

## **PALOS VERDES PENINSULA NEWS**

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“God and Allah Need to Talk”

by Akhtar Emon

Thanks to the efforts of Ms. Ruth Broyde-Sharone, Dr. Nur Amersi, and Dr. Julie Heifetz, the interfaith dialog on the documentary “God and Allah Need to Talk” on Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> at the Fairfax Laemmle Theatre in Los Angeles was well attended, and the interfaith organizations had a great opportunity to network.

The 18-minute documentary, endorsed by the Human Relations Commission of Los Angeles, pointed out the new approach of the Islamic Centers in Southern California to welcome individuals of other faiths to celebrate Muslim holidays at the mosques.

The film also documented a Muslim-Jewish “Seder of Reconciliation” held last Passover at Temple Kol Tikvah in Woodland Hills, the initiative of Rabbi Steven Jacobs and Dr. Nazir Khaja, director of the Islamic Information Service. The seder brought together some 150 participants, primarily Jews and Muslims, with some Christian guests, to symbolically reunite Isaac and Ishmael, the two sons of Prophet Abraham. This documentary is recommended as a “must watch” for all religious and interfaith organizations.

The interfaith program also included performances by Naser Musa, the Jordanian Oud player; Alula Tzadik, a Beit Israel musician from Ethiopia; Mitra Rahbar, a singer/entertainer from Iran; Los Angeles musician/composer Stephen Longfellow Fiske; singer Stefani Valadez, who specializes in Ladino melodies from Spain; a group of teenage Muslim ethnic dancers; and the Yuval Ron Trio with percussionist Jamie Papish, who performed sacred music of Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

One of the primary intentions of the event was to be a catalyst for individual citizens to think creatively and to take action to further intergroup/interfaith contact and understanding. Whether one initiates an interfaith dialog, and intergroup sporting event, a synagogue/mosque cultural exchange, interfaith youth activities or breaking bread together, each of us can be inventive within our circle of influence and can contribute to making a difference in our communities with or without joining an existing organization.

This is an important message to send out to residents of Palos Verdes, South Bay, Los Angeles and other cities. The interfaith event itself was an example of the possibility and the power of individuals to generate, create, and take action.

All participants clearly understood that God and Allah are one and the same – it is us who need to talk with each other.

Another highlight of the program included an eloquent speech by L.A. County Sheriff Lee Baca. Baca has shown greater understanding of human rights and fairness in law enforcement. At the end of the program, the audience felt very enriched and energized in promoting interfaith understanding among their respective communities.

*Akhtar H. Emon is the president of the Arabic Language Institute Foundation in Rancho Palos Verdes.*