

## INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

## Beyond tolerance and hospitality to interfaith understanding

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Last month, I wrote about moving beyond tolerance to hospitality, showing kindness to the stranger. As I noted, this call for hospitality is found in the scriptures of all our faith traditions. But one can be hospitable without really getting to know or liking the other person. I can be kind to someone on the street or to someone in need without taking the time to understand or get to know them. To show kindness is a step beyond basic tolerance, but we can go further by pursuing understanding.

In order to understand someone, it is necessary to truly listen



Kindschi

to that person and learn. Conversation is the vehicle for understanding. Through active listening, I can enter into the world of someone whose views and beliefs are different from my own. Conversation also means making my own views and beliefs intelligible to someone who does not share them. A conversation is not a debate; there are no winners and losers. In conversation, one is open to learning from someone who is very different: different lifestyle, different cultural background and different beliefs.

One of the benefits of travel to other countries is to experience this expanded understanding of what it means to be human. To put it very simply, one does not learn a lot by knowing only people like oneself.

As I write this, I am in Istanbul, Turkey, working on a grant to develop a science and religion program for Islam. While here, I am meeting faculty members and graduate students from the various sciences as well as from philosophy and theology. It once again makes me aware of how much we have in common with people from other cultures and religions. We both face issues in science and religion and are honestly dealing with

these differences, within our own traditions and in the different perspectives of our faiths.

Our sessions include reading appropriate scripture passages dealing with creation from the Quran and from the first two chapters of Genesis. We are discussing such topics as God's revelation in nature and scripture, the early scientists and philosophers and their understanding of God's relationship to his creation, contemporary discoveries from physics about the fine-tuning of physical constants that make life possible and how psychology and religion deal with issues of morality.

During our stay, the month of Ramadan has begun, a time

when Muslims refrain from food and drink during the daylight hours. (Note: The interfaith column on this topic two weeks ago by Aly Mageed is available at our website, [interfaithunderstanding.org](http://interfaithunderstanding.org).)

Even in the midst of Ramadan, our hosts are most attentive to our normal patterns and needs for food and drink while they themselves refrain from both during the long daytime hours. In our time together and in our meaningful conversations, we are moving well beyond hospitality to a true respect for each other and for our various beliefs. In the process, we are moving closer to genuine understanding.  
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