

Reckoning With Torture: A Faith-based Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is designed for congregations and other religious groups using the “Activism Toolkit” for the “Reckoning With Torture: Memos and Testimonies from the ‘War on Terror’” project of the American Civil Liberties Union (www.aclu.org/reckoning). The suggested discussion questions could be used to help people of faith process their experience in the context of their religious traditions. Depending on the number of people, you may decide to have participants address some or all of the questions in pairs or small groups.

Initial Reactions (5 minutes)

Turn to the person next to you and take 2 minutes to describe how you feel.

- What part of the program did you find to be the most powerful?
- What’s something you learned that you didn’t know before?

Desecrating the Sacred (5-10 minutes)

All faiths teach that human beings are sacred, created with dignity and worth, and some faiths teach that human beings are created in the image of God. Torture desecrates the image of God.

- How does this belief affect the way you hear the legalistic descriptions of “enhanced interrogation” techniques?
- How does it affect the way you hear the words of Abu Zubaydah, a member of al Qaeda, describing his treatment?
- How does your faith respond to the claim that torture is necessary in some situations?

Collective Responsibility (5-10 minutes)

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel is quoted as saying that “some are guilty, but all are responsible.”

- What are some of the ways that we might all have some responsibility for the torture described in the program?
- What does your religious tradition say about repentance, accountability and redemption? How can we actualize these values as a nation?

Repairing the Brokenness (5 minutes)

As people of faith, we know that brokenness can be healed – both in individual lives and in the life of the nation. All religions believe that redemption is possible. Learning the truth can set us on a path toward national healing and renewal. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) has called for a government-sponsored, nonpartisan Commission of Inquiry to discover the truth about U.S.-sponsored torture and make recommendations to ensure it never happens again. (For more information, see www.nrcat.org/coi and www.nrcat.org/repair.)

- What special role might there be for the religious community in this process of holding our nation accountable for torture?

Please consider collecting signatures on NRCAT’s petition: www.nrcat.org/COIpetition.