



A GUIDEBOOK FOR VIRTUAL
INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT

welcome to my table

RAMADAN 2021



UNITED
STATES OF
LOVE
OVER
HATE



SHOULDER TO SHOULDER



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CONNECTING THROUGHOUT RAMADAN
FROM HOME TO HOME

For the past several years, Shoulder to Shoulder has helped facilitate and uplift multi-faith connections during Ramadan through our [United States of Love Over Hate campaign](#). Usually, this has happened around real dinner tables sharing real food, face to face. For many of our Muslim neighbors, Ramadan is a time when they are often gathering, with their families, friends, and the wider community, to break the fast each evening and to connect with one another.



COVID-19 has changed the way we've all approached gatherings. While concern for public health still prevents us from gathering in person again this year in the same ways we have in years past, we are here to help you find opportunities to connect meaningfully during this time. We strongly believe that physical distancing should not mean social isolation. It takes extra intention, effort, and creativity to connect with one another in these times, and connection remains vitally important for our own well being and the well being of our communities. We will get through these times together.

What makes an Iftar different from any other meal? During the month of Ramadan, many Muslims fast from sunup to sundown, then gather together - in mosques, homes, restaurants, and elsewhere - to break their fast each evening of the month. Sometimes these dinners, called Iftars, are small family affairs, while others are more festive gatherings of larger groups. You can read more of the [basics here!](#)



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[#WelcomeToMyTable](#)

[#LoveOverHate](#)

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As the response to the public health crisis and the need to maintain physical distancing continues, we're once again launching an initiative called Welcome to My Table. This initiative connects households to each other or in small groupings to virtually share an Iftar meal. We have developed a system for pairing households to one another ([sign up here!](#)), but you can use these tools on your own as well, with friends, neighbors or co-workers you already know or with whom you want to connect.

Here's How:

- **Find another household*** (or multiple, though we recommend keeping the number of different households low (2-3) to allow for deeper engagement). Ask people you already know, friends, neighbors, or co-workers OR [you can use our matching system](#) to meet new friends. You could connect with another household locally, with the hope that you will connect in person when physical distancing is no longer necessary, or you could connect with someone from another part of the country!

Because this is a guide for Ramadan engagement specifically, at least one household should identify as Muslim.

*A "household" could be an individual, a family, a roommate grouping, or other small group of people who will be in the same home for this gathering

- **Pick a date & time to gather virtually** - let the Muslim household take lead on this, taking into account the timing for breaking the fast in their own time zone. Ramadan starts around April 12 and ends around May 12 this year. Often there are days during Ramadan that are more focused on prayer so we recommend suggesting dates in the middle 15 days (approx April 16-May 3) and then go from there to decide as a group.

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Select your tech.

- There are multiple platforms that you can utilize for this, and which one you select depends on your own familiarity with the various platforms. Using a computer will allow for a larger image of your virtual dinner guests, while using a smartphone or tablet will allow you to pass the guests around the table (perhaps using a selfie stick!). It depends on your preference and comfort. Though there are many more, here are some user-friendly platforms we recommend you consider:

Here are some platforms we recommend you consider:

- [Google](#)
- [FaceTime](#)
- WhatsApp (how to for [Android](#) and [iPhone](#))
- [Zoom](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Skype](#)



FaceTime



zoom



WhatsApp



Messenger



Google Hangouts

A Few Tech Tips

- Make sure you've downloaded any applications needed prior to the conversation and that someone in your household has explored the application a bit if it's a new one for you.
- Have charging cords nearby.
- If you're using a phone, you may want to use a selfie stick or a phone stand.
- Designate someone on each "side" of the computer/phone to help facilitate the conversation (calling on people to speak, repeating what was said if needed, etc.).
- If it's a larger group, designate a person responsible for monitoring the chat box, should you choose a platform with that function.

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Decide what elements you'd like to include in your shared meal.

Here are some ideas:

Exchange recipes before your gathering so that you can share some similar dishes.

- Ask for dietary requirements for each household. This could include Kosher or Halal guidelines, as well as vegetarian, vegan, low carb or no sodium diets. Do your best without stressing too much.

View a video together (prior to the meal, or together when you gather).

- Shoulder to Shoulder's [Ramadan Road Trip video series](#) (with corresponding discussion guides)
- [American Muslim](#) film (You can contact the director- Adam Zucker at adamzucker2@gmail.com, to consider viewing the 82min film, slightly abridged 62min film, or a series of clips to discuss)

Kid & Family Videos

- [5 children, 5 religions, 5 prayers](#)
- [Little Kids, Big Questions: What Do Kids Think About Religion?](#)
- [PBS Special on Ramadan for 1st-8th Grade](#)
- Family and Youth Institute: [My Voice My Life](#)

Discussion Guides

- This [Living Room Conversations discussion guide](#) talks more explicitly about life in the time of Coronavirus
- If you watched one of the many [Ramadan Road Trip videos](#), you could use our discussion guides for your time together
- The People's Supper has developed [a guide for virtual dinners](#), with question ideas and much more!
- OR create your own series of prompts/questions together: start a Google Doc or exchange questions via email.

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Set the tone for your time together.

Some options (to use independently, or mix & match):

- Invitation to Brave Space ([page 10 in this guide from the People's Supper](#))
- Go around and share one word about how you're feeling in the current moment
- Go around and share one intention you have for your time together
- Close your time together intentionally. We recommend having everyone share a word, a takeaway, or a question they're thinking through.

TIP: Your energy = their energy.

Online engagement requires you bring more energy than you may to new conversations. Vocal intonation is crucial. Speak slowly, engage in humor and leave time between comments to allow quieter individuals to speak up. If you find yourself talking a lot take a moment to pause and ask a question.

- **Intentionally guide a conversation, while leaving room for spontaneity as well.** We recommend putting some reasonable time limits on the "go-around-the-table" responses, so that you get to hear from everyone and have time after the more structured part of the conversation to just be with each other in a less structured way.
 - Have everyone who is willing share the story of their name (*This prompt borrowed from our friends at the People's Supper*)
 - Take turns sharing with one another about one dish on your table and the meaning/story behind it for you.
 - Take turns telling a story of one moment of joy, hope, or gratitude from the past few weeks.
- **Consider taking the time to think through how you might take action together to make a positive impact** with those in your community or around the world. For example, could you take joint action now to help those impacted by COVID-19? Or could you plan to do something together in the community when social distancing measures relax?

TIP: Use names as much as possible.

"I see that Lenora is asking in the chat box what is in our salad."

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Dealing with Disruptors

While our hope is that those who choose to participate in our virtual Ramadan campaign or in a larger virtual Iftar are coming with the desire to connect and learn, we are aware that there is also the possibility that someone could join with the intention of disrupting the conversation. We want this to be a connecting and positive experience for all involved. For small household-to-household dinners, if someone joins who is becoming offensive or disruptive and does not back down after an initial polite request, you can remove them from or discontinue the conversation.

If in a larger virtual gathering, there is a disruptor, here is some guidance on preventing and responding to the trend of [“Zoombombing” here](#).

A Special Note for Non-Muslim Participants:

If you're not Muslim and are joining an Iftar with a Muslim family/individual as a guest, we encourage you to not use this time as a chance to ask all your questions about Islam and Muslims, common tropes, and misperceptions, etc. We want this to be an opportunity for households to meet on equal footing, rather than one household being put on the spot to answer general questions about Islam. That said, of course, you can ask questions about a particular family's experience of Ramadan, etc. Aim to keep it personal!

If you have questions about Islam or Muslims more generally check out:

- [Harvard's Pluralism Project](#) and [ING](#) have some great resources for learning the basics about Islam and American Muslims.
- Additionally, this [ISPU toolkit](#) includes lots of great information about American Muslims specifically.

Always feel free to reach out to us at Shoulder to Shoulder if have any more questions!

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For Organizations or Houses of Worship planning virtual interfaith Iftars

If you're a mosque, community or interfaith organization that usually hosts a multi-faith Iftar, you might be looking for ways to create a virtual engagement experience this year. While we invite you to consider directing your regular participants to the Welcome to my Table campaign, outlined above, we welcome you to get creative and reformat your gathering to what works best for your community.

TIP: Regardless of what "front of the room" content you decide to feature, we recommend keeping the program brief- attention spans are shorter when looking at a computer screen.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- There are lots of web platforms out there to engage large groups of people in a virtual program, a few of which are outlined [here](#) and [here](#).
- You could do your own local household matching. We're happy to share our process.
- You could feature a speaker (or several) virtually, or host a video watch party or similar (see the content section above for some video resources you might consider!).
- **You CAN have interaction!** Zoom, for example, has an easy chat function and allows for break-out rooms ([here's a guide](#)), through which you can put smaller groups of people in different web "rooms" for more intimate conversations, for which you can provide conversation starters or discussion questions.
 - Start with a short description of what is about to happen, follow with the call to prayer, and then break into groups for sharing or discussion based on the guides linked above.
- Consider sharing a video or film (see Page 5 for more ideas), followed by breakout rooms for discussion or a panel discussion before/after.
 - OR Host a watch party on Facebook and then follow with a conversation on Zoom or Facebook live.



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However you decide to proceed this year, we encourage you to be intentional and creative in the ways you engage with your neighbors near and far during this time of physical distancing and uncertainty. We welcome you to please share any of your virtual Ramadan engagements with us using **#WelcomeToMyTable** **#LoveOverHate** so that we can see and uplift what you're doing in this unique and challenging time.

In Love & Unceasing Welcome,

The Team at Shoulder to Shoulder

Additional Partner Resources

- [The People's Supper](#)
- [Living Room Conversations](#)
- [Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom](#)
- [Family and Youth Institute](#)
- [Link to our Ramadan 2020 Planning Webinar recording hosted March 26, 2020](#)

Don't Forget to Share!

Share some photos or screenshots from your time together on social media, using **#WelcomeToMyTable** **#LoveOverHate** (Make sure to have permission to share from everyone in the group) and/or feel free to email Shoulder to Shoulder and tell us about your time together!