Jewish-Muslim Religious Fraternity

A Renewed Paradigm for a Shared Future

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Introduction:

> *The three Abrahamic religions were not created to be tolerant of one another out of some unavoidable fate or out of courtesy to one another. The reason they exist is to open up to one another and to know one another, so as to do one another good.*
>
> King Muhammad VI of Morocco.[1]

These words express the vision that has driven me and my work. I am a Rabbi who believes it to be God's will for the Abrahamic religions to heal our interrelationships and to become a source of blessing for all. I believe that there is a great and noble story that we share, in which each religion has a unique role it must fulfill for the sake of humanity.

A Renewed Paradigm

The subtitle of this work calls not for a new paradigm but for a renewed one. Years of study of my own and of other traditions have taught me that this call echoes within our foundational texts. The Ohr Torah Interfaith Center[2] approaches study and dialogue with a dual commitment: fidelity to our sacred texts, and the aspiration that our endeavors be truly motivated by and reflective of divine will. In the Quran, every Surah but one begins with the word *Bismillah*, "in the name of God". In the Bible, Abraham journeys throughout the Land calling in the name of God[3], and the Bible envisions a future unity for humanity, with all serving God and calling together in His name.[4]

1 https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/03/269240/king-mohammed-vi-pope-francis-morocco-2.

2 The Ohr Torah Interfaith Center is comprised of the Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue and the Beit Midrash for Judaism and Humanity.

3 Genesis 13:4.

4 Zephaniah 3:9.

Unique Dynamics Require a Unique Approach

The uniqueness of every religion requires us to recognize the specific challenges and potential blessings within each interfaith relationship. For this reason, working with a generic interfaith model for all religions offers limited potential, whereas acknowledging the distinct dynamics of each individual relationship allows for a deeper, more transformative engagement. With this in mind, I have chosen to dedicate this monograph to the relationship between Islam and Judaism.

Part I of this essay presents a Jewish view on the status and significance of Islam. Part II turns to the other side of this bilateral relationship to discuss the Islamic understanding of the status of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Before delving into this topic, I would like to point to an encouraging precedent in the Catholic Church. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued the *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Times) proclamation which began a process that led to profound changes in Christian-Jewish relations.[5] A bilateral process between Judaism and Islam is a necessary additional step; which is a long-term project for our institution.[6]

5 In an article I published at the Times of Israel, "The emerging Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue" (https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-evolving-jewish-christian-muslim-trialogue/), I suggested lessons that can be learned from this process. I also reviewed the book *From Confrontation to Covenantal Partnership: Jews and Christians reflect on the Orthodox Rabbinic Statement "To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven"* which reflects some of the Jewish responses to the Nostra Aetate.

I will also note the publication "A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" signed in 2019 by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad el-Tayeb (https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-02/pope-francis-uae-grand-imam-declaration-of-peace.html). This document decries violence in the name of religion, emphasizes shared religious values, and affirms: "Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved." This document, however, does not touch on the legitimacy and value of the particular religious identity of the other, the denial of which is often the source of violence and tension between adherents of different faiths. The affirmation of the legitimacy and value of other's religious identity can deepen mutual respect and partnership. This monogram aspires to take this additional step.

6 Allow me to stress that the current focus of Jewish-Muslim fraternity is not intended to undermine in any way any other interreligious relationships. On the contrary, the hope is that positive developments in any relationship can inspire and guide the developments in other relationships.

From Identity Conflict to Shared Narrative

Manifold conflicts in the Middle East grimly illustrate the devastating danger of weaponizing religion. Yet we must also bear in mind the potential for religion to be a source of blessing. This includes the diplomatic developments in recent years that have brought Jews and Muslims closer together, some of which highlight the unifying power of our shared Patriarch Abraham.

The key question confronting Jewish-Muslim relations, particularly in the Middle East, is: Will our essential identities pit us against one another, or bring us together to build a future in which we are complementary components of a great unfolding story? Can religion shift from being part of the problem to part of the solution? For those who believe that the other is rejected by God, and therefore follows a false religion, faith will continuously create division. But if, instead, we acknowledge, in our minds and in our hearts, that the God in whom we believe, whom we love, and to whom we pray, and who loves us, is the same God who loves the other and is the One whom the other serves and prays to -- then our faith will then connect us. As the book of Psalms states: "I am a friend and companion of all who fear You, of those committed to living by Your rules."[7] This monograph seeks to affirm the possibility of such connection and cooperation.

At first glance, the potential of shared heritage to link us together should be self-evident. After all, Rabbinic literature respects Islam's belief in God. As Maimonides[8] stated, Muslims "...unify God a proper unification, a unity that is unblemished." So too does Islam recognize this commonality. For example, the Quran states unequivocally regarding the Jews, "Our God and their God is one, and unto Him are we submitters."[9] Furthermore, the Quran grants special status to Jews as Ahl al-Kitāb, "People of the Book," and presents the Torah as a guide granted by God to the Jewish people.

7 Psalms 119:63.

8 Rabbi Moses Maimonides lived from 1135 – 1204 in Egypt. Responsa 448.

9 Quran 29.46.

However, there is a discrepancy between the potential for cooperation based on the above, and the current state of our relationship. This disparity is largely the result of medieval polemics and of conflicts throughout the ages that have led to interpretations of Islamic sources that undermine their many positive statements about Judaism, the Jewish people and the Bible; and by the historically insular position of the Jewish community, a product of centuries of persecution.

The time has come for both religions to realize that they can benefit from viewing their relationship not as one of competing narratives but rather of complementary components of a shared story. Together they can better meet the challenge of a world where the alternative for their adherents is not another faith but no faith at all. While this dynamic is relevant to relationships between all religions, it is particularly significant for the relationship between Judaism and Islam. Islam is built upon a progression of different emissaries and revelations; undermining Judaism therefore strikes at the building blocks of Islam and undermines Islamic faith.[10] Jews and Judaism provide essential testimony for certain pillars of Islamic doctrine, such as the revelation at Sinai, and the chain of divine prophecy. The Quran itself calls upon adherents to turn to the Jews to corroborate their faith (10:94).

From Judaism's perspective, if we yearn to fulfill the biblical promise of a shared future for the Jewish people and humanity, there must also come a time to build bridges and to lower our walls. The realization of this vision is a divine imperative, as reflected in the final aspiration mentioned in the *Aleinu* prayer, which concludes each of our three daily prayer sessions. *Aleinu* describes all of humanity acknowledging God together and calling in His name, fulfilling the verse "God shall be One and his name One."[11]

10 Professor Tamer Metwally poignantly makes this point in a recent book *Bias against Judaism in Contemporary Writings: Recognition and Apology,* Al Sadiqin Press, 2020.

11 Zechariah 14:9.

The Need to Be Rooted in the Sources

In truth, this process is not about rejecting religion's fundamental beliefs, but rather about returning to them, and contextualizing those sources that appear to contradict them. Loyal to our sacred texts, we reread them using new eyes. So too, we use new ears to hear the voice of God speaking to us, to build bridges and create mutual respect, all of which we believe to be the will of God - the God whom all Abrahamic religions agree is a personal God of compassion and mercy, with concern and love for all humanity.

To build partnership, it is essential to develop deeply authentic, text-based theological paradigms which recognize and value the other's religious identity as complementary in serving the Divine. Such paradigms do not preclude critiques and disagreements; however, they require a shared conviction — intellectual and heartfelt — that we all worship a single God.

Disseminating these paradigms through education, grassroots encounters, and engagement with the lived experiences and religiosity of the other are vital for lasting change. Joint study, prayer, and personal relationships can transform hearts and open minds to the richness of shared identity.

In the process of achieving this vision and rethinking our traditions, we should avoid terms such as "reform", as they may imply rejection of what we hold sacred. Moreover, such language would serve as evidence in the eyes of the extremists that their interpretation of an unreformed religion was indeed correct.

Time for a Renewed Jewish Theology of Islam

While the Quran discusses the Jews explicitly, the foundational Jewish texts of the Bible and Talmud predate the Quran and Islam, and thus do not directly relate to them. Nevertheless, from these and later Jewish texts it is possible to develop an essential theology of other religions and apply those principles to compose a Jewish theology of Islam.

For reasons mentioned above, until now this has occurred on a limited basis and often in specific contexts, as in response to anti-Judaism polemics and persecutions. For example, the full title of the classic work of medieval Jewish theology, the Kuzari, by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (1075 - 1141) is the *Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion* — a title that reveals the dejected state of the Jews at that time.

However, we believe that the time has come for a new approach. In *God Shall Be One: Re-envisioning Judaism's Approach to Other Religions*[12], a book published by our center, we present a Jewish theology of other religions based on sources culled from generations of rabbinical scholarship. This article further develops some of its conclusions and applies them specifically to Islam to serve as a basis for a strongly rooted, genuine Jewish respect for Islam.

Time for a Renewed Islamic Theology of Judaism

From the perspective of Islam, as noted above, its core texts are rich in sources granting respect and legitimacy to Judaism, the Jewish people and its sacred text, the Torah. Nevertheless, this respect and legitimacy have often been overshadowed by other sources and doctrines. Of course, cherry-picking the sympathetic sources while ignoring the problematic ones will not make them disappear. Instead, it is necessary to develop an authentic Islamic theology of Judaism that convincingly deals with these issues.

Certainly, this process is primarily the task of Muslim religious leaders. Nevertheless, allow me to explain why, despite not being Muslim, I have chosen to relate to these issues extensively in the course of this work.

First of all, much of what I share is what I have learned from many years of study and dialogue on these issues with Muslim leaders from around the world. Moreover, I believe that there is inherent value in a Jewish perspective on certain aspects of Islamic theology, certainly on its approach to Judaism. After all, much of the Quran

12 Maggid Books, 2024.

is built around stories about the Jewish people and their prophets. The Quran itself sees a role for the Jewish people as witnesses to God and His revelations. Surah Yunus reads, "So if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, **ask those who recite the Book before you**. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord. So be you not among the doubters."[13] [*all emphases within quotes are my own – Y.N.*] This could be interpreted as a call for a Jewish voice concerning Islam, certainly from Jews who have profound respect for it.

One must also bear in mind that to produce a renewed Jewish theology of Islam, it is essential for us to understand Islam's perspective on other religions. Is it an exclusivist religion that rejects and denies all others or one that respects other monotheistic paths? Does Islam have the potential to be a partner in a cosmic vision of humanity united in belief and service of God? These questions should guide a Jewish inquiry into Islam.

While recognizing the openness toward other religions in the core scripture of Islam, and in particular toward the religions of the People of the Book, one cannot deny that some Muslims adopt an extremist-exclusivist approach. Furthermore, it is indisputable that certain Islamic extremists have perpetrated acts of violence in the name of God and their religion. Every religion is the fruit of the interface between its sacred literature and the interpretations of its adherents. And we should remember that, while God and scripture are eternal for believers, popular understanding is open to change. For this reason, the mission of religious leaders in every generation is to guide and educate their communities to overcome extremism.

One of the goals of interreligious dialogue is to impact the way people perceive their own religion, and to bring to light the core values rooted in their sources. The late Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of England, understood this point. He decried the use of the term "fundamentalists" to describe violent extremists, as it implied that the fundamentals of religion were dangerous. On the contrary, he argued, religions become dangerous when we forget their fundamentals. So-called "fundamentalists" are the most serious violators

13 10.94. The translations from the Quran are based on *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, editor-in-chief, HarperCollins, 2015.

of the fundamental beliefs of their own religion.

A final justification for the contribution of a Jewish voice concerning a different Abrahamic religion is precedent. I mentioned the historical *Nostra Aetate* above. In that case, it was Jules Isaac,[14] a Jew, who played a pivotal role in awakening that process within the Catholic church, through his extensive research of Christianity and encounters with Christian leaders.[15]

I would like to emphasize that I do not believe that this type of scholarship is about the need for compromise, as religious truths cannot and should not be bargained with. On the contrary, this endeavor is an expression of the conviction that the only way to engender a deep and authentic relationship between adherents of different faiths is through reciprocal understanding. It is my belief that there is a firm theological basis for the re-imagining of Jewish-Islamic relations. In my eyes, there is a divine imperative to promote such a re-imagining, and thereby uncover the blessings both in our commonalities and our differences, creating profound religious fraternity.

14 See his book Jésus et Israël, published in 1948.

15 See the moving documentary "The Historian Jules Isaacs, from teaching of contempt to teachings of esteem" about his life: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=x5Ih8VMQ4dw&feature=youtu.be.

Part I: A Jewish Theology of Humanity and its Religions

Because both the Torah and the Talmud predate the Quran and Islam, as mentioned above, we must first develop an essential theology of other religions, and then compose a theology of Islam based on those principles. This section contains some of the conclusions from *God Shall Be One: Re-envisioning Judaism's Approach to Other Religions*.

Religion is not only about God, but about people. It therefore follows that Jewish theology of other religions is intimately intertwined with Jewish understanding of the broad story of humanity, and of the role of the Jewish people therein.

The Bible does not begin with Judaism or the Jewish people, but with the dual foundation of a shared humanity and shared Divinity. All humans are created in the image of God, and all descend from a common ancestor. Both of these principles are echoed in the *Talmud*. Mishna Sanhedrin states, "Adam was created alone…for the sake of peace, so that one person will not say to another, 'My father is greater than your father.'"[16] Mishna Avot emphasizes our shared Divinity when it declares, "Beloved is humanity who is created in the image (of God)."[17]

The Path of Abraham

When God singled out the biblical Patriarchs, His intention was not to abandon broader humanity. On the contrary, God chose them to serve as a source of blessing for the entire world — as the Bible says of Abraham, "In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[18] Likewise, God called upon Isaac and Jacob to serve as a channel for blessing for all nations.[19]

16 Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5.

17 Mishna Avot 3:14.

18 Genesis 12:3.

19 See Genesis 26:4 and Genesis 28:14.

Explaining why Abraham was chosen for this mission, the Torah states: "Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, **and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him**. For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, **that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice**."[20] These verses present a sequence: First we learn that Abraham will bring blessing to humanity; then that he was chosen because he would command his children, and all those under his sphere of influence, to "keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice." The focus seems to be on people, rather than God. But if we look beneath the surface, we see the essential linkage between the human and the Divine: "To do righteousness and justice" takes place on the human plane, but nonetheless constitutes "the way of the Lord." Just as the story of the creation of humanity places a dual emphasis on a shared origin and common divinity, here too we see both a vertical connection to God and a horizontal connection to one another. [21]

We see the continuity of this twofold approach in God's first address to the People of Israel when they arrive at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, during which He enjoins them to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."[22] The People of Israel are compared to priests, whose role is to serve a wider circle.[23] The great Italian biblical commentator Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475 - 1549) reads the charge to become

20 Genesis 18:18–19.

21 I believe that the connection of the human and divine is an essential message of the Abrahamic tradition. In the first lines of his book *For the Perplexed of the Generation*, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook declares: "That humanity was created in the image of God is the foundation of the Torah." An ancient work of Kabbalah, the Bahir (passage 6) roots this concept in the very name of Abraham, noting that the numerical value of the Hebrew name Abraham (248) is identical to that of the Hebrew term 'in God's image' [*betzelem Elokim*]. This is illustrated by the teachings of the central figure of the Talmudic law, Rabbi Akiva. He proclaimed, "Beloved is humanity who are created in the image (of God)" (Mishna Avot 3:14), and he established that the fundamental principle of the Torah is love of the other (Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4) This message runs throughout the Abrahamic religions. For example Jesus, when asked what was the most important commandment (Mark 12:28-31), chose two biblical verses: to love God with all your heart (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). Similarly, the Quran juxtaposes prayer and charity numerous times. See in particular Surah 107, al – Ma'un.

22 Exodus 19:6.

23 Malachi 2:7: "For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and men seek rulings from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts." This verse spells out the role of the priest as a source of knowledge for all.

a "kingdom of priests" as promoting the prophetic vision of all the nations serving God together.[24] It emerges that the consequence of chosenness is a sense of responsibility for the other.[25]

If we move to the period of the First Temple, which for the Jewish people represents the connection between heaven and earth, we again see the theme of universal responsibility. In his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, King Solomon calls to God to fulfill the prayers of all people coming to pray:

> *And to the foreigner who is not from Your people Israel and comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name... and comes pray at this house — You shall hearken from your heavenly abode, and do according to all that he shall ask of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You as do Your people Israel.*[26]

Moving to the prophet Isaiah, we see a realization of Abraham's mission. Isaiah describes a future in which **"all the nations"** come to Jerusalem in order learn the **"path of God"** of justice and peace.[27]

It is moving beyond words that it is Abraham's name that characterizes the shared heritage of the religious faiths of the majority of humanity today. A Talmudic legend from the early third century fancifully expresses the expectation of global acknowledgment of Abraham: "Rav says: On that day when our forefather Abraham left the world, the leaders of the nations of the world stood in a line, and said, 'Woe to the world that has lost its leader, and woe to the ship that has lost its captain.'"[28]

24 "'You will be to Me a kingdom of priests' **...understanding and teaching all of humanity to call in the name of God, and to serve Him together**, just as the Jewish people will be in the future, as it states: 'You will be called priests of God' (Isaiah 61:6), and as it says, 'Torah will go forth from Zion' (Isaiah 2:3)." (Sforno on Exodus 19:6)

25 This idea has been developed by the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, "I see myself obligated with respect to the Other; consequently I am infinitely more demanding of myself than of others... There is no moral awareness that is not an awareness of this exceptional position, an awareness of being chosen." *(Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, London 1990, pp. 21-22.)

26 I Kings 8:41–43.

27 Isaiah 2:2-4.

28 Bava Batra 91.

Calling in the Name of God with One Shoulder

For me the guiding vision of this future partnership of humanity is that of the prophet Zephaniah: "For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one shoulder."[29] What began with only Abraham calling in the name of God[30] here becomes a shared call for all humanity. I have always understood the first part of the verse as a calling to promote interfaith activity. But the meaning of "with one shoulder" had long eluded me. However, one day, after a joint prayer of rabbis and imams, I received a warm hug from my dear friend, Imam Dr. Talib Shareef. As we embraced, face to face, heart to heart, it suddenly struck me that we were also meeting shoulder to shoulder, becoming one. I then understood the verse in Zephaniah in its entirety: the first part "all calling in the name of God" tells of the vertical axis connecting humanity to God. The second half of "serving Him with one shoulder" refers to the horizontal line connecting humanity to one another, teaching us that fraternity is a way to serve God.

In August 2022, I had a severe brain hemorrhage and hovered between life and death for several days. In that time, this biblical verse took on a personal note. My wife urgently turned to our Jewish brothers and sisters for prayer and, through my phone's WhatsApp contacts, also reached out to every imam, sheikh, qadi, bishop and priest, beseeching them to pray for me. The response was overwhelming, and with the mercy of God - and the skill of the doctors - I am still here. For me, it was a small yet significant fulfillment of the vision of jointly calling in the name of God. My gratitude for the prayers on my behalf from good people of many faiths strengthened my mission and moral obligation to help heal our broken world and bring humanity together in light and love.

29 Zephaniah 3:9.

30 Genesis 12:8.

God Shall Be One

"God shall Be One and his name One."[31] As mentioned above, this is the concluding verse of each of the three daily Jewish prayers. It expresses the essence of the mantra of Jewish belief, the *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One."[32]

This message, of course, is central to all Abrahamic religions. In the Book of Mark, when asked "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus answers with the first two verses of the *Shema*: "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."[33] Likewise, the first of the five pillars of Islam is the *Shahada*, which begins with the affirmation of one God: "There is no God but God…"

The classical biblical commentator Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) learns from the above verses from Zechariah and Zephaniah that the fulfillment of the Shema is contingent on joint participation with all of humanity:

> *The Lord who is now our God and not the God of the other peoples of the world will in future time be the One (sole) God, as it is said: "For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:9), and as it is further said: "In that day shall the Lord be One and His name One."*
>
> (Zechariah 14:9)[34]

We now turn to a Jewish perspective on how to achieve this spiritual fellowship, the obstacles in the way, and how to overcome them.

31 Zechariah 14:9

32 Deuteronomy 6:4.

33 Mark 12:29-30, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

34 Rashi on Deuteronomy 6:4. It should be noted that for Rashi, this was a hope for the future, not a contemporary reality. He lived in the Rhineland during the period when Jewish communities there underwent widespread massacres and forced conversions perpetrated by the crusaders in the name of Christianity. This is an important context for understanding why, in general, Rashi had a negative view of Christianity.

A Jewish Approach to Monotheistic Religions

> *There is no essential principle in our faith that opposes other religions, and it is possible for them to be influenced by an abundance of knowledge and prophecy or the Holy Spirit or any other divine help according to their condition and value, by the good and pious among them … the faiths that accept that unity of God have no need to leave their religions and they can always remain in them with broad thoughts, with complete piety.*[35]

The number of adherents to Judaism is small compared to the other Abrahamic religions. This is, in part, because Judaism is not a proselytizing religion. This is not due to indifference to broader humanity, but because of our belief that salvation, the service of God, and a relationship with the Divine do not necessitate being Jewish. The ancient Tosefta[36] affirms that "The righteous of the nations have a portion in heaven."[37] The midrash Tanna Devei Eliyahu declares: "I bring as witnesses the heaven and the earth that whether Jew or Gentile, man or woman, slave or maidservant, it is according to their actions that the holy spirit is upon them."[38]

Together with the affirmation of the role of other monotheistic religions, Judaism believes that the Jewish people are uniquely bound to the terms of the Sinai covenant. This does not imply that for the rest of humanity all behavior and beliefs are legitimate. Rather, Judaism identifies specific universal ethical and spiritual values and beliefs; Jewish practice is not the exclusive way to realize these. Today, much of humanity and their faiths share many of these core values and beliefs.

35 Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865 – 1935) in *For the Perplexed of the Generation*, Chapter 52. A broad analysis of Rabbi Kook's theology of religions appears in the chapter devoted to him in *Re-envisioning*.

36 Sanhedrin 13:2 (written during the second and third centuries CE).

37 See also Sanhedrin 105a, and Maimonides' Laws of Kings and Wars in Mishneh Torah, 8:11.

38 Tanna Devei Eliyahu, chapter 9.

This conception preserves the unique identity of one's own community on one hand, yet at the same time acknowledges a shared vision with humanity. This essential teaching is the basis for global unity and fraternity.[39] I believe that this message is the mission of the Jewish people. I do not use the term "mission" in the Christian sense of seeking to convert others, but rather in the sense of following the call of the prophets to build a grand future for humanity, based on essential shared values and beliefs. In an image used by Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi,[40] the different identities of humanity can be compared to the beauty of a variety of flowers; the role of the Jewish people is to be a unifying force, binding the flowers together to form a beautiful bouquet. [41]

The Jewish people are doubly suited to fill this role. First, the Jews are the ancient bearers of and witnesses to the core story of most of humanity. The Hebrew Bible is accepted as holy scripture by Christians, and the biblical prophets are acknowledged by Islam, with Moses being the prophet mentioned the most in the Quran — more than 130 times. Second, Judaism does not seek to convert others. Together these two factors empower the Jewish people to strive for a world with the double blessing of unity within diversity.[42]

39 See chapter on Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi (Manitou) in *God Shall Be One* by Nagen, Rosenblatt and Malach; Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations,* in particular chapter 3; and Yakov Nagen, "Noaĥ: John Lennon and the Tower of Babel" in *Be Become Bless: Jewish Spirituality Between East and West*.

40 Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi (1922–1996), known by the moniker Manitou, was born and raised in the Muslim milieu of Algiers. In adulthood, he lived in France, where he was a leading rabbinic figure among French Jewry.

41 *Sod Midrash HaToledot*, vol. 1, p. 46. English translation in God Shall Be One.

42 As I discuss below, and as implied by the opening quote of this monogram from King Muhammad VI, there are also sources within Islam that value religious diversity. These sources are currently less prominent in contemporary discourse. We hope and believe that we can accelerate the process that will enable this voice to be heard from within Islam. I would also point to the motto of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation: "Bhinekka Tunggal Ika," meaning "unity amid diversity." On my visits to that republic, I have witnessed many Indonesians living out this motto. I have been particularly impressed by the Indonesian organization Nahdlatul Ulama (Awakening of the Scholars), which is the world's largest Muslim organization, and by its leader Pak Yahya Staquf, with whom I have been blessed to have a long-term relationship.

The Universal Obligations of Humanity

While there are divine universal rights, there are likewise divinely ordained universal obligations. On that basis, Judaism teaches that there are seven laws (*mitzvot*) of the children of Noah that apply to all of humanity. To understand their significance, it is essential to identify the context in which they originated, and their defining characteristics.[43]

The Talmud extrapolates from the Bible a list of seven commandments that obligate every descendant of Noah (that is, all of humanity). "The descendants of Noah were commanded seven *mitzvot*: establishing courts of judgment, blasphemy, idolatry, sexual immorality, murder, theft, and [eating] a limb from a live animal."[44] Until Noah, the biblical story of humanity was one of gradual societal degeneration, cumulating in the Flood. With this context in mind, one can understand the seven mitzvot as designed to prevent a repeat of the patterns of behavior that brought destruction to the world.

It is widely acknowledged that these *mitzvot* have been incorporated into each of the Abrahamic religions. In the words of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes (1805–1855)[45]: "The seven mitzvot constitute the entirety of rational law, which both the Christians and Muslims mandate wherever their jurisdiction extends. They also police the observance of forbidden sexual relations, murder, courts of judgment, blasphemy, and theft, and they are extremely exacting in their punishment of transgressors… Neither are the Muslims idolaters, and they are exacting about the seven mitzvot."[46]

43 See Yakov Nagen, "Noahide Laws: Civilization's Foundation or Religious Identity?" https://traditiononline.org/noahide-laws-civilizations-foundation-or-religious-identity/.

44 Sanhedrin 56a. Two of these *mitzvot* (idol worship and blasphemy) prevent damage to the relationship between man and God; two (forbidden relations and murder) prohibit the perpetration of grievous harm within human society; two (theft and establishing courts of justice) protect personal property, and by extension the fragile cooperation underlying human economies; and the last one (eating from a live animal) outlaws cruelty against our fellow creatures.

45 An important rabbinic scholar in Galicia, whose most popular work is the introduction to rabbinic literature known as *Mevo HaTalmud*.

46 *Kuntres Tiferet Yisrael*, quoted in *Kol Sifrei Maharatz Ḥayyot*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Divrei Ḥakhamim, 1958), 489–490. Many similar statements by other Rabbinical scholars are cited in *God Shall be One*.

These seven laws are primarily prohibitions. They address what to refrain from doing but offer no guidance on how to create an ideal society or deepen one's connection to God. They do not comprise the substance of a religion, which must include both the vertical service to God and the horizontal relationship to the other.

Fully developed religions that include faith in a transcendent, provident God who demands moral behavior, by nature generally include the Noahide laws. It follows that they are surely superior to that lean body of law alone.[47] This inference is the basis of a positive Jewish theology of other religions.

The notion that God values the religiosity and divine service of all of humanity is expressed in the Bible. In the words of the prophet Malachi:

> *For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense and pure grain offering are offered to My name — for My name is great among the nations, said the Lord of Hosts.*[48]

The greatness of God's name is recognized around the world and offerings are made to Him. Moreover, the Talmud notes that this divine acknowledgment goes beyond the geographic regions that are aware of the Jewish people.[49]

47 This has been explicitly stated throughout the ages by many rabbinical sages, most famously by the Meiri (Rabbi Menahem ben Shlomo Meiri 1249–1315), who applied this idea to the religions of which he was aware, Christianity and Islam. This perspective is the major theme of God Shall be One, which refers to many sources and contains many arguments to validate this approach.

48 Malachi 1:11.

49 *Talmud Menacḥot*, 110a.

A Jewish Theology of Islam:

What follows is a presentation of the elements that together form a Jewish theology of Islam. As each point builds upon the previous one, we will proceed step by step, in order to reveal the foundations of a meaningful fraternal relationship that stems from our core identities and beliefs.

1) A shared belief in God

While Surah 29.46, "Our God and their God is One," refers to the Jews, Maimonides makes a similar statement regarding Muslims, who "…unify God a proper unification, a unity that is unblemished."[50] Appreciation of our shared belief in the same God is an essential step to truly valuing the love, prayer, humility, piety and sincere service of the other to God.

The acknowledgment of Muslim belief in God has implications for Jewish law and practice. Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, who for decades served as Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, rules that Jewish law forbids the desecration or defacement of a mosque. When I asked him about this, he was surprised that I referred to it as an official rabbinic ruling, as it seemed to him that he was merely pointing out the obvious. Rabbi Nebenzahl explained to me that he did not see this issue as one of religious tolerance for differing beliefs. Rather, as Muslims pray to the same God, a mosque has the status of a house of prayer and must be respected. Another great rabbi of our time, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920 – 2013), who served as the Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1973 to 1983, likewise viewed mosques as a sacred space. When serving as a rabbi in Cairo in 1947, whenever he could not find a synagogue, he would prefer to pray in a mosque over praying outdoors.[51] Similarly, a tradition recounts that Rabbi Shmuel Salant (1816 – 1909), the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem for many decades, was careful not to walk in front of a Muslim at prayer, respecting the Jewish traditional belief that the Divine Presence graces the spot in front of one engaged in prayer to God.

50 *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam*, Blau edition, 448.

51 Rabbi Yosef's daughter Adina Bar Shalom is the source of this story.

2) The path of Abraham

As mentioned above, both Islam and Judaism see Abraham as a father figure who revealed the path of God to the world. Both grant him the unique title of special friendship with God: "friend of God."[52] The Quran describes Abraham as a universal teacher: "And [remember] when his Lord tried Abraham with [certain] words, and he fulfilled them. He said, 'I am making you an imam for mankind…'"[53] and "And who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul."[54] Similarly, in his *Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides describes Abraham as the "pillar of the world" and the one who "discovered the First Cause of the entire universe, and demonstrated the central importance of the principle of the Unity of God for all mankind."

3) Shared stories of the Prophets and other biblical figures

Moreover, we share much of the foundational story of the world and of God's interactions with humanity. Islam shares with Judaism much of its story of Creation, Noah, the Patriarchs, the Egyptian enslavement and the redemption of the Children of Israel, their covenant at Sinai, the journey to the promised land, Kings David and Solomon and much more.

4) Mutual acknowledgment of a shared ethnicity

Both Jews and Arabs (the early Muslims were of Arab ethnicity) recognize their shared ethnicity as descendants of Abraham. Even before the advent of Islam, there are Jewish sources that discuss Arab lineage. For example, the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius (37 – 100) refers to Arabs as descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham, which according to him explains their tradition of circumcision.[55] In a later era, Rabbi Chananel ben Chushiel (980 – 1055) wrote, in his biblical commentary on Genesis 17:20, that the Arab conquests in the Middle East of the seventh century were a fulfillment of the biblical blessing to Ishmael son of Abraham and a reason for the Jewish people not to lose faith in their long-awaited redemption, which had also been foretold

52 Quran, 4.125 and Isaiah, 41:8.

53 2.124.

54 2.130.

55 Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities* 1:214.

in the Bible.[56]

5) Shared religious tenets

In the above discussion of the seven Noahide Commandments, I noted that a full religion goes beyond these laws, building the vertical connection to God and the horizontal connection to one another. The Five Pillars of Islam include both of these essential components. Regarding the vertical connection, there is the *Shahada*, which affirms God and his unity, the five daily prayers, the month-long fast of Ramadan and the Haj pilgrimage. The horizontal connection includes, among other elements, the pillar of charity.

The interface of these Five Pillars with their Jewish counterparts would be an important and fascinating study in itself,[57] but for now I will discuss only a few basic points:

- The first part of the *Shahada* parallels the Jewish *Shema*, affirming God and his unity, which, according to the words of Rashi mentioned above, can be fulfilled in a complete manner only in a shared call with all of humanity.

- In Muslim tradition, the Pillar of Prayer was received by Muhammad during his night journey. In the account in the Hadith,[58] Muhammad meets the prophets during this journey, including Moses, with whom he discusses the commandment of prayer. Their dialogue is one of mutual regard, with Moses referring to their respective followers, calling his own the Children of Israel.

- The Pillar of Charity appears in the Bible as the essence of the path of Abraham, "*tzedakah* and justice."[59] In Hebrew, the world *tzedakah* means both charity and righteousness; this is linguistically similar to the Arabic word *sadaqa*.[60] One of my favorite Surat defines religion as caring for the needs of the other:

56 See also: Quran 17:104, "And We said thereafter unto the Children of Israel, 'Dwell in the land. And when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass, We shall bring you as a mixed assembly.'"

57 See podcast series I did with Sheik Ghassan Manasra about the Five Pillars of Islam and their Jewish counterparts. http://tiny.cc/zqbpzz.

58 Bukhari 3207.

59 Genesis 18:19.

60 For a discussion of the linguistic connection between these words: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadaqah.

> *Hast thou seen the one who denies religion? That is the one who drives away the orphan, and does not urge feeding the indigent. So woe unto the praying who are heedless of their prayers, those who strive to be seen, yet refuse small kindnesses.*[61]

This is similar to the passage in the Talmud that identifies loving the other as one loves oneself as the central principle of the Torah.[62]

Both the fasts of Ramadan and Yom Kippur are a time for charity, prayer and repentance.[63]

- The Haj pilgrimage to Mecca has many parallels to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.[64] Similarly, the prophet Isaiah saw Jerusalem as a spiritual center for all humanity[65] but also envisioned additional spiritual epicenters for other nations: "On that day there shall be an altar of the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border."[66]

6) A Jewish Perspective on Muhammad PBUH

I have presented a Jewish perspective on Islam that values the Islamic belief in God and His unity and sees it as a path to heavenly salvation. Through Muhammad and his teachings, this path has been opened to more than a billion people throughout the world, a fact that can serve as the basis for Jewish respect and appreciation for him.

From a Jewish perspective, recognizing the message of Muhammad as a path to God is more important than the question of whether Muhammad was a prophet. In general, Judaism values religious

61 Surah 107.

62 See above note 20.

63 In the standard blessing on Ramadan, *"Ramadan Karim,"* the Arabic "karim" means generosity and indeed already in the Quran (2.184) it is stated that if one cannot fast they can expiate by giving charity.

64 See Professor Abdulla Galadari, *Spiritual Meanings of the Haj Rituals*.

65 Isaiah 56.

66 Isaiah 19:19.

truths discovered by contemplation. Moreover, forms of divine service initiated by humanity are considered pleasing to God. For example, Judaism,[67] like the Quran,[68] praises Abraham for his contemplation of existence that led him to believe in God.[69]

This does not imply that Judaism denies the possibility of divine inspiration and prophecy in Islam and to Mohamad. In fact, throughout the ages there have been a range of opinions on the role of the Divine in the unfolding of Islam. There are two fundamental reasons why this range of opinions within Judaism exists and why there is no definite statement one way or the other. Firstly because, as discussed above, the Bible and Talmud predate Islam and Muhammad, making it difficult to infer a definite stance. Secondly, Judaism does not have criteria for making unqualified statements about God's relationship to other peoples. Humility requires us to refrain from presuming to have an absolute position on the relationship between God and people of other faiths. Instead, what we can do is evaluate the content of other faiths, and acknowledge and cherish our shared truths, values and actions.

In the next section, I present a few Jewish understandings of the role of Islam in the worldwide narrative charted by God.

67 Midrash Bereishit Rabba 39; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1:1-3.

See also: *Mishneh Torah* Laws of Shmitta 13:13: "Any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him and he understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before God to serve Him and minister to Him and to know God, proceeding justly as God made him, removing from his neck the yoke of the many reckonings which people seek, he is sanctified as holy of holies. God will be His portion and heritage forever and will provide what is sufficient for him in this world."

For another expression of religious authority and value not dependent on revelation, see the famous statement in the Talmud, "the sage is greater than the prophet" (*Talmud* Baba Batra 12a).

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (*Orot*, page 120) pointed out that there prophets whose calls to the people to repent were not heeded; whereas there were sages who managed to bring about changes through their teaching.

68 Quran 6:75-78.

69 In *God Shall Be One*, in the chapter "Religiosity as an Innate Quest for God," I argue that the core belief in Judaism of a partnership between the human and the divine leads to seeing value in the expression of the innate human drive to search out and touch the divine; religious gestures sprout from below instead of being delivered from above.

Jewish Perceptions of the Role of the Divine in Islam

One approach is to see the emergence of Islam as guided by Divine Providence, as part of the process of spreading the truth of Torah in the world. Maimonides, who as we saw praised Islam,[70] took this approach at the end of the *Mishneh Torah*.[71] He points to the development of Christianity and Islam as part of a divinely guided process, "the thoughts of the creator of the world," aiming to bring the entire world closer to Messianic times, when all of humanity will worship God together. [72]

Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1698 - 1776), following the position of Maimonides, saw the hand of God in the spread of Christianity and Islam: "The two families that God chose to subjugate many nations, to bring them under the yoke of the beliefs and positions that are necessary for settling the world and improving the national collective…"[73] Rabbi Yaakov Emden reads the Mishna, "Every assembly which is for the sake of heaven, will in the end endure"[74] as applying to Christianity and Islam. In his eyes Islam and Christianity both contain truth and are fitting for the nations of the world.

A more far-reaching approach is that of the sages who saw Islam, and particularly the Quran, not only as a product of divine providence, but also of divine revelation. Rabbi Netanel Fayyumi (1090 – 1165) was the *Nagid* (community leader) and leader of the rabbis of Yemen in the generation before Maimonides.[75] In the sixth chapter of his book *Garden of the Intellects*, he presents a systematic approach to the religions of the nations of the world:

Know, my brother, that it is not inconceivable for God

70 *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam*, 448.

71 *Mishneh Torah*, Law of Kings 11:9

72 Despite seeing their divinely guided positive historical role, Maimonides, himself was critical of these religions, later I will relate to this vis a vis Islam and argue that this was largely because of the extraordinarily painful realities of persecution of Jews an in the name of Islam in his time.

73 Emden, *Lehem Shamayim al Avot* 4:11.

74 Avot 4:11.

75 In Maimonides' *Letter to Yemen*, which was addressed to the son of Fayyumi, Maimonides calls Fayyumi "our teacher and rabbi." According to Rabbi Kapah, Fayyumi's book *Garden of the Intellects* influenced Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*.

> *to send to the world whom He wants, when He wants… and He, may He be blessed, already sent the nations prophets before the giving of the Torah… and it is not inconceivable for God to send whom He wants after giving the Torah as well, so that the world does not remain without faith.*

These words are instructive. First, they unequivocally assert the importance of religions among the nations as part of the divine goal "that the world does not remain without faith." Furthermore, not only do other religions have a place according to Judaism, it is possible that the source of these religions is a prophecy received by the nations from God. According to Fayyumi, every nation is obligated to accept the prophecy sent to it. Accepting these prophecies will lead to all of humanity worshipping God, each nation in its own way.

Fayyumi's belief that there was a divine goal of bringing the nations to worship God, combined with his faith in certain prophecies of the nations, led him to conclude that there were religions other than Judaism that were not only legitimate but also a realization of prophetic revelation. Therefore, Fayyumi related to the Quran very seriously and believed that the Quran obligated the Muslims. He analyzed the words of the Quran carefully, to such an extent that in the second chapter of his book he found mystical meaning in the *Shahada* (the Muslim declaration of faith).[76]

A substantial part of the sixth chapter of Fayyumi's book is dedicated to analysis and interpretation of the Quran. He concludes from this analysis that the Quran did not abrogate the Torah, but rather the opposite — the Quran confirms the obligation of the Jewish people to keep the Torah. At the same time, Fayyumi asserts that the Quran teaches that there are additional revelations to other nations that obligate them to adhere to their own religious systems.[77]

76 He notes the spiritual symbolism in the *Shahada*. In Arabic "There is no God but Allah" is composed of 4 words broken into 7 syllables and 12 letters with 4,7,12 numbers having cosmic significance in Fayyumi's philosophy (*Gan HaSekhalim*, Chapter 2, pp. 43–44).

77 As we will see extensively in our discussion of the Quran later in this monogram.

We can find similar ideas to Fayyumi in the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. He also raises the possibility that prophecy is the foundation of other religions. In his book, *For the Perplexed of the Generation*, Rabbi Kook writes:

> *In general, the essence of faith does not contain any opposition to other religions. As we have said already, it is possible that the abundance of knowledge and prophecy or divine spirit or other divine assistance will influence nations according to their situation and value, through the good and righteous among them.*[78]

Rav Kook presents a wide variety of possibilities, from "abundance of knowledge and prophecy" to "other divine assistance" that are at the foundation of the religions of the nations of the world.

Fraternity Without Agreement on Everything

I have shown that there is a powerful basis for an authentic and meaningful religious fraternity between Jews and Muslims. This does not require us to agree on everything. The ancient Mishna teaches that "every argument that is for [the sake of] Heaven's name is destined to endure."[79] If the disagreements are for the sake of Heaven's name, then the results will be positive.

Similarly, in Surah Al-Maida, the Quran affirms the legitimacy of the Torah for the Jews and then moves on to discuss the value of the existence of other religions:

> *44 Truly We sent down the Torah, wherein is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who submitted [unto God] judged those who are Jews, as did the sages and the rabbis, in accordance with such of God's Book as they were bidden to preserve and to which they were witnesses.*

78 Rabbi Abraham Kook, *For the Perplexed of the Generation*, chapter 52.

79 Mishna Avot 5:17.

> *48…For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ.*

The Quran asks us to vie with one another in good deeds until a future time when God explains to us our differences, which I believe are a reference to our theological debates, as is made explicit in the commentary of the Study Quran:

> *The subsequent command, vie with one another in good deeds… supposes not a process of supersession among religious forms, but rather a contemporaneous existence of different religious communities competing in virtue. The competition is in good deeds and thus on the practical rather than theological level. Resolving the intractable theological differences between the religions may not be a vocation for religious adherents in this world; rather, these may be matters only resolved by God in the Hereafter, when He will inform you of that wherein you differ.*[80]

I firmly believe that our points of disagreement and debate need not be an impediment to the fulfillment of the will of God, to realizing the potential for fraternity in our shared story.

Facing Problems in the Relationship

Throughout the history of Jewish-Muslim relations, there have been periods of mutual blessing and creativity, including what is referred to as the Golden Age of Jewish Muslim-relations. However, there have also been times during which, in the name of Islam and Muhammad, Jews suffered harsh religious persecution, including massacres, forced conversions, and institutionalized humiliation. For example, in Andalusia in the 1140s, Maimonides and his family were forced to flee the Almohad Caliphate, which obliterated many ancient Jewish

80 *Study Quran*, 301.

communities, forcing the Jews to convert or be executed.[81] As a Jewish leader, Maimonides had to respond in his epistles to life and death questions from Jewish communities from Andalusia in the West to communities as far as Yemen in the East, asking whether they should suffer a martyr's death or undergo forced conversion.

These persecutions, particularly forced conversion, are in contradiction to many Islamic sources, such as for example Surah 2.256, "There is no coercion in religion." Yet, it is understandable that Maimonides formulated some of his expressions of pain at the persecutions and humiliations that Jews underwent in the name of Islam as a critique of Islam.[82]

It is moving that as seen above, this persecution did not prevent Maimonides from acknowledging and praising Islamic faith as an unblemished belief in the unity of God, or from seeing the hand of God in the spread of Islam throughout the world.

Our Family Connection: A Source of Both Tension and Connection

While each of our religions believes in a shared ancestry for all of humanity, for Jews and Muslims this family connection is even more intimate, with Abraham as our Patriarch, and the brothers Isaac and Ishmael as our respective ancestors. A family precludes the possibility of indifference, which can be a mixed blessing; there is potential for sibling rivalry but also for fraternity and love. It is our responsibility to God, to our Patriarch, and to one another to ensure that we propagate the latter.

Both Jewish and Islamic traditions tell the story of the great faith and devotion of Abraham in his willingness to sacrifice his son in submission to the will of God. Jews commemorate this event on *Rosh Hashana*, while Muslims commemorate this event on *Eid al-Adha*, the Feast of the Sacrifice.

81 See David Wasserstein, "The intellectual genealogy of Almohad policy towards Christians and Jews" and Alan Verskin "Medieval Jewish perspectives on Almohad persecutions: Memory, repression and impact", both in *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, ed. Mercedes Garcia-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, Brill 2020.

82 See for example in Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*.

The differences between the two traditions should be studied, as they can serve as a source of connection. In the Torah, the son who is nearly sacrificed is Isaac, whereas according to most Islamic traditions the son is Ishmael. A close friend of mine, who is a Muslim Sheikh from Nazareth, was once asked who the son was in the story of the sacrifice. He replied "If it is Ishmael, it is my father. If it is Isaac, it is my uncle. Either way it is my family and family we must love and learn from."

My father-in-law, a professor of Bible, Uriel Simon, points out that in a close reading of the Torah, one can find truth in both traditions.[83] In the same section as the Binding of Isaac, the Torah tells the story of Hagar going into the desert with Ishmael. In that story too, there is mortal danger, as Hagar believes that Ishmael will die of thirst. In both stories, at the last moment an angel from God comes to say that the son is spared and will receive great blessing.[84] In other words, the Torah teaches that both sons, Isaac and Ishmael, are blessed.

The message is that Jews and Muslims must embrace all of Abraham's children. In fact, each of the five daily prayers in Islam refers to the blessing given to Abraham and his descendants (*the Salat al-Ibrahimiya*). Furthermore, in the Quran, the story of the sacrifice ends with a blessing to Isaac: "And we blessed him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous. And we blessed him and Isaac."[85]

Professor Simon points out that in the book of Genesis, during each of the three great struggles between brothers who are children of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers, the Bible ends with a moving image of reconciliation. In each story, the brothers unite peacefully to bury their father in Hebron, in the Cave of the Patriarchs. The message that emerges is that sibling rivalry is natural, and that in the end, despite the conflicts along the way, the family relationship will be a source of connection.[86]

83 *Seek Peace and Pursue It* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Books, 2002) 56-59.

84 Genesis 21.

85 Quran 37.112-113.

86 Simon quoted in *Be Become Bless: Jewish Spirituality between East and West*, 81. That sibling relations transcend intra-Jewish relations also appears in the Bible. See for example: "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for such is your brother" Deuteronomy 23:8.

In a letter penned in 1908, Rabbi Kook acknowledged the problems in contemporary inter-religious relations, but expressed the aspiration for a future in which "the fraternal love between Esau and Jacob, between Isaac and Ishmael, transcends all of those troubles."[87]

The Time Has Come for Renewed Mutual Respect and Friendship

After many years of interaction with Muslim leaders and my own study of Islam, I have come to believe that the periods of religious and ethnic persecution of Jews that led to great suffering are not reflective of the core texts and beliefs of Islam. They have been the exception, not the rule, of the history of the fourteen centuries of relations between us. This truth must be made clear and publicized if we are to overcome the vestiges of anti-Judaism that still exist. I believe this can lead to a future that fulfills the will of God for mutual respect and legitimacy, with a role for each of our religions.

87 *Iggerot HaRe'iya* 1:112.

Part II: Islamic Views on Jews and Judaism

Introduction

Part I comprised a Jewish perspective on Islam that affirmed its belief in God, saw it as a one of the paths to heavenly salvation and acknowledged its shared story and heritage with the Jewish people and Judaism. I turn now to Part II, which contemplates Islam's approach to Judaism.

I firmly believe that to fulfill the potential and blessings of a Jewish-Muslim religious fraternity, respect and acknowledgement of validity must be mutual. For this reason, we need both Part I, a Jewish theology of Islam, and Part II, an Islamic theology of Judaism.

As Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi writes:

> *One can speak endlessly about being moral, about values, but at the end of the day the Creator's demand of me is much simpler: how I can let others live in my world, and how they can let me live in theirs? Without reciprocity there is no solution to this moral problem, to the equation of fraternity.*[88]

Letting other people live in our world and other people letting us live in theirs, must include a place for religion, as it is a part of our essential identity.

88 *Sod Midrash HaToledot*, vol. 3, p. 151.

A Jewish Contribution to an Islamic Theology of Judaism

Certainly, an Islamic theology of Judaism must primarily come from Muslim religious authorities. Indeed, much of what I now present comes from many years of study and encounters with Muslim religious leaders throughout the world. It is my earnest hope that my work forefronts this issue and leads many more such leaders to formulate and disseminate teachings on this subject.

In Part I, I showed why a Jewish contribution to the discussion of Islam's conception of Judaism was both valid and helpful. The Quran itself sees the Jewish people as witnesses to God and His revelations, and much of the Quran is built around stories of the Jewish people and their prophets.

Moreover, it makes sense that whenever theologians from one religion seek to formulate a theology of another religion, they include within their deliberations the voice of adherents of that other religion. Much anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are fueled by false assumptions about the other and his/her beliefs; these false assumptions can lead to flawed theology. In this context it would be wise to recall the famous verse in the Quran: "Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes **that you may come to know one another**".[89] Certainly, my own understanding of Islam and conception of a Jewish theology of Islam has benefited from encounters and discussions with Muslims.

89 Quran 49.13.

Three Fundamental Issues

There are three fundamental issues that must be grappled with to lay the basis for a bilateral Jewish-Muslim religious fraternity:

One: The Status of Judaism

In many verses, the Quran affirms the divine origin and legitimacy of the earlier Abrahamic religions and of their being a path to salvation. However, there have been claims by some Muslims that these statements are "*Naskh*", meaning that they have been abrogated and are therefore null and void. This would imply that Judaism has been categorically superseded by Islam and is no longer a legitimate religion. Other Muslims reject this application of *naskh*, because the verses affirming the Abrahamic religions are among the latest in the Quran, making it difficult to claim that there were subsequent verses that annulled their teachings. Furthermore, as one global Muslim religious leader has written to me, "The concept of *naskh* is not applicable to verses that… state the principles of faith, which are the essence of the religion." This approach to *naskh* is essential for there to be respect between Islam and Judaism. There cannot be fraternity where one side rejects the other.

Two: The Validity of the Torah

The Quran often affirms the divine origin of the Torah (Bible), and the Hadith speaks of the respect Muhammad (PBUH) granted the Torah scroll. However some Muslims, by applying a certain interpretation of a concept called "*tachrif*", have claimed that the Torah revered by Jews today is a forgery of the original. This interpretation has been rejected by many contemporary Muslim religious leaders and scholars.

Three: Quran's Views on the Jewish People

Together with many positive statements about the Jewish people, there are also places in the Quran and Hadith that criticize Jews. It is anti-Semitic to take the latter as sweeping statements about the essential nature of Jews in general. Rather it must be demonstrated that these critiques are contextual, meaning that they relate specifically to a particular situation; this can be done from within the Quran itself.

These issues are essential for determining the vector of the relationship of Islam and Judaism — will it be one of connection or conflict? The dangers of the latter possibility are spelled out in the central message of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*. Sacks addresses the tragic phenomenon of the infliction of violence and other cruel treatment upon others justified by claims of acting in God's name. Rabbi Sacks explains the mindset of what he calls "pathological dualism," which divides the world into absolute categories of good and evil, light and darkness, those beloved by God and those rejected by God. This duality paves the way for brutal violence against those deemed to embody the identity representing evil and darkness, who are therefore rejected by the Divine.

The rejectionist approach to the three issues above has become a breeding ground for hatred, violence, and terror in the name of God.

A poignant example from the world of Christian-Jewish relations shows how acknowledgement of this painful reality can lead to change. Jules Isaac was a French-Jewish historian whose wife and daughter were murdered in the Holocaust. In his book *Jesus and Israel* he demonstrated how certain Christian interpretations of the New Testament led to teachings of contempt for Jews and Judaism and the development of doctrines of their rejection by God. He showed how this paved the way for a millennium of Christian anti-Semitism and ultimately the Holocaust. Pope John XXIII was deeply moved by Isaac and his work. Their encounter was pivotal in the process that led to the Church's groundbreaking declaration *Nostra Aetate*,

redefining the relationship of Christianity towards Jews and Judaism, which included a rereading of Christian Holy Scripture and a reconsideration of its doctrine on these issues.The danger of religion as a source of violence has already been raised by the Talmud, which critiques those who make it "a potion of death" instead of "a potion of life".[90] The English poet William Blake roots this danger in the manner in which sources are interpreted: "Both read the Bible day and night, but you read black where I read white." If, as Blake describes, religious disagreements are all matter of different reading approaches, does that mean that all is subjective and religion's holy script has no clear messages or truths? No! Religions have fundamentals; religions have core values. In each religion there is that which is the guiding rule and that which is the exception. These exceptions need to be understood, often by noting their particular context.

In the Torah, God is called *El Rachum v'Chanun*. In the Quran, every Surah but one begins in the name of *el-Rachman el-Raheem*. These powerful words in Hebrew and in Arabic are similar in sound and meaning: "God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." In interpreting both Jewish and Muslim texts, this compassion and mercy should be a guiding principle to uncover the will of the one God whom we all love and revere.

The Path of Abraham

We have seen that rather than rejecting all other religions, Islam, like Judaism, requires a commitment to core beliefs and values, which are embodied in the foundational figure of Abraham. It is his path that is the basis for monotheistic religion, as expressed in Surah Al-Anam: "Say, 'Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a Hanīf, and he was not of the idolaters.'"[91]

And again in Surah Al-Baqarah:

90 Talmud Yoma 72

91 Quran 6.161. See also: "Truly Abraham was a community, devoutly obedient to God, a ḥanīf, and he was not among the idolaters. [And he was] thankful for His Blessings. He chose him and guided him unto a straight path. And We granted him good in this world, and surely in the Hereafter he shall be among the righteous. Then We revealed unto thee, "Follow the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf, and he was not among the idolaters." Quran 16.120-123.

> *And who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul? We chose him in the world and in the Hereafter he shall be among the righteous. And when his Lord said unto him, "Submit!" he said, "I submit to the Lord of the worlds." And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, as did Jacob, "O my children, God has chosen for you the religion, so die not except in submission." Or were you witnesses when death came to Jacob, when he said to his children, "What will you worship after I am gone?" They said, "We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac: one God, and unto Him we submit."*[92]

The Quran warns against any religion claiming exclusivity over Abraham and his heritage:

> *O People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham, as neither the Torah nor the Gospel was sent down until after him? Do you not understand? Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but rather was a hanīf, a submitter, and he was not one of the idolaters. Truly the people worthiest of Abraham are those who followed him, and this prophet and those who believe....*[93]

The Quran is making the obvious point that, as Abraham preceded the revelations of the sacred books and their specific laws, he cannot be exclusively aligned with one of those religions. Abraham was *hanif*, a pure believer who was fully devoted to the One God.[94] This broad definition of devotion to God encompasses all the Abrahamic religions, the paths of the Torah, Gospel and Quran. It is through all of them that Abraham fulfills his destiny appointed by God to be "an imam for mankind" (Quran 2.124), "pillar of the world" (Maimonides)[95] and "the leader of the world" (Talmud).[96]

Unfortunately, this fundamental message is often obscured by a linguistic misunderstanding. Submission to God is common to all the paths of devotion of the Abrahamic religions. The Arabic word for submitter is *mus'liman*, and this is the word used in the Quran to

92 Quran 2.130-133.

93 Quran 3.65-68.

94 See *The Study Quran*, page 1773.

95 Laws of Foreign Worship, chapter 1.

96 Talmud Baba Batra 91a-b.

depict Abraham as well as Jacob and his sons' willingness to submit to God. The fact that the followers of the religion of Muhammad who live in accordance with the law of the Quran are also called Muslims has led to the misconception that Abraham was a "Muslim" who followed Islam and not the other two Abrahamic religions. As Professor Tamer Muhammad Metwally eloquently explains: "Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian or a Muhammadan; for these terms appeared after Abraham, and he was the father of all of them."[97]

When the Quran describes Abraham as a Muslim, it means that he submitted to God but was not associated with any one monotheistic religion. This clarification is fundamental to the development of a positive Islamic theology of Judaism, as it sees great value in devotion to God that is not specifically Islamic.

Judaism's Status in Islam

Our God and your God are one

That two religions both believe in a God is not enough to lead to interreligious harmony. On the contrary, belief in God has at times been a source of conflict when one religion sees the other as serving a false God and thereby rejecting the "true God." In this light, there is critical importance to the following clear and unequivocal declaration in the Quran that the God of Islam and the God of the People of the Book is one:

> *And dispute not with the People of the Book, save in the most virtuous manner, unless it be those of them who have done wrong. And say, "We believe in that which was sent down unto us and was sent down unto you; our God and your God are one, and unto Him are we submitters.*[98]

This formative statement in the Quran goes beyond a shared belief in God and proclaims that the sacred books of the other are from God and, as a corollary of this acknowledgment, calls to carry out

97 From "Towards a Curriculum Supporting a Culture of Peace and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) In Light of the Abraham Accords", Dubai 2023.

98 Quran 29.46.

religious disputes respectfully. Mutual respect does not preclude dispute, but does define the tone and approach thereof.

The belief in one God is at the heart of both the *Shahada*, the Muslim declaration of faith, and of the Jewish Shema. The belief in our shared God can and should be transformative.[99] However, it is not enough for this truth to be in our heads, it must be planted in our heart and soul. It is there that we must live the truth that, despite our disagreements, the Other serves and loves our God and in turn is loved and listened to by God in His compassion and mercy.

The Covenant between God and the Children of Israel

The Quran extensively acknowledges the sacred covenant between God and the Children of Israel and recognizes the Torah as given by God to Moses at Sinai.[100] It describes the special blessing given to the Jews by God and critiques those who fail to fulfill this Covenant.[101] The Quran also affirms that God will eventually fulfill his covenant with them.[102]

In particular, the Quran stresses the importance for Jews to observe the Sabbath, juxtaposing it with the convent at Mount Sinai.[103] Indeed, in the Torah, the Sabbath is a sign of the eternal covenant between God and the children of Israel:

> *The Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time; it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the Children of Israel... Upon finishing speaking with him on Mount Sinai, [God] gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact.*[104]

99 Shared belief in the One God underlies the call in the following Quranic verse, Āl ʿImrān: "Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you, that we shall worship none but God, shall not associate aught with Him, and shall not take one another as lords apart from God." (3:64) This verse is the name given to an open letter from 2007 from Muslim to Christian leaders calling for common ground and understanding between both religions.

100 Quran 2.53,63.

101 Quran 2.84-85.

102 Quran 2.40.

103 Quran 2.63-65.

104 Exodus 31:16-18.

Likewise, in the Hadith, Muhammad (PBUH) emphasizes the observance of the Sabbath for the Jews:

> *Narrated Safwan bin Assal: "They went to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) to question him about nine clear signs. So he said to them: 'Do not associate anything with Allah... and for you Jews particularly, to not violate the Sabbath.'"*[105]

The Enduring Validity of Torah and Judaism

The Quran often affirms the enduring validity of Jews living according to the Torah.[106] A key context in which this inter-religious respect is expressed is Surah Al-Maida, which many traditions identify as the latest Surah in the Quran, thus making it a definitive and final statement. We therefore offer an extensive reading:

> *Truly We sent down the Torah, wherein is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who submitted [unto God] judged those who are Jews, as did the sages and the rabbis, in accordance with such of God's Book as they were bidden to preserve and to which they were witnesses.*[107]

The Surah continues with a description of the giving of the Gospel to the 'People of the Gospel' for them to be judged by it and with a description of the 'Book' given to Muhammad. It then states:

> *So judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down, and follow not their caprices away from the truth that has come unto thee. For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ. And judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down...*[108]

105 Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2733.

106 See "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions" by Joseph Lumbard in *The Study Quran*, Harper 1, 2025, pages 1765-1784, which extensively documents and roots this approach.

107 5.44.

108 5.48-49.

Four essential principles emerge from these verses: **1:** The Torah was given by God to the Jews as their law code and basis for their way of life. **2:** It is the will of God for there to be different laws for different religious communities. **3:** The essential competition between these various communities is in good deeds. **4:** Finally, regarding the differences among the communities, God will eventually inform us at a later time. The notion of the various religious communities competing over good deeds and awaiting divine clarification of their differences at a future occasion clearly recognizes the validity of the continued existence of other religions.

Each of these elements is widely repeated throughout the Quran. For example, Surah Al-Maida later reiterates the expectation that Jews and Christians should observe what has been given to each of them in the Torah and in the Gospel, respectively:

> *Had they observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down unto them from their Lord, they would surely have received nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet.. Say, "O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord."*[109]

The Hadith tells of Jews coming to Muhammad to ask for his judgment. Instead of issuing a verdict, he calls a Jewish scholar to judge them on the basis of the Torah:

"Bring the Torah" It was then brought. He (Muhammad) then withdrew the cushion from beneath him and placed the Torah on it saying, "I believed in thee and in Him Who revealed thee." He then said, "Bring me one who is learned among you. Then a young man was brought..."[110]

109 5.66-68.

110 Hadith: Sunan Abi Dawud 4449.

In the same spirit, Surah Al Baqarah affirms that between religions there are differences in practice, but the essential competition is in good deeds: "Everyone has a direction toward which he turns. So vie with one another in good deeds. Wheresoever you are, God will bring you all together. Truly God is Powerful over all things".[111]

The primacy of doing echoes the Midrash quoted in Part I of this monograph that declared, "I bring as witnesses the heaven and the earth that whether Jew or Gentile, man or woman, slave or maidservant, it is all according to their actions that the holy spirit is upon them."[112]

The Quran often emphasizes that the different communities were given their own rites and messengers from God and therefore there is no reason to dispute or argue with one another.[113] In this spirit, the Quran declares that diversity is the will of God: "O mankind! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware."[114]

The logical consequence of this approach is a rejection of religious exclusivity, certainly among the monotheistic Abrahamic religions. In this light, Surah al-Baqarah critiques what it perceives as Jewish-Christian mutual repudiation, "though they recite the book":

> *The Jews say, "The Christians stand on nothing," and the Christians say, "The Jews stand on nothing," though they recite the Book. Likewise did those who know not speak words like theirs. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed… Never will the Jews be content with thee, nor the Christians, until thou followest their creed".*[115]

For a Muslim to conclude from the above verses that both Jews and Christians stand on nothing would be to miss the message of this teaching. That these verses also refer to the Day of Resurrection

111 2.148.

112 Tanna Devei Eliyahu, chapter 9.

113 See Quran 10:47, 22;34, 22:67.

114 49.13.

115 2.113,120.

in which God judges between the Jews and the Christians, settling their disagreements affirms the continuing legitimacy of these religions until that day arrives. For if indeed the emergence of Islam had rendered them obsolete, there would be no need to judge between them on the Day of Resurrection.[116]

A historical document that demonstrates the openness of Islam towards Judaism is the Constitution of the City-State of Medina[117], established by Muhammad, which states that Muslims and Jews together constitute one community[118] and that "for the Jews — their religion, and for the Muslims — theirs."

Heavenly Salvation for Jews

The question of whether adherents of another religious identity are worthy of salvation is not merely an issue of metaphysics but one critical for determining the course of relations between our two religious communities. If one deems that the very identity of the other dooms them to rejection by God and damnation, one may be legitimizing violence in the name of God in a pathology described earlier.

116 The notion that on the day of resurrection God will judge the Jews and judge between Jews and Christians appears many times in the Quran, clearly indicating that until then these religions are still relevant. Some additional examples:

"And the Sabbath was only ordained for those who differed concerning it, **and surely thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection, concerning that wherein they used to differ**" (6.124).

"Certainly, we settled the Children of Israel in a sure settlement, and We provided them with good things. They differed not till knowledge came unto them. **Thy Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed**" (10:93).

"As for those who believe, and those who are Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, indeed God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection" (22:17).

"And indeed We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgment, and prophethood, and We provided them with good things, and We favored them above the worlds. And We gave them clear proofs from the Command. And they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them, out of envy among themselves. **Thy Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that wherein they used to differ**" (15:16).

117 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Medina.

118 The Arabic text states *"Innahum ummatun — wiihidatun"* — they are one *umma*.

An inclusive criterion for heaven appears in many contexts in the Quran. For example, we read in the continuation of Surah Al-Maida: "Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabeans, and the Christians—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve."[119]

Elsewhere, the Quran rejects the belief that heaven is exclusively for one particular religion:

> *And they said, "None will enter the Garden unless he be a Jew or a Christian. Those are their hopes. Say, 'Bring your proof, if you are truthful.' Nay, whosoever submits his face to God, while being virtuous, shall have his reward with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve."*[120]

These verses rebut the notion that only adherents of a specific religion are rewarded in the afterlife.[121] In truth, the criteria for who is worthy are devotion to God and virtue, on which no single religion has a monopoly. The Quran anticipates the danger of the misconception of salvation-exclusivity in the following passage:

> *But for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall cause them to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein forever. God's Promise is true, and who is truer in speech than God? It will not be in accordance with your desires nor the desires of the People of the Book. Whosoever does evil shall be requited for it, and he will find no protector or helper for himself apart from God. And whosoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, and is a believer, such shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be wronged so much as the speck on a date stone.*[122]

119 5.69. See 2:62 for another formulation of this principle.

120 2.111-112.

121 As stated above: The mainstream, accepted Jewish belief is that the Garden of Eden is open for the all the pious of humanity.

122 4.122-124.

The key statement that entrance to the Garden "will not be in accordance with your desires nor the desires of the People of the Book" makes clear that worthiness is not based on religious identity but rather, as the continuation states, on "righteous deeds." This passage warns against the danger of Muslims (and of all Abrahamic religions) developing a theology of salvation-exclusivity.[123]

I conclude with a powerful statement from the Hadith that affirms salvation for Jews and Christians and warns against the assumption that Islamic identity is itself a guarantee for salvation:

> **It was narrated from 'Awf bin Malik that theMessenger of Allah said:**
>
> *"The Jews split into seventy-one sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy in Hell. The Christians split into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which will be in Hell and one in Paradise. I swear by the One Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, my nation will split into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two in Hell." It was said: "O Messenger of Allah, who are they?" He said: "The main body."*[124]

Has the Quran's Recognition of Judaism been Rescinded?

In light of the clear sources seen above, how is it that, nevertheless, many Muslims believe that Judaism is an obsolete religion? As we have already pointed out, this is not merely a metaphysical question but an existential as well. For there is a painfully short and dangerous path from rejecting the religious identity of the other to their delegitimization and demonization, and ultimately to violence against them.

123 Much of Christian theology predicated salvation on the Church's belief in divinity of Jesus (see also the Latin dictum *"Ecclesiam nulla salus"* (No salvation outside the church). Part of what makes possible the Quran's inclusive approach towards heavenly salvation is the lack of deification of Muhammad and the requirement that religious devotion should be to God alone. See for example: "Muhammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him. So if he dies or is slain, will you turn back on your heels?" (3:144).

The Hadith applies this to contrast the status of Jesus in Christianity with that of Muhammad in Islam: **"Narrated `Umar**: I heard the Prophet saying, "Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Slave. So, call me the Slave of Allah and His Apostle." Bukhari 3445.

124 Sunan Ibn Majah, 3992.

In a word, the answer to this question is *Naskh*, a jurisprudential principle that refers to the replacement of one legal ruling by another. Although, it is generally understood that this concept relates to commands and prohibitions but not to doctrine or metaphysics,[125] there have been those who, through an expansive use of this principle, claim that the inclusive statements from the Quran and Hadith relating to Judaism have been abrogated and are no longer valid. The tragic irony inherent in this approach is that in order to declare that Judaism has been abrogated, one must proclaim that many verses in the Quran have been annulled. Thus, the rejection of the Torah through this principle is no less than a rejection of parts of the Quran itself. Regarding this, one should heed the words of Quran, "Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part?"[126]

The consequences of this theological approach have been deadly. For example, one major proponent of applying *Naskh* to claim that Judaism has been abrogated was Ibn Hazm (994 –1064)[127], a son of converts from Christianity who lived in Andalusia. He asserted, "Here and elsewhere we have said that no one may be allowed to remain a non-Muslim" (*Fa-bi-hadha we-bi-ghayrihi qulna: alla yutraka ahad ala ghyary di al-islam*).[128] His theology significantly influenced the Almohads, who led the massacres, expulsions and forced conversions of the Jews in Andalusia,[129] in what was one of the darkest times for Jews under Muslim rule.

125 See *"The Study Quran"*, page 49, and the response of the Muslim religious leader Fethullah Gulen to my questions on the application of *Naskh* to Judaism: "*Naskh* is a jurisprudential issue and is related to the verses of the Quran that express judgment. The concept of *Naskh* is not applicable to verses that narrate historical events or state the principles of faith, which are the essence of the religion."

126 2.84. Originally raised against those who keep certain parts of the Torah but not all, it is equally applicable to those who reject parts of the Quran.

127 See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*. Brill, 1996, pp. 216-222.

128 Quoted by David Wasserstein in "The Intellectual Genealogy of Almohad Policy towards Christians and Jews" in Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, ed. Mercedes Garcia-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan. Brill, 2020, 140.

129 Ibid., pp. 133–151.

Why *Naskh* Is Inapplicable to Judaism

There are three fundamental reasons why *Naskh* should not be applied to the status of Judaism. First, as we have already mentioned, *Naskh* is not relevant to issues of belief, doctrine or metaphysics. Second, *Naskh* can be applied only to a later ruling's abrogation of an earlier ruling. However, some of the most powerful affirmations of the legitimacy of Torah and Judaism as a path to salvation appear in Surah Al Maida, a text that many traditions identify as the latest of the Quran. This late dating would preclude the application of *Naskh*, as explicitly stated in a tradition quoted by Ibn Kathir in the name of Aisha, the wife of Muhammad:

> *He has been reported to have called upon Sayyidah Aisha soon after Hajj. She asked him: "Do you read Surah al-Maida, O Jubayr?" He submitted: "I do." Sayyidah Aisha then said: "This is the last Surah of Holy Qur'an. The injunctions about things lawful and unlawful in it are Muhkam [of established meaning]. The probability of any abrogation (Naskh) does not exist there. So, be especially particular about them.*[130]

Finally, the Quranic verses cited as invalidating Judaism only seem to do so according to a particular interpretation of these verses, which conflicts with their simple meaning. A primary verse quoted as a basis for abrogation is 3:85: "Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission, it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers." But it must be remembered that "submission" is the general word used in the Quran for those following the path of Abraham of devotion to God — and not exclusively for those of who live according to the Quran. As we have seen, the Quran includes as submitters not only Abraham, but also Jacob and his sons, all who lived before both the Torah and the Quran. Another example of the broader meaning of the term "submitter" is the key verse of Surah al Maida about the status of Judaism, which uses the Arabic aslamū (submission) to depict the Jews living according to the Torah:

130 Commentary of Ibn Kathir on Surah al Maida.

> *"Truly we sent down the Torah, wherein is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who* **submitted** *[in Arabic:* **aslamū**, *Y.N.] judged those who are Jews, as did the sages and the rabbis, in accordance with such of God's Book as they were bidden to preserve and to which they were witnesses."*[131]

Each of the above three arguments for dismissing the application of *Naskh* to Judaism is sufficiently robust to stand on its own. It is my sincere hope that from the core values of Islam as reflected in its texts, a broad consensus emerges that rejects the rejection that undermines the hope of a future in which, for the sake of God, a Muslim-Jewish fraternity can flourish.

Status of the Torah:

The Quran grants the Jewish people the venerable title of *Ahl al-kitāb*, People of the Book.[132] Unfortunately, this basis for respect for Judaism is severely undermined by a claim by some Muslims that the Torah the Jews have today is a forgery and not the sacred Torah that the Quran mentions numerous times.

What is the origin of this claim, which is not in rooted in the formative Islamic sources and is in fact contradicted by them? There is a concept referred to as the *Tachrif* ("distortion"), based on a word that appears several times in the Quran relating to the Torah. For example: "Among those who are Jews are those who distort (yuharrifūna) the meaning of the word."[133]

Linguistically, the word *Tachrif* is related to the Arabic word for "slant." Many classic commentators such as Al-Tabari and Al-Razi interpret the verse above as referring to slanting[134] or misinterpreting[135] the meaning of the Torah. This is the meaning of *Tachrif*

131 5.44. In relation to the claim of the abrogation of Judaism, see also Rabbi Natanal Fayyumi (1090 -1165) leader of Yemenite Jewry in his book *Bustān al-Uqūl*, a Judeo-Arabic work of theology and ethics that quotes the Quran numerous times to affirm that it has not come to abrogate the Torah. For an English translation of relevant passages, see: *God Shall Be One*, pp. 48-49.

132 This designation includes Christians as well in acknowledgment of the Gospel which the Quran also sees of divine origin.

133 4.46. See also other places where *Tachrif* appears in the Quran: 2:75-79; 5:13; 5:41.

134 For the linguistic aspects of *Tachrif* as slant see *Study Quran*, p. 36.

135 Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 223-248.

as explained by Abdullah Ibn Abbas, a cousin of Muhammad and one of the *Sahabi* (companions), a status granting additional importance to his views: "'*Yuharrufuna*' (4.46) 'They corrupt the word' means 'they alter or change its meaning.' *Yet no one is able to change even a single word from any Book of God.* The meaning is that they interpret the word wrongly."[136]

Ibn Abbas's definition of *Tachrif* is consistent with passages in the Quran that clearly demonstrate that the Jews in the time of Muhammad still had the Torah given to them by God. For example, "And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, **when they have the Torah**, wherein is God's Judgment?"[137] and "So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask **those who recite the Book** before thee."[138]

The formative Hadith quoted earlier (and which we quote again below) about the respect Muhammad granted the Torah is incontrovertible proof that the prophet of Islam did not see it as a forgery:

> *"Bring the Torah!" It was then brought. He (Muhammad) then withdrew the cushion from beneath him and placed the Torah on it saying: "I believed in thee and in Him Who revealed thee." He then said: "Bring me one who is learned among you. Then a young man was brought..."*[139]

Moreover, as has been pointed out by many, the fact that the Quran describes only some Jews as engaging in *Tachrif* indicates that it refers to misinterpretation and not falsification of the text. For the latter definition would imply that Jews in different communities possessed different texts of the Torah because of the scriptural distortions of some Jews — a claim that has never been raised.[140]

136 Sahih al-Bukhari, *The Oneness of God*, the chapter on Surah Al-Borooj. Verses 85.21,22 saying, "Nay this is a Glorious Qur'an, (Inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved."

137 5.43.

138 10.94.

139 Hadith: Sunan Abi Dawud 4449.

140 In addition to Quran 4:46, see also 2:75. This point is made by Professor Tamer Muhammad Metwally (*"Bias against Judaism"*, al Sadiqin 2020, page 21), who also points out that just as this claim is against some and not all of the Jews, it relates to some and not all of the Torah (Quran 5:13).

Again, it is Ibn Hazm who — within his venomous anti-Jewish polemics — took an extreme position and preached that *Tachrif* means that the text itself is a forgery perpetrated by Ezra the Scribe, who lived more than a thousand years before Islam.[141] However, many Muslim Scholars have called for a return to the original meaning of *Tachrif*, not only because it contradicts so many passages in the Quran and Hadith that clearly recognize the enduring validity of the Torah, but also because the claim itself could have undesirable ramifications for Islam. The notion that the authentic Torah has been lost and what Jews have today is a forgery impinges on the Muslim doctrine that the words of God cannot be altered: "Recite that which has been revealed unto thee from the Book of thy Lord. None alters His Words."[142]

As Tamer Muhammad Metwally poignantly argues, Islam can be compared to the top of a building built upon previous revelations. The history of the Jews is an essential part of the story of Islam. And as bearers of the tradition, the Quran calls upon the Jews as witnesses. To claim that their book is a forgery undercuts this role. As Metwally puts it, "The demolition of any part of this building is the demolition of the whole building, and its defense is the maintenance of the whole construction… the history of the Jews is an important and vital part of our history".[143]

Defining *Tachrif* as deliberately adulterating the Torah is exactly what the Quran warns against: misinterpreting and twisting the words of the sacred books. In this respect, it parallels the method of those who invoke *Naskh* to claim that the Torah has been abrogated by declaring void the many verses of the Quran that explicitly state otherwise.

It is essential to absolutely reject both the claim of the forgery of the sacred Torah and of the abrogation of Judaism, in order to bring an end to the hate and violence fueled by these notions against the Jewish people, and to lay the groundwork for Jewish-Muslim fraternity. I believe such fraternity will be a fulfillment of the will of God, and will bring blessings to all.

141 See Camilla Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures," in *Muslim Perceptions of other Religions*, 1999. p. 153.

142 18.27. See also "None alter the word of God," 6.34.

143 *Bias against Judaism*, pages VII-VIII.

The Quranic View on the Jewish People:

Much of the Quran is a retelling of the story of the Jewish people. In fact, the figure mentioned most frequently in the Quran is Moses, whose name appears more than 130 times. A Muslim religious leader once shared with me a deep insight about the significance of Jewish history: "The story of the Jewish people is a school for humanity." Indeed, humanity can learn much from the Torah's description of the successes and failures of the Jewish people. However, essential to this learning process is remembering that the same sacred books that critique the Jews also express God's eternal love for them, despite the flaws they have, as do all people.

Reproof and criticism have always been an integral part of the Jewish path for change and growth. This approach is rooted in the Bible's conception of rebuke as an expression of God's love: "For whom the Lord loves He rebukes."[144] For this reason, the Torah includes criticisms of the failings and misdeeds of certain Jews in certain situations alongside the many positive statements about the Jews and God's love for them.

The value of pointing out fault and wrongdoing is expressed in the divine commandment of "you shall surely rebuke your neighbor" in the book of Leviticus 19, verse 17. We can extrapolate a powerful message from the Torah's placement of this precept between the prohibition against "standing idly by the blood of your neighbor" (verse 16) and the precept to "love your neighbor as yourself" (verse 18). On the one hand, refraining from admonishing others is to a degree comparable to failing to intervene when someone else is in mortal danger (standing idly by the blood of your neighbor). But on the other hand, when rebuke is appropriately administered, it is an act of love and compassion for those around us.

The ability to learn from the past and strive to overcome mistakes is one of the reasons for the resilience of the Jewish people, who have preserved the Torah and their identity for over three thousand years — since the covenant at Sinai. The Torah serves as a guide in the process of self-improvement through its honest and open approach to acknowledging problems.

144 Psalms 3:12.

In contrast, the Quran does not contain much criticism of its own adherents. This is in large part because it dates from the time when Islam was practiced by only a small circle of followers of Muhammad. Certainly, if the narratives of the Quran encompassed a millennium of the history of its followers, as does the Hebrew Bible, it would include the dimension of rebuke. This point is alluded to in the Hadith[145] that warns against the fallacy that identifying as a Muslim is in itself a guarantee of redemption. On the contrary, Jews, Christians and Muslims each have among them those who are deserving of Paradise and those who are not.

Unfortunately, the receptivity to self-criticism that has characterized the Jewish people throughout the ages has been misunderstood and, in some cases, become a source of anti-Semitism. Instead of embracing the message that all people should practice introspection and address their personal as well as their communal shortcomings,[146] some portray the criticism in the Bible of certain groups of Jews as categorical statements about the essential nature of all Jews. However, as we will see, the Quran not only rejects this mistaken approach but also explicitly affirms that the criticism of the People of the Book is contextual, which means that it cannot serve as the basis for sweeping condemnations of the Jewish people.

God's Blessings to the Children of Israel and Forgiveness

Before discussing the Quranic critiques of Jews, it is worthwhile first to recall some of the Quran's descriptions of the Jews as recipients of God's blessings and forgiveness, among many such descriptions: "O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and that I favored you above the worlds."[147]

145 See above for a discussion of this Hadith, Sunan Ibn Majah 3992.

146 "...Sayings attributed to the Prophet indicate that criticisms of previous religious communities need not be read as condemnations of those communities in and of themselves ...they can be read more broadly as a criticism of the human tendency to forget and thus break the covenant with God. In this sense, they serve not only as condemnations of those who have broken the covenant in times past, but also as warnings of the general tendency to break the covenant." Joseph Lumbard, "Covenant and Covenants in the Quran." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 2015, page 15.

147 2.47. See also 2:122, 5:20. 45:16.

The Children of Israel received these blessings because of their meritorious behavior:

> *And We bequeathed unto the people who were oppressed the eastern and western parts of the land that We blessed. And the most beautiful Word of thy Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel* **because they were patient**.[148]

An earlier verse in this Surah depicts Moses teaching his people that through patience they will be worthy of receiving the land from God:

> *Moses said to his people,* "**Seek help from God and be patient**. *Truly the land belongs to God; He bequeaths it to whomsoever He will among His servants. And the end belongs to the reverent.*[149]

The perseverance and dedication of the Jewish people to their faith has been recognized by Pope Francis, who said in reference to *Nostra Aetate*:

> *God has never neglected his faithfulness to the covenant with Israel, and that through the awful trials of these last centuries, the Jews have preserved their faith in God, and for this we, the Church and t he whole human family, can never be sufficiently grateful to them.*[150]

Patience and faith in God characterize the millennia-long history of the Jewish people, who have held on to their identity and beliefs despite ongoing religious persecution.

God's Forgiveness

Like the Torah, the Quran describes the sins of the Children of Israel during their wanderings in the desert after leaving Egypt. But it also describes God's forgiveness:

148 7.137.

149 7.128. See *Study Quran*, page 448.

150 Letter to Dr. Eugenio Scalfari.

> *And when We appointed forty nights for Moses, and you took up the calf while he was away, while you were wrongdoers.* **Then We pardoned you after that**, *that you might give thanks. And when We gave Moses the Book and the Criterion, that you might be guided And when Moses said to his people, "O my people! You have wronged yourselves by taking up the calf. So repent unto your Maker and slay your own. That is better for you in the sight of your Maker."* **Then He relented to you. Indeed, He is the Relenting, the Merciful**.[151]

These quotes are but a small selection of the many verses from the Quran that portray the Jewish people as forgiven and blessed by God and serve as an important backdrop to discussing the critiques.

Criticism of Jews in the Quran: "They are not all alike"

In anticipation of the danger of stereotyping the Jews, the Quran often accompanies criticism of the Jews with a warning against making generalizations. For example, after admonishing the Jewish people, Surah Al-Imran declares:

> *They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate. They believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and hasten unto good deeds. And they are among the righteous. Whatsoever good they do, they will not be denied it. And God knows the reverent."*[152]

The perspective embodied in the phrase "they are not all alike" is fundamental to understanding the nature of the critiques against Jews in the Quran, which were often directed at the behavior of specific groups of Jews because they were not observing their own commandments. In the following sections, I quote two examples of admonishment that, upon a deeper look, affirm respect for Jews and Judaism.

151 2.51-54.

152 3:113-115. See also 3:75, 4:160-162. 7:159. See Muhamad Ali, "They are not all Alike: Indonesian Muslim intellectuals perception of Judaism and Jews.' In *Indonesia and the Malay World* 38, 2010, pp. 329-347. See also Reuven Firestone, "The Quran on Jews and Judaism." In *CCAR Journal*, 2018, pp. 152-165.

Rebuke of Jews Who Violate the Sabbath

Some dehumanizing rhetoric regarding Jews declares in the name of Islam that they are apes, a characterization that has at times fueled violent anti-Semitism. This is another clear misrepresentation of the words and message of the Quran.

The excoriation to "be disgraced apes" appears within the context of criticism of the Jews who violate the Sabbath. In the Quran, observing the Sabbath is an integral part of the covenant at Sinai, as described in the following verse: "And We raised the Mount over them, at their covenant, and we said to them, 'Enter the gate, bowing humbly.' And We said to them, "Do not transgress the Sabbath." And We made with them a solemn covenant."[153] The Quran affirms this covenant by denouncing the Jews who fail to keep the Sabbath, calling them apes: "When they were stubborn concerning that which they had been forbidden, We said unto them, 'Be disgraced apes!'"[154]

The message the Quran conveys through this sharp condemnation is that everyone is duty-bound to be dedicated to one's covenant with God, a teaching relevant to members of any religious community. Furthermore, the Quran takes care here and in similar passages to emphasize that it is castigating only some Jews and not all of them.

The following Surah portrays the reaction in the Jewish community to the violation of the Sabbath. Some Jews warned others to stop their desecration while others, though observing the Sabbath themselves, remained silent on the issue. The latter group questioned the efficacy of the former's efforts:

And when a community among them said, "Why do you admonish a people [to observe the Sabbath] whom God is about to destroy or punish with a severe punishment?" They said, "To be blameless before your Lord, and so that they might repent." And when they ignored the admonishment, We saved those who warned against evil, and We seized those who did wrong with a dreadful punishment for their rebelliousness….When they were stubborn

153 4.154.
154 7.166.

concerning that which they had been forbidden, We said unto them, "Be disgraced apes!" ... **And We divided them into communities on the earth: some of them were righteous and some were otherwise**.[155]

The fact that the Quran identifies the Sabbath-observing Jews as righteous and the Sabbath-violators as deserving of punishment plainly shows that the criticisms against them are not intended as a categorical statement regarding the entire Jewish people, but as a general warning to be committed to one's covenant and to rebuke wrongdoers.

Understanding God's Wrath

At the heart of Muslim prayer is the first Surah of the Quran, al-Fatihah, which is repeated at least seventeen times a day. It concludes with a prayer for guidance: "Guide us upon the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed, not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who have gone astray."[156]

Regarding this verse, the *Tafsir al Kabir* of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi quotes the following Hadith: "The Jews are those with whom Allah is wrathful, and the Christians have strayed."[157] It can be demonstrated that the Hadith is not making a categorical statement. The Arabic word in the above verse for wrath is *"al-maghdubi"*. Its next appearance in the Quran is in Surah Al-Baqarah, in the story of the generation of the desert that incurred the wrath (*"bighadabin"*) of God through their sins:

> *And when you said, "O Moses, we shall not endure one food, so call upon your Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us some of what the earth grows."... So they were struck with abasement and poverty,* **and earned a burden of wrath from God**. *That is because they disbelieved in the signs of God, and killed the prophets without right. That is because they disobeyed, and were transgressors."*

155 7.163-165.

156 1:6-7.

157 Tirmidhi 2954.

Here, the sins of the Children of Israel in the desert serve as an example of behavior that incurs the anger of God. However, the very next verse in this Surah immediately affirms that Jews who do not transgress will have their reward:

> *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.*[158]

By concluding with this promise, this Surah cannot possibly serve as the basis of a sweeping condemnation of all Jews. God's wrath against the Children of Israel ultimately made room for forgiveness, described elsewhere in the Quran.[159] This forgiveness made it possible for the Jews to enter the land promised to them.

When the Hadith speaks of the Jews as those with whom Allah is wrathful, it is referring to a specific incident in the desert with which the term *al-maghdubi* is associated and is certainly not describing a perpetual dynamic between God and the Jews.

Return of the Witnesses

Part of the critique regarding certain Jews in the Quran is based on the belief that they desired to distance Muslims from God. From a Muslim perspective, this accusation embodies the very opposite of the divinely appointed role of the People of the Book: "So, if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down to you, ask those who recite the Book before you. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord. So be not among the doubters."[160]

The Quran identifies the Jewish people as those who recite the Book and can therefore vouch for the veracity of God's words. However, according to the Quran, there were Jews who failed to fulfill this role: "Many of the People of the Book wish to turn you back into disbelievers after your having believed."[161]

158 2.62.
159 2:51-54.
160 10.94.
161 2.109.

The following quote contrasts the accusation of turning people astray with the ideal of the Jewish people serving as God's witnesses: "A group among the People of the Book wishes to make you go astray; yet they make none go astray but themselves, though they are unaware. O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in God's signs, while you are witness?"[162]

The Quran is not alone in assigning the Jews the role of witnesses. On the contrary, there are formative Jewish sources and prayers that likewise articulate an obligation for Jews to help bring about a future in which humanity lives in harmony and together serves God. Part I of this work sets out the principles of this obligation and presents a deeply rooted Jewish statement on Islam that sees value and legitimacy in Muslims worshiping according to their faith. This well-sourced Jewish perspective on Islam is the inverse of the Quran's critique of Jews, and re-establishes them in their role as witnesses.

Jews who appreciate Islam in the broader context of the path of Abraham should bear witness and support those Muslims who espouse the fundamental messages and values of the Quran on these issues. The return to and internalization by Jews and Muslims of these foundations of fraternity and respect between our two religions will, *beezrat Hashem*, Inshallah, bring about the greatest blessing of a joint future with a place for each of us.

Blessing as the Basis of Fraternity

It is unfortunate that, over the centuries, some Muslim leaders have interpreted some passages in the Quran as theological justifications of violent and even deadly attacks against the Jewish people. Such interpretations are actually misreadings of the text. It is vital for Muslim teachers today to speak out against these misinterpretations of the Quran and their dangerous consequences.

If we return to a reading of above-mentioned verse from the Surah al-Fatihah, we can see that "the path of those whom You have blessed" can be also be seen as referring to the Jewish people. My friend Professor Abdulla Galadari has noted to me that the

162 3.69-70.

Arabic word for blessed, "an 'amta", is also used to describe the Jewish people: "O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed [**"an-amta"**] upon you, and fulfill My covenant, and I shall fulfill your covenant, and be in awe of Me."[163]

The fact that the Quran dedicates so many verses to teaching the story of the Jewish people is a reflection of how much there is to learn from their journey and their relationship to God as we forge a path toward a shared future.

163 2.40 and 2.47.

Afterword

After a call to follow the creed of Abraham[164] and an invocatio of the role of the People of the Book as witnesses,[165] the Quran describes the transformation of those who were once enemies into brothers whose hearts are joined:

> *And hold fast to the rope of God, all together, and be not divided. Remember the Blessing of God upon you,* **when you were enemies and He joined your hearts, such that you became brothers by His Blessing**. *You were on the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it. Thus does God make clear unto you His signs, that you may be rightly guided.*[166]

In the same spirit, the Zohar, the core text of Jewish spirituality, describes the shift from deadly conflict to loving brotherhood blessed by God:

> *At first they appear as men waging war, seeking to kill one another. Afterward, they appear in love, in brotherhood….the blessed Holy One delights with you and proclaims peace upon you — and for your sake peace will prevail in the world, as it is written, "For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, 'Peace be within you' (Psalms 122:8)."*[167]

Jews and Muslims are siblings, children of our father Abraham. We are all descendants, whether biologically or spiritually, of the brothers Isaac and Ishmael.

A parable in the Talmud warns against choosing the shorter road that turns out to be longer, instead of the longer road that turns out to be shorter. In other words, willingness to invest in a long-term process will yield better and more enduring results than an allegedly quick fix, which will lead to a much longer process. A "one size fits

164 3.95.

165 3.98.

166 3.103. The interpretation offered here is of brotherhood among all those who follow the creed of Abraham and includes the People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians.

167 Aĥarei Mot 59b. In *Zohar*, Pritzker Edition, translated by Daniel C. Matt.

all" approach to all interfaith relations might seem like the shorter road to building friendship and trust across our different religions. But to achieve genuinely transformative results, we must remember that fraternity is about relationships. For this reason, we need to acknowledge the uniqueness of each bilateral interfaith relationship, which requires its own approach.

Most of humanity follows one of the Abrahamic religions, which originated in the Middle East, currently one of the most conflicted areas in the world. If religion succeeds in becoming a source of peace and connection within this region, then people throughout the world will be inspired to find the path based on their own beliefs and identities to join a global process of coming together.

I sincerely hope that the methodology and approach presented here will contribute to healing our broken world. Fraternity is a blessing and value in itself. Moreover, it serves as a pathway to addressing the pressing problems of humanity. Alienation, fear, and hatred of others only harden grievances and exacerbate issues. The key to making breakthroughs can be summed up in three words: "connection before correction." By embracing this fraternal vision, we can collectively discover ways to overcome challenges that once seemed insurmountable.

My students sometimes ask me: "Rabbi Yakov, do you really think that just because you and an Imam meet and develop a relationship, that this will bring peace?" My answer is that it is not that such a meeting brings peace, but rather that it is already peace! When two people have a meaningful relationship, in which they connect from their inner essences, it is not just a path to shalom (peace), it is shalom in itself. The goal is to scale this up by millions. I then call upon my students to become partners and create new relationships with the Other. We need a massive partnership of leaders and lay people from both of our religions, and extensive grassroots encounters and educational initiatives to make Shalom and Fraternity ever broader and deeper between our communities.

This monograph shared a vision for Jewish and Muslim relations, but *e* for the future is even more expansive, aspiring to fraternity for humanity as a whole. I conclude with the words of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook on his vision for the future in which humanity will be brought together and the divisions among all religions bridged:

> *Love of all existence fills the heart…of the devout among people…hope for the happiness of all, wish for the light and joy of all…when they come among the dwellings of humanity, and they find divisions of nations, religions, sects, and opposing ambitions, they try with all their might to include everything, to unite and bring together.*[168]

168 Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Shemonah Kevatzim 1:101

Appendix: About the Ohr Torah Interfaith Center

Established to lead interfaith research and encounters, the Ohr Torah Interfaith Center is comprised of the Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue and the Beit Midrash for Judaism and Humanity.

It aims to make religion part of the solution to global challenges by promoting mutual recognition and respect between Judaism and other faiths. It is based on the belief that Judaism has a significant role to play in the larger story of humanity, especially in this new era of globalization on the one hand, and the establishment of Israel, on the other.

The Center's initiatives include developing an intellectual infrastructure, garnering support within the Jewish people for interfaith dialogue, and advancing long-term connections with leaders of other faiths (with an emphasis on the Muslim world). It is recognized by religious and political leaders and organizations nationally and globally, with connections including top leaders in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iraq, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Germany, the US, and more, as well as in Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The horrific events of October 7th gave the world a close encounter with the outcomes of the weaponization of religion and the challenge it poses to global stability. On top of that, the recent upheaval in Gaza has also led to a surge in antisemitism around the world, while Muslim communities suffer the consequences of Islamophobia. This situation creates a confluence of interests for Jewish and Muslim religious leaders, and we believe that the time has come for them to step up and forge creative alliances with one another. Such alliances can also help alleviate internal tensions within the Jewish people and Israeli society, which are torn over the relationship with the "other."

We envision a Jewish-Muslim *Nostra Aetate*,[169] as next year (2025), we will commemorate 60 years of this groundbreaking declaration and would like to capitalize on it to promote a similar Jewish-Muslim process.

We welcome your thoughts and comments and would be glad to be in touch.

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169 *Nostra aetate* (from Latin: "In our time"), or the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, was the first declaration in Catholic history to focus on the relationship that Catholics have with Jews, Muslims and other religions. Published in 1965 by the Vatican, it is considered a monumental declaration of historical importance which contributed considerably to promoting peace and tolerance around the world.

Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen is the head of **Ohr Torah Stone's Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue** and **Beit Midrash for Judaism and Humanity**, as well as the Executive Director of the **Ohr Torah Interfaith Center**. He has rabbinic ordination from RIETS, and a PhD in Jewish Philosophy from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A prominent advocate of religion as a means for promoting peace, he has been a leading figure in interfaith dialogue, particularly between Judaism and Islam, for two decades. He is the author of ten books and numerous articles on Jewish spirituality, Talmud and interfaith.

The Need for a Jewish Muslim Religious Fraternity

Can religion move from being a source of conflict in the Middle East to being part of the solution? Can our essential identities bring us together to build a joint future? The time has come for both Islam and Judaism to realize that they can each benefit from viewing their relationship not as one of competing narratives but rather as **complementary components of a shared story**.

This call echoes within our foundational sacred texts which give a firm basis to acknowledge the value, legitimacy, and blessing in the religious identity of the other.

Furthermore, our religions share a deep family connection through our common Patriarch, Abraham, with Isaac and Ishmael as our respective forebears. This bond can lead to rivalry, but it also offers the potential for fraternity. We believe it is our shared duty to God to cultivate mutual respect and unity, fulfilling the divine will for both of our faiths.

We, the Rabbis of the Ohr Torah Interfaith Center, have been working with Muslim religious leaders for years towards what we see as a historic process of developing an authentic, text-based set of theological paradigms that recognize and value the Other's religious identity as complementary in serving the Divine. In "Jewish-Muslim Religious Fraternity: A Renewed Paradigm for a Shared Future", we offer a theological road map for such a process.

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