



HEROES
of
DIALOGUE

Classroom

Edition



Classroom Edition



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KAICIID DIALOGUE CENTRE

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Faisal bin Muaammar
KAICIID Secretary General

IT IS EASY, living in the times we do, to get the feeling that conflict is on the rise, and that people are finding it harder and harder to get along. COVID-19 has driven us to retreat into our homes. Technology, which should bring us closer, can also divide us.

But we hope to show you, through this publication, that heroes live among us, and that they greatly outnumber those who seek to create conflict and spread hate. The world is filled with young men and women who are using dialogue to build peaceful, inclusive societies, based on respect for all people, no matter their religion, race or background. Heroes of Dialogue is dedicated to some of their stories.

The first edition of this book, which was published in 2019, was met with an overwhelmingly positive response and requests flooded in for additional resources that could be used with young people or in classroom settings.

We've added these resources, as well as tips

and guidelines, to help you design your own community dialogue projects. These resources are meant for all ages – young, old, experienced, new to dialogue, from all religions and from every country and continent.

At the end of the book, educators will find helpful discussion questions to start meaningful dialogues in their classrooms. Additionally, we've outlined the basic principles of dialogue and facilitation to help ensure a safe and inclusive space.

At KAICIID, we believe that dialogue is far more than a conversation. Dialogue takes place when people from different religions and cultures seek to understand and respect each other. This allows us to live together peacefully in spite of our differences.

Dialogue helps us prevent conflicts and make decisions which include everyone so that we can all enjoy human rights and dignity. It is the very heart of positive peacebuilding. In the following pages, you'll learn from our Heroes that

there is truly no contribution to peace which is too small or insignificant.

Each of us can make positive change in our communities no matter how old or young we are. Whether each one of us reaches out to “the Other” (someone from a different background, religion or perspective) by showing kindness, leading a community-wide movement, or helping to resolve conflict, we help promote a culture of peace and inclusivity.

We hope this publication inspires and encourages you to become an advocate for peace in your own community.

WOMEN'S VOICES MUST BE HEARD

Nigeria is home to hundreds of languages and cultures. Most of them are stitched together by two major religions -- Islam in the north and Christianity in the south. Justina Mike Ngwobia lives right in the middle.

She was raised in a Christian community but moved to Jos at 18 years old to do interfaith work with Muslims. Jos is a religiously diverse city in central Nigeria known locally as the "home of peace and tourism," but when

Justina arrived in 1990, she discovered a land of tension and mistrust.

In 2001, small fights over jobs and land exploded into violent conflict between Christians and Muslims. More than 2,000

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Women in Nigeria have always been pushed to the background, but we are key to peacebuilding



people were killed. Homes were burned. Churches and mosques were destroyed. Christian and Muslim neighbours who had long lived side-by-side moved to opposite ends of town. Old friends became strangers and grew further apart with each passing year.

Justina hated this division. She wanted to live in that “home of peace” she’d been promised, a community united by love and respect, not separated by fear and anger. She shared her dream with the women of Jos and found out she wasn’t alone.

“Women in Nigeria have always been pushed to the background, but we are key to peacebuilding,” she told them and anyone who would listen. “Our voices must be heard!”

Justina’s voice was loud on its own, but she needed other women to speak up too. In 2016 she invited 30 Christian and Muslim women from around Jos to join her in dia-

logue on peace and security issues in the region. They jumped at the opportunity.

“Most of the women had never entered the others’ neighbourhoods since the 2001 crisis. Now Muslim and Christian women are inviting each other into their communities, going across town, and going to the others’ area,” Justina said with pride. “They have a voice now and are saying they are tired of this crisis. They want to learn to live together as one people.”

That first meeting in 2016 started the Women Peacebuilders Network, now active in 10 communities around Jos. Members serve as peace ambassadors in their neighbourhoods to promote interfaith cooperation, understanding, tolerance, and respect. They work across religious lines to heal old wounds and make their community whole again. People who became enemies or strangers after the conflict have now reunited as friends and are working together for positive change.

“They have a voice now and are saying they are tired of this crisis. They want to learn to live together as one people.”

cision-making processes across Nigeria and to bring the Women Peacebuilders to other conflict zones where dialogue can help restore peace.

Justina wished for a “home of peace,” but wishes alone don’t bring change. She needed to work hard to make her dream a reality, and she needed help. She spoke up not knowing if anyone would listen, but the voices of the women who joined her were louder and more harmonious than she could have ever imagined. Jos is a more peaceful place today because they raised their voices together.

The Women Peacebuilders steer children away from violence by encouraging them to actively participate in their communities.

“Women are natural peacebuilders,” Justina believes. “When you build up women, they will be able to build a better family, and that will translate into a better society.”

The Women Peacebuilders encourage children and young people to actively participate in their communities and stop violence. They speak up online, spreading messages of love and unity to stop religious hate speech on social media platforms. Justina says these efforts are making a noticeable impact, helping calm tensions in areas of violence. She’s now working to get more women involved in government and de-



Justina is Christian and from Jos, Nigeria.

OFF THE MAT AND INTO THE WORLD

**Ganga Nandini grew up
between two worlds.**

In California, where she was born and went to school, most people think of yoga as a relaxing exercise routine. In India, where her parents are from and where she spent summers, Hindus practice Karma Yoga to help make the world a better place.

Nandini always loved celebrating Diwali with fireworks and Holi with rainbows of dyed powder, but something was missing. The holidays were fun, but she wanted to explore her religion on a deeper level. After finishing university in California, she packed her bags and

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I felt a deep energetic connection with the river.

It was more than just a flowing body of water, it felt like I had come home



flew to northern India to connect with her roots.

Along this spiritual journey Nandini came to Rishikesh, a beautiful city where “Mother Ganga” (the holy Ganges River) flows icy and clean from the Himalayan Mountains. There she met people from all over the world who had come to learn more about yoga and Hinduism, reconnect with nature, and reflect on their place in the universe.

One evening, while singing and praying with friends along the riverbank, Nandini met a wise and holy man who told her that the river she had fallen in love with and that feeds so many Indians was polluted and struggling to survive downstream.

“I felt a deep energetic connection with the river. It was more than just a flowing body of water, it felt like I had come home,” she remembers. “When he asked for help conserving Ganga, I immediately raised my hand.”

Nandini thought she would stay and help for a few months, but after cancelling her flight back to California six times, she fi-

nally realised that saving Mother Ganga would take a lifetime of service.

Ten years later, Nandini is still in Rishikesh fighting for Ganga’s life. She has also been given the new name Ganga Nandini. She works with Bahá’í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Sikh communities to help make water clean and safe around the world.

One of the best ways to improve water quality is for people to use toilets, but talking about them can be embarrassing. After India’s government put millions of new toilets around the country and people still weren’t using them, Nandini had an idea. She helped set up a “toilet

One evening Nandini met a wise and holy man who told her that the river she had fallen in love with was polluted and struggling to survive.

“We need to connect with our common humanity and celebrate its rich diversity for harmony to flow freely.”

park” and eco-friendly café at a major Hindu festival where visitors could take selfies and drink tea while sitting on decorated toilet seats.

“People would go to temples, take a holy swim, and then come take selfies and hang out at our toilet café,” Nandini said. “It was a huge success. We put posters on the walls with different toilet technologies so people could see how to improve sanitation and be inspired to live more sustainably.”

Nandini inspires religious leaders and school children of different faiths to talk about these issues within their communities and to become part of the solution.

“Harmony and interreligious dialogue are like the river’s flow,” she believes. “Discrimination, stereotypes, and our limited understanding of ‘the Other’ pollutes harmony. We need to connect with our common humanity and celebrate its

rich diversity for harmony to flow freely.”

Since arriving in Rishikesh, Nandini has taken her yoga practice “off the mat and into the world” to serve others, bringing her closer to Hinduism, India, Mother Ganga, and even herself.

“This work has given me a deep sense of meaning and fulfilment. The small ways I’m able to help others is actually making a big change in so many ways I can see... and so many ways I can’t.”



Ganga Nandini is Hindu and from Rishikesh, India.

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY CAN UNITE US

No matter the sport or how well they played, Simran Jeet Singh and his three brothers always stood out.

Simran's family is Sikh, a religion with roots in South Asia and around 30 million followers worldwide. Like most Sikhs, the Singhs wrap their hair in turbans, a look few of their neighbours in South Texas had ever seen.

"Being visibly different, we had to learn from an early age how to answer questions about our faith and traditions," Simran remembers. "If people were just being curious, we learned to welcome that and to promote the idea that we may be different, but we're all connected."

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We may
be different,
but we're all
connected.”



Simran admits that at times there were challenges. When he was in elementary school, his family went to his older brother's 5th grade graduation party which was held at the local roller skating rink. The manager of the rink wouldn't let the boys skate with their turbans on. He ordered them to remove their head coverings (a symbol of their religious identity) or leave the rink.

Instead of leaving the rink, or asking her sons to take off their turbans, Simran's mother went to the other parents and told them what was happening. The whole group left the skating rink together in a statement of solidarity and commitment to diversity – a moment that has stuck with Simran for the rest of his life.

Instead of seeing their minority status as a problem, Simran's family used it as an opportunity to break down stereotypes and be good ambassadors for Sikhs and minorities everywhere.

"Our turbans didn't matter to people if we were good at basketball, football, baseball, and soccer. Sports really helped equalise the playing field," Simran remembers. "All we had to do was show up

"Our turbans didn't matter to people if we were good at basketball, football, baseball, and soccer. Sports really helped equalise the playing field"

and connect with people, and that could change the way they see us, themselves, and society. That was super powerful."

The positive connections Simran's family built through sports and interfaith work helped them through some of America's darkest days. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, turbaned Sikhs and other minorities were targeted with racist and xenophobic hate crimes across the United States.

"We realised that it wasn't effective or helpful to only address the concerns of our community. We needed to address these issues at their core. That meant working together with Muslim, Arab, and other communities," he said.

This shared idea led Simran to a career in interreligious and intercultural dialogue and helped start the Sikh Coalition, which works to protect civil and human rights for everyone.

"It started as a way to protect our survival," Simran remembers. "Since then we've worked to seize the Sikh spirit of activism and agency."

The Sikh Coalition now helps empower religious and identity-based communities to stop hatred and discrimination by standing up for themselves and each other.

In 2014 when International Basketball Federation (FIBA) rules forced two Indian Sikh players to remove their turbans before a game, Simran started a successful multireligious campaign pressuring FIBA to lift its headgear ban, which it did in 2017.

"Muslim, Jewish, and other groups came together to explain how the headgear ban negatively affected us and negatively shaped how our kids imagine their place in society," Simran said. "Our uniting message was that sports should bring people together, not divide and dis-

criminate. This multireligious component helped show that other communities were directly affected and involved."

Beyond the sports arena, Simran writes and makes regular media appearances to educate Americans about diversity and representation.

"We don't see much media coverage of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists in America. These are the communities who end up being marginalised and whose stories I'm trying to tell. Anyone who is underrepresented, I try to bring their voice to the table," he said.



**Simran is a Sikh
from New York,
United States**

INTERRELIGIOUS ACTION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz was “born interfaith”.

He grew up in the United States celebrating Christmas and Easter with his mother’s side of the family and Passover and Rosh Hashanah with his father’s side. At 10 years old he committed to Judaism but never abandoned his interreligious roots.

“I think I just came to the conclusion that God is much greater than any one

faith,” Shmuly said. “There is wisdom in various approaches.”

As he explored different movements and communities within Judaism over the years, he developed his own worldview, one that embraces diversity, interreligious dialogue, and social justice.

This outlook inspired his grassroots or-

“ I think I just came to the conclusion that God is much greater than any one faith



ganization Arizona Jews for Justice. The group connects hundreds of Jewish volunteers with Christian organizations and churches to help Central American migrants who arrive at the border of the United States and Mexico after fleeing poverty and violence back home.

During busy migration weeks, thousands of people cross into the United States empty-handed and tired. Some are just young children, scared and separated from their families. Arizona Jews for Justice's volunteers bring them clothes and food, provide medical services, and offer free legal support.

"Taking care of the foreigner, the stranger, the refugee is a clear priority in our holy text," Shmuly explains. "It's the Jewish history. We were wanderers and immigrants for 2,000 years, so this work is important to who we are."

Shmuly and his team of volunteers try to bring stability and dignity to the migrant experience. They visit asylum seekers in detention centres to hear their stories and listen to their concerns.

"I've been amazed at how much they

talk about their faith as the key ingredient to their strength," he said. "They survived starving and abuse on their journeys because they had faith that they were not alone."

During busy migration weeks, thousands of people cross into the US empty-handed and exhausted. Some are just young children, scared and separated from their families.

"Not alone" in a religious sense, but also in terms of human connection. Arizona Jews for Justice's volunteers give the gift of community as much as they receive it.

"Most volunteers thought they would just be helping, but they were transformed by the work as well," Shmuly said. "Some were scared at first to open their homes

and host asylum-seeking families, but doing so opened their eyes to really wonderful people."

He hopes their experience will encourage more Jewish communities to think of interreligious service and social justice as core to their identities.

Beyond his work at the southern border, Shmuly helps people of different religious and cultural backgrounds from all over the world. He invites newly arrived Syrian refugees into his family home for Thanksgiving dinners and leads a Jewish-Muslim dialogue group to strengthen ties between local religious communities.

"I saw that young Jews were really hungry to engage with Muslims but didn't have outlets for that, so we created this space," he said. "The goal has been relationship building, not sharing theology but getting to know each other as human beings."

The dialogue group helps young people build interfaith friendships and has become an important source of solidarity against hate crimes targeting Jews, Muslims, and other minorities in the United States.

"It's important that we understand each other, stand together, and use the collective power of faith and religious communities to try to create positive change around the world," Shmuly believes.

The more he promotes interreligious dialogue, the more hope he has for the future.

"When you're on the ground doing interfaith social justice work, you see just how many people are humbly serving each and every day," Shmuly said. "This spiritually rooted solidarity is so powerful. It shows that we're never alone."



Rabbi Shmuly is Jewish and from Arizona, United States

EVERYONE BELONGS AT THE FEAST

Tim Fawsett's early childhood in Australia was "outside the box," but he never felt like an outsider.

His parents were Christian missionaries and some of the only white people in a remote aboriginal community. At school he learned about the local culture and aboriginal beliefs such as the Rainbow Serpent or Dreamtime. He became fast friends with the children in the village who quickly welcomed him into their community.

When Tim turned 10 years old, his family moved to a larger town. For the very first time he was a white boy in a mostly white school. He had to rethink what it meant to be a minority and what it meant to belong. This change helped shape his faith and identity and laid the foundation for his work in intercultural dialogue.

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Rather than trying to change people's beliefs or avoiding real differences, The Feast engages in difficult conversations without fights breaking out



The Feast has helped thousands of young people in the UK start their own interfaith journeys.

After university and nearly 10 years spent running youth camps in Australia, Tim learned about The Feast, a Christian charity in the UK that encourages young people from different religious backgrounds and cultures to create new friendships through dialogue.

His family had been looking for new cultural opportunities and The Feast seemed like a perfect fit. So in 2010 they packed their bags and moved around the world to a mostly Muslim community in Birmingham.

“Trying to work out the balance between Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in Birmingham was the real start of our interfaith journey,” Tim said. “Living there helped my family build friendships with our neighbours and strengthened my work promoting dialogue among teens. It also challenged and helped my own Christian faith come alive.”

The Feast has helped thousands of young

people in the UK start their own interfaith journeys. Small group activities like movie and sports nights, weekend adventure camps, photography courses, and even stand-up comedy help build these bridges.

“Any activity we thought would be fun became an opportunity to begin a conversation and to ask questions that would start a dialogue,” Tim said. “We reached out to churches, mosques, gurdwaras, and schools. We’d ask questions like, ‘How does your family celebrate and teach faith?’ or ‘What does prayer look like?’ It was an opportunity to talk, listen, and learn.”

Tim was doubtful at first but soon saw that these conversations helped kids think through their beliefs and get to know more about themselves and each other.

He remembers one group of Muslim boys who seemed as if they didn’t care much about their religion. Meeting Christians and talking about Islam through The

“Trying to work out the balance between Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in Birmingham was the real start of our interfaith journey.”

Feast sparked a deeper interest in their beliefs and identities and inspired them to lead prayers at their mosque.

Rather than trying to change people’s beliefs or avoiding real differences, The Feast engages in difficult conversations without fights breaking out.

“We’ve worked with a wide spectrum of Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Humanist communities. Everyone, no matter their faith story, is treated with real dignity,” Tim said.

Tim moved back to Australia in 2017, using his experience with The Feast with a new programme called CHAT (Cultural

Hearing, Asking, and Telling). He hopes The Feast’s work in the UK and CHAT’s work in Australia will strengthen minority communities and encourage the majority to stand up for their neighbours and fight against prejudice.

Tim is already teaching his own children to show respect and understanding for other religions and cultures.

“My nine-year-old son was born in Birmingham. Now back in Brisbane, he’s excited to understand aboriginal ethnicities in Australia. He’s starting to work out who he is in the world and to care for others. It’s so special to watch him grow like this and follow our lead,” he said.



**Tim is a
Christian
from Australia**

COMPASSION WITHOUT BORDERS

Mridul Upadhyay was born in a small village in North India. Raised Hindu, his first real chance to connect with Muslims came when he left home for New Delhi, India's vibrant capital.

“I was 17 and went from having no Muslim friends to living in a hostel with mostly Muslim students and attending a university where nearly all of the teachers were Muslim. That was the first time I started learning about other religions and the power of interfaith dialogue,” he remembers.

Mridul was curious about his new friends. He studied the Quran and fasted with them during Ramadan to learn more about their beliefs and cultures. These experiences only made his curiosity grow. He joined an interfaith youth forum where he met Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Sikh students and started volun-

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I want
to bring
communities
together



teering at an interfaith camp.

Each new connection he made helped him break down old biases, but he still felt something holding him back. There was an elephant in the room.

“We were ignoring the fact that diversity sometimes leads to conflict. We weren’t talking about the prejudices that can arise,” he said. “If we want to promote peace and coexistence, we need to engage in these difficult conversations.”

Mridul co-founded Youth for Peace International (YfPI) in 2015 to do just that. The network of young peacebuilders uses interreligious and intercultural dialogue to bring diverse communities together, break down prejudices, and prevent violent extremism. They talk openly about

“If we want to promote peace and coexistence, we need to engage in difficult conversations.”

their identities and stop intolerance and hate speech, often through social media campaigns.

In 2018, Mridul heard false rumours that his university was teaching anti-Indian beliefs. He and other alumni knew this wasn’t true, so they joined together to tell the facts.

“We created an online campaign to defend the university and its teachers, publishing articles and personal stories about how we as Hindus had studied there and had always felt safe and welcome,” Mridul remembers.

The YfPI team used their official Facebook page and personal pages to spread these positive messages to thousands of followers, helping stop the misinformation.

YfPI created similar campaigns to correct hateful stories that divide Hindus and Muslims and increase tensions with neighbouring Pakistan, a mostly Muslim country.

“The roots of conflict and hate often lie in bias and ignorance,” Mridul believes. “It’s

“...just because two countries are divided by religion does not mean that there should be hatred between them”

important for us to dialogue with each other using faith-based belief systems to bring these diverse communities together.”

YfPI recently ran an online dialogue campaign called “Guftagu” (Urdu for “Conversation”) encouraging Pakistanis and North Indians, who share a similar culture, to post photos and examples of their favourite foods, clothes, music, poetry, and festivals.

“We wanted to show that just because the two countries are divided by religion does not mean that there should be hatred between them,” Mridul said.

Another YfPI campaign encouraged young Indians and Pakistanis who have visited each other’s countries to share some of the fears and prejudices they held before

their trips and to discuss how their experiences across the border changed their perspectives in positive ways.

YfPI is now working with government schools to build new curriculums that will use interreligious and intercultural dialogue to promote mutual respect, trust, and love. Mridul hopes this will lead to more cross-cultural exchanges before students reach university -- the kind of powerful experiences he wishes he could have had as a child.

“I want to bring communities together,” he tells anyone who will listen. “I want to promote peace and coexistence so we can all have a little more tolerance for one another, and maybe even compassion.”



Mridul is a Hindu from New Delhi, India

THE FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS

Myo Htut grew up in Myanmar surrounded by religious diversity. In both his hometown Mawlamyine and in Yangon where he studies, Buddhist pagodas, Hindu temples, churches, and mosques all sit side-by-side.

Myo Htut has always loved this mix of cultures and encourages other people to view diversity not as a recipe for trouble but as an opportunity for dialogue.

“When we have heated discussions about our religions, I try to calm people

down by saying we should all have the right to express our own beliefs,” Myo Htut said.

His love for peacebuilding is much needed in Myanmar. As the country opens up after years of strict military rule, new freedoms have brought new challeng-

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Each religion contains positive elements. If we focus on these good things, we can live peacefully



es. Tensions between religious and ethnic minorities that once simmered below the surface now boil over online as hate speech and fake news spread across social media.

Myo Htut saw these tensions rising up among his own friends and decided to take action. After attending a KAICIID-Scouts Dialogue for Peace Facilitator Training in 2018, he designed a series of youth dialogue workshops to promote harmony among students at his university and high school students back home.

The workshops help teens create safe spaces where they can talk about sensitive issues and share their own experiences and identities. Groups come together for dialogue rather than debate and learn important tools and skills for good communication.

“Younger people are often the most flexible, open-minded, and effective in dialogue,” Myo Htut believes. “They can communicate across cultural, religious, and ethnic lines and help us stop fighting. If we want a peaceful situation, we need to empower the next generation. The future is in our hands.”

Most people in Myanmar are Buddhist, and some view the country’s religious minorities with fear or hatred. Myo Htut, who was raised Buddhist but now considers himself a “spiritual seeker”, uses interreligious dialogue skills to help others recognise the important contributions minorities make to Myanmar society.

“Each religion contains positive elements. If we focus on these good things, we can live peacefully,” he believes. “I have Muslim friends, and we have a good relationship because, despite our differences, we respect each other’s identities.”

Myo Htut is a minority (as an ethnic Mon) and appreciates this mutual respect. Leading these dialogue workshops has built his

“I have Muslim friends, and we have a good relationship because, despite our differences, we respect each other’s identities.”

“Being different was an insecurity thing for me, a source of fear, but now I see it as a positive part of my identity.”

confidence and helped him accept others as well as himself.

“Being different was an insecurity thing for me, a source of fear, but now I see it as a positive part of my identity,” he said. “If we can be good to other people, we can be good to ourselves as well.”

Myo Htut has taken this philosophy online, using social media to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue, body positivity, and gender rights. He also posts about Myanmar’s food, which he celebrates as a window into the country’s diverse cultures and a delicious way to bring people together.

His dream is to become a high school teacher back in Mawlamyine once he finishes university. Because of the city’s diversity, he knows his classroom will have students from different religious and cultural backgrounds. He plans to share dialogue skills with them and expand the

focus of future workshops to include sensitive topics beyond religion and ethnicity in order to help Myanmar’s next generation live in greater harmony.

“To understand ourselves and live in peace, we need to understand other people and view things from their perspectives,” he said. “Dialogue can help us do that.”



Myo Htut is a Buddhist from Yangon, Myanmar

YALLA TALK! FOREIGN LANGUAGES OPEN DOORS TO OTHER WORLDS

Hiba Ibrahim was born into a family of engineers, physicians, and scientists. They were passionate about numbers, but Hiba loved languages.

She spoke Arabic at home, studied English at school, and would stay up late into the night whispering foreign words and phrases into her pillow for practice. One evening her father passed Hiba's bedroom door, heard her whispers, and ran into the room to catch whoever she was talking to.

"It's just me," Hiba laughed, inviting him to look around. Her father left the room confused.

Hiba's parents found her late-night language sessions unusual, but they soon grew to respect her curiosity about the world and to accept that her own path

Learning languages allows us to communicate with and understand other people and their cultures. The more languages we speak, Hiba believes, the more minds we can reach.



led her to a job with words instead of numbers. They couldn't stop her passion for intercultural dialogue.

Hiba loved speaking with the American and European students at her high school in Jordan. The more they talked, the more she learned about their lives back home, and the more her English skills improved.

"I began thinking of language not just as a practical tool to get things done but as a way to interact with people and to learn more about our cultures," Hiba said.

This idea inspired Yalla Talk, a language partnership programme Hiba co-founded in 2006 during her final year of high school. "Yalla" means "Let's!" in Arabic, and Yalla Talk brought together young Jordanians and foreign exchange students to talk about their cultures.

"Back then, social media was not yet very popular in Jordan, so it was a new idea to bring people from different backgrounds together to speak about ideas and questions," Hiba remembers. "It was eye-opening to talk with Christian and Jewish students about their faiths and for us to share personal experiences around

wearing the hijab and practicing Islam."

Many participants came to the group shy, unsure of their language skills and how others would view their cultures. Little by little their confidence grew, and so did Hiba's.

"I began thinking of language not just as a functional tool to get things done but as a way to interact with people and to learn more about our cultures"

In 2013 she moved to the United States for a year to teach Arabic. There she spoke at churches, movie festivals, and universities where she shared her thoughts on women in the Middle East, religion, and Islamophobia. When ideas got lost in translation, both at Yalla Talk and in the United States, Hiba used her dialogue facilitation skills to smooth tensions and keep the peace.

Yalla Talk exposed Hiba to different cultures at a young age and helped her become more open-minded and curious about how people connect

She's now living in Canada working on a doctorate degree and developing intercultural communication tools for schools. One day she hopes to start an English and Arabic podcast for young people so they can talk about and celebrate their own diversity.

Yalla Talk exposed Hiba to different cultures at a young age and helped her become more open-minded and curious about how people connect. It made her celebrate being a Jordanian Muslim woman and appreciate intercultural dialogue as an opportunity to learn not just about other people, but also about herself.

Practicing English words on her pillow was a safe place to start, but Hiba's foreign language and dialogue skills really started to grow when she started real conversations with real people and overcame her fear of making mistakes.

Hiba's favourite proverb, "One language, one person; two languages, two persons," comes from Turkish, another language she speaks. Learning languages allows us to communicate with and understand other people and their cultures. The more languages we speak, Hiba believes, the more minds we can reach.



Hiba is Muslim and from Amman, Jordan.

CHANGING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

As a young man growing up in Hungary's capital Budapest, Tamas Horn worked as a rickshaw driver, a youth mentor, a photographer, a karaoke DJ, a childcarer, and a nightclub presenter.

He enjoyed most of these jobs but was starting to want a job with more purpose. That's when Europe's migrant crisis started.

In the summer of 2015, thousands of refugees arrived in Budapest in need

of help. Many Hungarians opened their hearts and homes to these asylum seekers, but as soon as the crisis stopped, so did a lot of their goodwill.

"We saw how much extra stuff people had in their homes because they didn't

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Our main
goal is
to build
bridges



know what to do with it or didn't trust existing organizations to put it to good use. So I thought, why don't we go directly to people's homes to pick it up? I posted the idea on Facebook, and that's how we started," Tamas said.

His idea started the Charity Taxi Foundation, which collects unwanted clothes and goods from hundreds of homes in the city and donates them to nearby villagers in need. With volunteers from Budapest and the countryside working together, people from different backgrounds are able to connect through dialogue and social action.

"Our main goal is to build bridges," Tamas said. "Participants enjoy volunteering but also see what village life is like. Meeting with local partners and families gives us the opportunity to talk about pressing issues and to stop harmful stereotypes. All this work contributes to a more collaborative and understanding

"Meeting with local partners and families gives us the opportunity to discuss pressing issues and to stop harmful stereotypes."

society, a more sustainable environment, and helps reduce social inequalities."

Most of the villagers Charity Taxi helps are Roma, a community that's often discriminated against in Europe. As a music mentor, Tamas had worked with Roma children in those early days of job uncertainty. He'd learned that many people from the countryside live in extreme poverty without real access to education, health care, or other basic services. Tamas knew they needed help, but many Charity Taxi volunteers from the city had no idea. Visiting the countryside and talking with villagers has opened their eyes to inequality and helped them recognise their own privilege.

"Sharing personal stories is the best way to break down stereotypes and make the volunteers step out of their Budapest bubble," Tamas said.

After giving out donations, sometimes

"It's not always clear where our paths will take us, but when inspiration strikes, follow through and see what falls into place."

through markets and events that benefit villagers, city volunteers play with local children, have lunch with community leaders, and visit families in their homes.

"We go there to talk and learn about each other's lives and the challenges we all face. The family visits are the most interesting part of each trip," Tamas said.

With its warehouse of donated goods overflowing, Tamas is busy expanding Charity Taxi's reach. He's now working to train and develop local leaders in the villages and encouraging more people from the city to volunteer and talk with people they might otherwise

not meet, bringing thousands more people together in dialogue.

Every great project starts as an idea. Tamas never imagined a Facebook post would change his life, but Charity Taxi has given him purpose and a mission to empower other people. Those twists and turns of his youth built the creativity and communication skills he needed to make Charity Taxi successful. It's not always clear where our paths will take us, but when inspiration strikes, follow through and see what falls into place. Like Tamas, you might just find your calling.



Tamas is Jewish and from Budapest, Hungary.

FORGIVENESS IS THE ULTIMATE FORM OF POWER

Arno Michaelis and Pardeep Singh Kaleka both grew up near Milwaukee in the United States. They never met as children. Even if they had, they wouldn't have been friends.

Arno had a troubled youth. He dropped out of school at 16, joined a white supremacist group, and wrote songs about killing minorities.

"I went from bullying kids on the bus to starting fights at school to beating people up," he said.

Meanwhile, Pardeep was just trying to fit in. His family had left their farm in India

when he was six and moved to the United States in search of a better life.

As Pardeep's American accent and baseball skills improved, Arno began wearing hate symbols to work, which upset his Jewish, Black, Latinx, and gay colleagues.

"These people I claimed to hate treated me with compassion I didn't deserve," Arno said. "Nothing showed

Pardeep invited Arno to speak with him at a local high school. Out of that successful collaboration, Serve 2 Unite was born.



me the wrongness of my actions more than that.”

In 1994 Arno’s daughter was born and one of his fellow gang members was murdered. He left the hate group and never looked back.

Arno later wrote a memoir called *My Life After Hate* and began speaking out publicly against extremism. He was busy starting his new life when Pardeep’s life was changed forever.

In 2012, a gunman entered the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin and killed Pardeep’s father and five other worshippers. The shooter, who killed himself after the attack, belonged to the same white supremacist group Arno had helped build.

Pardeep was hurt and confused. How could someone do something so evil? He asked Arno for help to understand. They decided to meet each other for dinner.

Together they came to the conclusion that hurt people often hurt other people. They needed to do something to heal the pain in their community so that it would not continue to affect others. “We needed to figure out how to prevent another shooting”, Pardeep said.

They needed to work together.

Together they came to the conclusion that hurt people often hurt other people. They needed to do something to heal their community.

Pardeep invited Arno to speak with him at a local high school. 700 students listened for more than an hour, interrupting them only to applaud. Out of that successful partnership, Serve 2 Unite was born.

Pardeep says that while individually his and Arno’s stories are strong, together they are far greater than the evil that happened. Today they want to deliver a message that “forgiveness is the ultimate form of power.”

Serve 2 Unite uses dialogue, service learning, and art to help young people establish a healthy sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. Their school programmes address gun violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious intolerance to protect youth from bullying, violent extremism, and other forms of harm.

Serve 2 Unite started as a call to action to stop hate crimes. Over time, it became a way to connect people through care for one another. Since that first school meet-

ing in 2013, Serve 2 Unite has reached more than 10,000 students in Wisconsin and thousands of other people across the United States.

Arno says that Akaya is one of the students that Serve 2 Unite helped change.

“She was the holy terror of her school, but after hearing our stories, Akaya went to her teacher and said, ‘I won’t start fights anymore. I’ll stop them from happening by getting people to talk’.”

She followed through on that promise, organizing parties for children in Milwaukee’s heavily segregated inner city and eventually getting an internship at a local organization that works to build safe and empowered neighbourhoods.

“Stories like Akaya’s show that peace can be contagious, just like violence. If we dedicate ourselves to this work, we can help each other heal,” Arno believes.

In 2018, Arno and Pardeep wrote a book together called *The Gift of Our Wounds*. The book is about their personal journeys and their work with Serve 2 Unite.

“We think we can escape our past because time has passed, but sometimes time does not heal wounds, it makes them worse,” Pardeep said, explaining the ti-

tle. “Arno promised me the day we met he would do what he could to heal the wounds of our past. The book explores how we find forgiveness so that we can heal properly moving forward.”

For Arno, this healing process involves difficult conversations with people he hurt, but also with himself.

“Pardeep helped me realise that I can’t encourage others to embrace self-love while still hating myself. He’s helping me learn the power of forgiveness,” Arno said.

Another man’s hatred brought Arno and Pardeep together under terrible circumstances. What joins them now is deep friendship and a shared commitment to transform hatred into courage, wisdom, and love.



**Arno is Buddhist
and Pardeep is Sikh.
Both are from
Milwaukee, Wisconsin,
United States**

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS!

Chantal Suissa-Runne was the only Jewish girl in her class. Instead of feeling alone in the small Dutch village where she grew up, Chantal felt special.

She lit menorah candles and opened gifts during Chanukah, dressed up in colourful costumes for Purim, ate sticky sweets on Rosh Hashanah, and celebrated other Jewish holidays her classmates had never even heard of.

Chantal liked being “different”. It helped her connect with other minorities at school

and better understand their feelings and needs. This skill became useful when she spent a few months on a kibbutz community farm in Israel as a teenager.

“I was this blonde blue-eyed Jewish girl sorting melons with Arab Muslims in the hot desert,” she said. “I made friends with them and decided to learn about their culture.”

“

I was this blonde blue-eyed Jewish girl sorting melons with Arab Muslims in the hot desert



Chantal had gone to Israel to learn the Hebrew language but also started learning Arabic words from her new Muslim friends. She stood up for them when others discriminated against them and shared meals with them on their caravan floor. Soon they invited her to a wedding in the desert.

“It was this huge, crazy experience of love and kindness and hospitality. I was so interested in these people and inspired to learn more about the world,” she said.

Chantal was surrounded by love, but she couldn't ignore the prejudice she saw between other Jews and Muslims on the kibbutz.

When she returned to the Netherlands and started hosting interfaith events in the capital city Amsterdam, that prejudice followed her home.

Chantal was surrounded by love, but she couldn't ignore the prejudice she saw between other Jews and Muslims on the kibbutz.

In 2011 some students at a school next door to her synagogue began targeting it with anti-Semitism. Rather than building a higher fence around the synagogue, Chantal invited the students inside to learn more about her faith and community.

Since that first meeting, Chantal's “Get to Know Your Neighbours” project has welcomed 13,000 students and teachers into Dutch synagogues across the Netherlands. Most visitors expect a heavy conversation, but Chantal tries to keep it light.

“Humour is like oxygen when dealing with this serious stuff,” Chantal says. She shares jokes about Jewish culture and beliefs at the beginning of each tour to get her neighbours talking. She believes it's better to talk about the anti-Semitic stereotypes in a safe environment rather than have people hide them inside their hearts.

Chantal was far younger than most of the interfaith activists she knew when she started Get to Know Your Neighbours, but she knew she could make a difference.

Visitors ask questions about religion, politics, dating, food -- whatever comes to mind -- and share their own experiences with hatred and discrimination. But not everyone comes to the synagogue with an open heart.

Chantal remembers one girl who entered saying she hated Jews. The girl apologised at the end of the tour and said she now sees Jewish people in a better light. One Muslim teacher hugged Chantal at the end of a visit, thanking her for opening the synagogue's doors and her students' minds. Visitors who arrive with doubt, fear, or hatred in their hearts are often surprised at how much they learn. Many don't want to leave when the tour is over!

Chantal was far younger than most of the interfaith activists she knew when she started Get to Know Your Neighbours, but she knew she could make a difference. She remembered her conversations with Muslim farmers on the kibbutz and understood how important it is to start respectful dialogue among people of different religions and backgrounds.

Her idea was simple, but it worked. She opened her door to neighbours, and they opened their hearts and minds in return. Sometimes the best ideas come from your past, sometimes they're right in front of you, and sometimes they're right next door.



Chantal is Jewish and from Amsterdam, Netherlands.

WE CAN'T BUILD PEACE WITHOUT DIALOGUE

Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, but Andreas Jonathan grew up there in a Christian bubble.

“I went to a Christian school and was sort of separated from Muslims,” he said. “I had no Muslim friends and didn’t know my Muslim neighbours. Older people warned us to be cautious of them.”

His experience wasn’t unique. Millions of Indonesian Christians and Muslims live separate lives. Andreas saw how this separation was creating prejudice within himself and conflict across the country and decided to take action. For interreligious

“
By sharing
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start to melt
away



peace to flourish, he realised, young Indonesians needed to come together and get to know “the Other.”

In 2007 Andreas and some of his Christian friends started hosting dialogue sessions with young Muslims. He and a Muslim classmate grew these informal gatherings into Young Peacemaker Trainings for students to address interreligious conflict. These trainings soon led them to form the Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community - Indonesia (YIPCI).

YIPCI's interfaith peace camps give religiously diverse students from across Indonesia the chance to make new friendships and learn about each other's beliefs and experiences. Unlike many secular approaches to dialogue, YIPCI emphasises the common core teachings of Christianity and Islam.

“For effective dialogue, we need to go back to the holy books,” Andreas believes. “We read scripture together every morning and have open discussions, highlighting peaceful verses in the Quran and the Bible to counter more radical verses some people misuse to promote religious conflict and violence.”

The camps focus on four peace values: peace with God, peace with neighbours, peace with yourself, and peace with the environment. Through games and scripture, campers discuss interreligious violence, conflict, forgiveness, and reconciliation in fun and memorable ways.

“We talk about religious diversity, gender diversity, and being inclusive. For some students, mostly the Muslims, it's their first direct encounter with ‘the Other’, and it's a life-changing experience,” Andreas said. “By sharing our actual beliefs and discussing them, our prejudices start to melt away.”

At each camp, Muslim and Christian students admit their past prejudices, apologise for them, and forgive one another. Andreas sees these heartfelt apologies and the genuine forgiveness that follows as important steps towards true reconciliation.

One of the most powerful reconciliations Andreas remembers came at a YIPCI camp with participants from Indonesia's Maluku Islands. A generation was born into violent conflict there some 20 years ago, and hostility and resentment has stayed between Christians and Muslims. Having

“Peace and interreligious dialogue are like two sides of the same coin. We can't build peace without dialogue”

experienced these tensions, Andreas and YIPCI decided to use interreligious dialogue tools to help bring about peace.

“Before the camp, the two groups were bitter towards each other, but during the reconciliation process, they found the opportunity to forgive and become friends,” Andreas said. “They understood that not every member of the other faith is violent and that the root of the problem isn't our religious teachings. Since the camp, they have opened their minds, forgiven previous ‘enemies’, and mobilised others to find peace.”

In addition to frequent peace camps, YIPCI organises a national conference and hosts interfaith dialogue courses to help former participants become peace camp facilitators.

Andreas handed YIPCI leadership over to younger members in 2017 but still serves as an adviser to help guide its growth.

YIPCI has already welcomed more than 2,000 students to its peace camps and now plans to reach every city and every university campus in Indonesia.

“If we can reach more students from diverse backgrounds, we can help change the future of our society for the better,” Andreas believes. “Peace and interreligious dialogue are like two sides of the same coin. We can't build peace without dialogue”.



**Andreas Jonathan
is a Christian
from Yogyakarta,
Indonesia**

VOCABULARY LIST

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ABORIGINAL: an individual belonging to one of the indigenous (native) groups in Australia

ACTIVISM: active efforts to bring about social or political change

ANTI-SEMITISM: prejudice or discrimination against Jews as a religious or ethnic group

ASYLUM SEEKERS: a person who seeks protection from the dangers in his/her home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn't been legally determined yet.

BIAS: having an unfair perception of someone or treating someone unfairly

CHANUKAH/HANUKKAH: a Jewish wintertime celebration (also called the festival of lights) with a nightly menorah lighting, special prayers and fried foods

COEXISTENCE: living in peace with one another

CONFLICT: a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs.

(HUMAN) DIGNITY: the idea that an individual holds a special value based on his/her humanity, rather than on class, gender, race, religion, abilities etc.

DISCRIMINATION: giving unjust treatment to individuals or groups, based on distinctions such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion,

national or social origin, property, birth or other status

DIALOGUE: a secure means of communication between individuals or groups aimed at the exchange of views, knowledge, understandings, impressions and perceptions each person carries on any given topic, in order to reach a common understanding of the subject matter at the heart of a given dialogue.

DIWALI: the Hindu festival of lights which symbolises the victory of light over darkness

EMPOWERMENT: authority or power given to someone to do something

HATE SPEECH: speech or writing that attacks or discriminates against an individual or a group on the basis of who they are – such as their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor

HIJAB: head covering worn by Muslim women

HOLI: the Hindu festival of colours which celebrates the victory of good over evil

HOSTILITY: unfriendliness or aggressive behaviour toward someone

INTOLERANCE: unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviours that differ from your own

KIBBUTZ: a collective community in Israel, often based on farming

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MIGRANT: there is no universal definition of a 'migrant'; however many international organizations describe a migrant as someone who moves away from his/her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. These may be for involuntary reasons, such as fleeing a political conflict or natural disaster, or for voluntary reasons, such as for economic or labour migration

MENORAH: a lamp with candles used for Hanukkah celebrations

MINORITIES: groups that are different based on race, politics, religion, etc. from the larger group of which they are a part

PREJUDICE: an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling formed about someone without enough thought or knowledge

PURIM: sometimes known as the Feast of Lots, Purim is a Jewish festival which commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people from persecution in the ancient Persian Empire

ROSH HASHANAH: the celebration of the Jewish New Year

SYNAGOGUE: Jewish house of worship

PEACE AMBASSADORS: an individual who actively promotes peace within his or her community

PESACH/PASSOVER: Jewish holiday which commemorates their liberation from slavery under ancient Egypt

RECONCILIATION: restoring friendly relationships between individuals or groups who were formally in conflict with one another

REFUGEES: a person who is fleeing per-

secution or conflict in her or his country of origin. Unlike migrants, refugees are entitled to the full protection of refugee law, including protection from expulsion or return to situations of persecution where their life and freedom are at risk

RESENTMENT: feelings of anger because you are forced to accept something you don't like

SAFE SPACES: places created for individuals who feel marginalised (left out) to come together to dialogue about their experiences

SANITATION: Access to clean water and safe waste disposal

SECULAR: not connected to religious or spiritual beliefs

SOCIAL INEQUALITY: uneven distribution of resources and opportunities within society

SOCIAL JUSTICE: a fair and equal society based on an even distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges

SOLIDARITY: agreement between and support for members of a group

STEREOTYPES: an often unfair or untrue belief about a particular group of people

THANKSGIVING: a holiday celebrated in the United States, Canada and other parts of the world which gives thanks for the harvest

TURBAN: head covering often worn by Sikh men

WHITE SUPREMACIST: an individual who believes that the white race is superior to others and should have control over people of other races

XENOPHOBIC: fear, prejudice or hatred of people from other countries

TEN PRINCIPLES of DIALOGUE

1

Establish
a safe space

2

Agree that the
main purpose of
the dialogue session
is learning

3

Use appropriate
communication
skills

4

Set proper
ground rules at
the beginning of
each dialogue
session

5

Take risks,
express feelings
and confront
perceptions
(honesty)

6

Put the
relationship
first

7

Gradually
address the
hard questions
and gradually
depart
from them

8

Do not quit
or avoid the
difficult issues

9

Expect to
be changed

10

Bring the
change to others

FACILITATION GUIDELINES

As the facilitator it is important to establish certain rules at the beginning of the dialogue session in order to create a safe space for participants.

Rules may change depending on the context and the needs of the group. It's best to start by brainstorming rules together at the beginning of the dialogue session. That way participants feel included and like they have ownership over the rules.

Examples might include but are not limited to:

CONFIDENTIALITY

Respect the privacy of each participant. Allow them to share at their own pace. Avoid asking deep questions directed at a specific individual, whether in group sessions or in private conversations. Give participants time to realise this is a safe space and that their views or sensitive stories will not be used against them later, either inside the group or outside of it. Once participants know they can trust each other, they will begin to feel more confident and share more deeply.

RESPECT DIFFERENCES

Participants in your group may have many differences that make them unique from one another. These could include different cultural or religious backgrounds, ethnic identities, social classes or physi-

cal differences. Group members must be committed to inclusiveness and respect for all differences within the group.

NO INTERRUPTION

It is important to let each participant finish their thoughts by allowing as much time as required. Of course, at times, some people speak more easily and for longer periods than others. This is not fair and does not promote a safe space. Facilitators can help set limits for how long a person speaks and also gently welcome those who are more quiet to join in the conversation – again being careful not to force their participation or ask them to answer any uncomfortable questions. This also promotes active listening and understanding among the group.

TALKING THROUGH PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND AVOIDING GENERALISATION

When someone uses 'I' when talking about a topic or sharing an experience, the listeners understand immediately that this is a personal view. Participants need to respect these views as part of the dialogue, even if they may disagree. Encourage each member of your dialogue session to speak from an "I" perspective rather than a "we" or "you" perspective in order to avoid unfairly generalising others in the group who may disagree or have a different experience.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

The dialogue will be successful if all the participants support its process and take the responsibility to ensure they follow the rules and respect each other.

REMEMBER TO LAUGH AND HAVE FUN

Dialogue can be serious business and some of the topics may create situations of great emotional intensity. But there will also be plenty of moments of fun and laughter. The experiences that participants share while getting to know one another better should be engaging and enjoyable. At times, they may even be funny. Who hasn't accidentally made a cultural or social faux pas because they were completely unaware? Facilitators should be prepared to share stories from their own lives, whether meaningful, sad, or funny. This sets an example for others about how trusting and open they can be. It can also help set the tone for the dialogue sessions and create the atmosphere for effective participation.

Abu-Nimer Mohammed, Anas Alabbadi. "10 Principles of Dialogue." 2015, KAICIID Training.

»» Where Should I Hold My Dialogue Session?

Physical space is very important in order to create a "safe space" for dialogue. Before you select a physical space for your dialogue, ask:

- Does the dialogue space identify with one group more than others? For instance, if the space takes place in a room related to a religious community, are there symbols/icons of a religion that may make participants from another religious tradition feel less included?
- Is the space easy for participants to reach? Do they have to travel far to get there?
- Is the space big enough for all of the participants?
- Is it free from noise and distractions?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been in a situation where someone didn't understand you or disagreed with you? How did you handle that?
2. Have you ever met someone who is completely different from you? What was that experience like?
3. What is a stereotype? Are stereotypes good or bad?
4. What is discrimination? How does it relate to stereotypes?
5. Think of a situation in which you were negatively stereotyped and/or discriminated against because of your religious or cultural identity. What did you do? How did you feel? What will you do if this happens again?
6. Think of a situation in which you negatively stereotyped and/or discriminated against someone because of his/her religious or cultural identity. What did you do? How did you feel? What will you do if this happens again?
7. What aspects of culture or religion do you think it's important to know about? (holidays, festivals, styles of worship, food, clothing, etc.)
8. Do you feel that you know enough about your own culture or religion? What aspects would you like to learn more about? How might you learn about those aspects?

9. In learning about other religions or cultures from your own, have you found anything that surprised you about a particular tradition?
10. How would you define a hero? What are some characteristics he/she must possess?
11. In the book, "Heroes of Dialogue" are young leaders who see a problem in their community and work together to find a solution. What are some of the problems they addressed?
12. What is a current problem that you see in the community around you? What could you do to help fix that problem?
13. What would make your school a more inclusive place for all students? What specifically could be done to make your school more welcoming and affirming for students who come from religious minorities?
14. Many of the Heroes used social media to promote peace or raise awareness. How do you use social media? What are some ways that social media can be used to help your community?

>> Would you like to learn more about dialogue or improve your skills in teamwork, speaking, and facilitation?

DialoGo! is an interactive board game that challenges players to practice facilitation skills, overcome misunderstandings, dispel stereotypes, as well as develop better listening and communication skills.

It is designed for everyone, from youth leaders, to peacebuilders, to teachers, students, or families and can be downloaded for free in 8 languages.



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