

Dear Chavraya,

I am sending a Shabbos message on Thursday, itself cause for exclamation, because we are just about to leave town for my son's college graduation from the University of Arizona in Tucson. This week's Torah portion is Parashat B'har, whose primary focus is the Sh'mitta/Sabbatical year and the Yovel/Jubilee year. From a root meaning "to bring," Yovel/Jubilee can be beautifully translated as a "home-bringing." Such a sense of people coming home to each other forms the framework for a gathering of hope just a few days ago.

On Tuesday of this week, there came to fruition an event that I had put much time into creating. It was a morning of shared learning for imams and rabbis called, "Building Bridges Through Learning." The first of a series, the program emerged from conversations between myself and Ahmed Elewa, whom I spoke about during a sermon last Rosh Hashannah. Ahmed and I have shared a warm friendship that began with our fascination for Hebrew and Arabic parallels and our desire to create more than linguistic bridges between Jews and Muslims. In an email before the High Holy Days, Ahmed gave a title and focus to my sermon when he spoke of our two peoples and communities as being like members of a family long separated from each other and having "sooooo much catching up to do." Working with a small committee we began by creating an opportunity for the clergy of both communities to encounter each other as people. Of some forty participants, many had never before had any such interaction.

Reflecting one of our recent linguistic conversations, Ahmed wrote a most moving and beautiful letter of welcome to the imams and rabbis. Later in the day, after the program, Ahmed left for Egypt to begin a four year period of study. While very sad that he will now be away from Boston for this period of time, I am very grateful for our friendship. I share with you his letter as a beautiful expression of hope and possibility for the homecoming to each other of our extended family.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

Dear Imams, Rabbis and Community Leaders,

Prophet Abraham is described in the Muslim Tradition as "Khalil Allah", or the "Friend of Allah". This description was used to name the city in which he dwelled, Al-Khalil. In Hebrew, the city is named Hebron, which traces back to the same root as "Haver", which also means "friend".

The method of learning we will be using today is called "Hevrutah". In a hevrutah, partners take turns reading a text aloud then embark on a journey of exploration and discussion. They share reactions, formulate insights and partake in an exchange of ideas that encourages freedom of expression and stimulates creative thinking.

The word hevrotah comes from the same Hebrew root as haver, “friend” and havurah, “community of friends”. Your hevrotah is your study partner and learning in this way often leads to a special friendship.

So we gather today to form a community of friends, while remembering the Friend of Allah. May we continue to learn and grow, as individuals, communities and as friends.

Sincerely,  
Ahmed Elewa