

*Cities of Light: The Rise and Fall of  
Islamic Spain*

Dialogue Packet

A Unity Production Foundation (UPF) project in cooperation with Connecting Cultures, LLC

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Dear Participant:

Thank you for participating in this unique dialogue event. By viewing and discussing the film, *Cities of Light: The Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain*, we hope that everyone is able to share his or her diverse views on faith, values, identity, all in a comfortable environment.

Much of what makes a comfortable and safe environment for this type of informal dialogue is a genuine intention to understand one another. This type of understanding, however, can only happen when each person promises not to preach or proselytize, but to share and listen.

**Twenty Thousand Dialogues (20K)** is a project organized by Unity Productions Foundation (UPF) and Connecting Cultures to encourage interfaith dialogue in the United States. We are delighted to have you join us in this initiative.

UPF is a non-profit media foundation, devoted to creating high-quality films for worldwide broadcast and long-term educational campaigns that increase understanding and dialogue among the world's religious, spiritual and cultural traditions.

Connecting Cultures is a company dedicated to increasing understanding across cultures and faiths through international exchange and training programs on diversity, culture and communication along with citizen diplomacy initiatives.

Once again, thank you. Together, we can bring people in the spirit of building one nation and one world that coexists in peace and mutual respect across our cultural and religious diversity.

## Facilitator Guidelines

### How to Host Your Dialogue

- Provide snacks and drinks if you can.
- If you are not going to facilitate the dialogue yourself, designate another, willing participant to facilitate.
- Aim for a minimum of 5 participants.
- If you have more than 15, watch the DVD together, but split the group into smaller groups for the dialogue and discussion.
- Aim to have at least 1 to 2 Muslims in a mostly non-Muslim group, or 2 -3 different faith groups in a mostly Muslim group.
- This is an inter-faith dialogue, so we do want people to talk about their faith, but...
  - Diversity exists amongst members within each faith group. Remind everyone that no one is expected to be “the expert” or the “spokesperson” representing all Muslims or all Christians or all Jews, etc. Each is a representative of him/herself and of his/her personal experience with their faith, and is encouraged to speak from his/her own personal understanding, experience, and practice.
  - Remind everyone that this is not the place for proselytizing, attempts at conversion, or pushing one’s beliefs on anyone else.
- Encourage everyone to be open and curious, and at the same time make note of anything in the DVD that surprises, confuses, or disturbs you.
- Request everyone to fill out the evaluations at the end.
- Most of all, the aim is to get to know each other, learn something about the history of Islamic Spain and its impact on and implications for contemporary society, and have fun doing it.

### How to Facilitate Your Dialogue

- Seat people in an open circle after watching the DVD before starting the dialogue.
- When someone is speaking, give them your full attention.
- Encourage whoever is sharing by looking at them and nodding to show that you’re listening.
- Be an active listener: Reflect back the most important thing that you heard the person say, or repeat the question they are asking but in your own words to be clear and to clarify.
- Try to involve everyone in the conversation (notice if someone is not speaking, encourage and desire to hear from everyone whatever their similar or different experiences, similar or different thoughts or questions), BUT...
  - Respect repeated hesitations to speak up in the larger group, which is why smaller groups typically give everyone a greater chance and comfort to speak and be heard.
- Participate more as the questioner/facilitator rather than a lecturer.
- When you do share, use “I-statements” and stories of personal experience, and encourage others to do the same. “I think . . .”, “I feel . . .”, “My experience is . . .”
- Let the dialogue go where it wants to go. The schedule and questions are simply guides.
- MOST IMPORTANT: Do the best you can. Its okay to say “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure”
- Remember this mantra: “However many people show up will be the right number. Whoever shows up will be the right people.”

- As a volunteer, you already are conveying sincerity and commitment in the belief that this is something that you want to do and believe in.
- If you have any questions, concerns or comments, please contact Lobna “Luby” Ismail at [dialogues@upf.tv](mailto:dialogues@upf.tv)

## Suggested Schedule for Your Dialogue

1. Plan on the dialogue taking a total of 3 hours depending on the format you choose.
2. The best format is one gathering for 3 hours total, 2 hours for watching the DVD and 1 hour for the dialogue. If this is too difficult, considering meeting twice for 90 minutes each.
3. Ask your friends/guests to arrive early or right on time in order to begin.
4. Have the TV and DVD set up and ready to go. Please do this before the first guest arrives.
5. Begin promptly, telling all your guests, "I want to honor your lives and keep closely to the schedule and the time we have together."
6. Do a 5-minute intro
  - Thanks for coming!
  - Introductions of yourself and of one another, if they don't know each other. (If time is tight, maybe just name and background)
  - Pass out the packet (give a little time for everyone to look at it)
  - Explain the schedule:
    - I'm going to give you a blank sheet of paper and ask you to write down your answers to 3 questions.
    - Then we're going to watch the video clips, which will take about an hour.
    - Before beginning the questions, provide a little break if needed.
    - Choose 3 or 4 of the post-viewing questions to discuss (if there is time, discuss the others).
    - Then we'll talk about the film.
    - We'll fill out the evaluations.
    - I'll collect the evaluations.
    - Then we'll all go home.
7. Show the DVD.
8. Hold the dialogue.
  - Wear a watch and pay attention to time.
  - Allow 10 minutes for closing thoughts, ideas, questions, and evaluations

Thank everyone for coming.
9. Send us the evaluations immediately after the dialogue either using the online tool or by mail to:

*UPF 20,000 Dialogues, P.O. Box 6175, SILVER SPRING, MD 20906*

## Group Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogues

Remember the *goals* of this kind of interfaith dialogue:

- Understand each other better
- Learn from one another
- Build relationships of mutual trust and respect

Remember the *opportunities* of this kind of interfaith dialogue:

- The chance to ask any questions (in a respectful manner) you may have
- The chance to answer these questions
- The chance to talk about religion and beliefs in a comfortable environment **free from** combative arguments, proselytizing, or pressure

Other tips:

- Be as open and curious as you can.
- Ask honest questions; remain sensitive to feelings.
- Use your wonderful mind and still come from the heart.
- Suspend judgment—seek first, second, and third to understand.
- Listen to each other without interrupting.
- Talk just enough, just a little; leave good space for the others to talk.
- Let each person define their own faith; don't define it for them.
- Be prepared to be pleasantly surprised by something someone says.
- Be like a detective, ask more questions to understand why someone thinks or feels the way they do. "That's so interesting, help me understand more about that . . .", but make sure to speak in a tone that is sincere and curious and not one that would make the person feel defensive or feel under attack.
- Depart from the script when it is compellingly appropriate to do so.
- Be sincere and have fun in the process.

## Discussion Questions

### Pre-Viewing Exercise

*For all viewers:*

In two separate columns on a single sheet of paper, respond to the following three requests:

1. List everything that you have *learned* about the history of Islamic Spain, through school, media, and other sources.
2. Describe what, if anything, Islamic Spain means to you as a place, or what perceptions you have about the importance of its history.
3. List your perceptions about the nature of social relations among Jews, Muslims and Christians before modern times.

### Post-Viewing Questions

1. What points of new learning about Islamic Spain have you acquired from viewing the film?
2. What in the film most surprised you (and why)?
3. How does knowledge of lengthy artistic, intellectual and scientific exchanges among Muslims, Jews and Christians affect your views of European and Islamic culture as separate and remote from one another?
4. Why do you think that the contributions of Islamic Spain to Europe have remained unknown to so many Americans and others in western countries?
5. What elements in the story of Islamic Spain seem to be most relevant to relations between Muslim and western societies today?
6. What historical conditions (for example: social, economic, political) portrayed in the various segments of the documentary seemed to foster tolerance among members of the various faiths? What historical conditions contributed to the growth of intolerance in the various segments of the documentary?
7. What positive and creative forms of civic behavior foster tolerance today, and what can individuals and groups do to encourage such positive behaviors?
8. What measures can individuals and groups appropriately take to counter intolerance towards others?

### Question and Answer Period

What questions remain unanswered? What questions did the film raise for you?

# Participant Evaluation - Please, Give Us Some Helpful Feedback

In order to guard the anonymity of all participants, we ask you not to write your name on this form.

*Please return this form to the facilitator of your dialogue.*

Location and date of your dialogue session (City/State/Date): \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What religious tradition/background do you follow or identify with?**

- Baha'i    Buddhist    Hindu    Humanist/Ethical Culture    Jain    Jewish  
 LDS/Mormon    Muslim    New Thought    Protestant    Roman Catholic  
 Sikh    Unitarian Universalist    Zoroastrian    Secular/Agnostic    Atheist  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. OVERALL, how would you characterize the dialogue experience?**

- |     |      |      |           |           |
|-----|------|------|-----------|-----------|
| 1   | 2    | 3    | 4         | 5         |
| Bad | Fair | Good | Very Good | Excellent |

**3. How effective was the DIALOGUE portion in promoting interfaith understanding, respect?**

- |               |                    |                    |           |                |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1             | 2                  | 3                  | 4         | 5              |
| Not Effective | Slightly Effective | Somewhat Effective | Effective | Very Effective |

**4. How helpful were the FILM and/or FILM CLIPS in stimulating the dialogue/discussion?**

- |             |                  |                  |         |              |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|---------|--------------|
| 1           | 2                | 3                | 4       | 5            |
| Not Helpful | Slightly Helpful | Somewhat Helpful | Helpful | Very Helpful |

**5. What improvement(s) do you think would make the DIALOGUES better, more effective, and more enjoyable?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. What was the one, most valuable thing you learnt about YOUR OWN faith?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. What was the one, most valuable thing you learnt about ANOTHER'S faith?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**8. Would you participate in a dialogue similar to this one again? Yes No**

FACILITATOR – PLEASE MAIL THESE FORMS TO:  
UPF 20K, P.O. Box 6175, SILVER SPRING, MD 20906  
or email [dialogues@upf.tv](mailto:dialogues@upf.tv)

## Facilitator Evaluation – One Per Group

In order to guard the anonymity of all participants, we ask you not to write your name on this form.

Location and date of your dialogue session (City/State/Date): \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many Muslims participated? \_\_\_\_
2. How many people of other faiths participated? \_\_\_\_
3. Did you provide food? Yes No
4. OVERALL, how would you characterize the dialogue experience?

1	2	3	4	5
Bad	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent

5. How effective was the DIALOGUE portion in promoting interfaith understanding and respect?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective

6. Did any negative incidents occur? (please explain)

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7. What improvement(s) do you think would make the experience better, more effective, and more enjoyable?

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8. Would you participate in a dialogue similar to this one again? Yes No

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND FOR YOUR EVALUATION!**

FACILITATOR – PLEASE MAIL THESE FORMS TO:  
UPF 20K, P.O. Box 6175, SILVER SPRING, MD 20906  
or email [dialogues@upf.tv](mailto:dialogues@upf.tv)

## INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FACILITATION: TAKE IT TO A NEW LEVEL!

Are you interested in facilitating future dialogues? Do you have a clear sense of those skills in yourself? Would you like to participate in ongoing film series to promote more interfaith dialogues? Please let us know.

**E-mail: Lobna “Luby” Ismail (dialogues@upf.tv)  
UPF 20K**

### What we need from you:

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home:** \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ and / or **Cell** \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Your religious identity** (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Agnostic, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of your organization, school, club, company, religious community, if applicable:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Some ideas we encourage beyond this dialogue experience to continue with the group:

- Visit each other’s place of worship. (a mosque/masjid, church, temple)
- Volunteer together at a soup kitchen, a walk for a cause everyone cares about, clean up a park, get together for a fun activity (a hike, play a game or sport together, go to the theatre, the movies, any event that others may enjoy, this doesn’t have to be tied to religion.)
- Meet at a restaurant for a meal together.

What other ideas or suggestions do you have that we can share on the website for others to consider?

## Notes