



The Fifth Bi-Annual Meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, Oxford (UK), March 2012

On the final day of the meeting, leaders were asked to reflect on what had been accomplished. They were asked to consider three questions:

- 1. What does Interreligious Friendship mean to you?***
- 2. How do you practise Interreligious Friendship?***
- 3. What messages and practices of Interreligious Friendship can you take back from this meeting to your community?***

Some chose to respond independently to each question while others integrated their answers.

Rabbi David Bigman



From the perspective of the Jewish ethos, and I believe this is also true of the Muslim ethos, the language of obligations and responsibilities towards the other, just as towards all of God's creation, precedes talk about love. But since I recently entered into an extended discourse about the concept of 'loving' God with my students and love was a central motif at the Oxford conference, I want to focus my reflection on the last few days around that concept. The magnificent landscape, the blossoming flowers and the wildlife, and the human creativity evident in the marvellous architecture of the place where we gathered for learning, provided an atmosphere where one had new points of contact for the heart on its journey towards love of the Creator. Also, the diverse human landscape expands the heart and, more than that, provides new ways of fulfilling the commandment of loving God [through loving those created in the image of God]. A conversation between a person committed to Torah and someone deeply committed to another faith is very special. The religious language of a person committed to Torah is enriched a thousand times, exponentially, rich in multiple colors. A meeting like this provides insights that cannot be gleaned from even the most poetic of writings. The person who stands before you is laden with his religious experiences in their range of colours that are far beyond any narrow definitions you can get from scholars of religion or experts of a particular culture. He is full of appreciation for the Creator, even if he uses different language to express that. He is also full of appreciation for his fellow human, created in the Divine image, and he brings ethical dimensions into efforts to improve the lot of humanity and to spread the word of God. The recognition and appreciation he has for human life and for a life lived under the shadow of the eternal is infectious and seductive. Love of the Creator is increased through the recognition of the multiple possibilities to experience His glory, filling the earth. The words of the prayer 'Even if our mouth were as full of song as the sea, and our tongue as full of joyous song as its multitude of waves, and our lips as full of praise as the breadth of the heavens, [we still would not be able to fully thank Him]' (from Shabbat prayers) receive new significance as a person is filled with admiration for the innumerable possibilities that the Creator planted in His creatures to know Him and to express their recognition of Him. At the same time, the sense of the limitations of religious language is intensified.