

Interfaith Seder 2013

Interfaith Council of SW Connecticut - Temple Beth El

From Egypt to Sinai, Selma to Sandy Hook:
Liberation from a Culture of Violence

At this season of Pesach, when we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt as though it were our own story of liberation, we're called to plunge into spiritual growth -- to choose to leap away from the spiritual mire of complacency and into the possibility of transformation.

*Weapons are instruments of fear; they are not a wise man's tools.
He uses them only when he has no choice.
Peace and quiet are dear to his heart,
And victory no cause for rejoicing.
If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in killing;
If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill yourself... (Lau Tzu)*

1) Hareni mekabel alay mitzvat aseh, shel v'ahavta l'reayehah camocha.
"Behold I accept upon myself the commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

2) HA LACHMA Self Liberation (Lesli Koppelman Ross)

In Hebrew, Egypt is called *Mitzrayim*. According to the text on Jewish mysticism, the Zohar, the name is derived from *m'tzarim*, meaning "narrow straits" (*mi*, "from," *tzar*, "narrow" or "tight"). When God took us out of *Mitzrayim*, He extricated us from the place of constricted opportunities, tight control, and narrow-mindedness, where movement was severely limited.

Each of us lives in his or her own *mitzrayim*, the external or physical narrow straits of financial or health constraints or, perhaps, personal tragedy; universally, the psychological burdens to which we subject ourselves. Like the duality in virtually all of Pesach's symbols, they work in two ways: they turn us into both slaves and oppressors, of ourselves and others. Passover leads us to question the values and attitudes we hold and which hold us to those roles

3) We are the Generations (The Shalom Center):

We are the generations/That stand between the fires.
Behind us is the flame and smoke/That rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima,
From the burning of our Towers/In jet fuel lit by rage,
From the torching of our forests for the sake of fast hamburger;
Before us is the nightmare of a Flood of Fire:
The scorching of our planet/From a flood of greenhouse gases,
Or the blazing of our cities/In thermonuclear fire/
Or the glare of gunfire/Exploding in our children.
It is our task to make from fire/Not an all-consuming blaze

But the light in which we see each other;
Each of us different,/All of us made in the image of God.
We light this fire to see more clearly
That the earth, the human race,/are not for burning.
We light this fire to see more clearly/The rainbow in our many-colored faces.
Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Breathing Spirit of the Universe, who gives us light that we may
become a light for peace and freedom and healing for all peoples and our planet.
Blessed are you, Breathing Spirit of the Universe, who has breathed life into us, lifted us up, and
carried us to reach this moment.

4) **FOUR CHILDREN - The Fifth Child (Rabbi Joshua Hammerman)**

Now we have a Fifth Child. Alongside the one who does not know how to ask, we must now include the one who can't ask, not because she's stuck in a Gulag or Gazan prison, but because he's been killed, right here in America. This is the child whose inquisitive mind has been stilled forever by the magazines of a maniac's assault rifle, or by the single bullet of a parent's unlocked handgun, or at the hands of an abusive caregiver, or as result of incessant bullying and unremitting cruelty. If Egypt is a metaphor, than we are enslaved not to Pharaoh, but to our own prejudice and anger - and to our pervasive culture of violence.

There are far too many Fifth Children out there, and we've allowed that to happen. We have produced a society where child sacrifice is once again in vogue. That child, though now residing in our cemeteries, deserves a place at this year's table.

So this Passover, we need to wonder about who is not at the table. The children of Newtown need a voice. So do the four children of Shirley Chambers, the Chicago mother who lost all four of her children to gun violence. All human life is of equal value. Let all those children now become the Fifth Child at our Seders, all children, everywhere, who have fallen victim to our society's gun-sanity. They are the child who cannot ask because we have allowed them to be killed on our watch.

We are killing our own children because we are letting them be killed.

5) **TEN PLAGUES (Midrash)**

Rabbi Johanan taught that God does not rejoice in the downfall of the wicked. Rabbi Johanan interpreted the words *zeh el zeh* in the phrase "And one did not come near the other all the night" in Exodus 14:20 to teach that when the Egyptians were drowning in the sea, the Ministering angels wanted to sing a song of rejoicing, as Isaiah 6:3 associates the words *zeh el zeh* with angelic singing. But God rebuked them: "The work of my hands is being drowned in the sea, and you want to sing songs?"

6) **Gandhi on Non-Violence**

Wherever there are jars [conflicts], wherever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love. In a crude manner, I have worked it out in my life. That does not mean that all my difficulties are solved. I have found, however, that this Law of Love has answered as the Law of Destruction has never done."

"For non-co-operation is a measure of discipline and sacrifice and it demands patience and respect for opposite views. And unless we are able to evolve a spirit of mutual toleration for diametrically opposite views, non-co-operation is an impossibility. I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so, our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world."

7) *Miriam: The Red Sea*

High above shores and times,
I on the shore
forever and ever.
Moses my brother
has crossed over to milk, honey,
that holy land.
Building Jerusalem.
I sing forever on the seashore.
I do remember
horseman and horses,
waves of passage
poured into war,
all poured into journey.
My unseen brothers
have gone over,
chariots deep seas under.
I alone stand here
ankle-deep
and I sing, I sing,
until the lands
sing to each other.

—Muriel Rukeyser

8) Leaving Egypt with Haste: (*Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav*)

One needs to leave Mitzrayim with great haste. This is the essence of the quote from Torah, "For they left Mitzrayim and couldn't tarry, and also they didn't make provisions [for the journey]." (Exodus 12:39) This truth is recapitulated in each person and in each era. In each person and in each time, there can be found a residue [of Mitzrayim], the cravings and woes of this world, and this is the essence of the exile in Mitzrayim. This is the essence of Pesach. At the moment of the Exodus from Mitzrayim, a great light from on high was revealed, as is known; and at that time, promptly, Israel went out in great haste and they couldn't tarry. For even if they had remained there even one more instant, they would have remained a remnant there, as is known.

9) Letter from a Birmingham Jail (*Martin Luther King, Jr.*) 16 April 1963

...Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily

understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides -and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . ." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

10) From the the *Qur'an*

If anyone slays a human being - unless it be in punishment for murder or for spreading corruption on earth - it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the life of all mankind.

11) Jihad as Internal Struggle (*Sumbul Ali-Karamali*)

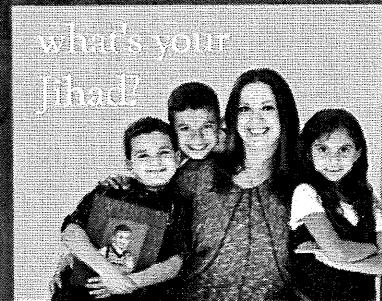
So what does jihad really mean, then? The media and anti-Islam manipulation of the word has so obscured the actual meaning that confusion is inevitable. I even encounter, alarmingly, a reluctance on the part of journalists and lay people to believe Muslims who try to explain their own religion and what jihad actually means.

Well, I'm a Muslim woman, an American, and a former corporate lawyer, and I know my religion pretty well, as I've not only been a practicing Muslim all my life, I have an additional degree in Islamic law. So let me explain what jihad, a specifically defined term of art, means in Islam. The word itself means "effort" or "struggle." Generally speaking, jihad can be divided into two broad categories: the internal jihad and the external jihad. The internal jihad is the struggle to make *oneself* better -- more just, more fair, more compassionate. The external jihad is the struggle to make *society* better -- more just, more fair, more compassionate. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, who died in 632, once famously described the internal jihad as the "Greater Jihad" and the external jihad as the "Lesser Jihad." The most difficult struggle and the greatest, in other words, is the struggle to improve our own selves.

Jihad. (n) def:

An Islamic concept
that means "to struggle"
against barriers & odds
in search of a better place.

Jihad requires faith, courage & perseverance.



12) People Must learn to Hate (Nelson Mandela)

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

13) Liberation is Costly (Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

Liberation is costly. Even after the Lord had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, they had to travel through the desert. They had to bear the responsibilities and difficulties of freedom. There was starvation and thirst and they kept complaining. We must remember that liberation is costly. It needs unity. We must hold hands and refuse to be divided.... We must be ready. Some of us will not see the day of our liberation physically. But these people will have contributed to the struggle. Let us be united. Let us be filled with hope, let us be those who respect one another.

14) Matthew 5: 38- 47 (Jesus' Sermon on the Mount):

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. .. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?"

15) Faith and Violence (Thomas Merton):

Nonviolence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient self-interest, even political, from its consideration. In a very really sense, he who practices nonviolent resistance must commit himself not to the defense of his

own interests or even those of a particular group: he must commit himself to the defense of objective truth and right and above all of humanity. He aims then not simply to “prevail” or to prove that he is right and the adversary wrong, or to make the adversary give in and yield what is demanded

16) Higher Stages of Development (*Jain Faith Statement*)

Jains believe that to attain the higher stages of personal development, lay people must adhere to the three jewels (ratna-traya), namely, enlightened worldview, true knowledge, and conduct based on enlightened worldview and true knowledge. They must endeavor to fulfil the anuvratas (small vows). Among the five vows is Ahimsa (nonviolence). This is the fundamental vow and runs through the Jain tradition like a golden thread. It involves avoidance of violence in any form through word or deed, not only to human beings but also to all nature. It means reverence for life in every form including plants and animals. Jains practice the principle of compassion for all living beings (Jiva-daya) at every step in daily life. Jains are vegetarians.

17) On Creating a Better Society (*EcoSikh website*)

Guru Nanak [the founder of Sikhism] in his philosophy states that the reality that humans create around themselves is a reflection of their inner state. The current instability of the natural system of the earth--the external environment of human beings--is only a reflection of the instability and pain within humans. The increasing barrenness of the earth's terrain is a reflection of the emptiness within humans...With an attitude of humility, and surrender to the Divine Spirit, conscientious human beings can seek to redress the current crises of the environment and of social justice. In the Sikh Way this is done through the guidance of the Guru, who is the Divine Master and messenger of God.

18) Being Armed Without Weapons (*Lau Tzu*)

Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water,
Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better;
It has no equal.
The weak can overcome the strong;
The supple can overcome the stiff. (Ch 78)
The softest thing in the universe
Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe.
That without substance can enter where there is no room. (Ch. 43)
A leaf, when young is supple and soft, in death it is brittle and breaks.
A tree, when young bends with the wind, when it is old, it is hard and stiff.
Therefore hard and stiff is the disciple of death,
Bending and yielding is the disciple of life. (Ch.76).
There is a saying among soldiers:
I dare not make the first move but would rather play the guest;
I dare not advance an inch but would rather withdraw a foot.
This is called marching without appearing to move,
Rolling up your sleeves without showing your arm,
Capturing the enemy without attacking,
Being armed without weapons. (Ch. 79)

A good soldier is not violent.
A good fighter is not angry.
A good winner is not vengeful,
A good employer is humble. (Ch. 68)
A brave and passionate man will kill or be killed.
A brave and calm man will always preserve life. (Ch. 73)

19) Let Us Be At Peace (*Thich N'hat Hanh - Buddhist*):

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds. Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves. Let us be aware of the source of being, common to us all and to all living things. Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion – towards ourselves and towards all living beings. Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other. With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us practice the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth.

20) Family (*Dalai Lama*):

Whenever I meet even a 'foreigner',
I have always the same feeling:
'I am meeting another member of the human family.,
This attitude has deepened
My affection and respect for all beings.
May this natural wish be
My small contribution to world peace.
I pray for a more friendly,
More caring, and more understanding
Human family on this planet.
To all who dislike suffering,
Who cherish lasting happiness -
This is my heartfelt appeal.

21) Religion as Social Force (*Baha'i writings*)

Writing of religion as a social force, Bahá'u'lláh said: "Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein." Referring to the eclipse or corruption of religion, he wrote: "Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine." In an enumeration of such consequences the Bahá'í writings point out that the "perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished."

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own

negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion—a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion. For from a fair-minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social milieus in which they were obliged to carry out their missions, there is nothing to support the contentions and prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and therefore all human affairs.

The teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions, lends force to this latter observation in two particular respects: it sums up the moral attitude, the peace-inducing aspect, extending through these religions irrespective of their place or time of origin; it also signifies an aspect of unity which is their essential virtue, a virtue mankind in its disjointed view of history has failed to appreciate.

22) Ideals (*Anne Frank*)

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all of my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery and death. I see a world gradually being turned into a wilderness. I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.

23) Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.*

24) A Prayer to Prevent Gun Violence (*Jewish*)

O God of Life, Creator of the universe, Sustainer of all, we come before you in sorrow and anger at the killing on our streets and in our schools, workplaces and houses of worship. We come in

repentance at our own participation in the culture of violence in our land. We come in hope borne of past victories over injustice, asking for strength and clarity and fortitude, that we might bring about transformation in our laws, in the ways we resolve conflict and address fear, in our tolerance for violence, in the hearts of our leaders and our fellow Americans. May we become a people who put our trust in You, not in our weapons. By your mighty power, and in your overwhelming love, renew our vision for peace and safety in our land, beginning with us today, we pray. *Amen.*

25) Ufros Aleynu (Jewish Evening Prayers)

ופרש עלינו סכת שלומך

Ufros Aleinu Sukkat Shlomecha

Spread over us your canopy of peace

ותקננו בעצה טובה מלפניך

Vetaknenu B'aytza Tovah Milfanecha

And repair us with good council before you

והושיענו

Vehoshiaynu

And rescue us

SHALOM!

26) Salaam

Od yavo' shalom aleinu

Od yavo' shalom aleinu

Od yavo' shalom aleinu

Ve al kulam

Salaam

Aleinu ve al kol ha olam,

Salaam, Salaam

Salaam

Aleinu ve al kol ha olam,

Salaam, Salaam

Translation:

Peace will come upon us Peace will come upon us

Peace will come upon us and on everyone.

Salaam ('peace' in Arabic) on us and on everyone Salaam, Salaam

27) Wherever we live, it is probably Egypt. There is, there really is, a better place, a promised land. And there is, there really is, a promised time. And there is no way to get from here to there, from now to then, except by joining together and marching – and sometimes stumbling – through the wilderness, watching this time not for signs and wonders, but for an opportunity to act. – Michael Walzer (adapted)

From <http://exodusconversations.org/> - on Washing the Hands

From what do we need purification?

David Arnow JEWISH

We wash to cleanse ourselves of indifference to the oppression of other human beings.

- To purify our hearts of dark wishes to dominate others.
- To loosen the unhealthy habits that enslave us.
- To prepare for a clear assessment of how we use and abuse freedom.
- To scrub away stains of cynicism.
- To remind ourselves that we are worthy of care.
- To demonstrate that we are heirs to traditions, to manners.
- To reawaken the sense of wonder as water runs through our fingers.

We wash to renew feelings of gratitude. We have water. We have hands.

Mary C. Boys CHRISTIAN

We wash for all the reasons David has listed.

As we wash, we also remember in particular two events in the life of Jesus, his baptism and his washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. So we wash for these reasons as well:

- To renew our own promises in baptism to renounce sin and evil.
- To recall belonging to the body of Christ
- To be clothed with the baptismal garment of “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (see Colossians 3:12)
- To wash one another’s feet—that is, to be of service.

Muhammad Shafiq MUSLIM

We wash ourselves for all the reasons stated in the Jewish voice. As we wash ourselves, taking ablution before worship, or taking ritual baths or washing hands before meals:

- We wash to purify ourselves from any wrongdoing and sins that we may have committed against God Almighty, or ourselves or others or the environment.
- We wash so God loves us as God loves clean and pure people.
- We wash to extinguish anger, suppress greed and control our desires.
- We wash to praise God’s blessing with gratitude.
- We wash to remind ourselves that we are heirs of the Abrahamic legacy and tradition.

On Slavery: How does your tradition understand oppression?

David Arnow JEWISH

Israel's enslavement in Egypt constitutes the archetype of oppression. The strong exploit the weak, denying them freedom with no recourse to justice. Oppression violates the fundamental human dignity that flows from our having been created in God's image. The oppressor turns a blind eye to the divine spark in each of us. As a result, God stands with the oppressed: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth . . ." (Exodus 22:20-23). When we struggle against oppression to build a just world, we join hands with God.

Mary C. Boys CHRISTIAN

Christianity, like Judaism, worships the God who takes notice of suffering. In his encounter with the mysterious "I am who I am" at the burning bush, Moses approaches the One who is attentive to the groaning of the enslaved Israelites (see Exodus 2:23—3:20). Similarly, the gospels depict Jesus as profoundly moved by suffering, whether physical impairment or spiritual desolation. They portray Jesus as healing, feeding the hungry, expelling demons and forgiving sins. "Those who are well," Jesus says, "have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Gospel of Mark 2:17).

So the imperative to struggle against oppression of any kind is rooted in our experience of God. God desires the flourishing of creation; our call is to use our divinely given gifts to alleviate any suffering that impedes this flourishing. Ameliorating suffering may involve direct encounter with people who are impoverished, victims of violence, afflicted with illness or lacking human rights. It also entails seeking to change systems that deprive people of their full humanity or despoil creation

Muhammad Shafiq MUSLIM

The Qur'an calls oppression *zulm* and the oppressor *zaalim*. Oppression comes in many forms -- political, social and economic. It can involve discrimination of many kinds: racial, gender, ethnic or religious. The opposite of *zulm* is *`adl* (justice) in Islam. The Qur'an calls for eradication of *zulm* and restoration of *`adl* in all fields of life. Justice prolongs life by creating the conditions for prosperity, while oppression leads to destruction. The Qur'an refers to Pharaoh and his advisors' oppressors (8:54). It speaks of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt as *mustad'afeen* (the weak and the oppressed), and commends them for being patient throughout the ordeal. God blessed the Israelites with power and destroyed Pharaoh and his army (7:137).

What are the resources in your tradition for struggling against our inner Pharaohs?

David Arnow JEWISH

You can think of the inner Pharaoh as a part of yourself that leads you to try to dominate others, to see yourself as master of the universe. As Mary Boys suggests, the heart of the struggle to overcome this all-too-human proclivity lies in recognizing that God is God and you're not. Prayer and participation in a Jewish community go a long way to keep that essential truth in focus.

In the story of the Exodus, Pharaoh's arrogance and ruthlessness lie in his failure to acknowledge God. When Moses confronts him with God's order to let the Israelites go, ". . . Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord nor will I let Israel go'" (Exodus 5:2). Centuries later the prophet Ezekiel delivers God's condemnation of a later Egyptian king whose grandiosity matched that of his predecessor: "I [God] am going to deal with you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, mighty monster, sprawling in your channels, who said, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself'" (Ezekiel 29:3). Stories such as these warn of the fall that inevitably awaits those grandiose souls who dominate others and see themselves as masters of the universe.

Many Jewish rituals serve to undermine our tendencies toward grandiosity. Matzah, the unleavened bread we eat at the Passover Seder, has often been said to symbolize simplicity and modesty. It is not puffed up. As one Hassidic master taught, matzah represents a point of purity to which we annually return to cleanse ourselves of the haughtiness that rises within us over the course of the year. On the Day of Atonement, observant Jews fast, refrain from bathing and wear a white robe that evokes a burial shroud. The day simulates death and sharpens the will to make amends. The liturgy includes repeated confessionals of the sins we have committed against others. Five days later, Jews celebrate the festival of Sukkot, Tabernacles, and build a flimsy structure called *asukkah*. Observant Jews will eat as many meals as possible in their *sukkah* and, weather permitting, will sleep in it, as well. The *sukkah's* frailty reminds us of that everything we build is ultimately temporary, as is life itself.

Mary C. Boys CHRISTIAN

Religion is not for the faint-hearted. It calls for honesty before God and acknowledgment for ways in which we ignore, rationalize and deny our call to flourish and contribute to the flourishing of all creation. Fortunately, religions offer abundant resources for struggling against our inner Pharaohs; personal and communal prayer and fasting are common ways in which adherents are invited to live more profoundly.

Worship of God lies at the heart of confronting our inner Pharaoh because in worshiping we acknowledge we are not God. Worship in Christianity includes confession of sin; we might think of sin as the "choice to remain in a wrecked relationship with God and with other human beings." But worship has myriad

expressions: celebrations of Eucharist or Communion Services, recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours (e.g., via the Book of Common Prayer, the Breviary, or other modes of recitation of Psalms, readings and prayers), various meditation practices (e.g., Centering Prayer), *Lectio Divina* ("sustained immersion into a revelatory text") and devotions (e.g., Bible study; shared prayer; the Rosary, a Catholic practice using prayer beads that bears similarity to Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu practices). Over the centuries one of the most significant Christian practices for confronting our inner Pharaoh has been the pilgrimage, particularly to the Way of St. James (*El Camino de Santiago*) in Compostela, Spain. This pilgrimage was the subject of the 2011 film, "The Way," starring Martin Sheen and Emilio Estevez. Increasingly, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius that originated with the 16th century founder of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, have become more widely practiced within the spectrum of Christian traditions.

Muhammad Shafiq MUSLIM

Our biggest inner Pharaohs in Islam are our arrogance and egoism. God asked Moses to go to Pharaoh: ". . . for, verily, he has transgressed all bounds of equity (20:24). Condemning Pharaoh's and his chieftains' arrogance, the Qur'an says: "Unto Pharaoh and his great ones; but these behaved with arrogance, for they were people wont to glorify [only] themselves" (23:46). In another verse the Qur'an says: "Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes. One group of them he deemed utterly low; he would slaughter their sons and spare [only] their women: for, behold, he was one of those who spread corruption [on earth]"(28:4).

The Qur'an calls for humility and asks people to reject arrogance in its all shapes: "And turn not thy cheek away from people in [false] pride, and walk not haughtily on earth: for, behold, God does not love anyone who, out of self-conceit, acts in a boastful manner" (31:18). The Qur'an asks its followers to worship God and fulfill their obligations to people humbly: "WORSHIP God [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess. Verily, God does not love any of those who, full of self-conceit, act in a boastful manner" (4:36). Praising those who are humble, the Qur'an says: "For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace" (25:63).

Worship, fasting and remembering God are the best methods of staying humble. When Muslims put their forehead on earth in prostration, they commit themselves to humbleness and to staying away from arrogance. Prostration reminds the believers that we come from earth and very soon will return to the earth and will be accountable to all for our actions before God.

Interfaith Statement to End the Culture of Violence

Adapted from Interfaith Clergy Statement from PICO National Network

We bear witness to the deep pain of our nation's people whose loved ones are dying needlessly in urban and suburban communities across the country. We believe we have abandoned far too many of our young people to the clutches of violence fueled by a pervasive sense of powerlessness that leads them to seek empowerment through deadly weapons.

We believe our God demands we speak out about the sanctity of life and affirm that all have the right to live in peace and safety. We believe all people of faith are commanded to work in coalition with one another across lines of race, class, location, age and gender to vigorously confront the proliferation of guns and gun violence in our cities, towns, malls and schools.

We affirm that every life is precious and that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. We are committed through our work to heal the soul of our nation. We will be vigilant and hopeful in leading our communities out of the valley of the shadow of death to the land of the living.

To that end, we call on all faith communities join in a sustainable movement to end the culture of violence and implement programs which empower young people and prevent them from turning to violence. Furthermore we call on all faith communities to advocate for the following:

- Targeted federal investments in urban communities most affected by gun violence.
- Investments in mental-health system to promote well-being among those at risk for committing acts of violence.
- An end to the glorification of violence in the media and video games.
- Universal background checks for all gun sales and annual gun registration.
- Making illegal gun sales and trafficking a federal crime.
- A ban on all assault and assault-style weapons and large-capacity ammunition magazines.
- Micro-stamping technology on all firearms sold, bought or delivered in the state to improve bullet tracing by law enforcement.

As leaders of diverse faith communities in Connecticut we commit ourselves to working together to achieve these goals and transform our culture of violence to one of kindness, safety and love.

Imam Kashif Abdul-Karim
Muhammad Islamic Center

Reverend Edwin Ayala
Christian Activities Council

Reverend David Baird
Christian Conf. of Conn.

Rabbi Donna Berman
Charter Oak Cultural Center

Reverend Stephen Camp
Faith Congregational Church

Ms. Malou Dusyn
Buddhist Community

Reverend Kate Heichler
Interfaith Council of Southwestern CT

Professor Yehezkel Landau
Hartford Seminary

Reverend Matthew Laney
Asylum Hill Congregational Church

Deacon Art Miller
Office of Black Catholic Ministries

Reverend Tim Oslovich
Trinity Lutheran Church

Reverend Joshua Pawelek
Unitarian Universalist Society

Rabbi Michael Pincus
Congregation Beth Israel

Mr. Harjit Singh Dargan
Sikh Community

Mr. Darshan Singh Bajwa
Sikh Community