

The Holy Exhilaration of AAi Compassion

by Rod Cardoza



As our compassion event planning meeting ends at the synagogue, the rabbi smiles and says to all gathered, “Every time I leave these meetings together, I’m *high* for about two days—*completely energized!* I’m not kidding! Meeting with you all gets me *high!*” Then the rabbi pauses, frowns, and says rather sadly, “But you know, when I leave meetings from my *own* community, it’s not always that way.”

I am astounded not only by the rabbi’s transparency, but also by his vulnerability to reveal something so deeply personal after collaborating in compassion with the others for only a few months. After a brief moment of silence, the mosque president says emphatically, “Same here.” Then the church pastor quickly admits, “Me too.” Whoa.

Something awesome happens when Jews, Christians, and Muslims unite to serve our neighbors in need. I have searched long and hard for a word to describe it, and I’ve listened to hundreds like the rabbi comment on the exhilaration they experience. Exhilaration is defined as a feeling of excitement, happiness, or elation. Its synonyms include *joy, delight, jubilation, even ecstasy*—a term used by cultural anthropologists to describe

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Sarah Sherfy (left) takes a photo break with her fellow volunteer Julie Priest (right) at a hygiene kit event at Congregation Shir Hadash in Los Gatos in 2020.

COVID-19 Opens Doors and Hearts for AAi

by Loureen Murphy

Lockdown created a land of missed opportunities: jobs, graduation ceremonies, weddings, reunions, even gatherings to honor the dead. Not so for AAi. Instead, pandemic restrictions opened doors. In its 13-year history, AAi focused on organizing compassion events that were congregationally sponsored by a particular synagogue, church, and mosque. Each congregation recruited volunteers from their own respective communities. Problem was, those who didn’t attend sponsoring congregations never got invited. For years AAi Executive Director Rod Cardoza had wanted to “fix this” by hosting compassion events for the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim public. With present staff overworked and the organization understaffed and underfunded, it never happened. In 2020, however, COVID-19 arranged it for him. Exit congregational events. Enter, the general public.

AAi started by emailing invites to previous volunteers. Additional appeals on social media, Eventbrite, and VolunteerMatch aimed to draw in newcomers.

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ecstatic religious experiences, and slang for a drug used to "get high."

Social scientists have identified three components that produce happiness and joy. Ironically, money is not one. If you are living in poverty without food and shelter, then yes, money to pay for basic needs will lead to an increase in happiness. However, once basic needs are met, an increase in wealth does not correspondingly lead to an increase in happiness. Instead, social scientists attribute happiness to being:

- 1) in community (not being isolated and alone)
- 2) engaged in a cause greater than self (like helping neighbors in need)
- 3) in "the flow," i.e., a satisfying state of mind we all experience when using our [God-given] talents and skills at which we are exceptionally good, but others are not. Being in "the flow" is often so enjoyable that we lose track of time when doing it. The same activity for others is hard work, but to us, it's fun.

I will never forget the hospitality I've enjoyed in humble villages of rural India and Mindanao, Philippines. While I grew up surrounded by the wealth of Silicon Valley, it seemed clear that my hosts abroad were much happier than my Silicon Valley neighbors.

In 1985, I studied at a Gandhian university in Gujarat, India. After accidentally straying into an urban slum, I expected to be approached by beggars. Instead, I was invited into numerous shacks for tea! One elderly man was so happy I accepted his invitation that he put on a mini concert for the neighborhood with his 1-string guitar. How can poor rickshaw pullers experience more joy than billionaires in fine homes? Social scientists have an answer. Interestingly, the prophets

provided similar answers centuries ago, albeit in a different language. Being in community and providing for neighbors in need are foundational commandments in all three of our traditions, and obedience to them can bring us immense joy.

When speaking at a mosque some years ago, I asked all gathered, "Do you think God asks us to serve the poor primarily for *their* benefit, or *ours*?" Without delay, all quickly concurred, "Primarily for *OUR* benefit!" I agree! And yet with the rabbi I frown because I'm not sure most in my Christian community would come to the same conclusion so quickly.

When I shared the rabbi's comment with one of our Muslim compassion event co-leaders, she said, "He's only high for *two days*? I'm high for *two weeks*!" In light of these responses, another rabbi once quipped that AAi compassion might be the solution to the opioid crisis!

Clearly, people don't need to use drugs to feel exhilarated or "high". We need to cooperate with God's divine agenda for humanity by serving the poor, suffering, and marginalized. Such cooperation can be deeply

rewarding because we are personally making a beautiful difference in the lives of precious people. However, I believe AAi compassion events multiply the joyful effects of serving the poor, suffering, and marginalized because we are cooperating with the divine agenda both in *community* and *across religious lines* that have divided the family of Abraham for centuries. Every AAi compassion event shows all present that peaceful coexistence between Jews, Christians, and Muslims is not a naïve and distant dream, but a growing and present reality—here and now. In other words, *our engagement in a cause greater than self* is not just about compassionate service to the poor, but also about *communities collaborating* in ways that would delight our ancestor, patriarch, and archetype of our faith: Abraham عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ

Cooperating with God's divine agenda for humanity satisfies our souls much more deeply than any amount of wealth ever could. This cause to which all are called is not only far greater than self, it is most holy and sacred work. When performed in community with other children of Abraham, we should not be surprised that it results in holy exhilaration. ●



AAi volunteers have fun after distributing food to hungry seniors and low-income families in San Jose, Calif.



Volunteers plate Pakistani cuisine for guests of Abraham's Tent.

Abraham's Tent Opens in Monterey County

by Noor Ahmed

A Ai's daughter organization, JCM United, has given birth to Abraham's Tent, a soup kitchen in Monterey County now serving hot meals weekly to the unhoused. It all began in 2016 with a special, ceremonial tea and a resounding sense that they were building something monumental. Pastor Brian Bajari remembers that first evening at the Islamic Society of Monterey County when his Muslim friend Dodi said, "I have this special tea from the holy land that I've been saving for a special occasion. I believe this is the occasion, and I'd like to share it as a symbolic act of uniting our faith traditions together as neighbors in our city."

Pastor Bajari had invited AAi Executive Director Rod Cardoza to help them get started. Bajari's work with refugee communities abroad introduced him to the significance of interfaith and intercultural solidarity work, and he wanted to do something similar with friends and neighbors of Monterey County. A year prior he had heard about an opportunity to volunteer with AAi in Gilroy and arrived saying, "I had to see it to believe it." Before leaving he exclaimed, "We need this in Monterey County!" So he returned home determined to gather key Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders to identify areas where they could serve together, and learn how Abrahamic Alliance could unite them to collaborate in compassion.

Dodi was right! According to Bajari, "There was an obvious synergy. People wanted not to just have a dialogue but to practice and embody the values of service to the less fortunate." That historic first meeting at the mosque led to one marvelous AAi compassion event after another. Rod Cardoza then trained Rabbi Bruce Greenbaum to facilitate compassion event planning and organization. In time, this Monterey County branch of the Abrahamic Alliance grew into JCM [Jews, Christians, and Muslims] United.

“People wanted to ... practice and embody the values of service to the less fortunate.”

Without a soup kitchen in Monterey, volunteers often drove one hour (round-trip) to serve at a Winter Warming Shelter in Salinas. Naturally, such driving created challenges for

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Aziz and Kathy Baameur at a Glance

Community: South Valley Islamic Center (SVIC), San Martin, Calif.

Home: Morgan Hill, California

Work: Both retired. Formerly: Aziz, University of California Farm Advisor. Kathy, ESL (English as Second Language) Instructor.

Hobbies: Aziz: Photography, hiking, travel, and reading. Kathy: Travel, reading, hiking, and biking.

Meet Members

Aziz & Kathy Baameur

by Farah Hasnat

The first time I met Aziz and Kathy Baameur was at one of AAI's Emergency Housing builds with Habitat for Humanity. I was deeply impressed by their winsome spirit and just had to get to know them better.

How did you two meet?

Kathy: We met in Morocco when I was serving with Peace Corps in healthcare and nutrition. Aziz was studying administration toward work in government. While on break, he was volunteering in a very poor part of town, helping kids study and pass their exams. That impressed me. We also had a mutual friend that we spent time with, so we got to know each other outside of volunteering together. What can I say? The planets were aligned and the chemistry was there. We fell in love.

How did you learn about AAI and its mission?

Aziz: In 2008, AAI organized an interfaith community service event, cleaning a park in San Jose. Then in

mid 2010, AAI organized a meal preparation and service event for the needy at St. Mary's Church in Gilroy, which united Muslims of South Valley Islamic Center, Jews of Congregation Emeth, and Christians of Lincoln Glen Church. My wife Kathy and I volunteered at both these events.

Kathy: In its founding phase, the South Valley Islamic Center went through a very difficult time. Then in late 2010 we had an open house and Rod Cardoza came to speak at that event. Rod was a long-time friend with some members of our community, from back when he was a student in India.



Kathy Baameur paints weather stripping for emergency housing in San Jose, Calif.

Where else do you volunteer and why?

Kathy: Through the Interfaith Community of South County, we provide meals to residents of the Safe Car Park at Morgan Hill Bible Church. Safe Car Park provides families and single women who live in cars a safe place to sleep in the church's parking lot. We also volunteer with an organization in Morgan Hill called Cecilia's Closet. They offer many services such as toy and turkey drives, clothing giveaways, free haircuts, hygiene kits, etc. We also help with other service projects with the Interfaith Community of South County, wherever there is need.

Aziz: We have been working with these two organizations for 4–5 years. These programs are in cooperation with the Morgan Hill Police Department and are recipients of grants from the city. The families they serve have social workers assisting them.

“My concept of truth has widened and expanded over the years.”

—Kathy

Tell us a little about your faith background?

Aziz: I was born and raised in a practicing Muslim family in Morocco. I lost interest in religion during my teen years due to what I perceived as un-Islamic behaviors and attitudes. I did not associate with any Muslim organizations until after September 11, when I moved here in 2002. It was then we were introduced to our Muslim community.

Kathy: I was baptized and raised in a very strict Catholic family. In my teens I began to question my faith, but I always had a deep spirituality. After we joined the SVIC mosque we became very involved with the Muslim community.

What values do you see that the three faiths have in common?

Kathy: Helping the poor and underserved. Love, justice, equality, and social activism.

Aziz: The idea of caring for all. Doing things for love, not out of fear of God. The core belief of all three religions is the same. In our interfaith group we have our difference of opinions, but we are all one.

In the future, what other service projects would you like to see and participate in?

Aziz: We would like to see more AAi projects in South County. Rod has many connections here in the Muslim community and is highly respected.

Kathy: We would like our interfaith group and AAi to join hands and reach prisoners, as prisons are mostly private and the prisoners often don't get what they need. Also farm workers. Many are undocumented, voiceless, and exploited.

Any advice for people who are reading this and have not yet volunteered?

Aziz: What are you waiting for? When you give, you will receive much more, mentally and spiritually. This is a fact.

Kathy: Try it, you'll like it! It gives one a sense of purpose. You are doing something that positively affects people's lives. You also meet like-minded people. ●

“Why should I let someone else's behavior prevent me from my faith? This religion is not theirs, it is ours.”

—Aziz



Photo by Kyle Chesser

Aziz Baameur (right) cuts flooring at AAi emergency housing build with Habitat for Humanity in San Jose, Calif.



Did You Know...?

The world's first university, the University of Al Qarawiyyin, was founded by a Muslim woman in 859 AD in Fez, which is now in Morocco. After receiving her father's sizeable inheritance, **Fatima al Fihri** used that wealth to pioneer a brand new concept: a place that would not only educate someone, but also grant them a certificate to guarantee their education was complete.



The University of Al Qarawiyyin (named after the residents of her hometown of Qayrawan, Tunisia), was the first institution to award degrees according to different levels of study: Islamic Studies, Mathematics, Grammar, and Medicine. In fact, Fatima al Fihri herself was one of its first graduates. Adjacent to Al Qarawiyyin University is the world's oldest library, in which one can view Fatima al Fihri's original diploma in Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) and Hadith (traditions of Prophet Mohammad, PBUH). ●



Before the pandemic, AAI volunteers have fun preparing fruit salad at Muslim Community Association (MCA) in Santa Clara, Calif.

Pandemic Mitzvahs

by David Ray

It wouldn't sound good: a group of Christians carrying large bundles of sharp knives into the mosque. Jews were being escorted into the Islamic Center. Inside, Muslims were preparing. It could have been the beginning of a really bad movie. Instead, it was the beginning of a very special day in my life. Muslim community members were preparing fruit and vegetables for the needy. Christians were bringing in extra knives to slice and dice the produce. And Jews were smiling because of the hospitable warmth they experienced en route to join the AAI compassion event.

This triad of communities did not convene to agree on everything. They had diverse and well-developed perspectives on faith, tradition, and politics. Instead, they were coming together in the spirit of Abraham to practice hospitality and feed the

wayfaring stranger—over 300 of them. Lettuce, tomatoes and carrots would get chopped for a green salad.

“They were coming together in the spirit of Abraham to practice hospitality and feed the wayfaring stranger.”

Apples, oranges, grapes and bananas would get chopped for a fruit salad. Delicious lasagna was ready to bake. New alliances and friendly connections would warm up between those otherwise assumed to be divided by religion. Still, whatever our commitment, no one among us believed that God wants us to be strangers to each other.

This, of course, was all before COVID. We chopped those

vegetables almost two years ago at the Muslim Community Center in Santa Clara, California. Fast forward to the pandemic. I volunteered at another AAI compassion event in San Jose. Now we are building emergency housing for the unhoused with Habitat for Humanity. There I met a small group of volunteers and was immediately given an electric screwdriver. All volunteers wore masks and socially-distanced while working. I installed vents for the crawlspace of the homes. I am not exceptionally handy but am happy to do what is asked. As I started working, I felt grateful to be building something that would be deeply appreciated—a home.

Still, a bit depleted by the strains of the past year, I felt more tired this day. I had to push myself to keep going. Doing good works is not always easy. AAI volunteer shifts to build emergency housing are 7.5 hours long. Real mitzvahs often involve determination and self-sacrifice. Mitzvah is a Jewish

term for a good deed done because of religious duty.

Of course, it is also not ideal that we met socially-distanced and masked. To connect with someone, I rely heavily on conversations, facial expressions, and playfulness. Today, the other AAI volunteers and I had to rely more on eye contact and distant interactions. It might be less than ideal, but I received a friendly uplifting from my co-volunteers. I recognized their determination and sacrifice to simply be there. I could not help but respect their presence.

Many volunteer organizations have decided not to hold events during this pandemic. Thankfully, AAI Executive Director Rod Cardoza knew we could not wait for circumstances to be "ideal." We have to join the frontlines and be the ones making good news in the world, which is so sorely needed. It is more important than ever that we heed to the call to service, and make the time to do whatever we can.

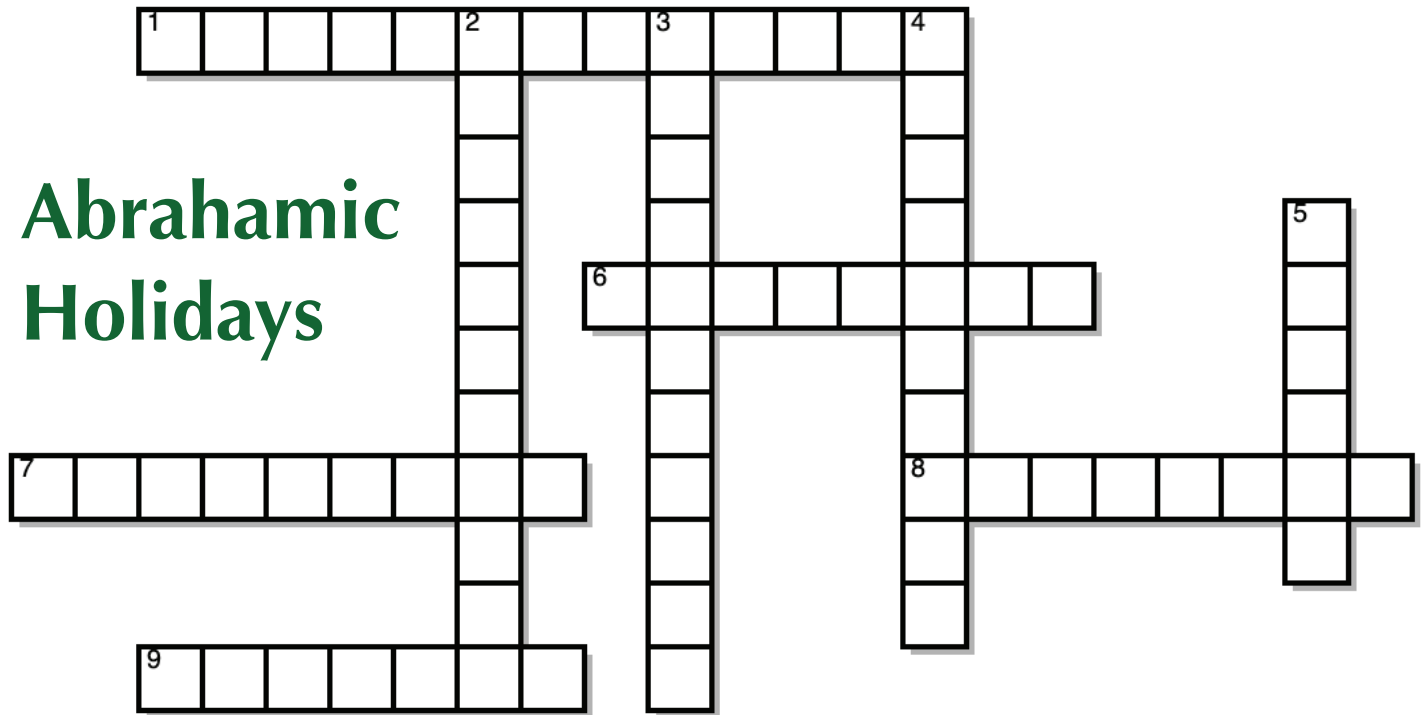
As it was with me years before at the Islamic Center, I left AAI's partnership with Habitat for Humanity with a glow in my heart. I left with confidence that I had done a mitzvah. I left with even more gratitude that people

from Abrahamic traditions can and will come together to collaborate in compassion. I left with greater confidence that it is important for me to be a part of a program like this for shalom, salaam, and peace. ●



David Ray cuts air vents for AAI emergency housing with his buddy Mohammed Hussain at Habitat for Humanity build site in San Jose.

Abrahamic Holidays



ACROSS

- 1 A Christian holy day of prayer and fasting which falls on the first day of Lent.
- 6 Also known as the Festival of Lights, this Jewish holy day commemorates the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent rededication of the Second Temple at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt.
- 7 The birthday of Jesus.
- 8 Also called Pesach, this major Jewish holiday commemorates ancient Israelite deliverance from slavery in Egypt.
- 9 A holy month of fasting for Muslims.

DOWN

- 2 A Muslim holy day honoring the willingness of the Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God's command.
- 3 A Muslim holy day marking the end of the holy month of fasting.
- 4 The holiest day of the year in Judaism, also known as the Day of Atonement.
- 5 A Christian holy day celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

For crossword answers, go to <https://www.abrahamicalliance.org/cw/2021springanswers.png>

Word of mouth spread.

But with such a broad invitation, the question hung unspoken: who would show up to work side by side with others in a milieu yet unknown? The answer? A dynamic group of interfaith, intergenerational volunteers appeared. Each came for different reasons, and found the work environment safe, and full of intrinsic rewards.

“The question hung unspoken: who would show up to work side by side with others in a milieu yet unknown?”

For example, Carrie Whitaker, who is Jewish, sought an activity that she and her 14-year-old son could join. Why? “There’s not a lot of hands-on stuff to do anymore,” said the former social worker. When she and Caleb first took part in an AAi food distribution at Blossom River Apartments, she didn’t know what to expect. But they both warmed to the interaction as they got acquainted in a mixed circle of volunteers, answering questions, such as, “If you were a trillionaire and could invent a solution to any problem, what would it be?” Carrie and Caleb both found deep satisfaction in getting food to people who needed it. “It’s heartbreaking when a young mom answers the door and says, ‘Oh Lord, milk and eggs!’ ...It’s really healing and empowering to feel like you make a difference.” Caleb agrees. At the end of their very first event, he asked his mother, “Can we do this every month?”

Julie Priest, a Christian, wanted to see how AAi’s compassion projects operated, so she took part in a meal



Ola Albaroudi gives a thumbs up at a recent AAi blood drive. Ola not only volunteered at the event, but donated blood as well.

preparation and service before the pandemic hit. “I thought it was great,” she said. So great that she then arranged for her church to host an AAi meal service in March, but had to postpone it due to soup kitchen closures during lockdown. After AAi pivoted to public compassion events, her church hosted a hygiene kit event over two Sundays. Volunteers setup, sorted, assembled, and delivered hygiene kits for the homeless. In each activity, Julie found the opening question-answer period “a beautiful bonding experience. These are things you wouldn’t even find out about a very close friend until after a good long time.”

Ola Albaroudi joined her husband at an AAi event prior to the pandemic. And once COVID-19 restrictions hit in Santa Clara County, she found herself with more time available to volunteer. “In Islam, you are always encouraged to help others,” she said, citing a *hadith* (saying or tradition of the Prophet): “And whoever alleviates the need of a needy person, Allah will alleviate his needs in this world and the Hereafter.” Once Ola attended her first project, she eagerly

signed up for more, taking her 10-year-old stepdaughter with her one time, and her 22-year-old stepson another. All enjoyed it. Her stepdaughter especially liked the social interaction.

Seventy-eight-year-old Ken Adler, dove into the AAi activity pool in March 2020, making hygiene kits for the homeless. Heeding the strong injunction from Jewish Scriptures in his tradition to pursue justice, he also volunteered at two Habitat for Humanity builds with AAi last year. “I have enjoyed establishing friendships with other people,” he said. “I think of them as my hands-on team members, Aziz and Farah.”

Another senior, Rosalie, had been aware of Abrahamic Alliance for several years because her church had sponsored some AAi events. She took part in a food preparation event in February 2020 and was hooked. So she stepped up to make hygiene kits and also to build emergency housing with Habitat for Humanity. “Habitat day was the BEST day! I loved it and want to do it again.”

Muslim Danny Kabakibo worked at a food distribution event with his step-mother, “because I really wanted to help the unfortunate, especially during these times.” He drew particular pleasure in the way his group “helped a lot of families in a short period of time.”

Great! But what about the COVID factor?

Carrie said that it “really felt like a safe activity” because the organizers took temperatures, and everyone wore masks and gloves. “I think they take the health and safety of volunteers very seriously.” Rosalie agreed. “I knew the AAi people would be very careful, as would Habitat for Humanity, because they have a reputation to uphold. And so I went.” Ola explained that she saw no reason for concern because of the precautions and the organization. With individual work areas and the needed supplies already laid out for each person, no one touches anything a fellow-volunteer has touched. As Ken put it, “We stuck by the rules of the game...and we’ll continue to do so.”

While each volunteer has reaped individual rewards for taking part, a sense of connection with others threads itself into all the experiences of those with whom we spoke.

While Carrie describes herself as “not a religious person at all,” she said the inter-faith atmosphere was comfortable, even during prayers. She commented that everyone can get behind prayers for unity, healing, and peace. Caleb also felt the unity with other AAi members, and especially liked the conversation during the get-acquainted openings.

“Amazed and delighted” by the organization for her first event, Rosalie continued to enjoy the times

of getting to know Muslims, Jews, and other Christians. She found all her co-workers at each event “warm-hearted,” as well as “welcoming and friendly and dedicated” in serving the community together.

Ken echoed the sense of peace found in working hand-in-hand with Muslims and Christians. “I have enjoyed establishing friendships with other people.” At one point during a project, he found himself singing in Hebrew, “How good it is that brothers and sisters can gather together” from Psalm (*Zabur*) 133. To him, linking efforts with Muslims, Christians, and “whoever else joins them next, is a powerful statement of what’s possible, especially at a time of great division in this country.”

Danny called the event he helped with a “very rewarding experience” that exceeded his expectations. He considers his fellow volunteers in general “a great group of people” and particularly connected with his food delivery team.

After several AAi events, Ola said, “You feel like you have a community...”

Seeing some of the same people over time gave her a familiarity with them. “There’s no need for ice-breakers at the start because there’s no ice to break. We can talk about the things that matter most to us.” Even more, she feels she’s making an impact as part of her new community in a way that she couldn’t as an individual.

Julie, who approached her AAi experiences with a “posture of learning,” appreciated the sharing of customs and prayer in a non-self-conscious atmosphere. But she was also delighted to see the intergenerational participation, noting several parent-child pairs at the hygiene kit assemblies. Not only did they serve the poor together, but they learned about other faiths together. Julie said that a hands-on project “provides such a natural way to get to know people.” She added that the length of AAi’s events contributes to natural conversation “because you’re doing a task together.”

Julie perhaps spoke for all the volunteers when she said that serving with AAi is “a good reminder of our commonalities as people....as descendants of Abraham.” ●



(Left to right) Dan Dresser, Carrie Whitaker, and Mohammad Shabbir distribute food to poor neighbors in San Jose, Calif. Jan 12, 2021

Photo by Farah Hasnat

volunteer recruitment, which in turn affected how often they could schedule meal service events. Brother Agha Bilal, however, wanted to serve more often, so he drove even further to join AAI in Gilroy, where it all began for Pastor Brian Bajari years prior. That's when Cardoza encouraged Bilal to start their own soup kitchen in Monterey: "Find a kitchen and start serving regularly. Unhoused neighbors will hear about it soon enough, and they will come."



Chef Agha Bilal (left) prepares the meal at Abraham's Tent in Seaside, Calif.

Brother Agha Bilal found a kitchen at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church—directly across the street from the mosque! As a professional chef, Bilal was ready to serve a meal weekly. He then made his proposal to JCM United and enthusiasm was overflowing, as were the efforts of JCM United members supporting the cause.

Soon, they began serving a meal every Thursday. Bethel's Pastor Rev. Harold Lusk was extremely enthusiastic to host the soup kitchen, beginning a new chapter of unity and solidarity with one another. Abraham's Tent opened its doors in the fall of 2019. When the

pandemic hit, their numbers climbed rapidly. Today, they serve an average of 150+ meals every Thursday.

Chef Agha Bilal develops the menu and coordinates the food, much of which initially came from a local food bank. Due to a recent surge of need during the pandemic, however, JCM United has been purchasing most food directly. Four Pakistani dishes are prepared weekly: rice, lentils, vegetables, and a meat dish. It took time for some guests to get used to Pakistani cuisine, but the number of

guests continues to increase.

I ask Br. Bilal about his inspiration to serve. As a Muslim myself, I wonder: is he spiritually motivated to be of service to people as a channel from God? I will never forget his answer, "Right now I'm retired. Last month was my last day of work, so I'm thinking, why just sit at home? I could do more, whatever my body allows. Whenever I go shopping, I normally stand outside and see so many people are also out there standing, asking for a little change, and for food. That kills me. If I could just supply ten more plates of food, that gives me a good night's sleep."

It is important to Br. Bilal to offer a freshly prepared meal based on a person's dietary concerns. This is one way to dignify those often stripped of their humanity during hard times. "A majority of the time," Br. Bilal said, "they get leftover food from people's homes, or fast-food leftovers are handed to them in a bag. I don't want to do that. I want to treat them on an equal basis. I like to serve the people... that's my passion."

“They get leftover food.
... I don't want to do that.
I want to treat them on
an equal basis.”

—Agha Bilal

Standing in solidarity with neighbors of different faiths, races, and genders has proven to be paramount throughout world history and today, in our polarized political climate. When asked about the significance of this solidarity work to promote unity and a more equitable future for all, Rabbi Bruce said that when JCM United meets, "We discuss how we can bring communities together during this time of divisiveness.... Doing social justice programs together side by side sends a message of unity to overcome this concept of, you know, fighting against one another instead of partnering together through common goals and causes.... We recognize that in Monterey County, we are so privileged to live in this beautiful place and to have the ability to help others. Uniting to serve demonstrates that we can overcome our differences. When Black Lives Matter began to explode in this country, we worked together to let everyone know that JCM United feels strongly that Black Lives Matter, [and] recently we've been having discussions about how to include more people, including Hindus and Buddhists."

JCM United also participated with AAI in a Solidarity Stand at their local mosque when Jews and Christians showed up with supportive placards after the shooting in New Zealand, as well as in a Solidarity Shabbat when Christians and Muslims showed up at the Carmel Valley synagogue after the shooting in Poway. As Pastor Bajari put it, “We’re just neighbors [and] despite our religious differences, we can get along and share the values of hospitality, love, and service.... In our faiths, traditions might look a little different from one another, but let’s agree to disagree on those and let’s agree on the fundamentals.”

Being part of JCM United and serving the community through Abraham’s Tent has deeply affirmed the faith of everyone interviewed. Rabbi Bruce emphasized the importance of extending the values embedded in his faith towards others by engaging with the community. “When we’re together,” he says, “the differences are put outside the door. What we have in common is brought in: compassion, care, love, and joy.”

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—Rabbi Bruce

Echoing Rabbi Bruce’s sentiment, Holly shared, “[when] my Muslim friends leave the kitchen in the afternoon to pray, it reminds me as a Christian of my own prayers of intercession and gratitude for the day. God said to Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. I’m a life-long church-going Christian, and I have to say now I get what this scripture is talking about. Working side-by-side with Jewish and Muslim friends has given me a new, wider, more open perspective of the world, and of the religions and people’s faiths within it. I understand now that those stars in the night sky don’t just represent Christians, but Jews and Muslims as well who are praying.

What an amazing, awe-inspiring God we have!”

Pastor Bajari brought our conversation back to the fundamentals of understanding our world through a spiritual lens, placing love at the forefront of all we do, “My faith in humanity and my faith in God has only expanded in this. Some people have a one-, two-, or three-dimensional faith, but I’m beginning to see that it is more like a diamond. There are so many different angles everywhere you turn that diamond.... Love by its very definition can never be hoarded. As you receive love, love is always flowing out of you. It can be healing, and it can be self-contained, but at the same time that love and healing, as it is happening to you, it is also emanating towards others as well. That’s how I feel about what we’re doing.”

Love that unites strangers who become friends is undoubtedly one of

“Love that unites
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the great wonders of our world. And when we come together in support of such a worthy cause as our neighbors in need, there is an almost magical quality to the joy and reverence that transfers between us. Stories like JCM United make clear that the work to create a more just, equitable, and prosperous world begins in our backyard, one conversation at a time. At Abraham’s Tent, it’s happening one meal at a time. ●



Historic 2016 meeting of community leaders at Islamic Society of Monterey County where their first AAI compassion event was scheduled.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Serve 300 hot meals (\$1,500) | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide 1,000 hygiene kits (\$3,000) | _____ |

Become an AAI Sustaining Partner

- | | |
|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 monthly | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 monthly | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 monthly | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$_____ monthly | _____ |

Total Donation \$ _____

Select Your Method of Giving

- ☐ Online: abrahamicalliance.org/aai/donate
- ☐ Check payable to AAI
- ☐ Debit/credit card (circle one and complete information at right):



PO Box 23955
San Jose, CA 95153

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ABOVE

Card # _____ CCV _____ Exp Date _____

Name on card (print) _____

Signature _____

Help us unite Jews, Christians, and Muslims to serve the poor, suffering, and marginalized.

AAI News

AAI News, the newsletter of Abrahamic Alliance International, aims to reveal the bountiful harvest of righteousness, *צדקה* (tzedakah), and *صدقة* (sadaqah) produced by a growing movement of Jews, Christians, and Muslims uniting to serve the poor, suffering and marginalized.

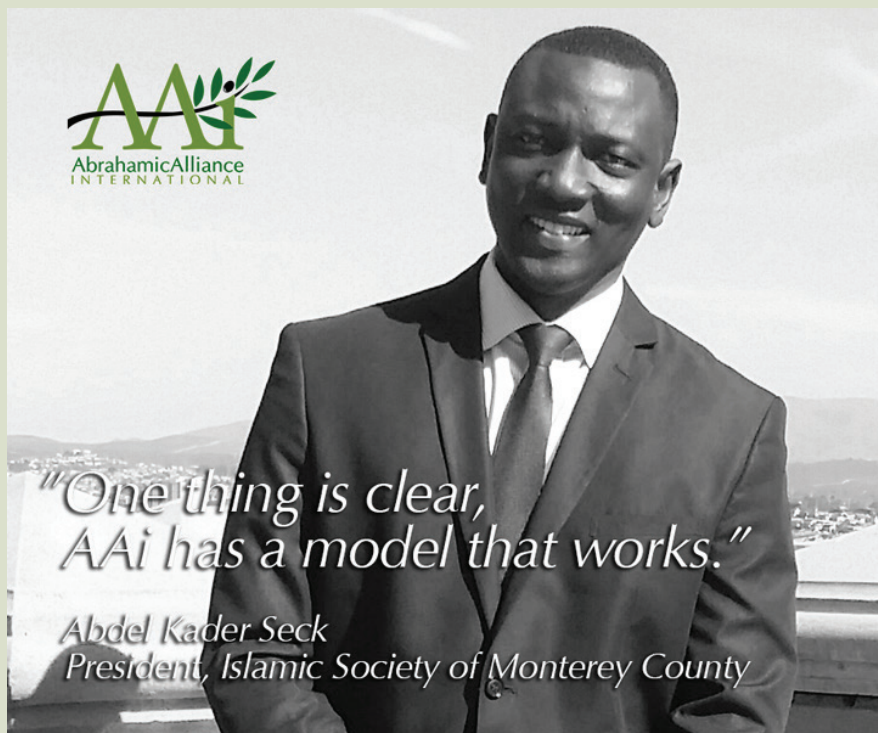
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About AAI

Abrahamic Alliance International unites Jews, Christians, and Muslims for active peacebuilding and poverty relief. AAI began with a simple dream that compassionate collaboration between Jews, Christians, and Muslims can build lasting bridges of understanding and respect between our communities.

Want to see AAI spread to new cities and flourish?

Become an AAI Sustainer!



"One thing is clear, AAI has a model that works."

*Abdel Kader Seck
President, Islamic Society of Monterey County*

Donate monthly at
www.abrahamicalliance.org

AAI is a Top-Rated Non-Profit

