

ABRAHAM'S TABLE FORUM SERIES

The History of Jewish-Muslim Relations



Jonathan Gribetz

The university is a sacred space for today's Jewish-Muslim relations.

Imam Shamsi Ali

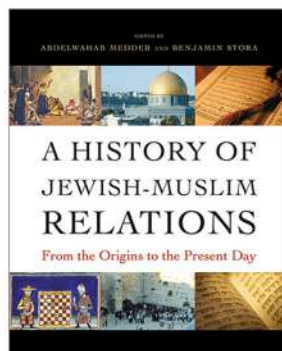
It is in our hands to change the direction of our history.

Rabbi Mark Cohen

A knowledge of history can play an important role in establishing lines of communication between people.

Imam Ibrahim Sayar

Historically, with few exception, it is in my view that Jews and Muslims live together peacefully.



The History of Jewish Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day

Abraham's table is a forum series organized by the center for interfaith affairs of Peace Islands Institute. It aims to establish a common ground among Abrahamic traditions. This month's topic was the history of Jewish-Muslim relations.

Although current events would lead us to believe that the Jewish and Muslim communities have fractious relationships, our panelists illustrated the full breath of the long standing closeness between Jews and Muslims. Leadership in the Jewish and Muslim communities can help these two groups to work together, become closer and promote peace.

BIOGRAPHIES

Imam Shamsi Ali is a renowned Muslim Scholar and a well known Imam in New York City, USA. He was an Imam of the city's largest mosque located in 96th street and 3rd AV Manhattan. He is Chairman of the Al-Hikmah Mosque in Astoria and the Director of Jamaica Muslim Center in Queens. Imam Ali serves as an Advisory Board member to numerous interfaith organizations, including the Tanenbaum Center and Federation for Middle East Peace. He is also Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Asean Muslim Federation of North America. Imam Ali also is a Board member for the Partnership of Faith in NY, and co-founder of the UNCC (Universal Clergy Coalition International). Furthermore, he is also Assistant Director and a Board member of the Muslim Foundation of America, Inc., and Chairman of the annual Muslim Day Parade in NYC. He also serves as the Vice President of the Asian-American Coalition USA (AAC-USA) and its UN Representative.

Jonathan Gribetz is an intellectual cultural historian with a particular interest in the study of Jews in the modern Middle East. His first book, forthcoming from Princeton University Press, focuses on the encounter between Jews and Arabs (both Christians and Muslims) in fin de siècle Palestine and in the broader region. Dr. Gribetz is the author of several articles, including "The Arabic-Zionist Talmud: Shimon Moyal's At-Talmud," Jewish Social Studies (2010) and "Their Blood is Eastern: Shahin Makaryus and Fin de Siècle Arab Pride in the Jewish 'Race,'" Middle Eastern Studies (2013). He is now working on a comparative study of Jewish and Arab nationalisms. Dr. Gribetz teaches courses on the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic history of Jerusalem; Jews in the Islamic world; the Arab-Israeli conflict; Jewish nationalism; and the modern Jewish experience. He received a Ph.D. in History from Columbia University, a Master's with distinction in Modern Jewish Studies from Oxford University, and an AB summa cum laude from Harvard University.

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Imam Shamsi Ali

Muslims and Jews are two people who share the same fate and a very close faith. There are no two religions closer than Judaism and Islam. However, there is a conflict between the two and I believe the reasons for this situation are: misread history, politics, media, misinterpretation of religious texts, and the Palestine-Israel conflict. Although we share a long and peaceful history together, we tend to focus on the darkest points of this history instead of the bright majority of the parts. Politics and politicians politicize Muslim-Jewish relations to their own advantage and try to play on human emotions; examples of this include the denial of the holocaust by some Muslim countries and the Park 51 incident in NYC. Another reason for this conflict is the media. The media focuses on the hate between the communities and the incidents of violence between the communities because things like these make better news and are more likely to be read and reacted to; we don't like to write about happy things. People also misinterpret religious texts; Muslims fear that Jews want to take over the world because they are chosen while the Jews think that the Muslims want to kill them. The Palestine-Israel conflict haven't helped in this struggle between the two religions; people tend to view the conflict as one between religions, but the conflict is one of politics and for political gain.



Professor Jonathan Gribetz

Arabs in the Middle East perceive the Zionist as typical Jewish people religiously, while others perceive them as Jews racially and this causes some confusion. I believe the University is the best environment in which to discuss these issues that we have. In a classroom environment, Students are open to questioning the conflict and their own original perspectives about the conflict because they feel that the information that they are receiving is coming from a sincere person with good will. The university is a sacred place, the first and often the last for them to get to know one other and people that are different than them and this doesn't mean covering up the conflicts. If we acknowledge the histories of the tension but in an honest way and develop relationships on friendship and honesty; these are the relations that last.



BIOGRAPHIES

Ibrahim Sayar is the Director of the Center for Interfaith Affairs at the Peace Islands Institute. He has his theological ordination from Harran University in Turkey and studied master's degree in Psychology at Concordia University in Chicago. He has been involved in interfaith and intercultural dialogue activities for the last 10 years in Chicago, Boston and New York. He is happily married with two children named Abdurrahim and Omer Rasim.

Rabbi Mark Cohen is an Emeritus Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Educated at Brandeis University (B.A.), Columbia University (M.A.), and the Jewish Theological Seminary (M.H.L., Rabbi, Ph.D.), he is a well-known historian of the Jews in Arab lands in the Middle Ages. More than 80 articles and reviews by him have been published, and several books including *Jewish Self-Government in Medieval Egypt* (1980), which won the National Jewish Book Award for Jewish history in 1981; *Jewish Life in Medieval Egypt 641-1382*, translated into Arabic, a survey written for leaders in the Arab world, 1987; *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, 1988; and, most recently, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, 1994, which has been translated into Hebrew and Turkish and is about to be translated into German.

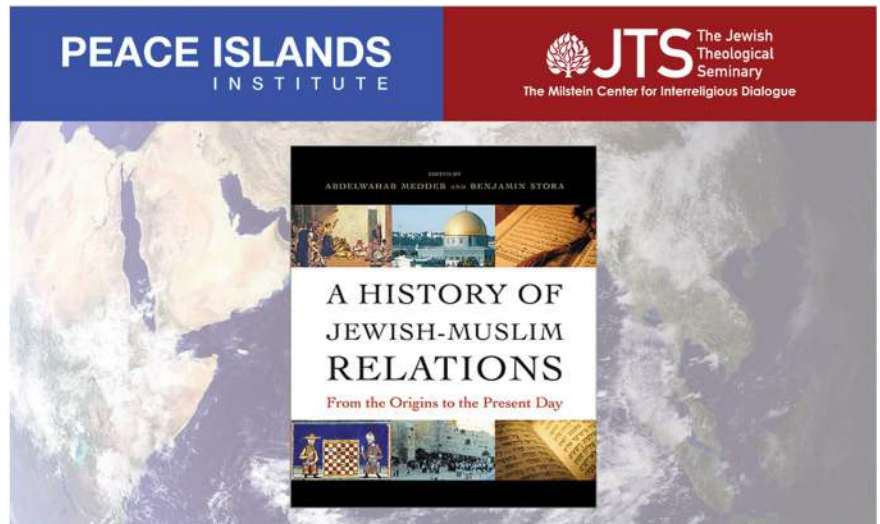
Peace Islands Institute (PII) aspires to facilitate a forum of mutual respect and collaboration, both welcoming and accepting varied viewpoints and voices with the intent to develop original and alternative perspectives on vital issues that our society is facing, generate solutions to these issues, support successful practices, thus promoting education, friendship and harmony and acting as an island of peace for all peoples in a society of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

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Imam Ibrahim Sayar

There are four aspects to this conflict: the historic aspect, the religious aspect, the political aspect, and the social aspect. In the Quran, Muslims are first introduced to Jews with the term Ehl-i Kitab. This term is used to describe Jews and Christians and is often translated as the people of the book. However, I think that this translation is inaccurate. The word "Ehl" is used to refer to closeness and means family; such as Ehl-i Beyt which refers to the family of the Prophet Muhammad (pub).

Considering this Jews, Muslims, and Christians are one big family. However, politicians emphasize the differences between the religions to receive support for what they have already decided they want to do. Either politics shape religion or religion shapes politics. Like the ant that was carrying a drop of water in order to do its part in trying to put out the fire that was built to burn Abraham, even though it knew the one drop of water wouldn't be enough; we have to do our best to help solve this situation and hope that God will see our efforts and turn this fire into a beautiful garden like he did with Abraham's fire.



Rabbi Emeritus Professor Mark Cohen

Some people don't like this book about the history of Muslim-Jewish relations because it doesn't tell the story that they want it to tell. They want to tell a story of hate and violence, but huge part of our history is one of peace and mutual understanding. Anti-Semitism is normally the belief in the diabolical Jew and in the modern sense it would be the belief in a conspiracy that Jews are trying to take over the world. Muslim Anti-Semitism did not originate in the Muslim world. Colonialism brought Western style Anti-Semitism to the Middle East and the Muslim world.



This then collided with Arab Nationalism. Then it was Islamicized by some Muslims who wanted to claim it as their own. This Muslim Anti-Semitism frightens people; however, people who try to deteriorate Muslim-Jewish relations have a hard time trying to prove their point so they use the same texts over and over again. This fear and conflict is caused and spreads because of a lack of knowledge of our history together. Hopefully this book will eliminate this lack of knowledge.