

The Sabbath as Resistance
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This past weekend the Imam from Duke University, Imam Antepi, Chief Representative of Muslim Affairs at Duke University and Faculty of Islamic Studies, spoke during Friday Muslim Prayer services here in Hendrix Hall and then again during that evening's Sharat Ha Yam's Shabbat Service with Rabbi Bretton Granatoor.

The Imam was elegant in his expression, so clear and heartfelt and strong. After speaking during the Muslim Prayer service, he taught us Muslim prayers. A sheet was laid in the RE room of the AR where we gathered, Muslim and not, and participated.

Something about putting my forehead to the floor and again and again, allows me to surrender my ego, my sense of knowing the way, and be released somehow, relaxed enough to imagine that there is a source of love and healing that I too can be connected to. And doing it in unison with others makes it all the more powerful.

Imam Antepi told us during the sermon part of Friday prayer service called the Khutba, that it is nearing the time of the Hajj, which is September 1st. This is a most holy of times for Muslims. In Islam, there are Five Pillars: the first is faith, believing in God and that Muhammed, accepted as a man, is his last messenger; the second is prayer, which happens 5 times a day facing Mecca, the place of the Hajj or pilgrimage; the third is charity, if able, one is required to spend a portion of one's income on those less fortunate and interest in considered usury in Islamic countries. It is the personal responsibility of each Muslim to ease the economic hardship of others and to strive towards eliminating

inequality; the fourth is fasting during Ramadan which brings one into a closer relationship with the poor and with god, and then the fifth is the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The *Hajj* is a pilgrimage that occurs during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah to the holy city of Mecca. Every able-bodied Muslim who has the financial means is obliged to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Everyone must dress in clothing which consists of two white sheets. Everyone who approaches Mecca and therefore God, looks the same, rich and poor.

The main rituals of the Hajj include walking seven times around the Kaaba, a building at the center of Islam's most holy mosque, traveling on foot seven times between Mount Safa and Mount Marwah, which adds up to a trip of about 2 miles, and symbolically throwing stones at the devil in city of Mina. I'll talk more about these in a moment.

Islamic teachers say that before such a pilgrimage, one should become self-aware, and undergo a kind of purification. In Islam, this has a specific process but Imam Antepli invited us symbolically all into it. Let's all pretend we are going on a ritual Hajj he said to us. Let's all imagine we are taking a journey to the most sacred place we can imagine and that we need to become self aware and whole before we set off.

What would you need to do to prepare for such a journey my friends? The Imam told us the first thing that Muslims are asked to do is clear their conscience, to ask forgiveness of others they have harmed or transgressed. This reminds me much of the Jewish ritual of Yom Kippur which happens on September 29th this year.

Who do you need to ask forgiveness of? Who have you trespassed against? Who has trespassed against you that you need to forgive for this too is part of purification: forgiveness asking and granting forgiveness must go hand in hand. And what else is there? What else must we look at more carefully in ourselves? Arrogance, greed, pride, wrath...only we can take our own inventory; and we must my friends. These political times are too tempting to point fingers, that must be pointed, but that in pointing we can grow lazy at doing the work of tending to our lives.

Imam Antepli then told reminded us of the story in the Bible that initiated the Hajj, a story that both the Jews, Muslims and Christians share, a time that dates back to Abraham. According to the Bible, Abraham was ordered by God to leave Hagar with whom he had a son, Ishmael, alone in the desert. In search of water, Hagar desperately ran seven times between the two hills of Safa and Marwah, the same run that Muslims must re-enact during the Hajj, but found none.

According to Islamic tradition, Hagar returned in despair to Ishmael, her son, and saw the baby scratching the ground with his leg and a water fountain sprang forth underneath his foot. Later, Abraham was commanded to build the Kaaba, the ancient building which Muslims circle during the pilgrimage (which he did with the help of Ishmael) and to invite people to perform pilgrimage there.

During the Hajj, as I mentioned, one runs between these 2 hills Safa and Marwah, that Hagar did, screaming out to God for water for a child thirsting to death. Help me God. Help me.

I love this ritual and feel that we could so benefit from running between these hills and screaming out collectively as a people for mercy, first because it means that we need more than our

individual minds can conceive to find the solution to our grieving, roiling, angry, polarized global situation; it shows the need for a collective listening and gathering and intelligence to bring us to the next step.

And second because it would give voice to our despair that I see all around and in us. Do you see and feel it too? Rather than eating or drinking or being plugged in all day or turned away, we could be screaming out together, en masse, while running in the desert, Help me god; my child (my earth, my brother, my sister, my mother, my father, my home, my soul) is dying of thirst.

And then there is one more part of the Hajj that fascinates me. Throwing rocks at the devil. It was Abraham who threw rocks at the devil in the Bible. When God calls Abraham and he answers, Here I am. Don't you love that answer? Here I am? Not what or yes or can I help you but Here I Am! So much has been written about that answer from Abraham. As an aside, there is a woman who works with us on the Immigration Resource Center once a month helping with translation and when there is a need, and no matter what is asked of her, she always answers the same way, "You can count on me." I told her the other day she reminds me of Abraham.

Anyway, God asks Abraham to do something and the devil comes to dissuade him from his task and Abraham throws stones at the devil, and this throwing of stones is reenacted too during the Hajj.

I know we do not believe in the devil or in a kind of God who gives orders or in the particular order that this God gave to Abraham, but I wonder if still there is some medicine here for us. What keeps us from doing what our best selves ask of us?

What keeps us from our greatest good? And what are the stones made of that we can learn to throw? Mine are made of community, this Meeting House, love, belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all people, that love is stronger than death, that we are all still worthy of fighting for. What are your stones made of? What allows you to wake and say, Here I am?

This sermon is entitled, “The Sabbath as Resistance” and I seem to have resisted speaking of the Sabbath until now! Rabbi Gary Bretton Granatoor said something that has stayed with me about the Sabbath, which is the day of rest for the Jews, when he spoke last Friday during Shabbat. He said, “The Sabbath, reminds us that we are not slaves.” As the Sabbath was established in the Bible to commemorate not only the day God rested from creating the world, but the days the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt, I understood Sabbath in a new way.

That we can choose to rest means that we are not slaves. And there are many ways of being enslaved of course. There is the most terrible way of all, which Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Corker estimates 27 million people still exist in today with the slavery of the forced labor and sex trade. 27 million people.

And there is another kind of enslavement, incomparable to the slavery I just mentioned in every way and one yet important to mention here- the kind that keeps us ensnared in habits and cycles and patterns that can be broken with the right kinds of intervention and love and compassion and care. Sometimes this is simple, as we know, and sometimes very complex.

And Sabbath, learning how to rest, to be still, to be together, to be alone, how to name as sacred something, anything, a time, a place, an hour, a day: can be a way to begin to sort out what we need and how we need it, to untangle what we belong to and

how we belong to it and what needs remain so that we might begin to live taking responsibility for the freedom and privilege given us and how to use it to do good by ourselves and others.

The Sabbath is honored as day of rest when we can reflect and observe our own lives enough to make a difference in them and ask: to whom must I ask forgiveness, to whom must I grant forgiveness, what do I need to let go of, where is love, hope, care, beauty, compassion needed in my own or someone else's life?

How might I say: Here I am? And oh dear friends, how can we even find the space to utter the words if we don't use our privilege to rest enough to utter them?

Let's take a Hajj, I'll meet you, wrapped in what is most easy to put on, with an open heart, arms open to the collective love we share, lifted up and asking: what is needed now and how can I be present to it, asking: please forgive me for the ways I've erred, promising: Here I Am and then looking up and beginning to recognize where it is that we are and who we are here with.

Amen.