Judaism and Islam: Directions for Dialogue, Collaboration and Mutual Recognition

Contextual Preamble

It is commonly perceived that Judaism and Islam are caught in hopeless, violent conflict. This perception is damaging to both religions and to their faithful, as well as to the role each religion should play in the world. Moreover, it is patently belied by the testimony of a rich history of mutual contact, enrichment and interdependence. This heritage is often lost sight of and its memory seems to have been all but eradicated. As a consequence, Muslims and Jews often lose sight of each others' religious values and spiritual wealth. Loss of visibility leads to loss of validity and then to loss of dignity and respect, at times resulting in hate, enmity and violence. The purpose of the present congress of Imams and Rabbis is to recall this rich tradition, to counteract historical forces that have led to false perception of and between these two religions and to evoke the well-springs of a shared Judeo-Muslim heritage as a resource for peace between our religious communities and a moral inspiration to humanity.

The profound historical relationship that existed between Judaism and Islam has been obscured by the political conflicts of the past century that have overshadowed the mutual perceptions of Judaism and Islam. During this time, the tension between Israel and its Arab neighbors, especially the Palestinians, has often been presented as conflict between two religions and as a result has had a negative impact on the relationship between them. Turmoil in the Middle East has thus drawn the religions themselves into a measure of conflict. National and political strife has been fired by religion, which has been cited and in some cases reshaped as support and justification for the conflict. It is crucial to halt this process and to disengage the image of the religions and their historical and theological relationship from the realm of politics and national discord.

The mutual understandings of Islam and Judaism and the perception of conflict between them are no longer a matter for only these two religions; To a significant degree they have become issues of global concern. Jews and Muslims live side by side not only in the Middle East but in many metropolitan centers. Relations between the two communities are often overshadowed by the specter of the Middle East, occasionally extending violence well beyond the confines of the Middle East. This situation is thus a significant concern for common life in most parts of the Western world.

In order to stem the tide of enmity and violence seeping into the faith traditions themselves and thereby advance the goals of peace, coexistence and understanding, it is imperative that religious leaders be heard and that they offer a counter testimony to prevailing perceptions. If religion is not to be utilized to further the conflict, it must play a constructive role in shaping, presenting and developing an alternative to it,

namely more positive relations between the two communities. The present meeting of Rabbis and Imams is designed to provide a forum for an alternative image to emerge in the public eye and to launch a process through which the changing image of relationships between the religions can gain further momentum, leading to concrete steps of respect, acceptance, recognition and collaboration. The meeting is held with the goal of affirming the rich tradition of Jewish-Muslim heritage, and its moral, religious and spiritual commonalities. Recognition of such commonalities does not assume disregard for significant differences between the religions, nor does it ignore the reality of troubled moments in their common history. Nevertheless, neither differences nor painful memories should set the agenda or define the perception of the two religions. Common heritage and the shared values are powerful enough to shape the future course of the relationship between Judaism and Islam.

The present meeting is an attempt to focus the attention of religious leaders on the potential for collaboration and for deepening of mutual understanding. It is hoped the uncovering of this potential will divert the use of religion from fuelling the present political conflict to constructive input for processes affecting the two religious communities, and through them, the rest of humanity. The present meeting is not structured to find political solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East. Rather, it is intended to allow Judaism and Islam, viewed in a global context and in light of their lengthy history, to address one another as religious entities facing common global challenges, seeking to discover a common way to serve humanity.

In light of the goals of the meeting, we strongly recommend that during the days of the meeting in Ifrane, participants make the conscious choice of avoiding reference to specific happenings in the Middle East, past or present, and focus their attention on the long term visions of the two religions, past, present and future. We also express our hope that participants can use this opportunity to suspend earlier notions and prejudgments and open themselves to a genuine listening to the other side as well as to an open exploration of the resources of their own religious tradition, in the presence of the other. Finally, we encourage participants to use this opportunity to create genuine friendships between themselves and leaders of the other religion. For centuries Jewish-Muslim coexistence flourished in the context of personal relationships, created in communities living alongside each other. Friendships and personal ties provide the soundest foundation for mutual recognition and the diffusion of peace.

Holding the present meeting in Ifrane, under the high patronage of Muhammad VI, King of Morocco and commander of the faithful, is of great symbolic value. In Morocco significant cultural exchanges have taken place for centuries and particular expressions of the Judaeo-Muslim culture, some unique to this country, have come to expression. The present commitment of the Moroccan royal house to furthering Jewish-Muslim rapprochment follows a venerable tradition, specific to this part of the Muslim world. One recalls with particular appreciation the precedent of King Muhammad V, whose positive relations with the Jews extended to the most concrete acts of protecting his Jewish subjects, during the Second World War.

The Mutual Enrichment of Judaism and Islam: the Testimony of History

In the turmoil of modern circumstances, sight is often lost of the mutual enrichment Judaism and Islam enjoyed during their common history. From its very inception, nearly a millennium and a half ago, the history of Islam has unfolded in continuous interaction with Judaism, initially in a receptive and later in a reciprocal mode. Three significant moments of this heritage can be evoked corresponding to institutional, cultural and spiritual influences. These characterize their mutual relationship respectively during Islam's formative period, during the subsequent flowering of Muslim thought and literature in Andalusian Spain, and then at the height of Islamic spirituality in Medieval Egypt.

It is worthwhile recalling the geographical proximity of Arabia, Islam's cradle, to the Land of Israel, which forms its northern border. This proximity nurtured spiritual ties from Biblical times, when Jews came to settle in Arabia, growing to sizable communities throughout the peninsula by the time of Muhammad in the 7th century. No doubt something of the "spirit of the land of prophecy" imbued the Arabian peninsula. Islam cannot be conceived without the heritage of the prophets of the Bible. It sees itself as grounded within this long ongoing tradition, characterized by the lineage of God-given prophets, who reveal a law, expressed in holy Scripture. This spiritual connection was acknowledged by early Islam, which recognized Jerusalem both as its first *qibla* (prayer direction) and as the scene of the Last Judgment at the End of Days. Thus at the beginning of Islam, Jews and Muslims, united in the faith in the same God, prayed to Him while facing the same direction. They held in common many other beliefs and rituals such as the monotheistic creed, the belief in revelation, prophecy, and the afterlife, the practice of circumcision, specific dietary laws, even sharing certain fast days, such as that of the *ashura*. Interaction with Jews during the formative period of Islam contributed to the elaboration of the latter's early scriptural, religious and ritual traditions through the medium of the Israiliyyat and *Qisas al-anbiya'* (Jewish and prophetic legends). Many of these features remain constitutive of the relations between Judaism and Islam, as shall be pointed out below.

No doubt in response to these common elements, Jews assimilated positively to the Muslim culture much more rapidly and deeply than they had done to the pagan Greek one. So totally immersed were they in Arabic culture that they chose to express almost all aspects of Jewish tradition in the Arabic idiom, translating the Bible into Arabic, even writing that language in the sacred characters of the Hebrew tongue.

In contrast to the cultural ostracism of the Jews in Medieval Europe, Jews in the Muslim context were well integrated into Muslim civilization as long as they enjoyed tolerance. In times of openness and enlightenment, they contributed in no small measure to the furtherance of Muslim culture itself. This cultural symbiosis reached its peak in Andalusia in the second great period of their mutual enrichment, in the areas of religious and secular sciences, including theology, philosophy, ethics

and medicine, and even poetry, which, though written in Hebrew, utilized nonetheless, Arabic metrics and literary devices. The Andalusian Jews meditated and commented on the Muslim philosophers, applied Muslim theological notions to the Torah and Talmud, and enriched Arabic science with their own compositions on astronomy, medicine and mathematics. As translators of Arabic works into Hebrew, Jews became the primal transmitters of Islamic civilization to the West. In certain cases, where the Arabic originals were lost in the passage of time, these Hebrew versions became the custodians of Muslim culture.

The third great encounter between Islam and Judaism took place in the spiritual realm in Medieval Egypt. Here the descendants of the foremost Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), who himself wrote most of his works in the Arabic language, adapted Muslim spirituality to their own religious and ritual traditions. They were deeply impressed by the extraordinary flowering of Sufism around them and perceived in its religious fervor a continuation of the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel. It is possible that the spirit of the ensuing Jewish pietist movement in Egypt was carried over to the Holy Land where, in the 14th century, it influenced the nascent Kabbalah and later Jewish mysticism, especially Lurianic Kabbalah that flowered during the Ottoman period.

In the intervening years and in subsequent generations, there was always to be a continuous exchange in daily life between Jews and their Muslim environment in such areas as music, art, poetry, folklore and architecture. Almost all stages of their respective life-cycles, in joy and grief, from the cradle to the grave, both in the home and their places of worship, were celebrated with similar melodies and customs. A particular indication of their common spiritual heritage is the fact that they venerated each others saints and shared common shrines. These became symbols of confluence between their respective religious traditions, as was the case in the country hosting the present conference. It is therefore important to preserve these shrines, which are part of this common heritage. But it is not only these shrines that are in danger of disappearing. Indeed, more generally, political tensions, patterns of emigration, and intolerance have brought about the virtual effacement of the history of the Judeo-Muslim civilization alongside its wealth of spiritual and humanistic values.

What Unites Judaism and Islam?

In many ways, Islam and Judaism are very similar religions. This fact is noticed not only by the scholar of comparative religion, but has been observed throughout the ages by thinkers within both traditions. Not only do they hold in common a variety of significant beliefs, that
shape their religious world view. There are also significant structural similarities between the religions. In other words, the internal logic and coherence, the central structuring concepts and many of the points that are cardinal to the understanding of the religion exhibit great similarity. In point of fact, Jews and Muslims practice their religion in ways that can allow each to recognize and to appreciate the religious life

of the other. Such commonality of belief and practice provides the basis for the possibility of mutual recognition between the two religions; because they can understand each other, they have the potential to recognize each other. Indeed this has been the case for most of their shared history. We therefore seek to renew something that has existed, not to create something new, *ex nihilo*.

Perhaps the best place to begin recognizing our similarities is the ultimate core of both religions – God. Both religions recognize God, and only one God. Throughout the generations Jews and Muslims have acknowledged they serve the same God. The identity of the God of the other religion as an "other" God has never been a serious option. Jews and Muslims have long recognized each other as worshipping the same one God and have attributed many similar qualities to that God. The actions ascribed to God are also identical – God is the creator of heaven and earth. God reveals Himself to humans and forms relationships with them. God cares for humans and cares about their actions and behavior. Consequently, God instructs humans in the proper way of living. God also judges humans according to their behavior and to how they follow His instructions.

A variety of religious sensibilities that are common to Judaism and Islam emerge from this fundamental description of God. Recognizing God as the creator shapes the attitude of both religions to creation. Creation is the handiwork of a creator. It must be respected, tended to and protected. At the same time, its ultimate significance is limited and contained in the fundamental recognition that it was created and can never be fully self-sufficient.

Both religions share a sense of religious duty, obligation and responsibility to God, flowing from the revelation of God and His will. Consequently, law is a central component of both religions. Through law, the concrete life of believers and their actions are determined. Religious experts in both traditions are experts in the law. Growth, change, adaptation, inter-group relations, approaches to modernity, politics and a broad range of social issues are all considered through the prism of the respective legal traditions.

Concomitant with law is a sense of morality. Both religions have strong moral teachings, many that are shared by both traditions. Emphasis on law and morality leads to great concern with justice – on the individual, societal and global planes. Both traditions have a vision of the importance, universality and ultimate hope of establishment of complete justice, in accordance with God's revelation.

The quest for justice is itself related to the notion of judgment. Fundamental to both religions is the recognition that "there is a judge and there is justice," ultimately providing the guarantee for a just world order and ensuring proper and just human behavior. Judgment is related to retribution. Both religions believe in retribution for good as well as bad deeds. Both also believe that ultimate retribution and ultimate justice extend from our present world to the afterlife, the world to come. Thus, both traditions relate the concern for justice with a future eschatological vision.

In both traditions God's revelation is not understood as a one-time event. Rather, a broader movement of prophecy is recognized, through which God speaks to His creatures. The centrality of prophecy and revelation leads to the centrality of the word of God, the product of God's revelation. Both religions revere God's word, as expressed in their respective Scriptures. God's word is a major organizing principle of the religious life of both communities. Both communities declare that prophecy is no longer in effect, thereby leading to the exaltation of God's revealed word of old along with a proliferation of interpretative traditions through which it continues to address believers in the here and now.

While the actual contents of both scriptural traditions differ in many ways, they also share many important similarities. Perhaps most significantly, both traditions bear witness to a common memory of a series of great people, events and prophets that form the backbone of their respective Scriptures. While the lives and testimony of many figures are echoed in both traditions, perhaps special mention should be made of the figure of Abraham. Both traditions point to Abraham as a significant founder and a constitutive figure. Recent decades have seen a rise in the appeal to Abraham as a symbol of commonality. Some even consider him a common ancestor. Such appeal, not entirely without earlier precedent, points to the continuing need of both religious communities to recognize each other and to point to a common heritage that can provide an anchor of unity in turbulent times.

Perhaps no less important than the common recognition of the reality of divine revelation is the common recognition of divine wisdom. Both traditions recognize divine wisdom as a significant expression of God. Wisdom is recognized through the common tradition of natural law, serving as a counterpoint to revealed law. Wisdom, thus understood, is broader than the revealed word of God. Such autonomy from the revealed word of God provides a moral common ground for both traditions that is independent of the particularities of both revelations. Appeal to such an ethic is of particular importance, inasmuch as it can provide a basis for criticizing actions carried out in the name of the law that are morally condemnable. Where law can be manipulated, misinterpreted or otherwise subject to negative human intervention, God and His wisdom serve as a corrective, providing both traditions with a broader moral vantage point.

Recognizing and Appreciating Our Diversity

Contrasting with significant shared commonalities are great divergences. In considering the historical relations as well as the areas that future dialogue must address, it is necessary to recognize and accept the differences between the two religions. In highlighting their differences we do not suggest that they are more significant than the commonalities; nor do we consider them theologically as obstacles to advancing a positive relationship between the two religions. The following discussion of diversity is intended first and foremost to open up a

conversation through which each side may get a better sense of the other. Based upon better mutual understanding, one may begin to explore theological and hermeneutical strategies, as these have been expressed in the past and as these may be articulated in the present, to help address the diversity between Judaism and Islam. The future dialogue of Judaism and Islam consists of respecting diversity while containing it in ways that inhibit it from obscuring the deeper fundamental accord between the religions.

Mention has been made earlier of the similar structure of Judaism and Islam. There is, however, one key element that sharply differentiates the structure of both religions. One may present this element as the tension between particularity and universality, or as the difference between a national religion versus a global religion. Judaism is unique among world religions. Though it is considered a world religion, properly speaking it is the religious way of life of a particular people, the people of Israel. Membership in the religion is identical with membership in a people, and vice versa. Judaism does possess a vision for all of humanity, which is expressed through the Noachide commandments, a moral code that is relevant for all of humanity. Judaism also envisions a future time in which all of humanity will come to know God. Prophetic visions to this effect form an important part of Jewish prayer. While thus maintaining universal awareness, Judaism nevertheless is practiced as a religious way of life of a particular people. While Islam also perceives itself communally, as evidenced by the designation of all believers as *umma* (a word identical in Hebrew and Arabic, designating "nation" for the one and "community" for the other), it is in fact a global religion, rather than a national one. Islam as a religion is distinct from national identity. Muslims are found in all parts of the world, espousing different national, ethnic and cultural identities. The drive to spread Islam throughout the world, through which Islam has attained the prominence it enjoys, is motivated by the understanding of the universal appeal and significance of Islam. It is precisely this kind of missionary zeal that is lacking in Judaism.

A comparison of the uses of two similar terms in both traditions is suggestive. The Hebrew word *berit* denotes the particular covenant made with the people of Israel, primarily through the covenant at Sinai. This *berit* provides the basic structure and definition for the religion known as Judaism. In fact, the authentic biblical term by means of which the religion of Israel may be described is *berit*. By contrast, the Qur'anic equivalent *mithaq* designates something of a different and universal scope. *Mithaq* denotes the universal covenant through which creatures recognize God's lordship over creation and thus addresses to all creatures the responsibility of submitting to God. *Mithaq* is thus not a particular historical covenant but a preexistent cosmic one.

The difference between particularity and universality leads to a further distinction, again of structural significance. National identity requires a territory through which to come to expression. As national identity is coextensive with religious identity, territory takes on religious significance. Attachment to the land of Israel is, for Judaism, a fundamental part of the *berit*, part of promises made to

Abraham and ratified in successive covenants in the Torah. Many of the Torah's commandments can be fulfilled only in the land, which is considered an indispensable condition for the flowering of Jewish religious life. Religious virtues from fulfillment of the commandments to prophecy and closeness to divine presence are predicated on life in the Holy Land. Millennia of Jewish reflection on the significance of the land of Israel offer ample testimony to the spiritual significance and yearning for this land, through those who were able to live in it and those who could only express their yearning for it.

This understanding of the territorial significance of the land of Israel should be contrasted with the Muslim universal notion of territory. In Islam, the concept of holiness of land is extended to the whole earth, which becomes holy in its entirety. The universality of humankind, understood through its responsibility of being the vicegerent of God on earth, implies a universal and global approach to territoriality. Thus, Islam has no need for territory or for a particular land as part of its self definition. While Islam does recognize some places as holy, its own self identity is not linked with a particular territory. Its theory of territoriality acknowledges the whole earth as a temple for worshipping and submitting to God. The Muslim ideal is to witness the achievement of a kingdom of God over the whole earth at the end of time. Thus, the vision of an end time in which all of earth comes to know God and His kingdom extends upon all of earth is a common vision of Islam and Judaism.

The shared eschatological visions of Judaism and Islam extend yet further into a common holy space, in ways that are often overlooked. While politically Jerusalem has stood at the very heart of the profoundest tension between people of both religions, it is important to consider the testimony to commonality offered by the spiritual visions of both traditions regarding Jerusalem as the site of eschatological expectation. Jerusalem's significance for Muslims is not due only to the night journey of the prophet Muhammad, who, it is understood, ascended to heaven through Jerusalem; it is the focus of Muslim eschatological expectation, as well. Thus Jerusalem, as the heritage of the whole prophetic tradition, plays a major role in the orientation of the Muslim understanding of history, because it is the place of the Judgment at the end of time.

The eschatological significance of Jerusalem deserves additional consideration. Jerusalem is not significant as the center of Muslim ritual life. As is well known, the *qibla*, the orientation of prayer, was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. While pilgrimage has been important throughout the generations, as a religious duty it applies only in relation to Mecca. Jerusalem thus provides orientation and ultimate perspective to all human life when considered eschatologically, but it does not structure the legal, religious and ritual life of Islam. This offers us food for reflection. Israel's place of particularity is part of Islam's place of the ultimate universal vision. As refracted through Jerusalem, the vision of particularity carried by Judaism and the universal vision carried by Islam are not contradictory. Further, the fact that Jerusalem has not been taken by Islam as its main religious center is also suggestive. For Islam, its universality transcends specific religious determinations. One may

reasonably suggest that the change of orientation for worshipping from Jerusalem to Mecca implies that Islam did not want to replace Judaism by appropriating the center of Jewish religious life. Thus one may suggest that Muslim universalism is based on the recognition of the particularity of Jewish identity.

While the most significant difference in the structures of both religions concerns the tension between particularity and universality, there are numerous differences that are the product of different views and understandings of the particulars of scriptural events and details. While there is a broad common memory, the details of Scripture often highlight diversity rather than underscore unity. Though there is ample evidence of early Muslim reliance on Jewish sources to complement and contribute to the interpretation of the Qur'an, and similarly ample evidence for the impact of Islamic hermeneutical methods on the Jewish interpretation of the Bible, part of the present heritage of pre-modern periods is the common perception of Muslim charges of Jewish falsification of Scripture alongside Jewish rejection of details found in Muslim Scriptures. The great similarity between Judaism and Islam provides the background against which diversity is highlighted. The question at hand is not only whether to ascribe greater weight to that which is common or that which separates. Ultimately, what is at stake in these claims is the very issue of the legitimacy of the other religion and the boundaries of legitimation that may be ascribed to another religion. Underlying the question of diversity of scriptural descriptions and of Scriptures as such is the fundamental question of the legitimacy of the other religion. This question is part of the historical legacy of the relationship of the two religions, but it has particular urgency today. The rich history of contact between Judaism and Islam includes many resources for addressing the kind of diversity found between both religions. The dynamics of inter-religious encounter, motivated to a large extent by the quest for global peace, provide further motivation for contemporary reconsideration of prevalent impressions of the legitimacy of the other. Let us therefore advance to the next part of our discussion, where we shall explore issues of mutual recognition, and bring to light some older sources as well as newer suggestion, in the service of mutual recognition

From Diversity to Mutual Recognition and Facing Common Challenges

The process of rediscovery of the historical depth of relations and interdependence between Judaism and Islam and of the retrieval of the common heritage of the Judeo-Muslim tradition assume as a fundamental condition mutual knowledge, recognition and respect. The history of Jewish-Muslim relations provides us with ample precedents for these, but the contemporary setting may also present us with new challenges and paradigms that necessitate novel theological reflection on both sides. Part of the price that politicization of Jewish-Muslim relations has exacted has been that not enough attention has been paid to recovering the commonalities that once were the hallmark of their coexistence, much less to making new advances in the area of interreligious and spiritual relations. This is particularly lacking when compared to other dialogical track records made with other major

world religions. The following paragraphs do not intend to make up for this deficiency. They do, however, offer pointers for reflection and suggestions for ways in which issues of mutual recognition and of handling diversity might be approached. They are meant to be suggestive and to stimulate to further thought more than to suggest fixed truths or solutions. Unlike earlier parts of our presentation that were descriptive, presenting what we hope are unassailable facts, some of the following are constructive suggestions that may not find favor with all readers. It is therefore important to recall that our goal is to open a discussion and point to ways in which it might advance. However, it is the participants in the discussion who will ultimately determine the contours of future dialogue between Judaism and Islam.

In order to advance the goal of mutual recognition, constructive theological work must be done to examine those issues that have been at the center of theological and historical contention. Mutual recognition does not eliminate the historical differences between traditions. Rather, it consists of recalling both the similar and the dissimilar, in legitimating the basic spiritual validity of each religion and in seeking new means of increasing understanding and legitimation in the areas of diversity. In this light, we would like to revisit some of the issues discussed in the previous section, offering some insights as these have been articulated in the history of the traditions and as fresh theological consideration may suggest.

Perhaps we should begin by setting before ourselves the very challenge of reflecting upon the meaning of religious diversity. Underlying the process of dialogue is the recognition of *de facto* diversity, but recognition ultimately hinges upon recognition of the deepest spiritual validity of the religious other. In this context, Judaism and Islam may be in a fundamentally non-reciprocal relationship. Islam, as the younger religion, sees itself as a continuation of the older tradition, thereby explicitly legitimating it. Muslim legitimation of earlier revelations is itself couched in a broader theory of diversity. “If your lord had wanted, He would have made you a single community” (V, 48; XI,118). The validity of the revelation of the Torah is thus asserted many times in the Qur’an, as in the following verse: “How could they take you as a judge since they have the Torah in which is God’s judgment” (V, 43), and “We have revealed the Torah in which there is right guidance and light” (V, 44).

By contrast, despite an important exception to be noted shortly, the conventional Jewish view does not recognize scriptural revelations following that of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, in seeking to legitimate the religious other, attention has been drawn to the substance of faith and the quality of practice, rather than the validity of revelation. One may here think of three different forms in which validation may take place, all without recognizing the fundamental revelation of the other religion. Traditionally Jewish authors have pointed to the validity of Muslim doctrine, as it conforms to the principles of Jewish beliefs. The common features of faith, spelled out above, were deemed to be of greater significance than the epistemological basis upon which Muslims believed in them. In part, the shared cultural milieu of the Middle Ages enabled sidestepping such issues of authority and

epistemology, grounded as these were in an alternative revelation, inasmuch as both religions functioned in the same broader cultural context.

A different strategy appeals to earlier pre-mosaic revelation as a means of validating the behavior of the other. Here we find appeal to morality, as practiced by non-Jews, as a means of legitimating other religions. The Jewish view of the religious other appeals to a revelation and set of commandments that are different from those given to the Israelites at Sinai. These are the Noachide laws, given to all of humanity from the time of Adam ("Noachide" being the rabbinic designation for a human person in general). These commandments include basic moral prohibitions such as the prohibitions of killing, stealing, adultery and more. A basic moral life and an adumbration of a religious world view are thus available to all of humanity, without the specifics of the religious way of life of Judaism.

A third strategy may be considered in terms of a future revelation, or a future realization of spiritual ideals. What cannot be validated in terms of a present day revelation may nevertheless be validated in terms of preparation for a future understanding and realization. Here the messianic ideal allows one to project into present times universal qualities and ideals, through which the religious other is validated. The most obvious application of this method is found in Maimonides' reference to the function of Islam (and Christianity) in preparing for the messianic future. Thus, what Judaism may consider an error could to some extent be ignored in favor of the significant change in perspective accomplished through the teaching of Islam, legitimated in terms of the ultimate preparation of the world to receive a future messianic understanding (Maimonides, Laws of Kings, end of Chapter 11 in uncensored editions).

The common denominator of the above positions is their attempt to validate Islam, or aspects of it, while avoiding validation of Muslim revelation. There is, however, one important exception to this tendency. At least one Jewish author in the Middle Ages was willing to consider the possibility of multiple religious revelations, thereby legitimating the Muslim revelation. In his book "The Garden of the Intellects" Rabbi Netanel Berebi Al-Fayyumi, a predecessor of and possible influence on Maimonides, provides a theory of revelation that may be best characterized as accommodational. God reveals Himself to diverse people in different ways and through different revelations as appropriate to their temperaments, customs, cultures, etc. Surprisingly, Al-Fayyumi also quotes the Qur'an as proof for his ideas, thereby offering us a glimpse of the depth the Judeo-Muslim culture could attain. God's revelation is thus not limited to a single appearance to humanity but finds expression through multiple revelations. One may note that the Hebrew Bible does not categorically deny the possibility of prophecy extending in various forms to other people; indeed it clearly attributes prophecy to non-Israelites. Nor is there any principle of Judaism that would necessitate denial of the possibility of prophecy and revelation being addressed to other peoples. Still, there has been a strong tendency, in part enforced by a broader view of the relationship of Israel and the nations, to dismiss the validity of other revelations. Al-Fayyumi's position is not only an

important early position that offers new theological possibilities but also a call to rethinking the scriptural basis for claims made in relation to other religions.

Let us move on from these broad considerations of diversity and its legitimacy to the tension between particularity and universality that sets the two religions apart. One cannot divorce the discussion of particularity and universality from the previous reflections upon revelation and its legitimacy. The following comments are made from a revelation-validating perspective. Of strategies that circumvent validation of other revelations, the messianic-preparatory strategy seems to be the most suitable to a discussion of particularity and universalism. From a theoretical perspective, not only are the notions of particularity and universality not in conflict, they may be considered harmoniously complimentary. Thus, a core of particularity marshaled by one revelation may be expanded through another. To the extent that a Muslim position can more readily consider both Judaism and Islam in terms of revelation, it may also consider the particularity of Judaism as a positive feature, complementary to Muslim universality. Once the spirit of prophetic continuity between the religions is acknowledged, one may go on to consider the particularity of Judaism's experience as the matrix from which this spirit then proceeds and expands. Beyond general considerations of particularity and universality, we find various specific validations in the Qur'an of Jewish particularity, including its territorial expression.

Muslim tradition recognizes the specific link between God and the Jews of which the Holy Land is the symbol. The Qur'an says: "We made a covenant with the sons of Israel and We sent them prophets" (V, 70) and "O my people, enter the Holy Land that God wrote for you. Don't retrace your steps, or you will go back as losers" (V, 21). Thus, the Holy Land appears to be both the sign of this covenant between God and the Jewish people and Judaism's expression of God-given particularity.

As our discussion indicates, mutual religious recognition may take place either through validation of revelation or through validation of the spiritual, religious and moral life of the other. Clearly, validation of revelation goes much farther in acknowledging the other. As we have seen, validation of revelation is not only an issue of Judaism in relation to Islam, but has also historically been an issue of Islam in relation to Judaism, as expressed through the charges of scriptural falsification. Accordingly, while a ground basis of revelational legitimacy is maintained, the actual Scriptures of Judaism are suspected and thereby potentially or partly invalidated. Despite the place this issue has occupied at some historical points, we believe it can be contained in such a way as to be marginal to the mutual recognition of the religions. Both historical precedents and fresh thinking suggest some ways of approaching this issue. Some of the following discussion is also relevant to a Jewish consideration of the validity of Muslim revelation.

The Arabic term, crucial to a discussion of the falsification of Scripture, is *tahrif*, literally "reverting, changing." Even though a majority of Muslims in modern times believe that *tahrif* means a material alteration of the Scriptures, the oldest interpretations of this term considered that *tahrif* meant an alteration in interpretation

and commentaries of the texts, rather than in the actual text of Scripture. The change in understanding may be traced back to the mu'tazilite al-Jahiz continuing with the Zahirite Andalusian theologian ibn Hazm, who, because of his literal reading of texts, could not conceive of alteration in other than a literal way. Nevertheless, when ibn Khaldun considers the holy Scriptures, he considers that the alteration concerns only interpretation, other than some marginal and normal mistakes made by copyists. He quotes the authority of ibn 'Abbas, who says : "It is impossible that a religious community damages the Scripture revealed to its own prophet, changes its text or does anything alike." He adds: "what they could change or alter is the interpretation" and "No one would dare change the words of God, but they interpret it differently from what it says." It is only in light of such understanding of the value of Jewish Scriptures that early Muslim theologians could consider relying on Jewish scriptural and interpretative materials to understand Qur'anic traditions. Thus, the reliance on traditions known as Isra'iliyyat in order to shed light on historical events mentioned in the Qur'an.

This last appeal to interpretation as human activity introduces us to a broader concept, current in contemporary religious as well as literary theory. Here one wonders whether a significant insight gained from the study of Torah may not be helpful also in an inter-religious context. Torah study, as carried out by the rabbis, is characterized by multiplicity of opinions and plurality of voices. Rabbinic theory recognizes this discourse as an expression of the wealth of tradition, rather than an inherent weakness. Divine speech is understood to generate plurality and diversity in its interpretation and these are celebrated as attributes of the full engagement with the word of God. This notion is also expressed by al-Ghazzali, who pointed to 60,000 potential interpretations of every Qur'anic verse, later Muslim writers who raised the number to over 300,000, and Jewish writers who took the figure as high as 2,400,000. Thus, plurality and diversity are norms in interpreting the canons of Scripture of both Judaism and Islam. However, such hermeneutical understanding is traditionally predicated upon recognizing its basis in revelation of some sort. The question deserving reflection is whether the Scriptures of our different traditions may be also approached through the prism of such plurality and multiplicity. To a large extent, the issue reverts, it would seem, to the issue of recognition of other Scriptures or the lack thereof. However, perhaps one may also consider to what extent the wealth of interpretation exhibited in midrash and in rabbinic interpretation is fully circumscribed by revelation. Such wealth is also testimony to the richness of the human spirit, to diversity inherent in our very humanity and in the plurality of approaches of finite human reality towards the divine absolute. In the space between the absolute of Divine reality and the multiplicity of human reality springs forth a multitude of reactions, responses and interpretations, all of which take up an original prophetic impulse and capture it in their respective terms. The question to be considered, then, is whether viewed from the perspective of interpretation, different religious traditions could not be validated, despite their diversity.

This suggestion is not put forth simply as a post-modern attempt to relativize truth, thereby recognizing multiple realities. It may be grounded within our classical

religious traditions. Seeing our traditions strictly in terms of truth, narrowly conceived, must lead to endless and fruitless disputes. Inability to resolve such disputes is one of the causes of religious violence, past and present. Thus, a superficial, narrow understanding of truth constitutes a real threat to all religious communities and their coexistence. Disputes over truth are an endless struggle that can be resolved only by God, as Qur'an says: "Jews said: the Christians are not in the truth, and Christians said: The Jews are not in the truth, while they read the Scripture. The ones who don't believe express the same words. And God will judge between them on the day of resurrection about what they were disputing" (II, 113). Disputes over truth lead to an effort to force one particular viewpoint, ultimately resulting in some form of violence. Recognition and validation of the other must suspend all arguments over truth, leaving each community free to express its own orientation toward God, as an expression of truth. Thus, the same eschatological moment in which the visions of Judaism and Islam unite is also the moment until which competition over competing truth claims must be suspended. Until the time of such final judgment, the best yardstick for measuring the quality of our religious lives lies not in the field of epistemology, seeking verification for truth claims, but in the ethical realm, through which our religious beliefs and the quality of our spiritual lives may be tested. Facing humanity and its diversity we are challenged to recognize in its multiplicity the call to care for one another through respect and compassion. Consequently, the impulse for religious competition finds its noblest expression in the competition for ethical excellence. Once again, we may evoke the Qur'anic recommendation to compete in good deeds without considering the religious community to which someone belongs. The ultimate criteria of religion are faith in God and ethical behavior toward all creatures. As the Qur'an states: "No! Those that will have submitted to God, being good, will have their reward with God. No fear be upon them, and they won't be afflicted" (II, 112).

Thus, perhaps the ultimate response to claims that invalidate one another's Scriptures or truths is the recognition that faith must be practiced in humility within one's own religious community and that its claims should not be subject to disputation, argumentation or competition. Thus, while holding with faith to one's understanding of tradition and revelation, one must also recognize that the validity of truth claims, the value of arguments and the rejection of the position of the religious other are ultimately an internal choice, specific to the community of believers and not fully communicable outside it. Recognition of such plurality of religious realities is actually morally beneficial, as the Qur'an suggests: "To each one an orientation toward which he turns his face. Compete with one another in good works" (II, 148), and "For every one of you, We have appointed a path and a way. If God had willed, he would have made you but one community" (V, 48). The Qur'an thus offers us an image of religious diversity that seeks to inspire us to moral excellence. Such a vision also opens us to the possibility that our own religious diversity must be both assessed and harnessed in terms of the moral wellbeing of society, leading us to the final point in the present section.

Once we acknowledge that we should measure our religions by the moral contribution they make, we must pose the question of how Judaism and Islam may approach issues of morality not simply as competitors in God's eyes but as collaborators for the wellbeing of humanity. Flowing from a mutual recognition of the two religions is therefore also the possibility of rising up to contemporary moral challenges, posed by present day life, in a joint movement. It is time to pose the question whether common reflection on contemporary moral challenges cannot be considered one of the fruits of such mutual recognition, allowing Islam and Judaism to face contemporary challenges together. The preceding discussion has assumed a commonality in a range of cardinal areas. Among these are moral and spiritual values that unite Judaism and Islam. These have come to expression throughout their intertwined history and have created what we have referred to as a Judeo-Muslim heritage. Beyond the common challenges, are there also common values, growing out of the Judeo-Muslim tradition that can be put at the service of humanity? Mutual recognition provides us with the possibility and responsibility of revitalizing and rediscovering the eclipsed treasures of the Judeo-Muslim tradition.

A major value of the Judeo-Muslim tradition that can have significant bearing upon contemporary issues is the value and dignity of the human person. Indeed, such dignity is fundamental to the process of mutual recognition, inasmuch as such recognition involves not only recognition of the religions but also of their practitioners. From this flows a fundamental sense of respect for members of the other religion. Respect and human dignity, as central features of the Judeo-Muslim tradition will constitute the final part of our presentation.

The Dignity of the Human Person – A Common Ground Value

Assessing the potential contribution of the Judeo-Muslim tradition to contemporary moral discourse and advancing relations between the two religious communities are aided by the discovery of ground values. Ground values refer to religious and spiritual principles that shape and control a broad range of practical decisions, legal rulings and concrete expressions through which the religious world view finds expression. Though broad and theoretical, ground values are powerful tools for guiding religious practice, critiquing ways in which the religion may have strayed from its ideal course and finding common ground between different religious traditions. The articulation of common ground values is an important step towards formulating where the common contributions of Judaism and Islam to humanity's problems may lie. The following discussion suggests that the dignity of the human person is a shared Judeo-Muslim ground value.

In both traditions, the dignity of the person is grounded in creation and reaffirmed through revelation that teaches the faithful how to respect the human. Both traditions affirm that Adam (man, humanity) was created as a single being, in contrast to the animals, which were created collectively. This suggests humanity's unique and privileged position in creation. It also has moral consequences, as spelled

out in the following Jewish tradition. Mishna Sanhedrin 4, 5 offers as a reason for the creation of Adam as a single being the following: "For the sake of peace among men, that none should say to his fellow, "My father is greater than yours." The Hebrew term for "man," shared also by Arabic, is *ben Adam*, "son of Adam," our common father. We have already referred to the universal moral commandments, known as the Noachide commandments, given to Adam as a common law for all humanity. The universal unity of man has its corresponding goal at the end of time when, in the eschatological vision of Judaism, when all of humanity will be reunited in the common knowledge of the one God.

Nonetheless, unity does not lead to disregard for diversity within humanity. The same mishna teaches: "this instructs us of the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, for man mints many coins with one die, and they are all alike, but the King of the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, stamped each man with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. Therefore each and every one is obliged to say: "For my sake the world was created." Qur'anic affirmation of human diversity as grounded in God's creative act has already been cited above.

The creation of the single man has further moral consequences. As the same mishna teaches: "Whoever destroys a single soul, is considered as if he had destroyed the whole world, and whosoever saves one soul, is considered as if he had saved a whole world." This idea is closely and directly echoed in the Qur'an: "For this, we prescribed to the sons of Israel that the one who killed a person without this one having taken a person, or spread corruption on earth it is as if he had killed the whole humanity. And we ordered that the one who made a person live it is as if he had made the whole humanity live" (V, 32). Thus, the supreme value of human life is grounded in an understanding of man's special position in creation, an understanding common to Judaism and Islam.

Man's special position in creation allows us to consider the correspondence between himself and his creator. Just as the creator is one, so man was created single. God's greatness is thus mirrored through humankind. Perhaps the most powerful relationship between God and the absolute value of man is conveyed by the biblical tenet that "Man was created in the image of God" (Gen. 1: 27). From the Jewish perspective, this concept has been proposed as the kind of ground value to which we referred above, a religious principle in light of which other aspects of religion are shaped. This is expressed in the thought of Ben Azzai in his famous dispute with Rabbi Akiba, recorded in the Midrash (Genesis Rabba 24, 8). Rabbi Akiba held that the principle maxim of Jewish teaching was "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. 19:18). In opposition to this, Ben Azzai presented as the most important lesson of the Bible "This is the book of the generations of man; in the day that God created man, in the likeness of God he made him.' (Gen. 5:1). According to Ben Azzai, man's creation in the image of God outweighs even the principle of neighborly love. Where neighborly love may be construed in narrow terms that limit the love offered within the community, the notion of creation in the image of God provides an external grounding in relation to God that guarantees the status and value

of the human person. The implication of creation in the image of God is the practice of dignity and respect towards all humanity, made in the divine image.

These sentiments are echoed in Islam, at times using similar language, at times using other language. The Qur'an offers various expressions for its high view of the perfection of the human person, such as in the following verse: "We created man with the best constitution" (XCV, 4). Most significant in light of the Biblical source is the Hadith tradition, variously understood, that "God created man at His image." It is striking how some of the reflections concerning the status of the human person are identical in both traditions. Further, we may recall the statement of Aisha concerning the Prophet, stating his whole nature was the Qur'an, which is the uncreated word of God. This suggests that man's perfection is nothing but a reflection of God's own perfection.

One dimension of the biblical understanding of creation in God's image is the charge placed in man's hands over all the rest of creation, for which he is to care. As well, Muslim tradition recognizes that manifesting God's perfection entails showing the same care, responsibility, love and mercy to the whole creation that God shows every moment to His creatures. Muslim tradition speaks of man as the crown of creation and as *khalifa,* i.e., vicegerent, representative, lieutenant, charged with responsibility for the world. The Muslim notion that God appointed man as His lieutenant in creation points both to man's special status and to his responsibility towards creation.

A beautiful testimony to the dignity of man and to how he is to act as God's vicegerent is found in the following source, extolling forgiveness, mercy, and understanding to others. The fourth caliph of Islam and son in law of the Prophet, Ali ibn Abi Talib, wrote to a governor he had appointed: "Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your subjects. Be not in face of them a voracious animal, counting them as easy prey, for they are of two kinds; either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation. Error catches them unaware, deficiencies overcome them, evil deeds are committed by them intentionally and by mistake. So grant them your pardon and your forgiveness to the same extent that you hope God will grant you His pardon and His forgiveness. For you are above them, and he who appointed you is above, and God is above him who appointed you."

In considering the common moral heritage of the Judeo-Muslim tradition, one of the key concepts that governs their respective and common world views concerns the place of the human person in the scheme of creation and in the spiritual life. The preceding discussion suggested this conceptual centrality and offered it as a guiding principle, in light of which both traditions can shape their attitude to the other, in practical and concrete terms. It would take us beyond our mandate to consider the multitude of practical implications that the notion of the dignity of the human person may have in day to day life of Jewish and Muslim communities living alongside one another. Present circumstances do not permit a consideration of how this principle could or should find expression in relation to specific legal rulings of both traditions,

especially as these are relevant to situations of conflict. The legal and hermeneutical work needed to engage these dimensions is too detailed and is, in any event, a subject for legal specialists on both sides. The present contribution seeks to open up the discussion between Muslims and Jews to the recognition of the shared ground value, which should serve as a beacon in whose light practical and legal discussions must take place. If this ground value is agreed upon, it allows us to consider the degree to which our traditions are faithful to it and calls us to ways of implementing this ground value.

From Theory to Practice – Concluding Remarks

The goals that have been outlined in the present essay are weighty theological matters. They present a challenge for thinkers on both sides and include:

- Recovery of the common Judeo-Muslim heritage.
- Mutual religious recognition between the two religions.
- Creative theological thinking regarding negative presentations of the other and issues that historically have been sources of discord between the traditions.
- Collaborative thinking regarding contemporary issues.

Thinking of such challenges must take place in a context. The Judeo-Muslim tradition took shape in the natural context of Jews and Muslims living alongside one another. This context has largely disappeared, and where Jews and Muslims do live alongside one another political conflict or its shadow often frustrates the ability to advance the goals set above. In lieu of a natural context of coexistence, religious leaders who seek to advance harmony between the religions must create new contexts in which to advance their thinking and in which to bring it to the attention of broader publics. Meetings, such as the Ifrane meeting, provide the context for beginning a fresh conversation between Judaism and Islam. However, the ultimate success of the meeting will depend not only on the quality of presentations or conversations at the meeting, but upon the ability of participants to establish life contexts through which dialogue, understanding and relations with the other can be advanced. The success of the meeting will be determined largely through the fruits it produces following the meeting. We therefore invite you, in preparation for the meeting of Imams and Rabbis, to reflect on some of the following issues:

- What contexts of personal and communal relations can be developed that can further the goals of mutual understanding, harmony and collaboration at all levels?
- How can the message of collaboration and understanding be carried into our religious communities and not remain an abstract theoretical vision?
- What practical steps can be taken in your community to gain a better appreciation of the religious other?

- What educational steps can be taken to rediscover the rich and positive history of Islam and Judaism and the Judeo-Muslim heritage?
- What cultural and artistic dimensions can be retrieved as part of a rediscovery of the Judeo-Muslim heritage?

It is our sincere prayer that the Ifrane meeting will offer answers to these questions that will resonate worldwide in all communities where Jews and Muslims live alongside one another.

Declaration of The Elijah Think-tank

Following our collaborative work in preparing this essay, we wish to present participants in the Ifrane meeting with our own resolution, summarizing the fruits of our common work. We offer our resolution to participants as a model resolution and recommend it to their consideration for incorporation as part of the final resolution of the Ifrane meeting.

Whereas the establishment of global peace is a burning concern for all religions, and in order to advance the goal of peace, it is imperative for religious leaders and for religious teaching to play a constructive role in it. And

Whereas hitherto, the specter of political conflicts of the past century has overshadowed the mutual perception of Judaism and Islam, leading to the obscuring of a rich historical relationship that has existed between the two religions. And

Whereas the external perceptions of Islam and Judaism are no longer a matter for the two religions only, but have become issues of global concern. Jews and Muslims live side by side not only in the Middle East but in many metropolitan centers around the world. Jewish-Muslim relations are thus a significant concern for common life in most parts of the Western world. Conflict in the Middle East has drawn the religions themselves into a measure of strife. And

Whereas Judaism and Islam have shared a rich and intertwined history, each having been inspired by the other, and their collective history points to unique moral and spiritual values that can be referred to as the Judeo-Muslim tradition. And

Whereas underlying the values of this shared tradition is the recognition of key theological concepts the religions have in common: God, creation, revelation, retribution, justice, morality and living in the service of God and humanity and more. And

Whereas the moral and spiritual commonalities of Judaism and Islam have led to various expressions of mutual recognition in history.

Therefore we submit:

This history needs to be reaffirmed. Political turmoil has all but obliterated the wealth of the historical tradition of the Judeo- Muslim heritage and the concomitant mutual recognition.

We further submit that Judaism and Islam can, based on the values inherent in their tradition, jointly contribute to the handling of challenges facing contemporary society and that their common positive values can contribute to the enhancement of the dignity of man, valued in both traditions, thus leading to the furtherance of world harmony and peace.

We further urge religious leaders to engage in inter-religious dialogue with one another, in order to better understand the diversity that exists between the religions as well as in order to uncover possibilities for handling centuries-old differences that could detract from the goals of harmonious understanding.

In conclusion, we wish to reaffirm that there is no room for religious war between Judaism and Islam and that through mutual recognition, understanding and collaboration religious leaders can help advance the perception of both religions globally as well as reduce the impact of their respective religions in strife torn areas. We urge religious leaders to find practical means, structures and methods to translate into action the mandates of better mutual understanding and collaboration and the rediscovery of the Judeo Muslim heritage.