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Jewish Muslim Dialogue

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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by

Brie Loskota

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SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT OF COMPLETED THESIS

I, Brie Loskota, hereby submit two (2) copies of my completed thesis in final form entitled Jewish Muslim Dialogue.

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Introduction

The desire or need for political religious-based organized dialogue seems to arise out of difficult circumstances. Two groups often engage with each other in dialogue representing the 'two sides' in a given situation. Dialogue projects develop out of group self-interest coupled with the desire to humanize the 'other' on some level. American Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups engage in a variety of programs, however themes around religion, culture and politics dominate. This context for dialogue makes for a variety of imbalances between the groups and these imbalances affect the power dynamics and fruitfulness of the groups' mutual engagement.

These wider issues in dialogue also filter into Jewish-Muslim dialogue; a recent and popular development out of older dialogue projects around Jewish-Christian issues and around conflicts arising in shared communities. Among the earliest Jewish-Muslim dialogue projects are those that began in the 1960s and ebbed and flowed within the larger political context of Israel and Palestine. The role of Israel in their deliberations is central either explicitly stated by groups or as implied by the way the groups construct the rules of their projects. Recently, Israel has not been the sole catalyst for dialogue but issues around terrorism, specifically, September 11, 2001 have created a new desire for Jews and Muslims to engage each other. All the while, both perceived and real differences in American Jewish and Muslim communities affect the nature of the dialogue and its depth.

This research will provide an overview of Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups in the United States and attempt to move to an organized way of conceptualizing the different groups. This project is meant to illuminate specific of concern around Jewish-Muslim

dialogue groups and provide a broad analysis of their undertakings. The conclusion of this paper will offer some recommendations for engaging in more productive dialogue projects.

Methodology

This study uses data from two years of participant observation, qualitative interviews and popular literature review. I completed an initial scan of Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups that made headlines from 2002-2005 using Lexis-Nexis key word searches and then created a database of articles on dialogue groups. The database served as the foundation for creating initial categories of groups, their programs, motivations and issues that arise to make them successful or to contribute to their failure. During this phase of research, I formulated a set of theories and questions that were then tested in twenty qualitative interviews. I selected interview subjects using non-random sampling and those chose were picked to represent a broad range of dialogue activities and roles within dialogue groups. Specific attention was paid to having a good balance of gender and age, though more Jews were interviewed than Muslims overall. Since there is very little that has been written about Jewish-Muslim dialogue specifically, there is little academic literature to serve as the basis for a review. Therefore, many of this project's categories and analysis are based on original primary research.

Defining Dialogue

An auditorium at a college campus is filled by an audience that has come to hear two individuals, a Muslim and a Jew discuss issues they currently face and then to ask them questions. Jews and Muslims take pictures and post them on a website meant to depict their lives as members of those two groups; they also post messages and responses on an

online message board. Rabbis and imams convene a public meeting and make pronouncement about the role of religion in producing violence. Members of a group, led by a facilitator employing intentional listening techniques, discuss their experiences as Jews and Muslims in areas of conflict. Members of a synagogue meet with a group from a local mosque and listen to a lecture on the role of *tzdekah* and *zakat* in their respective traditions. The above examples all represent what is popularly known as Jewish-Muslim dialogue.

Despite the fact that the term "dialogue" is used by all the organizations reviewed and interviewed for this research, no set standard definition of the term exists. Many groups cannot articulate their definition of dialogue but their understanding of the term can be implied by the type of activity they engage in. Other groups have explicit definitions of the term that is clearly communicated to its members. Dialogue, at its most basic level, is an umbrella from any number of activities in which an encounter of the "other" can take place. The only commonality between all the definitions seems to be that at least one member from each group is present at the symbolic "table," though the representation of the groups can be, and often are, disproportionate.

For many dialogue groups and leaders there is no measurable standard for conversations, sharing, or learning for an activity to be considered dialogue. Many groups undertake programs that vary widely: from artistic events, such as shared musical concerts, to peace marches, to lectures and performances of dialogue, where two individuals have a conversation that others observe. The dialogue can take place on stage where two musicians, a Jew and a Muslim, play pieces successively or possibly together, or two lectures on an agreed upon theme are given or a march is held that focuses on

tensions between Jews and Muslims. The programs may offer an opportunity to be in the same room with the other, but without a formal process of personally engaging with the other, though informally, members of different groups may interact.

Others see dialogue not as a one-time event but as a sustained program of interaction that should ultimately grapple with issues of mutual concern only after an environment of trust is developed. These groups go beyond the idea of encountering the other and offer an opportunity to humanize and know the other. One advocate of this notion states that this form of dialogue "is not a series of isolated events, but a sustained, ongoing activity. Concrete long-term agendas should be worked out to insure that the real issues at stake will indeed be dealt with. Yet through dialogue one must also aim to develop a mutual trust that will be able to withstand misunderstandings that are bound to emerge."[1]

Other groups have used new technologies to create an experience of the other and a dialogue that is deeply personal yet totally removed from actual physical presence of the other. The Children of Abraham Project, New York, is co-directed by a young American Jew named Ari Alexander and a young European Asian Muslim named Maria Ali-Adib. The two met in London when Ari was studying on a Fulbright Fellowship and developed a friendship. Ari was contacted by someone who was interested in putting together a project for Jews and Muslims, and had the ability to fund such an endeavor. The project began when Ari brought Maria into the planning process. They created a photography-essay project for Jews and Muslims around the world to show images from their religion and also set up an online dialogue forum for the participants to be able to talk to other young people around the world from the comfort and privacy of their own homes. The

[1] Kuttab, Jonathan & Edy Kaufman "An Exchange on Dialogue" Journal of Palestinian Studies, vol. 17 n. 2, 1998, 94.

Children of Abraham Project is currently in its second year with a new group of young people participating.

Many proponents of dialogue have argued that one of the overarching goals of dialogue is to personalize and humanize the other so it seems paradoxical that the internet, which can provide near total anonymity, would provide a valuable arena for dialogue. However, says Ari, the online dialogue allows the participants to be fully honest with each other without concern about how others will react or fear of being cut off by a moderator. Difficult issues are discussed on their message boards and the group is able to self-moderate. It solicits a level of frankness that is missing from many of the other programs that Ari has been involved in. It is also one of the few examples where a Jew and a Muslim are equally responsible for the programming and organization, though it was started, like every other example in this study, at the behest of a member of the Jewish community.

On a political level, important meetings and public gestures have also been included under the rubric of dialogue. Anwar Sadat's 1977 trip to Israel is considered to be a prime example of a public action defined as dialogue. A January 2005 meeting of religious leaders in Belgium also falls into this category. This conference "hosted more than 200 rabbis and imams as well as Christian clergy from all over the world to convey the message that religion does not send people out to kill and that anyone who takes a life in the name of religion transgresses a commandment of God."[2] These types of projects do "not resolve the conflict, but [are] an important step toward challenging attitudes

[2] Ben-Simon, Daniel "Rabbis and Imams Unite against Religious Extremism" Haaretz, January 9, 2005.

about the issues and may have helped lay the groundwork for cooperatively building peace in the future."[3]

There are some participants in dialogue who are dissatisfied with the idea of dialogue as merely a symbolic gathering. These people have defined dialogue to include social action and community building rather than merely talking or being together. These types of programs include promoting neighborly relationships, engaging in civic religious life, addressing social needs and working on projects that serve the interests of one or both of the communities. Many groups engage in some form of social action as a larger part of their dialogue program, including the Baltimore Jewish Council and the Maryland Muslim Council who are part of an ongoing dialogue program that includes service as a component. Citing the idea of moving forward toward common goals, one participant in the program observed, "we can be more productive working together than fighting each other...Deep down inside, we all want the same thing, which is to live in safe and meaningful communities."[4]

Professional research and other projects are hailed by some as de facto dialogue groups since they bridge divides and enable professionals to work together on areas of shared interest. Science and medicine is one field where groups are working together despite conflicts, especially in the Middle East.[5] Gershon Golomb, who heads a research group at Hebrew University of Jerusalem working on improved methods of drug delivery, lives in a settlement in Efrat and his colleague, Yousef Najajreh, lives in Beit

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[3] United States Institute for Peace "What Works?: Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs" Special Report 123, July 2004, 5.

[4] Scherr, Andrew "Muslims, Jews, Join to Rehab Home" Jewish Times, April 22, 2005

[5] In her study on professional teams comprised of Israelis and Palestinians, Helena Desivilya found that professional contact was not enough to overcome stereotyping and thus she considers these groups to be just the beginning of dialogue. See: Desivilya, Helena Syna "Jewish-Arab Coexistence in Israel: The Role of Joint Professional Teams" Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Jul., 1998).

Jala. They work together daily and use science as a buffer between themselves and the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. "We turn down the volume on our arguments because we have a shared value against sickness," says Najajreh. This type of interaction where two people may have expertise in an area and where the issues of group power are diminished can contribute to interaction that can be seen as dialogue, as it represents one common end result of actual coexistence despite ongoing conflict.[6]

Others see dialogue as a specific set of techniques for engaging with the other, that is viewing dialogue based in a specific methodology rooted in compassionate listening and couples therapy that should be run by trained facilitators who move the participants through a process. These dialogues employ therapeutic techniques like intentional or active listening, where one person talks, another repeats, summarizes and tries to empathize, in order to elicit personal stories and feelings told in a controlled setting. Proponents of this type of program say that it opens doors for trust to be created and experiences to be shared that create meaningful bonds between participants and empathy towards the other.

As illustrated above, there is no one definition for the term dialogue. Within a single group, members may operate with multiple notions of the term. In fact, groups seem to be able to evolve and change their concept of dialogue over time, engaging in multiple forms of activity that imply different definitions of dialogue. For example, a group interested in deeply personal sharing based on a therapeutic model may engage in social action, or a lecture series with a Jewish and Muslim speaker may have a smaller discussion group following the lecture. These multiple definitions may also help groups

[6] Thus, significant opportunities may exist to bring Jews and Muslims together along professional lines, and not religious or political associations or other collective and opposing identities.

appeal to a broader range of participants. Those who might be uninterested in the therapeutic model can engage in an act of community building with a different group and still consider the project to be dialogue; others who would rather not participate in social action can go to a joint lecture or see a musical performance or visit an arts festival.

Origin and Development of Jewish-Muslim Dialogue in the U.S.

Jewish-Muslim dialogue is a subject of recent popular interest, the roots of which are both varied and muddled. Though Jews and Muslims have lived together since the 7th century culminating with what some see as the golden age of their coexistence in Muslim Spain from the 8th through the 15th century, dialogue as a form of civic engagement is a contemporary phenomenon. The origin of Jewish-Muslim dialogue in America is not certain, but it seems to have developed out of the tradition of inter-group conflict dialogue that gained popularity among Jews and Arabs after the founding of the state of Israel and the establishment of inter-religious dialogue projects after Vatican II. These two streams of dialogue created exclusively Jewish-Muslim projects that began broadly in the 1980s in America, though there were earlier scattered programs in the 1940s-1960s. The groups delved into political and religious discussions, and the groups' willingness to engage in dialogue was affected by development in the Middle East political process. Although the advent of the second Intifada in 2000 and the events of September 11, 2001, have curtailed Jewish-Muslim dialogue activities, they have simultaneously provided a new source of motivation to energize these groups.

Inter-group dialogue exists between two or more identifiably different groups that are perceived as being in conflict with one another. One group's position of privilege can be predicated on the diminished position of the other. As Louis Kriesberg notes, "social

conflicts always involved one or more groups who see themselves as distinct and therefore have different collective identities."[7] These dialogue groups are the result of crisis situations, or more accurately, post-crisis situations. The groups affected by a frequently violent conflict seek to understand the roots of the issues and build relationships with members of the other community in order to ease the historical wounds, address current issues, and prevent future problematic situations.

An American example of community inter-group dialogue that emerged out of violent circumstances took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the decades following the race riots that tore the city apart. In the segregated city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, "the absence of any race relations was considered good race relations."[8] The riots were touched off by the alleged assault of a young white woman by an African American man, bringing the racial tension to a boiling point and followed by days of rioting and fires that left the black section of town known as "Little Africa" in ruins. Marshall law was declared to restore order, though no justice for those who incited the violence was ever had. Though it took decades, now community leaders discuss ways to increase civic engagement and community building to avoid the conditions that led to the riots in the 1920s. To date, the various communities in Tulsa, Oklahoma, including a sizable Muslim community, are civically engaged and cite the lessons learned in the race riots as a motivator.[9]

The founding of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing wars brought the issue of Jews in the largely Muslim Arab world to the fore. For the first time since the Crusades,

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[7] Kriesberg, Louis "Mediation and the Transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" Journal of Peace Research. Vol. 38, No. 3, 2001, 374.
[8] Halliburton, R., Jr. "The Tulsa Race War of 1921" Journal of Black Studies, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Mar., 1972), 334.

Muslim holy places were in the hands of non-Muslims, and this was the first time for Muslims that Jews controlled Jerusalem. Both religious and political issues surrounding this new nation and the new relationship between Arabs and Jews, and also Jews with the larger Muslim world, created the central issue that would provide the catalyst for Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the coming decades.

The roots of modern Jewish-Muslim dialogue can also be traced to the larger project of interfaith dialogue brought about in the Post-Holocaust era of Vatican II and the publication in 1965 of Nostra Aetate which details a "Declaration of the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions." Vatican II made public the need for and legitimacy of inter-religious dialogue, specifically with Jews. According to the theologian, William Cenker,

> Even before the end of the Council, Pope Paul VI established in 1964 the Secretariat for Non-Christians, but Pope John Paul II in 1989 renamed it the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. This indicates both the centrality given to dialogue with the religions of the world and the development of Catholic thinking in twenty-five years...Catholics were called to take the initiative in dialogue with those of other faiths over such issues as religious freedom, cultural and social development, civic order, and building up human community.[10]

Christian Anti-Judaism, the rise of Anti-Semitism and the participation of Catholic clergy and the Vatican in the Nazi persecution of the Jews laid the foundation for a reexamination of the origins of Catholic and other Christian hatred of Jews. Christian-Jewish dialogue has much of its roots in this troubled past yet nevertheless blossomed into discussions about shared religious heritage and texts, the role of religious minorities

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[9] Interviews with Tulsa community leaders as part of a television special called "A Quest," May 2003.
[10] Cenkner, William, "Mission and/or Dialogue: A Roman Catholic Perspective" Buddhist-Christian Studies. Vol. 17 (1997), 132.

living among Christian majorities and the ways religious groups can mutually engage in civic life in a meaningful manner.

There are early examples of interfaith groups such as the National Council of Christians and Jews[11] founded in 1927 in the United States. In 1945, NCCJ was motivated by the growing interest in understanding differences between religions[12] and held a number of summer intergroup educational workshops for teachers seeking to understand how to adjust to the cultural and religious differences of their students within a variety of educational settings. These groups represent the early beginning of inter-religious dialogue that flourished later other Christian-Jewish dialogues.

Christian-Jewish dialogue thus gave rise to dialogue among the three Abrahamic faiths, including Muslims and dialogue among Christians and Muslims.[13] Partnerships between Christians and Jews reached out to growing Muslim communities and incorporated them into existing dialogue activities. Thus, many Jewish-Muslim dialogue projects and programs did not start out as strictly Jewish and Muslim endeavors. In fact, participants and leaders in Jewish-Muslim dialogue are often veterans of other Abrahamic dialogue or interfaith groups, who have decided for a variety of reasons to create more specifically focused dialogue opportunities between their two communities. Some have argued, however, that applying the lessons learned from the dialogic process based on Christian-Jewish projects hampers Jewish-Muslim interactions since the situations of these communities in relation to each other are so different.

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[11] Currently known as the National Conference for Community and Justice and includes Muslims in their activities.

[12] Seamans, Herbert, "1945 Summer Workshops in Intergroup Education" Journal of Educational Sociology, Vol. 18 No. 9 (May, 1945), 569-572.

[13] This can probably be attributed to the wave of immigration of Muslims in the 1960s and their growing presence as a demographic force. Interestingly, it does not seem that Abrahamic dialogue grew to include

Jewish-Muslim dialogue has been both hindered and helped by the external political circumstances. For example, Rabbi Alfred Wolf in Los Angeles made notable efforts at dialogue in the early 1970s, but those programs fell apart in the wake of the 1973 war. The next international event with an impact on Jewish-Muslim relations came with the signing of A Framework for Peace in the Middle East at Camp David in Sept. 1978. Jewish-Muslim dialogue began to flower in the 1980s. Ira Rifkin, a journalist and veteran of dialogue observed that "dialogue began in earnest in the 1980s...Muslims were invited to synagogues, Jews visited mosques."[14] The beginning of the first Intifada in December, 1987, again hampered dialogue efforts.

The prospect of more fruitful relations between Jews and Muslims blossomed again with the promise of the Oslo Accords in 1993. For Jews and Muslims in the United States, the Oslo Peace Process also brought the promise of mutual recognition and the hope coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians. "The ill-fated Oslo agreement appeared to many as the political breakthrough that just might end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which the hopeful presumed would prompt hesitant Muslim governments to establish diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, thereby fostering a new era of Jewish-Muslim cooperation and understanding."[15]

The dialogue projects flourished in the mid-nineties in Los Angeles. The Progressive Jewish Alliance was involved in a leadership dialogue with prominent members of the Muslim community including Mr. Al-Marayati, Dr. Hassan Hatout, leaders from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the publisher of the Minaret newspaper. The

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Muslims because of the large African-American Islamic movement around the same period of time, and to date, little dialogue exists that include African American Muslims.

[14] Ira Rifkin, "Strained Relations: September 11 and the Second Intifada in Israel interrupted years of improvement in Muslim-Jewish relations" My Jewish Learning.com

group met regularly, held discussions around topics of mutual interest and several members signed on to a document that laid out an ethics of dialogue in 1999. A significant step in the dialogue process came in 1999 when Salam Al-Marayati's[16] name was submitted for appointment for the National Commission on Terrorism but was later pulled because of questions around his purported verbal support of groups linked to terror in the Middle East. Many of the Jewish partners in dialogue spoke out against this removal and came to the aid of their mutual friend.[17]

This good will began to flounder with the second Intifada. An article titled "Muslim-Jewish Group Breaks off Dialogue" appearing in the LA Times, June 6th, 2001, cited the difficulty for Jews and Muslims to conduct dialogue in an unsettling Middle East situation. The Los Angeles Leadership dialogue was also undermined by another series of events that left the participants feeling emotionally unsafe: the Jewish members were pressed one day to condemn an act of Israel and the Muslim members froze the dialogue for a cooling off period. Later, a member of the dialogue group published an anti-Zionist statement in his newspaper the Minaret, an action that the Jewish members said violated the group's purpose.

Later that year, the events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath both hampered and spurred dialogue. Salam Al-Marayati was interviewed on KCRW by Warren Olney, and citing the transcript as published in an LA Times article, Mr. Al-Marayati said:

> If we are going to look at suspects, we should look to the groups that benefit the most from these kinds of incidents, and I think we should put the state of Israel on the suspect list because I think it diverts attention

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[15] *Ibid*

[16] Executive Director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, CA

[17] In 1999, on of the most memorable phone calls I was asked to make while working for Professor Reuven Firestone at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, was to leave a message for Salam Al-Marayati following this incident and express outrage on his behalf over the situation.

> away from what's happening in the Palestinian territories so that they can go on with their aggression and occupation and apartheid policies. Why not put all the suspects on the list, instead of going ahead and shooting from the hip and saying those people did it and bombing the cornfields of Afghanistan and pharmaceutical factories in Sudan.[18]

Some of the members of the leadership dialogue that were already feeling beleaguered said that these comments were, at best ill-timed and politically inexpedient and at worst, anti-Semitic. Those who stood up to the larger Jewish community in defense of Al-Marayati's potential appointment to the National Commission on Terrorism felt a sense of betrayal.[19]

Many members of this dialogue group left in the wake of those statements and many in the Jewish community felt, after its disbanding that this dialogue had been a sham. Rabbi John Rosove, who notes that he called Al-Marayati after the attacks to express support and solidarity, still speaks of this incident with pain, feeling that he was misled throughout the dialogue.[20] Members of the Jewish community lambasted the Progressive Jewish Alliance for working with MPAC and the PJA was eventually pressured to end all Jewish-Muslim dialogue programs.[21] Other Jewish members of the dialogue group have harbored a bitterness and resentment towards dialogue with Muslims in general and with MPAC and Mr. Al-Marayati in particular. Those who abandoned the dialogue with MPAC still remain cautious about engaging in future dialogue with Muslim leaders.[22]

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[18] Stammer, Larry B. "Jewish-Muslim Dialogue Newly Tested" Los Angeles Times, September 22, 2001.
[19] Interview with Ira Rifkin, May 2005
[20] Interview with John Rosove, June 2005
[21] Interview with Daniel Sokatch, July 2005
[22] Members of the, especially liberal, Jewish community felt especially betrayed by Salam Al-Marayati's statements about Israel because of their support for his nomination to the terrorism commission in 1999 and their defense of him when questions were raised about his fitness for the post and the eventual withdrawal of his name.

But, September 11, 2001 also spurred the formation of new dialogue groups. Not surprisingly Americans suddenly became interested in Islam. The Muslim community sought to engage with their non-Muslim neighbors so that the face of Islam would not be that of terrorism. A journalist for the Christian Science Monitor noted that, "since Sept. 11, most Americans have become starkly aware of the great gaps in understanding and heightened tensions among Muslims, Christians, and Jews at home and abroad."[23] Many have noted that the Los Angeles Muslim communities began working together more closely across traditional lines to support outreach efforts to their neighbors. Dialogue and events focusing on increasing understanding through participation in religious events and shared educational programs began to increase across the nation. This larger American phenomenon also affected the Jewish community, and the desire of Jews to learn more about Muslims led many religious and community leaders to create dialogue and educational programs on Islam. College campuses, community relations groups and religious congregations, in particular, became sites for religious exchange.

By 2005, although some veterans of dialogue bear scars of negative interaction Jewish Muslim dialogue is still a topic that draws the interest of new people seeking dialogue while helping to renew interest in older institutional partners. Wilshire Boulevard Temple has been a pioneering institution of interreligious and cross-community dialogue for decades, largely because of the vision of Rabbi Alfred Wolf. Recently, Rabbi Stephen Julius Stein was hired to revive their dialogue programs and became involved in an interreligious dialogue that included Jews, Muslims, Protestants and Catholics. In 2004, the group decided to put together a pilgrimage to what they

[23] Lampman, Jane "Abrahamic faiths crack the door to deeper dialogue" The *Christian Science Monitor*, June 19, 2003

called "the Holy Land," with the goal of bringing equal numbers from each religious faith. The trip that was made in the spring of 2005 was almost exclusively religious and historical in nature and managed to avoid issues of politics even as participants traveled within sight of the security wall that Israel was building in the West Bank. An interfaith Passover Seder followed this trip and the group remains interested in continuing its work by speaking about their experiences together.

This group, however, is facing the next stage of its evolution which will require them more deeply with contemporary political issues. Rabbi Stein has observed a growing connection between the Jews and Muslims in the group—they share more in common than with the Christian participants and are more interested in exploring those areas of commonality. The group thus has to decide whether it will become a Jewish-Muslim dialogue group, which may require delving more seriously into contemporary politics, or whether it will continue to include all three faiths. Rabbi Stein wonders about his own ability to facilitate such a group, how it would change the nature of the relationships already established, and whether the group cam endure such a process.

In the current climate, there are new prospects for dialogue among Jews and Muslims and old and new efforts are building more mainstream support for dialogue between religious communities again. The context which dialogue finds itself in, especially related to the Middle East, but also now the issue of terrorism against the United States will play a role in pushing some members of the communities to dialogue and are unwilling to continue engaging. "With all the ups and downs of dialogues past and present, there remains a vital core of supporters on both sides who believe in the intrinsic

value of their efforts."[24] The current environment is mixed and varied, though new hopefulness is emerging out of the old skepticism and mistrust around dialogue.

Power & Privilege

Were dialogue groups to begin as true partnerships forged between two communities, they would be managed, attended and benefit equally all the groups involved. This, however, does not appear to have been realized in any group observed as part of this research (though some groups are closer to this goal than others). The group with the greatest privilege with the larger society is in a better position to call for dialogue, to set its rules and to steer it in a particular direction. "It is only when members of the oppressor or dominant group find it in their interest to engage in dialogue that it moves very rapidly and fruitfully."[25] The privileged group often seeks a fresh start, 'those issues are all in the past but how can we work together now' sort of approach that quickly brushes aside historical wrongs and looks for ways to be what it considers productive to the contemporary issues. The less privileged group will often seek redress for its grievances and to heard by the privileged group.[26]

The Jewish and Muslim communities are in similar demographic positions in the United States, but differ significantly in their communal structure, acceptance in the society, and political influence. A recent study of Muslims in America conducted by Ihsan Bagby, estimates, on the high end as critics say, that the total number of Muslims is about seven million.[27] The Jewish community is estimated to be approximately six million. In places like Los Angeles, where significant Jewish-Muslim dialogue began

[24] Tugend. Tom "Stopped Talks: Intifada II has put a halt on local efforts of Arab-Jewish dialogue" The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles. June 29. 2001
[25] Kuttab. 84.
[26] Interview with Melodye Feldman. 2004

decades ago, the communities are also about the same size. Raquel Ukeles notes that they are also equally educated and professional.

But with regard to overall standing in American society, the Jewish community is much more established than its Muslim counterparts. The mass emigration of Jews from eastern Europe began in the 1880s and led to the establishment of a vast network of Jewish religious institutions. The Jewish community finds itself in a comfortable and stable position in the United States with regard to security and prosperity. The community is highly organized and there are clear organizations politically, and there exist clear distinctions between denominations, seminaries and even lines of authority. It is easy to identify leaders of the Jewish community, whether clergy or lay. Its expansive institutional landscape already contains the infrastructure that may be needed for dialogue, or other educational programmatic undertakings.

The major wave of Muslim immigration, by contrast, occurred nearly a hundred years after the largest wave of Jewish immigration.[28] After President Johnson repealed immigration quotas that favored Europeans in 1965, large numbers of mostly Arab Muslims came to the United States, followed a decade later by their South Asian co-religionists. At the same time, the population of American born Muslims was growing owing to the conversion of African Americans to Islam. These different sources that fed the Muslims population in America produced a multi-layered American Muslim community.[29]

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[27] Ihsan Bagby, et al. The Mosque in America: A National Portrait, 2001

[28] Though Muslims, like Jews, trace their history in the Americas to among the earliest days of European exploration and slavery and there was significant immigration of both groups after the two World Wars.

[29] Ukeles, Raquel "Muslims in America: The Impact of 9/11" Mosaica, Winter 2003-4

This American Muslim community is much less religiously organized than its Jewish counterpart. Muslims do not belong to mosques in the same way Christians and Jews join congregations. Moreover, there is no similar concept of clergy that correlates with Christian or Jewish examples. The relationship between different Islamic schools of thought like Sunni and Shiite is unclear. There also is no Western-style institutionalized path that trains imams in a manner parallel to the way American seminaries train rabbis and pastors. Indeed, religious leaders are often not specifically trained in Islam as their Jewish counterparts are trained in Judaism. My admittedly anecdotal observation suggests that many public figures who speak on behalf of the Muslim community from within their mosques tend to be professionals such as physicians, accountants and engineers. Thus, even identifying religious leaders who can speak for large segments of the American Muslim community is often difficult.

In addition, there are fewer Muslim civic organizations and the ones that exist are advocacy oriented like Council of American-Islamic Relations and Muslim Public Affairs Council. These few groups have to incorporate the range of Muslim opinions from extreme to moderate, while the Jewish community has the luxury of a wider variety of groups that can cater to divergent interests. In an interview with Daniel Sokatch, he mentioned that his dialogue partner Nayyer Ali described the situation of the Muslim community vis-à-vis the Jewish community by explaining, "you have both the ADL [Anti-Defamation League] and the AJC [American Jewish Committee]. We have to fit everyone under one organization."[30]

While some note that the Jewish and Muslim communities appear to be parallel on paper, further probing of their demographics and history unmasks the critical differences

discussed above. The issue of imbalance in the level of establishment in America, the disparity in community infrastructure, and the difficulty in identifying clear counterparts, make equal Jewish-Muslim dialogue difficult to engage in. Thus, the question of what makes groups 'authentic' plagues discussions about engaging in dialogue and how successful it can be. The Jewish community is better equipped to carry out Jewish-Muslim dialogue, which can make dialogue a "Jewish" effort, putting the Muslim community in a position of diminished power and privilege and making dialogue between equally represented and equally empowered groups impossible.

The Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups reviewed for this study seem almost wholly initially conceived up and started by Jews. I have not found any example of a Jewish Muslim dialogue group started as a Muslim initiative. Indeed, the case of the Baltimore Jewish Council is an illustrative example. It began as an effort of a Jewish organization to reach out to Muslims in their communities. Similarly, the Children of Abraham photography program in New York, began as an idea of a member of the Jewish community who found a young Jewish emerging leader to develop it.

Along with being the initiators of dialogue groups, Jews seem to be overly represented as participants in or audience members at dialogue events. This may in part be the result of the location where the event is held. When Jewish groups conceive, recruit and plan the logistics of meetings it is more likely that they will hold the event in a 'Jewish place.' In the case of Common Ground and the Daniel Pearl Muslim-Jewish Dialogue, this has negatively impacted Muslim attendance. Once they recognized this, members of Common Ground made it a point to always met at the Omar Ibn Al Khattab

[30] Interview with Daniel Sokatch, July 2005

Foundation.[31] The overrepresentation of Jews at such events is likely related to Jews' leadership role in initiating the Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups.

Even in larger interfaith groups and those that call themselves Jewish-Palestinian dialogue projects, Muslim partners and participants can be difficult to identify.[32] The Face to Face/Faith to Faith Summer camp brings 60 high school students from around the world together for a two-week summer intensive program. The group has been successful at bringing Muslims from South Africa and the Middle East but the least well-represented group is American Muslims with usually only a handful participating every year. In January 2005, the Fetzer Institute hosted a gathering of leaders involved in Jewish-Palestinian dialogue that also runs camp programs for youth; the weekend retreat was facilitate by Libby and Len Traubman, pioneers of the Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue in San Mateo that has been meeting for over a decade. Of the twenty-five participants, there were only two self-identified Muslims. The Palestinians were largely made up of Christians.[33]

In addition to assuming a leadership role in initiating dialogue and populating its group, Jews, especially when affiliated with a Jewish organization have often used Israel as the benchmark for acceptable dialogue partners. In fact, acceptance of the State of Israel and its right to exist are often both pre-conditions for dialogue. As Kuttab

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[31] Having one consistent location may contribute to the stability of an on-going group.

[32] This may point to a flaw in many dialogue projects, that they are conceived of by one group and another partner group is then sought out.

[33] The most notable exception to this over representation of Jews in Jewish-Muslim dialogues was at the University of Southern California a dialogue event was planned as a joint study of text led Rabbi Reuven Firestone, Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College in the spring semester of 2005. The event was co-sponsored by neutral religious organizations: the Office of Religious Life and the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, and was to be held on an evening and include dinner (always a draw for college students). It was advertised in a variety of ways to Jewish and Muslim individual students and student groups. Many Muslim students responded that they were coming and only one Jewish student RSVP-ed in the affirmative. The event was never held.

explained, "one begins by accepting the legitimacy of the Jewish state because it is there. In fact, that is usually one of the stated or unstated conditions before dialogue can even begin."[34] This places Muslim leaders and institutions in a precarious and problematic position, forcing participating Muslims to take a position for the purpose of entering a process that is meant to give them the opportunity to articulate and express their own position. Clearly, such a contradictory set of expectations limits the effectiveness of the dialogue process. Raquel Ukeles points to another litmus test used by the American Jewish community that explains who is unfit for dialogue. "First, organizations and their leadership as well as individuals who actively endorse violence against noncombatants to further religious and/or political ends in general, and who promote international organizations committed to the destruction of Israel in particular; and second, Muslin individuals or organizations who are or have been affiliated/in contact with the above organizations or individuals."[35] These conditions thus make dialogue with Muslims nearly impossible and shifts the possible outcomes of successful dialogue to the criterion to enter dialogue.

Yet the question of who in fact represents the privileged group is anything but objective. Using the Israeli and Palestinian situation as an example of the differences between perceived and actual privilege illuminates the importance of subjective privilege.

> The status of a Palestinian compared with that of an Israeli is clearly one of under privilege. Yet for many Israelis the position of Israel is viewed in the context of a much larger Arab world with frightening (if unrealized) potential. This view is then filtered through the prism of past historical experience during which the Jewish people were by and large left alone to face persecution and extermination. Hence, it is difficult to measure

[34] Kuttab, 86.
[35] Ukeles, Raquel "Locating the Silent Muslim Majority: Policy recommendations for improving Jewish-Muslim relations in the United States" Mosaica- Research Center for Religion, State and Society. Winter 2003-4, 8.

> objectively the strength of subjective perceptions of asymmetry, and such perceptions should be recognized as genuinely existing on both sides.[36]

This notion of a lens of privilege also colors how both the American Jewish and American Muslim communities view themselves in relation to each other and how individuals from those communities view themselves in relation to individuals from the other community.

Although many members of the American Jewish community interviewed for this research do see themselves as privileged within American society, some caution that the situation is changing. "The days when Jews were seen as the premier non-Christian religion are behind us."[37] Many view the situation of Jews in the world as difficult, with much of this view through the historical eyes of persecution. They see the American Muslim community as less privileged but on a global scale they consider Muslims as a potential threat to their Jewish collective interests, most specifically in the case of Israel.

Unlike the split between the local and global, the American Muslim community perceives itself as being under siege in the United States in particular and in Western countries more generally. Issues surrounding discrimination in the name of security and racial profiling have made Muslims feel uneasy in the United States. The Muslim community also views its position through the historical lens of colonialism and creates identification with the repression of Muslims who are subjected to these forces across the globe. Moreover, they see the Jewish community, partially through the lens of anti-Semitism, as overly powerful both in the United States and internationally, in terms of access, wealth, and political influence.

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[36] Kuttab, 93.
[37] Wiener, Julie "As U.S. Muslims outnumber Jews, alliances and disillusionment grow" JTA Global News, May 1, 2001

These two opposing lenses through which each community views itself make clear how the concepts of privileged and underprivileged are defined as much by self-perception as reality. In the case of Jewish-Christian dialogue, which began as a means of addressing Christian Anti-Semitism there was no such ambiguity. "The impetus for Jewish-Christian dialogue was the Christian acknowledgement of the prejudice and injustices of the Church throughout history. This created a clear structure for dialogue and generally has given Jewish participants the moral high ground."[38] There is no clear structure in the case of Jewish-Muslim dialogue and if one group adopts the perception of being underprivileged, dialogue is stifled by a lack of understanding and misconception.

The problem of power and privilege in American Jewish-Muslim dialogue thus proves to delineate and a stumbling block for dialogue. At the level of individual dialogue, the power dynamics depends on the composition of the group, while at the global level, both Muslims and Jews feel under siege and othered. Where a dialogue is held, who leads and funds it and what constitutes the ground rules are all factors that determine who feels privileged in a given Jewish-Muslim dialogue group. How individuals view themselves in light of their historical situations color the lens of privilege through which they view their status. While the dynamics of groups vary, the established Jewish community and its institutions clearly have more resources and more motivation to initiate dialogue. The Muslim community, in the face of what it sees as persecution, makes dialogue a lower priority.

Dialogue Group Programs

At the very core, Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups engage in their projects to reduce tension and stereotypes. Jews seek to reduce anti-Semitism while are intended in

reducing Islamophobia. At the most basic motivation is the desire to encounter the other. This is apparent even with the earliest Christian-Jewish dialogues that focused on "shared concerns [that] are linked to the need to live with others, extending to those who differ from us culturally and religiously."[39] The subjects that are addressed in and through dialogue groups are as varied as the groups themselves and their definitions of dialogue. There are, however, some striking themes that seem to emerge repeatedly in American Jewish-Muslim dialogue projects. There are a variety of topics and most groups avoid contemporary politic issues in the beginning, either by an outright ban that the group sets or by carefully programming around non-political and non-Middle Eastern themes.

Incidents of community violence in which they are either both targeted, or one group is seen as targeting the other, brings calls for dialogue from community leaders. In Montreal, Canada, Congregation Talmud Torah's day school was firebombed motivated in response to the assassination of Yassin of Hamas. The communities called for the Jewish and Muslim congregations to engage in dialogue, which was supported by Canadian-Arab Federation, MSA Concordia, & Beth Israel Beth Aaron Synagogue. The groups were trying to diminish the violence they were experiencing on a local level and build relationships between organizations that might help the communities handle any future incidents better.

Some groups blend these religious motivations and the desires to diminish violence. The Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA) was involved in a dialogue among key Los Angeles area leaders in 2000. Within the organization, there was a push for a forum open to communication and relationship building at the grass-roots level. After September

[39] Eckhardt, A. Roy, "Recent Literature on Christian-Jewish Relations" Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Mar. 1981), 99.

11th, 2001, a group called Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP) was created as a forum for Jews, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists to dialogue around religion and justice. Because of this larger interfaith group, specific Muslim partners began to emerge and members from the PJA and Masjid Ibadullah, a small African-American mosque in South Los Angeles, sought a more focused dialogue.

> At the initial planning meetings, we discussed the fact that most Muslim/Jewish groups founder when issues of the Middle East emerge. We wanted to build a foundation of trust and common interest rather than start with political differences. So we decided that we would explore common elements in our religious traditions. Hence, our name—Common Ground.[40]

They formed Common Ground and their first meeting was in June 2002. The group began with a small invited core of 10 members from each of the Muslim and Jewish communities meeting once a month for religious teaching by a Jew and a Muslim on an agreed upon subject. The second year meetings were held every six weeks and in 2004-5, the frequency has become more sporadic. Initially meetings were held at a Jewish site and then the Omar Ibn Al Khattab Foundation trading off after each session. Since Muslim attendance was low at Jewish sites the Omar Foundation became the meeting site. Common Ground also engaged in social action including jointly building a house for a day with Habitat for Humanity and spent time exploring their personal opinions, finding areas of mutual concern.

This group is one of the few examples of Jewish-Muslim dialogue where the Muslim partner is predominantly African-American. The issue of Israel was important for dialogue participants but seemed to be less central then with other groups. However, the large class differences between Jews and African-Americans became an issue for the

[40]Written pre-interview with Judy Glass, April, 2005.

group, especially around education as their meetings were largely focused around joint learning where the group's educational differences were apparent. This caused frustration on the part of Jewish members of the group, as it meant that the depth they were hoping for could not be realistically achieved in that setting.

There were also issues that the group was not able to deal with. In an interview with a member of the group, after the interview ended she added, "our group had secrets." When this was probed further, she explained that there was a member of the group from the Jewish community who was gay, but for the sake of the dialogue chose to keep this part of his identity hidden. The gay member of the group felt that he should compartmentalize his identity so that the group could continue talking together. As far as I was able to learn, the Jewish members of the dialogue were aware of this and the Muslim side was, and still is, not.

Though the group considers itself successful and the participants found the interactions meaningful, members did not achieve strong and lasting personal relationships with members of the other religious community. "We weren't in and out of each other's houses," Judy mentioned. There seems to be a level of satisfaction for what was achieved mixed with disappointment for what might have been possible.

In the American context, Jews and Muslims share a status as religious minorities in a historically Christian and largely Protestant society. Jewish-Muslim dialogue can focus on the two groups in a shared cultural context where both are outsiders more closely related to each other religiously and culturally than they are to the dominate culture and religion, Christianity. There develops a shared recognition of similar forms of religiosity out of which a whole host of topics and themes are explored.

Groups use myths and stories to help ease the building of relationships. The story of Abraham is a foundational narrative for many groups, especially groups that are run out of religious institutions or by religious leaders. In fact, as many Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups are created after larger interfaith projects, these groups tend to employ the figure of Abraham as the father of monotheistic religion. This story has served as a unifying force and also as a way to push dialogue to an historical and religious discussion away from politics and contemporary issues of global concern, mostly notably the issue of Israel and Palestine. The story of Abraham may be a useful entry point for dialogue but its usefulness may be short-lived because, as Judea Pearl noted, the story puts, in the mind of Jews, the Jews in a favored position and the Muslims in a secondary role. Also, biblical narratives raise the issue that Jews have traditionally viewed the land of Israel as promised by God to the Jews and this raises precisely the issue that many want to avoid in the early stages of interaction.

Many Jews and Muslims have recognized that their religions are closer than any other two groups. However, this is most true when comparing religious Muslims and observant Jews, or liberal Jews and progressive Muslims who have more in common with each other than with their co-religionists of a different level of observance. One such example of religious Jews and Muslims working together is the Muslim Jewish Forum in Manchester, UK They have recognized that an even more focused dialogue is appropriate and useful; they are religious Jews and Muslims working together because of their common religious lifestyle. Their programs include regular meetings to discuss religious similarity and community issues that affect each group.

Thus, groups often engage in programs around their religious texts and legal traditions. The Qu'ran and Torah share many of the same stories, though often with substantive differences which dialogue groups explore through joint textual teachings and discussion about the religious histories. Additionally, as both legally based traditions, *halacha* and *shari'a*, are locations of discussion. Several groups have had teaching and discussions about the legal and traditional role that *zakat* and *tzedakah* play in their religions and often begin with an understanding of the similarity of the two words.

Both Judaism's and Islam's sacred texts and traditional prayers are in languages other than what most American Jews and Muslims use on a daily basis; for Judaism Hebrew is the religious language and for Muslims, Arabic. Jews have created institutions to support the teaching of Hebrew to young people and as Muslims from Arabic-speaking countries grow into the third and fourth generations there have been projects by Islamic institutions that are looking at Jewish Hebrew programs as models.

Many times, with gatherings of any mixed group, food is an issue. In Jewish-Muslim dialogue this is a central focus as part of understanding religious and cultural practice. The laws and traditions governing *kashrut* and the laws of *halal* are explored. This area causes unique interaction. For example, dinning halls at both Dartmouth and Oberlin College have been set aside for kosher and *halal* food, bringing Jews and Muslims together as a result of religious custom.[41] Jews and Muslims, have even banded together to oppose laws, restrictions and practices they seen as potentially undermining their communities. In the United Kingdom, Jews and Muslims fought laws that would require animals be stunned before they were killed for their meat. The Muslim Council of Britain

[41] Weiner, Julie "As US Muslims outnumber Jews, Alliances and Disillusionment grow" JTA Global News May 1, 2001.

and the Board of Deputies of British Jews worked together fighting this movement in September 2004.

Peace-focused movements seem to appropriate interfaith dialogue as an organizing principle, not because it was a central issue but rather because it was the most important issue of the day. Jewish Muslim Peace walk started as a result of the work of Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb of Congregation Nahalat Shalom and by Abdul Rauf Campos-Marquetti of The Islamic Center of New Mexico. Although, they have held many Peace Walks throughout the country, they have been criticized because the marchers are often Christians and Buddhists, not Muslims and Jews. By looking at pictures of this group, one would be hard-pressed to pick out anything uniquely Jewish or Muslim about it. These particular groups seem to be more interested in using the tensions between those two communities with the aim of getting its larger message of peace across. "We will make this religious and symbolic journey together to show that peace between people of all faiths is possible. It is a religious event and we will not carry political signs. We hope to change misconceptions about each other."

Other groups may exist, though examples have yet to be found, where Jews and Muslims find themselves work together on an issue that affects both communities equally; falling into the first steps toward dialogue and interaction because of economics, their neighborhoods or other shared self-interest. It deserves study to see if groups who don't consciously get together to dialogue create any significant differences in themes, what the role of Israel and Palestine is and any distinct outcomes.

From a Jewish perspective, Rabbi Daniel Brenner of the Auburn Theological Seminary's Center for Multifaith Education, when asked why dialogue with Muslims

stated that to be a Jew means to be in dialogue with the surrounding culture and thus dialogue is an expression of the long-standing Jewish tradition. Another view is that reducing tension among Jews and Muslims in the United States may also have the affect of reducing tensions and violence in the Middle East. Other leaders point to the inevitability of problems arising domestically between the communities and see dialogue as a way to lay the foundation of working together so that when something happens one will know who to call. Yet another view is that it behooves Jews to create friendly ties with Muslims now while they are a minority and Jews hold more political powers, so that when their numbers and their political importance increase, they will remember your friendship and treat you kindly.

Specific motivations for Muslims are equally varied. Some see Jews as a successful minority that has significant political power in the United States and thus good can come from both building relationships and learning from their past. Others hope to influence the situation in the Middle East towards a more humane policy regarding Palestinians. And yet, there is also the view that historically Muslims and Jews have had better relations then Jews living under Christians so this type of involvement is a continuation of that (a view shared by many Jews as well).

The issues of reducing tension, building strong community ties and exploring religious difference and similarities seem to be the foundational stage in many cases for groups to discuss more heated and emotional topics which often include terrorism, violence, and the issue of Israel, Palestine, Jerusalem and Zionism. The motivations for dialogue are varied, though dialogue groups seem to mix altruism and self-interest. Groups seem to engage in the previously mentioned topics to build trust, humanize the

other and create a sense of community. But that previous work can be broken down and dialogue can be abandoned when these contemporary political issues come to a head.Understanding the Role of Religion, Politics and the Middle East Conflict

One of the issues broached in Abrahamic dialogues is the story of Abraham and his promise to his son, Ishmael or Isaac depending on the group, and the ownership of the land of Israel. It is out of this text that may further the desire for focused dialogue strictly between the Muslims and Jews. The state of Israel and the rights of Palestinians are constant issues, whether outwardly dealt with or not, in Jewish-Muslim dialogue. As interview participants stated over and over again, simply put, without the state of Israel, there is no reason for Jews and Muslims to dialogue.

This is only one view. Another seems to be a self-conscious rejection the focus of Jewish-Muslim dialogue on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The issue of Israel/Palestine is seen by the Muslim community who holds this view as an Arab concern and the Muslim community is constructed as a group disinterested in such regional matters. The Jewish community constructed as non-Zionist at one extreme or on the other the role of Israel in Jewish identity is downplayed considerably. Groups including the Conference of Central Asian States and Jewish organizations have engaged in this type of non-Israel/Palestine-focused program. CCASJ met in Almaty, Kazakhstan to create Jewish-Muslim dialogue in 2003 because of the shared history of suffering they experienced under communism.

> Time and time again, Jewish and Muslim/Arab leaders here have vowed to concentrate on such local issues as ethnic discrimination and interreligious ties, and to ignore the intractable and divisive conflicts of the Middle East... 'The conflict in the Middle East is at the center of our dialogue; without it there would be no friction and need to dialogue with the Jewish community,' says Bustany. 'But the conflict is not a religious one, it's a

> matter of real estate,' he adds. 'What do Muslims from Indonesia and the Philippines care about Palestine?' Al-Marayati rebuts Bustany's point by arguing that the status and future of Jerusalem 'is a central concern of all Muslims everywhere.'[42]

The example of the Judea Pearl-Akbar Ahmed dialogue illuminates the problematic idea of Israel and Palestine in Jewish-Muslim dialogue. The story of Daniel Pearl's kidnapping and murder in Pakistan by terrorists shocked the nation. The former Pakistani Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Akbar Ahmed was driving in his car when the news first came across of Daniel's death. Ahmed describes his overwhelming sense of dismay and sadness which prompted him to reach out and make a public statement about this tragedy. Judea Pearl, Daniel's father, is a computer science professor at the University of California, Los Angeles and an emigrant from Israel, born in Tel Aviv. Ahmed and Pearl through the American Jewish Committee and 21st Century Networking held a public dialogue on October 23, 2003 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The audience was an overwhelming 400 people strong with members from a host of communities, including many South Asian Muslim leaders. Before the dialogue, Ahmed asked his friend who was a Pakistani official to offer an apology to the Pearl family for the death of their son. The official responded that he would apologize and then he would ask for an apology for the situation of Palestinians. Ahmed was able to persuade his colleague to offer the apology and it was delivered with great impact and emotion.

> I had invited my friend Umar Ghuman, a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan. Umar spoke with eloquent passion. He asked "forgiveness" from the Pearl family. This to my mind was the first time that a public figure had asked for forgiveness in such a public manner. Umar also pointed out a link between our backgrounds that had not been highlighted: Only three nations were founded in the pursuit of religious freedom — the US, Israel

[42] Tugend, Tom. Stopped Talks: Intifada II has put a halt to local efforts of Arab-Jewish dialogue The Jewish Journal, 6/29/01.

> and Pakistan. These were bold and courageous statements considering the confrontational political climate dividing the Abrahamic faiths in many parts of the world. [43]

Additional dialogues were held around the country and I observed a dialogue at the University of California, Irvine in May, 2005, their eighth meeting together. The dialogue was conducted in a loose format: an introduction by a moderator, a short statement by both Ahmed and Pearl and then they spent time asking each other questions that have come up for them since the last time they spoke. The tone was cordial and tempers the questions. They speak as individuals, not representing any groups and they stress that they are two grandfathers talking together and that the core of their dialogue is empathy. Theology, the story of the Qu'ran being flushed down a toilet at Guatanamo Bay and the need for Jews and Muslims to speak out against the horrors done to the other were central to the discussion on stage.

The issue of Israel, however, plagues this dialogue project. The audience's reception of this first dialogue in Pittsburgh and a more recent gathering at University of California, Irvine made Israel and Palestine a central issue. Questions about who is the real victim, which group feels under siege, comparing suffering and asking for condemnations of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians were all asked after once the question and answer period was opened to the audience. According to Ahmed,

> There had been debate in the Muslim community both in Pittsburgh and elsewhere about the event. Many felt that the victimization and killing of Muslims around the world provided no reason to talk to the "Jews". Others pointed out that the Pearl family was associated with Israel and therefore no dialogue or reconciliation could take place unless the problem of the Palestinians was resolved. [44]

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[43] Ahmed, Akbar S., "A Small Step Toward Interfaith Dialogue" Arab News, Opinion Editorials, October 2003, www.aljazeerah.info

[44] *Ibid.*

The frustration on Ahmed's face was visible since he prefers to distance himself as a South Asian Muslim. He downplays the Palestinian issue as a regional Arab problem, not central issue to Muslims around the world. He'd prefer to talk about the need for a Muslim renaissance and condemn acts such as the one that took Daniel Pearl's life as un-Islamic. This stance, while genuine, also seems very practical. It effectively would remove from discussion the main political obstacle between Jews and Muslims, Israel, and allow for a less heated exchange. Judea, on the other hand, constructs Jewish identity to be inseparable from the state of Israel. In his words, it is the central idea that unites all Jews together.

Their dialogue seems to be a powerful first step for many people. It is remarkable to see a father who has lost his son engage with a former government official from the country where the murder took place. The image of Daniel Pearl is being used to transform the relationship of Jews and Muslims, avenging "Danny's murder by attacking the hatred that took his son's life and by challenging the ideology that permitted the hatred to bloom."[45] The issue of Israel and Palestine plays an important and frustrating role, but is central point of contention within the dialogue of Pearl and Ahmed and for their audience as well.

There are also groups, seemingly a sizable portion of those in existence, that establish specific ground rules for their meetings-- the most notable is usually something like, "all religion all the time, which translated to no politics anytime" in the case of the Wilshire Blvd. Temple dialogue.[46] Politics, here, should be read as the dealing with the issue of Israel/Palestine. At Washington University in St. Louis a Muslim Jewish dialogue group

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[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Interview with Rabbi Stephen Julius Stein July 2005.

was formed in 2003. College students would get together, avoiding politics as a rule and have presentations by faculty, discuss issues facing them as Americans and share each other's holiday celebrations. In Baltimore, there is a group of Jews and Muslims that meet regularly through the Baltimore Jewish Community Relations Council[47] and Baltimore Muslim Council. Erica Hobby, a dynamic young social worker by trade, is charged by the BJCRC with outreach to other communities in the area. She has developed a friendship with the head of the Baltimore Muslim Council, Shahab Qarni; they are so friendly that they have each other's numbers programmed in their cell phones. They seem to avoid the areas of conflict, especially around Israel and Palestine, and stick to more local issues of concern including local politics. When, in a joint interview, they were asked their positions on the "difficult issues," as they called them, neither was willing to give their opinion.[48]

These groups hold the political in an untouchable category where dialogue is constructed to give participants something to talk about where positive movement can take place. The Middle East issues are seen as intractable, so this type of group moves to areas where impact and meaning can be found. Critics of this type of groups point to the surface nature of these groups and their dialogues. "They ignore the real conflict and instead emphasize some superficial manifestation of it. They conclude with activities in which Jewish and Palestinian children sign each other's songs together; all smile and everyone is happy." [49] While, this criticism may be true on some level, many of these

[47] Outreach by JCRCs seems to be happening across the country and it would be worth studying only these groups as a unique subset of Jewish-Muslim dialogue.
[48] Interview with Erica Hobby and Shahab Qarni. June 2005
[49] Kuttab, 86.

groups use ground rules about politics during an initial phase for trust building. They address political issues once trust has been achieved.

However, both the avoidance of politics as an issue, the desire to construct the Muslim community as non-Arab, and diminishing the issue of Israel/Palestine to a regional problem points to the thematic importance of the Middle East conflict in Jewish-Muslim dialogue. These strategies to shift the focus away from the topic seem to be mechanisms to cope with tension and build good will between the communities. The great irony is that in order to keep the dialogue moving forward, groups will set ground rules to keep the members from discussing precisely the issue that drives Jews and Muslims to the need to dialogue, that is, the issue of Israel and Palestine.

Arab-Jewish or Jewish-Muslim?

An argument can be made to include Arab-Jewish dialogue as a subset of Jewish-Muslim dialogue for several reasons. Thematically, Arab-Jewish groups (or Palestinian-Jewish as they are also called) deal with the central issue that seems to animate the need for Jewish-Muslim dialogue: Israel and Palestine. Arab, in the Western mindset, is synonymous with Muslim; there is little recognition of the Christian minority, though they are often over-represented in Arab-Jewish dialogue groups. Because the focus of the conflict is often around terrorism this too leads to the focus on Muslims. In many instances, the words Arab and Muslim are used interchangeably.

On the part of the Arab groups, there is little difference between American Jews and Israeli Jews. After talking with Libby and Len Traubman, who deal with Jewish-Palestinian dialogue, they are observing that Arab-Jewish dialogue is turning increasingly religious when it was not that way in the past. The language used in each forum also

shows the blurring of the terms-- Jewish and Israeli in are used interchangeably. In one exchange at Building Bridges for Peace in the summer of 2004, the issue of terrorism and its victims was being discussed among the participants. The Israeli girls, themselves used Israeli and Jewish interchangeably and the Palestinians talk about freedom fighters who become *shaheed.*[50] The conversation was peppered with religious language and a blur of identities.

Arab-Jewish dialogue uses the shared experience of troubles in and ties to the Middle East as an entry point into dialogue. It deals primarily with nationalist identities and aspirations of two distinct peoples with two distinct and conflicting territorial claims but members can be of three or more religious traditions (largely Christian on the Palestinian side) or not religiously affiliated at all. In fact, some have observed that a good number of people engaged in this type of dialogue are not religious, observant or affiliated, but that this type of work serves as a way for them to express their religious identities.

Jewish-Muslim dialogue seems motivated at the basic level with reducing tension and violence, most noticeably locally within one specific community but with the probable intention of a ripple effect globally. Arab-Jewish dialogue is usually peace and co-existence focused with the Middle East at the center. These dialogue also deal with religious topics particularly when they deal with the issue of suicide bombing and settlements and religious claims to land. Jewish-Muslim dialogue resembles the conflict oriented dialogue when it begins to deal with the issue of the Middle East, which seems to be the central or underlying issue drawing Jews and Muslims together.

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[50] Meaning holy young men, martyrs to them and suicide bombers to others.

What Affects Dialogue Groups' Sustainability

Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups are difficult endeavors to engage in and even more difficult to sustain over a long period of time. While some groups are intended to be single events, other groups desiring ongoing interaction falter after a short time or are unable to last when the political context in the Middle East becomes difficult. Groups looking for a longer-term activity are adversely effect by a host of issues including the leadership of the groups, how they will be executed, the assumptions of similarity and the depth of dialogue.

Many dialogue activities are intended to be short-lived and not part of an ongoing process like, for instance a shared dinner around a holiday like those mosques do for *Lalit al-Qatar* or a *Seder* for Passover held at a synagogue. Participants come to the event and sit with the other while sharing a meaningful religious event. The dialogue that takes place is informal between two people sitting next to each other and can create a sense of shared experience that is a valuable first step in the dialogue process but asks little of its participants in terms of either emotional or intellectual engagement. These events can be a springboard into more in-depth and sustained programs, however, follow-up planning is difficult when the focus is a single major event and seems to rarely occur.

Ongoing projects face their own problems. On the most mundane level, these groups lack the essential resources any group needs to continue to offer meaningful and substantive programming. All dialogue groups reviewed for this study were administered by non-profit organizations and many were administered by volunteers within those groups. Thus the myriad of issues that affect non-profits also contribute to the ending of dialogue groups. Specifically, issues around space to meet, staff to organize the meetings

and creating audiences outside the non-profit group and with another institutional partner. Also institutions may change their priorities around dialogue making these issues even more difficult to contend with.

There can also be goodwill among the leadership of a group but popular interest decreases and there is no real audience for dialogue. As mentioned previously, after the initial spur for dialogue, there can be a period where its popularity diminishes. Post-September 11th, groups have lost momentum after the initial interest in dialogue with Muslims ebbed. Also, many calls for dialogue come out of traumatic and violence events, and once the immediacy of the problem is over, interest in on-going projects dies out, though dialogue groups that do continue will site as their reason the need to be building relationships in quiet times so that when issues arise there is already an existing sense of the other groups, their leaders and how to work together.

Leadership can be lopsided and groups complain that they would like to start a dialogue but that there is no clear partner interested in joining the process. Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups tend to exist where only one group is pushing the group forward, providing in with resources and support, or one group is doing much more of the work. The Jewish community is disinterested in engaging in a dialogue with other like-minded Jews, but does a poor job of co-creating dialogue projects with Muslims and uses the previously mentioned litmus test around Israel to limit the field of potential partners. The Muslim community also has made dialogue with Jews less of a priority, addressing more immediate issues including human rights and discrimination in the United States. Without equal commitment from both groups, one group will be over-represented, making genuine dialogue nearly impossible.

Dialogue, itself, can be a long process filled with group intensity and a substantial investment in one's self and time. Members may be unwilling or unable to engage in that type of project and the group can loose momentum or shift to become a group oriented to the needed of their participants more. Groups may need to evolve into something other than the group that was originally formed in order to keep interest up.

Groups can assume that the intention to enter a dialogue means that the motivations, goals and ideas of the two groups are very similar. However, little is done in the beginning to shed light on these issues of difference. On a basic level, dialogue needs to happen in an environment of intimacy between the participants. Issues are kept to the external and no personal connections resulting in a lack of real trust and depth of dialogue. As the dialogue progresses, and differences come to light and participants can feel betrayed. The political context becomes more heated, whether local or international in scope. Particularly problematic is when the situation in Israel and Palestine becomes violent, whether through suicide bombings or military action, this, especially in groups that avoid political discussions created tensions that the group cannot address by design. Groups pressure each other to make proclamations, denouncements and publicly demonstrate an opinion. There are many people who have been participating in dialogue for a number of years. Some have positive experiences that are overshadowed by a real disdain for dialogue. Difficult issues thus break up group and they lack the skills needed to move through the tough issues.

Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups' success or failure can be narrowed to one specific overarching issue: imbalance. Imbalance in interest, demographics, leadership, attendance, power, goals, motivations all create their own tensions within dialogue

relationships that may lead to a groups' eventual ending, often with a sour taste for dialogue between Jews and Muslims as the result. "One of the first and most serious pitfalls encountered by those interested in dialogue is the assumption of a false symmetry...Yet the reality of the situation mandates major differences in terms of the freedom of expression granted to members of each group, their immunity from retaliation, options other than dialogue available to members of these two groups to pursue their goals, and the resources and general interests that each group has in its furtherance of dialogue."[51]

Conclusion

Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups are a modern phenomenon resulting out of the need to increase communication surrounding religious, political, and cultural issues with the hope of affecting the situation in the Middle East. The imbalance in both the Jewish and Muslim communities' positions, structures and desires for dialogue, make the projects difficult to undertake and even harder to sustain. The difficulty is exacerbated by the centrality of Israel and Palestine and the litmus test the Jewish community uses to find appropriate partners in the Muslim community. Despite all their difficulties, the importance of Jewish-Muslim dialogue groups cannot be underestimated. Some groups have built successful partnerships and created significant relationships between institutions and individuals enabled to handle problematic situations that may arise and also work on projects of mutual interest. The long-term fruits of these dialogue groups is yet to be seen and the actual effects on reducing violence and building peace in the world remain a hopeful, if unfulfilled vision.

[51] Kuttab. page 85