



'From the roots of Abraham': A unifying moral vision from the Abrahamic faiths

We have a choice to use religion to divide ourselves or to use it to explore our common humanity. At the crossroads that we are currently at, we can either tread the quagmire of destruction or the path of inspired transformation through a unifying moral vision offered by all faiths, says **Hasnain Walji**

All major civilisations have evolved under the overarching direction of one religion or another. Western civilisation is largely a synthesis of the Judeo-Christian tradition, albeit with a noteworthy influence of Islam. In a way that had never occurred before, today the process of globalisation is quickly transforming Western Civilisation into a Global Civilisation. However, this Global Civilisation is different from all previous ones in the sense that it is not directed by a single religion at its core, but rather by a plurality of religions.

Today the Global Community is undergoing the most profound, far-reaching, and perplexing transformation in history. We are at the crossroads and the very survival of life on our planet is at stake. As we grapple with ecological and environmental destruction, overpopulation, famine and the devastation of wars, we are at a turning point. We can tread the path of destruction or inspired transformation through a unifying moral vision offered by our faiths.

We have the choice to use religion to divide ourselves or to use it to explore our common humanity. We can use our ideology to perpetrate injustice or use our common values of justice, which is imbedded in all faiths, to eliminate

oppression and discrimination. The most basic question is: should we use religion to preach hate or love? Needless to say, positive answers to these questions can engender new consciousness - that the plurality of religions has the power to draw the human race into a global spiritual community providing it with the moral spirit and the roadmap for peace and harmony we so desperately need.

It is with that motivation that the team at Mulla Asgher Resource Center (MARC), in fulfilment of its mandate to enhance interfaith understanding, recently opened the 'From the Roots of Abraham Interfaith Exhibition' offers Jewish, Christian and Muslim men and women a chance to enhance their knowledge of one another's faiths. The exhibition is named after Prophet Abraham^(a) because he championed the concept of monotheism and uniquely enjoys the unanimous acclaim of the three major faith traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. This consensus amongst faiths makes Prophet Abraham an interfaith icon and provides us with an opportunity to celebrate our commonalities.

By designing exhibits that teach us about each other's faith traditions and learning about the practices of our respective faiths, the organisers hope to increase respect

for all the Abrahamic religions. A unique sculpture of intertwined roots was specially commissioned to symbolise the theme of the exhibition, signifying that whatever the branches may be, the roots remain intertwined and derive their spiritual nourishment from the same source.

In addition to highlighting the common concept of monotheism, the exhibits describe the lofty values of justice and compassion shared by the three faiths through the holy scriptures of the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an. A further example of shared belief in the Abrahamic religions is reflected by the virtue of repentance:

In the Torah - Tehillim - Psalms 51, it is said: *'Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity, and purify me of my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me'*.

According to the *Gates of Repentance*, a standard work of Jewish ethics written by Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona, if someone commits a sin or a forbidden act, he can be forgiven for that sin if he performs *teshuva*. *Teshuva* literally means 'return' and it is the word used to describe the concept of repentance in Judaism. Only by atoning for our sins can we restore balance to our relationship with God and with our fellow human beings.