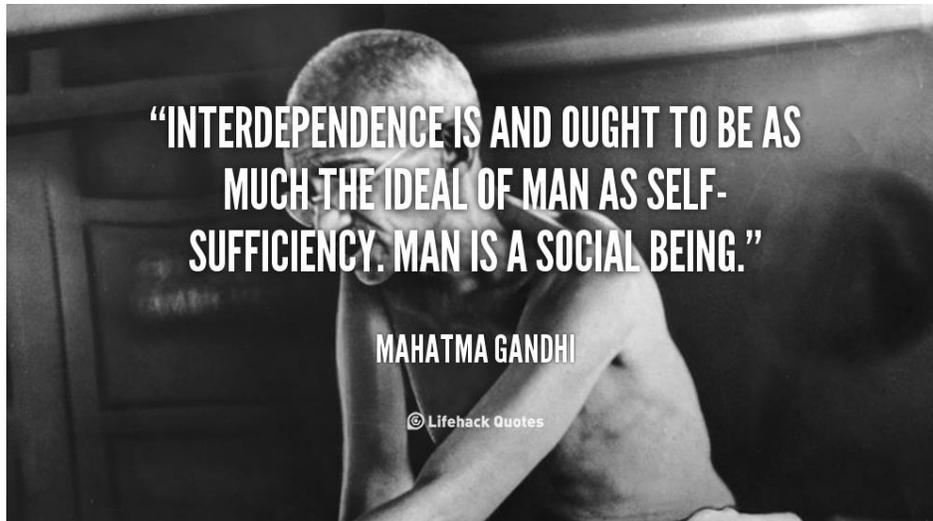


Adult Group Study on Faith and Displacement



East Bay Housing Organizations
Interfaith Communities United





**Adult Group Study, based on East Bay Housing Organizations'
FORUM ON FAITH AND DISPLACEMENT
Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, Oakland, CA
December 8, 2015**

Moderator: Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman

Panelists: Camisha Fatimah Gentry, Jeanne Robinson, Rev. Sandhya Jha

The event was designed so that panelists answered three questions and then attendees answered the same questions in small group settings with time to report back on what emerged from the group.

This adult group study is structured so that people who participate in the group study can reflect on the same questions as participants during the forum as well as expanding their reflections on the issues.

Invite participants to read the panelists' responses before the discussion time, or read it out loud together before moving into discussion time. There will also be suggestions for how discussion leaders might want to prepare to discuss this issue through the lens of your community's specific faith tradition, since the panel represented Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives.

Please note that the reflections of the panelists reflected their understanding of their faith traditions and should not be read as the universal understanding of every person from that faith tradition.

We hope you find your discussions inspiring and perhaps even motivating! The work of building the Beloved Community happens best when we work together. We hope this inspires your community to even deeper work on housing as a human right and a moral obligation.

Peace,

Rev. Sandhya Jha, Director of Interfaith Programs
East Bay Housing Organizations

BONUS RESOURCE:

INTERFAITH PRAYER CREATED BY THE ATTENDEES OF THE INTERFAITH FORUM ON DISPLACEMENT.

If appropriate, you are welcome to use this at the beginning or end of each session of your group study.

Liturgy based on the prayers and wisdom shared by participants of the East Bay Housing Organization's Interfaith Forum on Housing Displacement on December 6, 2015. Compiled by Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman. Interfaith housing activists used the prayer in their 'Home for the Holidays' campaign, where they held vigils right before Oakland City Council meetings to raise awareness and hold the City accountable for the dire housing and homelessness crisis.

WE CALL OUT TO YOU, GOD

We are many but you are One; your multi-faceted unity makes our unity possible.

WE CALL TO YOU BY MANY NAMES:

Jesus, Allah, Elohim, Great Creator, Father, Mother, Breath of Life;

(PRAYER LEADER – INVITE PEOPLE TO ADD NAMES OF/WAYS THEY REFER TO GOD OR THE DIVINE)

WE CALL OUT FOR TRUE JUSTICE, invoking the memory of the powerful prophets and teachers in whose broad footsteps we walk, knowing that we can only truly keep our balance when travelling together.

WE STAND TOGETHER in the belief that every human being has the right to a safe, healthy and truly affordable place to live, a personal sanctuary, a place they can call home without fear of displacement.

IT IS OUR SACRED INTENTION to witness one another lovingly; to notice the collective enlightenment evidenced by hearing one another's stories; to experience the power of sharing our experiences in the public realm.

IT IS OUR SACRED TASK to use the knowledge we gain wisely; and to apply our shared wisdom through skillful action, both collectively and as individuals.

WE PRAY TOGETHER:

That the homelessness that plagues far too many of our sisters and brothers come to an end - in Oakland, in Alameda County, in the Bay Area, in California and throughout the world;

That powerful people whose hearts have been hardened by the demands of their office or scarred by their own need for healing will have their hearts softened to the needs of the poor and the vulnerable;

That we feel the movement in our own hearts;

That courage, compassion and unwavering faith prevail when we feel most vulnerable;

That we are able to spread good in the world;

That the seniors at St. Mary's shelter find housing;

That ministers and faith leaders understand their own role in being good stewards over their property;

That ...*(PRAYER LEADER – INVITE PEOPLE TO CALL OUT FOR WHAT THEY ARE PRAYING)*

CLOSING

May these prayers and those still in our hearts be heard.

May every person have a place to call home.

May our longing for justice be fulfilled.

AMEN.

SESSION ONE:

How does your faith tradition address the issue of displacement and housing justice?

(group discussion questions at the end of the session)

FACILITATOR'S NOTE: Before you start this session, do a little research into the sacred texts from your own tradition and what they say about housing, homelessness, and providing shelter for poor people in particular. Most of our texts are explicit about shelter and housing as a basic right for all people.

Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman: I want to briefly tell you what brought me into this room and also introduce our panelists.

A lot of my professional life has been spent in health related fields including public health. And in public health for eight or nine years I've focused a lot on housing: healthy housing. It seems so intuitive. It seems so obvious that should be something everyone has; a healthy house that can be their home. A place that can be their sanctuary; that at least has the potential to be that. But we know that's not always true. And we know there are a number of health issues. Asthma is a great example. That play a much more prominent role in poor communities and communities of color. Although Asthma is not prejudiced; it's an equal opportunity chronic condition that can affect anyone. But poor communities and communities of color are much more highly impacted for a variety of reasons: environmental reasons, stress reasons, housing reasons. Housing reasons include not having homes, and more particularly for people with asthma having homes in really poor conditions. That makes it more likely that there's mold, that there are rodents or roaches, which are asthma triggers, make asthma worse. So I see it as emblematic of all kinds of problems that can happen for people when housing conditions aren't good.

All kinds of problems ... can happen for people when
housing conditions aren't good.

--Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman

So I've had time in my work to spend time with people all over the state. In central valley. In southern CA. In imperial valley near the border. In the bay area. And see the various ways people are creatively responding to the housing crisis and to try to make housing more available and more healthy.

So I'm here to learn from all of you.

Sitting directly to my left is Camisha Fatimah Gentry, a Muslim leader and a restorative justice activist and I'll let her say more about that.

To her left is Jeanne Robinson who is a member of Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church and a resident of Westlake Christian Terrace, an affordable housing resident and activist.

And we have the wonderful Rev. Sandhya Jha from East Bay Housing Organizations who makes it possible for all of us to come together as people of faith to address these important issues of housing justice.

The first question I'd like to ask is this: *how does your faith tradition and/or your sacred text speak to the issue of displacement or housing justice*. And as you answer any of these questions, feel free to share how the issue of displacement affects you personally.

Camisha Fatimah Gentry: In the Islamic tradition we greet everyone with as-salamu alaykum. (Some respond wa-alaikum as-salaam.) which means may peace be upon you. Bismillah—in the name of God. While I'm speaking with you I'm praying within myself.

This is an inspirational time that we're living in. Whenever there's been a time of struggle there's always been a selected few who move the people. I have always considered myself a mover of masses even before I converted in college twenty years ago. I was raised by an atheist Jewish mother, a white mother, and a very Black Baptist father. My mother was a cultural Jew, so we would celebrate all the holidays but I never went to temple unless I was dating someone and was trying to win their hearts. My father was very spiritual and raised spiritual but we didn't go to church. We celebrated all the holidays, went to the Jewish community center during school. The question about displacement and how our faith addresses it.

Like most faiths, everyone is entitled to healthy housing as you said, safe housing. It's a human right. It is my understanding that we're right on time. Our country, this is all in divine order. There have been plans for hundreds of years for what is happening with people of color, poverty stricken people, to be stricken down and a select few to rise. Welfare will soon be no more; SSI is going to get cut...this is not surprising that this is how things would turn out. As a Muslim woman and a voice for the voiceless, this conglomeration of different experiences, I believe that we have everything we need to get to where we need when it comes to displacement. I am displaced...I call it privileged displacement; friends have taken me in, and I will buy a home, in the Bay Area. I know what time we're living in, but that's my faith. You can call it naiveté or my youth but I have to ground myself in my faith.

Fatimah, the other half of my name, my father gave me, is the daughter of the prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him and her, and it means faithful one. She wasn't a girly girl, she loved to listen and learn and sat up under her dad to learn. When he sought to give me an Islamic name, that's the name my father chose for me. And I'm grateful to be here in this moment to remind me of that. We all have our dark hours but I believe we have everything we need to get where we need to be. And we might have things that the other person needs; that's what sets us apart from the people living in despair.

The Quran speaks to the right to safe and healthy housing all through our holy text. And most people don't know we take all of the texts as holy: The New Testament, the Torah and the Quran. Our faith matters in little things and big, like when we're crossing people who are homeless...the shame that happens for people who are homeless and also the families of people who are homeless is comparable to incarcerated people and their loved ones; we have thousands of people coming home right now. How are they going to transition and how are our families going to transition. I wanted to talk about that because we live in fear and shame and we're in this bubble of whatever issue; the level of shame we hide in for our own reasons; if we can find ways to break through that and instilling faith for people in despair for people who don't have what they need; that will help us get where we need to be.

Rabbi Tobacman: Thank you for speaking personally and also doing what we're able as people to do. What we're hoping for is that movement where we notice what's happening for us and think more globally.

Jeanne Robinson: I attend church here at Lakeshore Ave. Baptist Church. I've been here three years; I started changing religions at 70. But the basic tenets I was raised with were community. Scripture refers to community all the time and I was taught in Sunday School from a young age that we worship in community for a reason, and that that's an important thing. And of course, community is the first thing that gets destroyed when people get displaced. That's one of the most critical issues besides the personal devastation of finding yourself outside of your housing. There's also the greater loss of the people you know.

Community is the first thing that gets destroyed when people get displaced. That's one of the most critical issues besides the personal devastation of finding yourself outside of your housing.

--Jeanne Robinson

To illustrate how embedded I am in community, there are four people here from the community in which I live and we are all traveling together and we all participate in EBHO together. My housing complex is approximately 700 people and there are 10 of us or so active in EBHO. We have a community within a community, the way I've always lived.

I had a similar experience with dating. My father believed anyone I met in church would probably be a good suitor and so anybody I wanted to date, I would just have them go to youth group and then I could say, "Dad, he was at youth group!" I got away with that for several years.

The whole issue of community is getting our faith communities aware of how things are for people who aren't a part of this particular community but the community two doors down, so we know where the community breakdown is happening.

I lived in San Francisco when the changes were happening in the Filmore and I had to walk through that district to get to Kaiser and I saw it every day and every day and every day. I can imagine the devastation; I saw the physical aspects of people leaving their homes, houses being knocked down, other houses being built. That's my commitment to this issue, besides the self-serving aspect of having gotten myself into affordable housing, I did not have to go through displacement, I just put myself on a lot of waiting lists and I knew to do that because when I worked I was a geriatric social worker so I knew I did not want to live alone. I had some very wealthy clients who lived alone in their beautiful homes, and they lived in splendid isolation. They were not happy campers; money did not work for them. They had people around, but all people they had paid to be there. I had other clients in affordable housing and they lived, I thought, much happier lives, because they were in a more communal environment. I

knew that was the right thing for me. So I put myself on every list, and West Lake came up first; they won!

I've got my posse, and we're ready to go to work.

Rabbi Tobacman: It's great to hear your story. I love this idea of community. I love the idea of community as an issue of faith and spirituality.

Rev. Sandhya Jha: So I feel sadly for you that I'm on the panel today because it should have been Rev. Phil; for those of you who don't know, Rev. Phil Lawson was my mentor for a number of years, a prominent leader in the civil rights movement and the kid brother of the Rev. James Lawson, and at this point in his career he believes his best years are ahead of him. If you've heard him talk, I think you'll agree that's true. He was particularly excited to share with you his reflections on the theology of land. I think that's an important thing for us to be talking about.

I'm an ordained minister in the Disciples of Christ, and one of the reasons Camisha is my sister is we were both raised in multireligious household. My father's Hindu and my mother's Scottish Presbyterian – which worked! So when I think about the sacred texts that speak to issues of displacement, I think about one of the last times I visited India. My cousin took me to the birthplace of Krishna. He's one of the Hindu gods, very popular because when he's a little boy he always gets into trouble stealing butter and when he gets older he gets into trouble stealing milk maids, a very popular part of the Hindu pantheon. But when she took me to his birthplace, I didn't know this part of the story beforehand, his mother had been imprisoned. He was born in prison. I tell that story to say there is something in all of our texts about the dignity and the divinity of humanity, no matter what circumstances. And I think that's an important thing for us to be thinking about as people of faith, because that is something that the world does not encourage us to think about. That comes from our faith traditions and not a world shaped by capitalism and consumerism and what you were born with.

There is something in all of our texts about the dignity and the divinity of humanity, no matter what circumstances. And I think that's an important thing for us to be thinking about as people of faith, because that is something that the world does not encourage us to think about.

--Rev. Sandhya Jha

So I wanted to mention that because there are many stories that illustrate that. For those of us in the Christian tradition we're approaching the day of the birth of Jesus, who was born in a barn, basically. A carved out cave that functioned as a barn, because there was no shelter; there was no room at the inn. That's somebody that we within the Christian tradition we consider to be a savior, and throughout his

life he knew homelessness, he knew lack of shelter. He talks about how snakes have their holes and foxes have their dens but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. So the issues of homelessness and human dignity are related to each other in our faith traditions.

The reason I brought up Rev. Phil is that he wanted to talk about theology of the land. Something I have been really grateful for, especially since I moved out here, is the ways my understanding of the land has been shaped by my indigenous brothers and sisters. There's a colleague of mine I respect deeply named Andrea Smith. She was asked – about ten years ago there was a major supreme court case about indigenous land rights, it was a big deal at the time – and somebody said, “Andy, are you excited about this victory for Native American land rights?” And she said, “I guess I should be excited, by the standards of White western people. But we never thought the land belonged to us. We just didn't think the land belonged to you, either.”

And I think that matters because a lot of our faith traditions talk not about our ownership of the land that we should take care of because we own it, but our *stewardship* of the land. And that puts us in a position of servanthood. We are not the ones who own any of it, we're the ones responsible for caring for it. And this theology, I believe, carries through to the notion of property. I can't say for sure that's what Rev. Phil wanted to share with you this afternoon, and I know that he would have shared it more eloquently, but I wanted to mention on his behalf that “Whose land is it?” is a deep theological question I think undergirds every single policy decision.

So there's a big campaign for “public land for the public good.” I don't tend to use the term “public land.” I tend to use the term “sacred land.” Because the land is sacred, given to us by the Divine to be cared for and to be used for the good of God's sacred children, and that is all of us.

Rabbi Tobacman: Thank you especially for reminding us of the sacredness of not just land but of earth, the planet we inhabit. It seems the more and more fragile the earth's systems get, the less and less we can ignore the relationship between the land itself and the needs of people, of all of us who live on the earth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Have you witnessed any changes in your neighborhood as a result of displacement either from your neighborhood or to it? (New businesses, new residents, residents who have left, higher demands for particular social services in the community, services marketed to a different class of people than before, etc.) Has displacement affected you personally, or people in your family, or someone in your faith community?*
2. *Are there any references to people being displaced from their communities in your sacred texts? Are there stories or texts about housing as a spiritual issue or a justice issue?*
3. *How have our understandings of “who the land belongs to” shaped how we use land whether it be public or private? Does your faith tradition have anything to say about that issue?*

SESSION TWO:

Where does your faith tradition create barriers to addressing the issues of housing justice and displacement?

Discussion questions at the end.

NOTE FOR FACILITATORS: One of the speakers talks about gender inequalities. One talks about the stigma of losing a home in the context of an economic era where we now realize the banks encouraged bad borrowing and lending practices. One talks about how a dispossessed people ended up dispossessing other people in their effort to create a safe home for themselves. One speaker discusses Christianity not questioning economics of greed and materialism. These issues can all raise questions for people of faith; be prepared to re-orient the conversation to how this connects to spirituality, this faith community and housing. Remind them that these are the perspectives of individuals and ask what their perspectives are on the question asked of the panelists.

Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman: I'm pausing because I have my own reflection on the next question. The next question is, "where does your faith tradition perhaps put up barriers or present challenges for us in particular relating to this issue of housing justice and displacement?" It's not comfortable to talk about it, but it could be really helpful.

So I want to say a little bit about that from my faith tradition. I've been giving this a lot of thought. It's very painful. I am so proud of being part of a tradition based so largely on ethical values. Our tradition has all kinds of things about it in terms of housing, from when you're selling a house how to do that well to building a house don't block your neighbor's light because they may need to grow things, to in the Torah it talks about what to do if there's something growing on the walls, there's a spiritual way of dealing with that. It's all in there.

Sadly the history of the Jewish people has put us into exile many times from many places, from early on when temples and cities were destroyed and people were forced out of their homes to the Inquisition in the 1500s when Jewish people were forced out of Spain to the late 18th and early 19th century in eastern Europe when people were exiled due to persecution to the mid-20th century when people were exiled due to the Holocaust. It's happened many times. And what's happened along the way when combined with a deep attachment, a deep resonance with the language of our liturgy and our sacred texts, part of what's happened is a desire for home, a desire for a sense of home. So in the late 19th century and early 20th century when people were thinking in terms of nationhood, land, geographic space as a way to create home, that resonated with Jews who were longing for a place that could be safe, that they could call home. And that resulted along with a bunch of historical circumstances and political circumstances with the formation of a modern Jewish state.

I don't want to make this forum into something about Israel. I want to say that sadly what happened in the process of that being created is not that different than what happened in the creation of the United States in terms of the people who already lived there. People were displaced. One people who needed a place found a place at the expense of another people who were displaced.

It's happened again and again in places throughout the world. It's not unique. And it's complicated. And I'm not going to engage in a conversation about that particular thing during this forum, but I wanted to lift it up because I think it gets in the way sometimes, this sense of attachment, because at the same

time that the history of my people has often put us at the forefront of the social justice movement and made many of us allies to people the most harshly impacted by social injustice, there's a way that we have to consider what does it mean to live on our planet now, what does it mean, this concept of land and landedness? How do we create homes for everybody and have a place for everybody and have a community for everybody? How do we create homes for people who need them without displacing other people? It's mucky and complicated. It's a holy task.

The land is sacred. It doesn't belong to us. And at the same time we have principles of living in a society that maybe make ownership in that sense inevitable. How do we create a holy place for all of us?

With all that in mind, help me out!

Camisha Fatimah Gentry: What came up for me this week in terms of that question on barriers is the treatment and differences in genders. There are a lot of resources for men that women don't have; transitional housing, rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol, resources that traditionally there's a longer list for men than for women, which I don't understand because generally we end up with the children. One of the barriers in my faith I believe actually to be man's way of keeping women in their place. If you know the history of Islam, you know the women's rights movement came there a long time before it ever came to this country. When Islam was being revealed, women were given the right to vote, women were given the right to own property, the right to choose who they want to marry. Now some cultures chose not to practice that and choose not to to this very day, when that's just basics, just Islam 101. Women have the right to be educated.

Equal but not equitable. We strive to be equitable between men and women. If I have three children and my sister has one and we're both divorced, who should get my mom's house if she passes before us? It's equitable, not equal. The mother with more children, or we share. It's not just that all the resources are for one gender or birth order or class. Everyone is entitled to safe, healthy housing. So in regards to this question, the barrier is the unequal AND inequitable treatment of men and women when it comes to displacement, and it seems like if anyone should be at the top of the list or have a longer list of resources and opportunities, it should be the women. That's one of the things I think is a barrier to us.

if you're hiding out in shame no one can join in, no one
can throw up the cry.

--Jeanne Robinson

Jeanne Robinson: I was searching in my mind the history in worshipping congregations. I have always fallen into congregations that were pretty much middle class. That's where I was and that's where I am. It's my joy that this congregation while middle class is multi-racial. The barrier that continues to rise in this particular topic and doing something about it is because we come from many places. Some are from Fremont, Martinez, Richmond and in many parts of Oakland. We come together as one community here but we're not part of the same community when we go outside the doors. What's required to make a

change is outsiders to make noise and disagree, and to agree together to promote sanity in the housing market. So that has sent me trying to figure out how I can change that.

Also, because these congregations have been middle class, things like evictions aren't discussed. They happen. But they aren't discussed.

My first Sunday in this church, a man told me about how he and his family had been evicted. I know that family now, and his wife would kill him if she found out he had disclosed that. Because there's that shame attached to it.

The other part is if you're hiding out in shame no one can join in, no one can throw up the cry. It's why I've been the EBHO representative from and to that congregation. Whenever I speak on behalf of EBHO I make sure to say I live in affordable housing -- I'm one of *those people* -- and I could not otherwise afford to live here. And my particular banishment is east armpit Indiana. I don't know where I could live on that income. I certainly couldn't live here. Affordable housing is essential to my life, and if I could put a pin on myself that says "I live in affordable housing," I would do it so this congregation could know and so other people could come out of the closet so to speak on that particular issue.

That's our particular barrier, I think, our variety of residences.

When I'm speaking specifically from my faith tradition, I think that is when we began to create barriers to overcoming displacement...We forgot that God is always on the side of the displaced more than anyone else.

--Rev. Sandhya Jha

Rev. Sandhya Jha: So for me, and this might be for any Christians in the room a controversial statement, but I think Christianity began to go wrong on this when we became a majority religion. I believe Christianity was intended to be a religion of and for people on the margins. And it was intended not as a "here's how to get a bunch of stuff instead of being on the margins" religion; it was intended to be a "here's how to live faithfully on the margins when that's who God cares about." God is not impartial or dispassionate or even loves everybody equally. In the Christian faith, God clearly has favorites, and they're not the ones who have the stuff. And the point at which our faith became about getting enough of the stuff, the point at which we wanted to be on the winning side because we thought it was about winning and losing in those terms, when we forgot that we worship a savior who was murdered by the state, which indicates the world's definition of losing, I think we lost our moral center. And we have a lot to account for on that front, because Christianity today is a lot about forgiving ourselves for having the stuff and accepting the fact that we're on top, when that is not where Christ wants us to be. So when I'm speaking specifically from my faith tradition, I think that is when we began to create barriers to overcoming displacement. Because we forgot that God is always on the side of the displaced more than anyone else.

I am not speaking on behalf of all Christians everyone, and I am definitely not speaking on behalf of any of the preachers on television.

Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman: I speak on behalf of no one but myself today either. So we hold all that. We all know that ... well, this candelabra has a crack in it. What a crack does is when we can shine light through that crack, the fissures, we know what are the areas that need repair.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Are there any ways your faith tradition or your scriptures unintentionally creates barriers to creating housing justice or addressing displacement?*
2. *Is the fear of stigma or shaming people because they cannot afford a fancy home or because they have faced foreclosure something your faith community could address? How do we make it okay for people to talk about affordable housing or not blame themselves for economic situations that were not entirely their fault so that we can create more just laws in the future?*
3. *How does this faith community address our culture's desire to own things or to gain power? How could we intentionally redefine power so that we focus more on making the world better for people with fewer resources?*

SECTION THREE:

Where does your faith give you hope in regards to housing justice and ending displacement?

Questions at the end of this section.

Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman: I want to go back to the word on how we evolve beyond these challenges and this place where people still need safe, healthy truly affordable homes. There's got to be something to shine a light, to give us hope. So where does your faith give you hope in regards to housing justice?

In terms of the sacredness of the land we're on: some of our cities are on top of sacred burial grounds with all this consumerism on top.

--Camisha Fatimah Gentry

Camisha Fatimah Gentry: For me, it's the basic tenets of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Small picture: in passing someone displaced on the street I started calling them kings and queens, brother, sister, sir or ma'am, being reminded how long it might have been since they were called that and how a small act like that can make such a difference. Having the conversation with someone who's mentally ill, if it's safe of course, but giving someone the time of day. Everyone wants to be heard.

In terms of the sacredness of the land we're on: some of our cities are on top of sacred burial grounds with all this consumerism on top. So in conversations like this, remaining aware of that.

I try to bring us back to our humanity; my faith reminds me to do that. Hence restorative justice. That's a modern term of bringing us back to our original self. In Islam it's called our fitra, our original state, the way we originally came here. There are a few differences between Islam and the other traditions. One of them is Jesus being the son of God. In Islam, if you don't know, we believe that he's a prophet but that he will come back. The other main difference is we believe we were born closest to perfect, not in sin. Through being a product of our environment and our situations, that's how we became sinful. So that's about bringing us back to our original godly state.

And through our five daily prayers and through our duaahs, through reconnecting with people and healthy relationships.

Someone asked the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), and I'm paraphrasing, "What is the most important thing you can do to be faithful?" And the prophet said, "Perfect your relationships."

"And then, Prophet Mohammed, what is the most important thing?"

"Perfect your relationships."

"And THEN what is the most important thing in the world we can do?"

And what did the prophet say? "Perfect your relationships."

What does that mean?

The accountability, the taking responsibility. If I harm you, what happens to you happens to me. And it's true for our communities, too. Who's obligated to restore and repair that community? It's not always money, a home. It's what the injured party says they need.

It's why I'm so committed to restorative justice. What happens to you happens to me. Community comes together in the situation, and we come up with a way to restore the people and the community. Imagine what could happen if we lived that way.

Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman: As you told the story about relationship, I thought about the saying about real estate: location, location, location. What if we changed it to relationship, relationship, relationship?

My understanding of faith is that it is hope. The light shines on what we are to do, what we are called to actually physically do. There are times I feel I am being lifted by the collar of my shirt and dragged to something to do.

--Jeanne Robinson

Jeanne Robinson: My understanding of faith is that it is hope. The light shines on what we are to do, what we are called to actually physically do. There are times I feel I am being lifted by the collar of my shirt and dragged to something to do.

The task is inside each congregation there be someone teaching about these specific issues. There's no one in any congregation I've been a part of who would willfully cause harm. But people need to see where some activities are harmful and how they harm people. And that as a group working toward a cause we can make the cause happen; we can change the way things are: we can cause the cause. But we have to know about them.

We have to come together; we have to volunteer to go to Richmond or Fremont or they need to come here when a situation calls for it. That will create the change, so it's not just the few people who live here who are affected by it who are rallying at city hall but our comrades from other places gathering at city hall.

That's what I remember from the civil rights movement: it wasn't just the people who were in immediate danger; it was the people who saw it and knew it and came in to say, "We support you." We need to do the same thing about the displacements that are going on and about the gentrification. That's what needs to happen. That's where my hope is: that if we knew better we'd do better. Those who can, teach; those who can walk, walk. And when we witness someone being rude, tell them, "you're being rude." (Comment from another panelist: You don't have a political candidate in mind, do you?) About seven.

Because our job, first and foremost, is to remind people of who their best selves are.

--Sandhya Jha

Sandhya Jha: I'd like to take a moment of personal privilege to thank Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church for hosting us today, and want to offer special thanks to Jessica McFarland and Shifrah Tobacman who coordinated this event and to the other panelists.

If you'll forgive me for quoting Rev. Phil one more time, I was at an immigration even for interfaith leaders. We were trying to figure out what our policy strategy should be, what our organizing strategy should be, what our legal strategy should be. And Rev. Phil said, "Let me tell you a story from the freedom movement in the 1960s. There were lawyers who did the legal stuff; there were policy makers who did the policy stuff; there were organizers who did the logistics of organizing. Our job as people of faith was to be faithful." And to be explicit and unapologetic about that. Because our job, first and foremost, is to remind people of who their best selves are.

And that's exactly what folks have been talking about at this table. For me, there's a lot of hope to be found in the fact that we don't have to be all of those things. We have partners in the movement to help us with those things. But we also have something the movement desperately needs, because we're not just about building homes that are affordable for the sake of building homes that are affordable. We're about the work that Jeanne was talking about earlier: we're about building beloved community. And displacement is, in my faith tradition's language, a sin, because it destroys community.

And so I think that's important because there are housing organizations to the right of EBHO and to the left of EBHO and when I watch them get together and talk about their big victories, they talk about how they won this half of this one percent of this pot of money this year. That's the big win. And I'm not saying we shouldn't celebrate those wins; we should. But it's the job of the faith community to say "that's not the end." It's a tiny piece of a much bigger victory which is about changing the culture until we get to a point where when we sit down with our city council members and our governor and our President, they're saying "how do we make this a beloved community?" That's what we're about. And no one does that as well as the faith community.

For me, that's not just what my faith tradition offers in terms of hope, it's the fact that people of faith have a huge contribution we can make that no one else can make in the same way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *What hope does your faith tradition offer to the issue of housing justice or ending displacement?*
2. *Are there sacred texts in your tradition that give you hope? Could you ever use them to inspire or give courage to elected officials as they seek to do the right thing?*
3. *Where have you seen people within your faith tradition create hope in relation to individual people's housing needs? How about in relation to creating systems that make access to housing easier? How could your faith community begin to address that issue?*

If your faith community would like to get more involved in addressing housing justice, please reach out to Rev. Sandhya Jha at East Bay Housing Organizations (sandhya@ebho.org). We are happy to visit faith communities to share about the distinct role the faith community can play in our ongoing campaigns across Contra Costa and Alameda counties for access to affordable housing, tenants' rights and anti-displacement efforts.