



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

Religion, Otherness, and At-Homeness in America

Thanksgiving Rabbinic Webinar Sources November 20, 2017

Rivkah Press Schwartz

1. Jeremiah 29:7 p. 1
2. Pirkei Avot 3 p. 1
3. Associate Justice Robert Jackson, Opinion in *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 1943 p. 1

Rev. Mario Milián

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1939 p. 2
5. Richard Rohr, *The Art of Letting Go*, 2010 p. 2
6. Richard Rohr, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, 2010 p. 2
7. Henri Nowen p. 2
8. Anthony de Mello p. 2
9. Excerpt from interview of Fr. Rohr by Ryan Thomas Neace, *Huffington Post*, 2015 p. 2

Suhail A. Kahn

10. Kari Ansari, "A Traditional Muslim Thanksgiving", *Huffingpost.com*, 2011 p. 4
11. Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, "Thanksgiving in Islam", *Islamicity.org*, 2015 p. 5
12. Suhail A. Khan, "America's First Muslim President", *ForeignPolicy.com*, 2010 p. 7
13. Suhail A. Khan, "Islam Is All-American", *ForeignPolicy.com*, 2015 p. 10

Dr. Rivka Press Schwartz has spent more than 15 years in the field of Jewish secondary and post-secondary education, and currently serves as the Associate Principal, General Studies at SAR High School in the Bronx, New York. She is a research fellow at Shalom Hartman Institute of North America.

Rev. Mario E. Milián is rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Parish in Coral Gables, FL, and Chaplain (Capt.) with the 482nd Fighter Wing, Homestead Air Reserve Base, FL. He is an alumnus of the Hartman Christian Leadership Initiative.

Suhail Khan is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Global Engagement, a religious freedom think tank, and Director of External Affairs at Microsoft Corporation. He is an alumnus of the Hartman Muslim Leadership Initiative.

Christian Leadership Initiative (CLI)

The comprehensive, year-long **Christian Leadership Initiative (CLI)** study program, run in partnership with AJC, introduces prominent Christian leaders and change agents from North America to the central ideas of Jewish ethics and faith, the diverse ideologies and practices of contemporary Jewry, the meaning of Israel for world Jewry, foundations of religious pluralism, and interreligious study.

Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI)

The Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) was launched in summer 2013 under the directorship of Imam Abdullah Antepli and Yossi Klein Halevi. The program invites North American Muslims to explore how Jews understand Judaism, Israel, and Jewish peoplehood. The program also encourages participants to experience how Palestinians, both inside and outside Israel, identify themselves, while exploring the issues of ethics, faith, and practice.

Research Fellows and Faculty

North American Research Fellows are scholars who collaborate on interdisciplinary research teams to generate ideas in response to urgent questions of modern Jewish life. Currently our North American research teams are exploring the Israel-Diaspora relationship, ethical Jewish leadership, Jewish identity, and modern Orthodoxy in Jewish life. Fellows spend time researching and collaborating in residence at SHI North America New York offices. Faculty Educators are premier educators who teach and facilitate conversation on behalf of the Institute, drawing on the big ideas and curricula developed by our research teams as well as on their own professional areas of expertise.

Rivka Press Schwartz

1. Jeremiah 29:7

וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת-שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר, אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה, וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְעַדָּהּ, אֶל-יְהוָה: כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָהּ, יְהִי לְכֶם שְׁלוֹם.

And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the LORD in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper.

2. Pirkei Avot 3

רַבִּי חֲנִינָא סָגַן הַכֹּהֲנִים אוֹמֵר, הָיוּ מִתְפַּלְלִים בְּשָׁלוֹמָהּ שֶׁל מַלְכוּת, שֶׁאִלְמָלָא מוֹרְאָהּ, אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ חַיִּים בְּלָעוּ

Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy High Priest, says: Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, man would swallow his fellow alive.

3. Associate Justice Robert Jackson, Opinion in *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 1943

(The case asked whether students or their parents could be sanctioned for refusing to pledge allegiance to the flag, if doing so violated their religious beliefs. The Court ruled that they could not, with a ringing defense of the importance of dissent in a free society.)

Struggles to coerce uniformity of sentiment in support of some end thought essential to their time and country have been waged by many good, as well as by evil, men. ... Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard.

... We set up government by consent of the governed, and the Bill of Rights denies those in power any legal opportunity to coerce that consent. Authority here is to be controlled by public opinion, not public opinion by authority.

The case is made difficult not because the principles of its decision are obscure, but because the flag involved is our own. Nevertheless, we apply the limitations of the Constitution with no fear that freedom to be intellectually and spiritually diverse or even contrary will disintegrate the social organization. To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriotic ceremonies are voluntary and spontaneous, instead of a compulsory routine, is to make an unflattering estimate of the appeal of our institutions to free minds. We can have intellectual individualism and the rich cultural diversities that we owe to exceptional minds only at the price of occasional eccentricity and abnormal attitudes. When they are so harmless to others or to the State as those we deal with here, the price is not too great. But freedom to differ is not limited to things that do not matter much. That would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ as to things that touch the heart of the existing order.

If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion, or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein. If there are any circumstances which permit an exception, they do not now occur to us.

Rev. Mario Milián

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1939

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.

5. Richard Rohr, *The Art of Letting Go*, 2010

A paradox is a seeming contradiction, always demanding a change on the side of the observer. If we look at almost all things honestly we see everything has a character of paradox to it. Everything including ourselves.

6. Richard Rohr, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, 2010

My scientist friends have come up with things like 'principles of uncertainty' and dark holes. They're willing to live inside imagined hypotheses and theories, but many religious folks insist on answers that are always true. We love closure, resolution and clarity, while thinking that we are people of 'faith'! How strange that the very word 'faith' has come to mean its exact opposite.

7. Henri Nowen

Much violence is based on the illusion that life is a property to be defended and not to be shared.

8. Anthony de Mello

You see persons and things not as they are but as you are.

9. Excerpt from interview of Fr. Rohr by Ryan Thomas Neace, *Huffington Post*, 2015

RTN: Many Christians have spent a better portion of our lives organizing ourselves around what we “believe,” personal morality, and neat demarcations of who is “in” and who is “out” of God’s favor and kingdom. This is what you’ve referred to as a sort of “tribal” approach to religion, which refers to in-group/out-group thinking.

In order to transcend this, one must have what you’ve referred to “non-dual thinking.” Can you provide a working definition of dualism, and speak to what the starting point is for us who would work away from dualism?

Fr. Rohr: The natural way the mind already “knows” as a child is in opposition to something else. It’s funny that we have to have this explained to us, but you wouldn’t know what “cold” was unless there was such a thing as “hot.” If everything in the world was the same temperature, we wouldn’t have these words.

Unfortunately, we create those contrary words as necessary for the world we live in - that is, all kinds of comparisons, and competitions, and antagonisms...It becomes our primary way of reading reality.

So, since this is the way we naturally think, very soon we tend to think oppositionally. For some dang reason, the ego prefers to make one side better than the other, so we choose. And we decide males are better than females, America is better than Canada, Democrats are better than Republicans. And for most people, once this decision is made, it is amazing the amount of blindness they become capable of. They really don't see what's right in front of them - everything has to be understood in opposition to something else.

Once you see this, it's an amazing breakthrough, and that is the starting place for moving away from dualistic thinking...

This is why teachers like Jesus make so much of mercy, and forgiveness, and grace, because these are the things that, if truly experienced, totally break dualism down. Because once you experience being loved when you are unworthy, being forgiven when you did something wrong, that moves you into non-dual thinking. You move from what I call meritocracy, quid pro quo thinking, to the huge ocean of grace, where you stop counting, you stop calculating. That for me is the task of much of the entire spiritual life of a mystic or a saint - they fall deeper and deeper into that ocean of grace, and stop all the dang counting of "how much has been given to me," "how much I deserve." It's reached its real low-point in our own American country, which is almost entirely about counting and deserving and earning — we call it a sense of entitlement. When you're trapped inside of that mind, you're going to have the kind of angry country we have today, where you're just looking for who to blame, who to hate, who to shoot. It's reaching that level.

Suhail A. Kahn

10. Kari Ansari, "A Traditional Muslim Thanksgiving," Huffington Post, 2011

The common narrative of Thanksgiving brings to mind scenes from elementary school plays featuring the happy Pilgrims sharing their harvest feast with happy Native Americans. Both groups shared a communal meal and gave thanks for a bountiful first harvest in the New World. This was the harvest that saved the surviving English settlers from starvation and death after a devastating first winter that diminished their numbers by half. If it hadn't been for the almost miraculous appearance of the English-speaking Tisquantum — commonly known as Squanto — who taught the remaining Pilgrims how to cultivate maize, and to hunt and fish, our school play might have been very different.

While researching the origins of this national holiday, I was surprised to discover that Thanksgiving wasn't a new or unique practice among these religious new immigrants to the land. After barely surviving a ruinous drought the next year, a second Thanksgiving celebration in Plymouth was declared by Governor William Bradford. However, he first called for a religious fast to express thankfulness to God, which was then followed by a feast day. Annual days of fasting and thanksgiving were common practice among other New England settlements.

Thanksgiving didn't become an institutionalized event until the midst of the Civil War. In 1863, President Lincoln declared the fourth Thursday of November to be an official day for Americans to "ferverently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union." Since then the last Thursday of November has been an American holiday with the exception of two years during the Great Depression. President Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving to the third Thursday of November to stimulate Christmas retail sales, since advertising and promoting goods for Christmas before the Thanksgiving holiday was considered to be in bad taste.* The impetus for this date change signals the erosion of the religious focus of Thanksgiving to something more secular. In 2011, it's fair to say that we as a nation consider the modern expression of Thanksgiving to be getting together with family or friends, overeating, football, and a day to rest up before Black Friday.

While the religious significance of Thanksgiving has been lost for many Americans, Muslim Americans will say that it's not lost for us.

This original Thanksgiving celebration, preceded by fasting, is very familiar to Islamic practices. Muslims observe a month-long fast during the holy month of Ramadan, followed by the celebration of Eid al Fitr. Muslims should also fast on the day of Arafah in preparation for the next three days of celebration of Eid al-Adha. Devout Muslims follow the example of the Blessed Prophet Muhammad by fasting on Mondays and Thursdays as well.

We ritually express gratefulness to God in our five daily prayers with the Opening Prayer, *Al Fatihah*:

*In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds;
Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
Master of the Day of Judgment.
Thee (alone) do we worship, and whose aid we seek.*

*Show us the straight way,
The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath,
and who go not astray.*

After completing the ritual prayers, we recite *dhikr*. Traditionally, *dhikr*, (akin to saying a rosary), is expressing praise and gratitude to God. We say, *alhamdulillah* (all praise and thanks are due to God), *Subhan'Allah*, (Glory be to God) and *Allahu Akbar* (God is Greatest) 33 times each — which adds up to praising God at least 495 times a day with all 5 prayers. We do our best to have our lips moist with thanks and praise for God all day long.

The supplications given during prayer, and the ritual 99 words of thanks and praise after each prayer are only the beginning of a Muslim's expression of gratitude to God. Listening to Muslims speaking to one another you'll hear phrases like, *insha'Allah*, (if God wills it so), when speaking of something in the future; when the discussion surrounds a beautiful thing such as an autumn tree in all its flaming glory, a Muslim will say, "*subhan'Allah*" to remind himself that God created the miracle of the changing seasons. If I ask a Muslim, "how are you?" he will likely say, "*alhamdulillah*". This answer doesn't tell me if his roof was fixed, or if he got the hoped-for job promotion, but I will know this person is living in a state of God-consciousness with the ultimate belief that we have no control over the universe, or a leaking roof.

Another myth about Muslims in America can be put to rest. Muslims will be patriotically observing Thanksgiving all across America as a day of gratefulness, topped off with halal turkey and exotic takes on side dishes that rival the American green bean casserole and sweet potatoes.

While Muslims give thanks to God every day, the fourth Thursday of November will always be remembered with special consideration of the difficult times faced by America's first immigrants. They arrived on the shores of this spectacular land with great hope to freely practice their faith, and live peacefully among the folks who were already living here.

Sound familiar?

**Known as Franksgiving, the earlier Thanksgiving date only lasted two years. There was great public outcry against the change; folks felt it dishonored President Lincoln. Under political pressure, FDR signed a bill into law restoring the fourth Thursday of November as the permanent date for Thanksgiving.*

11. Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, "Thanksgiving in Islam," Islamicity.org, 2015

[Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and reject not Faith.] (Al-Baqarah 2:152)

[And remember when your Lord proclaimed, "If ye are grateful, I will add more (favours) unto you; but if ye show ingratitude, truly My torment is terrible indeed."] (Ibrahim 14:7)

[We bestowed wisdom on Luqman: "Show (thy) gratitude to Allah." Any who is (so) grateful does so to the profit of his own soul; but if any is ungrateful, verily Allah is free of all wants, worthy of all praise.] (Luqman 31:12)

The Qur'anic word for thanks is *shukr*. It is mentioned in the Qur'an many times. It is the quality of human beings and it is also the quality of Allah. According to scholars, *shukr* means the consideration of the favor and its acknowledgment. *Shukr* from the human means the recognition of the favor. *Shukr* from Allah means the reward and appreciation.

Shukr is a very important principle in Islam. It is a quality of the believers and it is a source of all goodness. *Shukr* is used in the Qur'an sometimes as equivalent to faith. The faithful are thankful people and the unfaithful are ungrateful people. Allah has described His prophets and messengers among those who were thankful people. Prophet Noah was a grateful servant of Allah (Al-Israa' 17:3). Prophet Abraham used to thank Allah for His many blessings (Al-Nahl 16:121). Prophet David and his family were told to be grateful to Allah (Saba' 34:13). Allah told His Prophet Muhammad: (Nay, but worship Allah, and be of those who give thanks) (Az-Zumar 39:66).

Allah also promised:

[Nor can a soul die except by Allah's leave, the term being fixed as by writing. If any do desire a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and if any do desire a reward in the Hereafter, We shall give it to him. And swiftly shall We reward those that who are thankful.] (Aal `Imran 3:145)

In Islam, thanksgiving is not only a particular religious act or service; it is the whole life. The whole life should be lived in obedience to our Ultimate Benefactor, Allah. He has been good to us and so in our thankfulness we should worship Him, obey His commands and orders. Our daily Prayers, our fasting during Ramadan, our zakah and Hajj are all our acts of thanksgiving. We should do them not only as duties that must be performed but as our gratitude to our Lord and Creator.

Furthermore, we should remind ourselves that we are constantly under Allah's favors and blessings. There are many special prayers that the Prophet taught us to keep us on the path of gratitude and thankfulness.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) went to bed, he would say, "In Your name I die and I live." And when he woke up, he would say, "Thanks be to Allah Who brought us to life after He made us to die, and to Him is the resurrection" (Al-Bukhari).

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) ate or drank, he would say, "Thanks be to Allah Who gave us food and drink and made us Muslims" (At-Tirmidhi).

Whenever the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) put on any new garment, he would say, "O Allah, thanks be to You; You gave me this to wear. I ask You to give me the good of this dress and the good for which it is made and I ask You to protect me from the evil of this dress and from the evil of that for which it is made" (At-Tirmidhi).

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) mounted his camel to go on a journey he would say "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is the greatest) three times and then he would say, "[Glory to Him Who has subjected these to our (use), for we could never have accomplished this (by ourselves). And to our Lord, surely, must we turn back!] [Az-Zukhruf 43:13]. O Allah, we ask You on this journey righteousness and piety and the deeds that are pleasing to You. O Allah, make this journey easy for us and shorten its distance. O Allah, You are the Companion in journey and You are the Guardian for the family (left behind). O Allah, we ask You to protect us from the exhaustion of journey, from bad scenes, and from bad return to our property and family."

When he returned he would say, "Returning, repenting, worshiping, and praising our Lord" (Muslim).

Islam does not only teach us to thank Allah, but we are also told to thank our parents, our spouses, our friends, our neighbors, and all those who do any good to us. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Those who do not thank people, they do not thank Allah" (At-Tirmidhi).

12. Suhail A. Khan, "America's First Muslim President," ForeignPolicy.com, 2010

Muslim Americans helped elect George W. Bush, but now they're leaving the Republican Party in droves. It didn't have to be this way.

I've been involved in politics for well over two decades, so you can imagine how proud I was when I learned that my newly retired mother had signed up to volunteer during the 2008 presidential primary campaign in our native California. But even though she was a longstanding Republican, it came as little surprise that the candidate for whom she was volunteering was not. After years as a GOP loyalist, my mother had come to believe that the party was hostile to her values and faith. Rather than stumping for John McCain's election effort, she told me, she was working for Barack Obama's.

My mother wasn't alone. In recent weeks, Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, and other prominent Republicans have loudly voiced their opposition to the proposed Cordoba House project near ground zero in lower Manhattan, fanning the flames of a protest that has since spread into a more generalized criticism of Muslim institutions in the United States. But even before this month's controversy, the exodus of Muslim Americans from the Republican Party was nearly complete. In 2008, this country's more than 7 million Muslims voted in record numbers, and nearly 90 percent of their votes went to Obama.

It wasn't always this way. Muslim Americans are, by and large, both socially and economically conservative. Sixty-one percent of them would ban abortion except to save the life of the mother; 84 percent support school choice. Muslims overwhelmingly support traditional marriage. More than a quarter — over twice the national average — are self-employed small-business owners, and most support reducing taxes and the abolition of the estate tax. By all rights they should be Republicans — and not long ago they were. American Muslims voted two to one for George H.W. Bush in 1992. While they went for Bill Clinton by the same margin in 1996, they were brought back into the Republican fold in 2000 by George W. Bush.

If Clinton was, as the author Toni Morrison once quipped, America's first black president, Bush was, at least momentarily, the country's first Muslim president. As early as 1999, he hosted a series of meetings between Muslim and Republican leaders, and paid a visit himself to an Islamic center in Michigan — the first and only major presidential candidate to do so. The 2000 Republican convention in Philadelphia was the first in either national party's history to include a Muslim prayer. On the campaign trail, Bush celebrated the faith of Americans who regularly attended a "church, synagogue, or mosque." After Muslim community leaders told him of their civil liberties concerns over a piece of 1996 immigration enforcement legislation signed into law

by Clinton, Bush criticized it himself in one of his presidential debates against Vice President Al Gore.

The work paid off. By election day, Bush had been endorsed by eight major Muslim American organizations. He won more than 70 percent of the Muslim vote, including 46,200 ballots in Florida alone, prompting longtime conservative activist Grover Norquist — one of the few prominent movement figures to caution against the current wave of mosque demagoguery — to proclaim in the *American Spectator* that “Bush was elected President of the United States of America because of the Muslim vote.”

The 9/11 tragedy, of course, changed everything. But in the early days after the terrorist attacks, it was Bush who reminded Americans, “Ours is a war not against a religion, not against the Muslim faith.... [O]urs is a war against individuals who absolutely hate what America stands for.” He met with Muslim American leaders on numerous occasions, becoming the only sitting president to visit an American mosque, and appointed Muslim Americans to several prominent government posts. Nor was Bush the only Republican politician to distinguish the United States’ war against Islamist extremism abroad from the religion itself. House Speaker Denny Hastert, former Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson, and National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Tom Davis joined Bush in writing letters urging the U.S. Postal Service to issue a postage stamp honoring Eid, the Muslim holiday, in 2001.

But as Bush’s first term unfolded, post-9/11 unity gave way to the Iraq war and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal; the same Muslim groups that protested over civil liberties infringement under the Clinton administration were predictably upset over the Patriot Act and the Bush administration’s detainment policies and warrantless wiretapping activities. In the 2004 election, more than half of the Muslim vote went to Democrat John Kerry and third-party candidates.

And despite Bush’s best efforts to separate terrorism from the faith of Islam, a growing chorus of conservative commentators was failing to make any such distinction. In October 2001, conservative pundit Ann Coulter was fired by the *National Review* for writing of Muslims, “We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity.” But a few years later, such arguments were commonplace. Colorado Republican Rep. Tom Tancredo commented in 2005 that the U.S. response to terrorism should be to bomb Muslim holy cities including Mecca. Virginia Republican Rep. Virgil Goode complained that the 2006 election of Muslim Americans such as Minnesota Democratic Rep. Keith Ellison underscored the need for immigration reform (a curious argument considering that Ellison was born in Detroit to Roman Catholic parents). In 2007, after Bush made a statement pointing to Islam’s place alongside Christianity and Judaism in the Abrahamic religious tradition, conservative columnist Cal Thomas asked, “How can the president say that we all worship the same God when Muslims deny the divinity of Jesus?” When the House of Representatives passed a resolution honoring Ramadan in 2007, 42 Republican congressmen declined to vote in favor of it, instead voting “present.”

As a Muslim American and a Republican who served in the Bush administration, I always believed that the anti-Muslim backlash was the work of a small number of cynical bigots, not the view of the vast, fair-minded majority of Americans. But as the 2008 election picked up steam, participating in the political process came at a great moral cost, and entailed

considerable heartache. At Republican campaign rallies, harsh statements about “Muslims” and “Arabs” were ubiquitous. Rod Parsley, an influential evangelical pastor in Ohio and an early McCain supporter, urged Christians to wage a “war” against the “false religion” of Islam (McCain eventually rejected Parsley’s support). Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, when asked about putting a Muslim American in his cabinet, replied that he “cannot see that a cabinet position would be justified” based on the percentage of Muslims in the country.

If the Republican candidates treated Muslims as the enemy, the Obama campaign treated them like untouchables, keeping the Democratic candidate’s Muslim supporters at arm’s length throughout the election. When prominent Muslim and Arab Americans such as Ellison and Democratic Party superdelegate James Zogby volunteered to campaign for Obama in key states such as North Carolina and Iowa, they were told to stay away. “A lot of us are waiting for [Obama] to say that there’s nothing wrong with being a Muslim,” Ellison lamented.

Instead, the campaign treated “Muslim” as an insult, classifying the much-circulated false claim that Obama practiced the religion as a “smear” to be debunked on the campaign’s website. A Muslim American campaign staffer resigned when a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, Glenn Simpson, asked about his religious background. At a rally in Detroit in June 2008, Obama campaign volunteers removed two Muslim American women who were seated behind the podium where the candidate would be speaking (campaign higher-ups later apologized for the incident). Only retired Gen. Colin Powell seemed willing to stand up to the fear mongering. “Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country?” he asked in a TV interview days before the election. “The answer is no. That’s not America.”

Despite the cold shoulder from Democrats, most Muslim Americans, like my mother, sided with Obama — and voted in record numbers, particularly in electorally crucial swing states such as Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Virginia. And though many American Muslims have grown impatient with the Democratic administration’s lack of progress on issues such as civil liberties, peace between Israel and Palestine, and the unfair treatment of Muslim charities, they remain firmly in the Obama camp. Why wouldn’t they? Since the so-called “Ground Zero mosque” controversy erupted last month, New York Republican gubernatorial candidate Rick Lazio has blasted the mosque’s “terrorist-sympathizing” imam; Gingrich has made statements equating Islam with Nazism.

On every issue and by every measure, Muslim Americans should vote firmly with the GOP. But they won’t until the party finds leadership willing to stop playing to the worst instincts of its minority of bigoted supporters. I’m not convinced that’s impossible — for one thing, it’s happened once already, in the GOP’s relationship with Hispanic voters. Republicans lost the broad support of Hispanics — who, like Muslim Americans, tend toward social conservatism — for several elections starting in 1994, when California Gov. Pete Wilson supported the passage of Proposition 187, a ballot initiative that sought to block illegal immigrants from accessing health care, public education, and other social services. But with Bush’s vigorous outreach efforts in 2000 and 2004, Hispanic support for the GOP climbed back up to 45 percent — only to crash again in 2008 amid the rhetorically charged debate over immigration reform.

There are similar rays of hope for Muslim Republicans. Former Bush administration solicitor general Ted Olson, who lost his wife Barbara on 9/11, declared on Aug. 18 that “people of all religions have a right to build ... places of religious worship or study, where the community

allows them to do it under zoning laws ... we don't want to turn an act of hate against us by extremists into an act of intolerance for people of religious faith." New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, an up-and-comer in the national conservative movement, recently warned against "overreacting" to the threat of terrorism and painting "all of Islam" with the brush of terrorism. "We have to bring people together," he said. Let's hope that thoughtful voices such as Governor Christie, and not those who rely on mistrust and fear, win the day.

13. Suhail A. Khan, "Islam Is All-American," ForeignPolicy.com, 2015

Long before Donald Trump's demonizing of Muslims, the Founding Fathers debated whether Islam should be defended.

As American Muslims find themselves at the center of a heated debate over religious freedom, it's important to remember that our nation's founders contemplated these very issues since before the creation of the United States.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." So begins the preamble of the Declaration of Independence, adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, which announced that the American colonies regarded themselves as a new nation.

The new nation would struggle to make that proposition a reality for all, including African slaves, women, and other religious and ethnic minorities. In times of real or perceived danger, this proposition has been tested: In 1882, for example, the Chinese Exclusion Act, a sweeping prohibition on the immigration of Chinese workers, was passed in the wake of anti-Asian hysteria. In 1919 and the 1950s, the "red scare" caused many innocent Americans to be unfairly accused of being communist sympathizers. American Jews, Catholics, and Mormons faced decades of prejudice and often violence. After Pearl Harbor, over 120,000 Japanese-American citizens were forced from their homes and placed in camps.

Today, it's the five to seven million Americans who happen to be Muslim who have been stereotyped and demonized. GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump has called for the registration of all Muslim Americans, the warrantless surveillance of all Muslim places of worship, and a ban on all Muslim travel and immigration, "They're not coming to this country if I'm president," he said this week in the Republican presidential debate in Las Vegas.

"We have a problem in this country: It's called Muslims. We know our current president is one. You know he's not even an American...when can we get rid of 'em?" one of Trump's supporters bellowed at a campaign rally in New Hampshire in September. Trump encouragingly nodded along: "We need this question," he agreed, and promised that "we're going to be looking at that and plenty of other things."

Such vitriolic sentiment stands in stark contrast to the unifying message of the most recent GOP occupant of the White House, President George W. Bush, in whose administration I was honored to serve for both terms. During the 2000 campaign for example, Bush praised the faith of Americans who regularly attended a "church, synagogue, or mosque," met with Muslim American supporters across the country, and visited a prominent Islamic center in Michigan —

the first major presidential candidate from either party to do so. The GOP convention in Philadelphia was the first in either national party's history to feature a Muslim prayer. And after Muslim American community leaders expressed their civil liberties concerns regarding a provision of Clinton's 1996 immigration enforcement legislation, Bush publicly promised to repeal the provision in the second presidential debate with Vice President Al Gore.

Bush's inclusive efforts earned him the endorsement of eight major Muslim American organizations. By election day, more than 70 percent of the Muslim vote — including 46,200 ballots in just Florida — went in his favor. And after his 2001 swearing-in, Bush appointed a record number of Muslim Americans to senior positions in the White House and throughout his new administration.

Bush also remained steadfast in his inclusiveness after the 9/11 terror attacks. Just days after the tragedy, Bush visited an American mosque, the first and only sitting president to do so. He also reminded the world, "ours is a war not against a religion, not against the Muslim faith. ... ours is a war against individuals who absolutely hate what America stands for." And when anti-Muslim rhetoric rose, Bush fired back, "Some of the comments that have been uttered about Islam do not reflect the sentiments of my government or the sentiments of most Americans. Islam, as practiced by the vast majority of people, is a peaceful religion, a religion that respects others. Ours is a country based upon tolerance and we welcome people of all faiths in America."

Such heroic leadership seems a lifetime away. While other presidential hopefuls and elected officials from both sides of the political aisle, editorial boards, and even celebrities and sports figures have widely condemned Trump's statements, it's easy for the nation's Muslims to feel singled out, particularly when poll after poll demonstrates increasing popular support for such anti-Muslim sentiment. (Muslim Americans, while perhaps small in their relative numbers, are growing in political influence. Their political organization is improving, they are increasingly generous financial contributors to campaign coffers, and they remain a key voting bloc in swing states such as Virginia, Ohio, and Florida.)

But even as Muslim Americans find themselves at the center of today's heated political debate, it's important to remind ourselves that Muslims have been a proud part of the American story from the very founding of our republic, and that the Founders contemplated the freedom for all — including Muslims — when they conceived our great nation over two centuries ago.

Historians estimate that a quarter to a third of the African slaves brought to the United States were Muslims. American Muslims, both slaves and freedmen, served in the American War of Independence and the War of 1812, and were a part of the impassioned debate about religious liberty from the very beginning of the nation's founding.

Referred to as "Mahometans" and "Turks," many of the founders referenced Muslims — along with Jews, Catholics, and others — as they hotly debated the limits of the freedom of worship. Thomas Jefferson, in authoring the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom in 1777, established the foundation for the rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. The statute disestablished the Church of England in Virginia, freeing Virginians from paying taxes to the church and guaranteeing freedom of religion to people of all faiths.

During the debate over the legislation, some Virginia legislators unsuccessfully sought to include a reference to Jesus Christ. Writing in 1821, Jefferson reflected that “the insertion was rejected by a great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of [the statute’s] protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, and Infidel of every denomination.”

While it’s unclear whether Jefferson knew any Muslims, we know that his opinions on religious freedom were heavily influenced by the philosopher John Locke who, in promoting religious freedom in England in 1689, expressed his belief that all citizens who believed in God — Jews, Catholics, and Muslims — should be protected. “The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others,” Jefferson wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which was published in 1781. “But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

James Madison, who would later become the fourth U.S. president, joined Jefferson in supporting religious liberty and assisted in supporting the final passage of the Virginia statute in 1786. Railing against religious taxes, Madison argued that the separation of church and state would actually promote Christianity as an open society would be welcoming to those “remaining under the dominion of false Religions.” Establishing an official church, he continued, “discourages those who are strangers to the light of revelation.”

Another supporting Jefferson was Richard Henry Lee, a delegate to the Second Continental Congress who made the June 7, 1776, motion that the American colonies declare independence. “True freedom,” Lee proclaimed, “embraces the Mahomitan and the Gentoo [Hindu] as well as the Christian religion.”

These ideas about religious freedom that were nurtured in the American colonies were written into the Constitution after the United States won its independence. The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was a notable precursor of the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which reads “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

But the real debate surrounded the language banning religious tests as a qualification for public office, put forth in Article 6, Clause 3, of the U.S. Constitution. This clause, revolutionary at its time, provided that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” By including this clause, the founders proclaimed that men of all faiths, or none at all, would be equally eligible to play a role in public life in the new democratic nation.

The ban on religious tests was a major source of contention during the debates to ratify the new constitution. Madison wrote to Jefferson in 1788 that “one of the objections in New England was that the Constitution by prohibiting religious tests opened a door for Jews, Turks & infidels.” Indeed, a delegate to Massachusetts’s ratifying convention warned that public office would be open for “a papist or an infidel.”

During North Carolina’s 1788 constitution ratification debate, anti-Federalist Henry Abbot argued that eliminating a religious test meant it would be possible that “pagans, deists, and Mahometans might obtain offices among us, and that the senators and representatives might all be pagans.” A South Carolina newspaper raised the possibility of Quakers taking over the

fledgling government. One Virginian suggested that the delegates rewrite the clause banning religious tests to require officeholders to swear a belief in the “one only true God, who is rewarder of good, and the punisher of evil.”

Defenders of the ban rallied support for the clause. Baptist preacher John Leland, who had opposed religious tests successfully in Virginia, argued “If a man merits the confidence of his neighbors in Virginia, let him worship one God, twenty Gods, or no God — be he Jew, Turk, Pagan, or Infidel, he is eligible to any office in the state.”

And Federalist James Iredell, who subsequently was appointed as a Supreme Court justice, stood firm in his defense of the clause. “[It] is objected that the people of America may, perhaps, choose representatives who have no religion at all, and that pagans and Mahometans may be admitted into offices,” Iredell said. “But how is it possible to exclude any set of men, without taking away that principle of religious freedom which we ourselves so warmly contend for?”

That same question, posed over two centuries ago, looms large over our debate today. The United States currently faces a determined enemy who makes no distinctions about our race, ethnicity, or religion — attacking us only because we are Americans. In response, some strident voices tragically seek to divide our nation on religious lines by casting suspicion on an entire faith group. Now more than ever, it’s important to remind ourselves that our great nation was founded on religious freedom for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion.

Muslim Americans are our neighbors, or friends; they are doctors, lawyers, business owners, teachers, first responders, and nearly 6,000 serve in uniform in our Armed Services. Many have given, as President Abraham Lincoln stated, “the last full measure of devotion.” In this time of real danger, let’s not allow our zeal to defend our ideals destroy them.