

## Resources on peace, interfaith cooperation, and remembrance for Ingathering 2011

### QUOTES

*Our first task in approaching another people, another culture is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we find ourselves treading on another's dream. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival. — Max Warren (1904-1977) General Secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Council. (from A Chorus of Faiths)*

*If we want a beloved community, we must stand for justice, have recognition for difference without attaching difference to privilege. — bell hooks, author, feminist, and social activist (from A Chorus of Faiths)*

*If we agree in love, there is no disagreement that can do us any injury, but if we do not, no other agreement can do us any good. Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. — Hosea Ballou (1771-1852), Universalist minister (from A Chorus of Faiths)*

*We have all of us, whether rich or poor, whether high or low, of whatever nationality and religious conviction, the same supreme necessities and the same great problem and infinity of love. This old world has rolled on through countless stages and phases of physical progress until it is the home of humanity, and it has, through a process of evolution or growth, reached an era of intellectual and spiritual development where there is "malice toward none and charity toward all," and when, without prejudice, without fear, and in perfect fidelity, we may clasp hands across the chasm of our differences and speed and cheer each other on in the ways of all that is good and true. — Augusta Jane Chapin (1836-1905), Universalist minister and educator (from A Chorus of Faiths)*

*Generosity of the spirit is ... the ability to acknowledge an interconnectedness—one's debts to society—that binds one to others whether one wants to accept it or not. It is also the ability to engage in the caring that nurtures that interconnectedness. It is a virtue that everyone should strive for, even though few people have a lot of it—a virtue the practice of which gives meaning to the frustrations of political work and the inevitable loneliness of the separate self. It is a virtue that leads one into community work and is sustained by such involvements. — Robert Bellah, sociologist, in Habits of the Heart (from A Chorus of Faiths)*

*Peace begins with yourself, with the way you treat your family, your friends, your communities, your country - but it does not stop there. Peace that begins in the*

*hearts of children can cover the whole world.* — Mayerly, 14, Colombian Children's Movement for Peace (from Heeding the Call)

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.*  
the words of St. Francis of Assisi (from Heeding the Call)

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.* — 1 John 4:7-8 (from A Place of Wholeness)

*For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.* — Nelson Mandela (from A Place of Wholeness)

*It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.* — Audre Lorde, writer, poet, and activist (from A Place of Wholeness)

*May your life preach more loudly than your lips.* — William Ellery Channing (from Heeding the Call)

*In my vision of a beloved community, I see a dazzling, light-filled, breathtakingly beautiful mosaic, a gigantic, all-encompassing mosaic, where each of us can see, can really see, and deeply appreciate each piece. We know that each piece is of immeasurable value. We know that each piece is part of a larger whole, a larger whole that would not be whole, indeed would not BE, without each piece shining through, and being seen and appreciated as its unique self.* — Marla Scharf, First Unitarian Church of San Jose, California. (from Building the World We Dream About)

## Readings

### **From Singing the Living Tradition:**

Reading #584 A Network of Mutuality,  
Responsive Readings #662 Strange and Foolish Walls; #657 It Matters what We Believe; #576 A Litany of Restoration

["The Place Where We Are Right"](#) by Yehuda Amichai, translated from the Hebrew by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell. (from A Place of Wholeness)

"From the place where we are right  
flowers will never grow  
in the spring..."

About Social Justice Work: "[Perhaps](#)" by Shu Ting (1952- ), translated by Carolyn Kizer (from Exploring Our Values through Poetry)

About Social Justice Work: "[End of a Discussion with a Jailer](#)" by Samih Al-Qasim (1939- ), translated by Abdullah al-Udhari (from Exploring Our Values through Poetry)

Responsive Reading: "We Give Thanks this Day," by O. Eugene Pickett (originally published in *Readings for Common Worship*, republished in [Young Adult Service Journal](#))

*For the expanding grandeur of Creation, worlds known and unknown,  
galaxies beyond galaxies, filling us with awe and challenging our  
imaginations:*

We Give Thanks This Day.

*For this fragile planet earth, its times and tides, its sunsets and seasons:*

We Give Thanks This Day.

*For the joy of human life, its wonders and surprises, its hopes and  
achievements:*

We Give Thanks This Day.

*For our community, our common past and future hope, our oneness  
transcending all separation, our capacity to work for peace and justice in  
the midst of hostility and oppression:*

We Give Thanks This Day.

*For high hopes and noble causes, for faith without fanaticism, for  
understanding of views not shared:*

We Give Thanks This Day.

*For all who have labored and suffered for a fairer world, who have lived  
so that others might live in dignity and freedom:*

We Give Thanks This Day

*For human liberty and sacred rites; for opportunities to change and grow,  
to affirm and choose:*

We give thanks this day.

*We pray that we may not live by our fears but by our hopes, not by our words but by our deeds.*

from *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us* by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker (quoted in Resistance and Transformation: Unitarian Universalist Social Justice History)

Violence denies presence and suffocates spirit. Violence robs us of knowledge of life and its intrinsic value; it steals our awareness of beauty; of complexity, of our bodies. Violence ignores vulnerability, dependence, and interdependence. A person who acts violently disregards self and other as distinct, obliterating the spaces in which spirit breathes. We can resist and redress violence by acting for justice and by being present to one another, present to beauty, present to the fire at the heart of things, the spirit that gives breath to life.

Cooperation: [Excerpt from Meditations of the Heart](#) by Howard Thurman (from Building the World We Dream About)

Water to Solace the Dryness at our Hearts: [The Fountain](#) by Denise Levertov (from Building the World We Dream About)

## Stories

[Religious Identity in a Diverse World](#) (from A Place of Wholeness)

No monopoly on Truth: [Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom](#) (from Amazing Grace)

Peace: [The Colombian Children's Peace Movement](#) (from Heeding the Call)

Cooperation: [The Village That Could](#) (from Heeding the Call)

[Peace begins with Me](#) a personal story by Young Adult Raziq Brown about the meaning of Social Justice (from Heeding the Call)

All the stories in [A Chorus of Faiths](#) deal with some aspect of interfaith cooperation and leadership. These reflect UU history: [A Chorus of Faith](#), [Righteous Amongst the Nations](#), [The March at Selma](#), [Faithful Fools](#), and [Jenkin Lloyd Jones and the Abraham Lincoln Center](#). These two are easily adaptable for a Story for Ages. One is about understanding and respecting each other's truths ([The Jellyfish](#)) and one is about social justice leadership ([The Fox and the Lion](#)).

[We Are Each Other's Business](#).(from A Chorus of Faiths) is a true story from Eboo Patel's life about support people of different faiths.

Another story Eboo Patel likes to tell is about Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota, who in 2009, was the first Muslim elected to Congress. When he announced that he planned to take his oath of office on a copy of the Quran, the holy book of his faith, he was verbally attacked. In particular, Virginia Representative Virgil Goode claimed that taking the oath of office on a Quran was a threat to American values.

Ellison contacted the Library of Congress and requested to use the Quran that was once part of Thomas Jefferson's personal library. As Ellison's spokesman, Rick Jauert articulated, "Keith is paying respect not only to the founding fathers' belief in religious freedom but the Constitution itself." He made his point, but did not allow the situation to devolve into an "Ellison vs. Goode" fight. He changed the conversation. ([the NPR story](#); the [Washington Post story](#))

Forgiveness: "A Repair Job" (from Building Bridges- publication Fall 2011)

Once upon a time, there were two sisters who lived side-by-side. They both owned farms: one grew the sweetest grapes for miles around, the other raised vegetables. A small creek ran between the two farms. For decades, they were as close as could be. Folks in town said if you ever saw one sister, the other was always near by. They shared life together: meals, tools, stories. Their children played together in the creek. Life was peaceful.

Then, one day, they had a disagreement. It wasn't about much, but they could not resolve it. Slowly, the disagreement become an argument and bitterness set into each sister's heart. There was no more exchanging of meals, tools, or stories. They stopped communicating entirely.

One day, a sister answered a knock at her door. There stood a carpenter. "Hello, ma'am, I'm looking for work. Do you have anything that needs building?"

"Yes, I do," replied the sister. She pointed to her sister's farm next door. "That farm belongs to my sister. We were best friends, but she has suddenly become unreasonable and I can no longer stand the sight of her. I would like you to build a tall fence between our properties so I don't have to look at her."

The carpenter replied, "Okay, I understand your need. I think I know exactly what to do." and so he set to work. The sister decided to do her weekly shopping while he was working so she would not be in his way. When she returned later that day, she was shocked to see that the carpenter had not built a fence, but had instead constructed a beautiful bridge across the creek. It was sturdy and wide, with gracefully carved handrails and posts. Before she could object, her sister came out of her house and also saw the bridge. Her sister approached her side of the

bridge and said, "I have been so foolish! How could I have forgotten: you are the most loving person in the world. This fence is evidence. I'm so lucky you are my sister!" and she started across the bridge. The first sister rushed across her side of the bridge and they met in the middle. Both sisters apologized, hugged, kissed, and maybe cried a little. They turned to the carpenter, who HAD known exactly what to do. They wanted to do something nice for him. They said, "We have other jobs you can do around the farm." "Thanks, but I think I'll be moving on," he said. "I've got other bridges to build."

The beauty of diversity and our interconnectedness: "Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net" (from Building Bridges, publication Fall 2011)

Far, far away, in the abode of the great god Indra, king of heaven, hangs a wondrous vast net, much like a spider's web in intricacy and loveliness. It stretches out indefinitely in all directions. At each node, or crossing point, of the net hangs a single glittering jewel. Since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. The sparkling jewels hang there, suspended in and supported by the net, glittering like stars, dazzling to behold.

Close your eyes, now, and imagine what this magnificent jeweled net looks like, spread across the vast expanse of space. Now, keep your eyes closed and move in close to one jewel in the net. Look closely, and you will see that the polished surface of the gem reflects all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number, just as two mirrors placed opposite each other reflect an image *ad infinitum*. Each jewel reflected in this gem you are gazing into also reflects all the other jewels, so that the process of reflection is itself infinite.

Now open your eyes, and know that you are a sparkling jewel in Indra's Net, as is every person around you. Every jewel is connected with all the other jewels in the net; every person is intimately connected with all the other persons in the universe. Each has an independent place within the net and we all reflect and influence each other. A change in one jewel—or person—produces a change, however slight, in every other. Realize, too, that the infinite reflections speak to the illusory nature of appearances. Appearances are not, in fact, reality, but only a reflection; the true nature of a thing is not to be captured in its appearance. However powerful that appearance might be, it is yet only a reflection of what is real.

In addition, whatever you do to one jewel affects the entire net, as well as yourself. You cannot damage one strand of a spider web without injuring the entire web, and you cannot damage one strand of the web that is the universe without injuring all others in it, whether that injury is known or unknown to them. This can work for good or ill because, of course, just as destructive acts affect the entire net, so do loving, constructive,

compassionate acts affect the entire net. A single helpful act—even a simple act of kindness—will send positive ripples across the infinite net, touching every jewel, every person in existence.

## Meditations/ Prayers

Meditation on Peace by Nicole Bowmer and Jodi Tharan (from *Heeding the Call*)

Relax your body. Let go of all tension. Close your eyes, if you wish. Take in a deep breath and slowly release it. Do this again. Take another breath and, as you release it, feel the breath flowing through your body—through your arms, torso, legs, your head. Take another deep breath.

Let your memory take you to a time you felt at peace. Hold this peaceful memory for a while. (Pause) What help bring about this peace? What were your surroundings? Were you alone or with others? How long did the peaceful feeling last? When you bring up the memory, can you still feel the peace?

Was there ever a time you did not feel at peace but you were able to attain a peaceful state? What helped you find peace? If there was never a time like this, do you think returning to your peaceful memory would help you regain peace? What does your peaceful memory teach you about your personal peace?

Think of the most peaceful community you have known. What kept this community peaceful? Was the peace ever shaken by discord and conflict? How did the community deal with the disruption? Did it return to a peaceful state afterwards? What did this community teach you about communal peace?

Now let go of the memories, but see if you can keep the peaceful feeling. When you are ready, take a deep breath, open your eyes, and join us back in the room.

Irish Blessing:

May the blessing of light be on you

Light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine on you and warm your heart  
Till it glows like a great peat fire,  
So that the stranger may come and warm himself at it,  
And also a friend.

## Rituals

In the multigenerational program, Gather the Spirit, the chalice-lighting involves water, not flame.

Gather around the chalice bowl. Say you will "light" the chalice by pouring the cup of water into the clear bowl as the group says the chalice lighting words aloud: "In the clear light of this chalice we see that as the drop

joins the brook, the stream, the river, and becomes a mighty sea, so do each of us gather with others and become a group strong enough to care for and change the world."

From the children's program Toolbox of Faith, the water ceremony:

Point to water in the clear vase or pitcher. Point out that water molecules never stop existing, they just get recycled over and over, so that water molecules from the local tap could have once been in the Amazon River, in a New England pond, in the blood of a tiger in India, in the saliva of a salamander, in the local swimming pool, or in snow on top of the Rocky Mountains. See if the children can think of more places where a water molecule in the vase or pitcher might once have been.

Give each child a plastic cup to hold. Pour into each cup some water from the pitcher or vase. Ask the children to close their eyes and meditate on their own experiences with water and think of their own personal "water stories" they could share with the group. Prompt them by suggesting they might have had an experience with a river, a creek, a pond, a puddle, a fish bowl, a swimming pool, a lake, a bathtub, a rain storm, or an ocean. Allow a few minutes of quiet time.

Then, gather the group around the large bowl. Invite each participant to share his/her personal water story and pour water from the cup into the bowl. As each child pours his/her water, have them recite, "This water is part of the living water that makes up our world."

A Ritual for Ingathering Water Communion Services: With an international focus  
Written by [Eric M. Cherry](#)

Many UU congregations follow an annual Ingathering tradition on the first Sunday after Labor Day that includes a Water Communion/Ceremony ritual. Specific traditions vary widely, but often they include introductory remarks, a time for reflection, a sharing of water that people collected over the summer, and closing remarks. For those congregations which include an element of prayer or meditation, please consider the included "Ingathering Prayer."

For some congregations, this tradition frames nearly the entirety of a worship service. In others, it is one element of a worship service inserted into the typical liturgy. The ritual elements described below can be adapted to either context

For more information, see the [Faith Without Borders](#) resource for Water Communion Services:

### **Ingathering Prayer**

Guided by Love, secured by Hope, and made courageous by Faith,  
We gather together at a moment of beginning:  
Both Learning and Teaching,  
Welcoming the Injured and the Healing,



Ever Justice-Seeking,  
We bless this church with our Love.  
With Pilgrims and Seekers,  
Growing Children and Cherished Seniors,  
Guided by Pillars and by Leaders,  
We bless this church with our Hope.  
Praying and Resolving,  
Trusting and Involving,  
Some Settled, some Evolving,  
We bless this church with our Faith.  
Let us receive our Ingathering as a gift.  
May it inspire renewed commitment to our great covenant of Love, Hope,  
and Faith.  
May our eyes be opened to opportunities for broad ministry within,  
throughout, and beyond.  
And may the blessings we come to know through that vision be a blessing  
to the world.  
Amen.

**Introductory Remarks for Water Communion ritual:**

We gather in community to worship at a corner of our year as a church.  
This morning we carry love and hope and courageous faith, and seek to  
renew our covenantal commitments. We remind ourselves of the home we  
share, a home that we come back to, whether after a long or short  
absence, a home we welcome all to make their own: a home of love and  
hope and faith – come, let us gather together within.

And, we gather ritually this morning – carrying gifts of our summer –  
symbols of the water that we have been present with, and which has  
been present to us.

These symbols may call to mind light summer showers, thunderstorms,  
dewy mornings, and misty evenings. Or moments at oceansides,  
poolsides, riversides, lakesides – swimming, fishing, hiking, strolling – and  
who we were with while there, even if we were alone. Perhaps we found  
ourselves in the presence of water during a moment of grief or birth or  
rebirth. Or, perhaps in a mundane place whose sacredness is palpable  
nonetheless.

We reflect upon what we brought with us to these moments and places,  
in backpacks and coolers, surely – but moreso, what spiritual, emotional  
or other baggage we carried. And what we did with it while we were in  
these watery places and moments.

Did the water's unprovoked and indefatigable resiliency inspire you? Or its  
serenity? Maybe its waxing and waning tides? The music of its motion, or  
the silence of its sleep?

Did you feel the interdependent web of all existence coming alive in those  
moments? Some of you may have had the gift of a momentary spiritual

epiphany. Others of you a growing awareness of how this very water is like strands of the web, and how the web is us...and everything. Perhaps the ties to spiritual companions throughout the world come clearer and clearer. Bring to mind the monsoon rains that our UU partners in the Philippines and India know; or the churning ocean that the UUs in Tierra del Fuego know; the rivers and valleys of Transylvania; or Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika present to UUs in Kenya, Uganda and Burundi. What brings these companions, like us, to the water? What does the water bring to them, like us?

How glorious. How sacred. How peaceful. Let us rest and rely on that truth in a moment of silence.

**Blending waters:**

And now, come forward to add the water you have carried with you.

*Depending upon your congregation's tradition, you may invite participants to describe the origin of the water they are bringing. Or, to offer one word the water carries for them. Or, in silence, or with contemplative music, or while singing a hymn like "Wade in the Water" or "Shall we gather at the river?" or "I've got Peace like a River"*

*After the waters have been gathered, conclude with the following paragraph.*

**Ending**

May our gathering together this morning be a blessing for one and all. May it inspire us to a year of hope and love and courageous faith. And may we walk that year in the full awareness - as often as possible - of the blessed ties that bind each to all. Amen.

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<b>Sermon Sample/ Resources to help with Sermon Preparation</b>
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**"Peace and Islam"**

A sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
First Parish Unitarian Universalist  
Cohasset, MA  
March 21, 2010

Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic year, was the occasion for my roommate, Layla, to give me the gift of this shawl. [Hold it up.] I treasure it. The setting was the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, where I spent my

junior year of college. It was mid-point in time between the U.S. troops landing in Beirut and the Six Day War. It was also a time of relative calm in Lebanon, though beneath the surface stirred an uneasy balance of power between Lebanese Christians and Lebanese Muslims, with Christians holding the edge though Muslims outnumbered them. In the Middle East religion, peace, and violence are intimately linked.

I hold this shawl as a personal icon of peace and Islam. Layla was Muslim. Her home city was Baghdad. Not long after the United States attacked Iraq just seven years ago yesterday, I tried to locate my friend. I contacted the university's alumni office. There was no record of her whereabouts. I continue to wonder about her well-being and whether she's even alive.

My year in Lebanon was the year I added Universalist to my then Presbyterian identity. I had yet to discover the Unitarian Universalism that would be my chosen faith, as those of us who were not raised "UU" commonly refer to it.

What happened that year that was so transformative for me? I met Layla. I met Tanya. I met Mahmoud. I studied with students and professors and visited families whose religious filters were radically different from my own—from Maronite and Greek Orthodox Christian to Druse and Muslim. To this stunningly beautiful campus on the Mediterranean we came to learn. We came from the United States, Britain, France, Greece, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, the Sudan, Iran, and Iraq, to name just a few of the nations represented. Christmas Dinner was spent on the terrace of a Muslim family in Cairo. My Christian American friend and I were treated like royalty.

Did I believe then that Muslims were all about peace and love? No more than I understand now that Christians or Jews or even Unitarian Universalists are all about peace and love. I just know that "us and them" isn't sustainable.

Peace and Islam is a topic I approach beyond gingerly. I'm an expert in neither. I struggle for peace from the inside out and the outside in. I'm in my infancy in discerning the richness of the religion that is Islam. This morning I'm modeling *chutzpah*, a non-Arabic word as you might know. I'm out on a slim limb as I seek to honor the winning bid made last spring at our service auction for a sermon topic of choice. The winning bidder graciously offered three or four topics, from which I was foolhardy enough to choose the highly complex topic of Islam. I was foolhardy minus one to hone in on the marginally narrower topic, "Peace and Islam." It could only consume the better part of a lifetime.

Nonetheless why not "Peace and Islam" on dual anniversaries? The first anniversary I've already noted. Yesterday marked the seventh anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, tied so erroneously to the 9/11/01 attack of 19 members of Al-Qaeda, a fundamentalist arm of the Sunni branch of Islam "calling for a global *jihad*," (struggle or effort) to vanquish perceived enemies of what they understood Islam to be. Like extremist arms of Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, extremist arms of Islam hold high-intensity self-righteousness unleashing the most horrific of acts. Their aftermath clouds for many of us the role of peace in this faith that is one of the great religions of the world stemming from the story of Abraham.

The second anniversary is a 1400<sup>th</sup>! Yes, 1400 years ago, in 610 CE during the month of Ramadan, which existed before the formalization of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdallah retreated to a cave atop Mount Hira on the outskirts of Mecca. There he prayed and fasted, distraught over the runaway greed in his own tribe. Legend tells us that in the middle of the night at almost the mid-point of Ramadan Muhammad awoke, seized by the sense of a powerful presence that spoke the first words of what would be the *Qur'an*, "the recitation." More revelations followed. What he received were prescriptions in the form of glorious and powerful poetry, but imparted in such a way that he had the good sense to tell no one except his trusted wife and cousin.

Two years passed, and he could contain himself no longer. He began to preach these revelations. Converts were slow in coming and were initially among those downwind of the growing economic disparities in Arab society. Just as Jesus preached a gospel of love as a return to the soul of Judaism, so Muhammad preached a message of social equity as a return to the soul of his culture. Both threatened power brokers of religion and government.

It would take 21 years for Muhammad to receive all 114 chapters, or *surahs*, of the *Qur'an*.

*Islam* means "surrender," and it was expressed in ritual prayer, originally three times a day and later increased to five times a day. To prostrate oneself was a physical antidote to the arrogance and greed that had become so pervasive in and around Mecca.

An adherent of Islam was called a Muslim,

"....a man or a woman who had made this submission of their entire being to Allah and his demand that human beings behave to one another with justice, equity and compassion."

Muslims were expected to live according to the precepts of the *Qur'an*. This meant giving a portion of their income to the poor. And it meant obligatory fasting during Ramadan—the month when Muhammad had received the first revelations of the *Qur'an*—as a reminder of the hunger known to the poor.

According to scholar Karen Armstrong,

“Social justice was...the crucial virtue of Islam. Muslims were commanded as their first duty to build a community (*ummah*) characterized by practical compassion, in which there was a fair distribution of wealth.”

Theological speculation was deemed self-indulgent. “....Far more crucial,” explains Armstrong, “was the effort (*jihad*) to live in the way God had intended for human beings.” The well-being of the community, the *ummah*, was evidence of their faithfulness.

Fair-play, compassion, and community are at the core of Islam. This is born out in the understanding that the Arabs issue not from Abraham’s legitimate son, Isaac, but from Ishmael, the son of Abraham’s mistress, Hagar, whom Abraham’s wife Sarah had cast out in a fit of envy when she was pregnant and Sarah wasn’t. God served as mediator. Sarah became pregnant after all and gave birth to Isaac. As for Hagar and Ishmael, God had promised that a great people would descend from Ishmael. To Abraham, God made a covenant with him that he would “be the father of a multitude of nations.” Then God promised Abraham that Sarah would conceive and bear him a son and that Sarah would “be a mother of nations.”

According to the narrative of Genesis, God made promises to Abraham about both his sons:

“As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac...” (Genesis 17:20-21a)

Hagar and Ishmael are said to have settled in Mecca. Muhammad learned from neighboring Jews about these promises made by God to Hagar and to Abraham and Sarah. Muhammad was overjoyed. God had not rejected his people after all. The Jews and the Arabs shared the same father, Abraham; but the Jews descended from Isaac; the Arabs, from Ishmael. In the sight of Muhammad, the historic scale had been tipped toward justice.

When I heard as a child the story of Sarah casting out Hagar, I was horrified and angry. How could Sarah behave so badly? How could God let this

happen? In Islam, this is not the whole story. The saga of Ishmael and his legendary descendants and the saga of Isaac and his legendary descendants continue to our day. We can understand the deep rivalry between Jews and Muslims as a family divided. *When peace comes, a great family will be whole.*

The history of the Jews and the history of the Arabs—and God knows the history of Christians claiming the Judaic tradition—have been fraught with violence. Each has self-righteously claimed to be the offended party. Holy wars have been fought in all religions. None are without accountability. Each seeks validation for violence. Each holds precepts for peace.

In our time, many non-Muslims tend to perceive violence as the heart of Islam. Perhaps some of us in this Meeting House share this sentiment. Hear the words of the *Qur'an*:

In the 7<sup>th</sup> *surah*, we read:

"...And My Mercy encompasses all things." (7:156)

In the 25<sup>th</sup> *surah*, we read:

"The servants of the Compassionate are they who walk upon the earth humbly, and when the foolish address them, they answer: 'Peace!'" (25:63)

And in the 60<sup>th</sup> *surah*, we read:

"It is possible that God will ordain love between you and your enemies. God is Almighty. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. God does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who have not fought against you, nor driven you from your homes. Truly, God loves the just." (60:8)

While there may not be a message of peace at all costs, there is a clear prohibition against pre-emptive violence.

In his introduction to a compilation of *The Koran's Teachings on Compassion, Peace & Love*, scholar Rez Shah-Kazemi notes the likely objections within and without the Islamic world to highlighting only one strain of teachings, namely, the compassionate, the peaceful, and the loving, when the *Qur'an* contains promise and threat, peace and violence, hope and fear. Because so much emphasis has been given in our time—and he wrote in 2007—to the Koranic themes of threat, violence, and fear, he registers hope that his work

"... will help to draw attention to the absolute centrality of the principles of compassion and mercy, peace and love in the Koranic worldview."

Peace does not equal pacifism, nor does peacemaking equal pacifism. Pacifism is an absolute, and I respect such a stance. Peacemaking is what I try

to practice. As long as I know that I am capable of violently *defending* myself or another creature, I am not a pacifist. If, however, I *feed the fear* that another person or another people or another religion is undermining however I consider "me and mine," and if I *act on this fear*, I am no more innocent than a hijacker, a crusader, or any of the women and men of history made and history being made who *reject surrender* to the promise and possibility of love and peace.

Embedded in a poem by the late W.H. Auden are the words:

"You shall love your crooked neighbor  
With your crooked heart."

As humans endowed with conflicting capacities, may we seek to acknowledge our own shortcomings and reach out in love and peace to our neighbor, who shares them.

*Salaam Aleikum*, Peace be unto you. Amen.

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[Four Lessons for Unitarian Universalists in Interfaith Work](#) by William Sinkford

*UU World* Family Pages: [Summer 2011](#): Ten years after 9/11, UUs and interfaith work Story: Building Bridges, Breaking Down Walls - First UU of Columbus, Ohio

<b>Hymn Suggestions</b>
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**From Singing the Living Tradition**

Hymns: #151 I Wish I Knew How; #1037 We Begin Again in Love; #1014  
Standing on the Side of Love

**From Singing the Journey**

Hymn #1051 We Are; #1009 Meditation on Breathing; #1017 Building a New  
Way; #1023 Building Bridges