Boosting Muslim-Jewish relations at Rosh Hashana

Rabbi Dr. Elie Abadie
Arab News - Sept. 6, 2021

The holiday of Rosh Hashana is a time for introspection. It is an important time to reflect on the achievements in Muslim-Jewish dialogue and the opportunities to further strengthen our bonds for the coming year. There is much that unites us, including our shared values and traditions.

Muslims and Jews working hand in hand is what will ultimately lead to the success of our region. As we usher in the Jewish new year on Monday evening, we must commit ourselves to furthering our relationship and dialogue.

The great Mahatma Gandhi once noted: “If we are to respect other’s religions as we would have them respect our own, a friendly study of the world’s religions is a sacred duty.” As religious leaders, our responsibility is to find a path toward peaceful coexistence between all religions and all people, especially the world’s three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Over the past year, we have seen many achievements in this area. In Dubai, a group of dynamic young Emiratis arranged a joint Iftar-Lag B’Omer celebration and invited Muslims and Jews to celebrate the holidays together. Our organization has arranged Shabbat meals in both Bahrain and Dubai, bringing together diplomats, Emiratis and Bahrainis—both Muslim and Jewish—to break bread and talk about our commonalities. Friday is a special day for both religions and we celebrate together.

Just a couple of weeks ago, a bar mitzvah was held in Bahrain for the first time in 16 years. In attendance were Muslims and Jews. In the last few months, Muslim and Jewish ambassadors participated in a joint panel discussion about the role of interfaith relations and how they are propelling the region forward. Abdul Rashed Al-Khalifa, Bahrain’s ambassador to the US; Yousef Al-Otaiba, the UAE ambassador to the US; Houda Nonoo, former Bahraini ambassador to the US; and Marc Sevres, former US ambassador to Oman, all spoke about why interfaith dialogue is critical for the region.

For 1,400 years, Judaism and Islam were inextricably linked in the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East and in medieval Spain. Each had a common ancestry, similar values and holy scriptures. We are enjoining by our faiths to find a path toward peaceful coexistence between all religions and all people. Therefore, in order to establish a channel of communication and cooperation between Jews and Muslims, between Judaism and Islam, the following steps are necessary.

First, we must lead by example and communicate to our own congregations that peace is a basic human right. We must stand together should any of our communities suffer harassment or attacks. And we must overcome some of the misrepresentation, demonization, stereotyping, prejudice and lack of awareness in the world through an ongoing educational process that teaches peace and respect for each religion.

Second, as each of us takes enormous pride in our own religion’s history, culture and tradition, so too must we pride ourselves on our level of understanding and tolerance of each other’s religion. Just as we encourage our own people’s pride in our own religions, we must castigate those who show intolerance and ignorance of other religions and cultures.

Third, it is our responsibility to guide our people toward looking for the inestimable value of peace, and not in the “importance” of religious conflict. Yes, the world is made up of different races, colors, ethnicities, religions, and political ideologies. However, the seeds of peace begin to grow when people of all walks and backgrounds are encouraged to communicate, tolerate, accept, respect, and ultimately trust one another.

As the Jewish new year approaches, let us reflect on the wise words included in the UN manifesto on the Culture of Peace, which states: “We must learn to use one another’s religious belief as ways to connect—not as reasons for conflict.” May these words serve as a guiding light for everybody in this region for the coming year. Judaism and Islam are forever bound together as sister religions. We are intertwined in our faith, history and culture. It behooves us to maintain an open dialogue and cherish our similarities and our differences with respect, acceptance, coexistence and love for each other. We owe it to our communities, to our people and to our common father Abraham.

Rabbi Dr. Elie Abadie is the rabbi of the Association of Gulf Jewish Communities and the senior rabbi of the Jewish Council of the Emirates.

Thank you.

Emily Bir
Michigan Director
517.449.0930
Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn

These materials are distributed by L2group on behalf of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.