

HOW JEWS AND MUSLIMS CAN FIGHT POVERTY TOGETHER

WILLIAM RAPFOGEL **Executive Vice President and CEO** **Metropolitan Coordinating Council** **on Jewish Poverty**

William E. Rapfogel is a lifelong New Yorker and graduate of Brooklyn College and the Columbia University Graduate Institute for Non-Profit Management. Prior to joining the Met Council, Rapfogel served as Executive Director of the Institute for Public Affairs of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. He spent several years as Assistant New York City Comptroller under Harrison J. Goldin and three years in the Administration of Mayor Edward I. Koch.

William Rapfogel has been Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty since 1992. One of New York City's largest and most efficient non-profits, Met Council and its "grass roots" network provides over 100,000 needy people with home care, housing, employment, crisis intervention and other social and community services. He serves on the board of numerous community and professional institutions and is vice-chair of Senior Health Partners.

Mr. Rapfogel resides in Manhattan with his wife Judy. They have three children and five grandchildren.

The Jewish imperative on poverty goes back to our common ancestor, Abraham, who looked after the stranger. Abraham's goal in life was to invite the stranger into his home and make sure he had food to eat and someone to watch over him when he was in need.

Or take the story of Joseph and Pharaoh. They came together to save a region from famine and to make sure that the seven years of plenty prepared for the seven years of famine and the entire region was able to have the food it needed, even to the point where Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. When he came back and was reunited with his brothers, instead of exacting revenge, he said, "It is to preserve life that God sent me here before you."

To preserve the lives of all the inhabitants of the region and to make sure they had enough food to be sustained.

In the same vein, we have come together to discuss how we can preserve life and quality of life for people in need. Our agency, the Metropolitan Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, provides community development under UJA-Federation, helping over 100,000 New Yorkers every single year; including both Jews and non-Jews. We help families in crisis become self-sufficient, raise awareness of poverty in our midst, and advocate to the city, state and federal governments on behalf of people in need. We provide crisis intervention, and social services, affordable housing and health care for children and elderly people. We help people get jobs and maintain a food pantry network that feeds over 1500 families every single month.

We would love to work together with the Muslim community to go to the White House Office of Faith-Based Initiatives to discuss how to work together to combat poverty. Our organization maintains a Growth Fund that helps provide grants and technical assistance to many small not-for-profits that are both community oriented and faith based so they are able to provide and enhance services to their communities, including the Armenian, African-American, Latino, Caribbean and Asian communities. The heads of those agencies come to our trainings to build coalitions to advocate for those in need. We would like to work more closely with the Muslim community as well.

We train people to become home attendants—a steady job with excellent benefits—as well as medical technicians and X-Ray technicians. These people then become independent and are able to provide for their families and communities. We build affordable housing for everyone who is eligible according to certain economic criteria. We would love to collaborate with the Muslim community, as well as other communities, to bring together on the local, state and national level ever-greater resources to help those who need it most. By working together, our communities can greatly reduce overlap which occurs when each community operates on its own and addresses its own needs without coordinating with others.



IMAM WAHY-UD DEEN SHARIF
Imam of the Masjid Waarith ud Deen
and Waris Cultural Center
Senior Advisor to Mayor Cory A. Booker of Newark

Wahy-ud Deen Shareef grew up in the Newark area. A graduate of Drexel University, Shareef worked at Kraft Foods for 25 years as an Engineering Project & Program Manager, designing planning and implementing major capital equipment installation projects for Kraft|Nabisco.

He has been instrumental in the establishment, operation and renovation of the Islamic and Cultural Centers in Newark, East Orange, Elizabeth, Hillside and Irvington, New Jersey. In 1984 Shareef co-founded the Waris Cultural Research and Development Center, a community and economic development center including a mosque, the Masjid Waarith ud Deen, where he serves as imam. These organizations, situated together in Irvington, N.J., cooperate to develop and implement a variety of spiritual, educational, recreational, cultural, social and economic development programs. Shareef is the Convener of the Council of Imams in New Jersey.

Shareef is currently the Director of Logistics and Industrial Opportunities in the Department of Economic & Housing Development and Senior Advisor to Mayor Cory A. Booker in the city of Newark, New Jersey. He and his wife, Helima share their lives with four children, 7 grandchildren and nurturing family members

“And seek in what G-d has given you the Home of the Destiny and do not forget your share of this World; and do good as G-d has done good to you and do not seek to spread corruption on earth; for G-d does not love the spreaders of corruption. —Holy Quran, Sura Al-Qasas The Story 28-77

Human life of faith has a purpose and an ultimate destiny, with a continuous and final judgment premised in how conscious we remain of our duty. Our purpose and duty is to serve G-d as ‘witnesses’ while expressing our usefulness to society. We do so as individuals, but more importantly as a community and society.

“Abraham was indeed a community (a model) devoutly obedient to G-d, true in faith and he joined not partners with G-d. Grateful for his bounty He chose him and guided him on a straight path. And We gave him good in this world and truly he, in the Life After will be of the Righteous. So We send to you the inspired (message), “Follow the millah (hopes/aspirations) of Abraham, the true in faith and he joined not partners with G-d.” —Holy Quran, Al Baqara 16 120-122

G-d identifies Abraham as an Ummah, i.e. a collective. He represents a type of leading collective—a composite figure representing universal human components brought together to make a whole social order. In the collective, Abraham is also Sarah Hajar (Hagar), Isma’il (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac). They are not just individuals, but personifications of the human community, attributes, attitudes, aspirations and needs.

The millah or hope of Abraham is to awaken and restore the balanced spiritual and material life to all people who serve G-d with the fullness of their minds, bodies and souls. We who are children of Adam and Abraham have a collective soul and an ethos and spirituality that yearn to connect to reason, righteousness and devotion to God. It is designed to lead us to spirituality, purity and balance, as well as to rational thinking and industriousness.

In addressing poverty, we should be aware that the first debilitating poverty is of the spirit—the neglected spirituality of poor people. This distracts us from moral thinking and desensitizes us from social responsibility. In the Holy Quran, G-d’s words are, “Satan threatens you with poverty.” The challenge of leadership is to reconnect people to what G-d promises them as their rightful inheritance. To not only believe in G-d, but to believe G-d is evolving us to higher levels of excellence. The foundation of a faithful, whole and ethical society is based and raised upon the disciples of rational, scientific material insight and industriousness standing on moral consciousness with spiritual purity and balance.

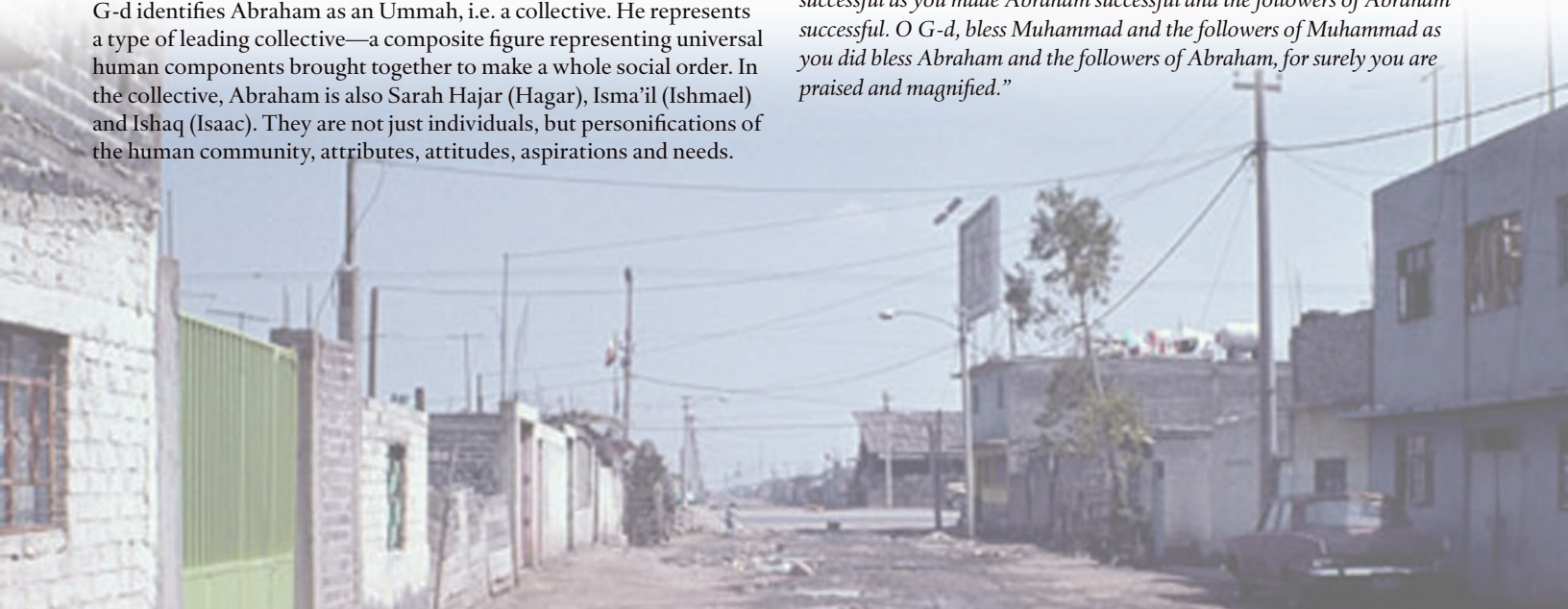
Our work in Newark/Essex County, NJ

I serve as Imam of Masjid Waarith ud Deen and Waris Cultural Center, which are urban community institutions focused on neighborhood stabilization, revitalization and transformation. Activities include education (Pre K-4th grade), cultural development, neighborhood cleanup, rehab and development projects for local business services.

I serve as faith leader liaison and senior advisor to Newark Mayor Cory A. Booker. In this position, I promote communication, engagement, cooperation and acknowledgment of value and responsibility. All of our residents have to pray, preserve, protect and thrive in the shared space of our communities.

I am a founder of the Newark Interfaith Coalition for Hope and Peace. The organization is working with faith-based and community groups to reduce violence and promote growth of organic systems that aid the safety, educational and social well-being of Newark residents. Let us examine our global community to see where there are needs and opportunities for us to complement each other in industrial, technical, commercial, educational, social and spiritual areas of community development. Let us structure programs and projects that facilitate cooperation in the use of our collective resources.

“O G-d, make Muhammad successful and the followers of Muhammad successful as you made Abraham successful and the followers of Abraham successful. O G-d, bless Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad as you did bless Abraham and the followers of Abraham, for surely you are praised and magnified.”





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WAYS MUSLIMS AND JEWS CAN FIGHT POVERTY TOGETHER

Both Rapfogel and Shareef point with pride to our common ancestor Abraham, who invited the stranger into his home, made sure he had food to eat and watched over him when he was in need and because emblematic of a collective with an ethos of addressing the material and spiritual needs of all members of society including the weakest. Both prescribe individuals to undertake acts of righteousness on behalf of the poor, hungry and homeless. On that basis, let us explore ways that our two communities can work together in serving the needy, so as not to duplicate each other's efforts.

- 1) Members of many synagogues and mosques presently take part in efforts to feed the hungry or operate soup kitchens on the own premises of their own congregations. Let twinned synagogues and mosques join together to serve hot and nutritious meals to people in need or set up joint soup kitchens that would be both kosher and halal. Thanksgiving can be a great time to start!
- 2) Let members of synagogues and mosques volunteer together in homeless shelters in their communities. Those congregations which operate homeless shelters within their own walls should invite members of the other faith to serve together with their own members as volunteers in serving homeless individuals and families.
- 3) Let members of mosques and synagogues come together under the aegis of groups like Habitat for Humanity www.habitat.org to build houses for people in need.
- 4) Many Jewish and Muslim doctors are volunteering at events at which they provide medical services free of charge to people without health insurance. Let doctors affiliated with twinned synagogues and mosques join together to organize special events at which they would together offer services in their communities to people without insurance.