

Oxford Three Faiths Encounter



God, Creation and Us: From Theology to Action Conference Transcription

Introductions from NAZIA SULTANA, founder of Sustainably Muslim (chair): SAFIYYA ABDUL-MUJIB, who wrote her undergraduate dissertation on “Islam and the Environment”: NAOMI REISS, founder member of the young Christian climate network: and student rabbi SHULAMIT MORRIS-EVANS, member of Extinction Rebellion and co-founder of Extinction Rebellion Jews.

Note: Shulamit’s contributions have not been edited by the speaker.

What drives the work that you do and how do you see your faith as a framework for action?

Safiyya: I first came across the idea of faith and the environment in my second year in university in 2019. The LSE Faith Centre, led by Revd James Walters, organised a new programme called “Faith and Climate Action.” It was a pilot programme with new speakers they had not contacted before. I signed up and found it was an amazing 8-week programme. We heard from lots of different faith groups working in the UK involved in faith based environmental activism. It was all about where faith is, in the climate narrative of all these faith groups. That opened my eyes and I found it really fascinating. So this was part of the reason why in my final year I did my dissertation on faith and the environment, focussing on how Islam can shape the environmental perceptions and practices of British Muslims. I had personal motivation as well: I was born into a Muslim family, and like everyone born into a faith upbringing, I had to make the decision for myself, you can’t drag someone into ‘your’ version of heaven - it was up to me. For me personally, bearing witness to God came through lots of contemplation, lots of reflection, on the natural world and the environment. There are a lot of God’s signs in nature. For my dissertation I interviewed ten community activists whose work was faith based environmental activism. It was so fascinating having these conversations and hearing how they got into this work and of their experiences. It was quite a small study but there weren’t many people in this work.

As for the framework, it provides the “why” behind what I do. I try to do environmental practice in my own life as well. It is very holistic. The idea of treading lightly on the earth is an Islamic principle, and I try to have that in everything I do.

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Naomi: It's lovely to be here in Oxford on such a beautiful day. I was part of a small group of people who helped to found the Young Christian Climate Network in the early days of the pandemic when we were all just getting used to Zoom. We felt the need for a youth led faith, focussed on collective action, more than just individual life style choices. There were Christian spaces engaging with climate activism and young spaces engaging with climate activism, but little overlap. All of us felt that our faith was a key and indispensable part of what we were doing. So we got together and slowly we started to found this movement which launched in August 2020 and grew very rapidly. We were thinking about COP 26 and in particular what our first major action was going to be in the run up to it, and we decided to do a relay pilgrimage from Cornwall, where the G7 was held, to Glasgow, to arrive in time for COP 26. It's a lot of miles but nobody did the whole thing: we passed the baton on, all the way up to Glasgow. I was there for the final week of that pilgrimage, from Edinburgh to Glasgow, and it rained so much! It was an experience, but a great one, and an amazing one, because on the way, in every place we were local people got involved: they hosted events, they came and walked with us, they hosted us, they cooked for us, they baked massive quantities of cake for us, and just the number of people, from all imaginable denominations, who got behind us, was really exciting and staggering. Our aim in terms of activism which we were bringing to the government, bringing to COP 26 with us, was to do with climate finance, chasing that \$200 billion which has been promised since around 2009 and still has not materialised; and chasing debt cancellation for developing countries, and chasing a proper loss and damage mechanism - that was our real focus. I've been a very small part of that really. I describe myself as a very part-time environmental activist and a very full-time environmental lover. But it has been a very exciting and beautiful thing to be a very small part of.

As for the theological question, this is something that I have thought more and more about in the last couple of years. I did a Master's in biblical studies last year, and as part of that we set up a reading group to think about ecological issues in scriptures and that has really opened my eyes and given me new frameworks with which to think about these issues. Shulamit may have something to say on this as well: when you open the very first pages of the Hebrew Bible, you see in Genesis a description of a world that is impossibly lovely and exciting, and interwoven in the most complex and beautiful ways, and in which humans are designed to be a part, not above or separate from, and to be a positive interactive part of and to play a positive role in that, to tend, to farm, to garden, and to manage, and I think that

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is so important: that is something that gives me a lot of encouragement, to remember that we are not set up in opposition to the rest of creation, but we are set up to be a loving and integral part of it. Obviously that relationship is one that has gone tremendously wrong, and every page of scripture bears witness to that - the relationships between ourselves, between every other part of creation, and between God. but into that place of crisis – and I think I speak for other members of the Young Christian Climate Network as well – we feel called to be a force for restoration and seeking justice. Ultimately, that is God’s work. We are a very small part of it but we have a gospel that says that big things start very small, and that small beginnings are not hopeless or unimportant in a very much wider story. That is a theological framework, a theological place to rest.

Shulamit: It’s so lovely to go last and to hear the lovely Safiyya and Naomi give their thoughts, because I think what’s so lovely about these kinds of events is getting to hear things you also feel, but articulated through the prism of different traditions, In answer to the question of what drives the work, I suppose it is worth mentioning the crisis itself as a driver, and the conviction that life on earth is sacred and worth fighting for and preserving, and that is at stake. I was brought up in a progressive Jewish household, a Reform household, going to a Reform synagogue, and as I think is a shared experience for many people in religious communities, what that gave me was a sense that my ethical existence was bound up with my religious identity, and I understood my sense of morality and my ethical obligation always through the prism of my Judaism. So when I turned up to the first Extinction Rebellion big event, which was the declaration of rebellion in the autumn of 2018, I went alone but very much with a sense that I was there bringing my full self, bringing my Jewish self to that event, and I think Extinction Rebellion itself had a lot of people who I think felt similarly, who were bringing themselves into that activist space through a connection to the ways in which they found spirituality, which made me all the more feel that I was there in that capacity, bringing my Jewish sensibilities to the space. So on that very first blockade of a road, people were sharing all sorts of songs and prayers and chants from different traditions, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, all sorts of things, and so I asked if I could share a Jewish song and was welcomed. So from the very beginning my involvement with Extinction Rebellion, my climate activism has felt like an expression of my Jewishness.

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I was not along in that and that led to the foundation of Extinction Rebellion Jews as a way for those of us who share that feeling in the way that we participate in Extinction Rebellion, which is a movement that encourages people to engage with it through different aspects of their identity. It is very much part of the way that that decentralised movement functions, and we were able therefore to be together in those spaces, being proudly Jewish in our activism and welcomed by the wider movement in that.

That was the story of the drive and where it went, and as I started off by saying, what Naomi is talking about is something that I very much feel, and that idea that these words *l'ovdah u'leshomrah* – “to serve and protect” is how I read those words, which is God’s injunction to humankind in that Genesis narrative. They permeate my sense of what responding to this situation means, and I feel that I then turn to those texts and those axioms that my tradition has given me in order to feel supported and inspired to continue in what that means, and in trying to work that out and enact it.

So those ideas of *bal taschit* – “do not destroy”, and the idea that is so often articulated in its most general sense in Judaism as a term for general social justice and ethical responsibility, this idea of *tikkun olam*, of healing the world, fixing the world, repairing the world, which feel so desperately literal in the case of the climate and ecological crisis, and as we confront that task, I turn to the words of *lo aleichah* – “it is not upon you” to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it. This sense that this task before us is of an enormity that we cannot alone compass yet alone tackle alone, and yet we are called to contribute what we can to it, together with this sense that it is very much *aleinu* “on us”, in this time, living through the epoch that we are in, to do something because as a famous rabbi said, “If not now, when?”

Nazia: I did an internship with an organisation called MADE (Muslim Action for Development and the Environment) and there I learned how Islam and sustainability are not two separate things, but completely interlinked: I led workshops with the young people there, and after that I studied the *Shamā'il* of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, which is a text that looks at all the different characteristics that he had, and I realised how ethical and sustainable his life was. He fixed his clothes when they were ripped. He always made a prayer that his clothes were not made from oppression, and he never over-indulged in

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anything. And that's what really inspires me to talk about sustainability, particularly when we are living in a capitalist world which encourages us to live a life of excess in every form, always wanting more money, more food, more clothes: and yet we are never fully satisfied, never fully content: and I think that something really striking about his life is the idea of *mizan* "balance", and one of the hadiths that I particularly like is the first one, and it describes how his hair was neither curly nor straight but in the middle. His height was neither too lanky nor too short, but in the middle. His physique was neither too bulky nor too skinny, but in the middle. It really showed how his outward state mirrored his internal being, and that's what motivates me to want to be a better person as well. Often when we think about environmentalists we think about David Attenborough or Greta Thunberg, but truly the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a staunch advocate of environmental protection. On migrating to Medina he organised the planting of trees, and he also created conservation areas. I really hope that in the future there will be more Muslims who know about these particular hadith and are able to say that their favourite environmentalist is the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Something that I listened to in a lecture by Dr Omid Safi who specialises in Sufism and he said something really beautiful: he said that in old illuminated manuscripts of the Quran there are arrows pointing outwards and these arrows are intended to guide the eye off the page and to see beyond it, and beyond the page you see God's scripture, not written with ink, but with trees and mountains and rivers. And you ultimately recognise that the signs of God are all around you and within your own self. Something I found particularly beautiful is that the prophet peace be upon him is described as a walking Quran, meaning that everything he read he applied to his everyday life. So I find it odd that a person would pray five times a day, fast in the month of Ramadan, but not care about things like animal welfare or deforestation. I really hope that this is something that in the future we see more of - Muslim engagement with the environment.

To what extent do you think that youth faith-based activism has been successful?

Naomi: That's a really good question and I don't feel massively qualified to answer, but this is something I have had cause to reflect on in the context of my own experience of being part of the relay, which is the biggest faith-based activism project that I have been involved with. On one level it felt tremendously exciting because we went from a room with six or seven people to involving thousands of people all across the country, turning on the conversation about the

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climate crisis in churches which had not been engaged with it up to that point. That was tremendously exciting, to watch these churches come together over a meal and engage with each other, maybe for the first time. And then we got to COP 26, and they had their day of discussion on climate finance, and it was a disaster! It felt like we saw very little progress. It is very discouraging!

So those are both answers to that question. It is very hard to know the impact that you are having, and it's also hard to look at what seems to be the big picture and to feel encouraged. What is the impact of faith in the world right now on the climate crisis? We are probably not going to come up with a very impressive answer: we have to look more locally: we have to look at what churches are doing in their communities and in their countries, and it is a very very different story.

When I was three we lived for a year in Portugal where my parents ran the A Rocha Centre in the Algarve. The centre was involved in a really long ongoing court battle with some property developers who had illegally built on a protected wetland area. A Rocha took the developers to court and won and they had to pay out – an historic first in Portuguese law. It was a very significant victory for that piece of ecology, for that eco-system, for that community, and that was something that a faith-based community achieved. You can look at the forest churches of Ethiopia who are preserving the last bits of forest in their increasingly over-farmed environment. Around the world there are so many faith communities who are doing incredibly significant work, and yet you are not likely to read about them unless you go looking, but I think their impact is much greater than we know.

Shulamit: I think it is a really difficult question to answer, because faith is broad and I am definitely not qualified to speak about, for example, indigenous activism, which is a really important part of the picture. For example, what does success look like or mean in this context? In reflecting on that, I thought about how I tried to summarise the *raison d'être* for XR Jews, which was to bring Jews to XR and XR to Jews. I think that for me it has been a very valuable and incredibly meaningful part of my involvement with XR, to have been able at the big rebellions that happened before Corona, before lockdown, that amidst this gathering, amidst the busy-ness and colour and noise of the activities that were going on, we were able to create a community, a congregation if you like of people who were there to engage in that activism and in that space in a Jewish way. And that we were able to create that space together I think felt really special, and important.

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And that also of course feeds into the second part, because that then is a hook for a conversation for people to engage who maybe didn't attend but then become aware of the turn the discussion is taking and the progress that is being made. Something that I was really pleased happened was that over the last summer, I was able to attend a youth summer camp in order to present a series of sessions on XR Jews to the youth attendees of the Jewish summer camp. Having that faith identity, then allows you to speak more directly to your community, because you are speaking from within. I think that's the great power that faith-based activism can have, to create the space within the whole, and also almost to domesticate the issues for our own communities, because I think that religious communities worldwide, which encompass such a great proportion of the global population, are inevitably going to be hugely important actors as we try and deal with this problem on so many levels. I always feel that there are practical things about religious communities, particularly certain models of organised religion which have resources at their disposal about which they can make decisions which are helpful and constructive in a practical way. But equally there's a sense in which the community building which goes on in religious communities is part of the solution, and the extent of connection to something greater that fuels those communities is a way in which many of us here I think will relate too, of tapping into that ground water that can irrigate our activism. We need that kind of replenishment from somewhere to keep going, to keep trying to protect and save.

I would also say in terms of successes that one of the successes and one of the lovely things about forming an explicitly Jewish group within XR, was that then made us able to engage in an interfaith space, which exists as a composite of those different identities and different groups. And that again has been one of the most rewarding and fulfilling parts of the experience of engaging in XR, being able to form those relationships, to pray on the steps of a church having spent all night there with Christian friends who covered me with a blanket during the night: those are the moments which exhibit the depth of connection that we formed together, when we recognise how deeply our visions are connected at the source. So whilst the success that we are ultimately talking about is something that goes far beyond any specific faith community, I believe that whatever we have done in the past there is so much that faith communities can and will achieve in furthering and securing those successes.

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Safiyya: From the UK perspective, thinking about faith and the environment is relatively new and feels quite niche. Because it is small, our impact will be small, but we do know, just as Naomi and Shulamit have said, that faith groups have had an impact. At the Paris climate accords, various different faith groups were very instrumental in bringing people together to make that happen. I remember towards the end of the faith and climate action module we were told about people who had heard about it across the grapevine, and were asking how to go about it so they could do it themselves. It's about piloting: in higher education it might be an extra-curricular project for students, showing something quite new, something emerging. When I had just finished my initial findings for my dissertation, I was accepted to speak at a conference organised by the Humboldt University in Berlin, on how faith groups can help meet the sustainability development goals. The conference was for researchers and marketers and above, so I was really surprised to be invited, and was told that they wanted people from different countries and different religions and that it was hard to find research in this area – that also shows that it is still a niche thing, still emerging. But I do think that it is definitely growing. Is it fast enough? I will always be optimistic, because being pessimistic is not going to do anyone any favours.

For my own research, looking from a Muslim perspective, the demographic of young Muslims and Muslims in general is very urban, so if you are working with people who do not have much connection to the environment - a bird may be just a pigeon and a plant just a weed poking out from the driveway, driveways completely paved for the cars, with no front lawns, with a vase on the window sill. I remember a quote from Gai Eaton who wrote “One of humanity’s connections to God was lost when they took away the stars.” It really struck me. He wasn’t actually writing about the environment at all, but talking about industrialisation, and when societies move towards living in cities, in houses, and with all the pollution, he couldn’t see the stars any more. It was a very earthly existence, because you weren’t looking up, but torn away from nature where you are supposed to be.

The people I spoke to had two challenges. One was building or rebuilding a relationship with the people they work with to the environment, and also trying to implement environmental practice based in Islam. When you are dealing with two things like that, it becomes an uphill struggle.

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Nazia: We have all worked with young people in some capacity. What do you think are the barriers that young people of faith face when it comes to getting involved in environmental activism?

Shulamit: (I hadn't thought until I saw this question about the notion that there really would be barriers. If your religious practices involve some areas that might be incompatible with a particular kind of event: for example, if you are a practising Orthodox Jew, you are going to find it very difficult to go along to a protest that is on a Saturday morning in town that you wouldn't be able to walk to. I imagine that there are equivalent situations that Naomi and Safiyya might think of. But that's not so much to do with youth, but with faith and practice in general. I certainly feel there's a piece about youth activism and the difficulties that young people, many of whom care deeply about their futures and the future of the planet. I hope this isn't too pessimistic a phraseology but sometimes are so crushed by the system that it's very difficult even to find the energy to fight it. That again, is not necessarily specific to young people of faith, and in a way I think that the barriers are not so specific to faith. I think what faith does in a way actually perhaps makes them easier to articulate and notice and in a way solve, hopefully, because I think they are about the need to find others who also feel moved in the same way and also want to engage in the same way. It is very difficult, especially in an issue that is so overwhelming, to engage alone. You might feel that loneliness more perhaps if you are identifying as an aspiring young activist of a faith if you don't have fellows who are coming from the same place. But the flip side of that is that if you can find other people, it can have a correspondingly positive effect on your ability to engage.

So finding others who are coming from that same place and driven in the same way, and then finding things that feel meaningful and right to do. Again, I don't think that's necessarily a youth-based problem, and again, I think that in some ways you can find the right people and the right community. Being part of a faith group can give you greater clarity of desire and action and priority because you do have that community to talk to, and those people you can engage with, the people around you whose minds you might want to change and whom you might want to engage in dialogue, and the communal structures, whose actions you might want to shift or applaud.

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But having that attachment can sometimes make it more difficult, if you are coming from a community that doesn't have the same approach, or doesn't have the same attitude to the kind of activism that you are engaging in. That then can be difficult. There are lots of moving parts here - youth and faith, finding people, finding things that you can engage in and do with those people. While those things can be barriers, I hope that you can also kind of flip the barrier and use it as a bridge.

Safiyya: For me personally, the first barrier I faced wasn't related to faith but was more logistical. I was on the committee for the Islamic Society. At the start of each year there is a big event for the freshers, with about 90 - 100 people. Usually the whole budget goes in catering, and then there are lots of plastic plates and cups, so I asked if it could be made plastic free, as our first big event. Reducing waste is a big thing in our religion, so it would be a blessing. The idea was agreed and I did some research into it and realised it would cost six times more than usual! Then I realised I couldn't use the compostable plates as they would contaminate the university recycling. So I had to go for bamboo and wood pulp plates, which turned out to be a bit wonky and did cost more. Afterwards, I couldn't put them into the bin but had to go to the back of the university in the dark with a big bag to try to find the place to put wood. It was dark and quite scary. So that was my logistical issue.

When I gave a talk in my mosque to a young audience, about Islam and the environment, I received such a positive reception - people said it was amazing to hear these things, it was interactive and they gave all of their own thoughts. So I thought, "Right, this is really great, but now what do I do?" I wasn't really sure how to move forward. And this was after spending 7 or 8 months talking to lots of different people, so I did know what people can do, and I did have contacts but I still felt people would not take me seriously if I try to turn this into something. If it's just you, in your local area, what is the way forward, especially if you are a young person and you have that question in your mind whether people are going to take you seriously. I have always felt insecure about that. I am 22, but some people think I am 14 or 15. Everyone says I should take it as a compliment but being told you look like you are 14 is never going to be amazing. It's about confidence and skills.

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Also in my research there was an idea among some of the young activists I spoke to that when they first got into this space, there was a hesitancy about it being perceived as very white middle class. I think about 8 of the 10 people I spoke too, both young and old, questioned how they would be able to fit in, so there is that barrier as well, although there was a bit of nuance, because I think there are real barriers and perceived barriers. I remember one lady I was speaking to in her early 20s who set up a group in Leicester called the Green Guardians, and she spoke about getting in touch with the local climate action group, but she wasn't sure how to reach out. She was having a few concerns and sometimes you feel a bit shy. But when she did finally reach out, she discovered that from their side they had been trying to find out ways to reach out to the Muslim community, and were so grateful this had happened. Sometimes it is about being curious and making that jump.

Nazia: I really know about confidence because it took me a really long time to start Sustainably Muslim because I don't have a background in theology or anything to do with the environment or in any formal Islamic studies. So I kept asking myself if this is something for me and something I should actually be doing and I kept thinking there must be someone in a better position that can talk about Islam and the environment. I remember listening to a talk that said that God does not call the qualified, he qualifies the called, and I think it is so important to remember that learning is a journey, and that it is through Sustainably Muslim that I have been able to learn a lot more than had I not started it. I am changing careers because I started this particular platform. Confidence is definitely a barrier that young people face.

Naomi: I really relate to what all three of you have said. I think confidence is a huge thing, and being taken seriously as a young person is a huge thing. I am only speaking from my own tradition here, but I think as well that a lack of support and mentorship within your faith community can be a real barrier. I have been to very many wonderful churches that are environmentally engaged, but they are the exception and they are not the norm! When I was an undergraduate I went to a great big student church that had over a hundred students, many of whom were very conscious of the climate crisis, who were part of activist movements, but there was a lack of support at the leadership level, and a lack of recognition that this was a crucial part of Christian witness. I used to be on their catering team for student lunches, and every week we would cook a vegetarian option and a meat

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option, and we thought that maybe twice a term we could just cook a vegetarian option and everyone could eat vegetarian, but there was a real lack of responsiveness there that was frustrating, and that is a barrier, because most young people don't have ready-made communities in which they can be activists. There aren't that many of them and this was the great gap that we felt YCCN was stepping into.

So lack of community can be a really big barrier as well because nobody can do this on their own and you need to be part of something bigger, otherwise it is just impossible. Those are really significant barriers. As you say, there are perceived barriers and there are internal barriers as well, like feeling you are not qualified, feeling just because you can't do everything, you can't do anything, feeling like you can't give what is at your disposal because you compare yourself to others or whatever it is. I think that is a really significant barrier.

And I think as well it is worth saying that young people tend not to have a lot of economic security, and they move around every year and change jobs every year, and that isn't conducive to forming strong links in their communities or building up patterns of having time to do these things and engage in these ways in a kind of sustained way, and that is just what being in your twenties is. That's just the reality, and a significant thing to remember as well, and I think that sometimes, particularly in climate activism, people forget that not everyone can get arrested – they can be quite exclusive. That's something we've been very conscious of. There are many barriers.

Nazia: I think it's really important to recognise that talking about the environment comes from a place of privilege, and that's why the environment has been dominated by middle class white people. Stats show that 50% of Muslims in the UK are living under poverty, so if you think about the young Muslim girl or boy living in a council estate in London, who is facing Islamophobia on a daily basis and racism, lacks multiple jobs, is financially dependent, then caring about the environment won't be at the top of their priority list: it will be right at the bottom, and financial security will be at the top. Often I grew up thinking that Muslims just didn't care about the environment. When you think about the barriers that are put up there, then you recognise that it is down to privilege, unfortunately.

Safiyya: The barriers I mentioned are mentioned by young people but when I had some insights, not from the older generation themselves but from people speaking

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about their grandparents and so on, on the one had they noticed loads of really good environmental practices: someone's grandmother went every single day for decades, making sure there was food for the birds: every chocolate container might not have chocolate in but other things, because everything gets reused. They never shout about it - it's just something they do. On the other hand, there are Muslims from ethnic minorities whose grandparents migrated to this country, so there was scepticism about where is the environmental movement, because they grew up in rural parts of south Asia where they were very close to the environment, but it was a very hard life. It's about not romanticising being in balance with nature. It was very hard, and it was the industrialised life that brought a lot more ease and prosperity. So they really don't romanticise the idea of living close to nature. I found that really really insightful, that nuanced way of looking at things.

Naomi: I think the question of the climate crisis has often been very unhelpfully divorced from questions of race, when they are so integrally linked. James Cone writes on this very forcefully, that when white Westerners talk about what "we humans" have done to the environment we forget that we are speaking for white Westerners rather than all humanity, that there are many other peoples who don't bear the responsibility of enormous environmental damage. It is in direct continuity with colonialism, and with slavery, and it's the same principle of exploitation and rampant consumerism that take no regard for others. Those things have not been appreciated. People of colour have not been invited into those conversations. There is an enormous amount of work still to be done there.

Nazia: There's a barrier that young people face. I grew up watching Steve Irwin and I thought he was the coolest guy ever but I never ever thought I could be like him, that I could work in conservation or anything like that, and so I think it's really important that the younger generation are able to see people who are visibly Muslim, people of colour and so on that are talking about the environment and so on. So our final question: *What do you think are possible solutions going forward to get more young people involved in environmental activism?*

Safiyya: There is a poet called Wendell Berry - I thought he was a poet because one of my top five poems is 'The peace of the wild things' and I think it's only a few months ago when his name just popped up, and then I researched his life, and he is an environmental activist and does all sorts of things. He is like a modern-day polymath, he does so many different things. He wrote that "the answers to the

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human problems of equality are to be found in the economy and the answers to the problems of the economy are to be found in culture and character.” The chain is first character, then culture, then the economy, then ecology. I think a lot of faith groups can resonate with this idea of change from within to have meaningful change without.

I’m on an environmental group set up by my local council to consult and give advice and suggestions on the various green and environmental projects that the council wants to do in the next ten years. It’s a really great group of really experienced people, and they asked me to join, and I listen quietly, and it really made me think about the projects, the funding viability, how effective they will be at effecting environmental change that can be measured against a baseline, but I really would like to have a conversation about human greed and why do we want these things so much. Going back to those questions of character, which are really important conversations that we need to have, and although not everyone will welcome or want to have these conversations in an explicitly faith-based setting, faith has that ability to bring that sort of language and imagery and narrative that can help people to think about these things.

And specifically from a Islamic perspective, like I said it is all very much emerging, growing in the UK, these environmental movements, but as things mature and grow I do think you will see things that are quite uniquely from the Islamic faith. A lot of things I saw people doing were implementing environmental practices and standards: it was the reason why behind it that was different. Going forward there might be more things like Ramadan, for example. Ramadan is the month of self-restraint, giving up bad practices, and getting closer to God, tying in practices and setting goals during that time: or even the halal meat industry. I remember reading a few years ago about some people who are asking and discussing now that the halal meat industry has really exploded and grown huge, it is like a big global industrial monster, similar to lots of other meat industries now, is this still halal? I think there have been the same questions I have been asked about, with environmental depletion is the method of halal, can we still call that halal in how we go about things. In Oxford there is Willowbrook Farm, which I read about years and years ago. I think they are pioneers in ethical Islamic meat production in the UK. That is quite another unique thing that might come about.

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Naomi: That's a great question. I think the main thing has to be community. I know I have said that a lot today but I think it's so so significant, and I know this is something you have touched on too, Safiyya, and I think this is something faith groups are good at. We know how to have communities, we know how to do things together, and we know how to have a global community. We know how to feel part of a family that extends across nations and across cultures, and we can do that. We know how to do that! We need to build climate activism into that and we need to build that into climate activism. And I think we can learn so much from faith communities in other parts of the world. There are Christian communities in parts of the world that are being directly affected by climate change right now, for whom this is not a kind of optional extra to their faith, but integral to their worship and their survival, and we can learn so much from them, from the Green Anglican Movement in Africa, from the churches in small Pacific Island nations. They know what it means for this to be deeply and holistically part of their communal faith life. We can learn so much from that. You just have to keep going, and find some friends to do it with in your faith community and in an interfaith community, and don't give up, and pray.

Shulamit: I think one of the things I wanted to say is how totally fantastic and re-invigorating it has been for me to be able to interact with Naomi and Safiyya: it has really been an incredible joy and privilege. There is something in that in what we are talking about now in terms of solutions. Picking up on what Naomi and Safiyya were just talking about, about community, community not only within our own faith groups but the ability that that then gives us to reach out and form communities across faiths, especially when we are talking about youth-based activism. I found the experience of fellow feeling between the three of us really helpful and I feel like that is something that could be further built upon. And also the learning. There is lots of desire, and intent and hope, and it mainly stays within people's hearts because they don't have the community or the knowledge, or the confidence. Greater intercommunal communication and intercommunal learning I think is something that could be really valuable and important, for example the Jewish climate movement going to the Islamic environmental movement to talk about how we deal with our particular communal attitudes to meat, or going to the Christian environmental movement to talk about a particular kind of communal set up that we have in common. Things like that can be really valuable, building communities within ourselves but also between ourselves.

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I'm also really grateful to the panel for unpacking a bit more in answer to the last question what I referred to as "the system" in my answer, and I think one of the solutions we have to try and find is how to support the next generation and all of us now in finding the solution while we are still in the problem. That's always the difficulty. How do you birth the new whilst you are still kind of trapped in what was toxic and what generates the need for it? For me it feels like we are getting to a moment in time when we need to start moving and thinking more practically, and I think we need to acknowledge that that is going to be *really* hard. I think there is a growing awareness, but I suspect its less widespread than I might think it is, because of where I live and the people that I talk to - I suspect it's much less widespread than I think it is in my community more generally - but I think it is growing, and the question is now, what do we do? I think giving people in general, and young people in particular, a sense that there are practical things that they can be involved in helping realise, can generate a virtuous circle of engagement and empowerment. And making those practical changes happen, changing things so that it is easier to have a plastic free student dinner, those things are going to be hard because they are going to come back to the kind of system we live in, ultimately, in a lot of cases, and how we deal with that, and how we get out of that. I think we will have to change things about the way our own communities run, probably, in many cases, and that will be difficult for us. And again, what that comes back to, as Naomi said, it does come back to community.

We need each other: we need each other to learn from: we need each other to give ourselves hope: we need each other for that sense of camaraderie: and we need each other so that we can hold hands and be brave and keep trying to preserve the world for future generations.