



## Resources for the *Faith Shared Initiative* June 26, 2011

Recognizing that June 26<sup>th</sup> is the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, marking the anniversary of the date the Convention Against Torture came into effect, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), along with its founding member groups Rabbis for Human Rights-North America (RHR-NA) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), offer the following readings from the three Abrahamic traditions that present the religious foundation for each faith group's efforts to end the use of torture.

### **Jewish Teachings on Torture**

The Torah and the teachings of Rabbis (including the Talmud and the Midrash) contain many teachings that emphasize the importance of human dignity and inherent human sacredness, leading to a rejection of torture.

*Genesis 1:27-28* – “God created the human in God's image. In the image of God, God created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them.”

*Exodus 23:9* – “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.”

*Genesis Rabbah 24* – “Ben Azzai taught: ‘This is the line of Adam’ (Genesis 5:1) is the most important concept in the Torah. Rabbi Akiva taught: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18) is a greater concept, so that no one should say: ‘Because I have been dishonored, let my fellow person be dishonored.’ Rabbi Tanhuma taught, ‘If you do thus, know that the person you have dishonored was created in the image of God.’”

*Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5* – “Therefore, Adam was created alone, to teach us that anyone who wastes one life in this world, the Torah treats them as though they had wasted a full world, and anyone who saves a life, the Torah treats them as though they had saved an entire world. And also for peace among creation, so that no person could say to another, ‘My ancestor was greater than yours,’ and to demonstrate God's greatness. When a person stamps coins, how many coins does he make from one mold and yet all are alike. And God stamps every person with the mold of the first person, and none are alike! Therefore, everyone is required to say, ‘For my sake the world was created.’”

*Mishna, Pirkei Avot 2:10* – “Rabbi Eliezer said, ‘Other people’s dignity should be as precious to you as your own.’”

*Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 19b* – “Come and learn: Human dignity is so important that it supersedes even a biblical prohibition.”

### **Islamic Teachings on Torture**

Both the Qur’an and the Hadeeth (collection of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) declare that God has invested the children of Adam with dignity, thus prohibiting any treatment that strips another

person of that dignity. Treating with respect the human body of all persons – whether dead or alive and regardless of religion or race – is a sacred trust. Torture clearly violates that trust.

*Qur'an (17:70)* – “Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured them far above most of Our creation.”

*Qur'an (5:8)* – “O you who believe, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do.”

**The following sayings of the Prophet have been taken from the *Encyclopedia of Hadeeth*.**

“Allah will punish those on the day of judgement who torture people in this world.”

“God alone can punish sinners on the day of judgement with the fire of Hell, but humans are not permitted to punish humans by fire in this life.”

“Only the creator of fire can punish sinners with fire, humans are not permitted to use fire to punish their fellow human beings.”

“The Prophet said that you should help your brothers whether they were oppressors or oppressed. They asked the Prophet how could one help a brother who is the oppressor. The Prophet replied that you help the victim of oppression by showing them sympathy and the perpetrator of oppression by moving him out of the oppressive mode.”

“You should show mercy to your people on earth, otherwise the One above you in the heavens will not show His mercy to you.”

## **Christian Scriptures on Torture**

The Christian Scriptures are full of teachings that lead to a rejection of the use of torture. (All quotations below are from the New Revised Standard Version.)

*Colossians 1:16* – “For in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or power – all things have been created through him and for him.”

*Matthew 5:43-44* – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous’.”

*Luke 6:27, 28,31* – “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. .... Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

*Romans 12: 14, 17, 19, 20, 21* – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ... Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ... Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

*Hebrews 13:3* – “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.”