



FACILITATOR'S TOOLS: **INTERFAITH CONVERSATIONS** **ON SHARED VALUES**

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INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Shared values are at the heart of interfaith cooperation. Those from different religious and ethical perspectives often have strong disagreements over vitally important issues. Interfaith cooperation relies on people of diverse perspectives identifying and holding up those values that are shared across traditions. Such values—like a dedication to serving others, caring for the environment, and offering hospitality—are important to interfaith work because they allow those who might disagree profoundly on certain issues to find common ground for dialogue and action. Such shared values are found in some of the most sacred and singular texts of different religions and ethical perspectives: from the Torah and the Qur’an, to the writings of Carl Sagan and the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The purpose of this tool is to **help you lead interfaith dialogue and conversation around shared values.** The tool includes facilitation guidelines, texts focused on specific shared values, and a guide to developing your own shared values dialogue. Ultimately, what give these shared values vibrancy and power in an interfaith dialogue are the **stories of the participants.** Storytelling is a compelling method for communicating the importance of these values; this tool will help you to explore these questions and share stories with others on your campus.

This collection is limited to a few shared values: **dedication to service, conservation and environmental care, alleviating poverty, hospitality, and forgiveness.** Consider selecting a set of texts that speaks to the work that you are doing on your campus or in your community, or to prompt reflection on why interfaith action might be a powerful means to address that issue. This is by no means a comprehensive list of either texts or values—there are many more texts that support the selected values and there are many more values that can, and should, be highlighted.

Whether as inspiration for storytelling, a reflection exercise after a service project, a classroom resource, or simply a means to start a conversation, use this tool to discuss those values, experiences, and commitments that **connect people of different religious and non-religious backgrounds.**

FACILITATION GUIDE

Use this facilitation guide to think about how you'll set a safe space for your interfaith conversation and to help participants to share stories and explore shared values together.

Goals of the conversation

- To help participants discover the shared values across different religious traditions through text, storytelling, and reflection on social action.
- To encourage participants to grow in their own religious and nonreligious identities, learning how to talk about what they value even as they learning to listen to others.
- To build a sense of cooperation and collaboration amongst participants.

Setting a safe space for conversation - 5 minutes

Introduce the kind of discussion we will be having today:

Tell the participants, "You will be asked to talk about your faith or values today with others who don't necessarily share your beliefs and ways of life."

Brainstorm the guidelines for this unique discussion:

- What do you need from yourself and others in order to feel safe having this conversation?
- Take notes on your group's responses and then read the responses aloud to conclude the discussion.

Here's a list of key safe space guidelines. When your group is done brainstorming, add to the list anything you might have missed:

- Everyone has the right to pass
- Everything said is confidential
- Seek clarification if you don't understand something someone else is saying
- Make sure to listen to others without interrupting
- Suspend your judgment
- Use "I" statements
- Remember the importance of the other person's faith or ethical tradition in his or her own life
- Don't expect others to know everything about your own tradition

Texts on the shared value of service - 10 minutes

- Using the set of texts that are most relevant for your group and your conversation, give each participant a sheet with the texts printed on it.
- Ask your group to go around the circle and read the texts aloud. Make it clear that no one has to read if they feel uncomfortable doing so.
- Ask the group to reflect on what they've read: "Did any of these—either from a tradition you identify with or not—particularly resonate with you?" "Did you hear anything that you found challenging or helped you to think about this particular value in a new way?"

- If no one offers a thought or reflection, ask the participants if they have previously read any of the excerpted texts before this activity. For the texts they have seen, ask them to explain where they have read it before and in what context. For the texts that people have not seen before, ask them what stood out from those particular texts. What was interesting about the text? Do they see any similarities with the other excerpts? How do all the excerpts connect with the service they performed today?
- Explain that these texts offer us a chance to think about how we interact with people who are different from us in light of our shared values. Use the texts to begin a reflection on the service project you participated in, to frame a discussion of other shared values your group might hold, or merely to open up a conversation how shared values support interfaith cooperation.

Storytelling as a means of dialogue - 15 minutes

- Ask the group to share their thoughts on the service project they participated in today. Were there any images or moments that especially grabbed their attention?
- Following that, ask a few participants to tell a story about this service experience or another personally meaningful service experience. If they get stuck, share your own reflections on the project today.
- Alternatively, encourage participants to think of an experience that connects to their service work today. This could be a story inspired by their personal history, their family, friends, classmates, or something they read in the news.
- Now, go further by asking participants to reflect on what inspired them to do this work: “What inspired you to do this act of service? Was it something from your faith tradition or moral perspective?” Give participants a chance to share these stories with one another.
- Ask participants to reflect on the connections, similarities, and differences they heard in one another’s story.

Returning to the texts - 10 minutes

- Ask the group to read the texts aloud again. Encourage participants to see if they think about things differently after they’ve listened to stories about inspiration from different traditions.
- Ask, “Is there anything new that sticks out to you as you read through these texts a second time?” “How did you see the themes of these texts playing out in our thoughts from today and the stories we just told?”

Texts on the Shared Value of Service

Bahá'í Tradition of Service (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá)

One amongst His Teachings is this: that love and good faith must so dominate the human heart that all will regard the stranger as a familiar friend, the malefactor as one of their own, the alien even as a loved one, the enemy as a companion dear and close.

Buddhist Tradition of Service (Itivuttaka 18)

If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it.

Christian Tradition of Service (Matthew 25:35)

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Hindu Tradition of Service (Bhagavad Gita 3.10)

At the beginning, humankind and the obligation of selfless service were created together. “Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find the fulfillment of your desires”: this is the promise of the Creator ...

Jain Tradition of Service (Tattvarthasutra 5.21)

Rendering help to another is the function of all human beings.

Jewish Tradition of Service (Deuteronomy 10:17)

For the Lord 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 parentless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Muslim Tradition of Service (Qur'an 93:1-11)

I call to witness the early hours of morning, and the night when dark and still, your Lord has neither left you, nor despises you. What is to come is better for you than what has gone before; for your Lord will certainly give you, and you will be content. Did your Lord not find you an orphan and take care of you? Did your Lord not find you perplexed, and show you the way? Did your Lord not find you poor and enrich you? So do not oppress the orphan, and do not drive the beggar away, and keep recounting the favors of your Lord.

Secular Humanism Tradition of Service (Pablo Neruda)

To feel the intimacy of brothers and sisters is a marvelous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses— that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being and unites all living things.

Sikh Tradition of Service (Guru Granth Sahib)

The individual who performs selfless service without thought of reward shall attain God's salvation.

Texts on the Shared Value of Conservation

Bahá'í Tradition of Conservation (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá)

Briefly, it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving kindness to every living creature...The feelings are one and the same, whether you inflict pain on human or on beast.

Buddhist Tradition of Conservation (Nirvana Sutra)

A tathagata's (buddha's) helping hand sees no distinction of friend or foe. A tathagata always acts for other living beings, not just for him or herself.

Christian Tradition of Conservation (Revelation 4:11)

Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.

Hindu Tradition of Conservation (Isa Upanishad)

Everything in the universe belongs to the Lord. Therefore take only what you need, that is set aside for you. Do not take anything else, for you know to whom it belongs.

Jain Tradition of Conservation (Sutrakrta-anga 1.11.33)

A human should wander about treating all creatures as she or he would be treated.

Jewish Tradition of Conservation (Ecclesiastes 7:13)

When G-d created the first human beings, G-d led them around the Garden of Eden and said: "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it."

Muslim Tradition of Conservation (Qur'an 40:57)

Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of humankind; but most of humankind knows not.

Secular Humanist Tradition of Conservation (Neil deGrasse Tyson)

We are all connected. To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe, atomically.

Sikh Tradition of Conservation (Guru Granth Sahib)

Humans, trees, pilgrimage places, banks of sacred streams, clouds, fields. Islands, spheres, universes, continents, solar systems. The sources of creation, egg-born, womb-born, earth-born, sweat-born, oceans, mountains, and sentient beings. The Lord, knows their condition...having created beings, the Lord takes care of them all. The Creator who created the world takes thought of it as well.

Texts on the Shared Value of Alleviating Poverty

Bahá'í Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity)

Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them... Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty.

Buddhist Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (Itivuttaka 18)

If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it.

Christian Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (1 John 3:17-18)

If anyone has material possessions and sees their brother and sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in them? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongues, but with actions and in truth.

Hindu Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (The Ramayana)

In the kingdom of God there is no premature death or suffering, everyone is healthy and beautiful. No one lives in poverty and want; no one is without learning or virtue.

Jewish Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (Deuteronomy 4:19-22)

When you cut down your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the orphan, and for the widow; that the Lord your G-d may bless you in all the work of your hands... And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.

Muslim Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (Qur'an 24:22)

Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kin, the poor, those who emigrated in God's way: let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful.

Secular Humanist Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (A. Philip Randolph)

A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.

Sikh Tradition of Alleviating Poverty (Guru Granth Sahib)

Those who remember God generously help others.

Texts on the Shared Value of Hospitality

Bahá'í Tradition on Hospitality (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá)

One amongst His Teachings is this, that love and good faith must so dominate the human heart that all will regard the stranger as a familiar friend, the malefactor as one of their own, the alien even as a loved one, the enemy as a companion dear and close.

Buddhist Tradition of Hospitality (Itivuttaka 18)

If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it.

Christian Tradition of Hospitality (Romans 12:13)

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Hindu Tradition of Hospitality (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.2)

Let a person never turn away a stranger from his house; that is the rule. Therefore one should, by all means, acquire much food, for good people say to the stranger: "There is enough food for you."

Jewish Tradition of Hospitality (Deuteronomy 10:17)

For the Lord 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 orphan and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing them with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Muslim Tradition of Hospitality (Qur'an 4:36)

Do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, the wayfarer, and your servants.

Secular Humanist Tradition of Hospitality (Pablo Neruda)

To feel the intimacy of brothers and sisters is a marvelous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses—that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things.

Sikh Tradition of Hospitality (Guru Granth Sahib)

None is our enemy, none is a stranger to us; we are in accord with one and all.

Native American Tradition of Hospitality (Chief Tecumseh, Shawnee Nation)

Always give a word or a sign of salute when meeting a passing friend, even a stranger, when in a lonely place. Show respect to all people and grovel to none.

Texts on the Shared Value of Forgiveness

Bahá'í Tradition on Forgiveness (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace)

Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If someone commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive.

Buddhist Tradition of Forgiveness (Itivuttaka 18)

Anger will never disappear so long as thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind. Anger will disappear just as soon as thoughts of resentment are forgotten.

Christian Tradition of Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32)

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Hindu Tradition of Forgiveness (Mahabharata, Vana Parva, Section XXVIII)

It has been said that the continuation of species is due to humans being forgiving. It is a wise and excellent person who has conquered wrath and shows forgiveness even when insulted, oppressed, and angered by a strong person ... Forgiveness is holiness and by forgiveness is it that the universe is held together.

Jain Tradition of Forgiveness (Tattvarthasutra 5.21)

Subvert anger by forgiveness.

Jewish Tradition of Forgiveness (Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4)

Who takes vengeance or bears a grudge acts like one who, having cut one hand while handling a knife, avenges oneself by stabbing the other hand.

Muslim Tradition of Forgiveness (Qur'an 24:22)

They should pardon and overlook. Would you not like Allah to forgive you? Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Secular Humanist Tradition of Forgiveness (Albert Einstein)

Anger only dwells in the bosom of fools.

Sikh Tradition of Forgiveness (Adi Granth, Shalok, Kabir)

Where there is forgiveness, there is God.

Your Shared Value:

What shared value or values are important to your tradition, or your campus and community? Ask friends, family, classmates, religious leaders, or others from your tradition and other traditions what values are important to them and what texts speak to those values. Write down the value and begin to identify excerpts from important religious, spiritual, and secular texts that support that value. Be sure to be as inclusive as possible, looking for texts and ideas from as many religious and non-religious traditions as you can.

1.

2.

3.

4.

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Come up with a great list? Share them with us and we will consider including them in future resources. Email info@ifyc.org to be in touch.

