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Let me begin with an anecdote about a pious person:

“It was told of a pious man [also known as a Hasidic person] that he met some people returning from a great battle with an enemy. He said to them, “You are returning, praised be God, from a smaller battle, carrying your booty. Now prepare yourself for the greater battle.” They asked, “What is that greater battle?” and he answered, “The battle against the instinct and its armies.”

This anecdote was quoted by one of the early Jewish Hasidic masters in 18th century Europe, Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoy. A pious person is known by the Hebrew term, Hasid. The source of this anecdote is the Hebrew translation of Bahya ibn Paquda’s book, *Duties of the Heart*, written in Arabic – better known as Judeo-Arabic – in the eleventh century in Spain. It was translated into Hebrew in 1161 and the book remains a prominent Jewish devotional to this day.

What the 18th century Jewish Hasidic master did not know was that the origin of the anecdote originated in the Islamic tradition of Hadith - elaborations on the life and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The pious one, the Hasid, on whom the story is based, was none other than the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad. A reader today might be surprised that Bahya ibn Paquda’s term for the external battle and the greater, internal struggle was *jihad*. Bahya had in mind a much more in-depth connotation for this struggle than the vulgar term ‘holy war.’

How is it then that the popular manual for Jewish piety, *Duties of the Heart*, included direct references to Islamic traditions concerning the Prophet of Islam? Bahya ibn Paquda lived in Muslim Spain during the flowering of Islamic culture – from the 10th through the 12th century. This Golden Age was a time of great cultural, religious and social interchange for Jews and Muslims. The anecdote is just one illustration of many whereby Jews and Muslims freely borrowed ideas, incorporated spiritual truths and honed their own religious traditions.

In his introduction to the book, Bahya states his aim by calling attention to the inwardness that Judaism demands of its adherents. Religious Jews are fully aware of the external rites, ceremonies, and other external obligations and they perform these duties of the limbs diligently. Bahya wanted to call attention to the duties of the heart. These duties include the love and fear of God, prayer with proper intention, love of neighbor, and pure, sincere and worship of God with all the heart. Included in this is inwardness, and seeking the God that cannot be known or named. This is a concept that appears in Jewish and Islamic mysticism, and it was remarkably similar to Sufism and it would be expressed again and again, especially by the Sufi master ibn Arabi.

I would like to highlight some of the ways and places in which Jews and Muslims shared religious insights in a manner that may seem surprising today. Several unique factors perpetuated this Golden Age of cooperation, even if it was not always a perfect age. This Golden Age extended from about the 9th century until the mid-seventeenth century, with its

height coming during the 10th to the 13th centuries. Dean Bell, the noted historian of the Jewish pre-modern age has stated, “Despite regional variations and high medieval political instability, in medieval Islam multicultural environments, combined with active engagement in sciences and literature, led to something of an Islam golden age for the Jews, at least according to most historical accounts. It has been primarily in the context of recent political developments that the once assumed positive views of Jewish life under medieval Islam have been seriously questioned.”¹

It should be noted that by highlighting these important details regarding positive Jewish Muslim relations in the Middle Ages I am not suggesting that any previous political reality or social structure is preferred. Nor do I suggest that previous models would alleviate today’s extremely complex problems regarding Jewish-Muslim relations. It is worth noting, however, that in the area of religion there is more that unites than separates these faiths and cultures. We should be aware that over a significant period of time cooperation and tolerance between Jews and Muslims in the medieval Middle East was more the norm than not. We should not then also assume there was or is such a thing as an interfaith utopia. While we focus on cooperation and tolerance we must admit certain realities that betray the spirit of tolerance. Toleration did exist in the Middle Ages; what I mean is that many people might think that the Middle Ages were defined as a dark age or a brutal age. There are genuine periods of toleration and outbursts of violence, then as now. We must remember that even though Jews fared far better under Muslim rule in Spain and the Near East than they did under Christian rulers in Europe, there were exceptions to Muslim tolerance, but even in several of these cases intolerance was judged as abnormal by other Muslims.

Jews were second class citizens and there were limitations imposed upon them. But there were also protections in place for them and for other non-Muslims. These conditions might seem to be less than ideal, but these and other factors allowed Jews certain freedoms that were not available to them in most places in Europe. As long as Jews were allowed to live in security and practice their religion without interference, this was “tolerance” in the medieval sense of the word.²

Some perspective on the history of Jews and Muslims may help us to understand the complex nature of their relationship. As Basma noted, Muhammad encountered Jews in Medina. Jews had lived in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries before Muhammad. Due to the Prophet’s early encounter with Jews, Jews were included in the earliest holy texts of Islam. The Qur’an is ambivalent about the Jews; on the one hand it instructs Mohammed to go and learn from the Jews; one passage states: “And if you are uncertain about what WE have sent down to you, ask those who read the Book that was before you. The truth has come to you from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt” (Q.10:94). Jews and Christians, and others who believed in God and acted righteously, it was generally understood, should fear nothing from Muslims. On the other hand the Qur’an chastises Jews for rejecting the prophetic status of Muhammad. Jews were stiff-necked and rebellious (2:93; 105; 5:78; 63:5), arrogant (3:24; 181; 5:64); jealous, and unbelievers (2:55; 103; 3:73; 5:41; 9:30-31). We must also recognize that Islam, like Judaism and Christianity before it, were all at one time budding religious communities. Each community

¹ Dean Bell, *Jews in the Early Modern World*, 25.

² Mark R. Cohen, *A History of Muslim Jewish Relations*, 30.

sought to define itself and develop its own notions of power and authority. One does not have to search too far in the Hebrew Scriptures to find similar negative attributes as mentioned above applied to Israelites or Jews by Hebrew prophets or by God himself.

A layer of sacred literature that followed the Qur'an contains the record of the *sunna*, or behaviors and sayings about or from Muhammad. These are recorded in the *Hadith*; the *Hadith* reflects interactions between Jews and early Muslims. Early Islam spread rapidly out of the Arabian Peninsula; in the process it assumed control of vast populations of non-Muslims. Policies were developed to account for these non-Muslims. The term "rules of protected minorities" became the foundation for the status applied to non-believers, the *dhimmi*, as has been noted.

Jews were, of course, used to living under foreign rulers long before there were Christians or Muslims. Jews were exiled numerous times from ancient Israel or Judah by such empires as the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans. Jews lived as a religious community in *diaspora* communities such as ancient Egypt, Babylon, Anatolia, and Rome. Jews settled in significant numbers in Spain by the 6th century and in the Rhineland of Germany as early as the 9th. They were already living in kingdoms that ranged from the Arabian Peninsula to modern India by the time Islam came into existence. Exile and living under foreign domination was nothing new to Jews. Byron Sherwin noted in his book on Kabbalah, "Just as the land of Israel became identified with a spiritual state of redemption; exile came to refer not only to a physical location outside the Holy Land, but also to a condition of spiritual exile or alienation."³ Exile, we must remember is a spiritual state, a religious issue not primarily a political one.

One of the earliest centers of Jewish exile was in Babylon. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE at the hand of the Babylonians, thousands of Jews were forcibly exiled to Babylon. The Persians later defeated the Babylonians and took their turn on the world stage. The Persians allowed Jews to return to their homeland in an edict announced by Cyrus the Great. Many Jews made the return trip home, but many remained in Babylon. There they flourished for over two thousand years – all of it under various foreign rulers. The Talmud states that "the law of the government is the law," meaning that Jews were to obey the laws of the sovereign of the land in which they resided.

Possibly the greatest work of medieval Jewish thought was written in Babylon. The Babylonian Talmud is in short the Oral Law, an elaboration and clarification on how to do Judaism in exile and without the Temple or the High Priesthood. It covers every possible topic relevant for Jews to live a Jewish life even when Jews were not in complete control of their physical or political destiny. The rabbis of Babylon established significant centers of learning - these academies produced the Babylonian Talmud. Some of the important books of the Bible were also written or written down here. While in Babylon Jews sat and pondered their fate, and engaged in theological speculation on their new found exile. As Normal Stillman stated in his book *The Jews of Arab Lands*, "The Rabbis gave them a concept of Jewishness that was independent of physical territory or political sovereignty."⁴

³ Byron Sherwin, *Kabbalah, an Introduction*, 214.

⁴ Pp. 27.

Initially Jewish centers of learning were established in Pumbeditha and Sura in the former borders of the Babylonian Empire; these locations were recognized by later Arab authorities as the home of the last of King David's descendants, and the leader of the Jews in Muslim lands. After the Muslim conquests Islamic leaders recognized the Exilarch of the Jews - the leader of the Jews in exile - one Bustanay ben Haninay, as a prophet. The Jewish academies were responsible for the legal and religious lives of Jews. Jews were judged under Jewish religious law, even as they were subject to the laws of the local authorities.

Some of the earliest significant works of Jewish thinking were composed or translated in Babylon. Some of this has to do with the relative stable environment Jews enjoyed under tolerant rulers. Jews eventually spoke and wrote in Arabic; even the Bible was translated into Arabic by the Jewish scholar Saadya Gaon. Saadya also engaged in the earliest example of Jewish theology, this due in part to the rise of Islamic scholars who did likewise with their tradition. The development of *Kalam*, or Islamic theology, motivated Jews to systematize their own theology – something that had not yet been done until the 10th century. Arabic was the language in which these advancements in religious speculation were conducted. Saadya Gaon (d. 942) rightly called the “father” of Judeo-Arabic culture, wrote poetry as well. He served as the head of the great academy in Baghdad. He also composed the first Jewish prayer book that we know of, a surprising fact that the book of Jewish prayer, called a siddur, would be such a late invention since standardized prayers were the norm for Judaism for centuries prior. Fragments of his prayer book are thus the earliest known attempt to codify Jewish prayer in a systematic way. Saadia was a pioneer in applying Greco-Arabic rational philosophic categories to Jewish thought. The influence of philosophy on Jewish thought was primarily due to the preoccupation of Islamic scholars with the philosophy of Aristotle.

Saadya's book, called the *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, defended the basic tenants of Judaism, and he showed that every rational Jew could believe in the truth of Torah and that of Aristotle and Plato. Some of the topics in this book include, Reason and Faith, The Argument for the Creation as *ex nihilo*, Two classes of Law - one based on reason and one based on Revelation. Saadya attempted to apply reason to the Jewish tradition, as would others after him, most notably Moses Maimonides. Still the tradition was preserved. I have no doubt that if the Islamic scholars had not already engaged in this type of philosophical and theological activity, Jewish scholars would not have entered into this area of study.

Rabbi Saadya demonstrates that the teachings of the Torah will stand the test of logical inquiry. He offers unassailable proofs that the universe was created *ex nihilo* - out of nothing, that the Creator is One, that man has a soul, that the Torah was given to the Jewish people by God on Mount Sinai, and that man has the freedom to choose between good and evil and receives reward or retribution accordingly.

Philosophy met theology in meaningful ways throughout the middle ages. This area was ripe for Jewish Muslim dialogue, and it helped Jews especially hone their own religious concepts. Even when philosophy was rejected by some Jews as a valid tool to understand the religion of Judaism, Jews were forced to consider the theological underpinnings of their faith in new ways.

The advancements in religious and philosophic scholarship in Babylon were only possible due to the confluence of several other factors. Jews enjoyed a relatively stable political

structure, and even though they were second-class citizens, they were also mostly free to direct their own religious affairs. They spoke and wrote in Arabic. Hebrew and Aramaic were reserved for holy texts, devotional works or for the Talmud. Under Islam commerce bustled and Jews participated in the economy in significant ways. A common language united the Islamic territories, and Jews were mostly free to travel, to work and to engage with their religious tradition. Particularly in the capital Babylon, the recording of the affairs of state and transmitting that information to remote areas of the expanding kingdom fueled a major book industry. Babylon was well suited to this challenge as dozens of book binders and paper production centers flourished. Both cultures were highly literate - Jews and Muslims engaged in documenting their religious, economic and political activities on pages of paper or parchment produced in Babylon.

Conditions for Jews in Muslim lands during the middle ages were generally favorable. Violence against Jews was rarely sanctioned at the highest levels of authority, and Jews were not expelled from Muslim nations as they were throughout the Middle Ages in Europe. It is when we compare the situation of Jews living in Christian lands against that of the Jews living in Muslim lands we see that Jews were in a much better situation. The noted Jewish author and theologian Franz Rosenzweig compared Islam favorably against Christianity in how it treated Jews. In his book *Star of Redemption*, he stated, "In a certain sense, Islam demanded and practiced 'tolerance' long before the concept was discovered by Christian Europe (Star, 216). Jews no doubt held some confidence in the *dhimmi* system. Most Jews simply wanted to practice their religion and participate in the benefits of any society to the extent possible.

When the protections broke down and certain leaders ignored the Pact of Umar things could go wrong, such as in the 12th century when the Muslim Berber Almohads destroyed Jewish communities in North Africa and Spain. Here Jews and Christians were forced to convert to Islam. Subsequent Muslim leaders reversed these harsh practices and allowed the forcibly converted to return to their former religions. Perhaps due to the fact that Jews were a protected class and that violent outbursts against them were exceptions, no literature of Jewish suffering emerged from the Muslim world, but it certainly did in Christian Europe. Jews did not call on a collective memory of suffering like they did in Europe. Numerous chronicles, liturgical dirges, and martyrologies were written in Europe. This is not to say that Jews were pleased with their second class status. The yellow badge appeared first in Muslim lands, but it never took on the ominous symbol it would in Europe.

Even their second class status fed into existing theological concepts concerning the Messianic Era - Jews would simply have to remain in exile until a future point in time. Messianic expectations were already inherent in Jewish thought. Nonetheless, some Jews saw the enlightened Ottoman Empire - at least at its beginnings - as a sign of the beginning of the redemption. The reasons for this included that the Ottoman rulers welcomed Jews who were expelled from Europe. Some Jews saw this as a preliminary step toward the several stage messianic era.

The conquests of Islam were rapid and too numerous to recount here. Suffice to say that the conquests united large numbers of Jews under a central authority. By the 8th century Islam spanned from India to the Pyrenees, and some 90% of the world's Jews of the time lived in Muslim lands. Islam respected trade and the urban lifestyle, and Jews in Muslim lands were well

equipped to participate in the economy. The rabbinic form of Judaism that prospered in Babylon spread to almost all Jews through the dissemination of books. This was made possible via the infrastructure of the new Islamic states. Islamic rule allowed the diffusion of Judaism. Jerusalem became open to Jewish settlement again; it was off limits to Jews since the edict of the Roman Emperor Hadrian in the year 135 CE. Jews were also barred consistent access to Jerusalem under the Byzantines; but this changed when the Umayyad ruler, Umar ibn al-Khattab ruled over Jerusalem in 638 CE; initially he preserved the ban, but further negotiations opened up the city to Jewish settlement. Later, Jews and Muslims fought together during the siege of the city by the Crusaders.

The economy was also an area in which Jews were active far more than was possible in Europe. We must remember that the restrictions on Jews in Europe were in part religiously motivated; at least that is the purported reason in many cases. In the Muslim lands Jews participated in at least 450 different occupations according to the documents found in the Cairo Genizah. A *genizah* is a repository for worn out or damaged Jewish sacred texts. Often they were preserved in synagogues or even buried in cemeteries. For the most part holy texts, prayer books, sacred writings of any sort, especially when they contained the four letter name of God, were deposited in a *genizah* when these texts were no longer usable. In Cairo, the Ben Ezra synagogue contained a *genizah* that has produced over 330,000 documents ranging from the 9th to the 13th century. The practice for this Egyptian Jewish community was to deposit any text written in Hebrew or Arabic that was of a religious in nature or not. The *genizah* was discovered in the late 1800's and it opened a window into the Middle Ages that was surprising to scholars. This rich collection of documents informs us about the complex world in which Jews lived among their Muslim neighbors. In those documents we read about the great variety of occupations Jews held; we also see that women entered the work force, owned immovable property and transacted with those assets. Jews were prominent in the textile industry, including working in finishing silk and dyeing fabrics. It is interesting to note that only in the last few years the Egyptian Antiquities Department partially funded the restoration efforts at the Ben Ezra synagogue and allowed Jews free access to it.

At times, socialization between Jews and Muslims was rather free; including that mixed bathing in public was not forbidden, and each group visited each other's homes. Mark R. Cohen, an author who has devoted his research to Jewish-Muslim relations in the Middle Ages noted, "The relatively relaxed ambience of interfaith relations in the Islamic marketplace revealed by the letters of Jewish merchants and artisans created truth and forged bonds, diminishing the ever-present religious disdain for Jews as members of an infidel religion."⁵ The common vernacular was Arabic, and this no doubt fostered bonds between the groups - not only in the economy and social interaction but, probably the most important area, religious or mystical thought.

Jews and Muslims created the greatest synergy in religious thought, philosophy and mysticism. All of the factors mentioned were still vital for this interaction to occur. A stable environment was crucial, a relatively open economic system was vital, and a common language furthered advancements in thought and religious tolerance. It should be noted that it takes some courage to engage in religious dialogue, and that dialogue may not always end in agreement; in

⁵ Mark R. Cohen, *History as Prelude*, 9.

fact, partners in dialogue have the unique ability to help the other group hone its own religious ideas if there is an atmosphere of trust. Examining one's own faith is a courageous endeavor.

Jews in Babylon lived at a time when Islamic scholars became masters of Arabic science, medicine and philosophy - both Jews and Muslims shared access to and interest in the translated texts read by Muslim scholars. Texts from the Greek world were reopened and studied; philosophical methods were applied to religious traditions by both groups. This activity spread to the Muslim west. Jews engaged in this activity and it led the emergence of the first systematic Jewish theology. The leaders of the Jewish academies in Babylon, especially in the 10th century, produced a body of work that was made public; ideas were shared in public and in semiprivate literary salons, known in Arabic as *majalis*. Philosophical and religious debates (often these were one and the same) could be aired in safety - this lack of boundaries among thinkers was without parallel to that point for Jews. A significant reason for some of this cooperation was that at their foundation both faiths shared common sources, meaning there was a shared collection of stories found in the Hebrew Bible and in subsequent exegesis. Further, there were far fewer theological problems than those that plagued Jews and Christians or Muslim and Christian dialogue. For example Jews were not 'prophet-killers' as they were 'Christ-killers' in Europe; Muslims insisted on a pure monotheism and the Trinity in Christianity was problematic for them.

The study of Scripture and translating biblical books from the original language of Hebrew into Arabic was a shared project. Unlocking the secrets of the Scriptures became a near obsession for both groups, and great overlaps in traditions were discovered. In religion and religious speculation there was significant agreement, respect and courage. This may be the most forgotten of the areas that served to unite rather than separate.

Influential Jewish scholars such as Saadia Gaon, Isaac Israeli, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Bahya ibn Pakuda and Moses Maimonides subjected the Jewish tradition and Scripture to great scrutiny; in so doing they borrowed from the examples set by Islamic scholars. The Islamic mystical school of Sufism, for example, was influenced by Greek philosophy, and in turn it influenced Jewish scholars and mystics, including Maimonides and his descendants.

As religious communities religious law is paramount for Jews and Muslims. The study of the Quran, the tradition known as *Hadith*, theology, known as *kalam*, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) dominated Muslim life as it did for Jews who studied Torah, Mishnah, Talmud, theology, mysticism and religious law.

The great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides left Adalus and arrived in Egypt in 1165, settling in Fustat, or Old Cairo. He worked as a doctor, and became a physician to the Arab court. Well respected, he was appointed the leader of the Egyptian Jewish community. He was deeply influenced by Sufism, or Islamic mysticism. Maimonides wrote his influential work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, in the 12th century. Even the title of the book was based on Islamic origins. Language that began with Sufi masters was used to convey the Islamic mystical ideal of "learned ignorance," the idea that the ultimate level of knowledge is to realize that one does not know. The more one "knew" God, according to Muslim thinkers, the more one would grow perplexed. It must be noted that Maimonides was somewhat of a radical thinker in Jewish history, and despite his expert and respected works on Jewish law, he took the rationalization of Scripture too far according to some Jews, and some of his ideas caused a backlash. Despite all this, the influence of Islamic culture on this icon of Jewish history was enormous.

Maimonides son, Abraham, went even further and unapologetically turned Jewish worship in the direction of Sufism. Abraham's attraction to the Islamic mystics grew out of the conviction that the Sufis walked in the ways of the prophets of Israel. While he did not shun his own Jewish practice, he saw great benefit in the Sufi path. The 13th century was a time of great fertility in Jewish mystical thought as it was for Christian scholars.

Jewish mysticism can be traced back even to biblical times, and it appears in all phases of Jewish history, including, biblical, rabbinic and medieval periods. The earliest stages of Kabbalah began in Europe, specifically in Provence, Castile and Catalonia. Jews speculated about creation, and developed a complex understanding of the inner life of God. Perhaps the greatest mystical speculation was about the God who creates. Since little is offered about this process in the opening pages of Genesis, the mystics sought answers that were not immediately apparent. Questions like how could a perfectly other and unknowable God, known in Kabbalah as the *en Sof*, or 'without end,' create the finite world. This was also a problem in Neoplatonic thought that influenced all the monotheistic faiths. The Jewish mystics composed a new elaborate mythology in the pages of the greatest work of medieval mysticism, the *Zohar*. The indescribable, distant God somehow possessed a will to create, and it did so through the first of the divine attributes of which something can be said, and that is wisdom. Emanation flowed down through the various other divine attributes, known as the *Sefirot*. Some of these attributes include Understanding, Judgment, Mercy, Beauty, Majesty and others. This otherwise hidden God and its will to create was a problem for philosophy and mysticism, and it spawned a highly creative conversation among Jews and Muslims who sought to unlock the secrets of creation. It should not be lost on us that inherent in this elaborate system is the concept of the importance of human kind to perfect the world in which we have inherited. The idea for Judaism at least was to close the gap of the spiritual exile. The completely unknowable, distant, hidden God was not sufficient for the mystics - they wanted to know more about the inner life of this God. How one acted and how one thought was of primary urgency in this system. Mystics both Muslim and Jewish played an active role in perfecting creation - both traditions offer paths toward human perfection – these concepts are in the religions, yet religious traditions are today ridiculed or erroneously labeled as violent. What we must remember is that the real battle is the taming of the instinct and its desires - as we noted in the opening anecdote.

Kabbalah as a term meaning the "received tradition" appeared first in the 11th century in south west Europe, but it was built on and incorporated much earlier mystical ideas. The horrific expulsions of Jews from Spain and France over the centuries eventually caused Jews to move eastward into Europe. After the disastrous Spanish expulsions in the late 15th century, many Jews migrated eastward to the Ottoman Empire, and for good reason.

From a chronological point of view, Judaism first influenced Sufism in its formative stage in Baghdad. This is often forgotten since it was assumed that Sufism was influenced solely by Neo-Platonism and Christian pietism. Sufi writings preserved a number of discussions of the pious men from among the children of Israel, known as *Isra'ilyyat*. Some of these tales came from Jewish sources, such as the *Pirkei Avot*, translated as *Sayings of the Fathers*. Once Sufism prospered it became attractive for Jews as well. Sufi historiographers note that some Jews converted to Islam due to the attractiveness of the mystical approach. In Spain Kabbalists were already engaged in mystical endeavors but here, too, the two mystical traditions met and influenced each other. In the 13th century the great Sufi mystic ibn Arabi and Jewish mystics

discussed the nature of the letters of the Holy Scriptures. Both traditions saw great power in the letters of Hebrew and Arabic to provide mystical truths, including about the creation of the cosmos. This endeavor is known as *gematria*, the manipulation of letters to reveal the hidden nature of the divine realm.

The greatest product by a Jewish sage in Andalusia was that of Bahya ibn Pakuda. His work entitled *Duties of the Heart* was a treatise on ascetic theology composed in Arabic. Partially this was a response to the dry rationalization of Judaism that had been imposed by the philosophers. It was also offered as a remedy against the rigid formalism in Jewish worship. Bahya devised an inward itinerary guiding the soul through contemplation and love to union with the "supernal light," - this idea of a single divine light was already found in southern Europe among Jewish mystics, and it would be fully developed by the Cabbalists in the Ottoman Empire. The Sufis also outlined a progressive spiritual path in their mystical manuals. Bahya ibn Pakuda illustrated the cross-fertilization of Islamic and Jewish religious culture at its most creative. An area on which Islamic and Jewish scholars and theologians agreed was the unity of God - monotheism, of course, is the root of both traditions, so there was a built in opportunity for religious engagement. Bahya's *Duties of the Heart* involves recognizing the unity of God and the unity of creation. The mystics of both traditions realized that mankind had a role in perfecting this world and also the divine world. This concept was taken a great deal further by the Jewish Cabbalists. In the area of theology, perhaps even more so, mysticism, we see perhaps the greatest outflow of Jewish-Muslim interaction.

When Jews were expelled from Spain in the late 15th century, some Jews found their way to the Ottoman Empire. Jews were welcomed with open arms due to the skills they possessed in various professions, including the processing of silks and fabrics. They were also expert in trade with various Mediterranean centers. Jews who traded in Europe opened channels for Muslim rulers to trade and transact business in Europe, and this was a major benefit Jews provided. They were cultural intermediaries in matters of trade and the economy.

Jews were, of course, already living in the lands the Ottomans conquered. Jews fled or were expelled from Europe, and many settled in Salonika, Venice, Jerusalem, and especially in Safed. Safed represents another example of Muslim Jewish cooperation and toleration, but we see more than toleration. Safed was already a mystical city for Jews. Some European Jewish mystics had already settled in Jerusalem or Safed before the major expulsions from Spain and Portugal. Safed is a city in the Galilee of northern Palestine; it was the home to many ancient rabbis whose wanderings and discussions were known to Jews in the pages of the Talmud. Jews flocked to Safed for several reasons, reasons made more attractive by factors we have already mentioned. Safed and other areas of the early Ottoman Empire were relatively tolerant places. In Safed Jews were able to continue their fabric processing - a skill they brought from southern Europe. The Sultan welcomed with Jews with open arms; the new empire needed the Jews and it was a relationship built on mutual benefits. In practical terms Jews were welcomed not for their religious ideas or skills in mysticism but because they were useful to the economy, were respected as physicians, spoke Arabic and were monotheists. The Sultan Bayezid II stated that the king of Aragon, Ferdinand, who had expelled the Jews from Iberia, had "impoverished his kingdom and enriched mine."

Safed is known as the mystical city of the Galilee, and there Kabbalah flourished - it was the Golden Age for mysticism in Judaism. Everything came together for Jews here. They were able to direct their own religious destiny, and they enjoyed certain protections that went beyond the usual ones outlined in the Pact of Umar. The Sultan heard their complaints of Jews when they arose, he intervened when Jews were told by local authorities to work on the Sabbath and he reversed this practice. Jewish mystics produced the greatest form of Cabbalistic speculation at Safed, building on the concepts initially created in Provence and Catalonia. Without Safed or a similar location in the rather free and enlightened Muslim east Jewish mysticism may have been lost to history. At Safed the legal scholars of Judaism created a way back for those Jews who were forcibly converted to Christianity by European rulers. They reversed the effects of the exile that had plagued them for centuries, and all of this was accomplished under Muslim rule. Yet, they were not totally free, but free enough to experience a renaissance that would disappear as the Ottoman Empire faded and the western powers intervened. Those topics must be saved for many other lectures.

We must remember these substantial episodes of cooperation, tolerance and courage from the middle ages for Jews and Muslims. More united them than divided them. In matters of economy, language, politics and other areas there was cooperation or even mutual dependency. In matters of thought - from philosophy, to law to mystical speculation even differences were cause for further reflection and symbiosis. Judaism was itself strengthened by virtue of its experience in Muslim lands. This is forgotten and it should be remembered.

In closing I quote Dean Bell,

"Jews were, of course, not simply idle spectators in their relations with non-Jews in the events that unfolded around and often included them. Jews of the Middle Ages debated non-Jews and contested marginalization. They did what they could to secure political rights and social and economic privileges. They defended their religious beliefs at the same time that they questioned Christian and Islamic dogma. Jewish relations with the Other in this sense were affected by Jewish settlement and migration, by internal Jewish developments and discussions, and by the developments in broader non-Jewish society. Jews both responded to and helped create early modern society. Their experiences allow us a window into an important and transitional period of Jewish history. "⁶

The goal here was to demonstrate, however briefly, how deeply intertwined are these two faiths and traditions. I hope I have shown that there was a time; a considerable period of time when religious concepts were valued and shared, and that even disagreement could be dealt with in an honorable way. In some ways the Middle Ages in this sense was more progressive than what we see even today. The mutual admiration shared by the most important medieval practitioners of both faiths must be recognized and remembered.

⁶ Dean Philip Bell, *Jews in the Early Modern World*, 233.

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