

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Jewish, Muslim religious leaders seek dialogue and peace

**By Douglas Kindschi,**  
Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute,  
GVSU

Last week, we introduced Imam Abdullah Antepli, one of our speakers for the upcoming dialogue, "Can We Find Common Ground Between Israel and Palestine?" The other panelist will be Donniel Hartman, an Orthodox rabbi and president of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

We are joining the Hauenstein Center at Grand Valley State University and its project "Common Ground" to explore, in a respectful manner, this most volatile topic.

Hartman deeply believes in the necessity of a Jewish state, but he is not above criticism of



Kindschi

its behavior. He argues criticism of one's community has a long tradition in Judaism and can be an act of love.

He seeks to articulate "a vision of Israel that lives up to the highest standards of Jewish values, morality and democracy."

In a recent article in the Times of Israel, Hartman calls for an Israel "that is simultaneously more democratic and more Jewish — more Jewish not in terms of its official laws, but in its ethics, its values, its culture ... where the quality and moral values of what happens within society are seen as being as existentially important as the external boundaries and borders of the country; where religious freedom and where human rights define our society. ... And where Orthodox, secular and traditional learn from each other and respect each other. This is the Israel that I want."

In an earlier essay, Hartman

warned of a culture developing in his country "of political fanaticism and judgmentalism. On both sides of the political map, there are increasing numbers of individuals who cloak themselves in the mantle of certainty and anoint themselves as judges over who is in and who is out, who is loyal and who a traitor."

## RADICAL PROPOSALS

He has refused to participate in a shouting match over these issues but has drawn controversy about his radical proposals. For example, rather than building more settlements, Hartman argues Israel should build cities and towns in Israel so those in the West Bank settlements will have a place to move to when they must leave their residences.

"We need to dream anew and call upon even greater fortitude to begin to build a new infrastructure for the establishment of tomorrow's peace," he writes.

He also has asked penetrating questions, such as: "How does Israel balance its legitimate right of self-defense with the rights of others? Can a Jewish state be reconciled with the values of Jewish pluralism and freedom?

... Not only are we not beyond criticism, we are in dire need of committed voices within our community who will lovingly challenge Israel to not accept the status quo and to continue to strive higher."

In his recent book, "Putting God Second: How to Save Religion From Itself," Hartman again stirred controversy. For him, it is the priority of ethics that goes back to the famous story of the seeker who wanted to learn the essence of Torah from Rabbi Hillel while standing on one foot. Hillel's response was: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others. This is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary. Go and learn."

He laments that Judaism, "as in all the great monotheistic religions, the obsession with God has been allowed to take intolerable precedence over that prime ethical imperative." He continues: "Religion is increasingly serving, not as a catalyst for moral sensitivity, but as a catalyst for national self-righteousness and for isolationism."

Hartman and Antepli have been criticized in their communities for their willingness to engage in dialogue with those whom some would see only as the enemy. We are privileged to learn from these two religious leaders who are willing to seek common ground. Join us in Grand Rapids at 7 p.m. Sept. 8 as we engage in respectful dialogue and discussion on this vital topic. Because of limited seating, registration is required. Visit [interfaithunderstanding.org](http://interfaithunderstanding.org) for information and registration.

Contact: [interfaith@gvsu.edu](mailto:interfaith@gvsu.edu)