BRIDGES OF VIRTUE

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UPF
Unity Productions Foundation

Bridges of Virtue

How Islam, the Abrahamic Faiths, and Philosophy Illuminate Love

Guide for Hosting a Community Discussion

An educational project inspired by Islam's Greatest Stories of Love

A documentary film created by Unity Productions Foundation
and broadcast nationally on PBS stations in August 2025.

Guide for Hosting a Community Discussion

Dear Colleague,

We are honored that you have chosen to host a community discussion around the abridged version of our film, Islam's Greatest Stories of Love. In this 60-minute film we introduce a shortened version of the full documentary that focuses on two powerful chapters: the story of the Prophet Muhammad and his wife Khadijah, and Malcolm X's relationship with his half-sister Ella Collins.

By hosting this event we are inviting you to help foster meaningful exchange among diverse participants about the concept of love and virtue and how religious traditions can cultivate virtues within society. Too often, love is reduced to romantic or sentimental frameworks. Rarely do we understand love as a social and civic force capable of shaping communities, strengthening institutions, and sustaining moral courage in moments of crisis. Likewise, religion is frequently portrayed as incapable of contributing to civic life in constructive and transformative ways. This film and discussion seek to challenge those assumptions.

In the video, we introduce the main themes of Bridges of Virtue. Below, you will find a more in-depth overview of the project, along with practical guidance to help you introduce the event, frame the conversation, and facilitate a thoughtful and engaging discussion.

Thank you again for taking a step to start this important conversation in your community.

Sincerely,
The UPF Team

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The 5 Steps for Your Dialogue Event

1. **Download the template flier** for your event and customize it with the details specific to your gathering: logistics, date, time, location, and RSVP instructions.

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2. **Aim to bring together between 15 and 50 participants.** Partner with local area Muslim groups, interfaith groups and student groups. Ensure that you have a good mix of people from different faith backgrounds and of different ages.

   Ensure you have the proper equipment to show the film and test everything beforehand. Download the 60-minute abridged film as an MP4 file and confirm audio and projection quality in advance.

   DOWNLOAD

3. **Welcome guests and offer brief introductory remarks.** For example: "I'm pleased to welcome you to this screening of Islam's Greatest Stories of Love, a new PBS documentary created by Unity Productions Foundation." Thank attendees for coming and, if feasible, consider breaking into small groups following the screening. Begin with a simple icebreaker to set a tone of openness and reflection.

   "LOVE BEYOND ROMANCE"

   Prompt:

   - When you hear the word love, what is the first image or story that comes to mind?
   - Now think of one example of love that is not romantic — what does it look like?

   Give everyone 5 – 7 minutes to discuss and offer a 1-minute warning.

4 **Show the film.** Pre- and post-evaluations are built into the film. Please ensure WiFi access is available so participants can complete surveys using their mobile phones.

5 **Host the discussion using the questions and exercises provided below.** Encourage respectful listening, thoughtful engagement, and diverse perspectives.

Plan your discussion by posing the question to the group and give them 5 – 7 minutes to discuss. If you plan for 30 minutes of discussion, you should plan to ask 4 – 5 questions.

- How does love operate in situations of inequality or power imbalance? Can love challenge injustice, or does it risk becoming passive?
- How did Khadijah's strength and loyalty contribute to the success of Muhammad's mission as a prophet and leader?
- How does love change when it passes through suffering or loss? Does grief deepen love, weaken it, or transform it into something new?
- Discuss aspects of Ella Collins' character and identify ways her strength influenced Malcolm's development.
- Do you find similarities between Malcolm's community and the community of the Prophet Muhammad? Explain.
- If love were understood as a civic virtue rather than a private feeling, how might our communities or institutions look different?
- What makes it difficult to practice love across religious, racial, or ideological difference? What makes it possible?

Close your event with a thank you and final reflection:

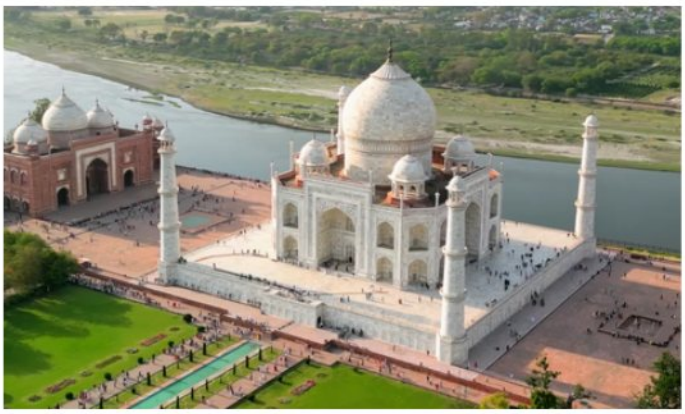
(Here is a potential script for your final thoughts and closing)
Tonight, we explored love not merely as a feeling, but as a virtue — something that requires courage, loyalty, sacrifice, and moral imagination. Through the stories of Muhammad and Khadijah, and Malcolm X and Ella Collins, we saw how love can sustain individuals in moments of crisis and shape communities in moments of transformation.

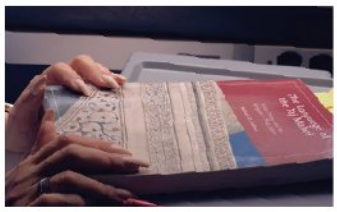
What stands out is that love, in these stories, is not passive. It is active. It builds. It protects. It strengthens. It endures hardship. It sometimes even challenges injustice. And perhaps most importantly, it binds people together across time, culture, and difference.

In a world that often feels fragmented, conversations like this remind us that our traditions — whether religious or philosophical — have deep resources for cultivating civic friendship and moral courage. Love, understood as a virtue, has the power to shape not only our private lives but our shared public life as well.

As you leave tonight, I invite you to carry one idea, one story, or one question with you — and to consider how love, as we have discussed it, might take form in your own daily relationships and commitments.

Thank you again for being part of this conversation, and for helping to build bridges of understanding in our community.





About Bridges of Virtue

Bridges of Virtue is a lecture series and educational website that seeks to inspire real-world change by encouraging participants to act more compassionately, build bridges across faith traditions, and carry the principles of love and virtue into their daily lives and long-term commitments. Through scholarship, dialogue, and public engagement, the project aspires to catalyze enduring moral growth.

The project features 15 leading scholars of interfaith dialogue, Islamic thought, philosophy, neuroscience and other social sciences. These scholars work looks at expanded conceptions of love beyond romance to include selflessness, sacrifice, compassion, and charity. Through these talks and the website (www.bridgesofvirtue.com) we explore similarities and differences in the teachings on love across Abrahamic and other faith and philosophical traditions. Through these screening events we aim to bring people of different faith communities together in conversation so they may learn from one another.

About Islam's Greatest Stories of Love

The film is framed through the story of Ariella Gayotto Hohl, a Harvard student whose father passed away unexpectedly while she was studying abroad. Raised Catholic, later engaged in Judaism, and ultimately embracing Islam while in college, Ariella's spiritual journey becomes a lens through which viewers explore the meaning of love in Islam.

As a practicing Muslim, Ariella finds solace among Muslim seminary students who encourage her to explore Islam's rich narratives of love. Through conversations with scholars, artists, and spiritual seekers, she examines stories that illuminate love's personal, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.

Learn more about the film:
https://www.upf.tv/films/islams-greatest-stories-of-love

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About Unity Productions Foundation (UPF)

Unity Productions Foundation has worked in film and television for over twenty years, producing documentaries for PBS and consulting with writers and producers across the industry. UPF's docudramas have won numerous national awards, including dozens of best film recognitions and a national Emmy Award nomination in 2018. Its films have reached an estimated global audience of 200 million viewers.

UPF's public engagement initiatives have partnered with more than 500 universities, faith communities, interfaith groups, and civic organizations, reaching over 200,000 participants through screenings and discussions.

Learn more about UPF: https://www.upf.tv

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