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Religious understanding

Jewish-Muslim initiative comes to UIC

By

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On February 7, 2011, a conference about the roles of Jewish and Muslim women in their communities will be held at UIC's Stevenson Hall on 701 S. Morgan St. The conference will be from 10:00 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. This conference, "Changing Roles?: Women in Traditional Jewish and Muslim Communities," will attempt to discuss and examine Muslim and Jewish women's traditional roles in context with modernity, women's rights, and progressivism.

"In both Islam and Judaism there's a sense that one's relationship [to God] is [through religious] law," said Samuel Fleischacker, Professor at UIC, director of Jewish Studies, and the organizer of this conference. Fleischacker says that there is a tension for these women between wanting to stick to traditional religious laws, and taking up leadership positions in their communities, and in turn breaking into Western society.

"There's a lot of deference to the past." These women want to show certain respect to the way things were done before.

Religious law is considered a "good thing," said Fleischacker. The Halacha (Jewish Law) and the Sharia (Islamic Law) are a part of the all encompassing practice of both religions.

Religious requirements like Muslim women covering their hair, and Jewish women covering their hair after they get married are just some of the issues modern women face today. Leadership in their communities is another. Can Muslim women lead prayer? Can Jewish women become rabbis?

Leadership, women's dress, prayer, and women's education are all issues that will be covered in the conference. The introductory session, "General Issues: Change in Sharia and Halacha" will feature one speaker from the Muslim perspective, and one from the Jewish perspective. It is a great opportunity for UIC students who would like to learn more about this subject, in general, to attend.

Fleischacker emphasized that one of the aims of this conference is bringing Muslim and Jewish women together. He said that Jews and Muslims don't know much about each other, in general due to some tensions between both communities.

"I don't think Jewish and Muslim women know each other." This conference is an attempt to 'look ahead,' and start a conversation with both sides. Since it is a part of the "Jewish/Muslim Initiative" at UIC, the conference aims to have speakers discuss their current positions in the area of their womanly and religious rights.

The "Jewish/Muslim Initiative" is a Postdoctoral Fellowship that enables applicants to teach through a Jewish-Muslim lens at UIC.

"I think all of them [the speakers] are committed to their tradition, and their communities," said Fleischacker.

Tova Hartman, and Najeeba Syeed-Miller will speak about "General Issues: Change in Sharia and Halacha" at 10:00 a.m. Tahera Ahmad, Marcia Hermansen, and Erin Leib Smokler will speak about "Specific Issues I: Dress; Study and Teaching" at 1:00 p.m. Ruth Balinsky, Hina Azam, and Deborah Klapper will speak about "Specific Issues II: Leadership; Prayer" at 3:15 p.m.

The conference is "an attempt to explore issues and spark a conversation that would go on."

This conference is free and open to all UIC students. For the program, and more information please visit: <http://www.uic.edu/depts/huminst/events/conferences/1011conferences/main.shtml>

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Photo courtesy of wvgazette.com

Najeeba Syeed-Miller is Assistant Professor of Interreligious Education and Senior Advisor for Muslim Relations at the Claremont School of Theology and will be speaking at UIC's new "Jewish-Muslim Initiative" to promote religious and cultural understanding.

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