? What are the fruits of their labors? "Do people pick grapes from thornbushes," Jesus asks, "or figs from thistles?"

If Mr. Gingrich, Ms. Palin, or any who claim their problem with the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" is not one of religion but location want to prove themselves, I have a simple suggestion: Come with me to Tennessee. Or California. Or Wisconsin.

Because there are mosque projects on hold in all those places, too—held back by hate, pure and simple.

In Murfreesboro, hundreds of people recently marched in protest of plans to build a Muslim community center. In Temecula, protestors have picketed the Muslim community's Friday prayers. In Sheboygan, a group of pastors have led a fight to keep Muslims from establishing a mosque in an abandoned health-food store.

Are these protests also a result of the Islamic community's insensitivity to the larger community's needs? Why haven't Ms. Palin and Mr. Gingrich defended the rights of Muslims across the country if they're so comfortable with Islam?

Unlike many who speak so authoritatively about the Manhattan neighborhood for which Cordoba House is planned, I actually live here. The gaping hole of Ground Zero lies just outside my windows; when I leave my apartment, I pass by Ladder 10 and Engine 10, a firehouse that lost many that horrific day. Mosque opponents are speaking not of some abstract stretch of land, but of my home.

And in my home, I will not stand for fear-mongering or hate speech.

The blocks around Ground Zero make up a neighborhood blessed by a dizzying diversity—of colors, faiths and political opinion. My neighbors are an embodiment of the American ideal, a collection of individuals who don't have to conform to the expectations of others but are free

to flourish and thrive in all their humanity under the protection of that finest of American documents: the Constitution.

And in this neighborhood, of all places, we cannot honor the memories of those lost by spitting on the very values that make us a nation. We do no honor to our dead—many of whom were innocent Muslims—by making a scapegoat of an entire religion and the 1.5 billion people who follow it.

As Americans, we have a sacred responsibility to defend the most vulnerable among us and minorities who are under attack. When we choose to stand silent in the face of injustice, we become accomplices. When we join hands, we perfect our union.

For years now, I've been intimately involved in cross-cultural and interfaith advocacy with my partner Rabbi Marc Schneier. I've watched rabbis and imams work together to combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and Jewish and Muslim communities "twin" with each other to perform community service. I've seen pastors bow their heads in mosques and heard Muslims talk about the Bhagavad Gita. I've seen how beautiful are the fruits of cooperation.

"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen," we read in Leviticus, a book holy to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In the spirit of that verse, I call on Ms. Palin and Mr. Gingrich to join me in fighting anti-Muslim hate-speech across the nation.

If the Cordoba House protestors aren't willing to come with me to California, Wisconsin or Tennessee, I'm going to have to judge them by the fruits of their labor and call on them to do something else: Stay out of my backyard. Because they're the only ones posing a real danger to it.

Mr. Simmons is chairman of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a U.N. goodwill ambassador, and co-founder of Def Jam Recordings.



The spiritual convergence of Rosh Hashanah, Eid al-Fitr and 9/11

August 30, 2010

By Rabbi Marc Schneier and Imam Shamsi Ali

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/08/the_spiritual_convergence_of_rosh_hashanah_eid_al-fitr_and_911.html

As American Muslims observe the last days of Ramadan and American Jews prepare to begin their observance of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, members of both faiths-- and all Americans-- are being confronted with a responsibility to speak out in defense of the values of religious liberty and mutual understanding upon which this country was founded.

The contentious issue of the proposed Islamic Community Center in Lower Manhattan has kicked up a political and social firestorm that has left many American Muslims feeling vulnerable and in fear of an upsurge of anti-Muslim bigotry. The recent stabbing of a Muslim New York City taxi driver by a deranged college student and the desecration of a Queens mosque by a drunken intruder are the evil fruits of a situation in which the vilification of an American religion--in this case Islam--has been allowed to become mainstream discourse.

As children of Abraham, there is no question that Jews and Muslims share a common bond, theology and history. Not only in our faith and teachings, but also through the perceptions of us by others. Earlier this year, a Gallup poll found that 43 percent of Americans admit to at least "a little" prejudice against Muslims, and that such self-reported feelings are strongly linked to the respondent's views on Jews. Remarkably, those who say they feel "a great deal" of prejudice toward Jews are about 32 times more likely to report feeling a "great deal" of prejudice toward Muslims, according to the polling company. If hatred of Jews and Muslims is linked then so should be our responsibility to fight it.

Whatever one's position on the highly emotional question of whether the Islamic community center should be built at its present site or be moved to a location further away, it is past time for all Americans of conscience to step forward and say, 'Inciting to religious hatred is unacceptable.' Specifically, with both Rosh Hashanah and the feast of Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan, falling this year on September 10--one day before the ninth anniversary of the 9-11 terror attacks-- American Jews and Muslims must stand shoulder to shoulder against all manifestations of religious hatred, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. If we can rise to the occasion at this fraught moment, our two communities can play a significant role in stopping the disturbing spread of bigotry and intolerance in this country.

Muslims and Jews should undertake this mission in the spirit of the very similar messages transmitted by our holidays and the deepest shared values of our two faith traditions. Ramadan and Rosh Hashanah are both based on timeless principles of the unity and brotherhood of all human beings. Rosh Hashanah commemorates the creation of humankind itself and reminds us that all people, regardless of ethnic or religious background, are created in God's image. As President Obama noted in a recent message to the American Muslim community, Ramadan is a time when Muslims "reflect on the responsibility human beings have to each other and to God."

Both the Torah and Quran contain numerous passages enjoining Jews and Muslims respectively to love and protect the 'stranger' in their midst. In Leviticus 19:34, God commands the Jewish people, "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." The Quran praises, "Those who show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and

entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves" (Surah 59, (Exile) Verse 9). When the great Rabbi Hillel was asked to sum up the entire Torah in concise fashion, he responded, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." Similarly the Quran enjoins "That which you want for yourself, seek for mankind."

Both of our faiths teach us that every person, whatever his or her station in life, has the power to make a positive difference in the world. The shofar (ram's horn) which is sounded during the Rosh Hashana service, is meant as a goad to conscience; to awaken each of us to our moral obligation to raise our voices on behalf of justice. During Eid-al-Fitr, Muslims are urged to reach out to people with whom they have become estranged and to do good deeds on behalf of the poor and unfortunate.

Animated by these values, the two of us are writing a book together in which we address the 'difficult passages' in the Torah and Quran, which appear at first glance to preach hatred of outsiders; in order to show that when taken in full context, both Holy Books transmit messages of universal justice and the Oneness of all Humankind. In short, we are truly enjoined to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers. While we may not agree on all issues, we must never allow ourselves to forget that those of other faith traditions are not aliens to be hated, demonized or, God forbid, violently attacked because of their faith, but rather fellow human beings with the same hopes and aspirations for themselves and their families as we have for ourselves and our own loved ones.

If Jews and Muslims, mistakenly perceived by many to be irreconcilable enemies, can reach out to and embrace each other, it will send a powerful message to all Americans that, for the sake of the values we hold dear in this country, we must resist the temptation to fear and hate those we may perceive as 'the Stranger,' but instead make a place at the table for all members of the American family.



Common Ground News Service
constructive articles that foster dialogue

Jews and Muslims confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism together

November 12, 2010

By Marc Schneier

<http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=28789&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0&isNew=1>

For generations, misunderstandings have existed between Jews and Muslims on what the other believes and practices. These misperceptions, as well as social and political factors, have unfortunately led to tensions between our two communities.

We are all the children of Abraham and like any sibling relationship it is vital for us both to remember our shared roots and support each other. The Weekend of Twinningsm is designed to foster and strengthen relationships between Jews and Muslims. This groundbreaking initiative joins together Jews and Muslims in their own communities at mosques and synagogues, as well as Muslim and Jewish students and young leadership groups.

Each year, participants pledge to work on an ongoing basis to combat Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. In some communities, this programme is the beginning of interreligious activities between Muslims and Jews that we hope will continue for generations to come.

The first Weekend of Twinningsm was held in November 2008 and spearheaded by The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) in cooperation with the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the World Jewish Congress. The twinning programme resulted from a resolution passed at the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis hosted by FFEU in New York in 2007. In addition, the Weekend of Twinningsm has the support of His Majesty, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and it mirrors his vision to promote the moderate voices and cooperation with other faith communities.

In July 2009, FFEU led a Mission of European Imams and Rabbis to the United States, co-sponsored by the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of North America. The imams and rabbis (28 in total) from France, Britain, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and Russia interacted with US political leaders and social advocates, and discussed how to improve interreligious relations in their own communities. The mission concluded with a commitment by the European imams and rabbis to take part in the 2009 Weekend of Twinningsm in their home countries.

In November 2009, the second annual Weekend of Twinningsm of Mosques and Synagogues culminated in 100 mosques and 100 synagogues joining together under the theme "Building a Common Agenda" to embrace social issues together as one community. The twinning in Europe was launched in Paris at an event sponsored by the Jewish-Muslim Friendship Society of France, and co-sponsored by the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF), the Consistoire, the Great Mosque of Paris and the European Jewish Fund.

As a result of the July mission of European imams and rabbis, participation in the 2009 Weekend of Twinningsm expanded to include twinned congregations from seven European countries – Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Netherlands. In France, where Muslim-Jewish tensions have been especially high, 19 mosques and 19 synagogues twinned with one another, reinforcing the notion that reconciliation between the two faith communities is possible.

This year, throughout November and December, more than 100 mosques and 100 synagogues in 22 countries on four continents will participate in the Weekend of Twinningsm. On 31 October, the twinning kicked off with a worldwide virtual twinning event during which participants from around the world heard reports on Jewish-Muslim initiatives underway in various countries.

In further support of our outreach efforts, we are announcing the publication of a new book that I am co-authoring with Imam Shamsi Ali, spiritual leader of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the largest and most prestigious mosque in New York City. We will analyse difficult and controversial passages from the Torah and the Qur'an, and present the voice of moderation in reviewing these sacred texts. The book will be an invaluable resource in advancing Muslim-Jewish relations to communities worldwide.

In the past three years, thousands of Jews and Muslims from California, New York and Toronto, as well as London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and other European cities, have not only visited their respective houses of worship for the first time, but have also studied the Torah and Qur'an together, served meals side-by-side to poor and homeless people, and built meaningful friendships.

The Weekend of Twinningsm has time and time again shown us that Jews and Muslims can not only live together peacefully as neighbours, but also partner together to build a better community.



Service de presse Common Ground
שירותי התקשורת של הקהילה והארגון

Juifs et musulmans : Ensemble pour faire face à l'islamophobie et à l'antisémitisme

November 12, 2010

By Marc Schneier

<http://www.cgnews.org/article.php?id=28804&lan=fr&sid=1&sp=0>

15 novembre 10 - Le rabbin Marc Schneier, vice-président du Congrès juif mondial, décrit une initiative lancée il y a deux ans visant à jumeler mosquées et synagogues pour favoriser des relations constructives entre juifs et musulmans.

Les malentendus entre juifs et musulmans portant sur ce que l'autre croit et pratique ont existé depuis des générations. Ces perceptions erronées, ainsi que des facteurs sociaux et politiques, ont malheureusement entraîné des tensions entre nos deux communautés.

Nous sommes tous des enfants d'Abraham et, comme dans tout rapport de fratrie, il est essentiel pour nous, juifs et musulmans, de nous rappeler nos origines communes et de nous soutenir les uns les autres. Le « week-end de jumelage » est conçu pour favoriser et renforcer les relations entre juifs et musulmans. Cette initiative novatrice réunit juifs et musulmans dans leurs propres communautés, dans les mosquées et synagogues, ainsi qu'étudiants et groupes de jeunes dirigeants musulmans et juifs.

Chaque année, des participants s'engagent à travailler de façon continue pour combattre l'islamophobie et l'antisémitisme. Dans certaines communautés, ce programme marque le début d'activités interreligieuses entre musulmans et juifs que nous espérons voir se poursuivre avec les générations à venir.

Le premier « week-end de jumelage » a eu lieu en novembre 2008. Il a été initié par la Fondation pour la compréhension ethnique (FFEU) en coopération avec la société islamique d'Amérique du Nord, le Conseil musulman des affaires publiques et le Congrès juif mondial. Le programme de jumelage résulte d'une résolution adoptée lors du Sommet national des imams et des rabbins organisé par la FFEU à New York en 2007. En outre, le « week-end de jumelage » bénéficie du soutien de sa Majesté le Roi Abdullah d'Arabie saoudite et reflète sa volonté de promouvoir les voix modérées et la coopération avec d'autres communautés religieuses.

En juillet 2009, la FFEU a conduit une mission d'imams et de rabbins européens aux Etats-Unis, coparrainée par le Congrès juif mondial et la Société islamique d'Amérique du Nord. Les imams et rabbins (28 au total) de France, Grande-Bretagne, Hollande, Belgique, Italie, Suisse, Allemagne, Norvège et Russie se sont entretenus avec des dirigeants politiques et des militants sociaux américains et ils ont discuté de la question de savoir comment améliorer les relations interreligieuses dans leurs propres communautés. La mission s'est achevée avec l'engagement des imams et des rabbins européens de participer au « week-end de jumelage » prévu en 2009 dans leurs pays d'origine.

En novembre 2009, le deuxième « week-end de jumelage » des mosquées et synagogues annuel a vu 100 mosquées et 100 synagogues se rassembler sous le thème "Construire un programme commun" pour englober les questions sociales au titre d'une seule communauté. En Europe, le jumelage a été lancé à Paris, lors d'un événement parrainé par la Société de l'amitié judéo-musulmane de France et coparrainé par le Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France (CRIF), le Consistoire, la Grande mosquée de Paris et le Fonds juif européen.

Suite à la mission de juillet des imams et des rabbins européens, la participation au « week-end de jumelage » en 2009 s'est élargie avec l'introduction de congrégations jumelées issues de sept pays européens – Grande-Bretagne, France, Allemagne, Italie, Suisse, Belgique et Pays-Bas. En France, où les tensions entre juifs et musulmans ont été particulièrement vives, 19 mosquées et 19 synagogues ont célébré leur jumelage, renforçant l'idée selon laquelle la réconciliation entre les deux communautés religieuses est possible.

Cette année, tout au long des mois de novembre et de décembre, plus de 100 mosquées et 100 synagogues, dans 22 pays répartis sur quatre continents, vont participer au « week-end de jumelage ». Le 31 octobre dernier, le jumelage a débuté avec un jumelage virtuel à l'échelle mondiale au cours duquel les participants du monde entier ont vu des reportages sur les initiatives judéo-musulmanes en cours dans plusieurs pays.

Soutien supplémentaire à nos efforts de sensibilisation, l'annonce de la publication d'un nouveau livre que je coécris avec l'imam Shamsi Ali, le chef spirituel du Centre culturel islamique de New York, la plus grande et la plus prestigieuse mosquée de la ville. Nous analyserons les passages difficiles et controversés de la Torah et du Coran et présenterons la voix de la modération en revoyant ces textes sacrés. Le livre sera un précieux outil pour faire avancer les relations judéo-musulmanes dans les communautés du monde entier.

Au cours des trois dernières années, des milliers de juifs et de musulmans de Californie, de New York et de Toronto, ainsi que de Londres, Paris, Bruxelles, Francfort et d'autres villes européennes, ont non seulement visité leurs lieux de culte respectifs pour la première fois mais ils ont également étudié la Torah et le Coran ensemble, servi, les uns à côtés des autres, des repas aux pauvres et aux sans-abri et noué de profondes amitiés.

Le « week-end de jumelage » nous a encore et encore montré que les juifs et les musulmans peuvent non seulement vivre pacifiquement en bons voisins mais aussi s'associer pour construire une communauté meilleure.

Le rabbin Marc Schneier est le vice-président du Congrès juif mondial et le président de la Fondation pour la compréhension ethnique. Article écrit pour le Service de Presse de Common Ground (CGNews).

The New York Times

Backstage With Six Rabbis, Six Imams and No 'Kumbaya'

April 13, 2008

By Anthony Ramirez

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/13/nyregion/13bias.html>

Marc Schneier, 3 years old and not yet a rabbi, had a knack for getting the attention of adults.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, in suit, with the commercial's director, Alan H. Zwiebel, and creative consultant, Geraldine Newman.

The story is told that he liked to wander. One night he was nowhere to be found in the synagogue during Yom Kippur services. His frantic mother searched. His stern father, who was officiating, started the service anyway.

When the congregation concluded a prayer, the ark holding the sacred Torah scrolls (about the size of a minivan) was opened.

And inside, waving at the congregants with both hands, was the toddler.

Last week, Rabbi Schneier, 49, worked on his latest attention-getting venture: a television commercial to promote tolerance between Muslims and Jews.

It is set to air in September, during Ramadan, the month in which it is said the Koran was revealed to Muhammad. It will also play in early October, during the Jewish High Holy Days.

And in November, Rabbi Schneier's group, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, plans a national initiative matching a synagogue with a mosque in 25 cities and towns; together, they fight anti-Semitism and what the foundation calls Islamophobia.

In a studio in Chelsea on Thursday, Rabbi Schneier gathered five other ecumenically minded rabbis as well as six ecumenically minded imams, some of whom had traveled from other states for the occasion.

They were there to record their condemnation of prejudice against Muslims and Jews, and intolerance between Muslims and Jews.

"Six rabbis, six imams, no waiting," joked the commercial's director, Alan H. Zwiebel.

"This is serious work," said Rabbi Eric Silver, 65, of Temple Beth David in Cheshire, Conn., whose son is serving in the Army in Kirkuk, Iraq. "This goes far beyond just talking about brotherhood and joining hands and singing 'Kumbaya.'"

An imam, Muneer Fareed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America in Plainfield, Ind., noted that Islam, like Judaism, had no central authority like the pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

"It creates a democratic chaos without Robert's Rules of Order," said Imam Fareed, 52. "No one can speak in the name of Islam. If only that fact got out to the general public, people

would know that Osama bin Laden doesn't have the authority to speak out on Islam nor does any other person on the face of the earth."

In truth, the interfaith commercial they made was a little plain vanilla. Rabbis and imams, no doubt forceful in the pulpit or minbar, seemed as halting as schoolchildren before the TV camera.

If there was awareness to be had, however, it was in the green room, as the rabbis and imams waited for their close-ups over the course of three hours.

There, in an exchange resembling a graduate school seminar, they talked freely about the common and not-so-common ground between those who believe in the Koran and those who follow the Torah, both of whom call themselves the children of Abraham.

Sometimes the participants talked shop. What was the necessity of such-and-such a Muslim garment? a rabbi asked. Modesty, came the answer.

Could a woman become an imam? In some senses, yes, but not in name, came the answer.

Other times, the talk veered toward brass tacks. "Does Islam seek to convert?" asked a rabbi. "No," an imam replied. "It seeks only to convey, to convey the truth."

And so, another rabbi asked, if a non-Muslim encounters this truth, can he find salvation? No, came the answer, "if he knows the Koran and knowingly rejects it, then he cannot."

When the talk seemed to founder, the focus turned instead to the other children of Abraham, the Christians, and specifically, the Roman Catholic Church and Benedict XVI, its 265th pope, who is scheduled to visit New York this week.

An imam cited the Muslim uproar after the pope's speech in September 2006, in which he quoted, without reproach, a 1391 text in which a Christian emperor says: "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

(The pope made the remark in an academic setting at a German university. He apologized for or clarified the use of the quotation at least four times and has said repeatedly that he respects Islam.)

Then a rabbi cited another controversy, in July 2007, when the pope authorized a wider use of the old Latin Mass, a move that dismayed many Catholics. The pope said the rite was an important tradition for some.

A prayer in the old Latin rite that called for the conversion of "the perfidious Jews" was changed in the 1960s, the Vatican noted, to "Oremus et pro iudaeis" or "Let us pray for the Jews."

But a rabbi, his palms upraised, exclaimed, "It still implies conversion."

For Rabbi Schneier, such talk is part of the hard work of cooperation. The latest of 18 generations of rabbis stretching back to the 1500s in Russia, Rabbi Schneier is the founding

rabbi of the Hampton Synagogue in Westhampton Beach on Long Island, and rabbi of the New York Synagogue in Manhattan.

While Rabbi Schneier wears a traditional black hat on the Sabbath, he looks nothing like the Orthodox rabbi of the popular imagination. He wears a dapper suit, an Hermès tie and silver cufflinks. His hair is slicked back.

His friends have flair, too. In 1989, he and Joseph Papp, head of the Public Theater, started the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, to improve relations between African-Americans and Jews. After Mr. Papp's death, Russell Simmons, the hip-hop record producer, joined the foundation in 2002 as its chairman.

Indeed, it was Mr. Simmons's idea to make a commercial starring imams and rabbis. The idea was an outgrowth of a popular public service announcement in 2007 in which Mr. Simmons and the rapper Jay-Z denounced anti-Semitism as "not cool."

Mr. Simmons, who was raised as an Episcopalian, said: "Actually I'm not very religious. I have a spiritual practice that I do religiously and that's yoga."

