

Peace in the Abrahamic Religions

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Abraham was the *father of many (religions)*. Abrahamic traditions are derived from the teachings of the prophet Abraham, as can be inferred from the name. The three major Abrahamic religions are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. All are religions of peace, justice, and equality. Many misconceptions about the religions and their followers arise from complete ignorance of the realities of each of these three faiths. Individuals uneducated about the faiths tend to associate negative things with the religions. It is up to the informed individuals to change the way the others think and prove that these religions are in fact religions of peace. Understanding the roots of peace in each of the three religions may bring about a greater religious understanding throughout communities by eliminating the ignorance that fuels the false impression.

These three peaceful religions share many similarities. The most important similarity is that they are monotheistic. Monotheism is the belief in a single god. That is the key that links all three religions together. Many of the other religions in the world today consist of polytheism. That is the belief in many gods. The monotheistic quality of the three Abrahamic faiths links them together and serves as their key unifier. It proves that if they can unite under a common belief system, the people can unite under one society. That also shows that stereotypes should not exist. If stereotypes do exist, they would be stemmed from ignorance. Peace stems from education and education eliminates ignorance. Believing in God is the basis of each religion. All religions believe God is almighty and powerful. He is the merciful creator who placed rules to direct his followers to a better life. The three Abrahamic faiths rely deeply on God's will and His rules. The followers understand that God's rules and system were set up to improve the world.

Therefore, there should be no hostility between the religions. A society should harmoniously exist and the three religions should complement each other to bring that about. That fact also supports the call to peace in all religions. The three religions also teach that humans have it within their capacity to improve their actions. All followers could become good doers if they so will it. The people can improve their relations with others if they so desire. Everything relies on will power. Christians, Muslims, and Jews can support one another and improve society if the followers take it upon themselves to educate others and improve the situation. All three faiths also claim that the main way to achieve salvation is to practice the religions in a more perfect and correct manner. All religions preach peace and a better society built on trust. If all followers respect that cause, society will be peaceful.

Peace is something very hard to attain and even harder to maintain. Peace may be defined in many ways. To some it is the freedom from quarrels and disagreements, fundamentally harmonic relationships. To others, it is public tranquility and organization. Lastly, it can be seen as a feeling of serenity and internal ease. The three Abrahamic traditions call for greater peace and love within a society. Islam, Judaism, and Christianity encourage respect between all Muslims, Jews, and Christians. This encouragement is mentioned in religious texts from each faith. In the Bible (Luke 6:27-30), it says, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again." Mohammad (peace be upon him), the last prophet and messenger of the Islamic people, claimed, "You will not enter paradise as long as you do not have faith, and you will not have complete faith as long as you do not love one another." In the Torah, it says (Talmud-Avot 1:11), "Be a student of Aaron: love peace and pursue peace." Each

religion highly values peace. It is discussed thoroughly throughout each religion. The three Abrahamic faiths value peace and equality. That provides further reason for each of the three faiths to coexist with the others. Peace is the result of respect and education. Education fuels respect because when one is informed about a situation, he/she learns to see all circumstances from various perspectives. When that occurs, respect stems almost ultimately. When one respects another, he/she will try to keep good relations with that person. Peace is keeping good relations. Everything is connected through that basic circle of trust, and that is what Islam, Judaism, and Christianity teach.

I am a proud Muslim and I wear the hijab. Muslim women wear the hijab, or headscarf, as an act of reverence. When I was in sixth grade, I attended an Episcopalian school, St. Stephens St. Agnes. I was the only hijab-wearing girl in my entire grade. The looks I received from a little over fifty percent of the students were very frustrating and irritating. Some people asked me about the scarf, while the younger children asked me if I had any hair. I would shrug off the latter comment, giving a polite laugh whenever necessary. Then, I would explain to those who asked me about the scarf the reason I wore it. I would tell them that it was part of my religion and that I was proud to wear it. I would also make it clear to them that I was not deprived or forced into wearing it, that it was a conscious decision I had made. The fact that I wore the hijab and attended one of the greater prestigious schools in Northern Virginia definitely had its impact on the students. The reason I say this is because, after approximately one week of school, the students didn't even notice that I wore a scarf. I became no different to the students than any other person. I educated them about my scarf, my religion, and myself. As a result of that, they became less ignorant and began understanding my situation. Hostility never existed between any of the sixth graders because of religion. There were also a few Jewish students in

my class, and we all respected and learned from one another. They could speak some Hebrew (the language of the Jewish faith) and I could speak some Arabic (the language of the Muslim faith). Children tend to learn easier and more quickly than adults; I think that is why it did not take my fellow classmates that long of a time to adjust. The sixth graders at St. Stephens and St. Agnes School learned to respect, learn from, and educate the other sixth graders. That simple fact is what leads me to believe everything stems from education.

Before this program, I really didn't understand the positions the various religions took on differing topics. I didn't have a clear understanding of the religions, their similarities, their differences, and their opinions on peace. I had a semi-biased opinion, and this exercise helped convince me that education is the most vital defining factor to establishing peace. I've come to understand that each religion feels as if it has come closer than the others in defining essential truths of reality, and the others have not recognized that fact. I have also understood that truth must be reinforced by power, and each religion sought to be the leading power. That is where the hostility, if it is present, originates. This program has taught me that education really is the answer to unlocking the wonderful entity of peace.

With my new outlook on the three Abrahamic faiths, I would like to implement a weeklong program at a local high school. The program would be called "STEP", which is the acronym for Seek Truth, Education, and Peace. Everyday during the five-day school week, one hour and a half would be set aside for this program. During each day, many new things would be learned. It would not be students listening to teachers; it would be more of a hands-on activity. Three days during the next week would be dedicated to the three Abrahamic faiths. That hour and a half would consist of culture, religious scriptures, food, attire, etc. On the Friday of the week prior to STEP, students wishing to participate (and they should be heavily encouraged to)

sign up for possible things they could bring to represent their religion. They would be in charge of bringing in priests, rabbis, or imams to speak generally to the remainder of the school.

The first day would consist of introductory ceremonies. The students would have prepared a few words to say about the history of the religions and any other basic information. They may begin to describe any speakers they would have invited or any of the activities they may well have planned. They may also begin to point out the purpose of this activity by encouraging honesty and bringing up students to discuss stereotypes. The students might be of different faiths and could bring up labels they might have experienced or witnessed. That would kick off the STEP program and the rest of the week would have had a great start.

The next hour and a half provided during the school day would focus on Christianity. They may bring a priest or nuns to speak about the religion, generally. A question and answer period may follow that, for the benefit of the students. Basic attire may possibly be shown; they could also prepare a play. The play could portray Christianity and its relation to peace and trust. They could also set up display boards that discuss various topics about the religion. The varying branches of this religion may be discussed and brought up. Christianity's opinion on politics, government, society, medicine, law, and so on could be discussed as well. This day is dedicated to Christianity and all of its aspects, to bring about greater understanding and education.

The third school day would be dedicated to Judaism. A rabbi may come in and speak, followed by another question and answer period. The same situation may occur that took place the previous day. It's up to the creative and innovative minds of the high schoolers to make the day interesting. A lesson on Hebrew may be provided. Students could learn phrases in Hebrew, or the alphabet. Somebody could bring in a Jewish children's book, and somebody could read it

aloud and translate. They could also set up a “school-like” theme, where the students are taught the aspects of the religion, indirectly.

During the fourth day Islam and its aspects would be discussed. An imam could be brought in to discuss Islam’s aspects and the differing branches. A creative idea for this day would be setting up a “fashion-show” because there is a huge misconception about what a Muslim girl could wear. It could display different types of hijabs. Lessons in Arabic could also be provided. Different stations could be set up to teach about different features. Traditional foods, clothes and other items may be brought in and displayed.

The last day would consist of closing remarks and a reception incorporating all three Abrahamic faiths. Students who wish to, may come and discuss what they have learned. Key organizers could come forth as well and say a few words on organizing this event. The principal or diversity counselor could come forth and discuss how this program would improve the situation with adapting to diversity. Hopefully, STEP would be a success and many other schools would undergo this convention. Every student would thereby get an honest impression of each religion by being exposed to it. Therefore, ignorance would be lessened and education would increase dramatically. Stereotypes stem from ignorance, and they would cease when ignorance does. Education would flourish and peace would most likely be achieved, if not maintained. I did not go into much detail on the possible activities that may take place during STEP. The reason for this is because it is up to the students and their creativity to schedule an interesting and event filled week. It should teach the students the fundamentals they need to know, so that they do not misjudge in their futures. It should also serve as a learning experience, from which students retain a lot of knowledge within themselves to use it whenever necessary. In my opinion, if one could stop a single person from misjudging his/her fellow human, one has been successful.

Education and the elimination of ignorance are the most significant aspects of peace. They are the bases for improvement. How is education achieved? The most viable answer would be enriching young minds, so as to change the way the world thinks. As the common phrase goes, "children are the future." Society cannot be shaped quickly and rashly. It's alteration must be eased into, and what better way than with persistent education. The end result to be achieved is world peace. That can only come about with respect and honesty. The three Abrahamic faiths can be the uniting force behind peace around the globe. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have so much in common and yet so many differences. Each should complement the other in society. Children need to feel secure enough to express themselves freely. Once that occurs, peace will come naturally. Life is all about learning from mistakes. In the past, many mistakes have occurred and it is societies duty to make sure they don't happen again. The only way to do this is to eliminate stereotypes and ignorance. Education is the light at the end of the tunnel.

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