

# Daily Herald

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## Turkey and biryani for Glen Ellyn man

### Muslim part of mini-book promoting religious understanding

By **Michael Wamble**  
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For Eboo Patel, a look around a dining table can provide a chance to see the beauty of America.

“At my lunch table at Glenbard South High School was an Indian Hindu, a Nigerian evangelical and a Cuban Jew,” said Patel, who grew up in Glen Ellyn. “Religion played a role in our lives, but we never talked about it.”

Patel would like to see that changed today, on Thanksgiving — not as a way to further divide people with religious differences, but as an opportunity to see shared values.

As founder of Interfaith Youth Core, a Chicago-based international organization that unites youths of all faiths in the common ethic of service, Patel, 31, is one of eight people profiled in this year’s edition of “America’s Table,” a mini-book published by the American Jewish Committee.

The 10-page “America’s Table” reader, which can be downloaded for free at [www.americastable.org](http://www.americastable.org), was created to spark discussion among families about inter-religious understanding. Publishers encourage people to read it at the Thanksgiving table.

For Patel, like many others, Thanksgiving means spending time with family.

His father is a small-business owner, his mother an accounting professor at College of DuPage.

Thanksgiving also means watching football, of course, and eating turkey and biryani, a Muslim rice-based dish with flavorful masala, sometimes with chicken or goat.

“My mom would allow us to choose traditional Thanksgiving or Muslim food,” Patel said. “We’d always mix and match.”

Away from the dinner table, Patel’s recent project will match youths with different cultures, sending a group of Chicago kids to Jordan and a Jordanian to Chicago.

Understanding others is critical, Patel said, as America grows more diverse.

Back in the late 1980s, Patel said, Glenbard South already was a “highly diverse place” but

still there were incidents of anti-Semitism.

Patel said he has talked and written about them as a way to highlight “the dangers of diversity without pluralism.”

At times, he said, there was anti-Semitic graffiti on desks and slurs sometimes shouted in the hallways.

Patel said nothing against it.

Instead, he’s written he was “relieved that my kind weren’t in the target range.” Looking back, Patel saw the need to apologize to his buddy with whom he often shared lunch.

Not speaking up at the time is a mistake Patel doesn’t want other kids to repeat.

“I work with Islamic youth, and I am hearing from them increased racism and Islamophobia, and I am increasingly disturbed by that,” Patel said.

The way to work against that is to “emphasize how religious traditions have made contributions to American society. We need to have a no-tolerance policy on creeping racism.”

Teaming with the American Jewish Committee to make that point, Patel said, matched with his own beliefs.

It might be his best Thanksgiving contribution, said Patel, who plans to spend this holiday at his in-laws’ dinner table.

“My talents lie far away from matters culinary,” Patel said.

Yet, he knows what will fill his plate.

“Turkey, some Indian food,” Patel said, “and heaps full of gratitude.”

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