

Abraham, One Father – Two Stories An Adult Text Study

Enduring Understanding:

Although different in many ways, Jews and Muslims share a common ancestry and our texts and traditions often overlap. In order to build a stronger relationship in this new age, a greater understanding of our commonalities and differences is an essential first step.

Essential Questions:

1. How do these two stories of Abraham and Ishmael overlap? How are they different?
2. What do the similarities and differences teach us about the relationship between Judaism and Islam?
3. How can we build on the relationship between Abraham and Ishmael and build a stronger relationship between Muslims and Jews?

Reading Resources for the Teacher:

- *Children of Abraham: Jews and Muslims in Conversation*. Prepared in partnership between the Union for Reform Judaism and the Islamic Society of North America
- Littman, Lesley. *Islam: A Short Course*. Union for Reform Judaism, 2007.

[Both resources are available through the Union for Reform Judaism by contacting Deborah Eichenbaum at deichenbaum@rac.org]

Course Overview:

Set Induction (10-15 minutes)
Jewish and Muslim Literature: Background (10-15 minutes)
Two Stories: A Text Study – Part I (20-25 minutes)
Two Stories: A Text Study – Part II
Conclusion (15-20 minutes)

Materials:

A Tale of Two Siblings

- Text study sheet 1
<http://elearning2.huc.edu/jointcomm/programs/10greattexts/10GreatTexts6/Jewish-and-Islamic-Texts.pdf> pages 1-2
- Text study sheet 2
<http://elearning2.huc.edu/jointcomm/programs/10greattexts/10GreatTexts6/Jewish-and-Islamic-Texts.pdf> pages 3-6
- Motif comparison sheets
<http://elearning2.huc.edu/jointcomm/programs/10greattexts/10GreatTexts6/Jewish-and-Islamic-Texts.pdf> pages 7-8

Glossary (identifies key texts in each religion and explains their use in each tradition)

LESSON PLAN

Set Induction (10-15 minutes)

1. Take 2 people out of the room. Have them read A Tale of Two Siblings. Ask one to go back into the room and retell the story from Claire’s perspective. Ask the other to go back into the room and retell the story from Matthew’s perspective.
2. Ask the group. How were these stories different or the same? Why were they different?
3. Explain that even though the siblings were part of the same event, they saw the situation differently. In some ways, Judaism and Islam are two children in the same family.
4. Explain that Islam and Judaism are two distinct religions which both grew up in the same part of the world. According to our traditions, we are related through Abraham and Ishmael. There are many parallels between our religions, in places our traditions even overlap. Yet, today, we are at best mistrustful of each other and at worst antagonistic towards each other. In our class, we are going to begin to examine the ways in which our traditions intersect by studying a common story. Perhaps this will begin to lead us to greater understanding.

Jewish and Muslim Literature: Background (10-15 minutes)

1. Provide the group with the Glossary handout. Review with the group, the terms Torah, Midrash, Qu’ran, and Stories of the Prophets.
2. Explain that the texts we will be studying today come from *Pirkey deRabbi Eli`ezer*, part of Jewish midrash and “Stories of the Prophets,” respectively. Both these texts are based on a story that appears in the Torah. (If you have not already done so, explain that while Muslims do not view the Torah as part of their own canon, it is still recognized as a holy text, and there are many stories in the “Stories of the Prophets” that deal with Biblical stories.)
3. Retell the story of Abraham and Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:9-21)/

Text Study – Part I (20-25 minutes)

1. Divide the class into two groups. Have one group read “Abraham Visits Ishmael: A Jewish Version – annotated.” Have the second group read Abraham Visits Ishmael: An Islamic Version – annotated.”
2. Ask each group to discuss the following questions:
 - a. What problem were the Rabbis/Muslims trying to address and resolve with this story?
 - b. What is the relationship between Abraham and Ishmael by the end of the story? How is this demonstrated?
3. Have each group summarize and share their version of the story with the whole class. Also have them share the answers to their discussion questions.

4. As a class, discuss different views of Abraham in each story, be sure to emphasize the fact that for Jews there is an ethical issue involved in Abraham's actions towards Ishmael, but that for Muslims, Abraham is on a faith journey and his actions are understood as the Will of God.

Text Study – Part II (20-25 minutes)

1. Hand out “Abraham Visits Ishmael: A Comparison,” and explain that this document shows both versions of the story in parallel for comparison purposes.
2. Ask someone to read out loud #4 of the Jewish text. Ask someone else to read out loud #4 of the Muslim text.
3. Discuss the following questions:
 - a. How are these two pieces of text similar? How are they different?
 - b. What other Biblical story about the patriarchs and matriarchs do these exchanges remind you of? How might we draw a connection between all these stories?
 - c. What might be the significance of the “threshold” of the door or home to the story? Why threshold?
4. Ask someone to read out loud #8 and #9 of the Jewish text. Ask someone else to read out loud #8 and #9 of the Muslim text.
5. Discuss the following questions:
 - a. How are these two pieces of text similar? How are they different?
 - b. Why was Ishmael's first wife rejected and the second approved?
 - c. Why is Abraham associated with the determination of the proper wife for Ishmael (think back to the earlier discussion of connections between these stories and others in the Bible)?
 - d. Why would it be so important to have a wife who would be acceptable to Abraham.
6. Ask someone to read out loud #10 of the Jewish Text. Ask someone else to read out loud #10 of the Muslim text.
7. Explain that the “House” built in this text is understood to be the *Ka'ba*, the Muslim shrine at Mecca.
8. Explain that Abraham is known as a builder of altars in Genesis (describe Genesis 12:7-8 and 13:3-4).
9. Discuss
 - a. How does the construction of the Ka'ba in Mecca relate to this biblical trait of Abraham?
 - b. What traits does the qur'anic Abraham share with the biblical Abraham? In what ways are they different.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here? (15-20 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

1. What did you learn about Judaism from our text study?
2. What did you learn about Islam from our text study?
3. What did you learn about the relationship between Judaism and Islam and/or how did your study of these texts change your understanding of how each tradition understands the Abraham-Ishmael story?
4. How can we build on our study experience and begin to build a better relationship between Jews and Muslims in our community?

Continuing Study and Special Resources

The Union for Reform Judaism announced a Jewish Muslim Dialogue initiative at the Biennial in 2007. You may want to consider doing either of the following programs as a follow-up to this class. Materials are available through the URJ at <http://urj.org/muslimdialogue/>.

1. Children of Abraham: Jews and Muslims in Conversation
2. Islam: A Short Course (adult study)

A TALE OF TWO SIBLINGS

by Adam Berger

Marty Philberg has just received a major job promotion that requires that he and his family relocate several states away from their current home. Marty's two children, 17-year-old Claire and 15-year-old Matthew, have very different reactions to the news that they will be moving away just before the beginning of the new school year.

CLAIRE'S STORY

My life is officially over. How could they do this to me? After all these years, I'm finally feeling like I'm fitting in and suddenly I'm going to be totally uprooted. And just as I'm about to begin my senior year! Great timing, Dad. I should have known it was too good to be true: landing a spot on the varsity cheerleading squad... getting to hang out with Tanya and Britney.... And then there's Derek! That's got to be the worst part of all. We were really starting to make it as a couple. I mean, he actually sort of said "hi" to me last month when we passed each other in the hallway. If only we had more time together. Who knows where our relationship could have gone? But now all of that has been flushed down the toilet. I hate starting over. My life totally bites!

MATTHEW'S STORY

My life is officially about to begin. I can't believe my luck! Finally, after all these years of torment, I get to leave those cretins behind and get a fresh start. No more bullying from Russell and his Neanderthal pal Derek... no more teasing every time I pass those bubbleheads Britney and Tanya in the hallway. I'm so sick and tired of getting picked on all the time just because I occasionally like to wear a Star Trek insignia and Spock ears to class. Is that such a crime? I'm ready for a new life. My prayers have finally been answered and I can't wait to shake the dust of this crappy town off my Starfleet-issue boots. At last, I'll have a future that I can look forward to...an opportunity to "Live long and prosper."