

Discussion and Reflection Guide – Part One
by Pat Kahn

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Muhammad

THE STORY OF A
PROPHET AND REFORMER

Sarah Conover

FOREWORD BY EBOO PATEL

From the UUA Bookstore:

In the pages of [*Muhammad: The Story of a Prophet and Reformer*](#), young readers will encounter a man very different from the figure often presented in Western popular culture.

Drawing from biographies, the Quran, and hadith, Sarah Conover, co-author of [*Ayat Jamilah: Beautiful Signs: A Treasury of Islamic Wisdom for Children and Parents*](#), relates the story of a radical prophet who challenged the rich and powerful, guided his community of followers through a dangerous time of persecution and exile, formed alliances with people of different beliefs, and preached "love for humanity what you love for yourself."

Written for readers 12 and up (and suitable as read-aloud for ages 10 and up), and with a foreword by Eboo Patel, founder of Interfaith Youth Core and a member of the President's Council on Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships, this beautiful book will educate and inspire youth and adults of all faiths.

Introduction

This Discussion and Reflection Guide – Part One provides a framework for exploring the book, *Muhammad: The Story of a Prophet and Reformer* with multigenerational groups, including children age 10 and up along with youth and adults. The guide is designed to be flexible in implementation and can be adapted for various settings within and beyond the congregation, including interfaith groups. The guide presents a 75-minute workshop which can be expanded to multiple sessions. The ideal size for a group is 8-10 participants; for larger numbers, consider multiple groups and recruit additional facilitators. Ensure that each group has representation of multiple ages/generations.

Parts Two and Three, to be published later this fall, are designed for multigenerational groups of youth and adults. Part Two will focus on Islam today, comparing and contrasting the book with stereotypes of contemporary Muslims and engaging participants with the question, "What does the story of Muhammad have to do with me?" Part Three will focus on interfaith relationships described in the book, as well as interfaith roots of early Unitarianism in Europe and interfaith/multifaith cooperation today.

Implementation

Before the session:

When publicizing the session, encourage participants to answer these questions BEFORE reading the book (parents can help record answers for children):

- What do you know about Muhammad? What do you know about the religion of Islam?
- What is the source of this knowledge? (personal relationship with Muslim people, learned in a book/online, heard on the news, studied in school)

For the session:

Decide whether you would like to serve refreshments such as mint tea, water, dates, pita bread, yogurt, or hummus. Refreshments could be available on a table during a short break or throughout the session. You might also consider enhancing the space with pillows or cushions for those who would like to sit on the floor (in the manner of sitting around a camp fire). Tables and chairs are needed for the art project.

The most important qualities for leaders of this program are curiosity and a commitment to lifelong learning. Multigenerational programs provide an excellent opportunity to engage youth in shared leadership with adults; adolescents rarely find themselves in communities that welcome their leadership, and this program invites congregations to be a sorely needed exception. Leaders may wish to read (and share) the article [“A Book Group for All Ages”](#) from the *UU World* magazine about a multigenerational book group formed by a congregation in Illinois. For more information on multigenerational faith formation, read “Best Practices in Intergenerational Faith Formation” by John Roberto from [Lifelong Faith Journal Vol. 1.3/4](#).

Session Plan – Part One

Goals

- To learn the story of Muhammad and recognize links to our own stories and experience
- To explore both the commonalities and differences between Islam and Unitarian Universalism
- To recognize the gifts that all ages bring to the group
- To develop multigenerational relationships.

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Small table and cloth for the chalice
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Name tags
- Optional: Copies of the hymnbook *Singing the Living Tradition*

Preparation

- Post chalice lighting words (if hymnbooks are not available).
- Place the table with the chalice in the center of a circle of chairs.
- Optional: Recruit a song leader.

Description

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Welcome participants to the circle. Light the chalice, or ask for a volunteer (you may wish to invite the youngest participant to light the chalice.) Say or sing the words from *Singing the Living Tradition*, Hymn 188, “Come, Come Whoever You Are”:

Come, come whoever you are, wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving. Ours is no caravan of despair. Come, yet again come.

Explain that the words to this hymn were adapted from the 13th century poet Rumi, who was a Sufi Muslim; the hymn is one of the very few hymns or readings from Islam in *Singing the Living Tradition*. (Sufism is one of several branches of Islam.)

Activity: Creation of Covenant (5 minutes)

Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape

Description

Participants will come with different experiences regarding the creation of a covenant; many children and youth will be familiar with the practice from being part of a religious education group; adults may have participated in the development of a congregational covenant. Point out that how we each behave affects everyone in the group, an example of interdependence. Like lighting a chalice, creating a group covenant is a common ritual in UU gatherings. Explain that a *covenant* is an agreement people make with each other. Ask:

- Has anyone in the group created a covenant? If so, ask if they are willing to help co-lead the covenant creating process.
- What guidelines will help group members be comfortable with, and respectful of, each other?

List responses on newsprint. Encourage positive wording. If participants do not suggest them, you may wish to include:

- Respect confidentiality; personal sharing stays in the room.
- Show concern for each other's welfare; when it's their turn, everyone has the right to either pass or share.
- Make sure everyone is heard; one person talks at a time.
- Be inclusive; help everyone feel like they are part of the group.
- Speak from your own experience; use "I" statements.

Ask participants to confirm their agreement with the covenant and thank them for sharing the responsibility of keeping the covenant together.

Activity: Introductions and "Before and After" (20 minutes)

Description

Ask participants to introduce themselves and briefly share one thing they knew (or thought they knew) about Muhammad "before" reading the book (lessen anxiety by stating that "nothing" is a perfectly acceptable answer). Each person should speak for a minute or less. Record the "before" statements on newsprint. Ask for a volunteer to email a list of "before" statements to the group after the session.

Once each person has had the chance to speak, invite participants to go around the circle a second time, stating their name and briefly sharing one response to the question, "How did reading the book confirm or change what you thought before?" Record the "after" statements on newsprint and include the "after" statements in the group email.

Activity: Art in Islam (15 minutes)

Materials

- Plain 8.5 x 11 paper
- Lead pencils and colored pencils
- Compass and ruler for each participant
- Handout 1, Islamic Art Resources
- Optional: Coloring pages
- Optional: Laptop with Internet access and projector

Preparation

- Set up tables and chairs and place materials where they are accessible to all.
- Decide if you will provide compasses and rulers or ask participants to bring their own.
- Familiarize yourself with the process described in Handout 1 or recruit a volunteer to lead this activity.
- Optional: Review websites listed on Handout 1 and choose which to share with the group.

Description

Introduce the art project and explain that participants will have 15 minutes to start the project and then you will start a group discussion that will continue while participants spend up to another 20 minutes on their art. Begin by asking if anyone knows why there are no pictures in the book. Hold up a copy and explain that calligraphy (turn to the frontispiece) and mosaics or geometric designs (show cover of the book) are important to Islam because many Muslims consider the portrayal of the human form as idolatry. Share some of the videos listed on Handout 1, if you have chosen this option. Invite participants to move to the designated tables, ensuring a mix of ages at each table. Pass out the materials and demonstrate the creation of overlapping circles. In addition to the videos, written instructions are included in the activity packet from the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (starting on page 20). Once the overlapping circles are drawn, participants can use colored pencils create their own designs. A third option is to print copies of coloring pages from the link found on the handout. When designs are completed, designate a place where they can be displayed.

Activity: Discussion (20 minutes)

Description

Lead a discussion, choosing from among the questions below and invite participants to continue to work on designs during the discussion.

UU's are inspired by the second source of our living tradition: "Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love."

- In what ways does the life story of Muhammad inspire you? Were there other people in the story who inspired you? (such as Muhammad's wife, Khadija or his uncle, Abu Talib or others)

Read this passage from the description on the back cover:

"...this is the story of a radical Prophet who challenged the rich and powerful, guided his community of followers through a dangerous time of persecution and exile, formed alliances with people of different beliefs, and preached 'love for humanity what you love for yourself'"

- Can you think of others who fit this description? (e.g. Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. From Universalist history, Mary Livermore was one of the women's rights and women's suffrage advocates, who was strongly motivated by her Universalist faith, believing that women and girls were equal human beings. She worked with all kinds of different people and was easily the most popular public speaker in the US in the late 1800s.)

Note: Some participants, especially younger ages, may not have previously understood that Muhammad was a human prophet and not considered divine compared to Christian beliefs of the divinity of Jesus. This is a major difference between Islam and Christianity. Ensure that the group understands the distinction.

Read this passage from page 11 which describes the relationship between Muhammad and his grandfather:

"So much did Abd al-Muttalib believe in his grandson's future that he even brought him to the assemblies of Meccan chiefs. Rarely did the eighty-year-old grandfather hesitate to ask the seven-year-old Muhammad's opinion, even on important matters."

- How does it feel when someone really listens to you and thinks what you have to say is important? Is/was there an older adult who listens/ed to you when you

were a child? (offer prompts as needed such as a teacher, neighbor, family friend, extended family member – male or female)

Aminah, Muhammad's mother, is concerned that the city of Mecca is "too polluted for raising a healthy child" and finds a Bedouin family to care for her son and introduce him to the ways of desert life. Read this passage from page 7:

"He knelt down and fingered a tiny green shoot that caught his eye. It grew out of a crack in the rock!...he hoped always to notice these simple signs of creation, these everyday miracles. God had much to teach through nature."

- What lessons have you learned from nature? Do you have a special place where can you go to notice "everyday miracles"?
- What in Unitarian Universalism holds sacred significance? How do we show reverence for things we hold sacred? (for example, the chalice; it would be offensive if the chalice were to be used as a container for popcorn)

Closing (10 minutes)

To close, ask each participant to share, if they choose to, the design they created as well as a closing thought or a new question they have about Muhammad. Ask participants to extinguish the chalice together by forming a close circle around the chalice and extending their arms, palms up, toward the chalice flame. Have participants blow **gently** on their palms to collectively extinguish the flame.

Find Out More**Links to Tapestry of Faith sessions about Muhammad or Islam:**

[Session 15](#) of Creating Home – K/1

[Session 15](#) of Signs of Our Faith – 2nd/3rd grade

[Session 9](#) of Moral Tales – 2nd/3rd grade

[Session 9](#) of Windows and Mirrors – 4th/5th grade

Workshops [13](#) and [14](#) of Building Bridges - youth

[Workshop 2](#) of Virtue Ethics – youth

[Workshop 7](#) of Gather the Spirit – multigenerational

Other resources on Islam:

[Unitarian Universalists and Islam: An Introduction to Interfaith Dialogue and Reading Group Guide](#)

“[Exploring Islam with Children](#)” by Michelle Richards on UU-Parenting blog

“[A Story of Muhammad: A Window into Islam](#)” by Susan Lawrence on Call and Response blog

[Ayat Jamilah: A Treasury of Islamic Wisdom for Children and Parents](#) by Sarah Conover

PBS series “[Life of Muhammad](#)”

[Islamic Society of North America](#)

Interfaith Resources:

[Ware Lecture](#) by Eboo Patel at General Assembly 2013 in Louisville, KY

2011-2012 UUA Common Read [Acts of Faith](#) by Eboo Patel with accompanying [study guide](#)

[A Chorus of Faiths: Unitarian Universalists as Interfaith Leaders](#), a Tapestry of Faith program for youth, in partnership with IFYC

[Interfaith Youth Core](#) founded by Eboo Patel

[Parliament of World Religions](#)

[The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions](#), from the Tapestry of Faith program for adults, Faith Like a River

[A Chorus of Faith](#), a story from the Tapestry of Faith program for youth, A Chorus of Faith

[The VUU](#): Church of the Larger Fellowship Muslim-UU Connections October 20, 2013

[Children of the Same God](#) by Susan Ritchie (to be published by June 2014)

[2009 Minns Lectures](#)

Handout 1: Islamic Art Resources

Demonstration videos and websites:

[Islamic Geometry](#) by Emystomology (3:21)

[How to Make an Islamic Tessellation](#) by Yoyo Manzoor (2:31)

[Art School: Geometric Design with Islamic Art](#)

[Islamic Design, Arabesque and Geometry](#)

[Downloadable Coloring Pages](#)

[Metropolitan Museum of Art Activities for Learning: Islamic Art](#)

[Exploring Islamic Design](#)

[Pattern in Islamic Art](#)

(Inexpensive) Coloring Books:

[Islamic Designs for Artists and Craftspeople](#) by Eva Wilson

[Decorative Tile Designs Coloring Book](#) by Marty Noble