

The  
Faith  
& Belief  
Forum



Understanding Interfaith -  
What? Why? How?

NEWS

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**2025**



What is Interfaith & Why Interfaith?





# Why Interfaith? Allport's 1954 Social Contact Theory



**Imagine you have  
a new classmate  
who seems  
different to you...**



**At first you  
might not  
understand  
them...**

**But if you  
spend  
time  
together...**

**Playing a  
game... talking...  
working on a  
project...**

**You start to  
see how much  
you have in  
common!**



Social Contact Theory says that when people from different groups meet and work together in a positive way, they are more likely to become friends, understand each other better, and be less unkind to one another.



Why  
Interfaith?

**NGOs**

## Principles for Effective Intergroup Contact

- Get into small groups
- See principles below
- As a group agree on which phrase 'fits' into which principle

### PRINCIPLES:

<b>EQUITY</b>	<b>SAFE BUT CHALLENGING</b>	<b>MEANINGFUL ENCOUNTERS</b>	<b>TIME &amp; SPACE FOR REFLECTION</b>	<b>RECOGNITION &amp; RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCE</b>	<b>CREATIVE WAYS TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER</b>
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### PHRASES:

Treating everyone fairly and making sure everyone is treated the same.	Making sure everyone has the same chances and is included, no matter what.	Doing things that are important and help you learn and grow	Moments that make you feel happy, proud, and ready to do amazing things
A place where people help each other and also learn exciting new things.	Feeling safe while also being encouraged to think and ask questions.	Times when you can think carefully and figure things out	A place where you can take your time to understand and think about things
A place that feels good but also helps you grow and learn new things	Building strong friendships and talking about things that matter.	Respecting what makes each person unique and special	Loving and appreciating how everyone is different and special



Examples of Interfaith in a Different Time





# The Cairo Genizah - Interfaith in Medieval society in the Middle East

## Introduction:

In the Middle Ages, most Jewish people lived in Islamic lands, including Egypt. Instead of being separated, they lived in mixed neighborhoods alongside Muslims and Christians.

Arabic was the common language, though Jews often wrote it using the Hebrew alphabet.

Under Islamic law, Jews & Christians were considered "dhimmi" (protected people), meaning they could freely practice their religion as long as they followed certain rules, such as accepting Islamic rule & paying a tax.

Thanks to these documents, we can learn how Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived, worked, and interacted in medieval Egypt.

In an 11th-century synagogue in Cairo, a Genizah was filled not only with old prayer books but also letters, legal papers, business records, poetry, and even shopping lists!

We know a lot about Jewish life in medieval Egypt thanks to the Cairo Genizah. A Genizah (ghen-ee-zah) is a special storage room in a synagogue where old religious writings are kept.

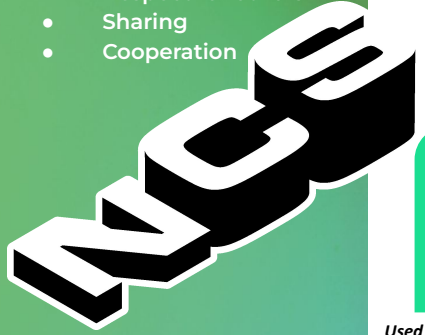
# NGS

# TASK:

## What can we infer from these examples about how people of different faiths lived together?

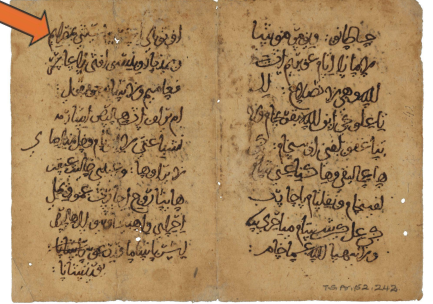
For example:

- language & cultural sharing
- Interfaith interaction, communication
- Friendship
- Living together
- Community
- Networking
- Respect for others
- Sharing
- Cooperation



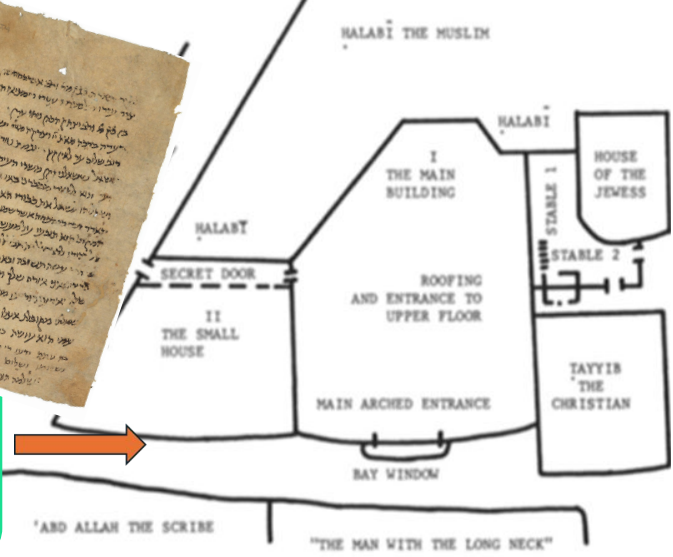
**1. Bible in Arabic script**

This Bible is written in the Hebrew language but using the Arabic alphabet. Some Jews chose to write using Arabic script because they believed Arabic's bigger alphabet presented a more correct way to pronounce the original Hebrew text (Arabic has 28 letters and Hebrew has 22).



**2. Quran in Hebrew script**

This fragment from the Quran, written in the Arabic language but using the Hebrew alphabet. Some Jews were interested in learning about Islamic theology, but the person who wrote this text probably had other plans. After the Quran text there are some omens (fortune telling) for travelling – this was written by a Jewish magician who used portions of the Quran as part of the magical forecast.



**3. Letter on behalf of a Muslim friend**

Solomon son of Judah was the head of Egypt's Jews in the mid 11th century. He wrote this letter to his friend Abraham who was an important figure in the court, asking Abraham to use his influence with the governor and intercede for Solomon's Muslim friend Qayn ibn 'Abd Qadir. Qayn is currently in hiding, trying to avoid arrest for his political loyalties. Solomon writes 'speak to the ruler so that he does not harm him... whatever he does to this man Qayn he also does to me.'



**4. A mixed neighbourhood**

This parchment was used by the court scribe to make notes for the sale of part of a compound. The boundary of the property and the abutting houses are carefully described, revealing details of the mixed nature of this neighbourhood in old Cairo. The neighbouring houses are inhabited by a scribe, a man with a 'long neck', a Jewish woman, a Christian man, and a Muslim man.



Interfaith in Recent Times

NEWS

# Interfaith in Recent Times

What impact may these examples have had? (on individuals, communities, issues)

What can we learn from them?



## Three Examples of Interfaith in Recent Times:

**Interreligious dialogue is as imperative today as it ever has been – The Irish Times, Sr Kathleen McGarvey, Tue Nov 16, 2021**

My own story can attest to that. I was a missionary in Kaduna in northern Nigeria. Nigeria is a great country with a booming population, now nearly 200 million, about half Christian and half Muslim; the north, where I was based, is majority Muslim.

Conflict too often erupts, primarily due to poverty, insecurity and bad governance, and issues are framed along the lines of religious identity.

[...]

This violence is extremely destructive, with many lives lost and properties and livelihoods destroyed. As in most cases throughout the world, women suffer the brunt of poverty and are too often voiceless.

[...]

Thus, we established the Interfaith Forum of Muslim and Christian Women's Association which is commonly known as the Women's Interfaith Council (WIC). This organisation has grown and developed primarily due to the work of committed and convinced Muslim and Christian women of faith.

[...]

It is through meeting each other as human beings, and not as 'Muslims' and 'Christians', that we can begin to overcome our prejudices about each other, learn to appreciate each other in our needs and beliefs, and learn to coexist and build a peaceful and just world.

**35,000 unite for Mitzvah Day: UK's biggest day of interfaith social action - Jewish News, Michelle Rosenberg November 27, 2024**

More than 35,000 people from all backgrounds came together last weekend for Mitzvah Day, Britain's biggest interfaith day of social action.

[...]

A total of 2,500+ projects were undertaken, encompassing care home visits, cooking for those in need, litter picks, card-writing, park clean-ups, and food bank and winter clothing collections.

All embodied Mitzvah Day's 2024 theme of 'Stronger Together', defying the forces that threaten to tear us apart and uniting to support local charities and build bridges of commonality.

[...]

Rabbi Baginsky said: "This was a heartwarming event on a very special day. Mitzvah Day provides us all with an incredible opportunity to take part in making the world a little bit better and remind ourselves how much stronger we are when we work together."

Imam Hafiz said: "Whether through zakat in Islam or tzedakah in Judaism, our shared traditions remind us that caring for others is not just an act of kindness but a sacred duty. Mitzvah Day beautifully reflects these shared values, bringing us together to strengthen our communities and make a meaningful difference."

**Corrymeela: Together is better**

Corrymeela officially started in 1965 in Northern Ireland. 'Corrymeela' means 'harmony hill'. Corrymeela began with the idea of 'community'. The aim was to start a Christian community that could act as a bridge between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland where tensions and conflict had created a divided society. They offered spaces for people 'to meet safely, have difficult conversations well and support one another. As we did so, we built a network of relationships based on trust and reconciliation.'

Today Corrymeela works with people from around the world, from many different communities, cultures, faiths and beliefs. "In our increasingly divided world, we support thousands of people from different backgrounds to live well together."

**How do they do what they do?**

Open invitations to meetings with people from all religious and non-religious beliefs on social, cultural, political and religious themes

Events allowing people across different faiths and beliefs to come together in a safe and peaceful environment

Opportunities for young people to meet across difference and ask questions of each other

Supporting Catholic, Protestant and mixed faith schools to work with each other on projects



How to Interfaith? Preparing for 'Good'  
Interfaith Encounters





Good Interfaith activities need to start with some reflection & recognition of where we stand... where others may stand... & how we can come together.

# Preparing for 'good' Interfaith Encounters

Pick one of the following 'HOT' topics that you feel passionate about:

SOCIAL MEDIA

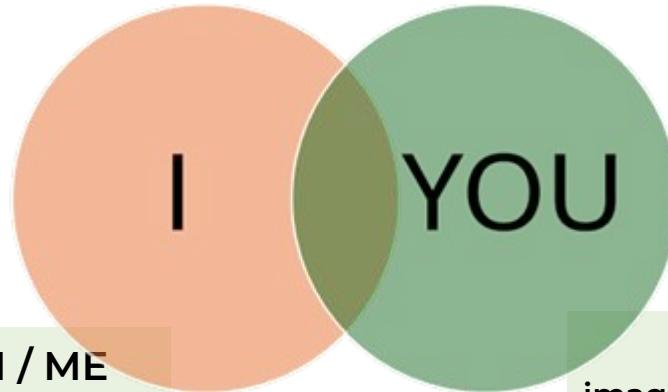
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

POLITICS

TECHNOLOGY

EDUCATION

SOCIETY



## 1. Start with I / ME Self reflection

**Where** do I stand?  
**What** influences my views / values?  
**Why** do I feel the way that I do?  
**How** might that make me act or behave in certain situations?

## 2. Move onto YOU imagine what others may say

**Where** might others stand?  
**What** experiences, values & views might influence them?  
**How** may they be feeling? **Why**?  
**How** might this make them act or behave?

How to  
Interfaith?

**NCES**

# Preparing for 'good' Interfaith Encounters

continued...

How might **WE** come together in joint spaces and places to interact?

How to  
Interfaith?

**NCS**

Keep Social Contact Theory Principles in mind

EQUITY

SAFE  
BUT  
CHALLENGING

MEANINGFUL  
ENCOUNTERS

TIME & SPACE  
FOR  
REFLECTION

RECOGNITION &  
RESPECT  
FOR  
DIFFERENCE

CREATIVE WAYS  
TO LEARN  
FROM  
EACH OTHER

**FUN!!!!**



## EXTENSION ACTIVITY



# Interfaith in the UK

## Levels of Interfaith across communities

(the below often overlap).

### 1.State-Led Interfaith

Government-driven, outcome-focused representation of faith communities, e.g., the COVID-19 Taskforce. TOP - DOWN

### 2.Formal Civil Society Interfaith

Structured networks coordinating interfaith activities, fostering long-term social cohesion. NATIONAL AND MORE LOCAL

### 3.Informal Civil Society

**Interfaith** Flexible, grassroots efforts tied to local causes, with less institutional oversight but dynamic engagement. HYPER LOCAL & OFTEN MORE SHORT-TERM

## Types of Interfaith Engagement

**1.Informal Interaction** – Casual encounters fostering awareness and respect (e.g. sharing a meal, sports, arts or cultural activities)

**2.Dialogue** – Structured discussions to understand beliefs and values (e.g. round table discussions, panels, workshops)

**3.Cooperation** – Joint efforts on social issues like charity, environmental work, or working together to meet a practical need in the local community

**4.Deep Engagement** – Long-term relationships promoting shared learning and unity (all of the above over a continued period of time)

## Interfaith in the UK – Key Aspects:

**Building Bridges:** Encourages learning about each other's beliefs and practices leading to better understanding between faiths.

**Promoting Tolerance:** Reduces prejudice and discrimination by encouraging mutual respect and acceptance of diverse viewpoints.

**Social Action:** Coming together to address shared issues like poverty and the environment.

**Community Building:** Fosters a sense of belonging and strengthened connections across diverse groups.

**Personal Growth:** Enhances self-awareness by deepening understanding of the self in relation to others.

