***Acting Out Sacred Stories: Hospitality Narratives***

**(45-Minute Activity Guide)**

**I. Preparation:**

There is no specific preparation needed for this activity.

**II. Required Materials:**

* Copies of “Hospitality Narratives” (See “Handouts” Section)
* Poster paper and markers

**III. Introduction: (5 minutes)**

1. Introduce the activity by sharing the goals and outline of the activity, and that this is an opportunity to explore a formative narrative from the sacred narratives of the spiritual backgrounds in the group.
2. Distribute copies of the “Hospitality Narratives”. Explain that each narrative is related to helping others and will be used to better understand the concept of hospitality.
3. Write the words “hospitality is…” on poster paper in the front of the room and elicit definitions/descriptive phrases from the group.

4. Create small groups, Select participants to serve as small group facilitators.

**IV. Small Group Activity: (30 minutes)**

1. Assign one narrative to each group. Ask each group to plan two skits: one that tells the story as it was written, and another that re-tells the story in a modern context.
2. Provide 20 minutes for groups to prepare the skits.
3. Invite each group to present both skits to the large group. After each skit, the rest of the group shares something they liked about the skit and any insights they gleaned about the definition of hospitality (adding it to the poster paper).

**V. Debriefing: (10 minutes)**

1. After all the skits, as a large group, review the definition of hospitality they created earlier.
2. Closing prompts:
   * “How can we demonstrate hospitality to our friends, families, campuses, congregations, and communities?”
   * “How does ‘creating a safe space’ relate to the concept of hospitality?”
   * “How can we show hospitality to the communities we visit this week?”
   * “What are some ways we can expect to be shown hospitality during the various visits to communities this week? Does hospitality always have to look the same?”

**Hospitality Narratives**

**Bahá’í Narrative: Hospitality**

**‘Abdu’l-Bahá – The Perfect Exemplar**

**Introduction and Overview:**

`Abdu'l-Bahá (title meaning servant of the Glory of God) was the son of [Bahá'u'lláh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27u%27ll%C3%A1h) (title meaning the Glory of God), the founder of the [Bahá'í Faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD_Faith). In Persia, up through the beginning of the 20th century, titles were often used as names. In 1892, `Abdu'l-Bahá was appointed in his father's [will](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablets_of_Bah%C3%A1%27u%27ll%C3%A1h#Kit.C3.A1b-i-.60Ahd_.28Book_of_the_Covenant.29) to be his successor and head of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá’u’lláh instructed His followers to turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a perfect example of how to live. The Bahá’ís often called him the Master.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá spent most of his life as a prisoner, but he was freed following the[1908](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1908) [Young Turks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Turks) revolution. In [1910](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1910) he embarked on a three-year journey to [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt), [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), and [North America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_America), spreading the Bahá'í message. `Abdu'l-Bahá usually wore traditional Persian clothing -- a long robe, white or light tan, a dark 'aba (overcoat) and a white turbaned headdress. Throughout the Middle East, everyone wore underclothing and loose drawstring pants or trousers. Unlike some of their Arabic neighbors, Persian men wore these as full-length pants. This description will help us to understand the following story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s kindness and generosity.

**Narrative: from *Portals to Freedom* by Howard Colby Ives, p. 128.**

[While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in Dublin, Ireland, he stayed at a small hotel. A woman staying at the same hotel tells this story.] It seems that she was occupying a room in the Inn at the same time that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá was there. She was dressing, and happening to glance out of the window, she saw ‘Abdu'l-Bahá pacing up and down dictating to his [male] secretary. An old man, wretchedly clothed, passed the Inn as she watched. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá sent his secretary to call him back.

The Master stepped up to him and took his hand, smiling into his face as though greeting a welcome friend. The man was very ragged and dirty. His trousers particularly were filthy and barely covered his limbs. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá talked with him a few moments, his face a smiling benediction. He seemed to be trying to cheer the old man and finally there did appear the trace of a smile, but it was rather bleak. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá eyes swept the pitiable figure, and then He laughed gently: He said something to the effect that the old man's trousers were not very serviceable and that we must remedy that lack.

It was very early in the morning and the street deserted. My friend, watching, saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá step into the shadow of the porch and He seemed to be fumbling under His `aba at the waist. Then He stooped. His trousers dropped to the ground. He gathered his robe about Him and turning handed the trousers to the old man. "May God go with you," He said, and turned to the secretary as if nothing unusual had happened.

**Reflection: Helping Others…**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá exemplified the following passage from Bahá’u’lláh’s writings, as all Bahá’ís are asked to do:

*Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts.* (Gleanings, p. 285)

*[Respectfully prepared by Nancy Tichenor, October 2007.*

**Christian Narrative: Hospitality**

**The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

**Introduction and Overview:**

Throughout his life, Jesus taught his disciples by telling stories called parables.

In Chapter 10 of Luke’s gospel, a man asks Jesus how to gain eternal life. Jesus says he must love God and love his neighbor. The man then asked, “But who is my neighbor?” and Jesus answers with a parable. He talks about a man who was beaten up by robbers and thrown to the side of the road. After two religious leaders pass by the man without stopping to help him, it is a Samaritan (someone who was an outcast in the Jewish community) who finally takes care of the beaten man. Jesus then asks the lawyer who the neighbor was in the story. The lawyer realizes it was the least-likely character and correctly answers that the Samaritan was the good neighbor. Jesus ends with a charge for the man to “go and do likewise.”

**Narrative: Luke 10:25-37 “The Parable of the Good Samaritan”**

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”

**Reflection: Helping Others…**

Christians are left with Jesus’ charge to “go and do likewise.” In helping those in need, we are called upon to act as the Samaritan acted rather than how the religious leaders acted. What’s particularly interesting in the story is that the people one would have expected to do the right thing and help the beaten man did nothing, and it was rather an outcast who turned out to be the hero.

*(Respectfully prepared by Rev. Nicole Diroff, October 2007.)*

**Muslim Narrative: Hospitality**

**Becoming God’s Love Towards Others**

**Introduction and Overview:**

While commanded to believe in the former scriptures, the Torah, the Psalms, the Books and the Gospel, Muslims first consult the Qur’an and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be blessings and peace, for guidance. The Qur’an consists of the words of Allah transmitted through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet and through him to his companions. The Traditions are either Prophetic Traditions which emanated from the understanding of the Prophet, or Sacred Traditions which come from a direct conversation with Allah. The Sacred Traditions, of which the following is one, are secondary only to the Qur’an in importance. Traditions begin with a chain of virtuous transmitters who have proved trustworthy in memory and veracity.

This tradition relates the truth that the best way to find and experience God is through acting with God’s qualities and actions toward all of mankind. To put it another way, the most effective route to experiencing God’s love is not to cry, “O my God, I want your love!” but rather to *become* God’s love toward others.

**Narrative: Authenticated Traditions of Muslim, Tradition #4661**

Muslim related that Muhammad, Son of Hatim, Son of Maimun related that Bahz related that Hammad, Son of Salamah had it from Thabit who had it from Rafi` who related that Abu Hurairah said that Allah's Messenger (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, Verily, Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, will say on the Day of Resurrection:

“O son of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit Me.” He will say: “O my Lord, how could I visit Thee when Thou art the Lord of the worlds?” Thereupon He will say: “Didn't you know that a certain servant of Mine was sick but you did not visit him, and were you not aware that if you had visited him, you would have found Me in his presence?”

“O son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed Me.” He will say: “My Lord, how could I feed Thee when Thou art the Lord of the worlds?” He will say: “Didn't you know that a certain servant of Mine asked you for food but you did not feed him, and were you not aware that if you had fed him you would have found him in My presence?”

“O son of Adam, I asked you for something to drink but you did not provide Me with any.” He will say: “My Lord, how could I provide Thee with something to drink when Thou art the Lord of the worlds?” Thereupon He will say: “A certain servant of Mine asked you for a drink but you did not provide him with one, and had you provided him with a drink you would have found him in My presence.”

**Reflection: Helping Others…**

This tradition will resonate with Christians who recall that in Matthew 25:40, Jesus, peace be upon him, will say to those on his right hand on the Day of Judgment, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Allah, in the Qur’an (90:13-18), describes one who will be on the right hand of God, “One who frees a slave, or feeds a poor pauper among his relatives or an impoverished beggar on a day of famine; and *then* will he be of those who believe and enjoin patience and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion..”

My Shaikh, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, may Allah’s mercy be upon him, told me, “Many Muslims memorize the entire Qur’an and some memorize all of the Traditions while still not knowing what is in the heart of their neighbor.” Not only should we know the suffering, the illness, the hunger, the thirst that is in their neighbor’s heart, we should also know that “what is in the heart of their neighbor” includes God. Developing the subtle empathy to sense needs in our neighbors and then acting with reliance on God to relieve them is the most direct path to experiencing the glory of God in both this world and the next.

*(Respectfully prepared by Imam Muhammad `Abdur-Razzaq Miller, October 2007.)*

**Jewish Narrative: Hospitality**

**Abraham and the Angels**

**Introduction and Overview**

The rabbis in the Jewish tradition read the stories in the Torah not always literally, but as metaphors for righteous action. Similarly, each biblical character was seen not just as a person in a story but as archetypes for certain Jewish values. Abraham is certainly a powerful example of this concept: at the beginning of chapter 18 of the book of Genesis, Abraham is recuperating from his *brit milah* (ritual circumcision commanded by God as a sign of the covenant between Abraham, Abraham’s family, and God). While he must have been in pain, when he sees strangers approach, he immediately jumps up and welcomes them into his home, gives them food and an opportunity to rest. The fact that the strangers were angels sent by God was not known to him, and therefore Abraham becomes an example of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming guests.

**Narrative: Genesis 18:1-8**

…[Abraham] was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them, and bowing to the ground, he said, “My lords, if it please you, do not go past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on – seeing that you have come your servant’s way.” They replied, “Do as you have said.” Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quick, three *seahs* of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!” Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

**Reflection: Helping Others…**

In the Hebrew Bible, strangers travelling on the road represent all those in need, as journeying back then was a much more arduous and even dangerous task. The rabbis of the Talmud suggest that welcoming a stranger possessed a higher level of holiness than even welcoming the Divine Presence. The Bible tells us that because we as Jews were ourselves strangers (and therefore in need of help) in the land of Egypt, we therefore have a spiritual obligation to reach out to all those in need in the world. Abraham, even though he himself was in need of rest in order to heal his body, nevertheless helped the angels. Jewish tradition teaches us that as Abraham did, so must we do!

*(Respectfully prepared by Rabbi Ethan Franzel, October 2007.]*