

BY JIM MERRITT
Special to Newsday

On Independence Day, we as a nation celebrate the foundations of our Democracy — including the guarantee of freedom of religion enshrined in the Bill of Rights. However, is there an aspect of this national holiday, and the emotions it inspires, that goes beyond the parades, traditional backyard barbecues and fireworks shows? This week's clergy discuss how love of God leads to love of country, and vice versa.

Rabbi Susie Heneson Moskowitz
Senior Rabbi, Temple Beth Torah,
Melville

The feeling I have when I hear "The Star-Spangled Banner" or "God Bless America" is spiritual. The allegiance I have to my country is deep and profound. I feel connected to something greater than myself. This is a similar feeling to my connection to Judaism and the Jewish people. I am in awe of the country I live in, often proud of its accomplishments, and sometimes frustrated by its shortcomings. I hold our soldiers who fight for our country in high esteem, and I am moved by our politicians and judges when they create legislation that makes the world a better place. If spirituality is connecting to a deep place within yourself that connects you to others and to God or a sense of grandeur in the universe, than I would say that being patriotic is a deeply spiritual practice. One that can elevate our souls, and motivate us to reach out and take responsibility for others. Our country is even greater because we can each worship God, or even not worship God, in a variety of ways, but all still be "good"



JONATHAN FREIBERGER

Susie Heneson Moskowitz



LT. RICHARD DUINN, U.S. NAVY

Jerry Durham



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Nanyar Imam

Christian I believe this is true and intrinsically ties my spirituality and my patriotism. Many people came to this new land in order to escape religious persecution. As this new nation began to form, they held this belief so firmly they sacrificed their own lives to live out their spiritual beliefs. Like so many of them, I believe spirituality and patriotism are interwoven in my own life.

Nanyar Imam
President, Long Island Muslim Alliance,
Mount Sinai Mosque; chaplain, Suffolk
County Police Department, Yaphank

ASKING THE CLERGY

Is there a spiritual element to patriotism?

Americans. I am proud to live in a country that allows me to be Jewish and American at the same time.

Lt. Cmdr. Jerry Durham
Minister, Assemblies of God; Command Chaplain, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 33:12) Our country's forefathers came together to forge a new nation. Accomplishing such a task required them to agree on the pillars on which this new nation would come to rest. The founders understood such a task would require the people to believe in something and someone larger than themselves. The nation's leaders crafted

a belief in true patriotism and a faith in God, which catapulted them into what they believed was their divine destiny. I believe there is a difference between religion and spirituality; religion is the form and function by which we choose to worship God, and spirituality, though tied to religion, exists as a yearning and need to connect with God, lying deep in the fiber of our being. One's religion may dictate what they should or should not believe regarding their patriotic conviction, and a person's spirituality may guide them as to how they live it out. Patriotism, on the other hand, is one's personal devotion to their nation. Patriotism, like spirituality, develops out of someone's personal beliefs. The psalmist tells us the Lord is the ruler over the nations. As a

In Islam, it says in the Quran that you should follow the orders of Allah and his prophets — his messengers like the Prophet Muhammad — and the people who are running the government in the place where you are living, as long as they do not do anything to harm your religion and humanity. "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority;" (Chapter 4, verse 59) You have to love the place where you live and take care of every person living around you, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. You have to be patriotic and faithful to your nation because they are the creations of God. The American system, according to most of the scholars who are living in the United States now, is the only one in the world at present where you can practice your religion freely. This is not so in all of the so-called Muslim countries. America is the best country for Muslims to live and practice our religion. When I graduated from Long Island University, there were only two or three mosques in Suffolk County, and now there are 20. You can build a mosque the way you like it, and pray at almost any time, any place. This is the beauty of America.