the right participants who are committed to peace, well grounded in their own faith. Smaller groups can conduct an interfaith dialogue with better results than larger groups. The selection of language is important. Knowledge of similarities and differences, addressing misconceptions and breaking down stereotypes is essential for interfaith dialogue. Building relationships between participants, openness to share the suffering of the other side, recognition of sins and shortcomings, apology and forgiveness are all powerful components of interfaith dialogue. Justice issues must be addressed in dialogues that contributes to peacemaking. It is essential also to teach participants conflict resolution skills, and to move away from a cycle of revenge. Lay persons should be given a role in dialogue besides religious leaders. Continuity of the dialogue is important for its success.

The contributors to this volume belong to the monotheistic religions, and they all agree that religion is essential in promoting understanding and reconciliation, and that interfaith dialogue is an invaluable instrument in peacebuilding. The book is a welcome addition in the interfaith dialogue discourse.

Muhammad Khalifa Hasan Ahmad


*Concentric Circles* is a delight for me as a parent as well as an educator. The foundational purpose of the book is to construct a holistic educational-spiritual experience for the young child. The book explicitly addresses the issue of educational worldview. In the introduction, Muzaffar Iqbal argues that much education today proceeds from “a consumption-oriented secularized worldview” wherein the Creator does not exist and which assumes a West-centric perspective on the world, civilization and history (p. xiv). The materials— toys, books, audio-visual materials, and teaching aids—produced by the multi-billion dollar educational industry emerge from and perpetuate this worldview. Secularized educational materials are being used worldwide by
Muslim children, who are raised in a worldview and a value-system that are opposed to the Islamic worldview.

Concentric Circles proposes a pedagogy that “present[s] to learners an understanding of both the unseen and the manifest universes, allowing them to acquire a systematic understanding of various levels of existence” (p. xvii), so that “we live what we believe” (p. xxi). It also works to make Arabic an integral part of the young child’s education. It attempts to create a world of learning, one that addresses the child’s needs—spiritual, educational, and personal—in a holistic fashion.

Each chapter follows a consistent pattern, starting with a conscious “intention,” focusing on an aspect of learning, and setting it within a “context,” with a graphic summary of the chapter. The religious context of learning is established to help the “learner be rooted in the Qur’anic worldview” (p. xxiii). Learning activities associated with learning goals are then listed, concluding with reflection for the teacher. The book is punctuated by Qur’anic verses and hadith, helpful charts for the teacher to organize educational activities, and anecdotes and comments that bring theory alive.

The book is clearly organized in the form of chapters and sub-sections, punctuated with reflective notes to keep the reader feeling as well as thinking. There are six chapters focusing on various aspects of learning: “The Two Learners” (pp. 1–31) reflects the book’s underlying assumption that the child and the teacher are both learners, and discusses the spiritual and learning characteristics of the learner. “The Space” (pp. 32–53) examines the learning environment, dividing it up into specific “circles” and “corners.” “Time” (pp. 55–72) analyses the nature of time and makes recommendations for routines and schedules. “The Languages” (pp. 73–94) examines basic understanding of language, and then moves to the language of art and calligraphy before addressing spoken language and the “issue” of additional languages. “The Straight Path” (pp. 95–127) connects the unseen with the seen worlds, and provides interconnected learning activities for learning about self, the world, and religious practice.

The chapter “Threads and Themes” (pp. 129–171) explores two ways of building concepts into learning: “threads” are incorporated into cumulative learning throughout the year while “themes” are the subject of focus during 2–3 week units. The book then provides three model units—Beginnings, The Garden and Tazkiyah. Harder provides graphic representations for additional themes so that the teacher may develop them into learning units. Happily, each thematic unit combines various subjects—Social Studies, Language Arts, and so on, reflecting a unified worldview—instead of breaking them up into discrete disconnected units.
Concentric Circles has a healthy emphasis on Islamic, educational and psychological theoretical background; still, unlike many other texts on religiously oriented education, this book is not overly theoretical, and it never loses sight of the very concrete realities of young learners. Where some "Islamic" educational materials are uni-dimensional, focusing only on religious education and not on the learner's characteristics, this book combines knowledge of child development and psychology with religious- and spiritual-centric pedagogy. Concentric Circles is a delight, spiritually focusing and pedagogically enriching without falling into the trap of being one-dimensional, boring, and excessively didactic on the religious side. According to the author's aim, religious-spiritual learning emerges from a unified process of learning.

The writing is warm, spiritually alive without being irritatingly opaque and fuzzy. The language is quite accessible, and succeeds in being technical for the trained educator but still readable and accessible for the lay reader.

On my first read, I got a bit lost in the structure of the book and the chapter introductions: the book has a specific culture—a pleasant and edifying one, to be sure—but it can take a bit of time to acclimatize oneself to it, less for some readers than others. For non-native English speaking parents and for parents who are not professionally trained teachers, the challenge may be greater. This is something the writer might consider for future editions or for similar materials, as I hope that the Concentric Circles approach will be available to a wider audience. I recommend it strongly to believing teachers but also to parents who should be centrally involved in their young children's early learning. It is intended for believers, and while it is primarily designed for a Muslim audience, non-Muslim believers will also benefit from perusal of this book.

Shabana Mir


The delightful book under review was first published in 1912 in London by Constable & Co. It has now come out as a photostatic reprint, alas, without