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January 20, 2009

Opinion

Finding A Connection To Judaism During the Eid

by Eboo Patel



Eileen Ryan

Eboo Patel is the founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core, a Chicago-based organization fostering the international interfaith youth movement. He lectures worldwide on youth and religion and was a keynote speaker at the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Forum.

[NPR.org](#), December 8, 2008 · He reminds me of my son.

That was my first thought when I saw the picture of Moshe Holtzberg — 2 years old, dark eyes, full lips — wearing a green shirt, clutching an orange ball and wailing "Dada."

My almost-2-year-old son just learned how to say "Dada." He walks around the house and claps his hands and repeats "Dada" in his own peculiar toddler rhythm. When I leave for work in the morning, he sometimes reaches for me and wails "Dada" with a tinge of sadness in his voice.

But not like Moshe's sadness. His parents are gone to God. They are not coming back. They were ripped from Moshe by terrorists who perversely believed that Islam is a totalitarian faith, a faith defined by destroying diversity. Mumbai, the city they attacked, is defined by its diversity — a masala of cultures that included Moshe's family of Hasidic Jews from Brooklyn.

The Chabad center they led is about a mile from my grandmother's apartment in Mumbai. That is where I learned what it means to be a Muslim.

I traveled to India 10 years ago with my friend Kevin, a Jew. My grandmother treated him like family from the moment he walked in the door. Every morning, she would call for Kevin to come into her room. She would hold his head in her lap and whisper Arabic prayers over him, asking God to keep him safe, to guide him on the straight path, to help him be a mercy upon the world.

When she saw Kevin's books on Judaism, she could hardly contain her excitement. "He is '*Ahl al kitab*,'" she would say — meaning he was part of the Abrahamic tradition, a son of the patriarch. My grandmother knew there was a Jewish community in Mumbai and ordered my cousin to track it down so Kevin could have Shabbat dinner. That's when I first learned there were Jews in India.

My grandmother told us a story about the Prophet Muhammad. A funeral caravan passed him one day, and he was told that it carried the body of a Jew. The prophet stood up to show his respect.

I stood up for the funeral of Moshe's parents. When my son says "Dada," I imagine Moshe's voice. When I pray for my son, I pray for Moshe too.

This week, Muslims are celebrating Eid, a commemoration of the story of Abraham and his son, a story shared by both Muslims and Jews. I cannot help but see a version of this story in Moshe's family: a father willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, a son miraculously saved.

In the Abraham story, it is God who performs the miracle, who saves the son.

In Mumbai, it was an Indian nanny who protected Moshe from the terrorists' bullets. Her arms were the mercy of God, shielding the son of Abraham. She embodies the lesson that my grandmother was teaching, the true meaning of all of our faiths:

We have to save each other. It's the only way to save ourselves.

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[Frank Fredericks \(worldfaith\)](#) wrote:

Hey Eboo,

Thanks for sharing your perspective on this, I have been trying to figure out how contextualize this with my upcoming trip to India. I can always count on you to make me think.

Wednesday, December 10, 2008 05:03:08 PM

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[judith grayson \(judyg\)](#) wrote:

why is there nothing but silence from those who believe as you do. and, why have the most evil, vicious and ignorant gained so much power? i suggest that while it is in part denial and sheer fright, the time has come to show not just the good, but to show the strength of the righteous. it is time to express rage and disgust forcefully, to intimidate and threaten and make it clear that muslims want to rid themselves of these miscreants. that muslims do not want to fall backwards into the darkness, the turgid swamp of the medieval world and that the enlightenment is the light of the world. unless, beneath it all, you believe differently.

Wednesday, December 10, 2008 12:26:04 PM

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[Steve Graham \(SolarSteve\)](#) wrote:

Eboo Patel, i just finished hearing another story this morning of an atheist US military man becoming friends with, among others, one of his Muslim Afgani translators. His and your stories touch the same cords. And your ending comment - " We have to save each other. It's the only way to save ourselves." is one more way of crying out that violence to other humans (and indeed all creation) is never justified, at least in my humble opinion. Blessings in your work.

P.S. If i am remebering rightly, it seems Patel is not a birthright Muslim name. Is this part of your story that led you to be in Interfaith Youth Core?

Tuesday, December 09, 2008 11:06:01 AM

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[V S \(Sizemorpheus\)](#) wrote:

What a touching piece...and reminder that many of us are 'People of the Book' and should share a special relationship with one another...One that does not include the violence, distrust, and hatred of our most recent experiences...

Tuesday, December 09, 2008 09:08:17 AM

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[Yasser Hassan \(yasser\)](#) wrote:

All religions are based on love, love of God and love of all human beings.

Don't believe those who say that being a Moslem means to hate Christians or Jews

Those attacks are completely political hiding behind religion

Killing people for no reason is not right in any religion.

Those who committed such attacks are just using religions to justify their aims.

That's not right and will never be right.

Religions are different ways which all lead to God,

May peace be upon the whole world and all nations.

Tuesday, December 09, 2008 06:58:56 AM

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