ON MYSTICISM AND ECUMENISM

Inroads in Jewish-Muslim Dialogue

MASTER’S THESIS

Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
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Hornstein Program
Jonathan Sarna, advisor

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By V. Judah Khaykin
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For my family…
ABSTRACT

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The history of Jewish-Muslim relations is one fraught with episodes of terrible enmity, conflict and bloodshed. Yet it is also a history marked by periods of peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange, cooperation, and profound mutual respect. This work is dedicated to multiplying the latter, and decreasing the former.

To do so, it promotes what the author believes is an effect inroad to improved interreligious relations, namely, the mystical traditions that exist at the core of religion. Mysticism, man's pursuit of direct experience of the divine, has been with us from the beginning, arising from man's primordial yearnings, and giving rise to some of the earliest foundations of the Jewish religion. It is this yearning that unites all mankind. In the words of Edward Kaplan, "people of different faiths are joined...by their yearning for God's presence, their quest for certainty about God."

Yet it is much more than a yearning. Jewish mysticism and Sufism, its Islamic counterpart, share a complex cosmology, teleology, and hermeneutics, a way of looking at the world, one that is ideally inclined toward ecumenism and
what Kaplan calls a "sacred humanism," that fosters profound respect for the other. Moreover, this ecumenism is not rooted simply in sentimental tolerance or superficial exigencies, but rather is grounded in a divinely sanctioned pluralism, one that appreciates the other in their particularity while nonetheless recognizing the Oneness that unites all being.

Moving from mystical doctrine, we find precedence for the efficacy of mysticism as a vehicle for ecumenism in the remarkable history of religious exchange in the esoteric domain. The figures who participated in dialogue and exchange were amongst the most respected and influential Jewish leaders of their time, including several generations of the progeny of Moses Maimonides. The fruits of this exchange have had tremendous impact on Judaism as we know it.
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**Introduction**

The history of Jewish-Muslim relations, a history spanning nearly 1500 years, or the length of the history of Islam itself, is a history fraught with episodes of terrible enmity, conflict and bloodshed. It is also a history marked by periods of peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange, reciprocal influence, and profound mutual respect.

In our own times, the relationship between Jews and Muslims is a highly tenuous one. The collusion between Muslim leaders and the Nazi regime, the establishment of the State of Israel in the middle of the Muslim world, and the subsequent displacement of nearly 2 million individuals, both Muslim and Mizrahi-Jewish; the rise of radical, anti-Semitic Islamic terror groups and the attacks of September 11, 2001; the grotesque murder of Jewish journalist Daniel Pearl by Islamic extremists – these are just some of the events that have characterized Jewish-Muslim relations over the past century. Yet we have also been witnessing moments of great hope: valiant efforts at reconciliation, dialogue and cooperation.

As I write this, over one hundred mosques and synagogues, in twenty-two countries across the world, are participating in a Twinning weekend, the third of
Its kind.\textsuperscript{1} It is an annual event organized by the Foundation For Ethnic Understanding, an American non-profit organization headed by Rabbi Marc Schneier, with Board Chair, Hip-Hop mogul Russell Simmons. During this 3-day event, Muslims will pray in Jewish synagogues, observed in their ritual prostrations by the synagogue's members. Conversely, Jews will pray in Muslim mosques, with Muslims looking on. Jewish and Muslim teens will participate in volunteerism and social service together, and Jewish and Muslim communities will lobby their local government on issues of shared interest, such as improving police protection of synagogues and mosques, and discuss issues of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

In the present moment, we are faced with both a dire necessity and a hopeful opportunity, signaled by the recent events such as those mentioned above, for building better relations and in fact cooperation between Jewish and Muslim communities. This paper arises out of the recognition of this opportunity and necessity. Its aims are at once humble, proposing no easy solutions, rather only an analysis of what the author believes is an inroad to dialogue and coexistence, yet at the same time ambitious: in the hope that the seeds planted herein will blossom into a future of Jewish-Muslim relations that is worthy of the vision of the Prophets, a vision of peace and brotherhood.

The idea that will be proposed here is that the mystical traditions within Judaism and Islam, in a number of ways, constitute an inroad to Jewish-Muslim

dialogue, ideally predisposed as they are toward interreligious ecumenism. This is borne out in a historical context, as well as an examination of the respective doctrines of Jewish and Sufi (Islamic) mysticism. This paper, then, will examine the doctrines of the respective mystical traditions in order to illustrate the ways in which they lend themselves to ecumenism, and will provide a historical basis that may serve the reader as a substantive precedent for Jewish and Islamic mysticism fostering interfaith respect, dialogue, and mutual enrichment.

Yet it does not seem sufficient to stop there. Demonstrating that mysticism has played an important, even vital role in fostering ecumenical and fraternal relations between Jews and Muslims in other times and places does not by itself substantiate the larger claim that it can play the same role today. It does not necessarily follow that something that was effective in one context will be as effective in another. Thus, an attempt will be made to persuade the reader that in fact, mysticism is a particularly suitable mode for present-day interfaith work.

In the interest of peaceful coexistence between people that transcends particularism and outward forms, without disregarding them, this work should be viewed as a piece of a broader puzzle that seeks harmony, not only between Jewish mysticism and Sufism, or Judaism and Islam, or their adherents, but among all peoples of all faiths, and those of no religious faith at all. My hope is to add to a conversation already begun by others, to present ideas that may serve as seeds for further development.
Additionally, my hopes in writing this piece are to secure for the mystical tradition a more prominent role in the religious life and institutions of, at least, the Jewish community. It is my belief that the mystical tradition offers benefits to the modern Jew in addressing many of the contemporary issues facing the individual, the community and the world. Improved interreligious relations is just one desirable that I believe we stand to gain.
CHAPTER 1.
Why Mysticism?

The Zohar, considered by many to be the principal text of Kabbalah or Jewish mysticism, teaches that the Torah we have on earth, a text comprised of mythical stories, allegories, laws, and sacred history, is but a garment for the truth that lies beneath the surface.² So too it has been suggested that the great world religions, composed as they are of doctrines and dogmas, traditions and rituals, are but the adornments for the inner truth that lies at their core. Though they may differ in their outward forms, just as mankind does in outward appearance – skin color, facial structure, hair and eye color – it is what lies at the core that unites humanity.

Thus, some have argued that in seeking unity among faiths and their adherents, we must turn to their respective esoteric teachings, their mystical doctrines, sometimes characterized as "the heart" of the tradition, where, more often than not, we find a striking affinity. "It is...on the level of esotericism," writes S.H. Nasr, one of the foremost contemporary scholars of Islamic mysticism, "that the most profound encounter with other traditions have been made, and where

one can find the indispensable ground for understanding of other religions today.\textsuperscript{3}

In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the greatest contemporary exponents of Jewish mystical thought and one of the foremost proponents of interreligious dialogue, "different are the languages of prayer, but the tears are the same. We have a vision in common in Him in whose compassion all men's prayers meet."\textsuperscript{4} Or, in the words of Heschel's biographer, Edward Kaplan, "people of different faiths are joined, rather than separated, by their yearning for God's presence, their quest for certainty about God."\textsuperscript{5}

Man's quest to experience God has a long and colorful history. Mysticism, that is, the corpus of beliefs and practices borne out of man's yearning for the direct experience of and communion with the divine, "the quest for certainty about God," has been a central aspect of man's religious life from the very earliest days. It is fair to say, at least, that this aspiration manifested itself in the beliefs and rituals that are at the heart of the Abrahamic traditions, embedded into their very mythology.

\textsuperscript{3} Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. \textit{Sufi Essays} (New York: State University of New York Press, 1972) p. 146  
I have argued, for example, that the biblical use of incense represents an early manifestation of this very impetus.\textsuperscript{6} This was amongst the first attempts by man to overcome what has been called "one of the most significant existential dilemmas for the religious person," namely, "the discrepancy between the assertion that God is everywhere and eternally present, and the inability to become aware of His presence"\textsuperscript{7}. Though the Biblical incense rituals can be interpreted in a number of different ways – as apotropaic, propitiatory, mediatory, and so on – at the core of all such understandings of this rituals lies one seemingly indisputable fact: that the ancient Israelites used incense to make the absent deity present and accessible, counteracting the sense of estrangement from an invisible, transcendent God. As such, the biblical incense rituals may be considered among the earliest Jewish mystical practices.

Yet this "existential dilemma" is no less the dilemma of the religious person today than it was for the ancient Israelites. Human beings today are, perhaps, as much in need of a sense of certainty about God as we have ever been. While our sacred scriptures are filled with accounts of God's theophany to our religious forebears, communicating divine instructions from on high – in fact it may be said that the Jewish religion is a product of one such theophany at Sinai – in our own modern lives God seems both absent and mute.

\textsuperscript{6} Khaykin, V. Judah. "Making the Absent God Present" (Unpublished work available from author)

Is it any surprise, then, that in our own time we are experiencing a renewed interest in mysticism and spirituality? Is it any wonder that the most popular and bestselling poet in the United States today is not Sylvia Plath or Robert Frost, neither Byron nor Shakespeare, but Jalaladin Rumi, a 13th century Persian mystical poet whose verses dealt primarily with the intimate experience of the divine, both as laments on the separation from God's presence and odes to the joys of mystical union? Evidence of the growing interest in mysticism is everywhere. One need look no further than "the rise of the Kabbalah movement," noted by sociologist Steven Cohen in his study on the spirituality of American Jews, for confirmation of this trend.

Indeed, Kabbalah has become a pop sensation drawing the interest of celebrities such as Madonna and Britney Spears. One family, the Bergs, have capitalized on this phenomenon extensively. The Kabbalah Centre, a multinational spiritual organization and merchandising empire, has grown exponentially since its founding in 1965. Today there is a Kabbalah Centre in many major cities across the world, from Los Angeles to New York City, Sao

8 The two terms "mysticism" and "spirituality" will, for the purposes this work, be used interchangeably. While the two categories are not synonymous, the author maintains that such use is justified as mysticism is concerned primarily with the move beyond forms, ritual, theology, the exoteric, toward the inward spirit of things. Kabbalah has commonly been referred to both as Jewish spirituality and Jewish mysticism.
Paulo to Moscow, and of course, Jerusalem. Kabbalah Centre also has locations "not just in major metropolitan centers, but in smaller places like Tyler, Texas and Evansville, Indiana too."\(^{11}\)

There is little doubt that interest in mysticism and spirituality constitutes an important part of religious consciousness in the modern age. Some religious groups have recognized this opportunity and have incorporated mystical teachings, rituals and practices into their work, whether religious outreach or liturgy, etc. Chabad-Lubavitch, the Chasidic movement known for missionizing to less observant or unaffiliated Jews, and one of the largest and most ubiquitous Jewish organizations in the world, incorporates Jewish mystical teachings into many of its outreach and educational efforts. Their website, chabad.org, has an extensive section dedicated to Kabbalah, including articles on Jewish mystical teachings and interpretations of the Torah, portions from standard Kabbalistic texts like the Zohar and Chassidic works like the Tanya, and even an animated series designed to make Kabbalistic teachings accessible to students of all ages called "Kabbala Toons."\(^{12}\)

Organizations like Chabad have recognized that the growing interest in Jewish mysticism and spirituality might provide what Cohen et al called a "route to Jewish engagement" which has the potential to "broaden Judaism's appeal"


amongst the unaffiliated. They also noted that it can provide a "common religious language" with the potential to ease tensions and foster greater harmony around "shared interests, activities and perspectives" amongst Jewish religious communities, particularly between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox. The potential, as will be argued in this work, is actually far greater, opening possibilities for nurturing not just intrareligious harmony, but interreligious harmony as well.

Next, we will delve into the mystical traditions that are the subject of this present work, Sufism and Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah, and examine the doctrinal aspects relevant to interreligious ecumenism.

13 Cohen and Hoffman, “How Spiritual are America’s Jews?”
CHAPTER 2.  
A Note on Oneness:  
*Adonai Echad, La illaha illa Allah*

Let us first turn to a concept that may be said to lie at the heart of both Jewish and Islamic mysticism.\(^{14}\) I am referring to the monistic doctrine of the unity of all existence in God, known as *wahdat al-wujud* to the Sufis. Sufi cosmology, like the cosmology of the Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism, holds that all things, the whole of all being and existence, is essentially One. It is in light of this doctrine that Sufis understand the *shahada*, the Muslim declaration of belief in the Oneness of God: *la illaha illa Allah*. To the Sufis, this is understood to mean that nothing exists other than God, that, as the Quran teaches, "wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God" (2:115). Thus, to the Sufi the multiplicity we experience in the world is only a reflection of the many aspects of God's, His divine attributes.\(^{15}\)

Judaism contains a similar pronouncement in the belief of God's unity, known as the *Shema*, which is recited by religious Jews several times every day in their prayers, and as the last words on their deathbed: *Shema Israel, Adonai*

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\(^{14}\) For the purposes of this paper the terms "Sufism" and "Islamic mysticism" will be used interchangeably.

Eloheinu, Adonai Echad – "Hear, oh Israel: The Lord, our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). In accordance with the teaching of the Torah that "the Lord, He is God; there is nothing else beside Him," the Kabbalists understand the Shma, this "quintessential expression of Judaism's 'most fundamental belief and commitment," in precisely the same way as the Sufis; "God is omnipresent" in the sense that "there is no being other than Him...Everything in the world is God Himself." Traditionally, Jews cover their eyes while reciting this verse. One interpretation of this practice is that it is performed to shield one's view from the world of multiplicity, which can distract one from the true Oneness of God.

The created world, in its myriad manifestations, is seen to be a manifestation of the attributes of God, known as Sephirot, or divine names. According to the Italian Kabbalist Menachem Recanati (d.1290), "All created being, earthly man and all the creatures in this world, exist according to the archetype of the ten sephirot." Thus, essentially, "there is no place free of Him." Or in the words of Rumi, the Persian Sufi poet of the 13th century, "all are

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He." All things, in their myriad forms refer the mystic to the Oneness that is inherent in the All.
As we have seen, the Jewish and Muslim mystic holds that every created thing, every phenomenon in our world is a manifestation of one of the myriad attributes of God. But while this is true of every created thing, for every created thing bears the mark of its Creator, this is much more true of the human being. Hewn in the divine image, a concept native to both Judaism and Islam, mankind, the pinnacle of creation, is the "elite of this lower world."22

Human beings, more than any other creatures, are capable of exhibiting the fullness of the attributes of God. "Human beings assume many of the traits of God…more than any other terrestrial creatures…A normal child cannot grow up without manifesting life, knowledge, desire, power, speech, hearing, sight and other divine attributes. Especially important here is the degree to which human beings display knowledge (or intelligence) and speech, since these are fundamental in setting them apart from other creatures."23 Yet it is not man's natural attributes such as speech and intelligence that make him the most perfect conduit of the Divine, but his moral dimension. "A person who aspires to become

more than a human animal will have to actualize other divine qualities which are likely to remain latent in the 'natural' human state, that is, those traits which have a specifically moral connotation, such as generosity, justice, forbearance, and gratitude. In other words, human beings are able to exhibit more fully the spectrum of God's qualities because of their capacity for exercising moral faculties. It is in this way that human beings are truly distinct from other creatures, terrestrial and otherwise, and most resembling of God to whom apply the appellations "the compassionate," "the merciful," and "the just."

Thus, Jewish and Islamic mysticism can rightly be called "sacred humanism." While searching for God, or the Absolute, or the One [the mystics] recognize the visage of the divine in the human other, in whom the Divine is most completely reflected. Such a perspective has extensive implications for interreligious dialogue as it elevates human interactions to a higher level. Writes Heschel, "To meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, the presence of God. According to a rabbinical interpretation, the Lord said to Moses: 'Wherever you see the trace of man there I stand before you.'"

To recognize the Divine in the human Other, obliges one to afford to every human being, irrespective of religious affiliation, a level of respectful behavior

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24 Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 22
commensurate to the presence of God. "Thou canst not offend a human being," writes Heschel, "without affecting the living God. Where man loves man, His name is sanctified."²⁹ Conversely, to disrespect a human being is to disrespect God and desecrate the Divine image in whose likeness that human was made. Hence, the other is respected not merely on the basis of "sentiment of religious tolerance, but on the basis of the perception of the other as an expression of the One,"³⁰ which is a much more weighty and binding basis indeed.

²⁹ Heschel, Abraham J. God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), p. 95
³⁰ Kazemi, The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue, p. xxv
CHAPTER 4.
Religious Pluralism, Divinely Sanctioned

As we have seen, for the mystic, whether Jewish or Sufi, the true essence of our world is not a fractured multiplicity, but a harmonious unity. Though we see in our world a great multiplicity and diversity of being, to the mystic this is not the highest truth. Thus, writes Scholem, "the energy of 'orthodox' Kabbalistic speculation is bent on the task of escaping from dualistic consequences."\(^{31}\)

This can be better understood through considering the metaphor of the ocean. The ocean is a vast oneness and the water that constitutes it is entirely undifferentiated. However, an imagined multiplicity arises if instead we conceive of the ocean as innumerable drops of water. Yet unity and oneness is restored as soon as we recognize that the "imagined multiplicity is nothing other than a real unity – the drops are nothing but the ocean, deriving their being from the ocean…viewed in their totality they are indistinguishable from it – they are the ocean and the ocean is them."\(^{32}\)

In the mystical perspective, the world of forms and multiplicity is not so much illusory as it is, in the words of Abraham J. Heschel, allusory. It *alludes* to

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\(^{32}\) Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 92
something greater than itself, to "transcendent meaning." Not that the world isn't real, but that it, per se, does not have an independent life of its own. The intention, indeed the raison d'être of an allusion is to point beyond itself. Thus, an allusion is a means to an end; it arises from and is given purpose by that which it signifies, that to which it alludes. Without the signified, the signifier does not come into being, for it has no independent purpose for existing.

A metaphor commonly used by Sufis to illustrate this point is that of the mirror. The image in the mirror and the object of which it is a reflection are wholly separate from one another. Yet, the image in the mirror has no reality of its own independent from the object that gives it its existence. Though the image in the mirror is the object in one sense, without the object the image "is reduced to sheer nothingness." Conversely, however, the object is entirely independent of the image in the mirror. Obadyah Maimonides (, grandson of the illustrious Moses Maimonides, who will come up again later in this work, employed a different reflecting surface to explicate the same theme in his mystical work *Treatise of the Pool*.

When applied to the religious situation, this leads to an understanding of and attitude toward one's own tradition that prevents dogmatism, the adversary of the ecumenical spirit. The religion, from this perspective, is not a universe unto itself – total, all encompassing, and absolute – but rather, like all things, alludes

34 Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 111
to and directs us toward that divine Reality which gives the religion life, which nonetheless is independent of that religion. Religious forms, thus become important not unto themselves, but only insofar as they properly allude, though always insufficiently, to the divine, and direct the religious practitioner toward God. Their particularity is seen in the light of the Universal that gives them purpose. To mistake the reflection for the object is, according to the mystical perspective of Sufism and Jewish mysticism alike, idolatry. "Religion as an institution…religion for religion's sake, is idolatry." \(35\)

Though they allude to God, they do not contain Him. Returning to the metaphor of the ocean, we recognize that water, which is the essence of the ocean itself, and constitutes every individual drop, cannot be contained by the individual drop. In the same way, every manifestation of God, which has God at its essence, including every religious manifestation, cannot fully contain God any more than a single drop of water can contain water-ness. Hence, no one religion, tradition, or religious community contains God entirely, though God is the essence of them all.

Such a perspective safeguards against the propping up of religious forms as religious idols. No thing, no religious text or system of law can contain the Ineffable. God, by his very nature, transcends all things even as all things reflect God's essence and thereby allude to Him. "True interfaith companionship requires a shared attitude of 'humility and contrition,' an open-mindedness that

\[\text{35 Heschel, } \text{Man is Not Alone. p. 236}\]
comes with a sense of finitude, of mystery…A person sensitive to the 'tragic insufficiency of human faith' is more likely to abandon the 'pretension and conceit' of dogmatic theology." 36 This perspective leads us to the conclusion that no religion can be viewed as having a monopoly on God, a welcome conclusion indeed in the pursuit of ecumenism.

This perspective conditions the religious person to understand his own religious community as a constituent part of, rather than the sum total of divine expression. The degree to which one is able to recognize one's own religion as a particular expression of universal, divine principles, rather than the only such expression, is the degree to which one is able to effectively participate in a truly fruitful interreligious dialogue. One of the most serious impediments to such constructive dialogue is the entrenched belief that one's own religion alone has a monopoly on truth, that only one's faith alone is the path leading to salvation, that only the adherents of one's own religious community are the beloved of God, the Creator of all mankind. How can we truly relate to another religious person when we reject his/her legitimacy, their relationship to the divine, which is, after all, their most important claim?

One of the key issues in interreligious dialogue is the relationship between the particular and the universal. The mystical traditions of Judaism and Islam provide a basis for successfully navigating the troubled waters between particularism and universalism, between appreciating the uniqueness of one's

36 Kaplan, "'Seeking God's Will Together': Heschel's Depth Theology as Common Ground," p. 193
own tradition while simultaneously maintaining a capacity for respecting the traditions of others.

According to the mystical doctrine, God, the infinite Reality, will naturally express Himself in infinite, diverse ways. Human diversity, as well as religious diversity that characterizes it, therefore, is an expression of the Divine infinity.\(^{37}\) Hence, religious diversity is not simply a matter of "accidental expression of the diversity of man,"\(^{38}\) of a great diverse multitude of cultures all striving to relate to and understand the divine, each in its own way. The multiplicity of religious forms is not merely the product of "cognitive responses' to the ineffable Real."\(^{39}\) Rather, from this perspective, religious diversity is an expression of the infinite nature of God and is therefore divinely ordained. "In the same way that each being in the universe is the theophany of a Divine Name, so does each religion reveal an aspect of the divine names and qualities. The multiplicity of religions is the direct result of the infinite richness of the Divine Being."\(^{40}\)

Abraham Heschel makes clear this principle, comparing the multiplicity of religions to great works of art in a museum and the multiplicity of human forms:

"It seems to be the will of God that there be more than one religion. I think it's a marvelous thing to realize. You know, if I were to ask the question"

\(^{37}\) Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue*, p. xviii
\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. xxv
\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. xiv
\(^{40}\) Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, p. 148
whether...the Metropolitan Museum should try to introduce that all paintings should look alike, or that all human faces should look alike – how would you respond to my proposal?...Yes, I think it is the will of God that there should be religious pluralism.41

This provides a basis for interreligious pluralism that goes beyond simple sentimental wishes for greater religious harmony or utilitarian considerations, which are subject to "the contingencies of pragmatism." Instead, the mystical perspective elucidated in the Jewish and Sufi mystical traditions provides a divinely sanctioned basis for religious pluralism. Carrying with it the "seal of Heaven" it is therefore much more unshakable, permanent and absolute.42

This is also of importance for another reason. This being a work intended to have practical, not only academic implications, it is imperative that any approach to religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue, such as the mystical approach proposed here, must prove to be palatable to the large body of religious exotericists, the "majoritarian"43 constituency. It must successfully address objections and placate concerns.

Certainly, some unease is bound to arise among this group at such notions of universalism and interfaith interchange. One objection may be that acknowledging a common, universal content that is at the core of these traditions, may lead some to question the necessity of retaining the outer

42 Kazemi, The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue, p. xii
43 Ibid., p. xx
garments of tradition, eschewing all particularities, all sense of Jewishness, or Muslimness and focusing on a common, universal religion. Such attempts have in fact been made at various times, by individuals arising from various religious traditions. In the Jewish sphere, we have the example of Felix Adler who progressed a similar idea, what he called "Ethical Culture."

Though we certainly know of examples of antinomianism in both mystical traditions, overall, adherents of these traditions have tended to adhere to halakhah and shariah, normative Jewish and Muslim law, respectively. Both Sufism and Jewish mysticism have historically been initiatic traditions, passed from master to disciple. Kabbalah, from the word I'kabel, meaning "to receive," intimates this quality of received tradition. Often times we find that knowledge of and adherence to religious law is a prerequisite to receiving discipleship and beginning on the mystical path, constituting part of that path itself. Abraham Maimonides, for example, to whom we will return again later, "acknowledged only one way to the mystical life, namely the one embodied in the laws and doctrines of traditional religion, which to him, of course, meant rabbinic Judaism."

Abraham's son, Obadyah Maimonides, who would continue the mystical tradition of his father, likewise maintained the imperative to follow the exoteric law as a means to the attainment of the esoteric goals. "The science can only be

attained after having mastered the exoteric revelation, inasmuch as the latter is
the axis of moral discipline and the ladder by which to ascend to the most high."\textsuperscript{45}

Sufism likewise requires its adherents to abide by the traditional normative
laws of Islam. Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi wrote the \textit{Kitab at-ta'arruf}, one of the most
important works on Sufism from the first three centuries of Islam. In it he
describes how the Sufis carefully adhere to the dictates of Islamic law:

\begin{quote}
They are agreed that all ordinances imposed by God on (His) servants in
His Book, and all the duties laid down by the Prophet (in the Traditions),
are a necessary obligation and a binding imposition for adults of mature
intelligence: and that they may not be abandoned or forsaken in any way
by any man, whether he be a veracious believer (siddiq), or a saint, or a
gnostic, even though he may have attained the furthest rank, the highest
degree, the noblest station, or the most exalted stage. They hold that
there is no station in which a man may dispense with the prescriptions
(adab) of the religious law, by holding permissible what God has
prohibited, or making illegal what God has declared legal, or legal what
God has pronounced illegal, or omitting to perform any religious duty…the
more inwardly pure a man is, the higher his rank and the nobler his
station, so much the more arduously he labours, with sincerer
performance and a greater fear of God.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Now, even if we succeed in allaying fears of antinomianism and
abandonment of particular religious forms, we may nonetheless be confronted
with reservations about the permissibility of interreligious dialogue and exchange
for fear of the adoption of foreign religious beliefs and practices. This is a most
serious concern. To allay such trepidation, we might employ the common

\textsuperscript{45} Maimonides, Obadyah, \textit{Treatise of the Pool}, trans. Paul Fenton (London: Octagon
Press, 1981), p. 79
\textsuperscript{46} Al-Kalabadhi, Abu Bakr. \textit{The Doctrine of the Sufis}, trans. A.J. Arberry (London:
Cambridge University Press, 1935) p. 43-44
technique of deferring to authority. As far as the Jewish community is concerned, we needn't go much further than the Talmud which teaches that "Whoever utters a wise word, even if he belongs to the gentiles, is called a sage."\textsuperscript{47}

We may also point out that those who have engaged in such interreligious dialogue and exchange as is proposed here, have been among the most illustrious and respected leaders in the history of Judaism. Among their writings we find clear precedent for interreligious engagement, for seeking out truth wherever it may be found. Maimonides, for example, notes that in so far as rules have been established by clear proofs, free from any flaw and irrefutable, we need not be concerned about the identity of their authors, whether they were Hebrew Prophets or gentile sages. For when we have to do with rules and propositions which have been demonstrated by sound and flawless proofs, we rely upon the author who has discovered them or has transmitted them only because of his demonstrated proofs and verified reasoning.\textsuperscript{48}

In other words, truth is truth, with one primary, heavenly Source that transcends religions and nations. Therefore, insofar as we are dealing with truth, we needn't be overly concerned with the secondary, terrestrial source of the truth, whether they are Jewish or gentile. Such a position clearly influenced the progeny of Moses Maimonides who reached across the religious divide to glean wisdom from their Sufi counterparts.

There is much more that could be said about the ways in which a doctrine such as the "unity of all being" lends itself to better relations between religious

\textsuperscript{47} Megillah 16a
\textsuperscript{48} Maimonides, Moses, as quoted by Eliezar Liebermann, \textit{Or Nogah}, trans. S. Fischer and S. Weinstein, (Dessau, 1818), pp. 22-25
groups, and more generally between all human beings. But, I think this is entirely self-evident and needs no further explanation. It is clear that such a cosmological doctrine and the mode of thought that emerges from it, naturally leads beyond the sort of thinking that may divide the self from the other – which is a consequence of "dualistic thinking," and cause rifts between or amongst religious communities. Suffice it to say that this idea has the effect of easing the sense of religious boundaries, or at least making them more flexible. We see this for example in the poems of Rumi (1207-1273), the beloved Sufi poet, who writes:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{Not Christian or Jew or} \\
&\text{Muslim, not Hindu,} \\
&\text{Buddhist, Sufi, or Zen.} \\
&\text{Not any religion} \\
&\text{or cultural system. I am} \\
&\text{not from the east} \\
&\text{or the west...} \\
&\text{I belong to the beloved,} \\
&\text{have seen the two worlds as one and} \\
&\text{that one} \\
&\text{call to and know,} \\
&\text{first, last, outer, inner,} \\
&\text{only that breath breathing} \\
&\text{human being.}^{49}
\end{align*}
\]

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These verses illustrate how the mystical doctrine of the unity of being in God facilitates the desire to see beyond forms, beyond religious and cultural distinctions, and allows the mystic to identify more broadly with his fellow human beings in an attitude of ever widening inclusiveness and fraternity.
CHAPTER 5.
Fraternitas Mysticus

Human beings identify with one another not only on the basis of a shared history, nationality, tradition, similarity of appearance, and so forth, but also on the basis of accordant principles and affinity of aspirations. We are likely to feel a certain kinship with those whom we see as being engaged in seeking similar ends as we do, who share our commitments and our struggles, who see themselves as playing a similar role in the world as ourselves.

In fact, when we look at the core of Jewish and Sufi mystical traditions we find such accord in a shared cosmological master narrative, a concurrence about the purpose and nature of creation and man's relation to it. Like all ideologies, this mythical master narrative shapes the mystics' worldview, or view of reality, their understanding of the world and their place within it, and their interpretation of its phenomena. The language used to describe this narrative is at times divergent, as it arises from within the cultural context of the history, texts, and traditions of each respective religious community. "We cannot," writes Scholem, "expect the physiognomy of Jewish mysticism to be the same as Catholic mysticism, Anabaptism or Sufi Islam." After all, "the outward forms of mystical religion within the orbit of a given religion are to a large extent shaped by the
positive content and values recognized and glorified in that religion.\textsuperscript{50} Yet, whatever the metaphors employed to tell the story, whatever the outward garb by which the mystic interprets the world, the heart of that interpretation remains overwhelmingly the consistent.

What we find in examining the stated goals of Jewish mystics and Sufis, is that the two are engaged, as it were, in the same work, committed to achieving the same ends. More importantly, the goal to which I am referring is not any arbitrary goal but the goal which answers man's most fundamental existential question: why are we here? On this most basic and principal question, Jewish mystics and Sufis are in absolute accord.

So, then, what is this objective that lies at the sacred center of both Jewish and Sufi mysticism? What is the purpose that drives the mystics of these two camps? What lies at the end of their respective journeys, the ends towards which all their aspirations are directed? According to the mystics, both Jewish and Sufi alike, man's \textit{raison d'être} is reunification, reparation, or re-membering of the unity that is the true essence of all creation. It is on the basis of these shared aspirations, a shared sense of one's own \textit{raison d'être}, that Jews and Muslims may build, and share, not just a tolerable coexistence, but actually a fruitful dialogue, a rewarding exchange of ideas, a mutually beneficial relationship, even a sense of camaraderie.

\textsuperscript{50} Scholem, \textit{Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism}, p. 10
To understand the endeavors of the mystic properly, we must return once more, briefly, to the concept of the unity of all things in God, which is the main idea of both Jewish and Sufi mysticism and from which all other principles are derived and our starting point. Let us begin at the beginning. According to both Jewish mysticism and Sufism, before the creation of the world, that is, material reality, there was only God, a single indivisible entity, the totality of all being.

According to a *Hadith Qudsi*\(^51\) often cited by Sufis, before creation, God "was a Hidden Treasure." It quotes the Divine as saying, "I desired to be known; therefore, I created the world so that I may be known."\(^52\) Thus, in Sufism, the impetus for cosmogenesis was God's desire to be known. Ibn Arabi (1165-1240, an Andalusian Islamic mystic and one of the most influential Sufi thinkers, explains: "He turned his desire to the things while they were in their state of nonexistence….He said to them *Be!*, that he might be known by every sort of knowledge,"\(^53\) to be known in time, not just in eternity, in the variety of attributes, not just in Oneness.

Remarkably, Jewish mystics attribute cosmogenesis to the same causal impulse and motivation. Rabbi Chaim Vital (1543-1620), an important exponent of Kabbalistic thought, writes in his work *Etz Chaim* (Tree of Life) using language similar to that used by Ibn Arabi before him, of God's wish to make known the

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\(^{51}\) A teaching attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in which he acts as the mouthpiece for God


\(^{53}\) Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, p. 64
complete array and totality of Himself. Vital himself was a student of Rabbi Isaac Luria, one of the most important figures in the development of Kabbalah. Luria hailed from Egypt where his ideas were likely influenced by contact with the Sufi tradition, which likewise flourished there. As we will see, by Luria's time, there were already several hundred years of interaction between Jewish and Sufi Mystics.

Martin Buber (1878-1965), an Austrian-Israeli Jewish philosopher and proponent of Hasidism and mysticism who developed an important theory of dialogue, explained the Hasidic understanding of cosmogenesis as such: God enacted the process of creation because "He, nondual and relationless unity, wanted to allow relation to emerge; because He wanted to be known, loved, and wanted. Because he wanted to allow to arise from His primally one Being…the other that strives to unity." 54

Thus, according to the Jewish and Muslim mystics, while the true essence and nature of reality is at its root an all-encompassing unity, the process of creation resulted in an apparent multiplicity, a seemingly fractured universe with a vast diversity of forms. The goal of the mystic, then, the end toward which all the mystics' endeavors are focused, is to fulfill God's desire and intention in creating the manifest world, to know God in His infiniteness and His Oneness, in His totality of being.

What does it mean "to know" God? To the Jewish and Sufi mystics, this entails more than an intellectual understanding, *ilm* to the Sufis. Instead, what the mystic seeks is more akin to gnosis, or *maarifah*, a word that connotes a more intimate, experiential knowing. We might understand the distinction between these two types of knowing by considering the difference in the type of knowledge that arises from a study of the production process of chocolate, its history and origins, its chemical composition and how it interacts with human taste buds to produce a distinct taste, its effects upon the human body, and so forth as distinct from the kind of knowledge which can only be truly attained through a taste of the chocolate itself. This latter type of knowledge is the type of knowledge sought by the mystics, who strive to know God not only in a conceptual, philosophical, theological, historical or other sense, but to actually taste God Himself.55

But it does not end there. This intimate, experiential knowledge of God is transformative, for knowledge of God is knowledge of God's essence and, as the *Shema* and the *Shahadah* both proclaim, God's essence is Oneness, outside of which there exists nothing else. Hence, this knowing is also a kind of unification. Abraham J. Heschel, notes that the Hebrew word "yada, does not always mean simply…'to be acquainted with.' In most semitic languages it also means sexual union as well as mental and spiritual activity." Hence, for the mystic, *da’at Elohim*,

knowledge of God, also implies a union with God, or more accurately, as we have seen, it is a reuniting. Heschel writes of the promised land that awaits the mystic at the end of his or her journey: "it is not a terra incognita, an unknown land; it is a forgotten land and our relation to God is a palimpsest rather than a tabula rasa."\(^{56}\) Likewise, commenting on the nature and significance of Sufism, contemporary Sufi scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, "It provides the means to awaken us from the dream of forgetfulness of who we are and allows us to enter into and remain in the remembrance of Divine Reality."\(^{57}\)

For Sufis and Jewish mystics alike, this reunion or reunification, the mending of a fractured reality into wholeness is the most important objective, the chief concern of their lives and religious practice, toward which all mental energies and physical faculties must be directed and in relation to which all other considerations are secondary or contingent.

Such a paradigm presents a clear basis upon which Jewish and Muslim mystics can regard one another as belonging to a common group, united by a shared cosmological narrative that impels them toward a shared purpose, and not just any purpose, but the most important of all purposes. This singular purpose, whether called tawhid, or tikkun, aligns Sufis and Jewish mystics as co-workers in this great work with which they see themselves as having been entrusted by God.

\(^{56}\) Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 141
\(^{57}\) Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, p. 6
Interreligious harmony can be seen as an important component in this shared mission of the Jewish and Muslim mystics. "All religious acts and character traits that foster positive interactions with others are prerequisites for this goal [of knowing God.]"\textsuperscript{58} This is because our phenomenal world is a reflection of the divine world; the two are inextricably bound with one another. In the Zohar, this concept is called: "the symmetry of above and below."\textsuperscript{59} Because this world is a reflection of the divine world, indeed of God Himself, to know the world is to know God. "Viewing all reality as animate with sparks of divine light, the Hasid strives to know God in \textit{all} of his ways"\textsuperscript{60} and thereby, as Buber says, "strive to unity," fulfilling the purpose for which we were created (emphasis added). This means that one must seek knowledge of the other, even of the other religion, as a religious imperative.

This position is upheld by the Sufi perspective, which as we have seen holds that multiplicity itself came about for the purposes of knowledge. The Quran states that genders, tribes, races and so forth were all created "that you may know one another" (49:13). Thus, knowledge of self, knowledge of the other and knowledge of God are "all interwoven and should be seen and complementary and mutually reinforcing, each having a role to play" in the

\textsuperscript{59} Matt, \textit{Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment}, p. 74
\textsuperscript{60} Brody, "Open to Me the Gates of Righteousness": \textit{Pursuit of Holiness and Non-Duality in Early Hasidic Teaching}, p. 2
fulfillment of the cosmic drama, man's ultimate quest, the knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{61}

This leads us to not simply tolerate the other, but to contemplate the "divine 'signs'" within the other, thus to learn more about the Divine reality – and themselves – through the other. This roots dialogue in something more substantive than superficial exigencies or "expedient toleration." The Divine is truly present in the other and must therefore truly be seen "in the light of the One."\textsuperscript{62}

This furthers the mission of the mystic, the restoration of Oneness. Both traditions hold that human behavior is of utmost importance to God and has ramifications that go beyond the earthly realm. Therefore, the behavior of the human being has ultimate significance since upon it depends not only the redemption of the individual, but the ultimate redemption of the world; our actions have "cosmic power."\textsuperscript{63} It is for this reason that "all encounters" may be seen as "wondrous opportunities through which the individual soul, as well as creation at large, can be 're-paired' (tikkun) and hence redeemed."\textsuperscript{64} The righteous actions of the individual actually have the power to affect the upper realms and restore cosmic Oneness, the ultimate goal of mysticism. In order to "re-member, or to rejoin the links of creation which have been rent asunder" writes Art Green, a contemporary scholar of Jewish mysticism,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Kazemi, \textit{The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue}, p. 113
\item Ibid.
\item Katz, "Mysticism and Morality in Western Mystical Traditions," p.418
\item Ibid., p. 420
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Each human being is to teach every other human being that we are all One, and to find ways in our behavior as well as our thought to include all other creatures within that vision of Oneness as well...We do so most successfully not by preaching, but by our actions. We let others know that we and they are part of the same One when we treat them like sisters and brothers, or part of our same universal body...We are called upon to proclaim the Oneness of being throughout the world, and to enable all those with whom we come into contact to feel themselves to be part of the Oneness as well. 

This is not to say that there are no differences between Jewish and Sufi mysticism. Certainly, there exist important distinctions between the two, which mustn't simply be written off as insignificant. Yet many of these differences exist not only between the two, but likewise within the corpus of each respective mystical tradition.

More importantly, though mystics may disagree on the details of how best to achieve their common goal, the unitary goal remains the same. Hence, any such disagreements, or disputes about theology, practice, dogma, and so on begin from the point of departure that they are, in a sense, intra-communal disputes about the best way to achieve common ends. They are, in the language of the Jewish sages, "disputes for the sake of heaven," those that progress the Divine plan. In so far as Jewish and Sufi mystics are on the same journey,

65 Green, Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow, p. 134-5
66 Mishnah, Pirkei Avot 5:20
seeking after the same objective, they can feel themselves to be part of one community, a community of seekers, of the "friends of God," an autonym that is employed by mystics belonging to all three Abrahamic faiths. There develops a sense that, though they may represent different exoteric traditions, nonetheless, and more importantly, they are part of the same body, same constituency, and may therefore see one another as natural allies who share one's own agenda. In this light, Sufis and Jewish mystics are allies who "help one another, to share insight and learning…to search in the wilderness for wellsprings of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love."  

We may be inclined to believe that such a sense of fraternity and mutual cooperation between Jews and Muslims are naught but wishful thinking or inane musings. Yet we have plenty of evidence in history to the contrary, not just in bygone eras, but right up to today. In the following section we will examine several historical examples of how Jewish and Sufi mystics developed a mutually influential dialogue and relationship of reciprocal respect and cooperation, even discipleship. Moreover, we shall see that these mystics belonged not to the fringe of their religious societies, but were quite often amongst the most illustrious and respected authorities of their time.

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67 Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," p. 249
CHAPTER 6.
Jewish and Muslim Mystics:
A Historical Perspective

Avraham Maimuni (1186-1237), also known as Abraham Maimonides, or Avraham ben HaRambam, the son of Moses Maimonides, the latter being one of the most important Jewish thinkers, whose contribution to Judaism is seen as authoritative and unparalleled, was, like his father, an important and influential Jewish thinker, writer and leader. His father, Moses Maimonides, praised his son in a letter to his close disciple R. Yosef ben Yehudah for his numerous "gifts" which are worthy of his namesake (Avraham the patriarch) saying that "without a doubt, he [Avraham Maimonides] will be prominent among the great men of the generation."\(^68\) Indeed, years later, R. Moses ben Nachman or Nachmanides, also known by the acronym Ramban, the biblical commentator and leader of Spanish Jewry, praised A. Maimonides as, "the first rank...the stately cedar whose top is

\(^68\) Maimonides, Avraham, \textit{The Guide to Serving God}, p. xiii-xiv
among the highest branches."⁶⁹ Scholars came to Egypt from as far off as France to pay respect to A. Maimonides who was said to be "small in years, but great in achievement; a young man who makes the wisest seem foolish by comparison."⁷⁰ He was destined for greatness. After the death of his father, A. Maimonides succeeded his father as Ra’is al-Yahud and nagid, leader of the Jewish community of Egypt, and "the supreme religious and political figure of his time."⁷¹ ⁷²

Avraham Maimonides was also a mystic. His writings are permeated with Sufi-like ideas and indicate that he was part of a Jewish pietist movement that was developed at least by the time of his father's tenure as Ra’is (pre-1204), if not earlier.⁷³ For example, his compendium for the Jewish seeker, Kifayat al-Abidin, The Complete Guide for the Servants of God, a large legal and ethical treatise which has been compared to his father's Mishneh Torah, "is distinctive in the strong propensity he displays therein for a mysticism of a manifestly Muslim type."⁷⁴ Moreover, A. Maimonides did not attempt to hide "the

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⁶⁹ Maimonides, Avraham, p. xiv
⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁷¹ Fenton, Paul B. "Judaism and Sufism." P. 207
⁷² Maimonides, Avraham, p. xvi
⁷³ Maimonides, Obadiah, Treatise of the Pool., p. 4
influence of Muslim mystics upon him and his admiration for them.⁷⁵ He even went so far as to introduce Sufi practices into Jewish ritual practices, including full prostrations, and donned the woolen garment worn by Sufis.⁷⁶

Yet, Abraham Maimonides felt no contradiction or inconsistency in his Sufi-like beliefs and practices. Quite to the contrary, his Kifayat makes clear his belief that the Sufi-like practices were native to Judaism and had been practiced by the ancient prophets of Israel and only later adopted by the Muslim Sufis, saying “Do not regard as unseemly our comparison…to the conduct of the Sufis, for the latter imitate the prophets [of Israel] and walk in their footsteps, not the prophets in theirs.”⁷⁷ A. Maimonides expressed deep regret that the Israelites of his day had lost touch with this tradition, "the pride of Israel" which, "on account of the iniquities of Israel,"⁷⁸ "was taken from them and bestowed on the nations of the world."⁷⁹

Some might write off such ideas, deferring to the notion of "vested originality." According to this concept, any innovations introduced into a religious tradition must be "vested" or subsumed under some accepted precedent or pretext, whether legal, scriptural, etc. Thereby, influences from outside sources

⁷⁶ The Arabic word for Sufism, tasawwuf, is thought by many scholars to be derived from the wool garment, suf, that Sufis were known to wear. See Nasr, "Garden of Truth," p. 171
⁷⁷ As quoted in Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism." p. 208
⁷⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁹ Ibid.
are minimized and assimilated through reinterpretation as native to the tradition. This is necessary, some have pointed out, in order for a religious community to define its boundaries, bolster self-identity, cohesion and "cultural homogeneity" and to safeguard against innovation, "the enemy of tradition."  

This, one may argue, is what is happening in the narrative proposed by A. Maimonides: elements totally foreign to Judaism, such as those of the Sufis, are introduced into the tradition under the guise that they are in truth elements with a Jewish precedent in the Jewish prophets, and are therefore, as it were, kosher.

This is also an element in the story of the Sufis, who, themselves have been attacked by the more fundamentalist elements in the Muslim community, especially of the Wahhabi or Salafi persuasion, as heretics for their introduction of innovations, bid’a. In Cordova, Spain, at the turn of the millennium, for example, Sufi books like those of al-Masarra and al-Ghazalli were being burned outside the Great Mosque of Cordoba. In response to their accusers, Sufis point to sacred scripture, deferring to the ultimate Islamic source of authority, to suggest that the prophet Muhammad and his companions themselves engaged in Sufi practices and are the models or archetypes for Sufi spirituality, and thus Sufi practices are only imitations of the Prophet and his companions.

However, some scholars have suggested that A. Maimonides may not have

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81 Ibid., p. 149
82 Maimonides, Obadiah, Treatise of the Pool, p. 3
83 Ibid., p. 8
been far off in his beliefs that the Sufis were inspired by and appropriated the teachings and practices of the Israelite prophets and sages. Scholars of comparative mysticism have suggested that in fact, this may have been the case, to some degree. The Quran records Muhammad, the founder of Islam, as describing his teachings, his religion, not as an innovation, but rather as a continuation of the teachings of the Prophets of Israel. During the course of several generations after the death of Muhammad, Islam was characterized, scholars suggest, by a kind of "philo-Judaism." Early Muslims were known to read the Torah alongside the Quran. This atmosphere fostered cross-pollination from Judaism to Islam.

Knowledgeable Jewish converts may have contributed to spreading Israiliyat, stories about the Banu Israel, the pious men of Israel and these legends and parables may have become the early models for Muslim piety.

One early exponent of Israiliyat was Hasan al Basri (642 - 728 or 737), a Sunni theologian of Iraq, who is also considered to be "the patriarch of Muslim mysticism." Al Basri is known to have introduced several Israiliyat legends as models for Muslim mystical and devotional piety, suggesting a Jewish source of inspiration for early Islamic mysticism.

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Since the time of the Babylonian exile, Iraq remained an important center of Jewish life and learning.\textsuperscript{88} Many large Jewish academies existed in Iraq and exerted a considerable influence upon Judaism. Amongst the illustrious academies of Iraq was \textit{Mata Mehasya}, mentioned in the Talmud, which was known to have interactions with Muslim pietists.\textsuperscript{89} It was there, and other such academies, that the Babylonian Talmud, one of the foundational texts of Judaism was written. This text contains the \textit{Tannaitic} writings, which record the legends about the Rabbinic sages and mystics, legends which may have influenced al-Basri and other early Islamic pietists and mystics.

One of the earliest mystical Jewish texts, the \textit{Sefer Yetzirah}, or Book of Creation, is mentioned in the Talmud.\textsuperscript{90} The ideas contained in this and other early Jewish mystical texts may also have exerted a profound influence on the development of early Muslim mysticism.

The mystical model of an intimate relationship with God, which positions the pious human being as a close personal companion of God, rather than the servant of a transcendent, imperceptible deity, a relationship common to Sufism, is certainly pre-Islamic. It appears already in the \textit{Sefer Yetzirah}, which has been speculated to originate around the period of the Mishnah, that is, approximately


\textsuperscript{89} Ariel, "'The Eastern Dawn of Wisdom': The Problem of the Relation Between Jewish and Muslim Mysticism," p. 156

\textsuperscript{90} Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 65b
the third century of the Common Era⁹¹ – the true date of origin is unknown⁹² – several hundred years before the birth of Mohammad. In it, Abraham the Patriarch is said to have successfully comprehended the mysteries of God at which point, in a theophanic confirmation of the success of his contemplation, God appeared to Abraham and, in the language of the prophet Isaiah, "called him his friend" (Sefer Yetzirah 6:10). This language is also present in the Christian Gospel of James where Abraham is likewise referred to as "the friend of God,"⁹³ and can also be found in the Gospel of John.⁹⁴ It would later be used by Christian contemplatives who referred to themselves in like manner as celi dei or gottesfreund, "friends of God." This same language appears also in the Quran and would be picked up by Muslim mystics, who, seeking always to dwell in the presence of God, referred to themselves as awliya Allah, the friends of God.

To this day, the name of the town that contains the tomb of Abraham the Patriarch, a place of pilgrimage for Jews, Muslims and Christians, and one of the four holiest cities in both Judaism and Islam, is a reference to this intimate relationship between God and his friend Abraham. It is called Hevron, or Hebron, from the word haver, meaning "friend."

Interesting to note also is the mode of attaining God's presence and favor. In the Sefer Yetzirah we find a model in which the knowledge of God bestows upon the seeker the favor and presence of God. As we saw above, the purpose

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⁹¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p.75
⁹² Ibid., p.69
⁹³ James 2:23
⁹⁴ John 15:14
of creation, according to both Sufi and Jewish mystical cosmology, was the self-
disclosure of God who yearned to be known. Thus, the Sufi, like his Jewish
counterpart, holds that his ultimate raison d'être is to fulfill this greatest of goals:
the knowledge of God.

In the Yetzirah, Abraham achieves the presence of God through the
contemplation of God's mysteries, through inquiry into the nature of creation
itself. Later, Sufis would also seek God within creation following the Quranic
statement that God is to be found "wheresoever you turn," (2:115) that is, in all of
creation. The path of the Sufis to God was also one in which knowledge of God
played a central role. It was also a prominent idea in the writings of Jewish
mystics like Bachye ibn Paquda, who held that "it is incumbent upon us to
investigate and study the entire universe, so as to understand the wisdom and
goodness of the Creator."

One of the means of attaining said knowledge, or gnosis, was through the
contemplation of God's attributes. In Kabbalah, these attributes are the sephirot,
which are first mentioned in the Sefer Yetzirah, and which express God's
essential characteristics. "All created being, earthly man and all the creatures in
this world, exist according to the archetype of the ten sephirot," also called
shemot (names), marot (mirrors), partzufim (faces), etc. Thus, we may

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95 Sefer Yetzirah 6:10
96 Ibn Paquda, Bachye. The Duties of the Heart, p. 40
97 Recanati, Menahem as quoted in Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, p. 124
understand God by understanding the phenomena which are but reflections of the attributes of God's nature.

As we have already seen, this idea, that the world is a reflection of God's attributes, appears also in Sufism, which, using similar language, understands the myriad phenomena of the world as manifestations of God's divine names.99 "The creatures of this universe make manifest the nature of the Creator."100 All manifestations of love in the world, for example, are products of God's name Al Wadud, "the Lover," which describes an aspect of God's nature. Sufis extracted these attributes from their primary spiritual text, the Quran. Applying a similar hermeneutical approach, their Jewish equivalents sought out the names for their sephirot in their own chief text, the Tanakh.101

Evidently, Jewish mystical pietism was neither unique to A. Maimonides, nor did it end with him. After his death, this tradition lived on for another two hundred years, propagated by his children, who like their father and grandfather were leaders of their Jewish communities in Egypt. They continued the tradition of Sufi-like mystical pietism, arising out of dialogue with their cultural milieu in Egypt, and with their Sufi counterparts.

99 Chittick, Sufism: A Short Introduction, p. 10
100 Ibid., p. 10
Obadyah, the son of Abraham Maimonides, was at least as immersed in Sufi ideas as his father. His work, *Treatise of the Pool*, which has already been mentioned above, is a spiritual guide replete with Sufi-like ideas that may be construed, like his father's *Kifayah*, as an "enlargement" upon the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Interestingly, the work of A. Maimonides, *The Guide to Serving God*, is published by Feldheim, an Orthodox Jewish publisher, using its Hebrew title, *HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem*, rather than its original Judeo-Arabic title *Hu Kitab Kifayat al Abidin*. Appropriately, it is filed in the Judaica section, alongside other Jewish religious texts. By contrast, the work of his son, Obadyah Maimonides, which is similar in many respects to the work of his father, is published by The Sufi Trust, through Octagon Press, which advertises that it has, "built a bridge between West and East and, for the past 45 years, has made available many of the greatest texts of Eastern thought, psychology and literature." It aims "to connect the Orient to the Occident, to provide accurate exposure and understanding of one tradition to the other." Its edition, the authoritative edition of Obadyah Maimonides' text, *The Treatise of the Pool*, is filed in the Sufism section alongside other Sufi writers.

I think this point is illustrative; there is what to be learned from the politics of publishing and the life of a text. The classification of a piece of literature, the entities that choose to publish a certain work, and those which employ it, even

adopting it as their own, is indicative of the nature of that text, indeed its very essence. A text, written by a Jew, and published, even taught by Muslims, as was done by ibn Hud who taught his students the *Guide for the Perplexed*, must have a quality about it that makes this possible. Texts appropriated by Jews, even preserved as sacred works, as in the case of the writings of al-Hallaj as Suhravardi, and Ibn Arabi in the Cairo Geniza have about them a quality that must lend itself to ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. It says much about the readers and publishers and teachers of these texts as well, buttressing the proposition of this work, which seeks to examine the way in which Jewish and Islamic mysticism is not only born of, but also lends itself, and inclines its adherents to a spirit of ecumenism and interfaith camaraderie.

In the same way as the literature itself seems to be able to fluidly pass between the domain of Islam and that of Judaism, or if you like, as it straddles the two worlds, so too can we see these two religious currents as being able to replicate that kind of fluidity outside of the library and the printing house, in the real world, serving as a bridge between the human beings that constitute the citizens of those two worlds, of Judaism and Islam.

This atmosphere of Jewish Muslim mystical interchange was not exclusive to Egypt. During the same time as Maimonidean pietists in Egypt, scholars have observed in the communities in Iraq a similar atmosphere of openness and spiritual cooperation, what some have referred to as an "interconfessional

103 Maimonides, Obadiah, *Treatise of the Pool*, p. 5
outlook," in which piety existed in Muslims, Christians and Jews and was subsumed under a universalist Islamic religiosity.\textsuperscript{104}

In fact, it seems that it was not uncommon to find Jewish mystics who studied with Sufi sheikhs. Many biographies of Sufi masters state that non-Muslims, including Jews, were in attendance at their mystical sessions.\textsuperscript{105} Hasan ibn Hud, for example, who was known to have had Jewish students and who taught Moses Maimonides' \textit{Guide of the Perplexed}, was once asked by a would-be disciple for instruction in the way of the Sufi, to which he is known to have responded, "Upon which road? That of Moses, of Christ or of Muhammad?"\textsuperscript{106}

Moreover, lest we imagine that the Sufi-like mysticism of the Maimonidean Egyptian pietists and ibn Paquda were isolated phenomena which arose on the Jewish scene, then burned out without much lasting influence, we should keep in mind that the ideas of these Jewish mystics would influence the development of subsequent manifestations of Jewish mysticism, which came to be known as Kabbalah. Works such as the \textit{Kifayah} of A. Maimonides and \textit{Hovot haLevavot} of Paquda were read and respected in Jewish communities far beyond Egypt and Spain, up to the present day. It is known, for example, that the \textit{Kifayah} was popular amongst the community in Safed in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, a time and place

\textsuperscript{104} Ariel, "The Eastern Dawn of Wisdom": The Problem of the Relation Between Jewish and Muslim Mysticism," p. 153
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 39
central to the development of the Kabbalah. Ibn Paquda’s *Duties*, which also influenced the Spanish and Palestinian Kabbalists, "who were particularly interested in Bahya's reflections on solitary meditation." Several hundred years later, in the eighteenth century, his work was "avidly read…by Polish Hasidim."  

In *Duties*, Paquda acknowledges that he defers not only to Jewish sources but that he also quotes, "the pious and wise men of other nations whose words have reached us – such as the words of the philosophers, the discipline of the ascetics, and their admirable codes of conduct." Moreover, he expresses his hope that his readers and students will "incline their hearts to them and listen to their wisdom." It seems that this instruction was taken to heart by those influenced by Paquda, such as the Safedan Kabbalists. A remarkable story tells of Rabbi Moshe Galante, grandson of Moshe Galante the Elder, disciple of prominent Safedan Kabbalist Joseph Caro, who became a student of a Sufi sheikh.  

Moshe Galante the Younger was considered to be one of the greatest men of his generation, learned, pious and wise. Yet, he learned of a Sufi sheikh who, Galante, acknowledged, had progressed even further along the mystical path than he had. Galante sought an audience with the sheikh. Upon hearing

107 Fenton, Paul B. "Judeo-Arabic Writings of the XIII-XIV Centuries," p. 101  
108 Fenton, Paul B. "Judaism and Sufism," p. 205  
this, the sheikh promptly arranged for a meeting for he too had heard of Rabbi Galante, whom he regarded to be "a wise man."  

Upon meeting the rabbi, the sheikh tested him and found that he was indeed wise in ways that the sheikh thought only himself to be. When he realized the rabbi’s wisdom, "he became bound to him by a great love." He called the rabbi, "my brother, my friend" and expressed his joy and delight at encountering such wisdom in another. He asked that the rabbi come visit him at least once a week so that he might "enjoy conversing with [the rabbi] on matters of wisdom." Thus began a relationship between two mystical masters, one Jewish and one Muslim.

During the course of their relationship, the sheikh realized that there was something at which the rabbi was more proficient than he. At which point he bowed at the rabbi’s feet and asked that he instruct him. The rabbi agreed, asking that the sheikh teach him the secret of healing the sick, which remained unknown to the rabbi. Though each of the men had been sworn to secrecy by their respective teachers, nonetheless they found it appropriate to share their secrets with one another.

110 Unknown, "An Awesome Tale that Occurred in the City of Damascus In the Time of Rabbi Moshe Galante of Blessed Memory," first published in Hebrew by Yitzhak Farhi in Matoq M'Dvash (Jerusalem, 1842). English translation by Zvi Zohar, Bar Ilan University and Shalom Hartman Institute

111 Ibid., p. 2
In the conclusion of this remarkable tale, the sheikh teaches the rabbi the secret of healing the sick, a secret which he revealed to "no other creature." What the rabbi finds is that the secret has to do with the Tetragrammaton, the holy name of God, the one God, which had been revealed to the Sufi sheikh to the surprise of Rabbi Galante.

This incredible story illustrates the possibility of the profound mutual respect and sense of brotherhood that can arise between two men who share a mystical agenda, a yearning for closeness to one God. This is just one case that exemplifies the possibility that Jews and Muslims can acknowledge that they are fellow travelers on the same path, to the same God, and that, moreover, they might even be able to learn from one another and help direct one another along the way.

Indeed Sufism, through proto-Kabbalistic texts as well as direct interaction between Jewish and Sufi mystics, as we have seen above, would have "an abiding influence on Jewish spirituality right down to present times, infusing generations of readers with Sufi notions." Take for example the tale of the pious man (hasid) who met a group of people returning from battle:

*He said to them, "You are returning, praised be God, from a smaller battle, carrying your booty. Now prepare yourself for the great battle." They asked, "What is the great battle?" and he answered, "The battle against the instinct and its armies."*

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112 Unknown, "An Awesome Tale that Occurred in the City of Damascus In the Time of Rabbi Moshe Galante of Blessed Memory" p. 4
113 Fenton, Paul B. "Judaism and Sufism," p. 205
This story from *Duties* was recounted hundreds of years after ibn Paquda wrote it by Rabbi Yosef of Polonnoy, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism. The Rabbi, surely was unaware that the *Hasid* that served as the prototype for this story was Muhammad, the founder of Islam. In fact, ibn Paquda's story was a retelling of a legend about the Prophet Muhammad that was popular amongst the Sufis.\(^\text{114}\)

Paquda's book is an ethical treatise and a guide for spiritual ascendancy through a great spiritual struggle against one's own lower nature. Though the theme would be familiar to modern day Hasidim and those from the *mussar* tradition, the terminology, may be surprising. The great spiritual struggle, in the original Judeo-Arabic of *Duties* is called *jihad*,\(^\text{115}\) a term borrowed from Islam and one which in our own time has taken on a more sinister popular meaning in the West.

Indeed, some have traced the development of Jewish mystical thought from the Middle Eastern milieu, in the heart of Babylon, where it arose out of the cultural exchange between Jewish and Muslim pietists, mystics and contemplatives, to Provence in the heart of Europe where it developed into what we would today recognize as Kabbalah. Gershom Scholem, for example, demonstrated that the *Sefer HaBahir*, Book of Luminance or Brightness, a prominent early Kabbalistic text that elaborates the notion of the *sefirot* and other


\(^{115}\) Ibid., p. ix
ideas contained in the Sefer Yetzirah (discussed earlier), as well as themes such as reincarnation and invocation of the sacred names, was an adaptation of an earlier work known as the Sefer Raza Rabba, or Book of the Great Secret.\footnote{Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 74-5} The Raza Rabba, originally written in Aramaic, was known to have been studied in the Jewish mystical circles of Baghdad,\footnote{Ibid., p. 153} which was a "center of fertile interaction" and exchange Jewish and Muslim mystics.\footnote{Ibid., p. 152} The ideas that developed in the Muslim milieu of Iraq, some have suggested, were then transmitted to the Jews of Christian Europe.

One account of such transmission can be found in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century chronicles of an Italian Jew known as Ahimaaz ben Paltiel. According to his work, now known as the Chronicles of Ahimaaz of Oria, his predecessor, a miracle-worker by the name of Rabbi Aaron of Baghdad, traveled from his home in Babylonia to Apulia, Italy, where he settled in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century. There, he taught his secrets to one Kalonymus of Lucca. The Kalonymide family would then settle in Germany, carrying with them this mystical tradition. In Germany, the family would produce generations of prominent Jewish leaders, including a man known as Judah he-Hasid, "Judah the pious."\footnote{Ibid., p. 152} It was this Judah of Regensburg who would produce an influential work known as the Sefer Hasidim. This book, the Sefer Hasidim, deemed to be "undoubtedly one of the most important and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 74-5
\item[118] Ibid., p. 153
\item[119] Ibid., p. 152
\end{footnotes}
remarkable products of Jewish literature,"¹²⁰ bears elements that can be traced back to the Islamic East.¹²¹ Among these are Judaized retellings of "popular Sufi anecdotes" and an ascetic "glorification of poverty,"¹²² which is common to Sufism.

It was Judah He-Hasid, heir to a mystical tradition that came to him from the "interconfessional" milieu of Babylonia, who would found a German mystical pietist movement known as the Hasidim, "pious ones," adopting the same autonym used by the sages of the Tannaitic period, the Maimonidean pietists, as well as modern-day proponents of Jewish mystical thought.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to untangle the complicated web of interaction and influence between the Jewish and Islamic traditions. Generally, however, we may safely assume that, in the words of Moshe Idel, the great contemporary scholar of Jewish mysticism, "the mystical [Jewish] models…owe much to the vigorous Muslim culture…These models…represent various interactions between Jewish thought and the immediate cultural environment. These models, significantly affected by Muslim culture, were transmitted to Jews in Europe through various channels and were formative in the emergence of

¹²¹ Ariel, "'The Eastern Dawn of Wisdom': The Problem of the Relation Between Jewish and Muslim Mysticism," p. 153
Hasidism,"123 which itself is a force that continues to influence Judaism to this day.

CHAPTER 7.  
Concluding Remarks:  
Going Forward

As we have seen the intercourse and cross pollination between Jewish and Islamic mysticism had a remarkable and extensive influence upon both religious traditions and indeed represents "one of the most striking chapters of the intimate interaction between Judaism and Islam."\(^{124}\) It is not an accident that scholars have noted a certain "interconfessional outlook" toward which mystics seem inclined, a certain "reciprocal receptivity [which exists] in the esoteric realm."\(^{125}\) While in the exoteric domain "they remained mutually exclusive,"\(^{126}\) in the esoteric domain, Jewish and Muslim mystics engaged in an extraordinary interfaith exchange, the implications and nuances of which are just beginning to be given proper treatment.

This, of course, is substantiated by Jewish history as a whole. Wherever the Jewish people went their religion was influenced by their environment, their neighbors' ideas, customs and social forms. Jonathan Sarna, in his seminal and authoritative work *American Judaism*, illuminates how the Judaism lived by most Americans was shaped by the Protestant ideas of their neighbors. In Catholic

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\(^{124}\) Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism." P. 216  
\(^{125}\) Ibid., p. 216 
\(^{126}\) Ibid., p. 216
and Muslim countries, Jews, like their neighbors, deferred to a central authority, a chief Rabbi. In Protestant countries, such as the United States, however, the Jewish religion became decentralized, no longer revolving around a central authority, but rather, organized according to autonomous communities. Rather than the synagogue community, which had previously been the norm, in America there developed a community of synagogues. Moreover, Jews were inspired by the individualism of the national spirit and influenced by the denominationalism of their Protestant neighbors. Thus, American Judaism, in contrast to other parts of the world, became denominationalized, splitting into Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, Renewal, and further subdivisions and hybridizations (Conservadox, Modern Orthodox, etc.)\textsuperscript{127}

While it is true that today this is beginning to change, at the present moment Jewish denominationalism is not a significant phenomenon in most parts of the world outside of North America. Any changes that are occurring are due largely to an influence from the United States.

Yet, while the Judaism of the United States contains traits that make it distinctly American, influenced as it is by American Protestantism, it is not entirely a product of Protestantism alone. The Jewish immigrants to the United States, the earliest of whom were Sephardim (Jews from Iberia and other Muslim lands), brought with them a religious tradition that had previously been molded, in

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\textsuperscript{127} Sarna, Jonathan, \textit{American Judaism: A History}, p. xix
the same fashion, by the encounter with the Muslim religion of the countries in which Jews resided for hundreds of years.

All of this is to say that the Judaism we have inherited, which continues to nourish and give meaning to our lives and direct our path through this world is one that has already been influenced greatly by the myriad milieus in which the Jewish people found themselves throughout history. Our luminary predecessors, illustrious and influential figures like the Maimonideans, Ibn Paquda, and so forth, hearkening unto the teachings of the sages who came before them, felt it appropriate in turn to glean wisdom from the cultures around them in order to illumine their own path. After all, they were taught, "Who is wise? He who learns from every man".

The proper recognition of the fruits of such interreligious exchange and the profound influences it had upon the religious traditions that participated therein bears the seeds for improved interreligious relations. The recognition of the debt owed to interreligious dialogue and exchange ought to move us toward repayment of this debt in the only way that it can be properly repaid, namely, through the continuation and propagation of such interreligious dialogue and exchange in our own time. This underscores the importance of scholarly research that examines the development of mysticism and illuminates the ways in which this development was influenced by contact with other religious traditions.

128 Talmud, Avot 4:1a
In recognition of and deference to the history of profound interreligious exchange that has so contributed to shaping our own tradition, we ought to pursue, consciously, a similar path of interreligious dialogue and exchange. After all, the effort to reach the divine, to mend a broken world and restore harmony is a colossal one, too large for an individual. It is an endeavor that is most likely to bear fruits when pursued in the company and with the aid of friends, the friends of God.

But where do we find such friends? As has been intimated here, such willing partners might be found in the religious communities of the mystically inclined.

More than any other, there is a need to establish a harmonious, fruitful relationship with the community of Islam. Everyday we stand witness to the atrocities reaped by fanatical Islamic thought that is the spawn of Wahabbism/Salafism. Yet, to paraphrase TJ Winter, if one branch of the Islamic religious community (the polemical, dogmatic and fanatical one) is the problem, "then another is emphatically the solution, advocating hospitality in a world desperately in need of transcendentally ordained tolerance."\footnote{Quoted in Kazemi, \textit{The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Dialogue}, xii. - Originally applied to Christianity.}

Thus, when we reach out to our brothers and sisters in the Islamic community, we ought to grasp at the branch most willing to reciprocate: that of the Sufis. The Islamic Institute in Mannheim, Germany, which works towards the integration of Muslims in Europe, sees Sufism as "particularly suited for
interreligious and intercultural harmony of peoples and cultures in democratic pluralist societies." It has described Sufism as "the symbol of tolerance and humanism in Islam, undogmatic, flexible and non-violent." This branch, if it is fair to call it a branch, is one which stands at odds with the Wahabbi/Salafi streams of Islam that have brought so much strife and destruction upon the world in general, from their own communities in the East, to our communities in the West. They have been particularly ruthless in targeting the Sufis, whom they've deemed heretics. Well, as the old saying goes, "my enemy's enemy is my friend."

The proposition that in seeking to build bonds with more moderate elements in Islam we ought to reach out to the Sufis, is nothing new. The government officials of India, for example, "have long recognized the value of utilizing the loyalty of the traditional Muslim masses for Sufis and condemning extreme forms of Islam by praising Sufism as the tolerant form of Islam, in contrast to what is described as rigid religious bigotry." Indeed, today we do find examples of fertile ground for interreligious partnership in the Sufi communities around the world. Take for example the Ahbash of Lebanon. The Ahbash are a Sufi umbrella organization led until 2008 by their spiritual leader, Sheikh Abdullah Ibn Muhammad Al-Harariyy, known as Al-Habashiyy, a man of Ethiopian origin who has been rumored to have Jewish roots. Begun "as a small philanthropic and spiritualist movement among the

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Sunni lower stratum, the Ahbash have come into the mainstream of Lebanon's Sunni community in direct rivalry with the Islamist organizations.\textsuperscript{132}

During the 1980s, the Ahbash were one of the largest Islamic groups operating in Lebanon. While recruiting from the more militant Islamic groups, the Ahbash "abstained from forming a militia of their own and abstained from forming a militia of its own and from involvement in intersectarian violence and fighting in Israel" displaying a "commitment to moderation."\textsuperscript{133}

Characterized by "an ideology of Islamic…tolerance which emphasizes Islam's innate pluralism…along with the opposition to the use of violence," the Ahbash have challenged the Islamist forces and their militant offshoots that have tried to pass themselves off as the defenders of Islam by "representing themselves as the Islamic mainstream to the exclusion of other exponents of the faith." They have done so through preaching, social action and "at the ballot box."\textsuperscript{134} They focus on building mosques and schools where they can proliferate their message. Along with religious education they also provide "vocational programs, computer training, sports activities, and instruction in English as a second language."\textsuperscript{135}

Their approach has seen successes. After decades of sectarian violence, bloodshed and political unrest, the Ahbashi message of peace, intersectarian

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., p. 220
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. 222
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 225
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harmony and political stability drew many followers. "By positioning themselves as a non-militant alternative to the Islamists, the Ahbash have emerged as a Sunni middle-class movement that attracts intellectuals, professionals, and businessmen, particularly the traditional Sunni commercial families of the urban centers."\textsuperscript{136} In 1992, the group ran two candidates in Lebanon's parliamentary elections, one of whom was successful in his bid for a seat in Beirut.\textsuperscript{137} They have also set up satellite groups in various countries around the world, from North America to Denmark Jordan, Tajikistan and Australia.\textsuperscript{138} The Ahbash also maintain a strong internet presence.\textsuperscript{139} Additionally, they have set up a coalition with the Naqshbandi Sufi Order. Such an alliance is of great import in the battle against fanatical Islamism "given the large following of the Naqshabandi order throughout the Islamic world."\textsuperscript{140}

In the Ahbash we find a case study of Sufi politics in action, representing a middle path, between radical Islamism and the secularist Arab regimes. Such an approach may prove a powerful alternative, one filled with promise of better relations between the world of Islam and that of the West. Moreover, it seems possible, given what we know, that we may find amongst the ranks of groups such as the Ahbash steadfast allies in seeking interreligious harmony. The Ahbash maintain good relations with their Christian neighbors and espouse

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\textsuperscript{136} Hamzah, et al. "A Sufi Response to Islamism: The Ahbash of Lebanon" p. 224
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 225
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 225
\textsuperscript{139} See www.aicp.org
\textsuperscript{140} Hamzah, et al. "A Sufi Response to Islamism: The Ahbash of Lebanon" p. 226
\end{flushleft}
beliefs in the kind of "fraternity of mystics" (al-rahaniyya) mentioned above,\textsuperscript{141} as a "virtuous way" that is also practiced by the monastic "followers of Christ."\textsuperscript{142}

As has been demonstrated here, the acceptance of mystical teachings amongst a religious community has the potential to increase the likelihood of an ecumenical predisposition, fostering interreligious dialogue, and contributing to better relations between and amongst religious communities. The implications seem clear enough. Promoting and propagating such mystical elements within religious groups may well lend to the betterment of interreligious relations. Furthermore, by building bridges via mystical channels, which has been demonstrated to provide a most fertile ground for interreligious engagement, we would be following clear precedent for effective interreligious exchange.

The organized structures of any community ought to be a reflection of their times, responding to the particular \textit{Zeitgeist}, lest they become anachronistic, and ultimately ineffective at fulfilling the needs of their communities' constituents. The Jews of today are more spiritual than their parent's generations,\textsuperscript{143} and exhibit a yearning for spiritual nourishment. Yet the communal structures erected by the previous generations are a reflection of those generations and are in need of renewal and renovation. We must not allow this to become a missed opportunity. A hungry person will find nourishment wherever it is available, and if it is unavailable at home, that person will venture out to other locales to seek

\textsuperscript{141} See section titled "Fraternitas Mysticus"
\textsuperscript{142} Hamzah, et al., "A Sufi Response to Islamism: The Albash of Lebanon" p. 224
\textsuperscript{143} See section titled "Why Mysticism?"
satisfaction. Hence, if this thing called Judaism is to be preserved, if it is to be saved from the fate of becoming an extinct species, an abandoned edifice, it is imperative to ensure that it provides the maximum amount of fulfillment, which includes spiritual fulfillment.

This necessitates that we create more portals for Jews to enter into Jewish life that address their particular needs. Embracing mysticism more fully and expanding offerings that emerge from this tradition can allow more people to connect to Jewish life and the Jewish people. The mystical tradition itself is expansive, incorporating diverse modes of engagement, from meditation to recitation of poetry, from text study to music, allowing for diverse groups of people to connect in diverse ways.

To do so, we needn't necessarily reinvent the wheel and undertake a massive project of new construction. Many of the existing programs and structures can simply be updated or expanded to include offerings from the mystical tradition. This renewal is already underway. Many synagogues, for example, have begun to offer classes on meditation. Organizations like Chabad, regularly proffer courses on Kabbalah and other offerings.

Yet there is much more that can be done. For example, Birthright trips might be fashioned to include significant content from the mystical tradition, including meetings with Jewish mystical teachers, concerts or recitals of Jewish sacred music, meditation sessions, and so forth. Places like the Ascent Center in
Israel already cater to Birthright alumni.\textsuperscript{144} Knowledge of Jewish mysticism can be implemented into Jewish day school curricula, beginning spiritual nourishment at an early age, rather than waiting until Jewish young adults seek spiritual fulfillment in Buddhism or other traditions because they simply were not given keys to the rich spiritual storehouse within Judaism.

Perhaps there is something to be learned from the Kabbalah Centre, all legitimate criticisms notwithstanding.\textsuperscript{145} They have been successful in attracting a large international following. The model employed by the Kabbalah Centre has been able to engage many people around Jewish ideas, Jewish spiritual teachings, and Jewish texts. \textit{Pirkei Avot}, Teachings of the Sages,\textsuperscript{146} stresses that the wise person is s/he who learns from all. In this spirit, I would suggest that the Jewish community might be able to learn from the Kabbalah Centre's approach to outreach and engagement of the spiritually inclined.

One thing we might learn is the efficacy of their non-discriminatory, universalizing approach. The Kabbalah Centre is open to all people, regardless of religious background and its teachings are marketed as having universal value for all, not just for Jews. To many modern Jews, this inclusive, universalist approach will be quite attractive. Conversely, that which is seen as exceedingly particularistic and smells of insularity will be unappealing. For many Jews, that which allows them to connect to their Judaism, their culture, and to feel Jewish

\textsuperscript{145} Many have voiced serious reservations about the commercialization of Kabbalah, as well as the Berg's teachings and business practices.
\textsuperscript{146} Talmud, Avot 4:1a
while at the same time allowing them to feel that they are participating in something that has ultimate significance, rather than just Jewish significance, and thereby connects them to the rest of the world, rather than sequestering them in a tiny claustrophobic community, will be much more attractive. The modern Jew, after all, feels him/herself not only a Jew, but also an American, a citizen of the world and a human being, not to mention the myriad other identifiers with which s/he may be associated. That which allows him/her to feel him/herself Jewish as a particular expression of something universal, that which connects them to others, rather than isolating them, in and of itself has the potential to engage many Jews. Such a pluralistic approach, an approach offered by the mysticism which is the subject of this paper, a pluralism which goes beyond mere tolerance between Orthodox Jews and Reform Jews, but embraces all of humanity, is of inestimable value for the future of Judaism and its relations with other religious communities.

Hence, programs, events, and educational opportunities that bring together people of different religious faiths united in their universal yearning for experiences of the transcendent, allow Jews to feel more in touch with their fellow human beings and their own humanity, and will thereby be of great appeal for many modern Jews. Such interreligious opportunities are thus a potent means to engage many Jews into Jewish life, learning and culture. For those who have fled from Jewish life because they are repelled by a Judaism that they see as particularistic and insular, and takes them out of the world, rather than making
them more deeply engaged with the world, interreligious spiritual programming will be very welcome and enticing.

Therefore, the Jewish community, and any community interested in engaging the modern person, ought to create programs and opportunities for such interreligious communion that connects to a shared yearning of the spirit. One example, in effect for many years, is the Fes Festival of Sacred Music in Morocco. This festival has drawn millions of people from around the world, of all different religious traditions, cultures and creeds. It functions not only as a music entertainment festival, but is committed to interfaith dialogue. "Alongside the music festival, The Fes Encounters (now called "Fes Forum") brings together politicians, academics and social activists to discuss the urgent issues of our times. These include conflict resolution, climate change, urban renewal, social justice and much more." Each year of the festival there is a theme. The theme for 2007 was "cultural diversity versus globalisation – and the relationship between faith and reason."147 Highlighting this theme, the Festival website notes that "Maïmonides, the Jewish physician and philosopher, also lived here [in Fes] for some years…The works of this philosopher are a wonderful illustration of the symbiosis that existed in Andalusia between Jewish and Islamic cultures, and a similar echo is found in Fez."148

Indeed, such a festival allows human beings to connect to one another

through an expression of universal yearning and devotion, sacred music, while at
the same time partaking of their own heritage, their own particular religious
manifestations of spiritual sentiments, be they Jewish, Islamic, etc. It is a
synthesis of the universal and the particular that has been discussed as being
classic of Jewish and Sufi mysticism and which makes it ideally
predisposed to addressing the need for ecumenism. Recognizing the ecumenical
power of such an event, the United Nations designated the Fes Festival "one of
the major events contributing in a remarkable fashion to the dialogue between
civilisations."149

This festival, which has now gone global, holding events in major cities
worldwide, has also inspired several other such festivals to develop. The Dalai
Lama who recognized the power of such a festival as a means bringing greater
intercommunal and interreligious understanding and harmony, for example,
initiated the Los Angeles World Festival of Sacred Music in 1999. Since then the
Festival has recurred regularly every three years.

Such events provide an ideal opportunity for people from diverse religious
communities to come together in an acknowledgement of their common spiritual
yearnings and aspirations, uniting around a shared primordial human pursuit of
communion with the divine. It is this core element of humanity that bears within it
the seed for harmonious relations amongst the religious communities of all the
members of the human family. It is in this element that gives rise to the mystical

149 "Festival History." Fes Festival of Sacred Music. Web. Accessed April, 16, 2011,
traditions of the religion and in which we ought to ground all of our pursuits of interreligious harmony. For generations, Jews and Muslims have found common ground in the esoteric domain of religion, and have come together to till this fertile soil in order to produce fruits that would nourish and renew their respective traditions, find meaning in their lives through drawing nearer to God. We must take up the mantle in our own times by replenishing the fertile soil of mysticism that bears within its womb the promise of greater harmony between all the children of God.
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