

Discussion and Reflection Guide – Part Two  
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**

The 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 are 90 minute sessions designed for multigenerational groups of youth and adults. Part Two focuses 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 focuses 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:

Sessions can be done as a series of three related workshops, or as stand-alone workshops. The art project described in Session One can be included in subsequent sessions if desired.

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 Two

### Goals

- To compare and contrast the depiction of Islam in the book *Muhammad* with contemporary understandings and stereotypes
- To articulate responses to the question, “What does the story of Muhammad have to do with me?”
- 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.
- Optional: *Singing Meditation: Together in Sound and Silence* by Ruthie Rosauer and Liz Hill, [available from the UUA Bookstore](#) (accompanying CD *Ephemerata Songs for Singing Meditation: Let Joy Fill Your Heart* is [also available](#)).

### Description

#### Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Welcome participants to the circle. Light the chalice, or ask for a volunteer. Teach the group the one-line tune and Arabic lyrics of the singing meditation song *Bismillah* by Nickomo Clarke found in the songbook *Songs for Singing Meditation: Let Joy Fill Your Heart* (available from the UUA Bookstore). Optional: Invite a song leader to teach and lead the song.

*Bismillah Er Rahman Er Rahim Bismillah.*

Translation: I begin in the name of God, all merciful and all compassionate.

Share this background with participants:

According to Helen Gierke and Ruthie Rosauer, editors of the songbook, “Muslims often invoke this phrase when beginning on a significant endeavor. The expression so concisely captures the essence of the Qur-an that all but one chapter of this holy book begins with this phrase.”

**Alternate Option:** Use the Session One chalice lighting *Come, Come Whoever You Are* (*Singing the Living Tradition*, Hymn 188).

**Activity: Creation of Covenant** (10 minutes)

Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape

Description

Participants will come with different experiences regarding the creation of a covenant; many 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.

**Alternate Option:** Use the covenant created in Session One if the same participants are present for Session Two.

**Activity: Introductions and Exploring Stereotypes** (30 minutes)

## Description

Ask participants to introduce themselves and share why they chose to read the book *Muhammad* and attend this session; ask for a show of hands of those who attended Session One. Each person should speak for a minute or less.

Ask for a volunteer to explain what a “stereotype” is. Invite participants to go around the circle a second time, re-stating their name and briefly sharing an example of a stereotype they have heard or read about Islam. Record responses on newsprint.

**Activity: Art in Islam** (15 minutes)

## Description

Introduce the art activity described in Part One, Session One of the Muhammad discussion guide or select [Alternate Activity 3](#) from Workshop 13 of the youth Tapestry of Faith program Building Bridges.

**Activity: Dispelling Stereotypes** (15 minutes)

## Description

Lead a discussion on stereotypes. If using an art activity, invite participants to continue to work during the discussion.

Read the passages describing the teaching of Muhammad on page 41:

*Muhammad taught that all people, wealthy or poor, were equal before God, “as equal as the teeth of a comb,” he said and the rich had a duty to share their wealth with the poor. A revelation that would further upset the powerful stated that the oppressed must be freed: Women were men’s partners, not property; infant girls must not be killed; slaves must be able to earn their freedom.*

And page 61:

*He (Muhammad) commanded us to speak truly, to respect the ties of kinship and the rights of our neighbors, and to refrain from crimes and from bloodshed.*

Point to the list of stereotypes on the newsprint and lead participants in a discussion of the differences they see between modern day stereotypes and the teachings of Muhammad as described in the book. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between what Muhammad taught versus what people think he said or meant (in much the same way that the Bible is quoted/misquoted and interpreted). Remind participants that as human

beings, we are imperfect and do not always live out our faith. What are some ways that UU's don't live up to our faith? What factors might contribute to this?

**Break** (5 minutes)

Allow participants a short break to stretch or move around.

**Activity: Now What?** (15 minutes)

Ask participants to reflect on what they have learned from the discussion about stereotypes. After a few minutes, ask participants to share their thoughts on what they might do with this information; in what ways might they share this with their friends and families, in the congregation, or with others outside of the congregation. Can they commit to doing one thing to dispel stereotypes, for example sharing what they learned with a friend, or through a school project, or telling a family member about the book, or writing an email to a TV station when they see stereotypes promoted, etc.?

A wonderful suggestion comes from Mary Benard, the Editorial Director of Skinner House books: The book *Muhammad* has been reviewed by Booklist, which means that it is recommended to libraries by the American Library Association. Do an audit of your local public or school library's holdings on Islam and suggest responsible resources, including this book. Take this a step further – if the library hosts book talks or discussion groups, consider finding a Muslim group to partner with and share this discussion guide as well.

Finally, ask participants to consider the question, "What does the story of Muhammad have to do with me?"

**Closing** (10 minutes)

To close, ask each participant to share, if they choose to, the art work 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 – 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> grade

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

[Session 9](#) of Windows and Mirrors – 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> 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 Faiths

[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](#)