

Divine Diversity

**An Orthodox Rabbi Engages
with Muslims**

الصادقين

Al Sadiqin Press

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Reprint Department
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www.alsadiqin.org

ISBN-13: 978-1503286399

ISBN-10: 150328639

Editor: Rebecca Abrahamson

Cover: Husada Tsalitsa Mardiansya

Interior Designer: The Publishing Pro, LLC, Colorado Springs, Colorado

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Many of the quotations from the Torah, Qur'an and other source documents were translated by the individual participants from the Hebrew and Arabic.

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Introduction

Rabbi Ben Abrahamson serves as the consultant on Islamic history and religion to Jewish religious courts in Jerusalem and elsewhere, and acts as advocate for issues pertaining to Islam. He has been active in cultural diplomacy since 2006, speaking at a UNESCO Conference in Paris, the Houses of Parliament in London, venues in Istanbul, Ankara, Jordan, India, Jerusalem, and Hebron, and at conferences at Yale University, Oxford University, and the United Nations.

His work in building understanding between Muslims and Jews was sparked by firsthand exposure to Middle East violence. Faced with the contradiction between violence and faith, he sought answers by reading every scholarly book he could find, yet books are a poor replacement for people. He then began simple discussion among people of faith who desire peace and are convinced that the way of God is indeed the way of peace. He explains, “modern rabbinic Judaism teaches that proper Muslims are perfect believers, complete in every way, guaranteed a portion in the World to Come. I believe this view reflects a fundamental teaching originally shared as part of all the Abrahamic religions.”

His approach is historical, with a focus on the identities of the Jews, Christians and proto-Muslims in Arabia at the time of the Qur’an’s revelation, and how they related to each other.

“Records of that period show that early Muslims and Jews originally recognized each other as believers, encouraged and supported each other, even fought and died for each other. I believe that appreciating our shared common history and heritage can help us today

by making any problem between communities easier to solve, as a problem ‘within the family’ and not a feud between foreigners and aliens.”

His Facebook® postings have given Ben the opportunity to share his research and gain feedback; his friends therein have insisted that he put his discussions into a book. Here you will be introduced to Arabic and Hebrew terms, written in italics, translated the first time the term is mentioned in each chapter, then used freely. It is essential that we become familiar, fluent even, with key terms in order to promote better understanding.

Remember that these essays are an encounter. Statements herein should not be taken as authoritative but as an effort in mutual understanding.

That this is in book form should not detract from the dynamic nature of the discussions. This is a snapshot of an ongoing movement to build a peaceful world, based on the assumption that the way of God is indeed the way of peace. Here is a small sample.

The Character of a God-Fearer

Ben Abrahamson: We have a teaching, “**He who is slow to anger is better than the strong man, and a master of his passions is better than a conqueror of a city**” (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1¹, Proverbs 16:32), I am reminded of this when I read the following *hadith*:

Allah’s Apostle said, “The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger.” (*sahih* Bukhari, *sahih* Muslim).²

1. “Sayings of the Fathers”, part of the *Mishnah*.

2. Collections of *ahadith* (legends)—*sahih* Bukhari 8, 73,135, *sahih* Muslim 32,6311.

Abu Hurayra¹ reported that a man said to the Prophet Muhammed, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, "Advise me." He said, "Do not get angry." He repeated his request several times and the Prophet said, "Do not get angry."²

'A'isha³ reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Whenever kindness is in a thing it adorns it, and whenever it is removed from anything, it disfigures it."⁴

Anas reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Make things easy for people and do not make them difficult. Give good news to people and do not frighten them away."⁵

A friend: *Jazak'Allah*, brother! Can you please provide the source for this text?

Ben: It is based on the *ayah*⁶ in the Qur'an, "**Those who spend [benevolently] in ease as well as in adversity, and those who restrain [their] anger and pardon men; and Allah loves the doers of good** [to others]" (Qur'an, *Al 'Imran* 3:134). It is these that will find peace.

Someone asks: Abrahamson, are you a Muslim?

1. One of the *sahaba*, companions of Muhammed, and a compiler of *ahadith*.

2. *sahih* Bukhari

3. One of Muhammed's wives.

4. *sahih* Muslim

5. *sahih* Bukhari 3, 69

6. Verse in the Qur'an

Ben: I am an orthodox, chassidic Jew.

Ahir: *Mash'Allah.*

Maksoom Hussain: May Allah increase your *iman*¹ as you have increased ours. Thank you, sir.

Ben: Amin

Another friend: Thank you, brother Ben.

1. Faith, similar to the Hebrew *emunah*

1. Calendar

*The sanctity of time is of vital importance in Islam and Judaism.
Correspondences between our calendars indicate shared historical
and theological roots.*

Two key words you will need in this chapter:

- Intercalation—inserting a leap month
- Commutation—exchanging a sacred month for a regular month

Ben Abrahamson: The Islamic or *Hijra* calendar is made up of twelve lunar months. Traces of Jewish holidays like *Rosh Hashana* (new year), *Yom Kippur* (day of atonement), *Pesach* (Passover) *Shavuot* (Pentecost) and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) are still evident in this calendar. However, because of structural differences between the Islamic and Jewish calendars, the celebration of their parallel holidays coincides only once in about thirty-three years.

The Jews of Arabia felt that they were the “true mourners of Zion” and carried customs of mourning for the destruction of the Temple to extremes not matched by Jews elsewhere. We can assume that the mourning for the Temple influenced pre-Islamic Arabian culture to some extent. But even so, it is surprising to find one of the holiest days of the Islamic calendar—the ninth of *Dhu al Hijja*, the Day of Arafat, the height of the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca—corresponding to the Jewish fast day of the ninth of Av, which commemorates the destruc-

tion of the Temple in 70 CE. Another remarkable parallel is the fast of *Ramadan*, similar to the Jewish *Sefirat haOmer* (counting the days of the *Omer* temple offering between the holidays *Pesach* and *Shavuot*), which among other things is a time of mourning for those killed after Bar Kochba's failed revolt against Rome in 135 CE. In the years after the destruction of the Temple, it was a time of partial fasting as no grains were permitted until the barley had been offered, which was not possible after the Temple was destroyed.

The Gregorian calendar, the most common one in use today, measures the time it takes for the Earth to rotate completely around the Sun, 365.2422 days. It is usually abbreviated CE (or AD) and BCE (or BC). Since 1582 CE, most countries have used the Gregorian calendar.

The Julian calendar, made official by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE, measures the time it takes for the Earth to be under exactly the same constellations, 365.256 days. In 1582 CE it was ten days short and abandoned by edict of Pope Gregory XIII, and replaced by the Gregorian calendar above.

Lunar Calendars, including Islamic and Jewish calendars, measure the time it takes for the moon to orbit the Earth twelve times, 354.3667 days. The lunar calendar starts about eleven days earlier each Gregorian/solar year. This means that any given month will migrate throughout the solar year. The Islamic year is considered to have started at sunset of Thursday, July 15, 622, in the Julian calendar.

The Islamic (*Hijri*) calendar is usually abbreviated AH in Western languages from the Latinized *Anno Hejirae* "year of the *Hijra* (journey)". The Jewish calendar is abbreviated AM from the Latinized *Anno Mundi* "year of (the creation of) the world".

The month of *Muharram* is the first month of the *Hijra* calendar, and is one of the four sacred months.

The number of the months according to Allah swt is twelve, mentioned in the Book of Allah, on the day He

created heavens and the earth. Among these there are four sanctified. (Qur'an, *At-Taubah* 9:36)

These months correspond to four months of pilgrimage to Jerusalem: *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Tisha b'Av*. (Below, the Hebrew month is in parentheses):

- *Muharram al-Haraam*—*Rosh Hashana*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot* pilgrimage (Tishrei)
- *Rajab al Murajjab*—*Pesach* pilgrimage (Nisan)
- *Dhu al Qa'dah*—*Shavuot* pilgrimage (Sivan)
- *Dhu al Hijjah*—*Tisha b'Av* pilgrimage (Av)

In both Islam and Judaism, hostilities were not permitted during these months. In Judaism it was to allow the free, unhindered passage of pilgrims to Jerusalem. The Children of Israel had three biblical pilgrimages, and a fourth (the Ninth of Av) added after the Temple was destroyed.

Irshad: The Jewish calendar has a few extra days and so it is also solar. But the *Hijri* calendar is purely lunar. When did Jews add those extra days?

Ben: The Torah relates:

This day [*Pesach*] you are going out in the month of *Aviv*.
(Exodus 13:4)¹

And the flax and the barley were smitten, because the barley was [in the month of] *Aviv* and the flax was *Giv'ol*. And the wheat and the spelt were not smitten because they were dark. (Exodus 9:31-32)

1. The second of the five books of Moses, or Pentateuch. The five books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. (Exodus 12:18; also Deuteronomy 16:1, Exodus 23:15, Exodus 34:18)

This means that *Pesach* must be in the spring (*aviv*). The sign that spring had arrived was the ripening of barley. Both the Muslim and Jewish month is purely lunar, beginning with the new moon. Since a twelve month lunar calendar is about eleven days short of a solar year, after about three years, the lunar calendar falls a month short.

If the barley was not going to ripen by the time of *aviv*, then an extra month would be inserted. This is called “intercalation” and was instituted when the Torah was first given on Mount Sinai.

Originally the calendar used in Arabia was the same, or almost the same, as the calendar used by the Children of Israel. The names of the months recall the season in which they used to fall:

- *Muharram* means sacred.
- *Safar al-Muzaffar* means whistling of the wind.
- *Rabi al-Awal* means first rains
- *Rabi al-Thaani* means second rains
- *Jumaada al-Awal* means dry, 1st month of summer
- *Jumaada al-Thaani* means dry, 2nd month of summer
- *Rajab* means majestic, great, honored, valuable
- *Shabaan* means branch, harvest
- *Ramadhaan* means heat
- *Shawwaal* means harvest
- *Dhu al Qa’dah* means to sit
- *Dhu al Hijjah* means pilgrimage

Intercalation was forbidden by the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) in the year 631. The classical Islamic commentaries say this is because the governors would declare intercalation and

commutation for their own self-interests, to make war convenient for example.

Today the holidays float around the year in the *Hijri* Calendar; many people have forgotten their biblical origins.

Yassiah Yasser: Thanks Ben. I learned something I had not paid attention to before. There is a parallel *Hijri-Shamsi* calendar as well which is an “Islamization” of the Gregorian calendar. It was devised about a hundred years ago.

Just to mention another similarity, Muslim and Jewish days start with sunset.

Thank you for sharing. May Allah bless you.

Ben: The days of the week have the same names in Islam and Judaism:

- *yawm al-a’had* = *yom ehad* (*yom rishon*) = Sunday
- *yawm al-athnayn* = *yom shnayim* (*yom sheni*) = Monday
- *yawm al-thalatha* = *yom shalosh* (*yom shaleshi*) = Tuesday
- *yawm al-arba’a* = *yom arba’a* (*yom rivi’i*) = Wednesday
- *yawm al-khamis* = *yom khamesh* (*yom khameshi*) = Thursday
- *yawm al-jum’a* = *yom shishi* = Friday
- *yawm al-sabt* = *yom shabat* = Shabbat

Micah David Naziri: Originally *Muharram* was the month of *Tishrei*, until the Caliphate adopted a purely lunar calendar. The Qur’an indicates that the sun and moon should both be used in calculating the months.

Ben: In the Qur’an, *Al-Taubah*, 9:36-37 refers to twelve months, and is generally understood to prohibit the manipulation of the calendar.

Surely the number of months with Allah is twelve months in Allah’s ordinance since the day when He created the heavens and the earth, of these four being sacred; that is the right reckoning; (Qur’an, *Al-Taubah* 9:36)

Postponing [of the sacred month] is only an addition in unbelief, wherewith those who disbelieve are led astray, violating it one year and keeping it sacred another, that they may agree in the number [of months] that Allah has made sacred, and thus violate what Allah has made sacred; the evil of their doings is made fair-seeming to them; and Allah does not guide the unbelieving people. (Qur'an, *Al-Taubah* 9:37).

This last verse could refer to commutation (exchanging a sacred month for a regular month) and not intercalation (inserting a month).

When you say “the sun and moon should both be used in calculating the months”, I assume you are referring to this verse:

He it is who appointed the sun a splendor and the moon a light and measured for her stages, that ye might know the number of the years, and the reckoning. (10:5)

I have not seen any of the classical commentators understand it this way. Regards.

Micah David Naziri: Correct, none of them do, but we do not see their *tafsir* (commentary) emerge until centuries after Muhammed.

Ben: I agree that originally the Arabians kept the same lunar-solar calendar that most Jews did. It seems to me that it was changed by the Prophet Muhammed, not a later Caliph.

According to the account of Creation in Genesis, it was decreed that the “**lesser light**” (the Moon) should “**rule the night**” and serve “**for signs and for festivals**” (Genesis 1:14). Psalms also says, “**He appointed the moon for festivals**” (Psalms 104:19).

A friend: Is it true that the practice to follow a lunar calendar is to distinguish Jews and Muslims from idolaters who worship the sun? What about the claim that the lunar calendar is based on worshipping a moon god? I understand that there is a claim that according to Dead Sea Scrolls the calendar should be solar.

Ben: You are referring to the Essene sect, an ascetic Jewish group which existed at the turn of the Common Era in the Holy Land. After the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, further excavations in the area near the Dead Sea known as Qumran revealed the Qumran Geniza (storage area of sacred texts). Some of those texts indicate that the Essene sect lived there, and that the Essenes had every book of the Torah. The Essenes did not claim to have another Torah. Also, most scholars understand that the Essenes held that the solar and lunar calendars had been in alignment. They believed that because of sin, the calendars deviated, and they followed the solar.

Concerning making distinctions, pagans worshipped both the sun and the moon, so there wouldn't be a clear distinction on that account. In the Torah and the Qur'an, when it is discussed that the moon should be used for calculating times, it is not said that the reason is to be a distinction from pagan custom.

She responds: I like your explanation, my teacher. Thank you so much.

A friend contributes: On 10 September, 2018 the first of *Muharram* 1440 and first of *Tishrei* 5779 will correspond. The Jewish calendar is intercalated that year, and thus matches the fixed Islamic calendar. That year the holidays will correspond, as they did in the year of the *Hijra*, 622 CE.

Ben: Here, the Hebrew name of the Jewish holiday follows the Arabic name of the Islamic holiday:

- *Ras as Sana*—*Rosh Hashana*—The New Year. In Islam, commemorates the *Hijra*, the journey of Prophet Muhammed from Mecca to Medinah in 622 CE. In Judaism, Adam was created; beginning of ten days of repentance.
- *Yaum Ashura* (tenth day)—*Yom Kippur*—The Day of Atonement. In Islam, commemoration of two events: Jews were freed from Egyptian slavery; martyrdom of Husayn Ibn Ali, grandson of Muhammed, at the battle of *Karbala*. In Judaism, fast day, culmination of ten days of repentance.
- *Lailat al Baraat*—*Pesach*—Passover. In Islam, on the “night of salvation”, prayer vigils are held. In Judaism, commemorates the Exodus from Egypt.
- *Ramadan*—*Sefirat HaOmer*. In Islam, fast from dawn to dusk. In Judaism, counting of the *Omer* offering between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, a time of partial mourning.
- *Eid Al Fitr*—*Shavuot*—Pentecost. Culmination of *Ramadan* and of *Sefirat HaOmer*.
- *Yaum Arafat*—*Tisha b’Av* (ninth of the month of *Av*). Fast day. In Islam, pilgrims gather on mount Arafat near Mecca to commemorate Muhammed’s final sermon. In Judaism, mourning for destruction of Temple. *El Hajj / Eid Al Adha* is the day after *Yaum Arafat*; Muslims share meat meals. On the tenth of *Av* Jews are allowed to eat meat after having been prohibited for the nine days previous to *Tisha b’Av*.

The Islamic New Year (*Ras as Sana*) commemorates the *Hijra*, as noted above. According to the Islamic calendar used today, Muhammed’s journey did not take place in the month of *Muharram*, but in the month of *Rabu’ul Awwal*. In that year *Rabu’ul Awwal* coincided with the Jewish month *Tishrei*.

There was a time when Jewish and Islamic holidays and months occurred at the same time, and celebrated the same events.

A Commentator offers: The Prophet Muhammed came to Medina and saw the Jews fasting on the day of *Ashura* (*Yom Kippur*) (*sahih* Bukhari 3.31.222).¹ He asked them why. They replied, “This is a good day, the day on which Allah rescued *Bani Israel* from their enemy. So, Moses fasted this day.” The Prophet said, “**We have more claim over Moses** [more claim to Jewishness] **than you.**” So, the Prophet fasted on that day and ordered the Muslims to fast.

Ben: Apparently, there were two calendars in use in Arabia at the time. The lunar-solar calendar of the Jews was used by the farmers and Bedouins because it was useful for agriculture and farming. The other was a strictly lunar calendar used for religious reasons at the *Ka’aba*,² which seems to have its roots among those who did not accept the mathematical intercalation of the calendar of Hillel II.

According to Tabari³ and the *ahadith*, the Prophet did not know that it was *Ashura/Yom Kippur* when he arrived, but immediately began fasting:

The Prophet [pbuh] ordered a man from the [tribe of] Aslam: “Announce to the people that whoever has eaten should fast the rest of the day, and whoever has not eaten should fast [the whole day], because today is the ‘Ashura [10th day of Muharram].” (*sahih* Bukhari)

1. One of the collections of *ahadith* (legends), it contains over 7,000 *ahadith*, compiled in the ninth century.

2. Center of worship at Mecca, holiest place on earth in Islam, said to have been built by Abraham and his son Ishmael. Muhammed removed idolatrous practices that had taken hold in the *Ka’aba* and rededicated it to the worship of One God. A Muslim is required to make a pilgrimage to the *Ka’aba* once in his lifetime.

3. Ninth-century Islamic scholar, Persia. A child prodigy, Tabari studied under a wide variety of Islamic scholars in Persia and present day Iraq, studying the various Islamic legal schools of jurisprudence. He wrote *History of the Prophet and Kings* (*Tarikh al Tabari*) and *The Commentary on the Qur’an* (*Tafsir al Tabari*).

The Prophet appears to have been unaware of the fast, yet quite willing to accept it. One possibility is that Muhammed was unaware of Jewish customs; this seems improbable. Another possibility is that the Jews and the Prophet were keeping different yet related calendars (one lunar and the other lunar-solar).

The commentator of *Mishkat al-Masabih*¹ claims that Muhammed must have arrived in the year 623 CE, “because in the first year the Prophet had arrived in Medina after *Ashura*, in the month of *Rabi al-Awal*.” This is an important observation, because it assumes the Prophet kept the same strictly lunar calendar that is in use today. If Muhammed arrived in *Rabi al-Awal*, he arrived two months after the month of *Muharram*, the month containing *Ashura*, and so the above event would have taken place ten months later.

However, in that year the tenth of *Tishrei* fell on the tenth of *Rabi al-Awal*, so an interpretation that agrees more readily with the *hadith* would be that the first day of the Prophet’s arrival in Medina was *Yom Kippur*. This implies that from this point in time, until intercalation was forbidden in 631 CE (Qur’an, *Al-Taubah* 9:36-37), the calendars coincided.

It is important to note that even though the calendars today do not coincide, the holidays that remained in Islam were not of pagan origin but had biblical roots.

Muhammed Ilyas² quotes Nadvi who wrote: “... the Islamic Era did not start with the victories of Islamic wars, nor with the birth or death of the Prophet (pbuh), nor with the Revelation itself. It starts with *Hijra* [Muhammed’s journey from Mecca to Medina]... . [This] reminds Muslims not of the pomp and glory of Islam but of its sacrifice and prepares them to do the same.”

1. Collection of almost 6,000 *ahadith*, compiled in the fourteenth century by Khatib al Tabrizi.

2. Twentieth century Islamic scholar and revivalist, India. He founded *Tablighi Jamaat*, the Society for Spreading Faith, a revival movement with ten million followers worldwide.

Insha'Allah, (God willing), we are beginning to understand that the Islamic calendar is full of meaning—meaning not just to Muslims, but to Jews. And by the same logic, the Jewish calendar is full of meaning not just to Jews but to Muslims.

A Commentator interjects: As you quote above, **“Postponing the sacred month is only an addition in unbelief. Those who do not believe are led astray, violating it one year and keeping it sacred another”** (Qur'an, *Al-Taubah* 9:37), the Qur'an rejects the lunar-solar calendar and confirms lunar calendars.

Ben responds: The *ayah* that you quote refers to exchanging a sacred month for a regular month. But we must differentiate this from intercalation, which is the insertion of a leap month.

According to the historian Tabari, at around 412 CE, Qussai, the leader of the Quraish family, gained influence and married Hobbah (Chavah), daughter of Holeil (Hillel) the king of an Arabian tribe known as the Khozaites. Qussai received from King Holeil several privileges, including the right of intercalation—*al Nasa*.¹ The *Nasi* in the ancient *Sanhedrin* (highest Jewish court of law) had the same right. One of the first efforts of Qussai was to build a Council House or Town Hall called *Dar-al-Nadwa*, near the *Ka'aba* in Mecca, and with its porch opening towards it. This mimicked the ancient *Sanhedrin*.

Later members of the Quraish abused this privilege, adding months and exchanging them when it was convenient for them to go to war. The classical commentaries on the Qur'an explain that this is the reason intercalation and commutation were prohibited—because of abuse.

In Judaism commutation is forbidden. Even intercalation is restricted: The “leap month” may not be decided by the High Priest or anyone with a vested interest because of the potential for abuse.

1. The term *al-Nasa* may be related to the Hebrew *nasi*—prince, religious leader.

Instead it was based on the appearance of barley grain.

In the Torah it is commanded that Passover must always occur in the month of *aviv* and it must occur in the spring. This is not possible with a strictly lunar calendar, which is eleven days short of a full year.

It was a descendant of King David that was given the honor to announce the leap month during the Second Temple period. Prior to that, it might have been announced by the High Priest as well.

In the year 541 CE, Roman Byzantine general Belisarius summoned a council of war against Persia. Two Roman officers in command of Syrian garrisons declined to follow the army to Nisibis, Turkey, giving the excuse that their absence would leave Syria and Phoenicia exposed to attack.

Belisarius argued that because the summer solstice was at hand, when the Arabs devoted two months to the customs of their religion and forbid war, there was no cause for apprehension; and he promised to let them go when that period was expired. These were the months of *Hajj*.

The summer solstice, June 21, 541 CE, would have fallen on the tenth of *Jumaada al-Thaani* according to the strictly lunar calendar now in Islamic use, six months too early for the *Hajj* pilgrimage. Yet according to the Jewish lunar-solar calendar it falls in the correct month.

This means that intercalation must have been in use at least a hundred years before the Prophet (pbuh).

A commentator states: Ben, your comments produce more questions: What was the original Jewish calendar in the time of Moses and David? If a descendant of David was given the authority to add leap years, how did they do so beforehand?

Ben: The Torah does not specify exactly how the calendar was calculated, but it could not have been without intercalation. Before the time of David, it is possible that the High Priest announced intercalation.

Passover must be on the fifteenth of the month of *aviv* (spring),

and it must be in the spring. It cannot float through the year.

This is also mentioned in both the Septuagint¹ and the Samaritan Torah.

The story of the Exodus relates, **“This day you are going out in the the month of the *aviv*”** (Exodus 13:4).

To commemorate that we left Egypt in the *aviv*, we are instructed to bring the Passover sacrifice and celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Hag HaMatzot*) at this time of year. Deuteronomy 16:1 states:

Keep the month of *aviv* and make the Passover (sacrifice) to the Lord your God at night, because in the month of the *aviv* the Lord your God took you out of Egypt.

Similarly, Exodus 23:15 states:

You will keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread; seven days you will eat unleavened bread, as I have commanded you, at the time of the month of *aviv*, because in it you went out of Egypt.

The Torah commands that after Passover, the barley offering should be brought for seven weeks, which culminates in the festival of *Shavuot*. So Passover must be fixed not only in the lunar, but also the solar (agricultural) calendar.

A friend contributes: In the fourth century CE, Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. What was the Jewish calendar before the fourth century?

Ben: Intercalation was always done by the Sanhedrin based on the testimony of witnesses. In the year 358 CE, the Byzantines disbanded the

1. Translation of the Torah into Greek in the second-century BCE.

Sanhedrin and ordered that anyone declaring a new month would be killed as well as the entire city in which he lived.

Thus, at the last clandestine meeting of the Sanhedrin in Tiberias, Hillel II proposed that the Sanhedrin “declare” all the intercalated months based on a mathematical calendar, until the Sanhedrin would be reassembled. This is the calendar that rabbinic Jews use today.

Some Jews, particularly those with literalist/Sadducean tendencies, did not accept the mathematical calendar. It has been suggested that they abandoned intercalation and allowed the calendar to float through the year. It has been further suggested that they used the crescent moon as the symbol of their group and continued to require witnesses for the beginning of each new month. In fact, the Samaritans and the Karaites rejected Hillel’s mathematical calendar and still look for the appearance of barley to declare spring.

If you calculate going back in the *Hijri* calendar and the Jewish calendar, you will find that they coincide in the year 358 CE, the year when the mathematical calendar was proposed.

The splitting of the moon is an event during the mission of the Prophet described in Islamic tradition. Virtually all commentators accept the historicity of this event, and describe it as a miracle. This incident is explained as the context of revelation in the Qur’an in *sura Al-Qamar* 54:1-2. The commentators agree that this incident occurred at Mina in Mecca about five years before the Prophet’s *Hijra* to Medina, approximately 617 CE.

The Jewish and Islamic calendars coincide twice every thirty-three years approximately. It should be noted that the two calendars were “joined” in 617 CE and 618 CE and “split” in 619 CE, the “year of sorrow”.

The “splitting of the Moon” may also refer to the splitting of calendars. There is an ancient Jewish tradition¹ that the splitting of the moon refers also to the deviation and eventual reconciliation of Jew-

1. Noted in *Midrash Geulah*, Jewish legends.

ish and *Hijri* calendars in the end of days.

At one time the lunar-solar calendar of Judaism corresponded to the now strictly lunar calendar of Islam. The month of *Muharram* corresponded to *Tishrei*, with *Ras as Sana* as *Rosh Hashana*, and *Ashura* as *Yom Kippur*. If you continue this correspondence then *Shabaan* was equivalent to *Nisan*, with the fifteenth of that month as *Lailat al Baraat* (night of salvation, an auspicious time for prayer) and Passover.

A friend: Many thanks brother Ben!

2. Festivals

In this thread, we see that politics and semantics often derail our efforts at dialogue. Once we get our basic assumptions and semantics articulated, we can enjoy fruitful discussion of our commonalities.

Ben Abrahamson: The ‘*umra* pilgrimage occurs in the *Hijri* (Islamic) month of *Shawwal* and completes the *Hajj* or ‘*umra* pilgrimage in the service of Allah.

But if ye are prevented [from completing it], **send an offering for sacrifice, such as ye may find, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice. And if any of you is ill, or has an ailment in his scalp,** [necessitating shaving], [he should] **in compensation either fast, or feed the poor, or offer nuskin** [sacrifice] ... (Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah* 2:196).

In the Torah a similar custom is described. The Torah describes the ‘*omer* offering which is an offering of grains:

And in the day when ye bring the ‘omer, ye shall offer a lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt-offering unto the LORD. And the meal-offering thereof shall be two tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour ... (Leviticus 23:13)

It was concluded by a *nesekh* (drink offering) and included semi-fasting:

And ye shall eat not bread, nor parched corn, nor fresh ears, until this selfsame day, until ye have brought the offering of your God; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. (Leviticus 23:14)

After the Temple was destroyed, mourning customs were adopted, including forbidding shaving or cutting hair or beard during this period.

A friend asks: You are a Jew?

Ben responds: I am an orthodox, chassidic Jew.

He continues, trying to return to the thread: *Shavuot* corresponds to *Eid ul-Fitr*. *Sivan* and *Shawwal* used to be the same month. Even their names are linguistically related.

Here we have a digression, seeking semantic clarification: The word "Muslim" is found in the Qur'an. But is the word "Jew" found in the Torah?

Ben: "Jew" is the name that has been given to us by others. It comes from the word Judeans. We call ourselves Israel.

Judea is related to the area given to the tribe of Judah. Samaria is related to the area given to the tribe of Shimon (according to one account), or placed under the control of Sanballat, related to the rise of the Samaritans. Today, the majority of Samaritans live in Holon, near Tel Aviv, and some near Nablus, in Samaria. According to their census, there are about 1,000 Samaritans in Israel.

In Ben's defense: Anybody here have a problem with what Ben Abrahamson is? How about getting interested in seeing his message. With all due respect guys, if someone is coming up with a message of the Qur'an why don't you appreciate it instead of asking what he is?

A question: Since you mention the *Hajj*, where did Jews have to perform their equivalent of it?

Ben: The Children of Israel were commanded by Allah swt to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year, for *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (Pentecost) and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles). After the Temple was destroyed, a fourth pilgrimage was instituted, on the ninth of *Av*. All these traditions have their correspondence in Islam.

A political digression, we get derailed at times: Do Jews have rights in the land of Palestine according to the Torah? If they already have rights in this land, did the Torah order them to occupy the people of Palestine? I know that you live in Israel!

Ben responds: How do you want me to answer your question? The Torah speaks dozens of times about the Children of Israel being assigned to the Land of Israel. The Qur'an mentions this as well:

Remember Moses said to his people: "O my people! Call in remembrance the favour of Allah unto you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. O my people! Enter the holy land which Allah hath assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin." (Qur'an, Al-Maedah 5:20-21)

However, it has nothing to do with “occupation”. From our point of view, the Land of Israel is the place where the *shari’a* (covenant) of Torah should be kept. This would include any God-fearer, including Muslims. It should be a place where religious people work together to support each other.

The Palestinians today have nothing to do with the Philistines of Moses’ (pbuh) time. Most Palestinians are probably descendants of Jews, and even if they weren’t, the Torah prohibits any mistreatment of God-fearers in the Holy Land. Exactly the opposite, one must care for their widows and orphans, provide them employment, guarantee their safety, etc.

As far as the mess that we are in, first of all, the non-religious media is no source for information. They wish to increase the conflict between believers. We need religious courts that fear Allah—more than they fear the media or politics—to clarify what is happening, and righteous leaders who will judge according to recognized moral standards.

A friend contributes: In my opinion all of the people in the world should live in coexistence and peace, so that we can serve Allah. By the way sir, I am impressed by your knowledge about Islam, and am ashamed that I don’t have that knowledge of my religion even though I am a Muslim.

Ben: That should be a good thing. The Qur’an says in a most perfect way **“so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth about the matters in which you are different”** (*Al-Maedah* 5:48). If I have encouraged you to learn more about your faith, then that is the way it is supposed to work.

A friend: If anyone kills a human being whether he is a Jew, Muslim, Christian or anyone, he is a sinful man; he killed all of humanity, according to the Holy Qur’an.

And another: There is no religion on earth which promotes terrorism.

Back to the Holy Land, a friend insists: The land of Palestine belongs to Arab Muslims who defended it many times. If the land of Palestine is where the *shari'a* of Torah is kept, Jews can live there.

Isma'eel AbdulKhaliq Alemao: "Holy Land" is the term we should use. The word "Palestine" does not exist in the Qur'an: **"O my people! Enter the Holy Land [Palestine] which Allah has assigned to you and turn not back [in flight] ..."** (*Al-Maedah* 5:21).

"Al-ArD al-Muqaddasah" (*Eretz haKodesh* in Hebrew, Holy Land) is the term used in this *ayah*.

The nomenclature is of vital importance. It is only the righteous servants of Allah that will inherit that land. According to the Qur'an, inheritance of the Holy Land is based on personal piety.

Allah himself said that near the end times the Jews would be brought back to the Holy Land in a mixed crowd:

And We said to the Children of Israel after him: "Dwell in the land, then, when the final and the last promise comes near. We shall bring you altogether as mixed crowd [gathered out of various nations]." (*Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, Al-Isra*, 17:104)

Yes the Jews have been brought back, but the warning has been given that piety must be the code of conduct and devotion to Allah the way of life.

Rachel: The term "Holy Land" unites us all.

Back to festivals, Ben: The faithful Muslim who can recite the Qur'an is like a citron (*'itraj*) whose fragrance (*rayh*) is good (*tayyib*) and whose taste (*ta'm*) is good (*tayyib*). The faithful Muslim who cannot recite the Qur'an is like the date [palm] (*tamr*) which has no fragrance but

whose taste is good. The unbeliever (*munafiq*) who can recite the Qur'an is like an aromatic plant (*rayhan*) whose fragrance is good but whose taste is bitter (*mar*). And the unbeliever who cannot recite the Qur'an is like the colocynth plant (*hanzal*), which has no fragrance and tastes bitter (*sahih Bukhari*, 65:338, also 61,538; 61,579; 93,649).¹

This reminds me of liturgy at the Jewish holiday of *Sukkot*: "Just as the citron (*'etrog*) has good taste (*ta'am tob*) and good fragrance (*reyah tob*), so Israel has among its men of learning who also perform good works. Just as the palm tree (*tamar*) has taste (*ta'am*) but no fragrance (*reyah*), so Israel has among them men of learning who do not perform good works. Just as myrtle has good fragrance but no taste, so Israel has among them men who perform good works but lack learning. And just as the willow has neither taste nor fragrance, so Israel has among it people who neither have learning nor perform good works." (Leviticus Rabbah 30:12).²

*Commentators interject amazement that more people do not know
of a peaceful Islam.*

Ben states: There are many who spread the true message of Islam, but they are not the ones you see in the media. The media benefits by encouraging conflict between believers.

Ben returns to the previous topic: In the *hadith* and the *midrash*,³ the same words are used: *'itraj* / *'etrog* (citron), *tamr* / *tamar* (date palm), *rayh* / *reyah* (fragrance), *ta'm* / *ta'am* (taste) and *tayyib* / *tob* (good). What is fascinating is the reversal of the correspondence of fragrance for learning and taste for good deeds in the *hadith*, and fragrance for good deeds and taste for learning in the *midrash*.

1. Collection of more than 7,000 *ahadith*.

2. Collection of Jewish legends, sixth or eighth century CE.

3. Jewish legends.

Another difference is that in the *hadith*, the person who is faithful is called a “Muslim”, the person who is not is called a hypocrite (*munafiq*), whereas in the *midrash* both the one with good deeds and the one without is still called “Israel”. From a Jewish point of view this is because a member of the nation of “Israel” is someone who is obligated to keep the *shari’a* of Torah, whether he or she keeps it or not. From a Muslim point of view, being a “hypocrite” is a hidden trait and that person is still treated as a Muslim.

But a commentator interjects: The Qur’an mentions Jews who are not righteous.

Ben responds: In the Qur’an, the *ayah* states:

[However] **They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book there is an upright community who recites the revelation of Allah swt during the night and fall prostrate before Him. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil, and vie with one another in good works. They are of the righteous. And whatever good they do, its reward will not be denied them. Allah knows those who fear [Him].** (*Al-Imran* 3:113-115)

Seeing that discussions of our commonalities continue to get derailed, Ben outlines his basic assumptions, as drawn from the teachings of Rabbi Benamozegh:¹ I am always looking for commonalities between Islam and Judaism. In this thread of the citron, I also see a parallel.

1. Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh was a nineteenth century Italian Kabbalist and Rabbi. He studied the major religions as well as Greek philosophy in an effort to encourage universal brotherhood via finding affinities among various systems of thought, all of which, he declared, fundamentally arise from divine precepts. His book *Israel and Humanity* was published posthumously by his disciple Aime Palliere, whom he guided in following the Noahide covenant.

In Judaism, we teach that there is a universal covenant which is obligated upon all mankind. Jews have called this *Bnei Noah* (children of Noah, righteous gentiles), *Yireh Shamayim* (God-fearers), and *Ger Toshav* (non-Jewish residents in the Jewish commonwealth). In modern parlance I would call it universal human rights and obligations. Rabbi Benamozegh declared this universal *deen* is also called Islam.

The universal covenant empowers and obligates all mankind. It is one *deen* that all humanity shares. It is the foundation of every proper belief system. The Torah clearly teaches the universal message of the prophets, and goes to great lengths to show that there was no division among them from the first to the last. All proper believers form a kind of brotherhood, where one can respect and in some cases even admire the faith and traditions of other peoples.

Rabbi Benamozegh compares it to groups of craftsmen who gather to build a great palace for a king. Each group thinks that it is the best and most correct, and it is indeed so, because each group is the best and most perfect in its trade. The carpenters are best at what they do. The bricklayers are the best at what they do. The electricians are the best at what they do. What one group teaches as the best way for it to contribute to building the palace would not be correct for another group. Mixing of talents and techniques between the groups would reduce the specialty and diversity needed to create the most perfect palace. The diet, clothing and training of each group must necessarily be different. The goal of all of them is the same, and they should compete as if in a race.

There is no room for feelings of superiority or arrogance, and each of us must recognize and appreciate with gratitude the work of other believers with whom God has made different covenants.

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are signs for those who know.

(Qur'an, *Al-Rum* 30:22)

From amongst all those *ummas* you are among the *umma* that has been allotted to me and from amongst all the prophets I am the prophet who hath been assigned to you. (Musnad Ahmad)¹

To each among you have we prescribed a *shari'a* [law] and *minhaj* [custom]. If Allah had so willed, He could have made you a single *umma* [faith community], but [His plan is] to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth about the matters in which you are different; (Qur'an, *Al-Maedah* 5:48)

It's a race in which everyone wins.

In this way, I can understand the desire of those who wish to make Islam pure of *bidah* (corruption) and outside influences. I can understand a sense of pride which encourages fervent devotion in the performance of the Torah's commandments. This is all what I would expect of a team in a race. But on the other hand, I can see that condemnation of different practices, intolerance, and generalizations work against the lofty goals of the covenants which Allah has entrusted us.

Abrahamic religions have both universalist and particularist aspects. Rabbi Benamozegh writes that in the Torah, the universal concepts of religion were expounded by the prophets. There is a thread running through the message of all the prophets uniting all mankind in the universal recognition of the One God and submission to His will.

The particularistic concepts of religion were embodied by the kings. A proper king was not a ruler of his people, above the whole nation, but rather he is the representative and servant of every citizen of that nation. He represented the needs and desires of the people,

1. Collection of *ahadith*, ninth century CE

their unique character, and was the main upholder of the covenant.

This is why, he explains, the end of times requires two significant leaders: one representing the universalist need of proper faith, one representing the particularist need of proper faith. In Judaism they are known as Elijah and Messiah. In Islam they are known as *Hazrat Mahdi* and *Hazrat Maseeh`*.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik¹ discusses the balance between particularistic and universal aspects of religion in his essay, "Confrontation." He emphasizes the necessity of diversity and the impossibility of intimately understanding the religious expression of another faith community. He states that full cross-cultural understanding cannot be achieved, and thus rejects interfaith dialogue which involves the particulars of religious doctrine and ritual. Our goal is not to merge into one worldwide faith community, but to embrace our inherent variety.

This gives important protection to the religious minority.

This would lead me to believe that we must be cautious about learning the scriptures of another faith community. Indeed I would discourage it as it could lead to serious misunderstandings.

James David Audlin: I do think the People of the Book (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) should study each other's scriptures—this would not only help them to overcome the mistaken things some people in each group say about the others, but it would help them understand their own, since these three wonderful faiths are extremely closely related in their histories.

He points out however that it is essential to do so with the guidance of an expert from that faith community and not relying on one's own reading of the text.

1. Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (1903-1993) was born in Russia, educated in Russia and Germany and emigrated to America in 1932, one of the founders of modern orthodox Judaism in America.

Ben: The reason given in Talmudic tractate *Baba Kama* 38a why many civil laws in rabbinic Judaism ceased to apply to non-Jews during Roman times was because they had become outlaws and rogue states which did not keep the most basic fundamental *deen* of Noah. The Torah did not require us to give pagan nations the legal protection that they themselves denied to the children of Israel. However, it follows that if these nations begin to keep the Covenant of Noah, then all rights and protections that Jewish law affords a proper non-Jewish citizen come into effect. We must return their lost objects, protect them from war, feed their widows and orphans, and accept their testimony in court.

It is based on this opinion that when people ask me why I write “the Prophet” when referring to Muhammed or speak about the Qur’an as a divine book, I reply, “the Torah teaches me that Muslims who follow their religion properly are perfect believers, complete in every way, and thus proper Noahides. Proper Muslims tell me that the Qur’an is a divine book, so I accept their testimony.

Keeping in mind the words of Rabbi Soloveitchik, what another faith community means by the terms “prophet”, “messiah”, or even “holy book” is not directly comparable to Jewish teachings. As a Jew, I can never have complete understanding of how they are using these terms. I have no right to import or export these terms across faith boundaries, to diminish boundaries or differences, to mix customs or judge traditions, only to offer support and encouragement to proper believers from a distance.

Rabbi Soloveitchik states that diverse nations, though they cannot merge, do indeed need each other as they share common political, economic and social needs; dialogue in these areas takes place within the framework of the seven basic tenets of the Noahide Covenant. They are:

1. Justice: Commandments to set up courts of law and pursue social justice

2. Blasphemy: Prohibitions against cursing God.
3. Idolatry: Prohibitions against worshipping any being except God.
4. Sexual morality.
5. Prohibitions against murder.
6. Prohibitions against theft.
7. Prohibitions against eating the limb of a living animal.

Allah knows best. May our redemption, of all of us together, come speedily and in our lifetime. Amin.

I ask Allah to accept my work and make it purely for His sake. May He benefit others through it, make it a source of reward for me in this life and the next, and make it a help for me on the Day of Reckoning. May He guide me through it to what is right, and protect me from errors of thinking, bad intentions, mistaken or misunderstood quotations, and improper honor shown to scholars and sages.

Ali paraphrases the message of Imam Iskender Ali Mihr of Turkey, who calls for unity among Abrahamic faiths: There are seventy-two different groups of faith in the world, each group pretty much considers the other to be an enemy. To imagine that God treats human beings, his most beloved creatures, with unjust favoritism by giving them different religions, only one of them leading to heaven, is pure naiveté.

The order of Allah is very clear:

You must hold fast, all of you together, to the bond of God and be not divided into sects. (Qur'an, *Al-Imran* 3:103)

This idea does not contradict variety; the Qur'an recognizes a multiplicity of righteous paths:

Through this Book, God guides to paths of Islam, those who seek His Approval. He brings them out of darkness

into the light of His grace, and guides them to the straight path. (Qur'an, *Al Maedah* 5:16)

As for those who sincerely strive for Us, We surely guide them onto paths that lead to Us. God is with those who do Good. (Quran, *Al Inkabut*, 29:69)

The Imam declares that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are correct versions of the same religion. Unity comes not from all people conforming to one expression of an Abrahamic faith, but by upholding basic principals.

The Imam refers to these basics as the seven stages—*reminiscent of the seven Noahide laws!*

Now we can return to our commonalities.

Ramadan

Ben: May Allah shower His very special blessings during the blessed month of *Ramadan* to the entire Muslim *umma* by forgiving our sins. *Amin, ya Rabbal 'Alameen.*

O you who believe! Observing *As-Saum* [the fasting] is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become *Al-Muttaqun* [the pious]. [Observing *saum* (fasts)] for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number [should be made up] from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty [e.g. an old man], they have [a choice either to fast or] to feed a *miskin* [poor person] [for every day]. But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast, is better for you if only you know. The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion [between right and wrong].

So whoever of you sights [the crescent on the first night of] **the month** [of Ramadan, ie, is present at his home], **he must observe saum** [fasts] **that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number** [of days which one did not observe *saum* (fasts) must be made up] **from other days. Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you.** [He wants that you] **must complete the same number** [of days], **and that you must magnify Allah** [ie, to say *Takbir* (*Allahu Akbar*—Allah is the Most Great)] **for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him.** (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 2:183-185)

Ben emphasies one ayah:

O you who believe! Observing *As-Saum* [the fasting] **is prescribed for you *as it was prescribed for those before you,*** **that you may become *Al-Muttaqun*** [the pious].

Judaism has seven major fast days in the rabbinical calendar, and additional minor fast days. Two of these days, Yom Kippur and the ninth of *Av* are twenty-four hour fasts. There is also an optional custom, which is also in Islam (al-Tirmidhi, 747), to fast on Mondays and Thursdays from morning until nightfall.

The month of *Ramadan* corresponds to *Iyyar* in the Jewish calendar. After *Pesach*, the barley offering would be brought during the seven weeks from *Pesach* to *Shavuot*, this spans the month of *Iyyar*. Until the barley offering was offered, it was forbidden to eat wheat, barley, oat, spelt, and rye.

And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.
(Leviticus 23:14)

After the Temple was destroyed, the barley offering could no longer be offered. In a grain-based culture like Arabia, the Sadducean Jews observed this period as almost a total fast. They took the verse “until the selfsame day” to mean that the fast occurs during the day, instituting a seven-week fast from *Pesach* to *Shavuot*. This is why it is considered meritorious to fast for six more days for the first six days of *Shawwaal*. These six days complete the number of forty-nine days (seven weeks), which is equivalent to the time span from *Pesach* to *Shavuot*.

Perhaps it is timely to note that there is a custom in Judaism called *Sefirat HaOmer*. This is the time during which the barley offering (*omer* in Hebrew, *umar* in Arabic) would be brought to the Temple. It is a period of seven weeks between the holidays of *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. Until the barley offering was made it was forbidden to eat any grains. These seven weeks span:

- 14 days in Nisan
- 29 days in Iyyar
- 6 days in Sivan

Rabbinic Jews living in Babylon prohibited new grains but allowed other foods. For them this period became a time of mourning. Among other mourning customs that are observed, weddings and music are forbidden. Some Jews fasted during these days.

However, full mourning does not span the entire seven weeks, but for a total of thirty-three days. Different Jewish communities observe slightly different days within this seven-week period. Sephardic Jewish families begin the period of mourning during the month of Iyyar and continue for thirty-three days until the third of Sivan.¹

1. “Sephardic” literally means “Spanish”; Sephardic Jews are descended from those exiled from Spain in 1492 and settled in Holland, Northern Africa through the Middle East as far as India.

The fasting was widespread, as documented by the numerous decrees by the Byzantine Empire to forbid fasting during the seven weeks after Passover. The punishment was death. Christianized Jews who feared Byzantine punishment began to fast or mourn in the seven weeks before Passover. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, these weeks became known as Lent.

In Arabia, where the Jews were mainly of the Sadducean variety, the prohibition of **“ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears”** amounted to a complete daytime fast.

Allah commanded the Prophet to observe one month as a complete fast from dawn to dusk.

In the month of *Ramadan* the Qur'an was revealed, a guidance for mankind, plus clear proofs of the guidance, and the criterion of right and wrong. **And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, a number of other days. Allah desires for you ease; He desires not hardship for you; and that you should complete the period, and that you should magnify Allah for having guided you, and that perhaps you may be thankful.** (Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah* 2:185)

A friend asks: Will you be observing the fast of *Ramadan*, Ben Abrahamson?

Ben answers: I follow the *shari'a* of the Torah; however I recognize, encourage and support those who follow the *shari'a* of the Prophet (pbuh).

Our friend continues: Should not the *shari'a* of the last and final messenger be followed? It abrogates the previous *shari'a*.

And another: *Shari'a* of Torah has no value in this age, because it is the age of Muhammed. **“And We have sent you [Muhammed] not but as a**

mercy for the ‘*Alamin* [mankind, *jinn*s and all that exists]. (Qur’an, *Al-Anbiyā’* 21:107).

And another: When I read your words I think you must be a true Muslim, right?

Ben responds that he is a Muslim in the sense that he follows the *shar’ia* given to his *umma*:

When it is recited to them they say, “We believe in it; it is the truth from our Lord. We were already Muslims before it came.” (Qur’an, *Al-Qasas* 28:53)

Another commentator supports Ben:

... And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is One; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.” (Qur’an, *Al-Ankabut* 29:46)

Eid-ul-Fitr

Festival of the Purification after Completing the Fasting Month of Ramadan

Ben: Fasting during the six days of *Shawwal* after the obligatory fast of *Ramadan* is *Sunnah Mustahabbah* (commendable tradition), not *waajib* (obligatory). It is recommended for the Muslim to fast six days of *Shawwal*, and in this there is great virtue and an immense reward. Whoever fasts these six days will have recorded for him a reward as if he had fasted a whole year, as was reported in *ahadith* (traditions) from the Prophet (pbuh).

Abu Ayoub¹ reported that the Messenger of Allah (Muhammed pbuh) said: "Whoever fasts *Ramadan* and follows it with six days of *Shawal*, it will be as if he fasted for a lifetime."²

The Prophet (pbuh) explained this when he said: "Whoever fasts for six days after *Eid al-Fitr* has completed the year: whoever does a good deed (*hasanah*) will have ten *hasanah* like it." According to another report: "Allah has made for each *hasanah* ten like it, so a month is like fasting ten months, and fasting six days completes the year."³ It was also narrated by Ibn Khuzaymah⁴ with the wording: "Fasting for the month of *Ramadan* brings the reward of ten like it, and fasting for six days brings the reward of two months, and that is the fasting of the whole year."⁵

Ben ties this in with Jewish traditions: Six days into the month of *Sivan* the holiday of *Shavuot*⁶ is celebrated. Three days before the holiday (Hebrew: *sheloshet yemei hagbalah*), the mourning customs end. This is the time when the first fruits of the field would be offered in the Temple. Today it is celebrated by decorating the home and synagogue with leafy branches, fruits and nuts and preparing a milk meal.

Based on Exodus 23:19:

The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe [cook] a kid in his mother's milk.

1. Abu Ayoub was one of the *Sahaba*, or companions of Muhammed; those who were in close association with the Prophet.

2. Narrated by the Islamic scholars who compiled the *ahadith* collections in the ninth and tenth centuries CE: Muslim, Abu Dawood, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nisaa'i and Ibn Maajah.

3. Al-Nisaa'i and Ibn Maajah. See also *Sahih al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, 1/421.

4. Tenth-century Muslim scholar, Persia. Compiled a collection of *ahadith* called *Sahih ibn Khuzaymah*.

5. Quoted from islamhouse.com website

6. Shavuot means "weeks" and is the festival of first fruits.

Due to the proximity of the verses, a milk meal is served.

There are also seven weeks between *Lailat al Baraat* and the “six days of fasting” in *Shawwal*.

- 13 days in *Shabaan*
- 30 days in *Ramadan*
- 6 days in *Shawwal*

Ramadan is an entire month of fasting during daylight hours. Most Islamic jurists think that the intention “I will fast for this approaching month of *Ramadan*” is not legally binding enough, since the intention to fast must be formulated each night for the following day, ie, “I will fast for *Ramadan* during this day.” This daily declaration is also required in Judaism during the counting of *Omer* period.

In the first days of *Shawwal*, the festival of *Eid ul-Fitr* occurs. Linguistically, *Shawwal* is related to *Sivan*. This festival is marked in many countries with a festival meal of fruits, nuts, and milk.

Thus even today, in a roundabout way, some Muslims continue to celebrate *Shavuot*, according to Exodus 23:19.

Someone sent me this: “These are the final days of Ramadan with Eid Al Fitr approaching. If the month of Ramadan is a special time in the Islamic calendar, the last ten days are a particularly special time within Ramadan. Traditionally, the last ten days are especially connected with seeking forgiveness.” *This reminds us of the ten days of repentance between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in the Jewish calendar.*

Eid Saeed, Kul Aam Wa Antum Bi Khair

Ben: The Muslim festival *Eid Al-Fitr* is the most important festival in the Islamic calendar. The day does not mark any historical event or epi-

sode, but it provides the Muslim an occasion to offer thanks to Allah for having given him the strength and the will to observe fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

It is also an occasion for prayers when Muslims gather in large congregations, standing shoulder to shoulder, to demonstrate the equality and equity which is the inherent feature of Islamic society all over the world.

But the greatest significance of this day of rejoicing lies in the fact that on this day every Muslim is enjoined to give the needy food at the rate of the prescribed weight per every member of his household, including servants and guests who were sheltered under his roof the preceding evening.

Eid Al-Fitr then serves a three-fold purpose: It places upon every Muslim the obligation to remember Allah and offer Him thanks; it affords him an opportunity of spiritual stock-taking in that he can now ponder over the strength of his will or the weakness of his character, as the case may be, which manifested itself during the preceding month (*Ramadan*); it also is the day for the haves to share a portion of what they have with the have-nots.

A flow of appreciative comments follow: *Salaam*, very kind Rabbi, pray for us.

Muhammed: *Salaam*, thank you very much, Rabbi.

Maksoom Hussain: *Jazak'Allah hu khair*, brother, thank you.

Amani: *Kol sana wenta taayeb*, Rabbi Abrahamson!

Sadika Ali: Thank You. May Allah swt bless you abundantly, amin. Blessed *Eid al Fitr* to you too.

Susan: *Jazak'Allahu Khiron wa Shabbat Shalom*.

Etta: Yes praise be, and good things to you.

Eka: Rabbi Ben, *toda* (thank you), may Allah bless you.

Naushad: Thank you, Rabbi. May the Lord bless you in His infinite ways!

Micah David Naziri: I'm going to read your work. It looks very interesting. Basically, I just overlay the Jewish calendar with the Muslim holidays, with *Yom Kippur*/ *Yaum Ashura* as the focal point. There are numerous *ahadith*, particularly Shiah ones, that talk about the revelation starting before *Ramadan*, which argues that the fast referenced in the Qur'an ("wherein revelation occurred") was one that spanned the month of *Ramadan* but started before it, went through it and ended afterwards, ending three days before *Shavuot*, which is likely where the three days of *`Eid* came from.

Ben responds: The overlay that I propose maps *Ras as Sana* to *Rosh Hashana*, *Yaum Ashura* to *Yom Kippur*, *Lailat al Baraat* to Passover, *Ramadan* to *Sefirot HaOmer*, *Eid al Fitr* to *Shavuot*, *Roz e Arafat* to the *ninth of Av* and the three holy months of *Muharram*, *Rajab* and *Dhu al Qa'dah* to the (commutated) months of *aliyat regel* (Jewish pilgrimage) for *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, and *Shavuot*. The three days of *`Eid* are referred in Talmudic literature as the *Shloshet Yemei HaHagbala* (the three juxtaposed days), where the six days of fasting in *Shawwal* have been dispersed, and the end of the fast moved up.

He responds: Yes, this seems like we have drawn very similar conclusions.

A friend offers his holiday blessings: Shalom Ben, and blessed *Eid* to all Caliphist Muslims! I think it is not wise to dismiss the traditional

opinion of Islam as expressed in so many *hadith*, *sirah* and clarified by so many Islamic scholars on the calendar issue. Only Al-Biruni¹ makes a mistake. *Ramadan* used to always be in December during the Prophet's lifetime

Ben disagrees: It is noted by the commentator of *Mishkatul-Masabih* that Muhammed noticed the Sadducean Jews fasting on the tenth of *Muharram* (which parallels the Hebrew month of *Iyyar* and is not a Jewish fast) "in the second year, because in the first year the Prophet had arrived at Medina after 'Ashura, in *Rabi'ul-awwal*."²

The mistake that the commentator makes is by assuming that in the *ahadith* he quotes:

- 1) The Prophet (pbuh) arrived on the 10th of *Rabi al-awal*.
- 2) The Prophet (pbuh) fasted on the 10th of Muharram, referring to the strictly lunar calendar that was mandated in the Qur'an in 631 CE.

He concludes that traditions that Muhammed's arrival took place on the tenth of *Muharram* are not correct and refer to the Prophet's fast almost a year later in 623 CE.

However, by understanding that the first *hadith* refers to the strictly lunar calendar and the second *hadith* refers to the lunar-solar calendar, then the two days match up. This can be confirmed mathematically by reverse calculation, noting that the tenth of *Rabi al-awal*, according to the strictly lunar calendar, fell on Yom Kippur in 622 CE in the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*, and not in *Iyyar*.

Our friend: Interesting ideas, but what about the writings of scholars Ibn

1. Al Biruni was a tenth-century Muslim scholar in Persia; scientist, linguist and historian, known as *al-Ustdadh*, "the Master" for his knowledge of Indian cultures.

2. *Mishkat al-Masabih*; Delhi ed.; 1307 A.H.; p.172; Collection of *ahadith*—published in fourteenth century by Khatib al Tabrizi.

Sa'd¹, Abu Ja'far² and Ibn Hisham?³ All accounts agree that the strictly lunar calendar of the Sadducean Jews was not imposed upon the Muslims until they made Umar⁴ their "Messiah" more than six years after the passing of the Prophet Muhammed.

Ben: Intercalation was prohibited in the Qur'an, *sura* 9:36–37, long before Umar. Most scholars date that to 631 CE. But it seems it was not universally observed until Umar's decree in 638 CE. So concerning years before 638 CE there is significant confusion as to which calendar is being referred to in the *ahadith*. All of these scholars are writing two centuries after the events.

Our friend. We can disagree but still be on the "same side": I think I will go with the majority Islamic view on this one, brother. Of course I am biased because the *Sabi* calendar from who the *Karaimi* laymen descend (not to be confused with Karaite Jews) was fixed with twelve stellar months of the zodiac for centuries.

Hanuka in Malaysia



1. Ninth-century Islamic biographer, Iraq

2. Tenth-century astronomer and mathematician, Persia

3. Ninth century Islamic scholar, Egypt, edited the biography of Muhammed.

4. Umar was a member of the *sahaba* and Caliph of the growing Islamic empire from 634–644 CE. Allowed Jews to reenter Jerusalem following the Byzantine ban.

Asher Adiv took the above picture and shares: Amazing, a festival like Hanuka celebrated by Malaysian Muslims during the last ten days of *Ramadan* to remind the coming of Holy Night, *Lailat al Qadr*. They call it “*Malam 7 Likur*” (Seventh Night). This occurs in Malaysia, I do not know about Muslims in other countries

Someone proposes: It’s like the Jewish *Lag Ba Omer* (the thirty-third day of the *Omer* counting after Passover, bonfires are lit, music is permissible).

Ben: This reminds me of the Egyptian custom of *Fawanees* (*Ramadan* lanterns). *Fanous* is a Greek word, and means “light” or “lantern”, and was historically used in reference to “light of the world” and as a symbol of hope as “light in darkness”.

One story has it that the sixth Fatimid Caliph Al Hakim Bi-Amr Illah wanted to light the streets of Cairo during *Ramadan* nights, so he ordered all the sheikhs of mosques to hang *fawanees* that could be illuminated by candles. As a result, the *fanous* became a custom that has never been abandoned.

Another story states that, during the time of this Caliph, women were not allowed to leave their houses except during *Ramadan*, but even then they had to be preceded by a little boy carrying a copper *fanous*. The *fanous* was then used as a tool to announce the arrival of a woman to caution men in the street to move away. As these practices softened, women were allowed to go out as they wished but people liked the idea of the fanous, and so it became a tradition that little children carry them in the streets every day to play.

A third story even relates that the lanterns came from a different source. Some believe that the use of lanterns was originally a Coptic Christian tradition celebrated during Christmas time (Coptic version), when people used to celebrate with colorful candles. This story explains that, since many Christians converted to Islam, they

took this tradition with them in the form of lanterns made of tin and lit with candles.

It is perhaps noteworthy that *Ramadan* corresponds to *Sefirat Ha Omer*. So *Lailat al Qadr* corresponds to *Lag Ba Omer*.

A commentator: Interesting!

Ben: Just to explore another possible connection, Caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah was a major proponent of Ismailism (a form of Shia Islam). Many Ismailis emigrated from India in 1920 under the guidance of Imam Sultan Muhammed Shah and were settled in the country now known as Malaysia, perhaps bringing the tradition of Ramadan Lanterns with them.

Other sources suggest the present *Ramadan fanous* tradition began during the rule of Saladin (1174-1193 CE), though the most widespread account of the lantern's origins places it a little earlier, when Fatimid leader Al-Muizz li-Din Allah entered Egypt on 15 *Ramadan* of 358 AH (969 CE), and Egyptians greeted him with lamps and torches.

There is yet another version of the origins of the lantern, attributing its development to the Fatimid caliphate. The story goes that the caliph would check for the moon marking the beginning of the holy month accompanied by children who lit his way with lanterns while singing songs.

Asher Adiv: There was a Jew who converted to Islam called Abdul Malik Israel who came to Indonesia most probably from Spain fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. I'm not sure if he was the only Jew or he came with a few others, who intermarried with some Hashemites who were also Javanese royals. There was even a sultanate known as Sultan Bani Israel in Batavia named after him I think. Some of the Javanese royals migrated to Malay land fleeing from the Dutch colonizers due to a rebellion against them. Then, there was a wave

of Jews coming from Europe in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The famous *meshulach* (fundraiser), Jacob Saphir, also came to visit Jews in this region.

*A discussion branches off as to the impact of holidays
which commemorate tragedies.*

A friend offers: The Muslim community has mixed feelings towards the New Year, due to the tragedy of *Karbala*; the Arab tribes of Mecca had grown fearful of the political ambitions of Muhammed's family and massacred them. An army of 30,000 clashed with the members of a caravan of less than one hundred men from the Prophet's family.

The Shia Muslims, who form about a quarter of the Middle Eastern Muslim population, go into a forty-day mourning period with the beginning of the New Year. Some Sunni Muslims also reflect with sadness on the events for the first ten days of the year, although many fault the Prophet's family for creating disunity by refusing to accept the authority of the Caliph.

Dan: From a purely mental-health standpoint, is it good to constantly be reminded of a historical tragedy? In the same vein, some Jews focus solely on the tragedy of the Holocaust and forget about the freedom struggle in Exodus, for example. So, though historical tragedies should be remembered, holding onto this sense of victimization can lead to an authoritarian mentality that leads one to victimize others as one was victimized oneself ... kind of the opposite of the "Golden Rule".

A friend offers that remembering the Karbala tragedy can inspire Muslims to have compassion for powerless minorities, as even the Prophet's own family met this tragic end. It can also help Muslims see the shortcomings of their own leaders.

Dan: In general, I don't feel that maintaining a psychology of victimization is wise. If I abuse others the way that I have been abused in the past, this is a type of spiritual blindness. So, I think it would be better for all the People of the Book to come together to break the chains of violence than to repeat the tragedies of the past by dwelling on them.

The Hajj



A friend contributes: Another rite which has helped so many to eradicate racism from their lives is the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, which is obligatory upon every Muslim at least once in a lifetime. This annual pilgrimage, or *Hajj* as it is called in Arabic, is one of the five pillars, one of the five fundamental religious duties to be performed by Muslims.

The *Hajj* is the prime example of the multi-racial aspect of Islam: Muslims of all races gather with one common purpose—to worship Allah. This is a compulsory act which should be done by all those Muslims with the strength and ability to do it.

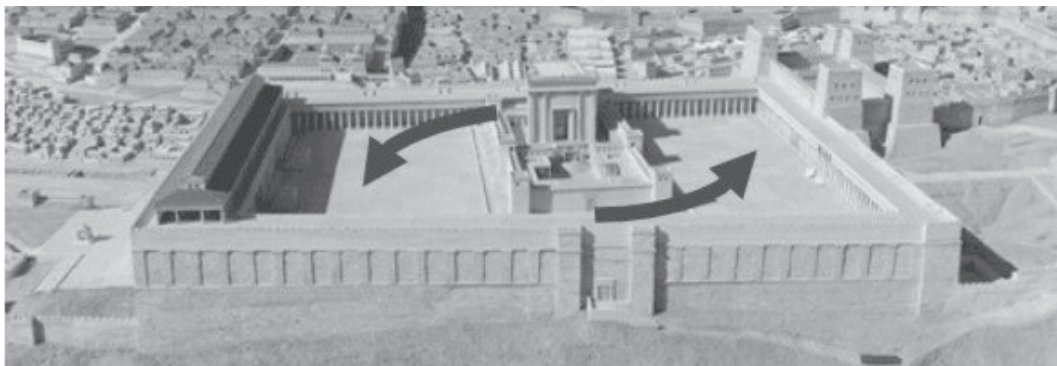
In the *Hajj* pilgrimage, you will see a multitude of men, women and children, close to two million, from every corner of the world, black and brown of complexion, yellow and white, Arabs and Iranians, Turks and Malays, Chinese and Africans, black and white Americans, blond and blue-eyed Europeans. Whether black or brown, yellow or white, rich or poor, young or old, every male that our eye beholds is dressed alike, wearing two white seamless sheets of simple material, thus eliminating completely all marks and signs of distinction of dress between the African and American, the Asian, Australian and

European, the mighty and wealthy and the poor and lowly. Here they have come, brother unto brother, sister unto sister, bearing witness to the brotherhood of mankind, to the equality of all human beings before their Creator, for it is to worship Him and to extol His glory that has brought them here.

The Hajj and the Ninth of Av

Ben: There were three holy months in the Jewish calendar when war was prohibited and uninhibited travel to Jerusalem was guaranteed. This was during the months of *Hag* (Hebrew) or *Hajj* (Arabic) or the pilgrimages for *Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*. After the temple was destroyed, a fourth pilgrimage was instituted, the ninth of *Av*, when the Jews would travel to Jerusalem to mourn on the Mount of Olives.

If the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashana*, on the first of Tishrei corresponds to *Ras as Sana* on the first of *Muharram*, then the ninth of *Av* corresponds to the ninth of *Dhu al Hijjah* (the Day of Arafat). In this way the *Hajj* and the ninth of *Av* share a common source.



This is supported by epigraphic¹ findings, such as the inscription published by Altheim and Stiehl, found in Mada'in Saleh, also called *Al-Hijr*, in the Al-Ula sector of the Al Madinah Region of Saudi Arabia. The inscription was engraved on a tomb erected by Adnun (Anan or Onias) bar Honi bar Shemuel *Rosh Higura* (Head of the Pilgrimage) for his wife Mina who died in the month of *Av* in 356 CE.

Tosefos² records that there was a pilgrimage on the ninth of *Av* from many places, and specifically mentions pilgrims coming from Arabia.

In the year 541 CE, Flavius Belisarius, commander of the Roman Byzantine armies, summoned a council of war against Persia. Two Roman officers in command of Syrian garrisons refused to join Belisarius' army to Nisibis. They said that their absence would leave Syria and Phoenicia exposed to the attacks of the Arabs. Belisarius argued that this would not be a problem because the summer solstice was at hand, when the Arabs went on pilgrimage and would not resort to arms, so there was no cause for apprehension. The summer solstice June 21, 541 CE would have fallen on the day after the ninth of *Jumaada al-Thaani* according to the strictly lunar calendar now in Islamic use, six months too early for the *Hajj* pilgrimage. This means that intercalation (inserting a leap month) must have been in use in the years before the Prophet. If we assume the intercalation currently used by the Jewish calendar, the solstice would have fallen on the ninth of *Dhu al-Hijja*—the correct date—which also happened to be the ninth of *Av*.

There is another indication that both holidays share the same source; the ninth of *Dhu al-Hijjah*, just like the ninth of *Av*, is a fast day.

On the ninth day, the pilgrims leave Mina for Mt. Arafat where they sit in contemplative vigil and pray and recite the Qur'an, near a hill overlooking Mecca. This hill is called *Jabal Al Rahmah* (The Hill of Forgiveness, Mount Arafat). This practice is known as *Wuquf* and is

1. Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions and writings

2. Commentaries on the Talmud, compiled in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

considered the highlight of the *Hajj*.



Roman soldiers from the tenth legion encamped on the Temple Mount after its destruction.

Jews made pilgrimages to the Mount of Olives because it was eighty meters higher than the Temple Mount and offered a panoramic view of the Temple site. It became a traditional place for lamenting the Temple's destruction on the ninth of *Av*.

Eka: It's wonderful, *sub'Anallah* (glory be to Allah), the same tradition of Abraham.

The calendar is intricately tied to festivals. Some friends ask about the calendar.

Ben: The lunar-solar calendar is commanded by the Torah, because Pass-over, the first month, must always be in the spring. This means approximately every three years a month must be added. However, scholars Al-Tabari and Ibn Waqidi¹ say that this privilege was abused by the leadership in Arabia. They would add or exchange

1.Eighth-century Muslim scholar, Arabia. Biographer of the prophet Muhammed.

months whenever convenient for them, to make holidays and holy months fall when best for their warfare. The Prophet (pbuh) declared that manipulating holidays is wrong and it was thus abolished.

People like intellectually honest unity.

A friend: *Mash'Allah*. Again thanks to Mr. Abrahamson we found another very interesting fact. May Allah bless you sir.

A friend asks: Does Judaism have a special kind of worship to commemorate Abraham's test to sacrifice his son?

Ben: According to the *shari'a* of Torah, the sacrifice of Abraham (pbuh) is commemorated mostly on *Rosh Hashana* (*Ras as-Sana*), because of the connection between the ram offered in place of Abraham's son Isaac and the ram's horn blown to announce the beginning of the New Year (also symbolizing Gabriel's trumpet blown before the Day of Judgment).

Our friend responds in an affectionate vein: Judaism is from Bani Israel, Islam from Bani Ishmael.

Eid Al Adha

Ben: *Eid Al Adha* is on the tenth of *Dhu al-Hijjah* and is a three-day holiday. It commemorates Abraham's test to sacrifice his son Ishmael. It is an *eid* (solemn festival) of sacrifice and commitment to Allah's commandments. My *dua* to Allah swt is that He bless all of us in all circles of life, and help all amongst us who are helpless, worried, especially the believers—my co-religionists—who are in great need in Syria and Egypt, waiting for His *rahmat* (mercy). Amin. *Eid Mubarak* (blessed *eid*) to all.

A friend: Amin—wish you the same!

Ben deftly mentions Abraham's test, with no qualms about the seeming contradiction of whether the son so tested was Isaac or Ishmael:

I do not have a problem with the different versions of the story of Abraham's relationship with Isaac and Ishmael because rabbinic Judaism strongly disagrees with the view that there is only one exclusive covenant. It is clear from the Torah that both Isaac and Ishmael were given covenants from Avraham. According to the Torah, the commemoration of Allah's covenant with Isaac at Mount Moriah in Jerusalem is on *Rosh Hashana*. Allah's covenant with Ishmael occurred at the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:20-27). If you look at the correspondence on the calendar, you will see that *Shavuot* corresponds to *Eid Al Adha*. There is a tradition that whenever two things seem to contradict, you wait for a third piece of information which reconciles the two.

"Two passages that contradict each other are resolved by a third passage that reconciles between them." (*Baraisa* of Rabbi Ishmael: The Thirteen Rules by which the Torah is expounded, listed in the Jewish prayer book)

So strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth about the matters in which you are different. (Qur'an, Al-Maedah 5:48).

A friend contributes: Imam al-Riza¹ said, "At the twenty-fifth night of the month *Dhu'l-Qa'dah*, Prophet Abraham was born, Prophet Jesus the son of Mary was born, and the earth was spread on the water where the Holy *Ka'aba* is now situated. Hence, if one observes fasting on this day, he will be given the reward of observing fasting sixty months."

1. Ninth century Imam, descendant of Muhammed and one of the Twelve Imams; successors of Muhammed, the Twelve Imams are descended from Muhammed through his daughter Fatima, from whom the *Mahdi* is said to descend.

According to another narration, Imam al-Riza added, “Verily, on this day, *al-Qa’im* (*Imam al-Mahdi*, Messiah) will appear.” May it be soon!

9. Jewish Sects in Last Days of Second Temple Commonwealth



Herod's Temple, the center of the Judeo-Arab commonwealth. The gate of Nicanor is seen (the small gate in the center).

A friend asks: Can you please narrate the history of divisions between the sects in Judah and Palestine during the Second Temple period? The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes. What were the scriptural bases for the ideology of each and which one was nearest to the ideology of the Levites and Cohanim, those allowed in the inner sanctuary of the holy of holies in the First Temple period?

Ben: Our major source for the Second Temple period is Josephus and the New Testament, although various Greek historians as well as the books of Maccabees augment our understanding. The major sects were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, as well as Herodians, Zealots, and Sicarii. They have their roots in the four Persian Jewish governors that were sent to rule the area in the fifth century BCE that had once been under Solomon's (pbuh) kingdom before the Babylonian exile. The four governors were: Zerubabel, Sanballat, Tobiah and Gashmu.

- 1) Zerubabel ruled in Judea. His followers eventually split into the Pharisaic and Sadducean sects. He was responsible for religious worship for the entire Trans-Euphrates. All the other governors had to pay taxes to him to support Temple worship in Jerusalem. He required the nobles to divorce their foreign wives who kept idolatrous and polytheistic practices.
- 2) Sanballat ruled the coast and was in charge of military colonies from Egypt and Arabia to what is now Lebanon. His people, the remnants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, mixed with local residents and sought to have their own independent base of worship. After Alexander the Great, this was set up in Mount Gezirim. While originally allied with Egypt, they prospered under

the Seleucids¹, populated Asia Minor and heavily intermarried with the local population. Their religious leadership was not involved in the general population. His followers were known as Shomronim, or Samaritans.

- 3) Tobiah ruled the Transjordan and was in charge of collecting taxes and tribute for the Persian king. Precursor of Sadducees and Essenes, his base was in Iraq Al-Amir in Jordan. His immediate family sought to intermarry with the line of prophets, including Zechariah. He used a system of doves for speedy communication between Jerusalem, Jordan and Persia. His people were the remnants of the tribes of Joseph mixed with local natives. The religion that developed under him was based on what they thought were the characteristics of Joseph: the use of doves as a means to obtain “word from heaven”, foretelling the future, reading stars, and embracing groups known as the “children of the prophets”. They developed a monastic movement, living in the desert and caves, seeking prophetic revelations. His followers were known as the *Notzrim*, one group of this was the Essenes.
- 4) Gashmu ruled the Arabian Peninsula and was in charge of managing its trade routes. Claiming to be a descendant of the Queen of Sheba, he followed a form of Abrahamic monotheism, and contributed to the support of the Temple in Jerusalem. His followers were known as Sabeans (TSaBiuN) which some derive linguistically from the word “*ger ToSaBiN*” or *ger toshav* (resident).

1. The Seleucid Empire was the Near-Eastern division of Alexander the Great’s empire following his demise, favored hellenism, fourth-to-first century BCE

Three of the four groups above are mentioned by Allah swt in the Qur'an:

Those who believe, those who are Jews, and the Nasaara [Christians] and Sabeans [righteous gentiles], all who believe in Allah swt and the Last Day and act rightly, will have their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow. (Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah* 2:62)

The Samaritan religion was limited in scope, so the Tobiad religion began to spread both north into Damascus and south into Egypt and Arabia. Supported by the Ptolemaic and then the Seleucid monarchies, their religion was a mix of Judaism and Hellenism. This had great success with the Ptolemies in Egypt, who contributed to the entire rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, and a great missionary effort ensued. Eventually the Tobiads set their sites on control of Jerusalem itself, as they felt had been prophesied to their forefather in Zechariah 6:12. Through a marriage of a daughter to the grandson of Zaddokite priest Shimon HaTzadik, they introduced Shimon, Onias and lastly Alcimus into the High Priesthood. With this new-found power they introduced Greek culture and traditions. This, in turn, provoked rebellion by the traditionalists and nationalists. The Jewish Hellenists later became known as Sadducees.

Eventually rebellion turned into open warfare when the Syrian forces tried to raid the Temple treasury. Syrian forces invaded, invoking martial law and prohibiting Jewish customs; this led to the wars of the Maccabees and the ousting of the Zaddokite, Oniad priesthood. Onias IV fled to Egypt and continued his missionizing movement there. This is based on the Prophecy in Isaiah 19:19, which says that there would be an altar in Egypt (Heliopolis) and a monument on the border of Egypt (Mecca). These altars were run by Zaddokite/Oniad priests, but the people who brought offerings were non-Jewish monotheistic believers.

The anti-Greek reaction, supported by the new rising power of Rome, led to the formation of the Pharisaic party, which claimed to represent the true chain of tradition that had returned with the Babylonian exiles from Persia. This party participated in the wars against the Syrians. But when the Hasmonean rulers themselves began to adopt Hellenism, confrontation erupted. One confrontation with Hasmonean king Alexander Yannai resulted in the crucifixion of 1,000 Pharisaic leaders. Pharisaism ceased to be a political party and became a popular conservative movement.

In the meantime, the Tobiads had split into two parties: those who supported the Ptolemaic (Egyptian) monarchy and those who supported the Seleucid (Syrian) monarchy. The Ptolemaic Tobiads lost power and withdrew to the deserts and caves. Their religion thrived and John the Baptist, as well as the Essenes, were probably members of this group. They resented the Hasmoneans who allied with wealthy Hellenist Sadducees. They waited for the return of the Teacher of Righteousness (Onias IV), the restoration of the Zaddokite priesthood, and a Messiah who was a descendant of Joseph.

The Hasmoneans, with the sanction of Rome, embarked on a period of expansionism. They tried to rebuild the entire Solomonic Empire of the Trans-Euphrates. They met with limited success, but the Hasmonean Alexander Yannai conquered the Edomites and what was left of the Ammonites and Moabites. He made them his “slaves” and using a Jewish legal technique he freed them, forcing them to become Jewish converts. This was opposed by the Pharisees and was one of the factors leading to the confrontation mentioned above. What this did mean was that Judeans and Idumeans (Edomites) were now mixing freely in Jerusalem.

In the meantime, one branch of the Ptolemaic Tobiads managed to regain power. Antipater had been educated in Rome and became an advisor to the Hasmonean king Hyrcanus. When civil war broke out between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, Rome intervened and Pompey restored Hyrcanus as a puppet king but gave the Edomite Antipater

the real authority. Eventually his son Herod came to power, and he embarked on a campaign to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 6:12. Herod gloriously reconstructed the Temple. He waged war in Arabia, trying to bring it under his control, and he negotiated with Rome for control of greater lands to the north and east of Israel. Herod's Judeo-Arab kingdom saw the Temple in Jerusalem become the center of culture and religion for the whole area. Those who saw him as messiah were called the Herodians.

Meanwhile the Ptolemaic Tobiads embarked on a revivalist movement, and a rejection of the Roman influence imported by the Herodians. This in turn sparked corresponding revivalist movement among the Pharisees. While there were differences in theology between the *Notzri* philosophy of the Ptolemaic Tobiads and the "traditions of the fathers" of the Pharisees, they generally were sympathetic to each other. Herod being rejected as the Messiah, the scene was set for the appearance of the Messiah, son of David.

The beliefs of each group varied:

- 1) The Pharisees were at various times a political party, a social movement, and a school of thought beginning under the Hasmonean dynasty (140–37 BC) in the wake of the Maccabean Revolt, as a rejection of Greek polytheistic influence. The Pharisees believed that God gave Moses both the commandments as well as the knowledge of how they should be applied. This oral tradition was codified and written down from about 200–600 CE in what is known as the Talmud, in both the land of Israel and Persia. As reported in the Christian book of Acts, the Pharisees were generally sympathetic to the *Notzrim*. The Pharisees also maintained that an afterlife existed and that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous in the world to come. They also believed in a messiah who would herald an era of world peace.

- 2) The Sadducees were elitists who wanted to maintain the priestly caste, but they were also liberal in their willingness to incorporate Hellenism into their lives, something the Pharisees opposed. The Sadducees rejected the idea of the Oral Law and insisted on a literal interpretation of the Written Law; consequently, they did not believe in an afterlife, since it is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. The main focus of Sadducean life was rituals associated with the Temple. After the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, the Pharisaic leadership gradually relocated to Persia. The Sadducean leadership gradually relocated to Egypt and Arabia. None of the writings of the Sadducees survived, so the little we know about them comes from their Pharisaic opponents. In the Gospel account of the crucifixion, the book of Acts, and Josephus, the Sadducees are portrayed as the most zealous persecutors of the Christians. Eventually almost the entire Sadducee population of Asia Minor converted to Christianity. A descendant of Tobiah in Edessa (Sanliurfa Turkey), is credited for allowing the Apostle Thaddäus to preach to Asia Minor.
- 3) The Essenes are proposed to be an offshoot of the Ptolemaic Tobiads, called the *Notzrim*. It has been suggested that the reason that the Essenes are never mentioned by name in the New Testament is because the proto-Christians were “Essenes”. In this sense the terms *Notzri* and perhaps even Nazereth would not just indicate a town but would indicate a religious group associated with Tobiads, tax collecting, doves, monasticism, and spending time in the desert to be “led by the spirit”.
- 4) The Zealots and Sicarii. When the Herodians (Idumeans) and other Hellenists faced conquest from Rome, they

encouraged insurrection. After the utter defeat in the First Revolt, which also resulted in the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Gamliel suppressed any further revolt. After his passing, Rabbi Akiva, a Pharisee of Edomite lineage, gave his approval to Bar Kokhba to revolt against Rome. Eventually the Pharisees saw the hopelessness of the situation and began to sue for peace. Bar Kokhba's troops killed Rabbi Eleazar and Pharisaic support for the revolt was withdrawn. The Romans slaughtered most of Bar Kokhba's troops in Beitar, although a few held out in Masada. The survivors of the zealots fled, some to Egypt and many to Arabia. The Romans closed Onias' Temple in Egypt to prevent it from becoming a rallying point for further revolt. The Romans made a foray into Arabia, perhaps to destroy Onias's Temple in Mecca, but they were thwarted by the desert.

- 5a) The Herodians were also an offshoot of the Ptolemaic Tobiads; a minority of academics have suggested that Paul was a Herodian. Some actual descendants of Herod were given minor positions by Rome outside of Israel. Aristobulus fled to Jordan and set up a kingdom there, but Rome destroyed that city. He and his family fled south to Arabia, eventually to intermarry with the royal family of Himyar, revitalizing a dying dynasty, and creating the first of the Tubba' kings who would play a role for the next 400 years in Arabia.
- 5b) A minor descendant of the Tobiads, an officer in the Roman army, Vaballathus (Wahballath) was made ruler of a Syrian outpost called Palmyra. His family received the Roman citizenship under an emperor of the Severan dynasty. Eventually his grandson Lucius Septimius Odaenathus took advantage of chaotic conditions in

Rome to claim to be Emperor of an Eastern Roman Empire. He did not forget his Tobiad roots and was referred to in the Talmud as “Ben Netzer (*Notzri*)”. When Palmyra was crushed by Rome in 270 CE, the refugees fled to Yathrib. There they were welcomed by the Himyarite king Shamir Yuhar’esh II Tubba’, 275 CE. These polytheistic Arab-Jews and Yemenites would later be referred to as the Aus and Kazraj.

5c) Lastly, we read of the Jewish prince “Tobiyah” described by Moses of Khorene who is said to have introduced Thaddæus, and thus Christianity, to Edessa (in modern day Şanlıurfa, Turkey). This Tobiyah is said to be the ancestor of the Armenian-Georgian royal family of Bagratuni and by some accounts the basis of their claim to “descent from Kings of Israel”

A friend: Interesting. I shall have to look and see if you have other “notes.”

Sa’id: Shalom, Rabbi, thanks for your article, very interesting indeed, and also thanks for accepting me as a friend, be blessed.

Ben: *Wa aleikum salaam wa rahmatullah.*

Ali: *Was salamu ala manit taba al huda.*

Muhammed R: *Jazak’Allah h’airan.*

Faried: May Allah reward you dear Rabbi. So many questions, only after I have tried to answer for myself. Thank you so much!

20. Cultural Diplomacy

Track III Diplomacy



The Road Map to a Culture of Peace in the Middle East

Ben Abrahamson: Track III diplomacy involves dialogue along cultural and religious lines to foster understanding between various peoples in areas of conflict. I have been involved in some of the meetings that have brought leaders of different faiths together in Istanbul, Ankara,

Paris, Jerusalem, Jordan, Oxford and Yale Universities, the House of Parliament and the United Nations, as well as in areas of conflict such as Hebron, in the Holy Land.

Dr. Emil Constantinescu, president of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, Berlin, defines cultural diplomacy as “a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests; cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society.”

He maintains that such diplomacy has existed as a practice for centuries. See more at: <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org>

Religious Affairs Chairman for Foreign Relations of Turkey, Mehmet Gormez, has stated “... the impact of religion in international relations is becoming increasingly more valuable, and we will see it peak in the future.”

As Dr. Mordechai Kedar, lecturer in Arabic at Bar-Ilan University, noted, “... traditional Islamic people find it easier to talk to traditional Jews who share the same cultural world, and perhaps it is time that the (Israel) Foreign Ministry also understand this... . It is important for Israel to be represented in a way that will make it easier for our traditional neighbors to accept us, and that the state of Israel is not entirely secular and liberal.”

Former Israeli Ambassador Alan Baker noted: “It requires ongoing spiritual and practical dialogue between religious leaders, clergy, and lay leaders in order to establish common interests and principals.”

Understanding the Erastian Roots of Western Institutions



From The Permanent Forum for Global Ethics and The Culture Of Peace—Track III Cultural Diplomacy; United Nations. Conf. Room 1. Main Bldg., June 24, 2013; “Implementation of The Levant Initiative: The Academic Dimension”

Ben Abrahamson: What is the role of religion in peacemaking? What is the role of religion in contemporary political theory?

In the UN declaration “Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace” (A/53/L.79) 53/243 there is a definition of what is a culture of peace.

Article 1

A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions, and modes of behaviour and ways of life based on: (a) Respect

for life ... (b) respect for sovereignty ... (c) respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (d) commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts (e) meet the developmental and environmental needs ... (f) respect right to development ... (g) respect for equal rights and opportunities for women and men; (h) Respect freedom of expression ... (i) principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue, and understanding

In this declaration, religion is not explicitly mentioned. It is only mentioned once, with regard to discrimination against the individual:

Recognizing the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination and intolerance, including those based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status,

What is not explicitly stated is the “respect for the religious community”, ie the rights of religious people when they combine with each other, and respect for the hierarchy of indigenous religious leadership.

In the UN declaration, “Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance” (A/59/503/Add.2) 59/199, it recalls that

... all States have pledged themselves, under the Charter of the United Nations, to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, ...

Also in this declaration, religion is only recognized as the right of the individual and not the community.

In the UN Declaration, “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001–2010)” 53/25 (A/53/L.25), the governments of member states:

... are invited *to take the necessary steps* to ensure that the practice of peace and nonviolence is taught at all levels in their respective societies, including in educational institutions;

Here the governments of member states are invited to take the role of moral guides.

This is even more explicit in the UN Declaration on “Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance” (A/59/503/Add.2) 59/199.

... restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion is permitted if necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Here we have the government restricting religion on moral grounds. What moral grounds are there if not based in some kind of religious thought?

Eric Nelson is a Professor of Government at Harvard University. His research focuses on the history of political thought in early-modern Europe and America, and on the implications of that history for debates in contemporary political theory.

In his essay, “The Religious Origins Of Religious Tolerance—

Analysis", he notes the popular way of thinking about the Western intellectual history:

The West moved from an indefensibly theological frame of mind to a confusedly metaphysical one, and then finally to a respectably rational one. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, we are told, that a titanic shift occurred in the way that European Christians thought about moral and political philosophy. In this period, under the influence of a specific set of circumstances and events—the rise of the new science, philosophical skepticism, and the carnage of the religious wars—Western theorists turned away from religion, regarding its claims as lacking in authority, and also as being fundamentally dangerous and inimical to peace.

The result of all of this was the "Great Separation", a decision made by Western theorists to sequester religion from moral and political theory and to allow those disciplines to get on according to their own rational criteria without any recourse to religious claims. This is an old and established view.

However, Professor Nelson asserts that many, if not most, of our most fundamental freedoms, commitments to human rights, and political institutions emerged instead out of a deeply theologized context and were explicitly justified in the first instance on the basis of religious claims. Committed early modern Christians found themselves arguing in favor of fundamental freedoms, rights and institutions, and doing so on religious grounds. Such leaders included Abraham Lincoln, the founding fathers of the United States of America, 16th–17th century political theorists such as Henry Ainsworth, Erastus, Gomerus, Armenius, Hugo Grotius, John Lightfoot, Thomas Coleman, John Seldon, and in recent history, Martin Luther King Jr.

The UN should be no exception, as in its founding charter, also

emblazoned on the statue outside, quotes the verse in Isaiah, “men shall beat their swords into plowshares ...”

16th-18th century Christian Hebraists explored rabbinic texts in search of creating the ideal commonwealth. The Talmud, Midrash and medieval codes of Jewish law were consulted. As Henry Ainsworth said (1611):

One must consult “Hebrew doctors of the ancients sort, and some later of best esteeme for learning” if one wishes “to give light to the ordinances of Moses touching the externall practice of them in the commonwealth of Israel, which the Rabbines did record, and without whose helpe, many of those legall rites (especially in Exodus and Leviticus) will not easily be understood.”

Ainsworth and other Hebraists proceeded under the fervent belief that the proper form of government was a theocracy, in which all would be guided by scripture in an effort to approximate the ideal heavenly standard on earth—however, at the same time, God himself restricted the enforcement of religious law to those laws of civic consequence as determined by the civil magistrate. Although there was no separation of religion and state, the only laws that were enforceable were those that if broken would threaten civic order. Thus, what sorts of religious practice and observance have important civic consequences? Not many. These Hebraists concurred with the rabbinic view that there are virtually no “thought crimes”, ie, thoughts are not punishable by earthly courts.

Thomas Lüber (Erastus) (1568) passionately supported theocracy based on the ancient Hebrew commonwealth. Note here how such a theocracy gives ample room for religious tolerance: “Although the Israelites could, of course, punish those who had committed civil offences, there was no spiritual sanction for errors in doctrine or belief.” and “While ‘externall Religion’ falls within the purview of the mag-

istrate (because it can affect civil peace and order), internal religion does not. For “who judgeth the heart but God?”

Concerning tolerance for the minority, Grotius stated: “Within the Hebrew republic itself, there always lived some strangers [not bound by Mosaic religious law], known as *hasidei ummot*, or Righteous among the Gentiles.

“These people were not bound by the Mosaic law, yet were allowed to live amongst the Israelites unmolested, provided that they observed a minimal standard of general morality.” This he argued, was the basis of civil, i.e. natural law. Grotius did advocate for regulation of blasphemy if the blasphemy would interfere with civil order, i.e. questioning God’s omnipotence. Later English Hebraists disagreed with Grotius on this point, and relegated such “thought crimes” to the peculiar needs of the Hebrew commonwealth and not applicable to English society. Here we have an opening for understanding that given the variety of human culture, some countries will tend towards reinforcement of beliefs and some will not.

John Selden, John Lightfoot, James Harrington, and Thomas Coleman were seventeenth century English political theorists, heavily influenced by Erastus and the model of the Hebrew commonwealth. Seldon’s “*De jure naturali et gentium iuxta disciplinam Ebraeorum*” (1640) was published three years before the convening of the Westminster Assembly, and contained Seldon’s derivation of a universal morality from the “*Praecepta Noachidarum*”, the Noachide laws.

While the civil magistrate was limited to enforcing infractions of laws regarded as criminal, employed to disturb the peace, or against universal morality as expressed in the Noachide laws, the Parliament was free to legislate on the full range of civil and religious law.

Selden owes all of this to rabbinic literature—specifically, to the canonical account in Talmudic tractate *Sanhedrin* 56a-b, and its elaboration in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*.

God's Embrace of Toleration

While the national religion was to be the main focus of Parliament, minority religions were guaranteed religious freedom based on the *praecepta Noachidarum*.

The existence of the category of sojourners (*proselyti domicilii*) who were allowed to live within the Hebrew republic even though they did not acknowledge or abide by the full Mosaic law, and were not subject to punishment for refusing to participate in public worship—proves, for Selden, that Israelite theocracy practiced toleration.

In the Qur'an this message is reinforced:

To each among you have we prescribed a Shar'ia [law] and Minhaj [custom]. If Allah had so willed, He could have made you a single Ummah [faith community], but [His plan is] to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth about the matters in which you are different. (Qur'an, *Al Maeda* 5.48)

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together [as in a race] towards all that is good. Wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things. (Qur'an, *Al Baqara* 2.148)

To every people [was sent] an Apostle/Law Giver (*rasûl*): when their Apostle/Law Giver (*rasûl*) comes [before them] the matter will be judged between them with justice and they will not be wronged. (Qur'an, *Al-Yunus* 10.47)

The word *Islam* is used in two ways, as a *deen* (Law) and as a *shari'a*. One will find that everywhere the word *deen* is used it refers

to the universal nature of religion and where the word *shari'a* is used it refers to the particular nature of religion as it applies to one faith community.

We see that early European religious thinkers found themselves arguing in favor of religious toleration, and doing so on religious grounds. When it comes to the founding fathers of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson's advocacy of separation of religion and state was in order to protect the churches from interference from the government, but not to place the government in a position of being able to trump religion. He stated in a letter to the minority Baptist congregation in Connecticut:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his god, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their "legislature" should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties."

His intent was to assure a minority denomination of its right to practice its form of religion, not, as has been used since, to put the government in a position of power over religion. Indeed, like the 16th-18th century Hebraists, he encourages the development of faith.

A series of court cases beginning in the 1940s sought to use Jefferson's above noted declaration to defund auxiliary needs of religious bodies, such as transportation to religious schools. The unintended effects of these court cases led to the lack of meaningful religious contribution to political dialogue during the passage of legislation and the increasing role of the Supreme Court to provide moral direction in legislation, albeit in an adhoc and unchecked fashion.

The French model of separation of religion and state, "laicite" has been criticized as anti-religious, for example, in its banning of religious apparel in public institutions, thus actually preventing adherence to religious precepts. We thus see in the French and American model a movement towards the marginalizing of religion and discrimination against religion rather than mere separation of powers.

Summary: So now we can answer the questions we asked at the beginning. Why wasn't religion explicitly mentioned in Article 1 of the "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace". And when it is mentioned once, it is only with regard to discrimination against the individual. There is no explicit recognition of the religious community: the rights of religious people when they combine with each other, as they have for thousands of years. Instead the governments of member states are invited to take the role of moral guides. And they may even restrict religious expression on moral grounds. What moral grounds are there if not based in some kind of religious thought?

Understanding the Erastian roots of Western institutions, it is possible to understand this in the sense we have described above. The civil magistrate, or executive branch of government, can legislate and even limit religious expression to promote civil order—but this was originally intended to be based on religious motives, under the guidance of spiritual leaders, and in an attempt to approximate what God would have us do.

Although the effect is the same, the recent idea that guidance of the civil magistrate should come from purely secular, that is humanistic norms, is a relatively recent innovation—and does not fit very well in the Levant.

It is true that the religion of humanism seems to be favored by UN declarations, such as the UN Declaration, “Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations” (*A/56/L.3 and Add.1*) 56/6, where it says:

Recognizing that human rights and fundamental freedoms derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person and are thus universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and that the human person is the central subject of human rights and fundamental freedoms and, consequently, should be the principal beneficiary and should participate actively in the realization of these rights and freedoms, ...

It is important to note that humanism in these declarations plays the role that religion plays, and in that sense functions as a religion. One cannot assume that because one is a humanist, that he or she is appealing to the common fundamental principles accepted by all mankind. Humanism is a world view with its own biases, bigotry, and prejudices. Often parliamentarians and political scientists gravitate to like minded intellectual elite, and shun religious intellectuals, not recognizing that the majority of fundamental freedoms, commitments to human rights, and political institutions were set in place by deeply religious intellectuals of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.

The role of the civil magistrate in Western tradition until very recently has been to arbitrate and administer religion for the good of civil order. It was not intended to be an opening for humanism to trump religion but for the civil magistrate to act as a representative of indigenous moral values.

When detecting prejudice and bias within our institutions, we can look at the numbers of any given community which are represented. If an institution contains almost exclusively white Europeans, or almost exclusively male gender, we can say that bias is at work. If the number of religiously trained parliamentarians is a miniscule presence, while the majority of citizens, especially in the Levant, are deeply religious, then we may again be facing bias within the institution.

The fact that parliamentarians may not even be aware of the bias against traditional religious values and towards humanism, can be seen in the offhand comment by one parliamentarian—who when asked about the number of religious intellectuals participating in the peace process—responded by saying that such people are very rare and almost don't exist.

Variety is thus not a new phenomenon; rather, it is inherently Abrahamic. We need not strategize social revolutions, thus threatening indigenous peoples who already have their own scripturally based mechanism for peacemaking. Indeed, to strategize influences into other cultures is to create a sense of antagonism towards them, which these peoples do indeed sense. Those involved in such efforts at social change end up creating another form of bigotry in a secular liberal guise and having the opposite effect from their original intent. Working with the positive, indigenous scriptural values of the peoples of the Levant will bring a lasting peace.

Peace efforts in the Middle East have been ongoing for the past few decades. Despite the peace treaties signed between Israel and Egypt, and Israel and Jordan, the region remains a powder-keg for hostilities at large in particular between the Palestinians and Israel. The Arab Spring, which brought new developments in Arab countries, made efforts to reach an encompassing solution to the Mideast conflict so far without success.

The UN must have a team of religiously trained leaders, approved of by indigenous religious authorities, who can act as advisors to the UN and liaisons between the UN and the peoples of the Levant. The people will feel represented and lasting peaceful change can finally take place.

Cultural diplomacy can succeed where other efforts have failed because it brings leaders together in an environment of familiarity, credibility, and trust.

Fadzilah: *Masha'Allah*, Rabbi.

Habib: Very good work ... keep going.

Rachel: UN initiatives state their intention to change societies via the arts, media, and educational systems. These efforts are likely to be seen as colonialism in disguise, certainly if they are not in line with *al kitab* and approved of by our religious leaders.

The Qur'an is replete with a framework for theocracy-cum-tolerance: in *Surat An-Nisa* 4, *ayat* 162-163:

But those among them who are well-grounded in knowledge, and the believers, believe in what hath been revealed to thee and what was revealed before thee: And [especially] those who establish regular prayer and practice regular charity and believe in Allah (*Subhanahu wa-ta'ala*) and in the Last Day: To them shall We soon give a great reward. We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.

Make allowances for people, command what is right, and turn away from the ignorant. (Qur'an , *Al-Araf* 7:199)

Tolerance of different races and peoples:

O Mankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other. The noblest among you in God's sight is that one of you who best performs his duty. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Qur'an, *Al Hujurat* 49:13).

Freedom of thought:

There is no compulsion in religion. (Qur'an *Al Baqarah* 2:256)

So remind them! You are only a reminder. You are not in control of them. (Qur'an, *Al Gashiyah* 88:21-22)

If your Lord had willed, all the people on earth would have believed. Do you think you can force people to be believers? (Qur'an, *Yunus* 10:99)

There is no separation of religion and state in Islam or Judaism. A state indeed must have laws, enforcement, and punishment for crimes that upset the fabric of society. However, in both Islam and Judaism, law enforcement must occur through a justice system, courts and witnesses, not via the media and majority opinion. Connecting the West with its Erastian roots will return us to both a God-fearing and tolerant framework. Muslims need not view the West as a foreign threat but as an entity in need of revival. What is needed is for Muslims to both cleave to Qur'anic teachings, and educate themselves about Western political science, especially about Erastus and his followers. Muslims can take an active part in reconnecting the West with

its own theocratic roots as well as expressing the authentic beauty of Islam.

Jeffrey identifies himself as a Reform Jew and asks Ben: Where does all this interfaith dialogue leave him? Are the religious Muslims and Jews going to band together against people like him?

Ben answers: All that is required is that you point to your covenant and identify it as the one under which you are bound. No one is checking up on your level of observance.

Jeff: I don't really trust religious people. I hope what you say is true; if it is then that is okay.

A Rope of Three Cords

An enthusiastic friend encourages Ben: Teach brother!

Ben responds: It's time for religious leaders to stand up and say what is right, even if it doesn't agree with politics or the media. It's time for believers to stand together.

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah [stretches out for you], and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided. (Qur'an, *Al-Imran* 3:103)

In Judaism we are taught that the strongest rope is made of three cords. This reminds me of the three Abrahamic faiths, Islam, Christi-

anity, and Judaism. If the proper believers of these faiths would bind together there would be no stronger rope.

Two are better than one ... and a strand of three cords is not easily broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Another friend: Right on brother, make it plain.

But another: Muslims, Jews, and Christians cannot bind in one rope because those three faiths can't let them bind, unless we say there is no religion.

Ben: Why not? Musavi Muslims, Isavi Muslims and Muhamadi Muslims have much in common.

Faried De Bruyns: I agree with the rabbi on his rope interpretation.

And those who believe in the oneness of Allah and do righteous good deeds, they are dwellers of paradise, they will dwell therein forever. [And like I said some people love opposition and want to be divided.] **Wake up to yourselves and evil and obey All come to common terms as Allah commanded.** (Qur'an, *Al Baqarah* 2:81)

Ibrahim: Truly, there is no deity but He!

Tim: God bless you.

Marcus: Gracias.

Stan Tenen shares an excerpt from his essays, "An Organic Model of Civilization: The Tree of Abraham" and "The Three Pillars of Love":

Stan: There is an historical flow from the perennial tradition to Abraham, and then to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When we look back in time through Islam, we see Christianity, and when we look back in time through Christianity, we see Judaism, and before that, perennial and unbounded history. This is the flow of civilization and time, moving from a metaphoric Jewish seed, through a metaphoric Christian tree, to a metaphoric Islamic fruit.

We also have all three traditions as three phases of life, together at the same time in our time. The conceptual phase is identified with Judaism, the gestational phase with Christianity, and the letting-go (birthing) phase with Islam. Of course, each of these phases of faith must include the other two, because this is all happening all at once, right now, just as it is also happening eternally, cyclically, and throughout history.

Life grows both ways. Life grows sequentially in time, and it grows spread out in different organs within an organism at any given time.

Each of the three phases of the Abrahamic traditions necessarily includes the highest qualities of the other two, while at the same time, each is the primary representative of only one. So, I associate the conceptual stage with Judaism, and I identify it embryologically with the seed, and functionally with reason and law (Torah), the priestly tradition, and integrity. The Christian tradition is associated primarily with passion, compassion, "good works," and what the Eastern traditions call "Dharma". Embryologically, it is identified with the tree that manifests the seed's life-force in the world (the tree as the cross is the symbol of Christianity). Moslems must submit to Allah, and let go of their ego and worldly attachments. This is the function

of the fruit, which must let go of the tree to provide the fertile ground for the next cycle of life. The Moslem covenant specializes in community and hospitality.

Put simply, Judaism is known for its Torah of integrity, Christianity is known for its Gospel of love, and Islam is known for its Quran of submission.

Of course, all three phases also include the other two.

Stan adds: When you see peacemaking among the children of Abraham as based not only upon scripture and history, but upon science and mathematics, then our proposals can be no more controversial than the law of gravity.

In geometric metaphor, the three cords are also the three edges, and/or the three ribbons, of the tetrahelical column. There's also extensive description of "wave-work" in the Letter of Aristeas, which outlines the gifts Ptolemy gave to encourage the Septuagint translation

For more information about the work of Stan and Levana Tenen in merging the scientific with the sacred, see www.meru.org.

The Seven Laws of Noah

The Torah View of Religion Among the Nations

*Much of this material is covered elsewhere in the book
and is condensed here.*

Ben Abrahamson: In *Baba Kama* 38a , we see that each nation was assigned a land and language. Noahide Laws are a measure of a proper religion. A faith is divine and its followers guaranteed a portion in the hereafter if it fulfills the minimum requirement of Noahism.

We can thus say that proper Islam is a divine religion, not because we have studied its teachings, or claim to understand it, but because the Torah says so.

‘Avodah Zarah 26a. A Gentile studies Torah for the purpose of observing the laws of Noah. R. Meïr says he is as good as a high priest, and quotes: Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them. The text does not specify an Israelite or a Levite or a priest, but simply “a man” —including a Gentile.

The Seven Laws are:

1. **Justice:** Commandments to set up courts of law and pursue social justice
2. **Respect and praise G-d:** prohibitions against blasphemy.
3. **Belief in God:** prohibitions against worshipping any being except God.

4. **Respect the family:** sexual morality.
5. **Respect human life:** prohibitions against murder.
6. **Respect for others' property:** prohibitions against theft.
7. **Respect all creatures:** prohibitions against eating the limb of a living animal.

And he said: **HaShem came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and He came from the myriads holy ones [prophets], at His right hand was a fiery law unto them. Yea, He loves the peoples, all His holy ones—they are in Thy hand; and they sit down at Thy feet, receiving of Thy words.** (Deuteronomy 33:2-4)

Seir, in the land of Edom, is a fitting symbol of Rome, which has always been identified with Edom, and Paran was the original home of Ishmael, father of the Arab peoples. (*Baba Batra* 25a; Sffirei, *Piska* 343; Midrash *Tannaim* 209)

Scripture links Seir and Paran with Sinai; the commentaries say that this is because these two names stand for all of mankind, for they represent the two great powers which at that time contended for domination of Judea: the Arabs and the Romans, the East and the West. God thus renewed His covenants with the Gentiles at Sinai. (*Avodah Zarah* 2b).

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The LORD spoke those words—those and no more to your whole congregation at the mountain, with a mighty voice.
(Deuteronomy 5:19)

R. Yochanan asserts that this refers to a multiplicity of voices; the sound of the holy voice divided into seventy voices so that all the nations might hear it. (Midrash *Shmot Rabbah* 28.6)

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**The Lord giveth the word: They that publish the tidings
are a great host.** (Psalms 68:12)

The School of R. Ishmael taught:: every single word that went forth from the Holy One, blessed be He, split up into seventy languages. (Sabbath 88b)

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Hear, for I will speak princely things. (Proverbs 8:6)

R. Hananel b. Papa said, why are the words of the Torah compared to a prince? Just as a prince has power of life and death, so have the words of Torah power of life and death. Thus Raba said; to those who go to the right hand thereof it is a medicine of life; to those who go to the left hand thereof it is a deadly poison. Another interpretation: "princely" denotes that on every word which went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, two crowns were set. (Sabbath 88b)

Although the nations rejected the Torah that was accepted by the Children of Israel, "two crowns" means that there must have been another covenant based on Noahism that was offered them.

**Know for sure that I will then enable the nations to give
me acceptable praise. All of them will invoke Hashem's
name when they pray, and will worship him in unison.**
(Zephaniah 3:9)

R. Joshua b. Levi said: Had the heathen nations of the world known how excellent a thing the Tent of Meeting was for them, they would have encompassed it with encampments and fortifications. One finds that before the Tent of Meeting was erected, the heathen nations of the world, on hearing the voice of divine speech, rushed in fright out of their camps. (Vayikra Rabba 1:9-12)

God cometh from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran, selah. His glory covereth the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise... He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: His ways are everlasting. (Habakuk 3:3,6)

The word “measured” in Hebrew is the same word as “characterized”, and “drove asunder” is related to “excesses”, so this verse is understood to teach: “He stood, and characterized [the nations of] the earth: He saw the excesses of the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow [they were given a path to overcome their bad traits]: His ways are everlasting [His scripture will never change].

Rabbinic commentary says that Jethro (Shu-ayb) was a “Bnei Noah” (righteous non-Jew). The “Children of Jethro” were “God fearers” also called “Kenites”. Targum Onkelos translates “Kenites” as Salamai or Muslamai.

Prophecy is not limited to the Jewish people

From His right hand went a fiery law for them (Deut 33:2)

The “fiery law” was the supernal Torah translated into seventy languages.

Sifre to Numbers 12:2. “[And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam,] **Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting.** [And the three of them came out...:]” This teaches that the three of them were called in a single act of speech, which an ordinary mouth cannot accomplish and an ordinary ear cannot hear. And so Scripture says,

And God spoke all these words, saying. (Exodus 20:1) **One thing did God say, but two did I hear** (Psalms 62:12). **Is not**

my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock (Jeremiah 23:29).

Sifre connects Numbers 12:2 to Exodus 20:1, Psalms 62:12 and Jeremiah 23:29. The common theme is that the “Voice of God” is a metaphor, which has qualities unlike a normal voice.

The connection with fire is significant. Just as fire appears differently to different people looking at different angles, sounds different, and feels different, so too does the Lord have the ability to speak at one time to many people. This multifaceted Voice of God is described with the imagery of “fire”.

At Mount Sinai there was a noise, thunder and fire. In rabbinic tradition the “fire” is related to the fact that the Torah was spoken simultaneously in seventy languages at the same time (Talmud *Shabbos* 88a; *Exodus Raba* 5). The supernal Torah was written in seventy languages in order that the nations should not be able to plead ignorance as their excuse for rejecting it (Tosefta, *Sotah* 8).

Perhaps this can explain Deuteronomy 18:

When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the flame [Molech worship], one that useth divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or one that consulteth a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the LORD; and because of these abominations the LORD thy God is driving them out from before thee. (Deuteronomy 18:9-12)

A prophet will the LORD thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him

ye shall hearken; according to all that thou didst desire of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying: "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not." And the LORD said unto me: "They have well said that which they have spoken." (Deuteronomy 18:15-17)

I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him. (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

There is a repetition between Deuteronomy 18:15 and Deuteronomy 18:18. Both say that the Lord will raise up a Prophet like Moses (pbuh), but the former is in the second person (of your brethren) and the latter is in the third person (from their brethren). In between is the verse: **"Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not."** This verse means that originally the entire Children of Israel were to accept the Torah (the voice of the LORD) and the supernal Torah (this great fire), but they could not bear this, and would have died. Instead God would raise up Prophets. The Prophets would be for you (children of Israel) and for them (seventy nations of the world). This is supported by the use "whosoever" (*ish*) which is a general word for mankind, not limited to the Children of Israel.

The Pesikta invokes:

All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, for they have heard the words You spoke. They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, Great is the majesty of the LORD! (Psalm 138:4,5)

Know too that in every generation, [Gentile] witnesses appear to confirm the giving of the Torah. These are Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar of Naama [The friends of Job]; Job of the land of Uz; and last of all, Balaam son of Beor.

The term Muslim

It is a fact of Jewish Law that Muslims are perfect monotheists.

Rabbinic literature teaches that there is common faith, a fundamental “religion” which all are born into. Jews have called this *yireh shomaym*, *ger toshav* or *bnei noah* in Hebrew, *theosebeia* in Greek.

In the Torah, “Kenite” is translated to Aramaic as *salamai* or *muslamai*. This refers to the great numbers of non-Jewish believers who came to sacrifice the *korban shlamim* in Jerusalem: Salamai, Musalamai, Muslims. This could be a clear indication in our literature that Islam is an ancient religion, dating back to second temple times, at least. And if Islam’s roots are the same as what we call *bnei noah*, then it is much older, it is the religion of Noah and Adam himself.

The closeness of Islam and Judaism was always understood by biblical scholars up until recent years. The close relationship between Jews, the ten lost tribes, the Arabs and Rachabites was all assumed. With the advent of German revisionists such as Wellhausen and Büchler, this all changed. They introduced ideas that Islam started with moon or rock worship. Devout Jews know that this is not true.

In the following verses we have three circles: the Children of Aaron (the priesthood), the Children of Israel and the God-fearers / Muslamai :

O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: He is their help and their shield. You that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: He is their help and their shield. (Psalm 115:9-12)

Let the Children of Israel say: "His love endures forever."

Let the Children of Aaron say: "His love endures forever."

Let the God Fearers say: "His love endures forever." (Psalm 118:2-4)

Attempts to water down Judaism make it difficult for Muslims to relate to the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel's loyalty to the Torah will make Jews more accessible to Muslims and make Muslims more accessible to Jews.

We need our divine diversity.

The nation of Israel and the nations of the world are to work in harmony to bring completion to humanity and peace to the world.