

Interreligious Insight

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September 11th the case against us

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In summer 2001, I was invited to give the Younghusband lecture, an annual event sponsored by the World Congress of Faiths. In my mind it was to be an academic paper on the dangers of fundamentalism. In October, a few weeks after the catastrophe in the United States, I found myself, along with twenty other 'faith leaders' sitting round the table at No.10 Downing Street in London becoming more and more irritated by the collective politeness and rather pallid blessings bestowed upon the Prime Minister. When it came to my turn to speak, I think I caused some offence by saying that, given the scenes daily on our televisions from New York, Belfast, Kashmir and Israel, it was little short of miraculous that the Prime Minister had not written off all religion and religious leaders as a dangerous waste of space and wasn't it about time that we all stood up against the fundamentalists within our respective traditions and stood together in affirmation of the shared values we claimed to believe in.

Over the following months, the situation in Israel/Palestine became more and more the focus of my concern. I became increasingly inarticulate and less and less clear what I wanted or felt able to say. In the nick of time – maybe I should say the old nick of time – I found a way out of my dilemma. What follows, however, is full of anguish and anger - anguish and anger which terrified me during the process of writing and giving the lecture.

This isn't a lecture in the conventional sense, still less a learned paper. But I have chosen to publish it exactly as it was given. If it has any merit, it has merit as it was written and given rather than dying the death of a thousand qualifications and footnotes. One final point. This is a lecture about Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As I said before the lecture, I have singled out the three Abrahamic faiths because I think there are features that are peculiar to this particular trinity of which I am a member. But I have no wish to make listeners or readers of other faiths feel excluded and some of the charges apply far beyond the three faiths on trial. Fundamentalism has become a universal scar across the world's religions. There is no reason why only Jews, Christians and Muslims should feel attacked and insulted by what follows.

There is a famous passage in a somewhat esoteric tractate of the Talmud called Eruvin, with which I have been working recently.¹ It is marvellous stuff, which will be familiar to some here. It's about two 'schools' – Pharisaic, early rabbinic – founded by two older contemporaries of Jesus called Hillel and Shammai. They were in dispute about a matter of halakhah, Jewish law, and both sides maintained that they alone were right. After three years the situation was finally resolved only by a bat kol, a heavenly voice which

declared that “these and these (both views) are the words of the living God”. But, said the voice, there are some matters such as matters of law where we have to have a definitive ruling even though both views are ‘God’s truth’. Because we are forced in this instance to make a decision, we will follow the school of Hillel. Why, asks the Talmud? Because the members of the school of Hillel were kind and modest and studied the rulings of both sides and mentioned the school of Shammai before the school of Hillel and humility, not actively seeking greatness and the power to impose that goes with it, and not being over anxious to win at all costs are virtues that deserve the highest reward. It is a marvellous passage and it is one that I as a progressive Jew read as an essential seed of a most profound concept – that different groups hear the voice of the living God in different ways; that only on very limited occasions is it necessary to make a definitive ruling. For the most part we can and must live with the fact that not only do Jews, Christians and Muslims all hear the words of the living God but that we often hear them in different ways. Even when there has to be a single way of doing things that does not invalidate the truth of the other, what matters is humility and respect and not seeking cheap victories or the power to impose our view.

It is truly marvellous stuff. But a few days ago I noticed that this particular section of Talmud ends immediately after the passage I have just quoted with another famous passage. “Our rabbis taught,” it goes on, “for two and a half years the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel were in dispute again, the former asserting that it would have been better for us if human beings had not been created and the latter maintaining that it is better for us to have been created. Finally, they took a vote and decided that it would have been better for us not to have been created but, since we have been created, we should reflect on our past deeds and make amends or, as some say, examine our future actions.”²

The Talmud is a literary work. It appears at first glance simply to be the record of debates that took place over a period of some hundreds of years, roughly connected by theme. But that isn’t so. It is a record of discussions and debates over some hundreds of years but very carefully and thoughtfully edited to reflect an overriding argument, to provide an added overall dimension. So it is quite legitimate to ask why the editors of this section chose to end a sublime, tolerant, exalted view of human debate and dispute, a section advancing an insight so profound about the fragmentary, partial nature of revelation and truth as perceived by human beings, with something which punctures these exalted ideals and brings us down to earth with such a harsh, discordant note of deflation and despondency.

I think there is little option but to conclude that they did so because they knew that we would find the internalisation of such a modest and humble view of what each of us hold dear, to be extraordinarily hard. In fact, they knew that we would fail repeatedly to acknowledge that ‘these and these are both the words of the living God’; that we would not listen respectfully to each other and restrain our desire to ‘win’; that we would become hopelessly entangled in the dilemma of distinguishing that which is relative from that which is universal; that we would become obsessed by the desire to justify ourselves amidst the inevitable dirtying of hands when exercising power; that we would fail the

challenge to be humble and self-critical and therefore it would have been better had we not been set the challenge of life in the first place. As one who simply cannot live up to the standards demanded of me by that passage in the Talmud, as one who has to exercise leadership within the Jewish community, as one who constantly gets his hands dirty because he believes he has to, as one who shares the terror and anger and sense of betrayal and sense of being repeatedly and deliberately misrepresented and misunderstood and experiences the internal conflicts of shame and guilt of most Jews at this time, I simply cannot begin to speak in the spirit of that heavenly voice because I don't in my innermost heart really believe it. I have never empathised with the note of deflation and despair at the end of that section of Talmud before but there are times now when I do. As Rabbi Tony Bayfield, professional head of the Reform Movement in Britain. I am too angry, too fearful, too hurt, too conflicted and despairing to say anything constructive to you but yet I know there is something that must be said.

I hope you will give me the benefit of the doubt, show me a little compassion in what I am about to do. Even, if I show you and me no compassion at all.³

As I am sure you know, the word Satan, Satan or ha-Satan, 'the Satan', is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible. It is used in a number of ways and developed in different ways within later Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. There is, however, no doubt that one of the meanings of Satan in the Hebrew Scriptures is adversary, prosecuting counsel. Satan was the angel who presented before God the case against.⁴ The only way that I can escape from my inner conflict and emotional turmoil is to address you, to address us in the guise of the prosecuting angel. It adds hubris as well as cowardice and intellectual dishonesty to my many other sins but remember that I am not playing Satan, just a humble barrister ('a humble barrister', now there is an oxymoron for you!).⁵

When those two planes smashed murderously and deliberately into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre on September 11th last year, one of the most horrifying things that should have been apparent in an appalling, horrifying event was the failure, the absolute failure of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Dear God, it should have been apparent before in a hundred terrifying, excruciating⁶ scenes over the last seventy years. I won't, at this point, name them because if you do know what they are, my case is proved and if you really don't know what they are, if you can only see scenes which condemn another faith not your own, then my case is doubly proved. Indictment 1

My first indictment is the failure to recognise that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are siblings yet to continue to act out the worst features of sibling rivalry that even the most dysfunctional family could possibly muster.

Let me remind you that you are each the child of Abraham and that rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam all share either the same scriptures or versions of the same scriptures. Yet you do not act with the love that normal, reasonably well-adjusted siblings show towards each other. Nor do you recognise the feelings of jealousy and rivalry that normal siblings also experience and have to recognise if they are to move forward in a constructive way. Where you are so remarkably alike, both in your strengths and in your

faults, you show no acknowledgment of this fact. Have you any idea of the similarities between today's Muslims in Britain and Jews in Britain a century ago – not just socially and economically but in the way you view your sacred scriptures and in your attitudes to the discipline of religious law. Yet you experience all of the murderous and violent feelings of dysfunctional siblings and don't recognise it.

Let me quote, your Honour, a Jewish scholar, Alan Segal: Judaism and Christianity designed two different ways of understanding their universal missions..... When Christianity promulgated its doctrine of the salvation of all believers, it understood itself to be the universal proselytising religion for world salvation. By contrast, Judaism understood itself to be a kingdom of priests in a culturally plural world.... Their different histories do not alter the fact of their birth as twins in the last years of Judean statehood. They are both truly Rebecca's children, but unlike Jacob and Esau, they have no need to dispute their birthright. It can belong to both of them together.⁷

Siblings. No need to dispute their birth-right. So, why the patronising and the stereotyping and the scarcely concealed distaste?⁸

Why, dear Christians, do you rush to use the language of your own greatest infamy – holocaust, Nazis, genocide – to describe the behaviour of Jews in Israel and Palestine today?⁹ Are you so desperate to prove that Jews are no better than anyone else, no better than you? Do you have any idea of how hurtful and offensive such language is? I suspect you do. And, my dear Jews, do you really think that the past excuses you your continuing contempt for the New Testament as a book of revelation and experience of the Divine, your failure to hold Christian holy places as sacred as your own? You use terms like 'goyim' with such contempt; many of you refuse to discuss matters of theology with your siblings;¹⁰ will not enter a church even for a funeral mass; drink wine produced by your own sisters and brothers lest you be drawn into apostasy through socialising.¹¹

Nor have I finished my first indictment there. It was Louis IX, 'Saint' Louis, King of France, who burnt Jewish books in Paris and then set out on Crusade to attack his Muslim sibling as well. It was in Christian France in 2002 that Muslims attacked synagogues and Christians in their droves voted for Le Pen in a show of Islamophobia that shook even Britain – evidently reminding our Home Secretary of the hordes of Muslim and Hindu bogeymen who threaten to 'swamp' us here as well.

Let me continue, from a Jewish prayer book no less. "Ishmael, my brother, how long shall we fight each other? My brother, from times bygone, my brother – Hagar's son, my brother the wandering one. Time is running out, put hatred to sleep". If ever words were empty, those are they. If ever words were poisonous they are those in the Saudi press reviving the blood libel which, dear Christian sibling, you invented to demonise the Jew and which is but one example of the wholesale export of the vocabulary of Christian anti-Semitism into the Islamic world in the last decade.¹² Only siblings could show such enduring, murderous hatred.

Indictment II

None of you have confronted the challenges of your own scriptures.

However you wriggle and however you squirm there are passages in the Qur'an, which have licensed misguided Muslims to claim the superiority of Islam and to use accounts of rebellious Jewish tribes to support anti-Jewish sentiments. There are passages that have been used to justify the fatwah to hound people and call for their murder, the proclamation of Jihad as bloody holy war, the imposition of cruel and violent punishments and the support of governments that set Muslim against Muslim, Sunnis against Shi'ites and fund and sponsor terrorism. It is no use you saying that people who interpret the Qur'an in those terms are interpreting it wrongly. Your brilliant and uplifting sacred texts have been misused and abused and you have done nothing effective to stop it.

Exactly the same is true of the New Testament text which still serves as a vehicle for those who would argue in favour of Christian superiority and supercession, who would seek to deny their siblings their share of the birthright and inheritance. You cannot reasonably suggest that the very text of the New Testament as it is read so often without explanation is kind to your Jewish sisters and brothers, the heirs of the Pharisees. And let me remind you of that most dangerous of passages in the Gospel of St. John (Ch.8 v.44) which describes Jews as children of the devil – your devil, not Satan!

And, finally, back to the Jews. Let me refer you to the story of Pinchas, which you read with such reverence and often with so little public commentary, each year. Pinchas who took the law into his own hands and murdered a Jew and a non-Jew. Pinchas who was rewarded for extra-judicial murder with hereditary priesthood. Remember Yigal Amir who took the law into his own hands and murdered Yitzhak Rabin in the name of Judaism. Remember Baruch Goldstein who rose in the night after reading the book of Esther and murdered Muslims at prayer.¹³

Each of you has failed to confront the real challenges of your scriptures, the terrifying passages and the passages that can be used to license the murder of siblings. Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael in the Hebrew bible. The very text prefigures the desperate, sinful struggle based upon ignoble fears, jealousies and passions that you have read instead as license and justification.¹⁴

Indictment III

You have been seduced by Graeco-Roman and later notions of imperialism into thinking that you alone are the way and the truth and the life', into thinking that your story is the only story, into thinking not only that yours is the only family on earth but that you are the only child who is loved by God, the only child who really matters, the only child who is the true heir of Abraham.

Where is the modesty? Where is the humility? You make truth claims as if you were God. Is it not enough that each of you has the most wonderful story, a fragment of history

touched by God? Is it not enough that each of you has a precious strand of the covenant made originally through Noah with the whole of humanity?¹⁵ Why have you been insatiable? Why do you continue to fight battles against each other for power and control over the whole world? Why do you still fight the Crusades? Were they not monstrous and appalling enough? Your Honour, do I really need to detail what Karen Armstrong has called “the contempt for Islam”¹⁶ that has disfigured the thinking even of liberal western intellectuals in the twentieth century – the support of colonialisation from Algiers to Damascus, the fantasies, the stereotypes, the belittling. Today you reap huge anger, radicalisation, the desire for revenge – are you surprised? But does that make it right?

When will your misguided lust for empire and power end? Why is it not possible for Christian and Muslim to be content with what they have? Why do you need to own the whole world, which is actually God’s? Why can the three of you not allow each other to be – with Christian or post-Christian lands in which Muslims and Jews are respected minorities; Muslim lands with Christians and Jews as respected and un-persecuted minorities and Jews in their tiny land side by side with a Palestinian land in which minorities can live without fear or hindrance – in which Palestinians do not still openly or secretly covet Tel Aviv and in which dreams of a Greater Israel are simply shameful memories.

Indictment IV

Since the 1960s we have seen the rise of the most disfiguring feature on the face of world religion and particularly amongst you three that even I can remember in my long and distinguished career. It is called fundamentalism.

Before you start protesting that Judaism or Islam cannot be fundamentalist, let me tell you that fundamentalism has little or nothing to do with a literal reading of scripture. Though fundamentalism has its origins, I accept, in a series of pamphlets written in the United States ninety years ago, I am not talking pamphlets. If religion is not about facing up to the challenges of the present; if it is not about leading people resolutely into a future, into a world in which nature in every sense is transformed, in which justice rolls down like waters and righteousness as an everlasting torrent; if it is not about building a world in which every human being can sit under their vine and under their fig tree and no one will terrorise them; if it is not about creating a world in which, as the prophet Micah says, each person walks in the way of their God, a God who is Herself a manifestation of that which is shared, unnameable and Without End; if it is not about that true peace which fills the world as the waters cover the sea – then it has no meaning and no value. Yet fundamentalists are afraid of the present and terrified of the future; fainthearted in the face of their mission, they run away from the challenge of reality. They build an imaginary world which they think resembles the Christianity of the New Testament or eighth-century Islam or eighteenth-century Poland, but which doesn’t and has no authenticity. Fundamentalists, in their fear and in their insecurity claim to have a monopoly on truth and more, they seek to seize power and so impose their authority on others. It is a desperate and disastrous phenomenon.¹⁷

It has led to fifteen or twenty thousand¹⁸ fundamentalist Jews clinging to land which must, in justice, become part of the State of Palestine. It has led to coalition governments in Israel, which reflect neither the democratic will nor the ideals of Judaism. It has led to a situation in the United States where Churches have been captured and seduced by men like Pat Robertson and have become a major obstacle to American participation in aid, in development, in the eradication of poverty in the Third World. Fundamentalism has led to the defacing and defaming of everything that is good and just and life enhancing in Islam so that the term 'Muslim fundamentalist' now, tragically, seems synonymous with 'Muslim' in the minds of many ordinary people in the West, fuelling the present scandal of Islamophobia and bringing libel, pain, discrimination and suffering to ordinary Muslims in Britain.

Brainwashing young, deprived and discriminated against young people into thinking that becoming a suicide bomber and killing innocent civilians – men, women and children – is not what Islam is about even in extremis. Terrorism can never, never be justified and fundamentalism has scarred the reputation of religion in a way that makes my task, Your Honour, so delightfully easy. The failure of Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders alike to denounce fundamentalism and to stand together in affirmation of shared values, in particular values relating to the sanctity of life and the central role of religion to challenge power, not to seize it for coercive purposes – that is my penultimate indictment.

Indictment V

You have indulged in the rape of the Third World

There is no doubt that the Christian and post-Christian west is carrying out a process of exploitation of the Third World, which is a scandal and a disgrace. Whole swathes of the world have been exploited economically primarily for the benefit of developed countries. Whole swathes of the world have been left to deal with the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. Whole swathes of the world have been exploited by the Abrahamic faiths which showed no respect whatsoever for the faiths of the indigenous peoples. His Honour once implored you to 'take care of your own soul and another person's body, not your own body and another person's soul'.¹⁹ You took no notice and did the reverse.

You have made globalisation a nightmare by making it an instrument, not for spreading education and welfare and eliminating hunger, but for trampling the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity, each person's precious individuality, under foot. You have sought to impose democracy, free trade and human rights primarily to win economic and political advantage. You have resisted democracy, free trade and human rights, protesting that they are part of Western imperialism, because they threaten your hegemony and stand as an implies criticism of your culture.

That exploitation, that cynicism, that venality, that failure of responsibility, that use of alliances for strategic and economic reasons even if it has meant supporting oppressive regimes with no regard for human rights, whether they be defined by Judaism, Christianity or Islam, has sown seeds in which fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism

– absolutely and completely unjustified though they are – have as a terrible matter of fact found fertile breeding grounds in which they too can abuse and betray the starving, the uneducated, the defenceless and the impoverished.

There is my indictment. For many centuries you could, to some extent at least, have been excused – ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’; you were the tinok shenishba, the child blinded by the limited values of the world around you. But since the emergence of the global village, since the development of universal communications, since the unlearned lessons of world war, since the tremendum of the Shoah – there can be no alibi. You reveal only arrogance. You show no humility. You have not been prepared to be even moderately self-critical, let alone radically self-critical which alone could save you. You have performed small acts of goodness and kindness but you have failed when it comes to the big picture and the tough issues. You speak of peace but you train children to hate and arm them with terrible weapons.

You do not know who you are – siblings, siblings, siblings. You treat each other abominably yet you have no insight at all into the origins of your murderous feelings towards each other, which you deny even as you are exhibiting them. You allow your scriptures to be the mandate for violence, hatred and contempt. You have been seduced by political notions of empire into the conquest of land and souls. You have allowed fundamentalists and fanatics to perform your dirty work and fulfil your base ambitions. You have raped and exploited the Third World and created the conditions in which despair and terror are rife.

Now you will instantly resort to self-justification or pay lip service to my criticisms whilst mounting an uncompromising defence and justification of your conduct in your heart.

Your Honour, your children out there, Jews, Christians and Muslims are suffering and dying yet their leaders are fiddling the books of cheshbon nefesh, of true accounting whilst the three Abrahamic faiths, their cities, their people and their souls burn. September 11th did indeed change the world forever. It finally made apparent the abject failure of religion, the farce of religion, the moral bankruptcy of religion. Your Honour, I rest my case.

Satan slumps into his seat with a hypocritical inner smile of satisfaction. Or is the awful smile mine? Has he indeed, cruelly but necessarily, spoken the words of Adonai, of Allah, of Christ, of the living God? Or has he been a vehicle too clever by half for saying what a Jew and a Christian and a Muslim must say in public for themselves?

Better to have been created or not created?20 I cannot believe that I am so depressed that I can even contemplate the Talmudic answer. But it is the qualification to that answer with which I will end: ‘We should reflect on our past deeds or, as some say, examine our future actions’. I am so desperate that I do not think that there is any point in calling upon us to reflect upon our past deeds, such is the extent to which we are bound up with our own stories and our own telling of history. If history does indeed teach that history

teaches the three Abrahamic faiths nothing, then the only thing we can do is to examine our future actions and, starting from this very moment, resolve to act to save our faiths and the world.

Notes:

1. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 13b(Soncino English edition starts bottom p85)
2. Ibid pp 86/87
3. I am not sure how much it is necessary to explain. My anger comes from the fact that I think that Israel has been grossly misrepresented in much of the world's press, not the least in Britain. It is monstrous that people should question the right of the State of Israel to exist or deny its right to protect its citizens against a vile and inhuman terrorist assault. That is not to deny that Israel has been drawn into a situation in which the totally unacceptable has occurred – the continued occupation of someone else's land, the denial of human rights, the killing and maiming of innocents, collective punishment and a host of other related actions. I stand by both the preceding sentences. One of the problems of speaking as a Jew in Britain today is that people repeatedly take comments out of context and use those comments to reinforce positions with which one totally disagrees. Another was summed up for me by a journalist in The Independent who described me as being like two people. I don't think that schizophrenia is the correct diagnosis of my present mental state but depression may well be - the anger and the anguish being symptoms. I hope this is of some use in explaining further why I adopted the device that I am now about to explain.
4. See for instance haSatan, the 'adversary' at the beginning of the book of Job.
5. A Muslim respondent pointed out that I was being unfair in adopting a Satan (the prosecuting counsel) who does not exist in Muslim tradition. I can see the point in that the Satan of Job is Jewish and Christian in a way that he is not Muslim. But I am not sure that it is unfair since this is a self conscious device to allow me to speak rather than remain inarticulate. But I leave you to judge.
6. Yes, an intended choice of word!
7. Alan F. Segal, Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1986 pp 180-1
8. Satan would say that Christians especially adopt a patronising tone which hints at those awful Jews and less than civilised Muslims not sharing the Christian understanding and propensity for peace, reconciliation and self sacrificing love. He would add that the French Ambassador to Britain, in privately describing Israel as "a shitty little country" illustrated perfectly the word distaste.
9. I was fascinated that a member of the audience rushed to the defence of Christianity, ascribing responsibility for the Final Solution solely to the tiny group who attended the Wannsee Conference. Firstly, don't we get the Governments we deserve? Secondly, I am of course aware that Nazi anti-Semitism and Christian anti-Judaism are not the same thing. But there is an overwhelming body of literature which demonstrates conclusively that Nazi anti-Semitism could never have wrought the horror it did without countless centuries of Christian anti-Judaism. Satan would ask whether people really thought that the Shoah was the shining culmination of Western Christian civilisation?
10. For instance, Joseph B. Soloveichik, one the most revered Jewish thinkers of the 20th century.
11. This is the reason why wine produced by gentiles is not regarded by some Jews as kosher
12. Someone objected that the Saudis could not be guilty of anti-Semitism since they are themselves Semites. I think that is an obtuse point to make. One of my Muslim friends says that a decade ago there was little or no anti-Semitism or, if you prefer, anti-Judaism amongst Muslims. Today, he goes on, it is rife. All of the old libels have been taken on board – only a matter of days ago there was an outburst of chanting and rioting and use of the blood libel in, of all places, San Francisco. The belief that September 11th could not have been perpetrated by Muslims but must have been a Mossad plot, part of the international Israeli-Jewish conspiracy to discredit and destroy Islam, is, my Muslim friend tells me, widespread. Objection overruled!
13. A member of the audience told me that I was being unfair in singling out the Jewish fanatics by name – implying that they are only a handful of individuals – whilst implying that Muslim and Christian fanatics were too many to name. But somebody else told me that I was being journalistic

- and generalising. All I can say is that I wasn't trying to make light of Jewish culpability and Satan's imprecision was more to do with having a thirty-minute not a thirty day trial than with my Jewish bias getting in the way.
14. What is being said here is that the very text of the Hebrew bible is deeply uncomfortable for Muslims and quite understandably makes them feel excluded and set apart. Much of Jewish interpretation of this passage simply seeks to justify that which cannot and should not be justified.
 15. The point was rightly made that the covenant with Noah is not part of Muslim tradition. However, Satan stand by his assertion that God has a covenantal relationship with all humanity and the Jewish relationship, the Christian relationship and the Muslim relationship are all subsets and do not imply either the superiority of one or the inferiority of the other.
 16. Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London 1991.
 17. One of the objections raised at this point was that not all fundamentalists are dangerous and not all are fanatics. Furthermore, we cannot be held responsible for the dangerous fanatics in our respective faith traditions. Satan would reply that all fundamentalists as defined by him are dangerous or potentially dangerous. More importantly, he would be caustic in the extreme at the denial of responsibility. He would quote the Jews, "All Israel are sureties one for another". He would quote the Christians, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls" (John Donne). He would quote the Muslims, No.34 in An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith.
 18. There are, I believe, some 200,000 settlers. However, many are there not for ideological reasons (at least not their own) but for economic reasons, lured there by government subsidies and cheap housing. The figure of 15,000 or 20,000 refers to those who are there for ideological reasons. The overwhelming majority are not a real obstacle to peace since they would, presumably, readily accept re-housing provided only that they did not lose out economically. It is the minority of fundamentalists, fanatics and ideologues who hold both peoples to ransom as Satan asserts.
 19. A well known Hasidic aphorism
 20. I was told by some that the end of the lecture was hard to understand. I have re-read it. Provided that one realises that I have gone back to near the beginning, to the second passage from the Talmud I hope that it is now clear. I do not think that rehearsing our respective cases and retelling history is actually going to yield very much. Our only salvation lies in asking where and on the basis of which shared values can we go constructively, together from here.
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Rabbi Tony Bayfield is professional head of the Jewish Reform Movement in Britain. The Younghusband lecture is a prestigious annual event organised in memory of Sir Francis Younghusband, founder of the World Congress of Faiths. This lecture was given at the Sternberg Centre for Judaism in London, on May 3, 2002.