

Spiritual Guidance in Our Multi-Faith Society

Delegates' Conference Statement

The following draft statement was finalised in May 2008 after two conferences attended by over 130 Muslim and Christian delegates at the end of November 2007 and April 2008. Delegates included a wide variety of Muslims and Christians providing spiritual guidance in multi-faith, English society.

This statement reflects the delegates' general understanding of and approach towards spiritual guidance in our multi-faith English society. It focuses on the many similarities Christianity and Islam have on this topic. It is hoped that the statement will be a source of reflection and inspiration for any Muslim or Christian providing spiritual guidance, in whatever context, in England.

It is important to note that when identifying similarities in their approach to the provision of spiritual guidance the conference delegates are not in any way compromising, diluting or diminishing their individual faiths.

What is Spirituality?

For Christians and Muslims spirituality is at the core of what it means to be human, that is, reaching out to or responding to the Creator God. They are spiritualities that address our inner being, our relationships with others, and are rooted in our being with God.

Our experiences of spirituality, as Christians and Muslims, are shaped by our scriptures and traditions and also the historical context.

"He is not far from each one of us. For "In Him we live and move and have our being" (The Bible, Acts 17. 27, 28).

"And when he had said this. he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (The Bible, Chapter 20, verse 22).

"And when I have made him complete and I breathed into him of My spirit" (The Qur'aan, Chapter 15, verse 29)

"O soul that art at peace, return to thy Lord, well- pleased and well-pleasing, So enter among My servants, And enter My Garden!" (The Qur'aan, Chapter 89 verses 27-30).

Our beliefs, attitudes, social relations and behaviors are underpinned by our spiritual ideals. Therefore all aspects of life are permeated by spirituality.

Characteristics of Spiritual Guidance

Spiritual guidance is the act of assisting people reaching out to or connecting with God. The spiritual guide is there to assist all people at all times. Spiritual guidance is characterised by:

Serving Others

For both the Christian and Muslim, the one who provides spiritual guidance is first and foremost a servant to the person seeking spiritual guidance.

This is exemplified by Christ washing the feet of his disciples (*The Bible, John's Gospel, 13. 2 - 15*) and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) saying the "the leader is the one who serves".

Role Model

The spiritual guide often acts as a role model for those seeking spiritual guidance:

"You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful example (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the remembrance of Allah" (The Qur'aan, Chapter 33, verse 21)

"And We sent after them (previous messengers) Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy" (The Qur'aan, Chapter 57, verse 27)

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" (The Bible, Philipians 2:4-6)

Communicating Effectively

Being able to communicate with empathy, respect and understanding is crucial in the provision of effective spiritual guidance:

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (The Bible, Colossians 3. 12)

"Always speak beautiful words to people" (The Qur'aan, Chapter 16, verse 125)

"Speak to people according to (the levels or types of) their minds". (Saying of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him)