

2016/2017 Lecture Offerings by Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, International Executive Director of The Abrahamic Reunion

My Life In The Middle: 25 Years as a Front-line Interfaith Peacemaker in Israel & Palestine

Sheikh Ghassan Manasra is an award-winning interreligious peacemaker, scholar, Imam, and dialogue facilitator from Nazareth, Israel, who has been at the head of interfaith dialogue and peacemaking in Israel and the Palestinian Territories for the last 25 years.

He has walked down streets in Israel where on one side he has been stoned by radical Muslims, and on the other by radical Jews. He and his family (his son, also a Sheikh, continues in the path of his father) have been attacked on numerous occasions by radicals seeking to prevent the simple and courageous acts of bringing people of different faiths together in peace in Israel.

His projects – creating unbiased teacher-training programs for Israeli schools, organizing the World Congress Of Rabbis And Imams For Peace, facilitating countless encounters between different faiths and faith leaders in Israel and Palestine, speaking throughout Israel, Palestine, Europe, and North America – are all in the name of bringing peace to the land where he was born, a land torn in violent conflict and separation, a land that he believes can be an example to the world of multifaith and multicultural coexistence.

In his words: “Most people think Muslims are the most radical and aggressive people in the world – it’s not true – and I want to tell you that this Muslim Sheikh decided that I will fight my own radicalism. I realized from the beginning that if I wanted peace to win I would need to come from the inside, and because I am a Muslim, I must clean myself of radicalism and work from within Islam to stop radicalism. I cannot say that I created miracles but I did have successes, to bring people to be part of this way of peacemaking. I cannot say that I am a great hero but I can add my small part to this great process, and you and others can add your parts, and together we can bring light to the earth through our peacemaking.”

Religion As A Force For Peace In Israel & Palestine – The Work of the Abrahamic Reunion

A Solution When The Political Peace Process Has Stalled

Come spend an evening with an international peacemaker from Israel. Sheikh Ghassan Manasra is International Executive Director of the Abrahamic Reunion, a multi-faith group of peacemakers committed to using religion as a force for peace. Its members are committed to the principles of nonviolence, tolerance, coexistence, and a religious, human solution to the ongoing struggle in the Holy Land. They are responding to the tense and violent situation in Israel and Palestine by establishing ongoing projects that embody their ideals of “Love, peace, communication, cooperation, and dialogue among the people of Israel and Palestine, including men, women, Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Druze, as well as other spiritual traditions.”

The projects of the Abrahamic Reunion bring hundreds of people of all religions together – both Israelis and Palestinians – in programs across the Holy Land to eat during Ramadan, walk publicly in demonstration of interreligious and Israeli-Palestinian friendship, study each other’s religious texts in each other’s houses of worship, pray for peace at the border of conflict zones, and get to know each other beyond concept and prejudice. When a synagogue is burned, or a Christian monastery is torched, or a mosque firebombed – the Abrahamic Reunion responds in solidarity by bringing fresh scriptures and praying.

The wounds are open and flowing in the Holy Land, where violence has become commonplace. The Abrahamic Reunion keep hope alive, exemplifying peace amidst conflict. These brave men and women often risk their lives, but still they continue in their desire to help others tear down the walls within their hearts and reunite the “Children of Abraham” in their land.

Understanding Radical Islam – The Perspective of a Moderate Imam, Peacemaker, & Scholar

Radical Islam is a major concern in today's religious and socio-political landscape, but is not a new movement. We can trace Radical Islam's roots to the time surrounding the assassination of the 3rd Caliph Uthman in 656 AD. Radicalism fomented during and after the short Caliphate of Ali, notably via Al-Khuareg, an early Islamic sect.

The actions of Islamic radicals shock the world with agendas of violence, misogyny, and fundamentalism. From this early split in the early Muslim world we can trace offshoots which developed into today's radical Islam made notorious in ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and other terrorist organizations.

Sheikh Ghassan Manasra has lived his life in contrast to Radical Islam – as a moderate Muslim Imam and scholar he has worked with countless Rabbis, Priests, Jews, and people of all religions and races, often while under pressure from radicals. He has overseen countless projects aimed at stymying religious bias, hate crimes, and persecution.

The unique perspective of Mr Manasra helps to illuminate what role Radical Islam occupies in the Islamic world today, contextualizing how their ideology and theology stem from early Islamic splinter sects, and describing the contrast between the beliefs and practices of various radical Islamic movements and the moderate majority of the 1.4 billion Muslims practice and believe in their daily lives.

By more thoroughly understanding Radical Islam's roots, aims, and contemporary outgrowths we can work more wisely for peace and advancing an agenda of interreligious understanding, tolerance, collaboration, and harmonious coexistence.

Sufism in the 21st century: The Moderate, Silent Majority within Islam

Sufism, often described as “the mystical expression of Islam,” in reality informs the moderate movements in the Muslim world today, and comprises the majority of Muslims worldwide. Sufi doctrine is often light and open philosophically and quite apt to collaborate, connect with, and coexist harmoniously with non-Muslims. We can see Islam in a completely different light by focusing on Sufism, that silent majority within Islam which often works on the side of nonviolence, peace, and community. Sufism provides a counterpoint to the portrayal of Islam as a purely radical and fundamentalist religion.

In this presentation we will introduce moderate Islamic Sufi doctrine, analyze Sufism’s contrast to Islamic fundamentalism, and explain the conflict between Sufi and Radical Muslim theological doctrine. We will explore the liberal culture of Sufism and understand its role in informing many contemporary, moderate Muslim movements.