

My friends, I returned to Marian University last Sunday to take part in another interfaith service. I found this to be an even more powerful experience than my first interfaith service at Marian. Several members of Shaarey Tefilla were there, which was very nice. I hope they found the afternoon as worthwhile as I did.

I had been told before the service about a man by the last name of Singh who has been a powerful and positive presence in Indianapolis interfaith activities for many years. I was introduced to a man, a Sikh named Singh, before the service. I shared the following with him privately, and then decided to share it as part of my contribution to the service.

Some years ago, someone sent me a link to an online questionnaire that was designed to determine the perfect religion for the person answering the questions. As a lark, I took the test. The results were fascinating. I scored a very

low correlation to Reform Judaism, which with all due respect to the Reform Movement and its members, is accurate. I respect Reform Judaism and Reform Jews, but it is not for me. I scored a 99% compatibility with Orthodox Judaism—pretty good, given that Conservative Judaism was not one of the religions listed. Perhaps the one per cent short of full compatibility reflected the difference between Orthodox and Conservative Judaism. That I do not know, but here is why I told the story: I scored 100% compatibility with being a Sikh, which earned me a round of applause from the several Sikhs attending the service.

I told the story to emphasize how much common ground there is between most religious traditions. I am still not sure of the details of how I would make a good Sikh, but I did learn something about the Sikh religion last Sunday.

When the leader of the Sikh community got up to speak, it turned out not to be the man I had met before the service.

I felt silly—I could have sworn the man I met before the service was named Singh, but here was K.P. Singh, and it was not the man I had been speaking to.

Within minutes, things became clear. It turns out every Sikh has the last name of Singh. And I learned some ways that the Sikh religious service is similar to our Shabbat morning service. They only have a few people present when they start their service. An hour or so later, the service fills up. Just like us. But their service makes ours look short—they start at 6:00 a.m. and go to about 2:00. That's longer than our Yom Kippur service.

The service was a peace service, and each participant was asked to bring a peace-related prayer. I chose Shalom Aleichem. I explained the legend behind it and the meaning of each of the four verses: greeting the angles with the traditional greeting of *shalom aleichem*, inviting them into our homes with *bo'achem l'shalom*, asking for

their blessing with *borchuni l'shalom*, and finally bidding them farewell with *tzeitchem l'shalom*. Then I sang the prayer in Hebrew.

I was a bit nervous about the fact that I would be praying in Hebrew. I imagined more of a Jewish-Christian interfaith service, with everyone but me praying in English. Not only did that turn out to be wrong, but it was the best part of the service for me.

I'm talking about how many languages were spoken there. The Sikhs prayed with drums in their sacred tongue of Punjabi. Hindu children and their father chanted in Sanskrit. The man who represented Buddhism apologized for the fact that their leader could not attend and that he would have to mainly use translation, although he did speak a few words in Pali. By that point, I was very glad that I had used our holy tongue. I had done so frequently in Florida, and I found that the most common reaction was

Christians thanking me for allowing them to hear God's word in God's own language.

I left the service marveling at the combination of commonalities and differences that had made the service so rich. I felt grateful that our religion does have a holy language. A common holy tongue helps bind us together as a Jewish people. I am sure that the other religious traditions with their own sacred tongues would express a similar feeling.

I anticipate being involved in more interfaith activities in the future, and I urge our membership to attend some of these events. I believe in cooperation without compromise, which is the motto of the U.S. Navy Chaplains Corp. By that I mean that I do not want to have a lowest common denominator service in which we must abandon all that is distinctive about our various faiths. Let the Sikhs demonstrate their tradition in Punjabi, the Hindus in

Sanskrit, the Buddhists in Pali, and yes, let the Christians pray in the name of Jesus, just as I prayed in Hebrew. This is, for me, the richest kind of interfaith service, one in which all represented faiths share their heritage to the fullest extent possible. In a setting like that, a Christian invoking the name of Jesus does not bother me any more than I would expect Hebrew prayer to offend a Christian.

My friends, in a world in which the greatest danger is extremism in the name of Islam, it is all the more important for decent, peaceful people of all faiths, including Islam, to be proactive about not only preserving our own traditions within our own communities, but to show that it is not mere lip service when we say there are many paths to the one God. And that is why, as I told the congregation at this service, that Judaism teaches that the righteous of all nations have a share in the World to Come. Let us not fear to come together with non-Jews and hear their prayers and let them hear ours. That is no threat to us. We are

threatened by those who want to blow us and Israel off the face of the earth, not those who want to sit by our sides and learn how one another prays to God. Embracing the latter is one way of resisting the former. I would never advocate turning a blind eye to those who are our enemies. Let us not do that same thing to those who ask for our friendship.