

Muslims

Sometimes when I feel particularly wicked, especially in an American context, I will casually mention that I have attended a celebration of the Prophet Mohamed's birthday at a Shiite mosque. This never fails to raise eyebrows even with some American monks.

If the truth be told, all the monks of our priory went, as well, along with two monastics from the Tibetan tradition. I went because of an Iraqi imam whom I had met earlier - he reminded me of a Jewish grandfather, led a mosque of Iranians and Iraqis and thought that my name was Mr. Soto Zen.

I went to the mosque with three preconceptions that seem foolish in hindsight. I thought that no one would speak English, that the women would be suppressed and that people would be "touchy", as we say in Nfld. I found that we were shown around by young people who spoke excellent English, the women were very outspoken and fearless in their views and that we were made very welcome with baklava and coffee.

I have also participated in interfaith events with a Muslim woman who is a good friend and a Sufi. She is a professor of classical Arabic and chants the Koran at public events.

Therefore Islam to me is not an abstraction, it is these people whose presence in the world I cherish.

Imagine, if you will, an enormous mountain, so high that the top is wreathed in clouds. That is mount Carmel, Sumeru, Sinai, Ararat. We come towards this mountain from many different directions with our different maps of the journey - bibles, torahs, korans, sutras that have led us to the foot of this mountain. The foolish circle around and around the base quarreling over who has the best map. The wise, on the other hand, just start to climb. The farther up the mountain they go the more they are simply grateful to encounter other people there.