

Weekly Teaching

March 2, 2018



Members of our group with Israeli Arab Jessica Yasmin Barhum.



Rev. Lemler and I lead our group in a Prayer for Peace.

We recently returned from our Interfaith mission trip to Israel. Co-led by myself and Rev. Lemler, this was our 4th Interfaith trip together. Each and every time I return home more inspired. A highlight of this year's trip was our meeting with Jessica Yasmin Barhum (pictured above). Jessica is a Muslim convert, married to an Israeli Arab, and together they are blessed with four children. Their family business is designing and building private gardens, but, Jessica also seeks to build bridges between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Jessica, who was born and raised in England, routinely welcomes visiting groups to her home where she provides them with tea, English biscuits and a stimulating discussion of how she is in a unique position by which to share how Israelis of different faiths effectively confront challenges, and embrace unique opportunities only available in Israel amongst all the other Middle Eastern Countries.

Often Jessica will bring visitors to her local mosque in Ein Rafa, and also facilitate a discussion with her Imam. A brief introduction to Islam is provided and questions and answers generate wonderful discussions. Jessica serves as the Arabic/English translator, and along with the Imam, she comments on the history of the local Israeli Arab community in Ein Rafa, and how Arab Israeli citizens find their own way within the Jewish State of Israel.

Ein Rafa is located six miles outside of Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish State. Jessica's sons attend a Muslim School in Jerusalem, and her daughters a Catholic School. All of her children attend a Jewish Summer Camp. While not sugar-coating the challenges that exist for Arab Muslims who are Israeli citizens, she asserts that in Israel all Arab citizens are enabled to better their lives more than anywhere else in the Middle East. Her hope is that the children of today will grow up with greater exposure to co-existence initiatives and that they will organically help foster an environment of mutual respect and love. It's in this spirit that she helps to lead a co-existence project whereby the local children and teachers from different faiths and ethnicities routinely gather to share in joint activities in which they share food and games, learning in this way to become more trusting of one another.

Jessica reminds her listeners that Judaism, Christianity and Islam preach the idea of God's "Tabernacle of Peace." While the media likes to portray the negative news in Israel, the reality is that for decades there have been inter-religious good works that have fostered friendship and cooperation on educational and social projects and programs that have benefited Jews and Arabs. Mutual respect is present even amongst those who might hold dramatically differing views. This trip Jessica noted that she lives in a "world of harmony" even if there are those who might wish to stay stuck in their tone-deaf world.

Listening to Jessica, and observing her personal warmth, I thought of our prayer that we recite each Shabbat evening. It's a particular line at the end of the *Hashkiveinu* prayer that especially resonated: *HaPoresh Sukkat Shalom*—We ask God to spread the Sukkah of peace upon us, and upon all of Israel, and upon Jerusalem.

The Sukkah is familiar to us from our Festival of Booths holiday of Sukkot. We build temporary Booths by which to remember the Booths that our Spiritual Ancestors lived in during their four decades of wanderings within the wilderness after their Exodus from Egypt. Jewish tradition also teaches us that our Sukkah's walls and roof are made purposefully in a flimsy manner. This is because the Sukkah is a reminder of God's Divine Sukkah of Peace; a Peace that isn't held in place by physical means, but becomes manifest only if we constantly envelope the spirit of peace within every aspect of our lives. The walls we live within, the roof over our head might make for a house to dwell, but a Home only exists when love and kindness are pervasively present.

Jessica was reminding us—Jew, Christian and Muslim—that it's only through mutual trust that we can succeed in God's Divine purpose for the Human family. Our Interfaith Mission visited many historical holy sites. But, it was in Jessica's backyard that we perhaps experienced the most holy experience of all.

“Spread Your tabernacle of peace, O Lord, over us and our people, we pray...Bless all who are in our prayers, and all who should be in our thoughts...To the sick and the suffering, send your hope; to the forgotten and the lonely, send Your love...To the confused and the distressed, send Your light; to the weary and the wronged, send renewed strength...To the pursuers of justice, send wisdom and faith; to the pursuers of peace, send unwavering resolve. To Jerusalem and its people, send tranquility and joy; to the World today, and every day, send the blessings of Peace.”

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

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