

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Can we find common ground between Israel and Palestine?

By Douglas Kindschi,
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Is there hope in a world that seems to be becoming more divided than ever?

Whether it is the political divisiveness in our own country or the seemingly impossible divisions over the Israel-Palestine issue, we are finding polarization rather than hope.

In times of uncertainty or frustration, tribalism reasserts itself as a way to withdraw into the supposed comfort of those "just like me." Religion is not immune from this and, in some ways, it fosters this retreat into tribes, even though nearly all religions teach our common



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humanity and the charge to treat the other as one would wish to be treated. We are reminded of the admonition from the theologian Hans Kung: "There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions."

Religious faith and tradition are important parts of our identity, but identity comes with boundaries. There is a "we" and a "them," and identity can exclude and even lead to dehumanizing the "other."

Professor Avishai Margalit, formerly from Hebrew University, challenged us: "Can Judaism, Christianity and Islam be pluralistic? The question is not whether they can tolerate one another, but whether they can accept the idea that the other religions have intrinsic value. ... They will not only refrain from persecuting the others but will also encourage the flourishing of

their way of life."

I am reminded of my visit to Israel and the West Bank a couple of years ago, when we visited the tomb of the patriarchs in Hebron.

The tomb of Abraham, considered the common ancestor of Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths, should be a place where we can come together to celebrate our common heritage. But it is divided; depending on your religion and nationality, you must approach it from two different entrances.

One entrance is a part of a mosque, and the tomb can be viewed through a window, but Jews cannot enter here, only Muslims and Christians. The other entrance is for Jews, but Muslims are not allowed to enter, and neither are Christians if they are not of the right nationality. Here, Abraham's tomb is viewed

through a window on the other side of the memorial.

How sad that the tomb of this person that our various religions have in common cannot even be viewed in common.

This issue in both its religious and political dimensions will be the theme of next week's dialogue, "Can We Find Common Ground Between Israel and Palestine?" from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Sept. 8 at GVSU's Loosemore Auditorium.

The Hauenstein Center of Grand Valley State University, with the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, will come together with a number of religious and community co-sponsors to explore this vital issue.

Our speakers include Donniel Hartman, an Orthodox rabbi and president of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem; and, Abdullah Antepli, the first

IF YOU GO

'CAN WE FIND COMMON GROUND BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE?'

What: A conversation between Orthodox Rabbi Donniel Hartman and Duke University Imam Abdullah Antepli

When: 7 to 8:30 p.m. Sept. 8

Where: Loosemore Auditorium, Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, MI 49401

imam at Duke University and now their Chief Representative for Muslim Affairs.

Because of limited seating and the importance of the issue, registration will be necessary for entrance.

Visit interfaithunderstanding.org for further information and registration.

— Contact interfaith@gvsu.edu