



**8<sup>th</sup> annual Doha Interfaith Dialogue Conference**  
**Tuesday, October 19, 2010-Plenary Session #1**

Rabbi Marc Schneier, Vice President, World Jewish Congress and Chairman, World Jewish Congress United States; President, The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, [www.ffeu.org](http://www.ffeu.org)

For generations, there has been a series of misunderstandings by Jews and Muslims on what the other religious community believes and practices. These misperceptions and other societal and political factors have unfortunately led to tensions between our two communities. Both the Jewish and Muslim communities are descended from the children of Abraham and like any sibling relationship it is vital that our communities remember our shared roots and strive to trust and support each other.

The sacred task we all face as parents is raising our children with a solid foundation of religious values and traditions. Today, more than ever, we share a solemn responsibility to ensure that our children grow into caring and responsible human beings.

In Judaism, we teach our children that what matters in life are values and not valuables. As noted in Deuteronomy (8:11-14), the Torah specifically warns us against materialism because it will lead us away from God. *"Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commandments, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. <sup>12</sup> Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*

The Mishnah points out that when a man leaves the world, neither silver nor gold nor precious stones accompanies him, but only the Torah he has learned and the good works he has carried out. Judaism, like Islam, is a practical, down to earth guide for living a fulfilling life where one's personal needs are satisfied by taking care of one's family and being of service to others.

In that same vein, Judaism and Islam instill the direct responsibility of reaching out to help others in the community. Jews are commanded to give charity or *tzedakah* of one tenth of our earnings. Similarly, Muslims are required to give *zakat*. We as parents must not only teach this to our children, but role model it as well.

And role models are what we are to our children. We nurture their every step and every decision. And especially in today's world, we must lead our children by example. The Ten Commandments not only



transmit to our children a moral code that will guide them through life, but as a result of our parental behavior the laws provide a compass for our children to measure the concepts of integrity, respecting oneself and others and balancing work and play. In the process, our children learn to appreciate and understand that *"The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord and he watches all paths."* (Proverbs 5:21)

I am now co-authoring a book with Imam Shamsi Ali, spiritual leader of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the largest and most prestigious mosque in New York City. Imam Ali and I are analyzing difficult and controversial passages from the Torah and the Quran. We are presenting the voice of moderation when reviewing these sacred texts, making this book an invaluable resource in advancing Muslim Jewish relations to communities worldwide. At the end of this past summer, Imam Ali and I wrote a joint oped for the Washington Post, entitled "The Spiritual Convergence of Rosh Hashanah, Eid al-Fitr and 9/11." The following is a passage from that piece and most appropriate to my speech today. *"Both the Torah and Quran contain numerous passages enjoining Jews and Muslims respectively to love and protect the 'stranger' in their midst. In Leviticus 19:34, God commands the Jewish people, 'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.' The Quran praises, 'Those who show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves' (Surah 59, (Exile) Verse 9). When the great Rabbi Hillel was asked to sum up the entire Torah in concise fashion, he responded, 'That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.' Similarly the Quran enjoins 'That which you want for yourself, seek for mankind.' There are no more important lessons than these to teach our children.*

When we reach out with our children to embrace those around us, both neighbor and stranger, we are joining forces to improve our world. In 2005, I became the first rabbi to speak to a group of students from the Razi School in Queens, NY, the only Muslim day school of its kind in the New York Metropolitan area. This program was attended by over 200 students and was broadcast on Arab television around the United States and had a tremendous impact on the community. We led by example.

For two millenia, since the time of Hillel, our rabbis have described the primary goal of humanity as that of *tikkun olam*, or repairing the world, and striving for a state of shalom or peaceful wholeness. We have a moral obligation to do all we can to give comfort to the sick and ailing, to help the weak and powerless and to improve our communities. Both Judaism and Islam share this common belief system. In this context, in 2008 The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FEEU) introduced the first-ever Weekend of Twinning<sup>sm</sup> in cooperation with the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the World Jewish Congress and with the support of His Majesty, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. Over 50 mosques and 50 synagogues representing over 100,000 Muslims and Jews throughout the United States and Canada joined together to confront Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and to strengthen the relationship between the Jewish and Muslim communities. We led by example.

Last year, the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Weekend of Twinning<sup>sm</sup> of Mosques and Synagogues culminated in 100 mosques and 100 synagogues joining together on the theme "Building A Common Agenda" to embrace social issues together as one community. Topics included saving the environment, fighting poverty, immigration reform and confronting Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Twinned congregations joined us from seven European countries, including Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Netherlands. In France, where Muslim-Jewish tensions have been especially high, 19 mosques and 19 synagogues twinned with one another. We led by example.



In two weeks, we will once again lead by example. The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Weekend of Twinning<sup>sm</sup> of Mosques and Synagogues is scheduled for November 5-7, 2010 and Latin America will be joining our worldwide network. To date, programs are being planned in Argentina and Brazil. We will also extend our reach in North America and Europe to maximize participation of mosques and synagogues across these continents and have been asked to initiate programs in Australia, Israel, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda.

Our world, our children's world, is a better place when we come together to build ties of friendship and trust with each other. Our similarities are ultimately much greater than our differences. Muslims and Jews, all the children of Abraham, share a common faith and a common fate. As noted in the 2008 FFEU public service announcement which ran on CNN featuring six imams and six rabbis joining together to denounce Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, *"We are rabbis and imams standing side by side, knowing that our words and our actions will determine our future."* The overwhelming success of the Weekend of Twinning<sup>sm</sup> proves that Muslims and Jews across North America and Europe are keen to connect with each other and to build a movement dedicated to nurturing communication, reconciliation and cooperation between our two communities and creating a better world for our children.

We are uniting people across the globe to work together. From New York to California, from Canada to Paris, Russia to Doha and everywhere in between, Muslims, Jews, imams and rabbis are leading discussions, workgroups and panels on ways to confront hate in our communities. We can build sustainable ties of understanding and trust and we can lead by example. In the end, it is our worth before God that is important, not our wealth. In both Judaism and Islam, our rigorous and sustained commitment ensures that our children will grow to maturity committed to service to God, service to our own people and to all mankind.

In closing, I would like to quote my partner Russell Simmons who summed it up beautifully in an oped piece he wrote last month in USA Today, *"It's our responsibility, as we raise a generation of post-9/11 Americans, to teach our children the mutual tolerance and respect that informs our founding documents, and that inspired past generations to extend and expand the rights available to all Americans. As we are taught from Proverbs 22:6, we should 'train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.' We should also remember the words of Mahatma Gandhi: 'If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.'"*

***The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, under the leadership of Rabbi Marc Schneier, President, and Russell Simmons, Chairman, is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting racial harmony and strengthening inter-group relations. The Foundation, founded in 1989, has offices in New York City. Please visit our website at [www.ffeu.org](http://www.ffeu.org)***