Chapter 1
Introduction: Come; Let Us Reason Together

For committed religious people, our faith convictions are some of the strongest (if not *the* strongest) beliefs we hold about God, ourselves, our identities, and our world. And yet we live in communities, societies, and a world in which there are others who hold different religious commitments with the same degree of conviction and commitment as we do. How can we manage, as people of different faiths, to live together not only peaceably but also in a way which heals the broken world of which we are a part? How should we engage in cultures that are complexly pluralist and secular without somehow diminishing our deeply held convictions and replacing them with an unsatisfactory relativism? What might it mean to go more deeply into our own, individual faith convictions in order to seek the flourishing and thriving of creation in partnership with those of other faith convictions? How might our deepest held faith be a way of resourcing reconciliation in a world in which religion so often seems to divide people? We believe one way this can be achieved is through the practice of Scriptural Reasoning.

Scriptural Reasoning: Abrahamic Inter-faith Practice, First Edition. Maria Dakake, Tom Greggs, and Steven Kepnes.

Published 2026 by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Scriptural Reasoning (hereafter, SR) is an interactive mode of inter-faith engagement which centers around mutual hospitality between people of different religions who read their sacred Scriptures together. The practice involves small group study of the scriptural texts together with members of one's own faith community and members of other religious communities. In this practice, one offers hospitality in sharing, reading, discussing, and studying one's own Scripture with people who have other Scriptures, and receives hospitality as a guest, reading, discussing, and studying the Scriptures that are authoritative to other religious communities present. The concept is at once very simple and very profound. On the one hand, a selection of short texts on topics is chosen by members of each religious community, and these texts are studied together with members of the other religious communities. On the other hand, this activity of hosting and being hosted around different Scriptures and their study can lead to new insights, deeper understanding of one's own faith and the faith of others, and deep friendship across religious divides. For all of the simplicity of the idea, it is a practice that had not been observed for almost a thousand years, since the Moorish Empire, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians coexisted in Spain and studied together.

The practice began with university academics from the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions. But the practice has spurred on all kinds of variations. The past decades have seen Jewish and Muslim people studying together in hospitals in Israel; Muslims, Jews, and Christians reading their texts together in prisons in the southern states of North America; SR being used to help educate policemen in the UK; and engagements in China with people reading religious texts across different religious traditions together. The practice has developed highly academic and philosophical reflections, and has also been used as a tool for reconciliation across difference in all kinds of contexts globally.

This book is focused on the original form of SR, however. This is the form of SR which involves "The Peoples of the Book"—Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Within each of these religions, Scripture (in different ways) holds highest authority. Central to the life of

Jewish, Muslim, and Christian people is the hearing, reciting, studying, and reading the Word of God, which is revealed to them in the Torah, Qur'an, and Bible, respectively. Scripture holds a central place in their prayer life and devotional acts. The ways in which these people "reason" about the faith they have in the world in which we live involve reflecting on Scripture and its significance for the lives of the faithful. Recognizing that others from different religions who also see their different Scriptures as authoritative may (or will) also be "reasoning" in this way opens up an opportunity for shared study together.

This shared study in no way seeks to diminish, dilute, or replace the routine and normative, individual and particular, study of Scripture within one's own faith community. In reading Scripture together, we don't work to flatten out difference or pretend we agree, nor do we seek to work to any end point that suggests some kind of inter-religious Esperanto. SR is of necessity an occasional practice that some choose to engage in outside of their normal religious practice, but informed by it. At the same time, SR ideally deepens the participant's regular religious practice, and many participants of SR find that their own faith is intensified in light of studying together across difference.

Instead, SR takes seriously the command to offer hospitality to the stranger, foreigner, or outsider, which is deeply present to all three of the monotheistic traditions. And the hospitality we seek to offer is hospitality in relation to one of (if not *the*) most sacred things we have—our Scriptures which we believe contain the Word of God. Sharing this and our reading and study of it is one of the most precious gifts we can offer members of other faith communities since it is such an intimate and—indeed—holy thing. Offering hospitality determines that we are enabled to treat others as honored guests, even in their difference and as the strangers to us they might initially be. And in so doing, those who were once strangers might become deep friends. But by studying *each other's* texts *together*, power dynamics are also challenged. We don't just get to be the host, but are also simultaneously the one hosted; we don't just get to offer hospitality, but are also the honored guest;

we don't just get to be the one offering friendship, but are also the one receiving it. People who engage in SR find they develop lasting, patient, and deep friendships with people very different from themselves through the long and engaged practice of reading together. After all, Scripture for each of us can never be exhausted, and study of it never ends. Recognizing this reality for each member of the community in their particularity and difference, and recognizing that they read these Scriptures (albeit with a different understanding of what this means) before the God whose Word they understand the Scriptures to speak determines the conversations can never end, and this provides a basis for long-term engagement and friendship. Indeed, the production of this book is one expression of such a friendship over 20 years.

This idea of Abrahamic inter-religious hospitality is particularly important at a time in history when religious division within and between states and communities has been highly visible and continues around the world. Each of the Abrahamic monotheistic traditions has a strong sense of peace as a constituent and resultant part of their religion: *salaam*, *shalom*, and peace both characterize God and are imperatives for the believer. We engage in this activity of SR at this time in the world's history seeking peace within communities of difference. We make no claim to agree, but we do make claims to try to have peaceful and peace-loving disagreement in relation to the most fundamental part of our lives—our religious identity. Reading Scriptures and reasoning about them together provides a way for the text to mediate our disagreements, a way for our knowledge of "the other" to be deepened, a way for our own reading of Scripture (through which we read the world) to be refreshed, enhanced, and renewed.

The History of SR

SR began as a practice that emerged from a group of Jewish philosophers and Rabbinic scholars who met to study texts together. The group, originally called "Textual Reasoning," used this context

to explore the different approaches and disciplines they had, and to consider matters of Judaism in the present and for the future, especially as these related to university life. These scholars included Peter Ochs, Steven Kepnes (co-author of this book), Laurie Zoloth, and Bob Gibbs. Two leading principles were "speech-thinking," the idea that thinking out loud with friends offers certain advantages to solo thought, and "*havutah* study," the idea that study of Jewish texts with a *haver*, or friend, enhances understanding of the text. This model of study is taken from the traditional Jewish Talmud school, or Yeshivah, where mastering Talmud legal discussion could be particularly challenging to the single mind, and multiple ways of understanding the law were encouraged. *Havruta* study was also encouraged for Biblical exegesis, where again, multiple possible understandings were encouraged, and agreement on meaning was not required. The two principles of speech-thinking and *havruta* study were adopted in Textual Reasoning to develop a form of engagement that could be considered as a kind of group *havruta* in which the Bible, Talmud, and traditional commentaries were studied together with an eye to its contemporary meaning. Delving deeply into the texts together then led to fellowship that generated energy and creative discussion of ideas that faced Jews and Judaism in contemporary life. *Havrutot* usually involve two people studying the Talmud together over a sustained period, but this was expanded in Textual Reasoning to five of six scholars, men and women, with different scholarly backgrounds, seeking to understand the text and how it relates to the Jewish practice and belief. By bringing colleagues from philosophical and textual backgrounds together, Jewish philosophers were able to rediscover the roots of their thinking in the texts of the Bible and the Rabbis, and the text scholars were able to rediscover the significance of the Scripture not just for its academic study but for larger issues of meaning and value as they were articulated by modern Jewish philosophers.

In the mid-1990s, David Ford and the late Daniel Hardy began to attend the Textual Reasoning group's meetings at the American Academy of Religion, and the potential for an inter-faith version of

this practice emerged. These Christian scholars soon learned that the lively discussions and debates taking place in Textual Reasoning echoed their own concerns and lives. They found the activities so attractive that they wondered about it being used in some form as the basis for inter-faith (then, Jewish and Christian) dialog. Soon, Muslim scholars and friends (Basit Koshul, Isra Yazigiolu, and Yamima Mermer) also joined the practice. After trying different ways of engaging and developing a sense of the promise of studying together, Peter Ochs coined the term *Scriptural Reasoning*, to demarcate this inter-faith practice from the specific religious "*intra*-faith" practices of studying religious texts within one tradition alone. Certainly, there was recognition of clear parallels to the intra-faith practices, but the focus on scriptural study and reasoning with the Scriptures of the three faiths together opened up a host of new possibilities, both for the study of Scripture and for the expansion of friendship among people from the different religions. Thus, study of Scripture across difference and similarity became the means to create inter-faith, Abrahamic friendships. And SR as an inter-religious Abrahamic study grew into a practice that practitioners sought to regularize and expand in universities, religious institutions, and international meetings. Realizing the potential this practice has for healing in society without giving up on one's strongest held beliefs, the practice soon spread across all kinds of settings—from civic practice in London to prisons in Israel. From university professors to grassroots communities, SR has provided a mechanism by which to engage with one another in hospitality without denying the deep differences that exist between us.

While there were clear antecedents in Jewish and Christian religions to this kind of study, for some Muslim scholars the practice even of intra-Muslim joint group study and discussion of the Qur'an has seemed somewhat alien. As Timothy Winter has argued:

> Properly speaking, a Muslim may only interpret Scripture after authorisation (*ijaza*) from traditional masters, who have themselves been authorised as part of an unbroken succession

> (*isnad*) stretching back to the Prophet himself. . . . Medieval exegesis, too, is authoritative, and Muslim scholars will, in theory, not use it unless they are accredited in the same fashion, this time as links in a chain extending back to the author of a given commentary. In this way, Muslims see themselves not just as interpreters but as para-witnesses to the Scripture and to the exegetic cumulation. This imposes formal restraints on the reflections they are likely to offer. Muslims are not, however, required to be custodians of a univocal tradition. Medieval Muslims, like Jews and Christians, lived in internally diverse worlds; and like Jews, normally inhabited societies where more than one Scripture was widely followed. Although the canonical form of the Qur'anic text is not discernibly the product of an internal argument, but of an argument against other religions, the manifold difficulties of its language, and the immense and ambiguous body of hadith which supply its initial exegesis and sitz im leben, prohibit a single Islamic gloss on any given verse. Even the earliest major commentaries show this clearly.
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> Yet the Muslim freedom from Enlightenment constraints is very different from post-Enlightenment, postliberal freedom. Where, for Jews, premodern riches may be alive currently in smallish rivulets that escaped the Shoah, and where, for Christians, they might be found on Athos, to be brought home to the seminar room and unpacked, and jubilantly recognised, for Muslims premodern orthodoxy, liturgy, and scriptural reading are likely to exist in the nearest mosque.[1]

Of course, for Jewish practitioners, the activity of reading the New Testament has been alien, as has the activity of reading the Qur'an for both Jewish and Christian participants. Furthermore, the notion of authoritative interpretations is particularly challenging also for Christians, and particularly those Christians from Orthodox or Roman Catholic backgrounds. The role of these traditions is discussed later in this book. But the issues of presupposed modes of reading Scripture

[1] Winter, Timothy, "Qurānic Reasoning as an Academic Practice", *Modern Theology* 22.3 (2006), 449–463; quotation from 454.

and debating it together without the presence of an "authority" have particular significance for some Muslim practitioners. And, following the horrors of the Shoah (Holocaust), Christians and Jews had met together in different forums for dialog and engagement.

Mahan Mirza, an active participant in SR and Executive Director of the Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion at Notre Dame, has drawn parallels, however, to the Islamic concept of the *halaqa*. He has allowed us to share a slightly edited version of his reflections on SR in relation to the space between the *halaqa* and the academic seminar.

Muslim Engagement in SR (Mahan Mirza)

One potential way to understand an intra-religious precursor to the inter-faith activity of SR for Muslim participants might be found in relation to the *halaqas* in Islam. Mirza shares his experience as an academic, but the experience is one which can translate to other groups engaging in SR:

> Mosques, Muslim Student Associations, and informal neighborhood groups in Islamic faith communities are known for their *halaqas*. A *halaqa* is a devotional study circle that may be either thematic or text based, invariably led by an authority figure possessing requisite knowledge and charisma. *Halaqas* can be discussion oriented or one-sided lectures. When the former, the content is carefully crafted, rhetorically directed toward certain pre-determined take-home lessons. As a young Muslim struggling to find my place in the modern world, I was attracted to Qur'an *halaqas*, first as a participant and then as a leader. These *halaqas* were formative for me: they helped me develop an identity and an intellectual approach toward the interpretation of Islam's sacred text. On becoming a graduate student in the field of Islamic studies, the transition from Qur'an *halaqas* to the forum for SR was instinctive and natural, but not seamless.
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> SR forums in the academy of religion are the equivalent of faith-based *halaqas* in communities, with a few key differences. SR is exclusively discussion oriented without any single individual

at the center; SR depends not on the charisma of a leader, but on respectful dialog generated by participants of different persuasions around their sacred texts; SR proceeds from a shared commitment that the texts, in our process of reasoning with them, are capable of revealing a special kind of wisdom; SR is goal-oriented in an *abstract* sense of accessing divine wisdom, instead of in a *particular* sense brought forth by the pre-formulated conclusions of a single person; SR operates as an inter-faith forum in multiple registers: one in which participants actively reason with texts from their own tradition, another in which participants actively listen and respond to texts from another tradition. Two words used by Peter Ochs, one of the founding fathers of SR, to characterize this activity capture the distinctiveness of the SR space: "hospitality" and "repair."[2] Each of these is generative and subversive.

In inviting members of different faiths to overhear the reasoning that takes place from within a particular tradition and participate through questioning, SR by design is a place of hospitality. Making room for "others" in a community's most intimate of spaces demonstrates a comfort with pluralism. Pluralism, in its liberal secular form, is one of the most pressing challenges posed to communities of faith by modernity.[3] In being at ease with difference, SR performs an act of "repair," affirming exclusive faith identities in active conversation if not collaborative partnership with others rather than in opposition to them. But SR repairs in more ways than one: it also helps to repair religious thought by opening up new ways to reason with Scripture. SR is theologically generative.

The kinds of questions that one asks of the text depend on who is asking them. In an insular study circle (*halaqa*), especially when guided by a single charismatic authority figure, the questions are asked and answered prior to a given session. These questions are then merely rhetorically rehearsed for group consumption. In SR, questions are posed and answered fluidly and open-endedly. While

[2] See Peter, Ochs, "The Possibilities and Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue", in Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 488–515; I especially like his term "hearth-to-hearth dialogue.".

[3] As compellingly argued by Berger, Peter, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979).

the focus remains on the scriptural text, participants are accompanied by their "personal libraries," a combination of faith commitments, personal experiences, exegetical texts, and critical academic tools.[4] No questions are blasphemous, no shared conclusions are expected. Instead, a series of insights appear one after the other, like a spring that gushes forth. SR provides participants with the unique opportunity to integrate their academic and believing selves. That is another act of repair that is radically subversive—it is subversive to an academic vision that necessitates a bracketing of faith in inquiry that it considers legitimate or objective.

An example of the generative capacity of SR comes from a recent session at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Colorado, Nov, 2018). The selections included Matthew 7:1–7 from Christian texts, Exodus 18:5–7 and 13–27 from Jewish texts, and Qur'an 3:128–135 from Islamic texts. Each of the selections revolves around an aspect of judgment. The selection from Matthew includes the well-known lines of Jesus, "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." The emphasis in this passage is clearly on self-reflection; the guidance is directed toward correcting the inner spiritual life of a believer. The selection from Exodus speaks of Moses as "magistrate among the people." The passage contains practical guidance for dispensing justice at the institutional level to regulate community affairs. In the selection from the Qur'an, God addresses the prophet: "Naught is thine in the matter." The passage emphasizes God's sole and absolute authority; he alone is the judge of all.

The contrasts between the three Scriptures is clear. But the contrast is illuminating and constructive, not polemical or destructive, an observation that delightfully comes to life in the warm hearth of SR. Muslims, Jews, and Christians who overhear the other scriptural texts find echoes of the same teachings in the mystical, ethical, theological, and exegetical storehouses of their personal libraries. As they grapple with the complexities and layers of their respective texts, they overhear teachings from other traditions that resonate deeply with their own. The complementarity generates new layers of meaning: in our

[4] See Kepnes, Steven, *The Future of Jewish Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

example, how the demands of inner spiritual life are in tension with those of institutional communal life, and how we are called to be judge while never assuming the position of Judge. Speaking from a personal perspective, the complexity in complementarity feeds my academic mind as much as it nourishes my spiritual soul. It comes as a breath of fresh air that one breathes in a third space between mosque *halaqa* and academic seminar.

The Qur'an proclaims that in the Jewish Torah and Christian Gospel are "guidance and light."[5] A better world can only emerge if we are willing to see each other's light instead of simply attempting to outshine others with our own. SR responds to a kind of crisis in the modern world.[6] The crisis is being experienced by both spiritual and secular traditions.[7] The crisis stems from a combination of two perennial questions that pose themselves anew in light of our recent historical experiences: Who am I, and who are we?[8] From an Islamic perspective, I believe SR has the potential to generate a new genre of *tafsir*, one that has the capacity to respond in reparative ways to the unique challenges of our time. (Mahan Mirza, written for this book)

The Practice of SR and How to Use This Book

This description of one experience of SR invites a little more discussion about what actually happens in an SR study group. SR is a practice before it is a theory, and to know what it involves, it is a case of—over time—engaging in the practice and learning about its form. But what is needed at the most basic level?

In its most basic form, SR needs short texts from each of the three Abrahamic traditions and a group including members of each

[5] Qur'an 5:44–46.

[6] See Ochs, Peter, and Johnson, William Stacy (eds.)., *Crisis, Call, and Leadership in the Abrahamic Traditions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); the first chapter, by the editors, speaks directly to the issue of crisis.

[7] For example, the popular historian Yuval Noah Harari's trilogy on *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus*, and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. The first is about the past, the second about one possible future, and the third about our choices in the present, beginning with a chapter on "Disillusionment."

[8] Even Francis Fukuyama seems to have delayed his *End of History* in the face of the new identity crises of humanity. See his latest reflections in *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

of the religions whose texts are being discussed. While SR began in academic contexts, the practice has been used in all kinds of ways and in all kinds of situations globally. More than any academic ability, people in these groups need to be willing to listen and to talk to each other about the texts, with the discussion focused on how to understand the texts. Grassroots community members are as expert at this than academics—in fact, quite often more so! People need to be open to questions being raised (respectfully) about the individual text and prepared to "reason" or explain how they understand the text and listen to how others (from other and our own religions) also read and understand it. There needs to be generosity and hospitality and patience in engagement with each other. And there needs to be some familiarity with the scriptural texts of our own traditions along with openness to share our thoughts, and an awareness that agreeing is not the point; rather, *disagreeing better* is the purpose. Many other, quite remarkable and amazing things can happen along the way, and we hope that this book will show some of this (not least at the end). But in the first place, what is needed is time for a session (each session might last an hour to 90 minutes), people to do it, and texts to talk about. In this volume, we have given some potential sample texts (only in English) at the end of each chapter. Texts work well when they are on shared themes or when they parallel each other across the three faiths. It's usually helpful if someone from each religious tradition gives some context and a short introduction to the text from their tradition to orientate people. Taking the texts one by one is a good idea, adding in another every 15–20 minutes or so, after discussion, as is being sensitive to when there is a lull in the conversation (though our experience is that this often does not happen!). If you are meeting together and wanting to offer food or drinks as part of your hospitality, there will need to be some sensitivity to dietary laws, if people are offered food or eating and drinking together; and someone will need to organize and run the event(s), doing so with direct engagement with a member of each of the other religions. Treating the material texts of the Scriptures with dignity is also very important, as is having a group coordinator for each small group to make sure no one is left out or

dominating and that the conversation moves on. In the next chapter, there will be more detailed guidelines and advice about how to set up and run a group. But since we believe this is a practice before it is a theory, at the end of this chapter are some initial texts to try discussing if you are using this book in a group. Before doing that, however, it is worth reflecting on how we might use this book.

Crucially, this book is designed as a background resource to help with the establishment and practice of SR for Abrahamic peoples. While there are other groups, religions, and contexts within which SR is practiced, this book is focused on the Abrahamic practice. There are two reasons for this—one pragmatic, and one religious. Pragmatically, the people who have written this book are Muslim (Maria Dakake), Christian (Tom Greggs), and Jewish (Steven Kepnes). We are writing from within our particularities and faith commitments as friends who have done this together over many years. And it is not possible to cover everything and every particularity, and we would, anyway, want to resist universalizing tendencies so often present in inter-faith engagements. Religiously, there is something very distinct about the Abrahamic traditions. We are all monotheistic and all lay claim in different ways to a shared history relating to Abraham. Our Scriptures interrelate in direct and indirect ways. And we all believe in the God who revealed Godself to Abraham. For us, there is a way of reading our texts, to use a Hebrew term *L'shma*—both for its own sakes and for God's.

It is vitally important that everyone recognizes this book is a background, introductory text. The book does not at any point wish to take away from the *practice of and engagement in* SR. Instead, it is by design background reading to accompany the practice for those doing it for the first time, or those wishing to delve a bit deeper. The book tries, where possible, to offer simple and clear information that is helpful for those who wish to participate in SR. Some chapters reflect directly on the practice of SR (the way it is done, the kinds of reasoning it employs, examples of the sorts of interpretations it produces, and even the question of whether religious texts are themselves the problem). Other chapters seek to offer short introductory texts with some background information about each

of the Abrahamic faiths that might be useful (such as, what the Scriptures of the traditions are, how these Scriptures understand and relate to revelation, what ways commentaries are used in the religions). At least, these latter chapters are things we have found useful to know and things which might enable practitioners to "hit the ground running." Together, it is hoped these chapters might help to build up a "tool kit" for SR practice, as well as a very introductory entry into SR Theory. There are all kinds of other resources available in relation to the practice. On one side, there is the very practical and practice-based material that has been produced by the Rose Castle Foundation, and readers are encouraged to explore their website. On the other side, there are more directly academic pieces, which will help those teaching the practice or researching it further, including the seminal and highly important book by Peter Ochs *Religion Without Violence: The Practice and Philosophy of SR*. We believe teachers of SR could do no better than read Ochs' work. In addition, there are so many wonderful writings on SR and its theory, and (thanks to Nick Adams of the University of Birmingham) we have included a bibliography of writings that could be further consulted at the end. Our aim has been to produce not just another piece of theory or only another short statement on "how to do SR," but a simple handbook or textbook to help those at the start of the practice with some background.

Our little book is, therefore, determinately an *introduction*—for the beginner, the student, the lay person. Inevitably, it is likely that almost no reader will feel the need to read the whole of the current book. Each member of each tradition may well feel at home enough in their own traditions not to need the descriptions of them to be rehearsed at the kind of level they are here. But it is hoped this book offers some helpful information and basics to get things moving in the first place. We are clear that we are not and cannot be exhaustive in our coverage, and we have purposefully not gone "too deep." This is a taster aimed at students of SR either in classrooms and universities or potentially in religious or civic contexts. We realize there are lots of statements made in our book which can be contested and nuanced, and that it is impossible to write in a satisfactory way about all of the issues we seek to cover so briefly. Our aim as writers

is to offer something accessible, concise, and easy to use. Hopefully, as well as the texts of Scripture, the book itself will lead to some discussion where it is used in group settings.

It may well even be, indeed, that some sections or chapters are skipped altogether. Our primary audience, as university teachers, has been to think of the first or second year undergraduate who has a religious background or is interested in the monotheistic religions and in learning about the practice of SR for the first time. Each chapter might potentially be used as background reading for one week of classes. The history in the discussion of whether religion is a problem or the accounts of reasoning in the chapter on reason are there to enable intellectual reflection on the practice and to provide material relevant for a course that might be examined as part of a degree. We hope that people using this book within religious communities might also be interested in what this book offers as a way of providing some background about the practice of SR and the three Abrahamic traditions. But, it is likely that such users will be more selective in the use of the book. For both putative audiences, at the end of each chapter are three short texts (in English) which relate materially to the topic discussed in the chapter. This will enable readers who are starting the practice to make a beginning and never get too far away from doing the practice and reflecting on it.

With one exception, we have not indicated throughout the book who has written what and which chapters. This has been a genuinely collegial process of writing. But readers should be assured that tradition-specific information and writing has been written by the member of that religious community. We worked together, often in person, on the writing of this book, and have tried as far as possible to write something that is at least representative of each of the three religious traditions.

We offer this book as just one description by three colleagues who have become friends as we have engaged in SR, taught SR, and reflected on SR. Our desire is not for you to agree with all we have written, but to do the practice itself and find the joy, friendships, and possibilities it offers that we have discovered.

So … *Come; let us reason together*.

Texts to Use for an SR Session

Genesis 18:1–8
1 The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. 3 He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." 7 Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

Hebrews 11:8–10
8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Qur'an 15:51–55
51. And inform them of the guests of Abraham.
52. When they entered upon him, and said, "Peace." He said, "We are wary of you."
53. They said, "Do not fear; we bring you good news of a boy endowed with knowledge."
54. He said, "Do you bring me good news, when old age has overtaken me? What good news do you bring?"
55. They said, "We bring you good news in truth, so do not despair."