



NORTHERN VIRGINIA HEBREW CONGREGATION

October 11, 2023

Dear ADAMS Community,

On behalf of the Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, we invite the members of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society to attend Jumma prayers at our synagogue building as you have done every Friday for over fifteen years.

Earlier this week, following the Hamas attack on the State of Israel, Imam Mohamed Magid expressed his consolation and sympathy to our community and asked me to consider if Jumma at our synagogue this week might inflame emotions and whether we should take this week off. After prayer and consideration, this invitation is our answer to his generous and compassionate offer.

Yes, Imam Magid, in his wisdom and compassion, senses the pain and hurt in the Jewish community this week, and we appreciate his desire to cause no further suffering. However, we firmly believe that any cessation of our relationship would cause more harm for the following reasons:

- We do not want to support the notion that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people is primarily a conflict between Judaism and Islam. Both of our religions clearly prohibit violence against innocents, the taking of revenge, or the holding of hostages. We reject the idea that the Holy Land is meant for believers of any one faith. We affirm the teaching of the holy Koran that God created us different so that we can learn from one another. We understand from the Torah's command to love the neighbor that we must first know the neighbor, and therefore we are meant to co-exist in proximity to one another.
- Extremists in the Israel/Palestine conflict use the cycle of violence and retribution to prevent the possibility of compromise and solidify the idea that our civilizations will forever be at war. We reject this tribalist worldview and believe that through our small, shared prayer space we demonstrate the greatness of human nobility. Our welcome is rooted in a desire to defeat extremism and the idolatry of vengeance.
- This week we welcome you in prayer as we do every week. Now is the time to elevate the universal experience of human grief, and set aside disagreements, no matter how well reasoned. Now is the time for healing of our souls, and we open our spiritual home in the hope that your Friday Jumma afternoon prayers will mingle with our Friday Shabbat evening prayers and provide consolation to the broken-hearted in both our communities.
- Prayer is also a time for repentance, and we ask for forgiveness that for too long we have avoided discussing this topic, that we have failed to create a healthy dialog about this terrible conflict, that we have allowed mistrust, slogans, and stereotypes to fester in our local community, and that we still do not fully see each other's connection to the Holy Land. We commit to returning to these topics after we take time for healing.

Every week, when you come to our synagogue, you remove your shoes for prayer, which you conduct on prayer rugs on the floor. You might not be aware, but it is customary in a Jewish home, at a time of mourning, that the bereaved remove their shoes and sit on a low stool or on the floor. This week we seek comfort in the presence of each other and the mourners of Jerusalem.

L'shalom, tamid l'shalom (For Peace, always, for peace),

Rabbi Michael G. Holzman

Cantor Susan Caro

Rabbi Ashley Barrett

Elizabeth Lacher, President of the Board of Trustees