

Amie Baron
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Speech for Parent's Weekend Multi-faith Service

Good morning, and welcome.

I would like to thank the Office of Religious Life for inviting me to share my thoughts with all of you during today's service. It is a pleasure to be with you in Memorial Church for Parent's Weekend.

I am very active at Hillel at Stanford, and am currently the Jewish Student Association's Vice President of Campus Relations.

With my deep interest in public policy and social change, I was honored to receive a philanthropy fellowship from Stanford's Haas Center for Public Service. Through my fellowship, I interned at the Jewish Life Program at the Walter and Elise Haas Fund. The fund has a deep emphasis on reaching out to the broader Bay Area community, which closely parallels my personal interests. I largely focused on researching Muslim-Jewish relations and opportunities for Muslim-Jewish dialogue. The volatility of the times and extreme tension caused by the Israeli-Hezbollah war added a definite sense of urgency to my work. With the violence in the Middle East, the effectiveness of dialogue became increasingly intangible, and evermore significant and essential. I am constantly seeking ways to apply much of what I've learned to continue to foster tolerance.

Shortly after returning to Stanford in September, I found great joy in co-planning and organizing a Ramadan/Yom Kippur Joint Break Fast for approximately 200 students. It was a wonderful opportunity for the Islamic Society and Jewish Student Association to come together to co-sponsor this event. As I looked out at a sea of Jewish and Muslim students, along with their friends from different backgrounds, eating and talking together, I could only be delighted.

Clinging to this image of hope, over Winter Break, I stumbled across an ancient Jewish temple in the heart of Paris. Eager to escape the rain and cold to revel in the warmth of the synagogue and love of the community, I darted up the steps. But I couldn't make it past the front door. Several boys, no older than 10 or 11, broke away from their spirited game of catch held in the foyer outside of the main sanctuary, to look us over, and cautiously inspect our bags. I was shocked. At such a young age, they were already aware of their responsibility to protect their community. Fear of hate crimes manifested itself in painfully high levels of security blockading the Jewish places and synagogues. Sadly, many French university students could not fathom that a Jew and Muslim could break a

Ramadan and Yom Kippur fast together, as so many of us did, right here, at Stanford, during Fall quarter.

My experience reinforced for me how very fortunate I am to be a Stanford student. I relish working with the Islamic Society, and collaborating with both Jewish and Muslim student leaders. As the prophet Hillel wrote, “If I’m not for myself who am I? But, if I’m only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

As you may be aware, a Divestment-from-Israel campaign was initiated this year on the Stanford campus. The debate is politically charged, making dialogue so much more essential, yet even more challenging. But(?), When I came home from Shabbat Services on Friday night, a touching e-mail from a Palestinian Stanford student was waiting for me. He wrote, “The dialogue must remain open, no matter how much our views differ. We can even speak as friends about other things if you would like. Politicizing everything is not fun.” He extended an olive branch to me.

We are all blessed to attend a university where students can be inspired to cross the line to reach out to each other. I was asked to speak to you, today, about the intersections among my spiritual, religious, and academic life. We can find spirituality in hope, joy, and triumph. We can find spirituality in consciously and continuously working toward peace.