

# ABRAHAM'S TABLE FORUM SERIES

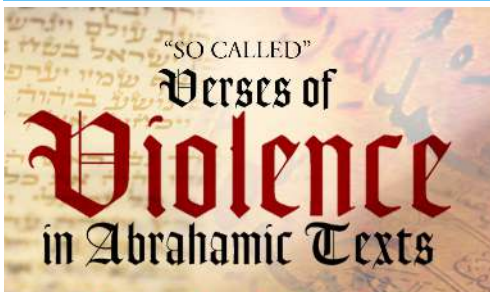
So Called Verses of Violence  
in Abrahamic Traditions



Rabbi  
Marc Schneier

Rev.  
N.L'Heureaux, Jr.

Imam  
Shamsi Ali



## So Called Verses of Violence In Abrahamic Traditions

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 forum of Abraham's Table will explore "so called" verses of violence in Torah, Bible and Qur'an. A general perspective on how to understand these verses will be studied with a sample interpretation of such verses.



## BIOGRAPHIES

**Rabbi Marc Schneier** is the 18<sup>th</sup> generation of a rabbinic dynasty. Founder and President of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding; Vice President of the World Jewish Congress; Founding Rabbi of The Hampton Synagogue in Westhampton Beach, New York; He has been named one of America's Top 50 Rabbis by *Newsweek Magazine* and one of the 50 most prominent Jews in the United States by the *Forward*. Rabbi Schneier has been inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College and has been appointed to the Steering Committee of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's World Conference on Dialogue and to the Executive Steering Committee of the Multi-Religious Campaign Against Anti-Muslim Bigotry in the United States. He was honored by the United States Congress and the State of Israel as an advocate for human and civil rights and religious and ethnic tolerance.

**Reverend N. J. L'Heureux, Jr.**, is the Executive Director of the Queens Federation of Churches, the ecumenical agency in the Borough of Queens, City of New York, which relates to over 700 Christian congregations in that Borough. Ordained by The United Methodist Church in 1969, Pastor L'Heureux served churches in Northport, Long Island, and in Maspeth, Queens, before being called by the Queens Federation of Churches in 1978 to become its third executive director. He is an active religious leader in New York City. He is a past chairman of the Committee of Religious Leaders in the City of New York and continues to chair the New York State Interfaith Commission on Landmarking of Religious Property. He is chairman of Tri-State Media Ministries, past chairman of the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing; He has participated in many international conferences for religious freedom in several European countries and an ecumenical delegation inquiring into accusations of the persecution of Christians in Arab Republic of Egypt which was officially received by President Hosni Mubarak in 1997. He was invited by the World Council of Churches in November 2011 as one of 25 experts to participate in an Interfaith Study Consultation on Religious Freedom and the Rights of Religious Minorities, held in Istanbul, Turkey.

**Imam Shamsi Ali** is the current Imam & Director of Jamaica Muslim Center, the largest Muslim Center in the Queens area. He is also Chairman of Masjid Al-Hikmah in Astoria, Queens. Up until recently Imam Ali was the Imam of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York. He serves as an Advisory Board member to numerous interfaith organizations, including the Tanenbaum Center and Federation for Middle East Peace. He is also the Assistant Director and a Board member of the Muslim Foundation of America, Inc. Imam Ali participated in the International Conference of Imams and Rabbis for Peace in Seville Spain in 2006 and the first National Summit of Imams and Rabbis of North America in 2007. He represented the Muslim community at an interfaith discussion on Religions and Sustainable Development at the White House in 2007, and participated in the 2008 Transatlantic Interfaith Dialogue in Frankfurt, Germany. Recently Imam Ali was one chosen to be a part of US Interfaith Peace Mission trip to the Middle East, where he met with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, including President Shimon Perez. Furthermore, in 2009, 2010, and 2011 Imam Ali was chosen as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in Jordan and Georgetown University.

### Rabbi Schneier

Our first keynote speaker of the evening was Rabbi Marc Schneier. The main question asked by him was "How do we deal with those who differ from our beliefs?" Citing chapters from The Torah, Rabbi Schneier read a few verses that if read literally, seemed very violent. However, he urges the importance of not reading the text in a selective manner, and instead, compares them to other texts that have to do with the subject matter. Reading from a passage that seemed to imply the justification to eradicate descendants of an ancient tribe, he cites the Talmud that it means not to physically destroy, but eradicate certain negative behaviors by this tribe. He concludes with stressing that we cannot, and must not, read the sacred text in a literal fashion, and instead, turn to the oral interpretation of the Talmud to "help bring understanding and sensitivity on how to deal with others."

### Reverend N.J L'Heureux, Jr.

Our second keynote speaker was Reverend N.J L'Heureux, Jr. He starts touching briefly on early Christian history, stating that early Christians were pacifists and against war. However, he attributes the misunderstanding of the texts and the justification of violence in the name of Christianity due to different cultural factors and different mindsets, as well as political and economical reasons throughout history. Reverend L'Heureux places emphasis on that The Bible stresses kindness, and that "kindness to other people is at the core of how we will be judged by God" and instead that "judgment is the role of God himself". Unfortunately, throughout history, misinterpretation has led to the false impression that religion justifies violence.

### Imam Shamsi Ali

Our last keynote speaker of the evening was Imam Shamsi Ali, who represented the Islamic faith. As like the other two speakers, Imam Ali also stressed that we cannot take specific passages without reading the text that surrounds it. Language must also be taken into context, and can be a big source of misunderstanding. Imam Ali cites a specific example of this when the Arabic word "Awliyah" is simply translated into friend in a passage that would then read that Muslims cannot be friends with Jews and Christians. This of course proved contradictory to other passages in The Qu'ran. Lastly, he touched on the widely misinterpreted meaning of Jihad. In the media, this word is presented as meaning "Holy War", but instead, Jihad means, "to struggle, to achieve goodness". Imam Ali gave certain examples of Jihad in the Qu'ran, and after reading the texts surrounding the initial quote, explained how they could be misinterpreted.

