

# ABRAHAM'S TABLE FORUM SERIES

## The Status of Women in Abrahamic Traditions



Sarah Sayeed, Ph.D

Hijab, usually seen by the West as an oppressing item, actually applies to both women and men, calling for modest dress.

Lucinda A. Mosher, Th.D

Mary Magdalene, has a vital role in Christianity, it signifies the Church

Rabbi Carol Levithan

Jewish Ketuba guarentees the bride's rights in marriage



## The Status of Women 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 month's topic was the status of women in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Women's roles in religion today tend to be seen as oppressive and degrading, as we are often met with stories of women being portrayed as second-class citizens in religious life. However, our three panelists from each of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) spoke about how women in their sacred texts actually took on leadership roles and the abundance of rights that they are guaranteed.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Sarah Sayeed** is currently the board President of Women in Islam, Inc., a social justice and human rights education and advocacy organization. She also works as a Program Associate at the Interfaith Center of New York, where she runs the Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Retreats for Social Justice and manages a program focused on Catholic-Muslim partnerships in social services. She has been involved in interfaith activities in New York City for more than a decade, including through previous work with New York Disaster Interfaith Services and the American Jewish World Service. Prior to joining ICNY, Dr. Sayeed served as Assistant Professor at Baruch College's School of Public Affairs, where she taught public communication and health communication. Sarah earned a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Near East Studies from Princeton University and an MA and PhD in Communication from the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Sayeed regularly delivers presentations and facilitated discussions about Muslims and Islam to a wide range of audiences. She has authored articles relating to women, Islam and public health and some of her recent writings are featured in the Huffington Post's Religion Blog.

**Rabbi Carol Levithan** was ordained as a Conservative rabbi by The Jewish Theological Seminary in May 1995 with a concentration in Bible. Prior to attending rabbinical school she earned an MA in teaching from Columbia University and an MA in political science from The New School for Social Research where she completed all doctoral course work and exams but not the dissertation! She has worked at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan since 1995 and is currently Rabbinic Director and Senior Director of Adult Programs where her responsibilities include Jewish learning programs, teaching, supervision of the adult program staff, special projects and counseling, particularly for those who are interested in conversion to Judaism. She is the mother of three and the grandmother of three.

**Dr. Lucinda Allen Mosher** is Faculty Associate in Interfaith Studies at Hartford Seminary, where she is developing the Graduate Certificate Program in Chaplaincy for Multifaith Contexts and teaches on Christian-Muslim relations. She is also the founding instructor for the annual Worldviews Seminar at The University of Michigan-Dearborn, and works as a consultant on interreligious matters. The author of Faith in the Neighborhood—a book series on America's religious diversity, Dr. Mosher has published a number of articles on multifaith issues generally and Christian-Muslim concerns specifically. She was a participant in the 2011 Building Bridges Seminar—an annual international Christian-Muslim dialogue convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Her current project is a book on the Episcopal Church and interreligious relations. Dr. Mosher is an Episcopal Church Fellow with degrees from Boston University, the University of Massachusetts (Lowell), Hartford Seminary, and the General Theological Seminary (NYC). She maintains offices in Hartford (CT), New York City, and northeast Florida.



### Rabbi Carol Levithan

Currently the Rabbinic Director and Senior Director of Adult Programs at the Jewish Community Center Manhattan, Rabbi Carol Levithan was our first speaker of the night. Rabbi Levithan spoke of the wide array of important roles for women in Judaism and noted specific women, such as Prophet Hulda and Deborah. Also noted was the Jewish Ketuba, which guarantees the bride's rights in marriage. Although Rabbi Levithan noted that there were still some limitations in Judaism, there have been progressive efforts, especially in the conservative stream of Judaism for women, including women becoming Rabbi like Rabbi Levithan herself.

### Lucinda Allen Mosher, Th.D.

Dr. Lucinda Allen Mosher is currently the Faculty Associate in Interfaith Studies at Hartford Seminary. Our second speaker of the night, Dr. Mosher also spoke on the wide range of traditions that women have in Christianity. A large portion of her speech emphasized the importance of Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ, who Christians and Muslims believe conceived her son miraculously. Dr. Mosher pointed out that Mary the Mother of Jesus, because of her vital role in Christianity, signifies the church. Later on, Dr. Mosher gave examples of women leadership in Christianity, both in ancient and present-day times.

### Sarah Sayeed, Ph.D

Dr. Sarah Sayeed is the current Board President of Women in Islam, Inc. Although our media portrays women in Islam as oppressed, Dr. Sayeed points out that according to the Qur'an, women and men are spiritual equals and that there is no difference between them in the eyes of God. In Hadith 24, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) forbids oppression. Hijab, usually seen by the West as an oppressing item, actually applies to both women and men, calling for modest dress. Throughout her dialogue, she also noted specific women leaders in Islam, including Khadijah and Aisha, as well as ones in the present day.

