

## Shegufa

Hello Everyone,

My name is Dr. Shegufa Merchant and I am a member of the Abraham Festival. I sincerely thank you for your presence here today. It really brings me so much joy to be here with all of you.

Today I will help us journey through this event as your coordinator with help my co-coordinators at the organizing front Jenn Reid and the tech front Pam Van Nest.

Today, we will start with some housekeeping protocols and welcome, diving into our interfaith message and wrapping up with poetry and song, ending with some drumbeats in music.

I would like us to get started with a few instructions and notes about the Zoom protocol from Pam.

## Pam:

Zoom Protocol

## Shegufa

Thank you, Pam.

Most of us here are already familiar with the Abraham Festival and its presence in our community for the last 17 years. The Abraham Festival was founded not by Faith Leaders and not as a consequence of disturbing world events such as 911 but by three women from our very own Peterborough community to celebrate our common heritage as spiritual cousins. The three women are Helen McCarthy from the Christian faith, Elizabeth Rahman from the Islamic faith and Heather Pollock from the Jewish faith. I would like to invite Helen McCarthy to extend our welcome from the Abraham Festival and to tell us a little about the Abraham Festivals work in the community.

## Helen McCarthy

Screen share.

## Shegufa

Thank you very much Helen.

What is our message from the Abraham Festival today?

That WE as a people have faith in each other. Also, irrespective of which faith we choose to follow, all our faiths teach us the common message ' We have to look out and care for one another'.

The current times have offered us an opportunity to reflect and care. More than ever we have been called as a community to come together, to proactively seek out and be present for each other. To keep our eyes and hearts open to people in our communities and internationally. And

our communities have answered that call in so many ways. By staying at home in social distancing, by serving as frontline workers, through prayers and positive intentions or through donating time and money.

Earlier our AF message of oneness has been communicated by meeting and praying in each other's places of worship, the mosque, synagogue or church, today we celebrate that common message of oneness, comfort and being together ONLINE from our own sanctuaries in our hearts and homes.

To celebrate our message that 'all our faiths teach us to care for each other, we have with us today

**Retired Rev. Jessica Stockton** from the United Church. She is also a member of the Abraham Festival Committee. And she is passionate about Interfaith work.

**Rev. Julie van Haften** from the St. James United Church. Julie has been an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada for 21 years. Prior to becoming a minister, she worked in health care.

**Dr. Dan Houpt** from the Beth Israel Synagogue. Dr. Houpt conducts the Jewish services in Peterborough. He practices family medicine and plays a mean guitar at other times. Dr. Houpt has been an ardent supporter of the Abraham Festival over the years.

**Shaikh Habeeb Alli**, Fund Development Manager at the Muslim Food Bank. Habeeb Alli is an Imam and works as Chaplain of prisons and is also a published author and poet. He is also a member of the Abraham Festival.

Today each of our faith leaders will share with us a Reading that they have chosen from their sacred text which speaks to us about caring for one another. They will then share their reflections about each other's readings that give them comfort and wisdom from the background of their own faith teachings.

How will the Readings and Reflections proceed?

I will invite one of our Faith Leaders to present their reading. As each Reading is being shared by our Faith Leaders, the Reading will be made available on the Chat to follow along if you wish.

After the reading is finished, I will invite each of the other two Faith Leaders to share their reflections about the Reading.

Without further ado, I would like to start by inviting Dr. Dan Houpt to present a Reading from the Jewish Faith

**Dr. Dan Houpt with Reading**

Jewish Reading

**Adapted from “The Commandment to Love and Help the Stranger” D'var Torah by Reuven Firestone**

**(Ki Tavo, Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8)**

The commandment to love, include and help the stranger (*ha-ger*) is mentioned more times than *any* other commandment in the Torah — more even than the command to love G-d (*v'ahavta*). The decree is articulated in a number of ways:

"You shall not wrong nor oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20).

"The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens ... for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Leviticus 19:34).

"For the Eternal your G-d is G-d supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome G-d, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, providing food and clothing — you too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

The great Spanish Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (d.1270), reminds us that it was not because of their merit that G-d helped the Israelites, but only because G-d had mercy on them.

We are also commanded to include strangers in our times of joy and community. Farmers were instructed to rejoice and share together “with the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the Eternal your G-d has bestowed upon you and your household.” (Deuteronomy 26:11).

We must always remember how it feels to be oppressed, disregarded and in need. In all of these ways, the Torah expects the collective experience of the Jewish people to sensitize us to the plight of others, especially strangers

**Shegufa**

Thank you Dr. Houpt.

I would like to invite Rev. Julie van Haaften to share her reflections about this Reading.

**Rev. Julie van Haaften**

Reflections from Rev. Julie van Haaften are available on the video.

**Shegufa**

Thank you, Rev. Julie van Haaften

I would like to invite Shaikh Habeeb Alli to share his reflections about this Reading.

**Sh. Habeeb Alli**

Reflections from Habeeb are available on the video.

**Shegufa**

Thank you, Shaikh Habeeb Alli

For all of us who would like to close our eyes and just reflect for a moment, please do.

I would now like to invite Retired Reverend Jessica Stockton to share a Reading from the Christian Faith. Reverend Jessica Stockton is joining us by phone.

**Rev. Jessica Stockton**

Christian Reading

'Come, you who are blessed by God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat,  
I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you took Me in,  
I was naked and you clothed Me,  
I was sick and you looked after Me,  
I was in prison and you visited Me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him,

'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You,  
Or thirsty and give You something to drink?  
When did we see You a stranger and take You in,  
Or naked and clothe You?  
When did we see You sick,  
Or in prison and visit You?'

And the King will reply,

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, my brothers and my sisters,  
You did for Me.'

**Shegufa**

Thank you Rev. Jessica Stockton

I would like to invite Shaikh Habeeb Alli to share his reflections about this Reading.

**Sh. Habeeb Alli**

Reflections from Sh. Habeeb Alli are available on the video.

**Shegufa**

Thank you Shaikh Alli

I would like to invite Dr. Dan Houpt to share his reflections about this Reading.

**Dr. Dan Houpt**

Reflections from Dr. Dan Houpt are available on the video.

**Shegufa**

Thank you, Dr. Houpt

For all of us who would like to close our eyes and just reflect for a moment, please do.

I would now like to invite Shaikh Habeeb Alli to share a Reading from the Islamic Faith.

**Sh. Habeeb Alli**

Islamic Reading

*{And when he came to the well of Madyan, he found there a crowd of people watering [their flocks], and he found aside from them two women driving back [their flocks]. He said, "What is your circumstance?" They said, "We do not water until the shepherds dispatch [their flocks]; and our father is an old man." So he watered [their flocks] for them; then he went back to the shade and said, "My Lord, indeed I am, for whatever good You would send down to me, in need."}* [Quran 28:23, 24]

**Shegufa**

Thank you Shaikh Alli

I would like to invite Rev. Julie van Haften to share her reflections about this Reading.

**Rev. Julie van Haften**

Reflections from Rev. Julie van Haften are available on the video.

**Shegufa**

Thank you Rev. van Haften

I would like to invite Dr. Dan Houpt to share his reflections about this Reading.

**Dr. Dan Houpt**

Reflections from Dr. Dan Houpt are available on the video.

**Shegufa**

Thank you Dr. Houpt.

For all of us who would like to close our eyes and just reflect for a moment, please do.

I would now like to invite all our faith leaders to share **their combined reflections**, stories, personal experiences that help us receive the message how our faiths teach us to look after each other.

I would like Dr. Houpt to lead us into this conversation between the three of them.

**Dr. Dan Houpt, Sh. Habeeb Alli and Rev. Julie van Haaften and Rev. Jessica Stockton**

Reflections are available on the video.

### **Shegufa**

The readings and reflections today reaffirm the premise that loving each other, and loving the stranger, is a central commandment in Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

These messages that we have heard from our faith leaders are from ancient texts, but those ideas are very relevant in the present.... These are very forward-thinking themes!

The beauty is that we are commanded to love and serve the stranger. Right now, (in this era of the coronavirus) it is the stranger who is our hero, who is sustaining and caring for us, - the grocery worker, the medical staff, the truck driver. They are the face of our creator as they care for us and we also contribute to the healing by loving these strangers! We are part of the solution by seeing our creator in and around that grocery store worker, that truck driver, that letter carrier. By staying home, we are actively caring for others; we are protecting the vulnerable in our communities. This is truly our faith in action.

We feel grateful to live in Canada. We feel grateful to have one another. This comforts us. But we also believe that this present dilemma is a call to action, - to proactively look for ways to advocate for those who are so very vulnerable right now- single parents, the homeless, the elderly, low income families and racialized communities.

The diversity of faith backgrounds and heritages within our Festival team also bring us awareness. Never was the old adage to "Think Globally and Act Locally" truer. We keep our hearts and hands open to the needs of people across the world. We are in this together. We don't feel alone, because we answer the unified call to love and care for one another, to find ways to heal each other and our planet.

Be present.

Be grateful.

Stay home and come together.

This time at home has also allowed us to care and give to each other in another beautiful way: through song and poetry.

I would like to ask Shaikh Habeeb Alli to share with us his poem Corona Kindness

The poem is also shown in the chat feature to follow along.

Sh. Habeeb Alli

### Corona Kindness

We are not alone  
Home alone is no longer a movie  
Mosques, Synagogues and Churches empty  
But look at the brighter side of the pulpit

When you cannot congregate  
The online platforms you once demonised now dictate  
No longer a case for racism this virus teaches  
Your best manners it showcases

You may complain of being stuck by social distancing  
But you have a home to stay safe whilst working  
Teaching online is now a fad thing  
But I know from professors what a battle it is uphill!

The laughs and goofy messages you receive daily  
You got to talk to that Aunt or neighbour on TikTok happily  
You had no idea how they were for a long time until Covid haunted you  
And now you are watching Netflix till you turn blue!

This crisis too will Covit like Brexit  
At the turns and twists of every tunnel there is an exit  
The rainbow reminds us like the doctors and nurses who sacrifice  
That there is an end to the gouging price

Look at the kindness of humankind  
Sewing masks and making sanitizers of all kind  
Serving food and delivering hampers  
Police and Doctors on the frontlines our heroes!

If this isn't Faith, what is?  
If this isn't humanity, what will be?  
If this isn't Interfaith, what else?  
Corona kindness dedicated to our care bears!

Shegufa

Thank you so much for sharing this with us Shaikh Habeeb Alli. We really appreciate your poem.

Abraham Festival Interfaith Online Event April 18<sup>th</sup> 2:15 pm

Transcript

I would like to invite Dr. Dan Houpt to share the song he wrote specially for us for today.

The words Peace Shalom Salaam, are a greeting in the three faiths and in the song they appear in the order of the historical emergence of the faiths. The words to the song are shared in the chat box for us to sing along in our homes.

**Dr. Dan Houpt**

Song

Peace Salaam Shalom. Adaption by D. Dan Houpt.

I shall learn from you; and you will learn from me  
When we realize, how grateful we will be

Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam

I will hold your hand, and lift you off the ground  
And we will walk together, what joy and love we've found

Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam

We shall beat our swords into plowshares  
And we shall till the land and grow our garden there.

Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam; Peace Shalom Salaam

**Shegufa**

Thank you so much for sharing this with us Dr. Houpt. We really appreciate your song.

I would like to take this moment to say **thank you** to all of you for being present and joining in from different parts of Canada and the world.

I hope you have found the Interfaith message comforting and have enjoyed the togetherness online. Please reach out to us if you have any questions for the Abraham Festival or any of the Faith Leaders who presented today. The email is visible in the chat box just now.

[abrahamfestivalptbo@gmail.com](mailto:abrahamfestivalptbo@gmail.com)

We will be happy to answer any questions and revert.

I would also like to announce that the Abraham Festival is now postponed to Saturday October 18<sup>th</sup> at Mark Street United Church in Peterborough. More details about the program will be



Abraham Festival Interfaith Online Event April 18<sup>th</sup> 2:15 pm  
Transcript

forwarded to our mailing list. Please write to us on the email if you wish to be added to our mailing list.

The recording for our event today will be available for sharing at a later date for those who have missed it. More information about this will also be provided later.

We invite you to stay enjoy drumbeats in the song as it plays on your screens before we begin to sign out.

Salaams, Thank you and Enjoy.