ACTS OF FAITH

The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation

by Eboo Patel
(Beacon Press, 2007)

INTRODUCTION

"I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’"

– Alasdair MacIntyre

You have just read one person’s story of identity, faith, and action. What is your story? This guide is designed to help you, and a group of others on your campus, explore some of the major themes of the book as well as essential elements of your own stories. Our hope is that, like Eboo, by exploring and sharing stories you will be inspired to take action to build religious pluralism and a better world.

The discussion is based on three major themes from the book: identity, community, and common action. These questions mean to guide but not limit the group’s conversation. As participants and/or facilitators, you should feel free to adjust the questions as appropriate.
IDENTITY

“I loved my work as a teacher, and I loved the people I was living with, but however I combined community, justice, and creativity, it did not add up to identity.” (p. 69)

Although it should have felt like all the pieces of his life were coming together, Eboo still felt unsure of who he was. Seeing Brother Wayne’s connection to his Catholic tradition—and the way Brother Wayne used that connection to articulate a call to service—inspired and challenged Eboo to seek more.

How did Brother Wayne help Eboo along his path to defining his identity? In what way did Brother Wayne give Eboo “wings” while encouraging his “roots” (p.70)?

- How did Brother Wayne help Eboo along his path to defining his identity? In what way did Brother Wayne give Eboo “wings” while encouraging his “roots” (p.70)?
- Tell the story of the formation of your own religious or non-religious identity.
- When was a time you were unsure about your own values or identity? Were there any individuals or events that helped you have “wings” and “roots”?
- How do give voice to your religious or non-religious identity?
- What other identities do you hold? How do they inform your religious or non-religious identity? Do these identities ever come into tension?

SETTING THE SPACE

Before you get started, it’s important to set the right tone for your discussion. This should enable people from all backgrounds to feel comfortable sharing their insights on the book as well as more personal reflections.

Together, brainstorm guidelines you will need in order to feel comfortable in your discussions:

- What do you need from yourself and others in order to feel comfortable during this book discussion?
  Examples of possible guidelines are: listening attentively when someone else is speaking, using “I” statements (I feel that...), or being able to pass on answering specific questions
- Have someone in the group take notes on the group’s responses and then read the responses aloud to conclude setting the space.
- Ask everyone if they feel comfortable abiding by the guidelines. Revisit or reword guidelines that your group cannot reach consensus

Examples of possible guidelines are: listening attentively when someone else is speaking, using “I” statements (I feel that...), or being able to pass on answering specific questions
COMMUNITY

“That night, in prayer, I had a moment of stark clarity: I was part of the story of Islam. I was part of the story of pluralism. I was part of the story of ubuntu.” (p. 119)

While in South Africa, Eboo learns the South African term for the principle of human togetherness: ubuntu (p. 116). Eboo explains that it was because of this sense of human togetherness that South Africans chose pluralism and reconciliation over separatist politics and vengeance.

- How did Eboo’s previous experiences bring him to this moment of clarity? Which of these experiences do you think was most transformative?
- What stories are you a part of? Give an example of a time when you felt that you were a part of something larger than yourself.
- How can you engage others on campus or in your community? What motivates or inspires you to do so?

ACTION

“‘Where does this service ethic come from?’ I asked. ‘From God, at the moment of creation,’ Azim said. I looked at him a little blankly. ‘It is best articulated in Sura 2 of the Holy Qur’an,’ he told me.” (p. 109)

The conversation that Eboo has with Azim Nanji about the source of the ethic of service in Islam compels Eboo to go to the Qur’an and explore this concept for himself. Reading Sura 2 brings Eboo to a better understanding of the source from which this service ethic comes.

- Think of your own religious or ethical tradition. Can you find an example of a call to serve? Has this or another example from your tradition compelled you to serve? Why? How did you serve?
- Having heard others in the group share their answer, and from your own experience, what shared values compel people from many different traditions to serve their community?
- Read, silently or aloud to the group, pages 109-110. Eboo writes that he “suddenly understood [his] grandmother ... Dorothy Day and King and Heschel.” What does Eboo mean by this statement? What do these individuals have in common? Who inspires you in a similar way?
REFLECTION

Once your group completes this portion of the discussion, take a few minutes and discuss the following questions:

- What portion of today’s discussion was most meaningful or interesting? Why? What was the most challenging aspect of the conversation?
- *Acts of Faith* is the story of a young person reflecting on his values and using that to take action with others. How can young people in college take action on their values? What tools and support do they need?
- Eboo writes about the importance of pluralism. How does action on specific issues (poverty, hunger, the environment, etc.) strengthen interfaith work and enhance pluralism?

CONCLUSION

You have just discussed Eboo’s story as well as shared stories of identity, community, and action with each other. By coming together like this, you have been involved in building pluralism. Building pluralism requires young interfaith leaders to build relationships across identities, tell powerful stories to bridge divides, and act together on issues of common concern. The identities we hold, the stories we tell, and the actions we take all help contribute to the interfaith movement.

If you want to take the next step to contributing to the movement, check out IFYC’s Better Together campaign ([www.ifyc.org/better-together](http://www.ifyc.org/better-together)). Better Together is a national campaign that mobilizes college students to take interfaith action on their campus.

To learn more about IFYC, visit [www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org) or find us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/ifyc](http://www.facebook.com/ifyc)) or Twitter ([@ifyc](http://twitter.com/ifyc)).

© 2013 Interfaith Youth Core