



Story: Sulaiman and the Ants

MANY WAYS

>> Lesson 3: Islam

Eight point: By calling ourselves progressive Christians, we mean that we are Christians who affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey.

Affirmation: My heart is open to the wisdom teachings of the world.

Getting to the Heart of the Lesson

Islam has its roots in the Judaic tradition, just as Christianity does. Mohammed was the founder and considered Moses and Jesus prophets. Prayer and fasting help Muslims remember God. The five pillars of Islam include prayer (five times daily), giving alms to the poor, fasting during the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage (Hajj, pronounced “hodge”), and belief in one god.

People who practice the Islamic religion are called Muslims or Moslems. They worship in mosques and their holy text is the Qur’an (sometimes spelled Koran). In addition to following the five pillars of their faith, Muslims also focus on right action, gratitude, understanding God and studying their scripture, much like people who follow Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity and other religions.

The Arabic word for God is Allah. Muslims have

ninety-eight other names for God, which they recite using prayer beads.

Here are a few:

- The Timeless
- The Patient
- The Eternal
- The Hidden
- The Unmanifest The Inner
- The Beginning-less
- The Loving
- The Wise
- The Great
- The All-Knowing
- The Creator
- The Source of Peace
- The Compassionate
- The Light

You can see that these aspects of God are similar to the conceptions of God in the other major religions. The importance of helping others is also emphasized in the New Testament.

Teacher Reflection

The call to prayer is integral to a Muslim’s life. It’s the first thing recited in the ears of a newborn baby. It rings out in mosques, Islamic schools, homes, and on the street in Muslim communities five times a day.

Experience the call to prayer in your daily life:

- Consider the names of God above and choose one that is meaningful and inspiring for you.
- Set a timer on your cell phone or watch to ring five times during the day.
- When you hear the signal, pause in what you are

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doing and silently say the name of God you've chosen. How did you feel when the timer went off? Were you surprised, perturbed, relieved, happy, or some other emotion? Was it different each time? Was there a time during that day that you found you preferred to pray?

Quotations

Alms (sadaqa) shall go to the poor, the needy, the workers who collect them, those hearts that have been recently reconciled, those in bondage, those in debt, in the cause of God, and to the wayfarer. Such is God's commandment. God is all-knowing and most wise.
— *Qur'an 9:60*

Allah is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light.
— *Qur'an 2:257*

All God's creatures are His family; and he is the most beloved of God who doeth most good to God's creatures.
— *Prophet Muhammad*

Bible Verse

Psalm 103
Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Opening the Lesson

Story

The story included in this lesson may be used anytime during the lesson activities. It could be a good way to begin the discussion about Islam or a natural way to wind down the activities at the end. A story is also a good break in the middle of a lesson, depending on the energy of the group.

Introduction to Islam

Ask students if they ever pray. Do they maybe pray

before meals or before bedtime? Do they know that there is a religion that requires its adherents to wash the exposed parts of their body [otherwise it sounds like they're washing the prayer rug], spread a prayer rug, and kneel down and pray five times every day? Morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night. When it's time for prayer, Muslims must stop what they are doing and remember that their relationship with God is more important than anything else.

We highly recommend you show the children a call to prayer on YouTube. There are many beautiful ones that feature particular mosques. (Search "Islam call to prayer.") Ask the children to notice the beautiful shape of the mosques.

Explain that Muslims do not believe in using photos or images in their mosques or their holy book, the Qur'an. Therefore they have a rich tradition of making their temples and texts beautiful through geometric patterns and calligraphy (graceful handwriting). Show the group some mosques and prayer rugs online. You can also find beautiful photos of mosques and of Muslims kneeling on their prayer rugs in library books about Islam.

Building the Lesson

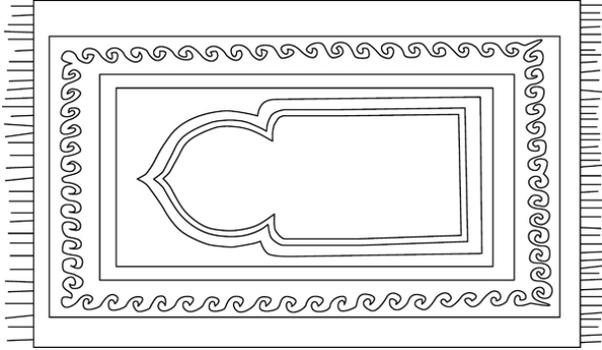
Call to Prayer

After listening to calls to prayer and viewing mosques and prayer rugs, explain that during class today we are going to experience what it's like to be called to prayer right in the middle of our activities. We will set a timer, and when it rings we will all immediately stop what we are doing and pray.

Set a timer for ten or fifteen minutes. When it goes off, lead the children in a prayer of thanks for parents, friends and whatever else you are inspired to be thankful for. You might call on a different person each time to suggest what we might give thanks for: pets, friends, trees and so on.

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Prayer Rugs



Let each child design and color a prayer rug. Prayer rugs often have a picture of the mosque at Mecca (the holy city of Islam where Mohammed was born) or a stylized representation of it in the middle. Around the outside there is always at least one stylized border.

Show the children some examples of prayer rugs for sale on websites (search for “Islam prayer rugs”) if you did not already share examples.

Make copies of the prayer rug template and the outlines of borders. Cut the border designs in cardboard so children can choose to trace around them. Some children will prefer to draw their own.

Let them design them and color borders on their rug templates.

Prayer Positions

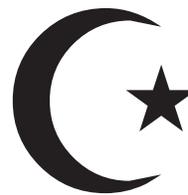
Some children will finish early. You can teach them the series of prayer positions that Muslims use and let them imitate them.

1. Stand upright and raise hands to ear height, palms facing forward
2. Remain standing and cross hands (right over left) on chest or near navel.

3. While standing with legs straight, bow at the waist and place hands on knees.
4. Stand upright with arms relaxed at sides.
5. Kneel on ground with forehead, nose, palms, knees, and toes touching the prayer rug.
6. Sit with back straight in kneeling position, hands resting on knees, palms down.
7. While kneeling, turn head to the right and then the left, saying, “Peace be unto you.”

Closing the Lesson

Show students the symbol for Islam, and note that both the moon and the star emit light. Light is often associated with religion. Christianity, too, uses a star to represent Christ at Christmas time. Explain to the children that giving alms (money to the poor) is a very important part of being a good Muslim. Christianity, too, teaches that we should help those we can (see quotes). Finally, another commonality between the religions is that both emphasize putting God first in one’s life. Praying five times a day helps them to do that.



Now give each child a chance to display his or her rug design, if desired. Model making objective comments about each child’s work. These comments should not be value judgments such as “That’s good!” or, “You did a beautiful job.”

For example, responses might be, “You used many bright colors in yours.” “That’s a complicated pattern you created.” “You worked hard on that with a lot of concentration.” “You chose to put blue triangles all

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around the border.” These types of comments draw the child’s attention away from wanting approval and to the works themselves, as well as help the children develop observational skills.

Introduction to Story

*Note to teachers: Sulaiman is the English transliteration of an Arabic name meaning “man of peace.” Sulaiman is the spelling used in the Muslim tradition. Solomon is the equivalent English name and the spelling traditionally used in Christian stories.

This story is an adaptation of a story told in the Islamic scripture, the Holy Qur’an (pronounced koo-rah-n, sometimes seen as Koran).

Story: Sulaiman and the Ants

Imagine how big the world looks to a tiny ant. Even a grain of sand or a blade of grass is large compared to a little ant. Yet the ants have busy lives building colonies, gathering food, raising their young and tending to their queen without concern for the ways of the big world.

Think of how small and unimportant the ant would appear to a mighty king. Kings are busy making big decisions, leading the people of their kingdom, and would not normally be thinking about the small world of the ant.

But there is a story of an ant and a king that took place long ago.

Sulaiman* was a king and a prophet (someone inspired by God) who was known throughout the land for his wisdom and his devotion to Allah. From the time he was small he wanted to be of service to his people and to Allah, and use the gifts he had been given to be a wise and just ruler. One extraordinary ability given to him by Allah was the ability to understand and communicate with animals. This made him a very unusual king.

King Sulaiman was leading his vast army on a journey to a neighboring country. There were thousands of men marching and riding horses. Hundreds of carts and wagons loaded with supplies rolled across the ground, all making a tremendous noise. The king rode on his beautiful white horse up front, where his men could see him as they covered the long miles.

When the deep rumbling and trembling of the earth began, the worker ants rushed to their queen in fear. Could it be a thunderstorm? A storm could wash away the entire colony! The rumbling continued and grew louder as the nursery ants, who cared for the precious eggs laid by the queen, joined the worker ants in the queen’s chamber. What if it was an earthquake and the world collapsed?

The queen had to decide what to do, but first she needed to know the nature of the danger they faced. So she bravely left the colony and climbed up the closest hill where she could look down the valley towards the source of the rumbling. She could see that it was a great army with a rider on a white horse leading the way. She had heard of the wise King Sulaiman who ruled the big world beyond the Valley of the Ants and knew he always rode a white horse. The king and all those following were heading directly towards the queen and her colony.

The queen rushed back to the ants awaiting her return and issued a royal command. “Every ant must immediately go to the deepest underground chambers, or risk being crushed by the approaching army! King Sulaiman is a compassionate servant of Allah, and would not knowingly harm us, but we are so small and the army is so big — he will not notice our home in the valley before it is too late!” Every ant scurried to obey their queen.

Unknown to the queen ant, King Sulaiman heard her royal command and smiled. Do you know why he smiled?

He smiled when he heard the queen because he was

