



Photographs from Shoulder to Shoulder's 2019 Ramadan Road Trip (top to bottom) Raleigh, NC, Nashville, TN & Atlanta, GA

INTERFAITH IFTARS

A GUIDE FOR DINNER DIALOGUES



SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

Standing with American Muslims. Advancing American Ideals.



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Please note this guide is neither static nor complete: figure out what works for you, flag what doesn't, and record tips of your own. Though this guide is designed for smaller dinner gatherings, it can easily be adapted for larger community events by focusing on the ground rules, discussion suggestions, and activity tips. Don't forget to share your wisdom and experiences with the rest of us!

If you have any questions, reach out to the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign at info@s2scampaign.org or to our friends at the People's Supper.

Welcome

In a world that seems to be dividing at alarming rates we need more opportunities to come together across cultural, religious, and political differences. Thankfully, many of our religious traditions have spaces built into the regular rhythms of life to make this even more possible.

For many Muslims, Ramadan is a time set apart for (re)connecting with God, self, and community. It is a time overflowing with prayer and tradition, and it is also a time filled with joy and delicious food. Whether people gather at the mosque, a community center, or in homes, Ramadan is a time to build relationships and cultivate community.

During the month of Ramadan, the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign hosts The United States of Love Over Hate: A Ramadan Supper Series. The primary goal of this effort is to identify, support, and connect people to Iftars open to interfaith guests across the nation, in order to help facilitate local relationship-building among Muslims and those of other faiths, cultures, and backgrounds.

We collaborated with our friends at The People's Supper to help people make room for storytelling and building bridges between guests at their interfaith iftar. We've pulled together everything you need to know to host an interfaith supper — from pointers on how to create an inviting and intimate space to how to break the ice. This guidebook is a resource for those already planning Iftars open to interfaith guests, and for those looking to put one together.



*Top & bottom photos from 2019 Ramadan Road Trip in Raleigh, NC & Atlanta, GA
Middle photo by Jack Storm, Seattle Training*

HOW IT WORKS

A People's Supper is simple by design



Photo from 2019 Ramadan Road Trip, Raleigh, NC

A small table of people, sharing a meal together, with questions that are intended to crack open the conversation. We hope that together we can see and bear witness to the stories behind the assumptions we make about each other - what are the experiences that often propel us to show up in the world in the ways we do, but aren't the ones we often share with each other? How do the particulars of our identities and experiences inform who we are and how we experience the world? How can we interrupt our assumptions of one another, and build deep, transformative trust and connection?

IS HOSTING FOR ME?

A host commits to one thing and one thing only: to host a meaningful conversation over a shared meal.

We've found that great hosts have similar qualities. Our tables are peer-to-peer, so our hosts are participants, too, rather than outside facilitators. If you are not Muslim and want to host an Iftar, connect with a Muslim co-host to partner with you.

Regardless of your background, YOU'LL MAKE A GREAT HOST IF...

- You are willing to model Brave Space. Creating Brave Space is about being courageous enough to model vulnerability. It's about co-creating a space of radical hospitality and nurturing where we seek to truly see each other and respect the other's humanity.
- You want real talk. This isn't about giving advice, waxing poetic from your soapbox, intellectual banter, or philosophizing of any kind. Sharing your own story and lived experiences gives others permission to share theirs. To become a successful host, you should be willing to reflect deeply on your own story.
- You can open your doors. You might have space in your home to host a supper or you have the creativity to find another cozy spot (e.g. a house of worship, a gallery, a park, or a friend's backyard).
- You find it easy to make conversation. These conversations are all about connecting through conversation and storytelling, so you'll need to be comfortable chatting, prodding, questioning, and laughing with other people while discussing sensitive stuff.
- You listen deeply. You recognize that what you don't know about someone far exceeds what you do, and you prefer asking questions over giving answers. A big part of being a host is simply listening, asking follow-up questions, and resisting the urge to "fix" something for someone else. The most important thing hosts do is create space at the table for every person to be heard.



“In our interconnected world, we must learn to feel enlarged, not threatened, by difference.”

RABBI
JONATHAN
SACKS

HOW TO HOST

We use the word “tables” and “hosts” because we want to cultivate that feeling of a vibrant, joyful, connective dinner party. The “table” can be literal (maybe you truly gather around a table) or metaphorical (e.g., a Zoom room). You are the “host,” not the expert, but the brave and gracious human creating space, setting the tone, and gathering a great group of people.

THREE KEY ROLES OF A HOST

1. Organize and communicate the logistics for gathering
2. Model the type of conversation you hope to have
3. Be curious as you lightly facilitate the conversation

PREP

1. Set a time, date, and location that will work for you and your guests. This might be a challenging task. **A quick internet search helps find the [prayer time](#), which differs based on location and within Muslim communities.** Since your gathering will include people with multiple religious identities, start by looking at an interfaith calendar, then check in with your intended guests. While many people may follow their community's religious observances, there are many variations and personal considerations. So it's best to check in with a few of your intended guests of different religious identities.
2. Send a confirmation email to all guests. Check to see if anyone has any food allergies or dietary requirements, and for potlucks, have folks sign up to bring a dish (ideally, one with a story behind it).
3. Place the communal agreements where everyone will see them. (Tip: Try placing them on every plate before guests arrive. ([Click here for printer-friendly version that you can download and print at home.](#)))
4. Cook up the main dish and set the table.

SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR THE EVENING [Click here to check the prayer times for your location & date](#)



7:00 - Guests begin to arrive - try to create a space for people to spend this time in reflection and prayer or casual conversation, if desired.

7:25 - Call to prayer, duas, and breaking fast

7:35 - Maghrib prayer

7:55 - Welcome everyone, share the context and ground rules for the evening.

8:00 - Eat, share stories, and have a great time together!



Photograph by Jack Storm, Seattle Training

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Introductions and toasts. Invite everyone to introduce themselves by sharing why they chose to show up and the name of a person who inspires courage in them, living or dead, famous or familial. Toast those just named, and those who inspire us to be our best selves, and toast each other for having the guts to step into a space of vulnerability right now.

TIP: Pick just 3-4 questions for the evening and don't worry about going through them all. Let the conversation flow.

Science has shown that taking a few minutes to reflect at the end of an experience can help us internalize it.

Question 1: Tell a story about a time that fasting, or another spiritual practice that is important to you, has brought you strength or clarity.

Question 2: Describe a moment, recent or long passed, in which you've been made to feel unwelcome, unsafe, unworthy, and threatened.

Question 3: Describe a moment, recent or long passed, in which you were made to feel the opposite: in which you felt fully seen, heard, and at ease. Or describe a time you experienced support or solidarity from someone different from you.

Question 4: What can we do to create more moments of being fully seen, heard, and at ease?

Reflection: Fifteen minutes before the scheduled end (or thereabouts), serve dessert, tea, or coffee. End the night by asking people how this conversation went for them. What is one thing they're grateful for at the end of our meal together?

More Conversation Starters

- What's one thing about your faith practice that you wish others knew?
- In your daily life, how do you activate love to build the community that you dream of?
- Who is someone you know, or a figure from your faith tradition/sacred texts, who models love through their actions?



Photo from 2019 Ramadan Road Trip, Washington, D.C.

DINNER ACTIVITIES WE LOVE

“When I ask, ‘How are you?’ that is really what I want to know. I am not asking how many items are on your to-do list, nor asking how many items are in your inbox. I want to know how your heart is doing, at this very moment.”

OMID SAFI

BRING A READING

Invite guests to bring a reading (a poem, a scripture, a quote, a song lyric) that’s fortified them over the last few months. Read it together, popcorn-style, and allow the words to wash over you. Share whatever is stirred.

SHOW ‘N TELL

Have everyone bring a photo or an object that’s meaningful to them: the kind that activates your senses, something that immediately conjures a place or a person, the touch of a hand, the sound of a voice, a moment in which you felt fully alive. Inspired by our friends at [Interfaith Photovoice](#), you could ask people to take a picture of a place where they feel close to God or where they feel most mindful. Invite everyone to share the picture and story.

LET FOOD TELL THE STORY

Food often plays a central role in spiritual traditions - and can be a powerful prompt for storytelling. Invite people to share a story about a certain food they love (or hate!) from a certain holiday, or bring a dish with a story behind it from their family or community.



Ground Rules

Building the trust necessary to really open up — especially when it comes to expressing vulnerability — takes time.

Introducing ground rules (or deciding on them together) is a way to both offer parameters you all can work within, and to let everyone know that you (and they) are engaging in these conversations with intention.

- **Be present.** We encourage you to turn off phone notifications during our time, and, if the event is virtual, to resist the urge to shift between tabs on a computer screen, or engage in other tasks around you.
- **Speak from your own experience** and in a way that accommodates others. Use “I” statements, knowing that your experience is yours and others’ experiences are theirs. Remember: You can stand in your truth and also know that others have their own. Expect others’ stories to be different than yours. What we need, what we long for, or how we’re feeling varies from person to person.
- **Being here is participating.** You are, at any point, under pressure to talk. We welcome silence just as much as we welcome speech and ask only that when you speak, you do so intentionally. During this supper there’s no such thing as awkward silence.
- **Beware erasure.** Empathy isn’t putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, nor is it expecting someone to move like you. It is honoring that we bring our own unique experiences to this space. We know how powerful the words “me, too” can be, but be careful to avoid what researcher and civil rights leader John A. Powell calls “samings”: “I don’t see race,” or “I don’t see disability,” or trying to relate to something you can’t. (Example: “My partner died.” -> “Oh, I know exactly what you’re feeling. My parakeet died.”)
- **Make space for every voice.** Notice that you’re talking more than others? Step back and give other voices a chance to be heard. Know that we welcome silence as much as we welcome speech. Be patient and respectful with speaking turns and speaking times.
- **Meet hard moments with curiosity.** Conflict and tension can come up naturally when we share different and deeply held experiences. We encourage you to meet them first with reflection (including self-reflection) centered on curiosity, learning, empathy, and respect. That said, we are also invited to name our boundaries of what we will engage, share, and receive.

COMMUNITY AGREEMENT

[Click here for a printable version of this agreement to place on the table](#)

WE AGREE



There's a lot we may not agree on. In sitting down, we choose to agree on this:

I will grant you welcome, and I thank you for the welcome you grant me.

I will show up, be present, and be open to creating this experience together.

I will speak & listen with truth & love, agreeing or disagreeing with respect & kindness.

www.thepeoplessupper.org



Photo from 2019 Ramadan Road Trip, Raleigh, NC

TIPS FOR PLANNING

Like the food we place upon our tables, the way we choose to share a meal represents one of the most enduring human rituals. Gathering for supper is something to look forward to at the end of a long day or week: a chance to break bread, toast the future, and enjoy the company of others.

SUPPER PREP

- Deciding who to invite: Start with people you know and branch out from there. We find tables of 5-8 people are ideal for a home-based supper, though you can do it with as few as four people or as many as 12.
- Can children participate? Absolutely! Most young children do not fast during Ramadan, though some may practice, so they may eat before the adults break their fast. You can make the decision with your community and invited guests. about whether this is an adult-only space or a family-friendly event.
- If you'd like this to be potluck-style, you can [use our Google sheet](#) or something like SignupGenius to allow people to share what they'll be bringing. Ask them to bring labels for their food, noting whether the dish aligns with some or all of the group's dietary requirements (For example, is it Halal, Kosher, dairy free, etc.). Does the dish usually use pork bacon or meat stock, maybe substitute with halal/kosher bacon or veggie stock. Consider encouraging your guests to bring a dish that is meaningful in their faith or culture such as a special food that they ate at a holiday growing up.
- Halal, Kosher, Vegetarian...Dining together across religious differences is about learning what foods we eat and love – not just about figuring out what each other doesn't eat. Ask in your email invitation about dietary requirements or food allergies. Remember that kosher is different from halal. If you have questions about someone's requirements, ask the person(s) to clarify.
- Instructions for first-time guests: It may be some of your guests' first Iftar dinner so do not forget to ask individuals to dress modestly but comfortably.
- Enlist help: While folks are filtering in, intentionally leave a few things unfinished: save lighting the candles, for instance, or setting the table. It helps to give people something to do as they're waiting for everyone else to arrive.

TIPS FOR PLANNING

SUPPER PREP (CONTINUED)

- Can I host in a restaurant? We find private homes or religious spaces work best for deep conversation, in part because it's more intimate, and in part because it's easier to avoid interruptions and distractions. A waiter arriving right as someone is halfway through a powerful story can break the mood, and no one likes the feeling that the next table over is listening in, just as you prepare to share something vulnerable. If you do meet at a restaurant, pick one with a private room, or where there's plenty of space between tables, so that people can easily be heard.
- Prepare your guests: We recommend sharing the ground rules or [group agreement](#) ahead of time with the invitation to help share expectations of the dinner.

PRAYER

- Leave time and space for duas (prayers). It is believed that the minutes leading to Iftar is a special time in which duas will be accepted.
- Some guests may also need to perform their wudu (ablution or purification ritual) before the Maghrib prayer. So, do provide a clean space and clean water. A clean bathroom works for this!
- **Insider Tip:** It is helpful to lay down a bathroom rug or mat by the sink to absorb water from those performing wudu.
- Ensure the prayer area is clean with clean prayer rugs. If you don't have prayer rugs, clean blankets, sheets, or fabric tablecloths, work. Crowdsource these if needed! Be sure to lay them facing in the direction of the qibla (direction towards the Kaaba in the sacred mosque in Mecca). There are phone apps that can help to guide you in determining the exact angle or ask your Muslim co-host/guests.
- Arrange for someone to lead the call to prayer and to lead the prayer (talk to your Muslim friends about who can do this).
- It may be useful to have the following dua available for distribution. People will likely notice Muslim guests murmuring it right before breaking their fast: Allahumma laka sumtu wa `alaa rizqika aftartu – O, God. I fasted for your sake, and now I am breaking my fast with the food provided by you.
- **Insider Tip:** Some guests find it meaningful to pray or meditate quietly or in silence alongside or nearby Muslims in prayer.

TIPS FOR PLANNING

BREAKING FAST

- It is recommended to break one's fast, preferably with dates (or other dried fruit) before the Maghrib prayer (after the adhan). Guests can also be presented with room-temperature milk or water in place of, or in addition to, dates. Other small finger foods or appetizers may also be served with the initial iftar to supplement the dates.
- There is no one way of breaking one's fast after the Maghrib prayer. Iftar can include hot soup, casseroles, sweet treats, and simple or elaborate meals.
- **Inside Tips**
 - Keep large food platters away from eyesight before the Maghrib prayer as it may understandably distract those who fasted (they'll be hungry!).
 - Breaking the fast with a warm or room temperature liquid and foods can help restore the body temperature and prepare your stomach more easily for digestion after a long fast. It also helps avoid indigestion.

DON'T FORGET

- Document the supper: Take photos of the food and table from the supper.
*NOTE: Snapping selfies or people pics? Want to share a quote that came up around the table? Just be sure to ask permission first.
- This guide is intended to be neither static nor complete: figure out what works for you, flag what doesn't, and record your own tips. And don't forget to share your wisdom with the rest of us!

“Revolutionary love is a wellspring of care,
an awakening to the inherent dignity and beauty of
others and the earth, a quieting of the ego,
a way of moving through the world in relationship,
asking: ‘What is your story? What is at
stake? What is my part in your
flourishing?’”

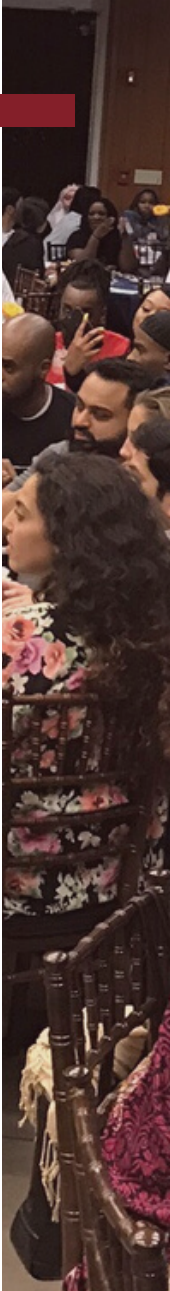
VALERIE KAUR

I'M NOT MUSLIM... BUT I WANT TO PARTICIPATE

If you're not Muslim, we ask that you collaborate closely with a Muslim individual and/or community on planning an interfaith Iftar. Here are some answers to frequently asked questions to get you started.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is Ramadan?** During Ramadan, also the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, Muslims believe the first verses of the Qur'an (Sacred book of Islam) were revealed to Prophet Muhammad - Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH). Starting with the sighting of the new moon, Ramadan lasts for 30 days or until the next sighting of the new moon. [Read more here.](#)
- **What is an iftar?** Iftar is the evening meal eaten to break one's fast during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **How can I find a supper to attend if I don't want to host?** You can find an iftar to attend by looking at [our nationwide interfaith iftar listing](#). You can also do a quick internet search of your region for interfaith iftars or interfaith Ramadan events.
- **Why do Muslims fast during Ramadan?** The act of fasting during Ramadan is one of the [five pillars of Islam](#), helping people focus on God and the community. During the hours of fasting (from sunrise to sunset), Muslims are encouraged to read the Quran and refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, sex, ill-thinking, and ill-doing.
- **What is Maghrib prayer?** The Maghrib prayer is prayed just after sunset, the fourth of five obligatory daily prayers.
- **How does iftar dinner work?** Iftar (literally means "break-fast") starts after the evening Maghrib prayer adhan, or call for prayer. The prayer time for Maghrib differs based on geographical location and particular community (Sunni or Shia).
- **What does halal mean?** Halal means lawful or permitted in Arabic. When describing food, it is the dietary standard as prescribed in the Qur'an. [Learn more here.](#)
- **Even water?** Yes. Fasting during the daylight hours of Ramadan includes not drinking water. Accommodations are made for people who are pregnant, menstruating, and traveling, and whether someone is young, old, sick, or has certain health conditions.
- **TIP:** Do not ask why someone is not fasting, this choice is personal and there are many reasons a person may not be fasting on a particular day.



CHECKLIST

We hope you feel ready to host an interfaith iftar, People's Supper style! Here's a checklist to help you prep.

PLANNING A SUPPER

- Decide if you'd like to host solo or if you'd like to recruit a co-host
- Decide who you'd like to invite
- Set the date and location
- Send out invitations
- Send a follow-up to guests with logistics and some context setting

DAY-OF SUPPER

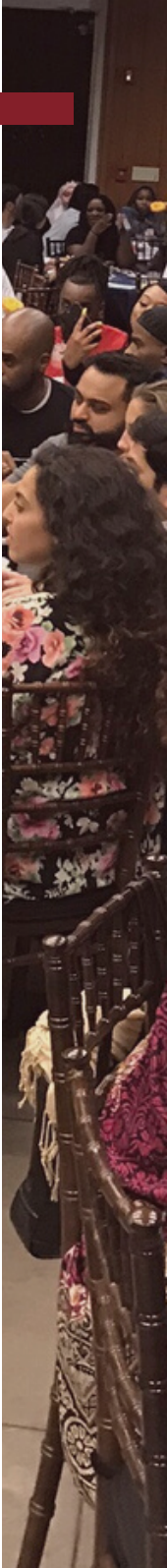
- Cook the main dish (Alternatively: Feel free to invite guests over early to cook together)
- Set-up the space, including prayer rugs and printed duas (be sure to place the [group agreements](#) where guests will see them)
- Kick-off with a toast
- Introduce the ground rules (see P8)
- Have everyone introduce themselves
- Introduce conversation starters (see P6)
- Talk, listen, eat, & drink
- Reflect and close
- Document supper with photos of table and food

AFTER THE SUPPER

- Send thank you notes or emails, resource information, and photos.

“If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway. It's easy to tell when a question is coming from a good place. Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here's to possibilities of friendship and connection and understanding.”

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE, AMERICANAH



WHAT'S NEXT

“The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them: we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them”

THOMAS MERTON

Attending or hosting one interfaith Iftar is not necessarily going to end anti-Muslim discrimination, but it's an important start to building the relationships and infrastructure we need in order to make a significant impact.

IDEAS

- Another supper
- Service projects
- Attending Eid celebrations
- Inviting guests to celebrate holy or culturally important days with other communities
- Book or movie club to learn more about Islam and Muslims in the U.S. ([check out our Ramadan Road Trip mini-doc and video series here](#))
- Connect with a local organization to make change in your community, ([check our our Shoulder to Shoulder Community & Congregational Network here](#))
- Take a Shoulder to Shoulder training on how to counter anti-Muslim discrimination ([more information about our trainings linked here](#))

Photo by Alex Montalvo from 2019 Ramadan Road Trip, Atlanta, GA





SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

Standing with American Muslims
Advancing American Ideals

The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign: Standing with American Muslims, Advancing American Ideals is a national coalition of religious denominations and faith-based organizations and communities that are committed to ending discrimination and violence against Muslims in the United States. Shoulder to Shoulder connects, equips, and mobilizes faith communities as strategic partners in countering, addressing, and preventing anti-Muslim discrimination. We envision a pluralistic and inclusive United States of America where all people are treated respectfully, fairly, and with dignity.

THE PEOPLE'S SUPPER



At The People's Supper, we believe that to be welcome – to feel wholly at ease in our own skin, to be fully seen and heard and witnessed – is a basic right. Suppers are a place where we can come together over one of humanity's most ancient and simple rituals. A place where we can share meaningful stories, good food, and a sense of community. A place where we can build understanding and trust.

If you have any questions or would like to share your experience, reach out to the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign at info@s2scampaign.org or to our friends at the People's Supper.

Photographs in this guide are from Shoulder to Shoulder's 2019 Ramadan Road Trip and our 2018 Seattle training on countering anti-Muslim discrimination