



The Joseph Interfaith Foundation

United in a Vision for Truth

Building Trust, Peace and Harmony Through Interfaith Relations

6th Feb. 2012- MCB Event, House of Lords

Your Excellency, Lord Sheikh, Dr Manazir, Mr Farooq Murad, honourable guests

It is a privilege indeed to have been asked to speak at this important occasion.

I say “privilege” not just as a matter of rhetoric, but as a specific reference to the first part of the topic for today’s meeting, namely, building trust. I am privileged because I feel I am trusted in my position to have been asked to speak.

As most of you know, I have been deeply involved in Muslim-Jewish interfaith relations for over twenty five years. Let me say that it has never been merely a profession for me but a vocation. It is also well-known that Muslim-Jewish interaction is one of the most challenging areas of interfaith relations in this country.

Since a year ago, we have been witnessing unprecedented events in the Middle East as the tectonic plates of leadership and old regimes crack and shift towards an as yet not settled future. The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to remain unresolved and it seems that there is not much hope for a bilateral resolution in the very near future. How do all of these affect or not affect Muslim-Jewish relations in this country? Here are a couple of observations based on experience.

I am well-aware of the politically correct statement: “What happen elsewhere does not or should not affect our interfaith relations here.” While this may be true on a superficial level, I came to the conclusion a long time ago that regrettably it is not so. It seems to me that what happens elsewhere does indeed affect our interfaith relations here, and if we deny it we are either in fantasy land or realms of wishful thinking. Neither does preaching to the converted, nor engaging with those who do



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not have a genuine constituency in the community and at best only represent themselves is going to be a confluence for a realistic Muslim-Jewish relation in this country.

Experience has proved that none of the above will get us any further than the niceties of what I have long called “meeting and greeting”. If we wish to build realistic, sustainable and productive interfaith relations in this country, we must acknowledge these issues first and then we may be better able to see the wood for the trees and suggest an achievable way forward.

That is why I began to speak with the matter of “trust”. The issue of gaining trust in the eyes of your dialogue partner is vital in building sound interfaith relations, particularly Muslim-Jewish. Dialogue is not dialectic. The former requires no trust, while the latter is built on trust. Therefore, it seems to me that political agendas imposed on interfaith relations are not perceived as positive, though genuine support and encouragement by the political leadership is empowering and at times helpful. Most of all, we must first prove ourselves to our fellow dialogists to be genuine and with truthful intentions. We must have the strength to speak the truth while hearing the truth- no matter how bitter-tasting it may be - and still believe in working together for the sake of peace among God’s creation. Trust can not be built on less than truth; and truth is the major principle of all faiths.

The Prophet of Islam was called *Mohammad al-Amin*, “Mohammad the trustworthy one.” An appellation he earned after many years of working as a trustworthy leader and negotiator of major caravans of merchandise. In Judaism, God is often referred to as ‘Emet (the Truth). May it be God’s will that we go forward to build our interfaith relations based on truth and trust.