

This was an interesting week, my friends, in the arena of interfaith relations. I took part in an interfaith service this past Monday at Marian University. Knowing it is a Catholic university, I expected a certain amount of Christological references, and there certainly were some of those. That's fine—in a setting like that, I don't expect Christians to be less Christian because they have invited me to participate in their event. I also met a local imam, Michael Saahir. I don't know him well yet, but he seemed like a decent enough fellow. I knew two imams in Florida. One I would have been proud to have speak in my sanctuary any time, and the other talked peace talk while he yearned for the destruction of the state of Israel.

So I went to Marian and met many priests and nuns, several ministers, and one imam. Still, if you had told me after the event that this Friday night I would be talking something from the Koran, I would not have believed you.

This talk does not come from my encounter with the imam at Marian. It comes from the debate over the proposed

construction of an Islamic center near Ground Zero in New York. Watching news coverage of this issue, I heard an Islamic woman interviewed. What she had to say is worth sharing in shul.

Her name is Irshad Manji, and she is a professor and author of a book entitled *The Trouble With Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*. I looked at her web site and saw that translations of her book can be downloaded free in the languages of the various countries that have banned her book outright.

Irshad Manji strikes me as the Islamic version of a Conservative Jew. She is observant, but believes certain changes should happen within Islam, just as we in the Conservative movement are observant but have made changes regarding the role of women in ritual life, for example. That is but one area in which she calls for change in Islam. She rejects the violent approach of Muslims she calls Islamists with the same disdain that we, the Jewish world, showed for the infamous Baruch

Goldstein, the Jewish extremist who slaughtered Muslims at prayer at the cave of Machpeilah where the Jewish patriarchs are buried. She is opposed to Park51, the proposed Islamic center, because she is offended by its proximity to Ground Zero. She tells her fellow Muslims that their religion began as a religion of justice, but has been corrupted into an ideology of fear. She goes so far as to say that it is not Israel nor the United States that has corrupted Islam, it is Muslims themselves who are responsible, and therefore only Muslims can fix what is wrong with Islam.

In the interview I listened to, she brought a teaching from the Koran: God will not be the condition of a people until they change what is inside themselves. As we approach Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, Jewish tradition focuses on the very same thing. We practice *teshuvah*, and that begins with our inner selves and works its way outward. Irshad Manji is calling on the Muslim world to do *teshuvah*.

My friends, if there is ever to come a time when Islamic extremism no longer threatens the world, it will take nothing short of a revolution in the Islamic world. Are there Muslims who hunger for such change? I am sure there are, but they are irrelevant. The leadership of the Muslim world are not merely Muslim but Islamists, extremists who embrace terrorism as the way to cultivate the climate of fear that Manji speaks and writes about.

One woman does not a revolution make. But even the longest of journeys begins with a single step. One musket fired at Concord, MA, became known as the shot heard 'round the world, began the American Revolution, and led to the birth of these United States. I hope and pray that this one, small voice will become another shot heard 'round the world. From a purely Jewish perspective, Irshad Manji and the Koran are correct. Nothing will change in for the Muslim people until Muslim people change what is inside themselves, and change their present leadership for leaders with something different inside them. To paraphrase President Kennedy's Inaugural Address, this

change in the Muslim world may not be completed in my lifetime, and maybe not during the lifetimes of anyone alive today, but let them begin. Irshad Manji is a beginning, and that brings a glimmer of hope that the world would not have if not for her courageous voice.