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## Evening of fellowship in Burlington unites religious groups



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Rabbi Susan Abramson of Temple Shalom Emeth in Burlington displays one of the temple's Torahs during the Nov. 18 Evening of Fellowship. COURTESY PHOTO/ STEVE WASSERMAN

**Monday**

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By [Judy Wassermanburlington@wickedlocal.com](mailto:JudyWassermanburlington@wickedlocal.com)

More than 100 people, Jewish and Muslim of all ages, gathered at Temple Shalom Emeth in Burlington Nov. 18 for the community's first-ever "Evening of Fellowship."

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After praying, dining, and talking together, many participants said they left the nearly four-hour event feeling positive about their new partnership.

“It was one of the nights that I will never forget. It melted my heart. I don’t remember feeling that good and that special. It gives me hope,” wrote one participant in an anonymous feedback survey at the end of the evening.

The evening was conceived by Rabbi Susan Abramson, with support from members of the Islamic community. In opening remarks before the Jewish prayer service, Abramson said, “With so much turmoil and hatred on the rise, we must unite as one. It’s a privilege to be here with all of you tonight.”

Following the Muslim prayer service, she added, “It’s a blessing for all to be here,” referencing the many commonalities in the two religions, evident during the two prayer services.

Ahmed Ayad, representing the Muslim community, said before leading the two congregations in prayer, “Thank you for inviting us. We would like to do this more often.”

Steve DiOrio of Billerica, representing Temple Shalom Emeth, and Kashif Ahmed of Burlington, representing the Islamic community, co-chaired the event.

Ahmed told the crowded community room during the pot luck dinner, “I am moved to see all of you here. Where but in America is this possible?”

Ahmed added, “We can sit in our own little corner, or we can get together and talk. We discovered tonight we have more in common than we have differences,” and that is good.

Later in the evening, DiOrio noted that “we planted a seed tonight,” and “we are all going away better and richer. It has opened our minds.”

He added, “Tonight’s success is beyond our wildest dreams.”

Ahmed said he expected the night’s discussion would continue, and that the evening had “lit a spark which will hopefully be replicated elsewhere.”

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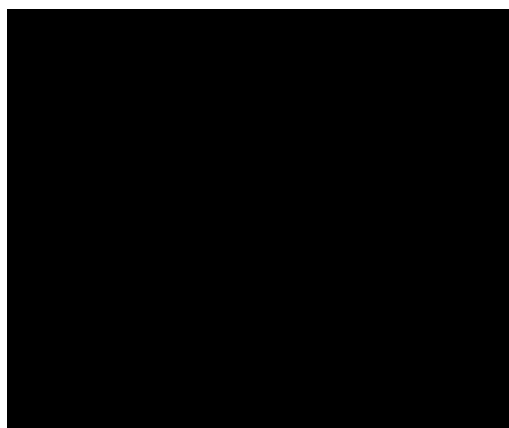
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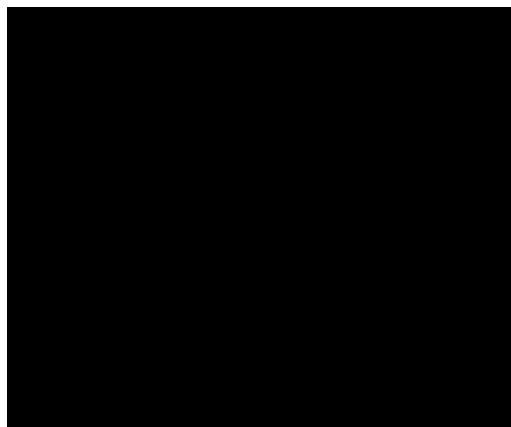
Burlington Police Chief Michael Kent, who attended the event, praised the event's goal of getting people to talk to each other. When that happens, he said, "issues get cleared up."

During the evening, several Muslims requested an opportunity to see the Torah, and Abramson gave an impromptu tutorial about the sacred document, which can be described as the five books of Moses or the Old Testament.

She unrolled the Torah to show the handwritten text on parchment, and explained its history. Abramson talked about the sanctity of the Torah, and how scribes created each Torah.

Throughout the evening, Jews and Muslims talked, asked questions, and learned about each other's religions and cultures.

Betul Sevinc of Malden, who came to America from Turkey 13 years ago, and attends the Turkish Cultural Center in Revere, said she attended the event to learn how other people pray, and noticed there are similar verses of prayer in both Jewish and Muslim services. She added, "I want to be open to everybody, so we can truly be united."



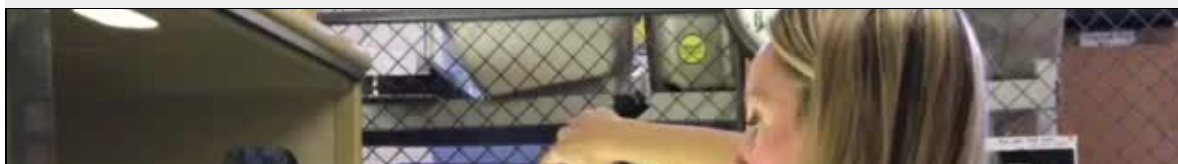
Lorena Jafarov of Sudbury, who attends the Islamic Center of Wayland, said she appreciated learning about Jewish traditions and rituals, and enjoyed the Jewish prayers and songs. The meeting of the two communities, she said, re-enforced "that we believe in one God."

Dan Flagg of Billerica, a Temple Shalom Emeth member, praised the Evening of Fellowship for "fostering a sense of community. We have so much in common. It helps to dispel the myths by learning about each other."

Dima Basha of Newton, who came to America from Syria four years ago, and attends the Islamic Center of Wayland, wrote on Facebook, "Thank you for such a wonderful event. We learned a lot, and met many wonderful people. Shalom."

Mindy Pollack Fusi of Bedford wrote on Facebook, "Participating helps me feel I am doing something important, not just sitting back, hoping things improve."

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