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Box 2, Folder 28, "Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Discovery of Mutual Harmonies", 16 February 1972.

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DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, BEFORE THE PAKISTANI COUNCIL  
OF ASIA SOCIETY, LECTURE ON "JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: DISCOVERY  
OF MUTUAL HARMONIES", WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1972

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I greatly welcome this opportunity to open a dialogue with representatives of Islam, as well as of Christianity, in this country. There has been far too much hostility and suffering between members of our three monotheistic communities and hopefully, this dialogue between the three branches of the one Covenant is a "sign of the times" marking the beginning of a more constructive and humane relationship between our three faiths.

From the researches and studies of such eminent scholars as Professor S. D. Goitein and many others, we know how great and lasting a reciprocal influence Judaism and Islam have had on each other from the seventh century down to recent times. Nearly 1400 years ago Judaism and a segment of the Jewish people then living in Arabia stood beside the cradle of the Muslim religion and Arab statehood. Judaism played a decisive role in the development of the religious, moral, and legal conceptions in the Koran in early Islam, and in the formulation of the young Muslim community and state.

Indeed prominent scholars have stressed that Islam was far more akin to Judaism in its basic ideas, as well as in the details regulating the lives of its believers, than to Christianity - despite the closer "family relationship" between Christianity and Judaism.

Reciprocally, Jewish thought and philosophy, even Jewish law and religious practices, were systematically and finally formulated under Islamic influences. The Hebrew language developed its grammar and vocabulary on the model of the Arab language, and the revival of Hebrew today is unthinkable without the influence of the Arab world some 1000 years ago. To phrase the relationship more directly, the Muslim religion and Arab nationhood took form under Jewish impact, while traditional Judaism received its final shape under Muslim-Arab influences. When the Arabs faded out from world history (roughly from 1300 to 1900), the Oriental Jews also virtually disappeared from Jewish history, thus demonstrating their interdependence.

To gain a truer perspective today of relationships between Judaism and Islam, it would be helpful to remind ourselves that Judaism and Islam, in distinction from the great civilizations that surrounded them, shared very definite common ideals, and common traits in social traditions and moral attitudes.

It is clear that the uncompromising attitude on monotheism by the Prophet Mohammad is due to the very strong influences of Jewish monotheists. Mohammad declared in the Koran (Sura No. 7, 59), after

proclaiming himself the Prophet of Gentiles, "Among the followers of Moses there is one people who lead others with the truth and with it they judge." The prophet never ceased to emphasize that these ideals came from Israel - the intrinsic values of the belief in one God, the creator of the world and the designer of human destiny, the god of justice and mercy. Before Him everyone, high and low, bears personal responsibility.

As there is a very close connection between Mohammad's creation, the Koran, and the religion of Israel, there is an even more amazing affinity between the fully developed systems of the two religions:

- A) Both possess a tradition of revealed law - halachah in Judaism and Sharig in Islam - which regulate worship, ethics, and social etiquette, and all aspects of life.
- B) Both have an oral tradition - in Judaism, Torah She'beal Peh and in Islam, Hadith - which authoritatively interpret and supplement the written law.
- C) Both rely on a completely free and unorganized republic of scholars rather than on a hierarchy of religious dignitaries who made decisions.
- D) The study even of purely legal matters is regarded in both religions as worship. The holy men of Islam and Judaism are not priests or monks, but students of the divinely revealed law.



In addition, both Judaism and Islam shared such common social traditions and moral attitudes as the following: they were both "primitive democracies" characterized by the absence of privileged castes and classes; the absence of forced obedience to a strong authority; a high respect of freedom of speech, for human life, dignity and freedom.

Overriding these common features is the extraordinary unique fact that both Judaism and Islam are basically national religions which are essentially universal in character.

Much more could be said about the historical aspect of the Jewish people under Islam. Suffice it to say that there has been both periods of enormously creative Islamic - Jewish symbiosis, as well as periods of mutual intolerance and oppression. The moral and spiritual challenge posed to Muslims, Christians and Jews today is essentially that of George Santanyana, "Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

As Christians, Muslims and Jews begin to dialogue together in mutual respect, hopefully they will recover those common features of their religious beliefs and ways of life that will enable them to make a genuine contribution to the building of a unified human community which respects the diversity of religious, ethnic, and racial groups as a source of positive enrichment.