



To **Interfaith**: To enter into respectful dialogue regarding beliefs, values, and practices with adherents of religious world views other than one's own.

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Welcome to the spring, 2008 issue of *Interfaithings*, the fourth issue of this newsletter/journal.

Those of us who are engaged in building bridges across religious and cultural divides know that one important facet of our task is education – clarifying about what our neighbors believe and what they do to live in alignment with their core values. Another important facet of this work is relationship building. Personal connection can have magical effects.

And then there is a third facet of interfaith work – a facet that is all too often neglected. Our histories as faith communities are rife with controversy and strife – polarization of many stripes. To effect a healing of these wounds and a transformation of attitudes, those of us who are advocates for new possibility must create containers that will hold and defuse the polarities that have informed our experiences of one another for a very long time. And to do that, we must be willing to come to grips with the

polarities and unfinished conversations within ourselves.

In this issue, we offer three accounts of this all important inner work, three reports from the salt mines. Each of the three authors featured here has been actively engaged in interfaith work in the Twin Cities and elsewhere. Each has subjected himself to the demanding task of looking at his reflection in a mirror and asking of himself tough questions. Questions like "*Why am I doing what I'm doing?*" and "*What do I have a hard time seeing?*" We hope that their attempts to ferret out honest answers to these and other related questions will be of use to you, dear reader, as you move forward on your own continuing journey of self discovery.

Note:
If one or another of these articles should raise questions in your mind, feel free to voice your queries – either directly to the author via the contact information provided or by sending us a letter to the editor. (Please see the editor's address on the masthead, page 2.)

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Interfaithings

Interfaithings is a quarterly electronic newsletter published by IBI, the Interfaith Bridging Initiative. Please send questions, complaints, laudatory remarks, and letters to the editor to:

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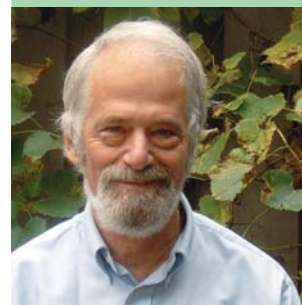
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Interfaithings is a publication of the Interfaith Bridging Initiative or IBI. The mission statement of IBI is:
To serve as an agent for enhanced communication, cooperation, and understanding among interfaith leaders and individuals committed to doing interfaith work in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

IBI was launched in the summer of 2006. In addition to publishing this newsletter/journal, the Initiative hosts conferences and maintains a website where you will find the archives of this publication and a bulletin board of upcoming interfaith events in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Our website address is www.interfaithings.org.

We are supported in these endeavors by a generous grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation and by donations from those who support what we're doing. If you would like to make a donation, please refer to the form below.

Ira Gordon



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Ira L. Gordon, Editor

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Getting Beyond Ourselves In Interfaith Work

by Rev. Paul A. Tidemann

We live in a world in which people are desperately seeking security in one way or another. In the realm of religion, this often ends up in some form of fundamentalism or exclusive claims to truth. People seem to like that – that there is only one way, that anyone who holds a different point of view, practices a different religion or who even claims a broader understanding within a given faith tradition is simply wrong. Statements that are made include suggestions that those who differ are “going to hell,” are “undermining the true faith,” or are weakening the structures of society.

I have been involved in various dimensions of interfaith work for more than 45 years. I now realize that those of us who appreciate the gifts and insights of religions other than our own may be accused of a kind of exclusivism. People might assume that we who are open to other faiths will not honor the positions of those who disagree with such openness, those who question whether being open is the only way to be. I do not believe that we live in a world of absolutes, that what people believe is either right or wrong. To be sure, some things in this world are clearly wrong and need correction, but when it comes to religious belief there is more ambiguity and also greater commonality than used to be thought of in earlier generations. That does not mean that it doesn't matter what one believes. We all need to stand for something. At the foundation of our belief system, lies the importance of honoring and caring for all of God's creation, appreciating the gifts of all people, understanding the shortcomings of what people have done, sometimes because of their beliefs.

If we are to be more effective, we need to realize that people are not necessarily evil because they hold on dearly to what is familiar. Many people are terribly fearful. They also feel very powerless. One of the things we need to do in response is to let people know that we understand their concern and that we will not reject them outright because they hold a view which is different from ours. In short, we need to listen more carefully. We also need to avoid angry or insistent responses.

On the other hand, I believe it is important to realize that there are forces of evil in this world and that some people act in ways that are destructive and evil. The reasons for evil actions may have a base in one's belief system, or in the way one is raised, or because one follows the actions of others. People also do destructive things because they feel that they have been abused or violated in some way. We live in a world in which people get caught up in circles of influence which they seem unable to resist.

When someone approaches me with an accusation that I am misguided or exclusivist in some way, I try to indicate that I do stand within a particular religious tradition, which happens to be Christian. Through the years, however, I have found life to be far more interesting and hopeful when I have been able to listen to the faith concerns and ideas of others and when I have been able to discern where some of these traditions coincide.

I think it is very important that we be able to talk to each other across faith and other boundaries. I was a pastor in Guyana, South America some years back. In our church one of the things we were required to do was to go through six weeks of missionary training. Now, frankly, I find the word *missionary* to be a problem - mostly because of its history. When we were in the training program we were involved in conversations about why we were setting out to do this work. There was a strong belief among most of those who were going out around the world that they were going to “save” people, “save the world,” indeed.

I took the position, very vocally, that I did not think this was my calling. In my faith framework, I determined that God is the one who persuades people to become grounded in faith. That is not my responsibility. I simply need to let people know what is my source of faith and let them decide.

I have found life to be far more interesting... where some of these traditions coincide

Guyana calls itself a nation of six peoples: Amerindian, African, East Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, and European. I soon learned in going there that missionaries had done that country a lot of damage. The Amerindians were the

aboriginal people. They lived out of the mainstream of the society, though the missionaries tried to convert them from their ancient tribal ways. The Africans were captured and brought to be slave laborers on the sugar plantations, and the missionaries got after them too. But even as newly baptized Christians, they were

not allowed to sit in the main sanctuaries of the churches. They had to sit in the balcony. Slavery was abolished by the British in 1834.

The plantation owners desperately looked for labor and went to China and brought some of those folks, then to Portugal to look for laborers, and both of those groups had a very hard time with the climate and disease in northern South America. So the European plantation guys went to the Bengal area of India and brought back hundred and thousands of East Indian people who knew how to survive the climate and do the sugar cane cutting work. But you know what? Most of them were Hindu and a few were Muslim. The missionaries? The first thing many did was to tell the Africans, recently emancipated, that they should not associate with East Indians because they were heathen. Meanwhile, the missionaries went to work on the East Indians to convert them.

To this day in Guyana, where 52% or so are East Indian, many are still Hindu and some are Muslim. The religious and racial divisions in that land still exist today, thanks to what the missionaries taught and for other reasons too. In January this year, a gang of Africans went into a small East Indian village that I know well and slaughtered women, children and men in their beds at night. In February, they went to another area farther inland where more Amerindian and Portuguese live, and they slaughtered

13 people at night.

I recall conversations with a man in Guyana about Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduism, as he saw it being practiced, was so focused on the individual and fulfillment for the individual in another life (because this life was intolerable) that there was no way for the people to come together to change the suffering of the people.

Suffering was accepted as the norm for this life, and the only prayer was for another life, another incarnation.

This man observed some of what was happening among Christians in Guyana and could see that at least some people banded together for the common good. While he had

strong Hindu roots, he was attracted to the corporate sense of mission of Christianity.

My task in relationship to him was not to convert him to Christianity. It was, instead, to hear where he was, to pose questions about his religious experience, to affirm those things in his religious tradition which I also see in Christianity, and to offer a way, within his tradition, to be a more effective, committed Hindu.

As a strategy, the way that I see myself being involved in mission is to listen to persons of other religions, to process their experience through my screen as a Christian whose particularity lies in God's grace in Jesus Christ, to offer to others suggestions of ways of being better religious persons within their tradition.

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In other words, being a "little Christ to my neighbor" (Luther) means that I use the gift of God in Christ that is in me to assist my neighbor:

1. To give thanks for life as it is,
2. To see his/her shortcomings,
3. To be clear that he or she is blessed and received by God,
4. To invite her or him to engage in life knowing that God's presence uplifts us and gives us life, and
5. To gather with like-minded people in order to act in freedom to relieve suffering, set aside injustice, and to give life and hope to all.

I do not present Christianity as a replacement for the tradition from which my neighbor has come. What I try to do is to present Christ as one who brings fulfillment and particularity to that essence of God which I believe is present in my neighbor's tradition. In our interfaith efforts we need to be in dialogue with one another. I need to constantly be aware that I am, on the one hand, a teacher and a resource for and with others; but, on the other hand, I am a student, a learner as I listen to others from different traditions than my own. So, for example, when I speak of "Christ" in interfaith dialogue, I am not necessarily referring to Jesus of Nazareth but to the word about life that is in Christ, embodied in Jesus, yes, but also to be found in what may emerge in the words of Brahma, Krishna, the God of Israel and the like.

I came to have good friends in Guyana who were Hindu and Muslim. I could tell you many stories about them. A leading member of the church I served was East Indian but became Christian.

His birth name was Jhagaru with no surname. But the missionaries said this was not a proper Biblical name, and they baptized him Joseph and gave him the surname Persaud. I was a founding member of the Guyana Inter-Religious Council in Guyana that brought together Muslims, Hindus and Christians. It was not easy because of some of the traditional obstacles among groups and within groups. We literally did have to discuss the shape of the table, but we

came together primarily to discuss ways in which we could work cooperatively together for the good of the country.

We have a lot to learn. The richness of faith and life among the peoples of the world is such a gift. I wish we would embrace that and give thanks to God-Allah-Brahma-Adonai-Shangdi-Ahura Mazda-Aten.

Rev. Paul Tidemann



Paul A. Tidemann is a Lutheran pastor. He retired in 2006 after 42 years of ministry. He served for 25 years as pastor of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church in St. Paul. He lives in St. Paul, Minnesota and is part of SPIN: the St. Paul Interfaith Network. He can be reached at PTidemann@aol.com

Imam Hesham Hussein: A Remembrance

by Rabbi Amy Eilberg

Imam Hesham Hussein died in an automobile accident in Saudi Arabia on January 26, 2008. Hesham was the founder of two Islamic schools and the president of the Muslim American Society of Minnesota. At the time of his death at age 44, he was a figure of inspiration to many in the Muslim community and an esteemed leader and colleague in the Twin Cities interfaith community. Hesham Hussein is survived by his wife, Abeer, and his five children. The following remembrance by Rabbi Eilberg first appeared in the Star Tribune newspaper on January 30, 2008.

Imam Hesham Hussein was a man with a quick wit, a delightful laugh, boundless energy, and profound dedication to the needs of the Muslim community in the Twin Cities. He was the founder of several significant local Muslim institutions, a respected spokesperson for

the Muslim community in the larger society, and a pioneering advocate of interfaith dialogue.

I will most treasure two encounters with Hesham. One was a conversation we had about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at a meeting of local leaders of interfaith dialogue programs. Hesham, originally from Egypt, and I – a rabbi with profound connections to Israel – disagreed rather strongly. But we stayed at the table, exploring our differences with respect, knowing that our relationship would be strengthened by our ability to dialogue about this most difficult issue.

The other encounter was a lunch meeting, at which Hesham and I – the Egyptian imam and the woman rabbi – talked about creating a Jewish-Muslim dialogue group in the Twin Cities. There

were many questions to explore: about our communities' readiness for the conversation, about the process of breaking down walls of fear, anger and distrust. We agreed to talk more and to develop our relationship with one another before launching the program. I grieve the lost opportunity to continue this work with him. I hope that his memory will inspire many others to dare to enter into such conversations with "the other," building a more peaceful world one relationship at a time.

*Rabbi Amy Eilberg,
Jay Phillips Center for
Jewish-Christian-Dialogue*

Activism: Living with Arrogance, a Reverie

by Jan Phillips

I'm in a quandary. Interfaith dialogue makes me feel good when I don't have to be a missionary. There are, of course, different kinds of dialogue – some of which urge me to step forward as an advocate for one or another of the things I believe in. And quite suddenly I'm uncomfortable.

Previously, I have experienced dialogue as a rather peaceful endeavor. After all, some Jews and Catholics have been talking with each other for decades. And Protestants and Muslims come to the table as well. We listen to one another or not. We learn from one another or not. With this kind of dialogue, there is a certain restrained politeness. There are rules. People can break bread together and listen, but there is no preaching.

Do I want interfaith dialogue to be a quiet affair? I see all of us sitting about the great table speaking of the things that we agree about. Admittedly, this can be a bit boring. On the other hand, when we move toward a more active engagement, toward advocacy, my self-righteousness gets triggered. I've come a good distance, I've kept my judgments to myself, and I've listened. What should I put forward as an advocate? The truth of my position? Why should I put my hard-earned truth out for negotiation?

My personal beliefs, of course – precisely where they differ from those of others – give me a kind of ego strength. These things that I believe, I hold with a pride

that arises out of some struggle. I reserve them and keep them safe. For the sake of holding my own truth and entitlement inside of myself, for simple cussedness, I am uncertain about advocacy. But what

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do I do if a person across the table is not the enlightened fellow that I am? What if he were quite certain that his truth were correct – for example, that there were only his way to salvation? And he wanted to debate? Or worse. What if he sought, in his fashion, to save me? And I parried by stepping forward cloaked in my righteousness. Who then is the more arrogant?

It prods at me, this activism. That is, outreach, evangelism, proselytism, they prod at me. Must I in my certainty go poking around with a big stick, proving myself? How does one – in the phrase of the day – "*live with*" one's pride? I seek in all cases in some fashion to be right. Must I and my brother (or sister) poke at one another across the table only to arouse self-defense? To re-enforce each of our own certainties? The answer, I find, remains a work in progress: in the moment, I struggle to remember the arrogance that undergirds my certainty.

Jan Phillips, May 21, 2008

Jan Phillips



Jan is an active member of the St Paul Interfaith Network (SPIN). He is a member of Temple of Aaron Synagogue and has taught Jewish-Christian relations at Metropolitan State University for some years. Educated at Stanford University, Yale University, and the University of Washington, his training is in Medieval History with special focus upon religious studies. Contact Jan at mrjanphillips@yahoo.com

Both/And?

by Ira L. Gordon

Early in the film, *Fiddler on the Roof*, there is a colorful scene that speaks directly to an issue with which I have been grappling. A cluster of men of varying ages – all Jews – have gathered in the center of Anatevka, a shtetl or village in the south of Russia. The time: early 20th century. The men are standing around the milk wagon of Tevye, a larger than life husband, father, milkman, and chief protagonist of the story. They're discussing the news as reported in a recent Russian language newspaper. The following conversation then ensues:

Mordechai, the tavern keeper:

"Poo! Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head!"

Tevya:

"You're right, Mordechai. You're right."

Perchik, a young idealistic activist:

"No! No! You can't close your eyes to what's happening in the world!"

Tevye, addressing the older men and shrugging his shoulder:

"Nu... He's right."

Avram, a scholarly type:

"He's right and he's right? Reb Tevye, they can't both be right!"

Tevye:

"You know, Avram... You're also right."

And so... the question arises: Is Tevye's paradoxical response indicative of a deeply compassionate and deeply wise refusal to be confined by limiting judgments? Or is it indicative of a play-it-safe approach conditioned by membership in a persecuted minority living in a harsh and unforgiving world? Or is it, in some way, both?

For some thousands of years, our fellow humans have been zealously attempting to be right no matter what the cost. And the cost has been high – whether

measured in lives cut violently short or in other subtler but no less real acts of castigation, abuse, and oppression. Those of us attempting to span cross cultural and cross religious divides know that, if our various faiths are to become the force for transformation

and awakening they could be, we must find a way to bypass the certitudes and blindered convictions that keep us mired in antipathy and cloistered negation. And it is not only those active in interfaith work who know this. The energy generated by the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, even among some who disagree with Mr. Obama on the issues, is testimony to the widespread hunger for an alternative to scorched earth rightness.

How, then, do we get off the scorched earth escalator? How do we overcome the polarities, the acrimonies, the wounds to which we all are heir? One important part of the answer lies in the magic of that infinitesimal, it seems to me, point known as *the present moment*, what Eckhart Tolle is referencing when he speaks of *the power of now*.¹

Over the years, I have worked diligently to be present when I communicate: to locate the still center that is the present moment, to talk from that place, to listen from that place. And in deploying that skill, I've been treated to extraordinary

results. I've seen presentness defuse highly volatile situations. In three instances, my success in standing at the still point prevented serious violence –

once to a friend, once to me, and once to both a friend and to me.

There is, however, another factor at play when I set out to be present. Frequently, in the course of my interfaith and intrafaith work, it has happened that the

"He's right and he's right? Reb Tevye, they can't both be right!"

person with whom I've ventured into the sharing of world views has said something that was hard for my digestive system to metabolize. Some of the time, the indigestible piece has been a contention I was hard put to take seriously: "Only if you embrace Christ as your personal redeemer, will you be saved;" "You're too intelligent to believe in God;" "Hitler was an agent of the Divine Plan;" etc. etc. Other times the problematic contention has been clothed in ambiguities and tangles that pushed me to enlarge my understanding. "Violence is always wrong" and "the Jews are God's chosen people" are two recent examples.

What was common in these various instances? Ideas were being proffered and sensitivities stirred up that threatened to undermine commonality and rapport. I was finding myself tempted – tempted to speak, even if silently, the two words that can quickly complicate any aspiration toward deep sharing: the words, "You're wrong."

At times, I've attempted, with temporary success, to forcefully turn off, to repress the voice of "You're wrong." That, however, is a recipe for false peace, a peace that is hollow. I've also attempted to connect with the pain that might have been informing and coloring my neighbor's tilted stance. "Poor fellow, he obviously wouldn't believe that unless he was very frightened" is one way to avoid conflict. Unfortunately, (or fortunately), that sort of compassion doesn't work very well. Bridges built with pity will not carry much weight and collapse easily. And then there is another possibility. Suppose it is I who is tilted, not my neighbor? What better way to avoid looking at the limitations of my own perspective than to insulate myself in the lofty redoubt of an "understanding" attitude?

Of course, there is another way to silence the voice of "You're wrong." When I've been privileged to enjoy soul to soul communion, that's been quite easy to do – for a while. If I truly *see* you and you truly *see* me, the differences in our world view are unlikely to sever the bond that brings us together. Like love, however, soul to soul communion is not something one accesses by pushing a button or clicking a mouse. It is more nearly a matter of grace.

Furthermore, on more than one occasion, I've been privileged to enjoy deeply soulful connection only to find that, an hour or a day later, the magic of the earlier moment had been eclipsed by differences set aside but now reencountered. As a tactic, suppressing my evaluative thoughts has yielded short term gains. As a strategy, that approach has usually left a great deal to be desired.

And then there's something else. The danger of "turning off" my discernments and my judgments is not only that I court the danger of becoming less real, less present. Controversy, I would submit, can itself be the gateway to richer, deeper connection, the gateway to sacred encounter.

I am fortunate. My life journey has been grounded in two traditions – one religious, one philosophical – that never looked upon the clash of ideas and interpretations as truant or derogatory. In the rabbinic engagement with text, disputation is not about the gratification of ego. It is, rather, a sacred dance. And in the western philosophical tradition which has recurrently supported my willingness to ask hard questions, ideas in all their unsettling contrariness are often the living waters that bring relief to the parched places.

Please understand: I am not saying that the clash of ideas is dependably life enhancing. Thought as an elixir of creative life force can and all too often does deteriorate into a drug that intoxicates and disables. When I lose the agility needed to dance with ideas and judgments – mine and yours – when I succumb to "I have to be right," at that point I no longer have access to the still center. At that point I am trapped.

One author who helps me when I'm attempting to negotiate this terrain is the Jewish theologian, philosopher, and translator, Martin Buber. Buber describes all human relationships as falling on a continuum with *I-Thou* at one end and *I-It* on the other. Both *I-Thou* and *I-It* connections can occur in a variety of contexts – with a friend, a lover, an

animal, a tree, a piece of text, or God. In *I-It* connection, we have agendas, we strategize, we make things happen. When we stand in the connection of *I-Thou*, we have no agendas. We aren't aspiring to any result. And that includes results such as greater understanding or more heartfelt connection. We aren't trying to make anything happen.

Here is Buber's language: "The *Thou* encounters me by Grace – it cannot be found by seeking. ... The basic word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a *Thou* to become; becoming *I*, I say *Thou*. All actual life is encounter."²

And yet, life according to Buber is not and cannot be lived solely inside the speech act of *I-Thou*. To function on this earth as incarnate beings, it is imperative that we also stand in the speech act of *I-It*. Both are necessary: "This is the sublime melancholy of our lot: that every *Thou* must become an *It* in our world."³ And again: "...I prize science, so called 'objective knowledge.' Without it there is no orientation in the world of 'things' or of 'phenomena,' hence no orienting connection with the space-time sphere in which we have to pass our individualized time on earth."⁴

There are aspects of Buber's thought that leave me puzzled and dissatisfied. Nevertheless, his central vision, has been of considerable help to me as I struggle to arrive at a more enlightened way of housing my *together's* and my *apart's*. Buber provides me with a useful map, a map reminding me that, as I move

Footnotes:

[1] Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*. Novato, New York: New World Library, 1997.

[2] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translator: Walter Kaufmann. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970, p. 62. Note: Professor Kaufmann translates the German *Du* as *You*. In deference to a more traditional reading of the text, I've taken the liberty of replacing *You* with *Thou*.

[3] *Ibid.* P. 69.

[4] Martin Buber, *Philosophical Interrogations*, ed. Sidney and Beatrice Rome. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964, p.48.

toward my next place, I must walk with contradiction. I am called to speak *I-Thou*; I am called to speak *I-It*. And I am called to appreciate how both ways of speaking can be conduits to the sacred.

Return with me now, for a moment, to our friend, Reb Tevye. Was he playing it safe when he responded paradoxically to Avram's "they can't both be right"? Or was he being a conduit of a deep wisdom – a wisdom that sustained his forebearers through their times of blessing and through their times of near despair? Like most of us, I would submit, he was in between. He was doing both.

The difficulty of the task confronting all of us who till in the gardens of cross

cultural and cross religious understanding should not be minimized. If we are to do the real work, if we are to reject half measures, heart warming comity will not suffice. We must be willing to confront and challenge the Tevye within us who adopts a play-it-safe approach. Then but only then, will we be able to embrace the Tevye who knows that subtly, mysteriously "you're wrong" and "we're all right" can both be true. Then but only then, will we be able to properly celebrate the hidden gifts of *either/or* and the life transforming wisdom of *both/and*.

Ira Gordon



Ira L. Gordon is the editor of *Interfaithings* and a member of Mayim Rabim Reconstructionist Congregation in Minneapolis. In his gilded youth, he was a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, a student of Walter Kaufmann's, and a professor of philosophy. Currently, he divides his time between astrological counseling, interfaith work, playwriting, choreography, and pulsing pizzicatti of Hosannah. He can be reached at takunow@live.com.

Wanted: Your Input

On October 19, 2008, the Interfaith Bridging Initiative and the University of Minnesota Human Rights Center will be hosting a one day conference, entitled *The Gifts and Challenges of Controversy in Interfaith Work*. (Cf. the announcement on p.10.) One objective of the event will be to provide participants with basic tools to be employed in dealing with conflict. And to that end, the conference will begin with a debate. That's where you come in. Below you will find possible debate questions. Does one of these questions particularly galvanize your interest? Appeal to you more than the others? Let us know your preference. And if you're so disposed, tell us why. Send your e-mail responses to takunow@live.com. Just one caveat: Because of time constraints, we will need to hear from you by noon on June 16th in order to factor your response into our theme selection process. The question selected will be announced in our Autumn issue of *Interfaithings* and posted on our website, www.interfaithings.org.

Possible Questions for the Oct. 19 Conference on Controversy

1. With reference to your religious beliefs...
Resolved: *Illegal immigrants should be aggressively identified and returned to their countries of origin.*
2. With reference to your religious beliefs...
Resolved: *The Israeli government should dismantle all its West bank settlements within 12 months.*
3. With reference to your religious beliefs...
Resolved: *All parents of children born on American soil should be deemed legal residents of the United States of America.*
4. With reference to your religious beliefs...
Resolved: *All illegal immigrants should be given legal status in the United States and all fences/border guards should be withdrawn.*
5. With reference to your religious beliefs...
Resolved: *All migrant farm workers should be exempt from American illegal immigrant laws and regulations.*

Continued on the next page.

Wanted: Your Input Continued from the previous page.

Questions for the Oct. 19 Conference on Controversy Continued

6. With reference to your religious beliefs...

Resolved: *The annual income of all U.S. citizens should be capped at \$500,000, and all money thus saved should be used to raise the salaries of the poor.*

7. With reference to your religious beliefs...

Resolved: *"Moments of silence" in the public schools constitute prayer and should therefore be deemed unconstitutional.*

8. With reference to your religious beliefs...

Resolved: *The United States government should cut off all further funding for the military occupation of Iraq and convert said monies into funding for Iraqi reconstruction, green collar jobs, medical assistance for everyone, and access to education from early childhood through University.*

The Freedom To Believe... Baha'is in Jeopardy

Editor's Note: One of our goals at *Interfaithings* is to bring to your attention events and developments of interfaith interest. That includes events and developments impacting our assorted efforts to further interfaith conversation and to support the right of all faith practitioners to worship and live in accordance with their values. In that spirit, we offer the following information, culled from the website of the Freedom To Believe Foundation.

On May 14, 2008, six members of a committee overseeing the needs of Baha'is in Iran were arrested in Tehran on grounds that they were engaged in activity undermining the security of the Iranian nation. Since then, the six leaders have been held incommunicado, without access to lawyers or relatives. A seventh leader was arrested in early March in the city of Mashhad. These arrests call to mind the abduction and/or arrest of

members of Iranian Baha'i governing councils in the 1980's – none of whom were ever seen or heard from again.

These actions directly violate a resolution adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on November 25, 1981. Article 1. of that resolution reads in part: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his[her] choice and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his[her] religion or belief in worship, observance, practices and teaching."

To learn more about the current crisis in the Iranian Baha'i community, please refer to:

<http://www.freedomtobelievefoundation.com/>

If you should care to communicate your concern to members of the local Baha'i

community, the following addresses should serve...

The Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Saint Paul

kikidiggs@yahoo.com

The Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Minneapolis:

mplslsa@comcast.net

BULLETIN BOARD

Upcoming Interfaith Events in the Twin Cities Metro Area

Ongoing Activities

Islamic Christian Dialogue -

Third Sundays - 2:00–4:00 PM

Hosted by the Islamic Center of Minnesota and the Minnesota Council of Churches

Location: at the Islamic Center of Minnesota, 1401 Gardena Ave. NE, Fridley, Minnesota

Call Gail at (612) 230-3210 Or:
www.mnchurches.org - No admission fee

Interfaith Conversations with Other Café

Third Wednesdays - 6:30–8:30

Interfaith dialogue

Hosted by the St. Paul Interfaith Network

Topics/questions of faith change at every conversation.

Location: the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches, 1671 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55105.

Registration requested:
joan@pleromacoaching.com

Cost: \$5.00 Donation

For more information contact Joan at (651) 641-0946 or Katie at (952) 432-3654. The conversation café model is described at the following web site: www.conversationcafe.org.

For more information or for room reservations, please contact the Jay Phillips Center for Jewish-Christian Learning at (651) 962-5780 or e- mail: klschierman@stthomas.edu.

Cost: \$500

The Gifts and Challenges of Controversy in Interfaith Work

Sunday, October 19, 2008, 1:00 PM – Evening

Co-hosts: The Interfaith Bridging Initiative & The University of Minnesota Human Rights Center

Location: Law School, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Key Note Speaker: Prof. Kenneth Fox, Director, Graduate and Undergraduate Conflict Studies, Hamline University. Also: Breakout sessions and exercises providing hands on tools for working creatively with controversy. The conference will include a light meal.

For further information, call Ira Gordon at (612) 861-6040.

Events

Animating the Biblical Experience

Monday, June 16 – Friday June 20, 2008, Noon

A training in the art and craft of conducting Bibliodrama, conducted by Dr. Peter A. Pitzele.

The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota