

DISCUSSION GUIDE for
CROSSING CAIRO: A Jewish Woman's Encounter with Egypt
By Ruth H. Sohn

1. On her way to Cairo (see end of Prologue, pp.19-20), Sohn becomes aware of deep-seated fears and stereotypes she carries about Arabs. Are you aware of carrying any similar feelings about Arabs, Muslims, or any other groups of people? Are you comfortable sharing any examples? What feelings accompany these stereotypes and fears?

- The author notes that personal experiences with individual members of a group of people we relate to as “other” sometimes changes our perspective and feelings toward the individual, and sometimes even the group of people they are part of. What has been your personal experience?
- Did any of Sohn’s experiences or observations raise questions about the way you think about Egyptians, Muslims, or Arabs?

2. Sohn and her family also experienced themselves as the “Other” -- as “foreigners” and more specifically as Americans and Jews --in the eyes of Egyptians.

- Have you ever been aware of being viewed as the “other” and what was that experience like?
- Did reading *Crossing Cairo* shed any new light on your own experiences? Do you see any particular value in having such experiences?

3. How frequently do you engage in conversation about politics and/or religion with people with whom you fundamentally disagree? Is this something you find yourself seeking out or avoiding, and why?

- What factors do you find contribute to such conversations being a negative or positive experience? Are you aware of things you can do that make a difference?
- Throughout *Crossing Cairo*, Sohn shares her reflections about what makes such conversations so challenging, for example, the power of the particular narratives we carry. Were there any particular ideas she shared that you found helpful? Problematic? Are you able to relate them to your own experience?
- Do you come away from *Crossing Cairo* with an increased desire to engage with people from different religious or political perspectives? Why/why not?

4. In the course of Sohn’s discussions with Zayna and others about Israel in particular, were there ideas expressed by any of the participants that you found surprising? Troubling? Enlightening?

5. In Noam's discovery of the Egyptians' view of the Yom Kippur War/October War as a victory for Egypt and the family's visit to the Panorama War Museum, were there points of information or perspective that you found surprising? Troubling? Insightful?
6. What were your reactions to the discussion between Ruth and Zayna about Zayna's reasons for wearing the *hijaab* and Orthodox Jewish women's reasons for covering their hair? Did you find Zayna's reasons for wearing the *hijaab* surprising in any ways? Did the discussion offer any new perspectives on any practices in your own tradition, Jewish or otherwise? Explain.
7. How much did you know about the Karaites before reading *Crossing Cairo*? What did you find most interesting in the book's discussion of the Karaites in Cairo? If you are Jewish, have you had experiences traveling that have expanded your sense of Jewish diversity? Has this had any impact on your own sense of Jewish identity? If you are not Jewish, has traveling expanded your own sense of identity in relation to the national, religious, and/or ethnic groups you are part of?
8. In Chapter 8, Sohn discusses her growing awareness over time of the crucial importance of "honor" in Egyptian society, and the significant role it plays in a variety of situations, both personal and political. Have you had any comparable experiences travelling or otherwise? Can you think of any other contemporary situations in the Middle East, where an appreciation of the importance of honor may help us better understand the situation?
9. How do you respond to the Arab proverbs at the beginning of each chapter? Are there any you find particularly striking or insightful? Explain.
10. What experiences and/or ideas did you find most surprising in reading *Crossing Cairo* and why? Problematic or disturbing? Insightful or inspiring?