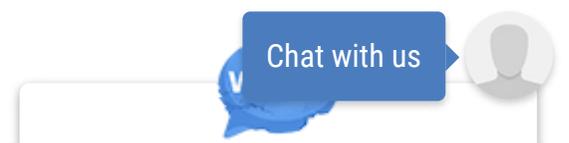


The Prophet of Islam and the Jews





By [Faysal Burhan](#),
Edited by Michael D. Berdine
Published: 2002

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The Prophet of Islam and the Jews Basis of Conduct: Acceptance, Respect, and Cooperation

Introduction

America is the land of opportunity, where people of different ethnicities and nationalities share a common land. Muslims and Jews have a better chance of understanding each other and to participate in activities that would bring mutual benefits to both communities. Unlike the popular conception, Islam is not a hostile religion. Acceptance, kindness, respect, and cooperation are divine Islamic principles revealed to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (p) for conducting his affairs with all people, especially the People of the Book (the Jews and Christians). These principles have led to the establishment of the constitution governing a pluralistic community in Medina, in the Arabian Peninsula, in the year 622 CE. The Constitution of Medina is the first written civil and political law spelling out the freedom of worship, trade,

and speech, community defense against its enemy, promotion of justice and goodness and the fighting of evil. The city of Medina is where people of different faiths and nationalities, including Jews, Muslims, Ethiopians, and Persians lived together in cooperation and peace.

This article discusses certain Jewish and Muslim historical events and Islamic principles relevant to the mutual benefits for both Jews and Muslims. Furthermore, the divine laws and the historical events are proof that Muslim's relations with the People of the Book are based on acceptance, consideration, and collaboration. There is a beautiful book written by the Christian Scholar and Archaeologist, Dr. William Baker, entitled "[More in Common than you Think – A Bridge Between Islam and Christianity](#)", I recommend all to read it. Although the subject of this book is the Prophet of Islam and the Jews, Christians and other ethnic groups are treated in the same manner. I strongly recommend not only Christians to read it, but those of other faiths as well.

Although some hostilities and differences between the Muslims and the Jews occurred during and after the life of the Prophet (p), the causes were not that Islam changed its standards, but rather were due to the breaking of covenants such as that of the tribe of Quraythah with the Prophet, as will be shown later under the title: "Harmony is the Goal of Every Muslim." Recent hostility between the Jews and Muslims is about the conflict in Palestine. There is always hope that both will move towards peace in the region. Next is a focus on some of the universal Islamic principles relevant to the topic which will include Christians and others.

Conviction, not Compulsion (Freedom of Belief)

Compulsion in religion is incompatible with the spirit of faith. This is certainly true of the Islamic faith. Religious belief must depend on people's free-will and choice. Islam establishes that people's belief must come by conviction. A believer is one who willingly, through the signs of God in the universe and in himself, and through inner-self satisfaction, accepts the faith of Islam. The Holy Qur'an is full of verses and examples of this concept. Since belief by conviction is not our topic here, we will not discuss any of these relevant verses. Confirming the "no compulsion-in-religion" Islamic principle, however, the following Qur'anic quotations are considered:

If it had been the Lord's Will, they would all have believed, all who are on the earth: will you then (Muhammad) compel mankind, against their will, to believe? Qur'an, 10: 99

Another Qur'anic verse states:

Let there be no compulsion in religion, truth stands out clear from error. Qur'an, 2: 256

The two verses above basically establish the principle that no-force or pressure is to be used against people, including Christians and Jews to become Muslims. This principle is clearly reflected in the life and practice of Prophet Muhammad and is reflected in the Constitution of Medina, discussed below, which guarantees the freedom of worship for all.

Qur'an Teaches Peaceful Dialogue

A Muslim is encouraged to carry out a warm intellectual dialogue with the People of the Book to establish and improve relations. Following are two examples:

Say O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God. If then they turn back, say: "Bear witness that we (at least) are muslims (submitters to God's Will). Qur'an, 3:64

Say: We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another. Qur'an, 3:84

And if people "turn back" not embracing Islam, it does not mean war or hostility forever, but rather Muslims must seek elements of cooperation, promote common matters to build the life, not destroy it. After all, it is an integral part of Muslim's faith to honor the Prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all other prophets of God and follow their teachings.

Acceptance and Understanding

Islam teaches the Muslim to be kind, tolerant, understanding and to establish fraternity among all people. The Qur'an tells us that God has made people into nations and tribes in order to know and collaborate with each other in kindness and that the best one is he who is more pious than others.

O humankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know and collaborate with each other in kindness (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God (is he who is) the most righteous of you and God is Knower, Aware. Qur'an, 49:13

Thus, Islam bases people's relational conduct and collaboration on kindness. Hence, it condemns intolerance, prejudice, and bigotry and rejects discrimination based on color, creed, national origin or religion. The Muslim acceptance and collaboration principles apply to all elements of life and must reflect in all of Muslim's affairs. The teaching of Islam towards proper behavior, anger control and patience, treatment of spouse, parent and neighbor, young and old, friend and enemy, the environment and specifically the People of the Book are all evident in the Holy Qur'an and the life and example of Prophet Muhammad (p). In calling people to the Islamic faith, for example, a Muslim must be wise, sensitive, humble and considerate. The Qur'an teaches:

Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and discuss with them in ways that are best and most gracious. Qur'an, 16:25

The Muslim's acceptance of the Jews and Christians is even more intense and specifically addresses the Muslims to prevent any communication or approach that would lead to dispute, anger or negative implications between the two parties. Allah instructs the Muslims:

And dispute not with People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury. Qur'an, 29:46

The Prophet (p) also said:

Let it be known if anyone (Muslim) commits injustice, insults, aggravates, mistreats or abuses a person of the People of the Book (protected, by the state or an agreement), he will have to answer me (for his immoral action) on the Day of Judgment. -Izzeddin Blaque, Minhaj Alsaliheen, Page 106.

Thus, the lack of tolerance towards the non-Muslims under Islamic rule is a grave offense.

Does Islam Approve Terrorism?

Absolutely not! The human soul is sacred and highly protected in Islam. As discussed in the previous section, (Acceptance and Understanding) God created people into nations and tribes to deal with each other in kindness and that God's criterion of differentiation among people is piety. Islam does not tolerate bloodshed, prejudice or discriminatory actions. God tells us in the Holy Qur'an:

If anyone kills a person, it would be as if he killed the whole people and if anyone saves a life, it would be as if he saved the whole people. Qur'an, 5:32

What could be a stronger condemnation for the assassination of an individual than equating it with slaying all of mankind and a greater reward for saving a life than equating it with saving the lives of all people? The verse above can also be interpreted in terms of safety. As an extension of saving the human from death due to unsafe conditions, and for promoting environmentally healthy communities. The indiscriminate killing of people is prohibited in the Islamic faith irrespective of the mechanism.

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

Whoever fights under an erratic irrational banner, buffs up angry for a particular (irrational) group or promotes (irrational) group, or supports (irrational) group and died in that cause, he died as a disbeliever and whoever indiscriminately attacks my people killing the righteous and the wicked of them, sparing not (even) those with whom is a covenant (such as Jews and Christians "People

of Book” or others) and not fulfilling the promises made with those who have been given a pledge of security; he belongs not to me and I belong not to him. -Muslim, Tradition # 3436

Does the Islamic Faith order Muslims to Kill Westerners or Christians and Jews?

Absolutely not! This is a myth. Islam does not in any way approve of the killing of innocent people, whether they are Christians, Jews or of any faith or philosophy. Prophet Muhammad said:

Whoever kills a person of the People of Covenant (such as Jews and Christian or people of others creeds or philosophy) with whom there is a covenant between them and Muslims, he or she will not enter Paradise. -Bukhari, Tradition # 2930

This myth about Muslims entering Paradise by killing Christians, Jews or Westerners, may have been a misinterpretation of the saying of Prophet Muhammad “All those who die today will enter Paradise,” during the Battle of Badr.

Let me shed some light surrounding this matter. The Battle of Badr was the first battle to take place between the Muslims and the Pagans. The battle took place in the first year after the Prophet migrated to Medina, 623 AD, escaping the torture and execution of Muslims by the pagan Quraysh tribe of Mecca. In Medina, the Prophet joined his followers who were similarly driven out of Mecca leaving behind their families, homes, and belongings, much of which was confiscated by Quraysh. The Muslims learned about a caravan of goods belonging to Quraysh coming from Syria into Mecca. The Prophet and his companions decided to intercept the caravan and prevent it from reaching the Quraysh. He and three hundred of his people left the Medina to intercept, not to enter into a battle of any kind. In the meantime, The Meccans learned about the Muslim’s intention of intercepting the caravan, summoned themselves and made an army of one thousand people to save the caravan from the Muslims.

Meanwhile, Abu Sufian, however, the leader of the caravan learned of the Muslim’s move, changed the route and escaped the Muslims into Mecca safely. Even though the caravan escaped into safety, Quraysh with its mighty force refused to listen to some of its prominent leaders, such as Alwaleed ibn Al Mugheerah, to return to Mecca but insisted to “meet the Muslims in the battlefield and destroy them.” It was here, where Muslims were few and were not equipped to go into a war that the Prophet said: “All those who die today will enter Paradise.”

Although the saying can take several different interpretations, none of them can be interpreted as saying, “if you kill a Christian, Jew or Westerner you will enter Paradise.” First, the Prophet was facing the pagans of Mecca, not Christians, Jews or Westerners. Second, the Prophet’s word “today” limits the act of entering Paradise by dying, to those who would die that day only. Third, the words of the Prophet were made in a situation of “defense,” not offense. The Prophet told his companions: “Those who die (in self-defense) will enter Paradise.” He did not say “all those who kill will enter Paradise.” This principle is also in line with the philosophy of Islam regarding prevention of bloodshed and war. See the earlier Section: Does Islam Approve of Terrorism? How can this quotation of the Prophet be twisted to mean the killing of Westerners?

On the contrary, the Muslims and the Jews joined each other a few months earlier and formed an alliance to defend the city of Medina against the pagans. Furthermore, prior to this, Prophet Muhammad sent his followers to Abyssinia, escaping Quraysh’s execution and to be protected by its Christian King, Negus. Nine years before this Battle and for many more years to come, the Muslims and Christians were allies. This was and still is the policy of Islam regarding the People of the Book, Christians, and Jews. After all, the Islamic philosophy of martyrdom and entering paradise is no different than the concept of martyrdom in Christianity. This philosophy too, cannot be interpreted as permission to kill Christians, Jews, Westerners or any human being.

The Constitution of Medina

The Constitution of Medina is a magnificent historical document, authored and dictated by Prophet Muhammad (p) as the law of a land inhabited by different ethnic groups and nationalities, including Muslims and Jews. This manifestation established political rights, citizen obligations, freedom of belief, freedom of speech and trade, the sanctity of life, the prohibition of bloodshed and crime, and the laws of municipalities and justice. The document also secured and promoted cooperation and fraternity among all people of any creed, color, ethnicity, and lineage and sets out the criterion of righteousness as the base of distinction.

In the year 622 CE, Prophet Muhammad (p) migrated from Mecca to Medina ending 13 years of strife calling the people of Quraysh (a major governing tribe in Mecca) to Islam and escaping their latest plot to assassinate him. Here in the city of Medina, where he had already made many supporters, some of whom had migrated earlier from Mecca (the Emigrants) and others who received Islam and accepted it in Medina (the Helpers). The city of Medina and its surrounding area was home to many Jewish and Arabian pagan tribes. Residing in the city were also people of different national origins including Romans, Persians, and Ethiopians. This community of multi-religious beliefs and nationalities was ruled by a new pluralistic law.

During his first year in Medina, Prophet Muhammad (p) laid out the principles of a pluralistic constitution that ruled the city of Medina for the next decade and later extended to Arabia and the Islamic Empire. The new constitution established the unity and brotherhood between the Emigrants and the Helpers and instituted the rights and equality of every citizen before the law.

Note: Similar to local city and county governments in the west today, the pre-Islamic tribal structure was that each tribe constituted a local autonomy. Each tribe had a leader that kept agreements with other tribes, set and enforced the law in its territory.

Note also that all the parties to this document endorsed it, including the eleven Jewish tribes that were residents in the area. The text of this translation of the Constitution of Medina is copied as a whole from the book, *Sunshine at Madinah*, published by Islamic Publication International. Also see Minhaj Alsaliheen, Page 777, and *Albidayah wa Alnihayah*, Volume 3, Page 177.

The following is an English translation of the Constitution of Medina, as recorded by Ibn Hisham. No attempt is made to follow literally the layout of the original. On the contrary, we have, in places, deliberately departed from the original paragraphing and added numeral prefixes to the main paragraphs of the translation, for the purposes of easy reference and understanding: "The Messenger of God wrote documents (stipulating the relationship) between Immigrants and Helpers, in which he made peace with the Jews and pledged himself to them that they will be established in security regarding their religion, wealth and property. He pledged to honor certain rights for them and demanded that they fulfill certain obligations."

The Constitution of Medina reads:

In the name of Allah the Compassionate the Most Merciful. This is a document dictated by Muhammad the Prophet (p) (governing the relations) between the believers and Muslims from Quraysh and Yathrib (Medina), and those who followed and joined them and strove with them. They are one nation, distinct from all nations. The Immigrants from Quraysh, according to their established customs are bound together and shall ransom their prisoners in the kindness and justice common among believers.

- 1. The Banu 'Awf (a Jewish tribe) according to their established customs, are bound together as before, each group shall ransom their prisoners in the kindness and justice common among believers. The Banu Sa'idah, the Banu al-Harith, The Banu Jushm and the Banu an-Najjar (Jewish tribes) are likewise.*
- 2. The Banu 'Amr ibn 'Awf, the Banu an-Nabeet, and the Banu al-Aws (Jewish tribes) likewise.*
- 3. Believers shall not leave anyone among them in destitution by failing to give for him redemption money or blood-wit (legal fine imposed on one who caused the blood shedding) in kindness.*
- 4. A believer shall not take as an ally a freedman of another believer against him.*
- 5. The God-fearing believers shall be against whoever rebels or he who seeks to spread injustice, or sin or aggression or spread enmity between believers; the hands of everyone of them shall be together against him, even if he be a son of one of them.*
- 6. A believer shall not slay a believer for the sake of an unbeliever nor shall he aid an unbeliever against a believer.*
- 7. The bond of God is one, the least of them (believers) may give protection (to a stranger) on behalf of them. Believers are protectors of one of another, to the exclusion of outsiders.*

8. *The Jew who follows us is surely entitled to our support and the same equal rights as any one of us. He shall not be wronged nor his enemy be assisted.*
9. *The peace of believers is one and indivisible; no believer shall make a separate peace without other believers, when they are engaged in war in the way of God, except when conditions are deemed fair and equitable to all.*
10. *In every foray, a rider must take another behind him. The believers must avenge the blood of one another, if anyone of them fails fighting in the cause of God. The God-fearing believers follow the best and most upright guidance.*
11. *No polytheist shall take the property or person of Quraysh under his protection nor shall he intervene on their behalf against a believer.*
12. *Who ever is convicted of deliberately killing a believer without legitimate cause, shall be liable to retaliation, unless the next of kin is satisfied (with blood money). The believers shall all be against him and they are bound to keep him under their custody (until either the next of kin is satisfied or retaliation takes place).*
13. *It shall not be lawful to a believer who has accepted this document as binding and who believes in God and the last day, to help an evil-doer or to shelter him. The curse of God and His anger on the Day of Resurrection will be upon him if he does, and neither repentance nor ransom will be received from him.*
14. *When ever you have a disagreement amongst you, it must be referred to God and Muhammad.*
15. *Jews shall contribute to the cost of war, so long as they are fighting alongside the believers.*
16. *The Jews of Banu 'Awf are one nation with the Muslims; the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs, their freedmen and their persons shall be protected except those who behave unjustly or sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families. The same applies to the Jews of Banu an-Najjar, Banu al-Harith, Banu Sa'idah, Banu Jusham, Banu al-Aws, Banu Tha'labah, and the Jafnah, clan of the Tha'labah and Banu al-Shua'ibah. Doing good deeds is a protection against sinfulness. The freedmen of Tha'labah are as themselves. The close friends of the Jews are as themselves.*
17. *None of them shall go out to war, without the permission of Muhammad. But none shall be prevented from taking revenge for a wound inflicted upon him. Whoever kills a man, kills himself and his household, unless it be one who has wronged him, for God would accept that.*
18. *The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims bear theirs. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. Their condition must be one of mutual advice, consultation and charity rather than harm and aggression.*
19. *No man is liable for a crime committed by his ally. Support must be given to him who is wronged. The Jews must spend of their wealth, along with the believers, so long as fighting continues.*
20. *Yathrib (Medina) shall be a sanctuary for the people of this document. A stranger under protection shall be as his protecting host, unharmed and committing no crime. A woman shall not be granted protection without the consent of her family.*
21. *If any dispute is likely to cause trouble and should arise among the people of this document, it must be referred to God and to Muhammad.*
22. *God approves and is pleased with the piety and goodness in this document.*
23. *Quraysh and their helpers shall not be given protection.*
24. *The people of this document are bound to help one another against any attack on Yathrib. If they are called to make peace and maintain it, they must do so; and if they make a similar he Muslims, it must be carried out except with one who insists on fighting against their religion.*

25. *To every small group belongs the share which is their due as members of the larger group which is party to this covenant. The Jews of the Aws and their clients, are entitled to the same rights as any other party to this document, together with the goodness and charity from all parties to it. Charity and good deeds exclude sinfulness and wrongdoing.*

26. *There is no responsibility except for one's own deeds.*

27. *God approves of such truth and goodness as is included in this document.*

28. *This document shall not constitute any protection for the unjust or the wrongdoers.*

29. *Whoever goes out to fight or stays at home is safe in the city, unless he has committed an injustice or a crime. God is the protector of whom ever honors his commitment to this document and is God-fearing and also to Muhammad, the Messenger of God.*

Other Historical Accounts

Looking into the early Islamic and later history, there are many examples of Islamic and Jewish acceptance and collaboration. Following are some of these examples.

A – The Prophet (p) Stands up in Respect for a Jew's Funeral

Historians (see Sahih Bukhari, Tradition Number 1311) report that as a funeral of a Jew passed before Prophet Muhammad (p), as a sign of respect he stood up. In doing this, he showed respect and shared in the feeling of sorrow with Jewish family and community. "Why did you stand up for a Jewish funeral?" he was asked. The Prophet replied: "Is it not a human soul?"

B – The Prophet (p) Visits his Sick Jewish Neighbor

Upon learning of the sickness of his Jewish neighbor, Prophet Muhammad (p) paid him a visit. During the visit the Prophet asked the young man to accept Islam. The young man looked at his father for permission. The father assented and the young man accepted Islam. (see Sahih Bukhari, Tradition Number 1356).

C – The Prophet's (p) Marriage to a Jewish Lady

Getting closer to others and making your enemy your friend was the practice of Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad (p) utilized the traditional Arabian way of making an alliance through marriage. Any time a person marries from a clan outside of his own, he becomes honored by every member of the clan and protected by the entire tribe of the bride. Showing his nearness and trustworthiness to the Jews, he married one of their own. Her name was Sufiah Bint Alnudair, the daughter of the leader of the Nudair tribe.

D – Harmony is a Goal for Every Muslim

In the year 627 CE, the Quraysh of Mecca and the surrounding tribes, marched with ten thousand men and women with the intention to attack the Muslims in Medina and wipe them out for good. This was to be known as the Battle of the Trench. Learning about the Quraysh's preparation to attack their city, the Muslims decided to dig a trench around the city to slow and confuse the enemy. Approaching the city, Quraysh faced the predicament of the trench, and had to camped outside Medina, in a siege, failing in many attempts to engage the Muslims in a fight.

During the 29 days siege, Quraysh attempted to get the Jewish tribe of Quraythah, residing in Medina, who has a covenant with the Muslims to protect the city, to attack the Muslims from the back. They sent Huyay bin Akhtab Al-Nudair, the leader of the Jewish tribe of Nudhair to the Quraythah tribe to entice them to break their agreement with Muhammad and join them in attacking the Muslims from the back.

Knowing Quraysh's intention, the Jewish tribe of Quraythah closed their castle's gates and did not allow Huyay to enter the castle. Calling Quraythah tribe leader, Ka'ab bin Asad from outside the walls of the castle and insisting to speak to him proved to be another failure. Determined to speak to Ka'ab over the next several days, Huyay was finally permitted to enter the castle. The tribe leader Ka'ab, however, told him, "You are a cursed man, and I have an agreement with Muhammad that I am not breaking. I have not

seen of him anything other than trustworthiness and fulfillment of the promise.” Upon this Huyay left disappointed.

It was reported, however that Huyay was not content with this, but insisted on returning to Ka’ab with lucrative proposals and protection from Quraysh against Muhammad. This time he was able to change Ka’ab’s mind, who indeed broke the covenant with the Prophet. (See Ibn Katheer, *Albidayah Wa Alnihayah*, Volum 4, page 84.)

After 29 days of siege, with no engagement, Quraysh and its allies gave up and left the area.

Although it is unfortunate that Ka’ab broke the truce with Prophet Muhammad (p), this example is proof of the extent of cooperation between the Muslims and the Jews during this early period of the history of Islam.

E – Natural Feeling of a Jew Towards the Prophecy of Muhammad (p)

For several days, on the outskirts of Medina, awaiting eagerly the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (p) and his companion from Mecca, was a small group of Muslims. Also, nearby was a Jew, Abdullah Bin Salaam, picking dates off a palm tree with his aunt on the ground assisting him. Abdullah was in a better position to spot the incoming from afar; therefore he was the first to see the Prophet and his companion coming. He became overwhelmed with excitement, calling loudly, “Muhammad has arrived, God is great!” Upon this, his aunt told him to quiet down saying, “If he was Moses son of Imran, you would not have shouted as loud.” Abdullah responded, “Oh my aunt by Allah, he is (only) the brother of Moses, son of Imran and is on his faith.” She asked, “Is he the expected Prophet we have been told about (in the Torah)?” He said, “Yes.”

This historical event is a natural reflection of what is in the inner-hearts of many of the true believers in God. Abdullah and other Jewish leaders and individuals accepted Islam along with many Arabian tribes living in the city of Medina. (See A. Alhalabi, *Alsirah Alhalabiyah*, Volume 2, page 121).

F – Protectors of the Jews

Jewish communities in Anatolia flourished and continued to prosper throughout the Ottoman conquest. When the Ottomans captured Busra in 1324 and made it their capital, they found a Jewish community oppressed under Byzantine rule. The Jews welcomed the Ottomans as saviors. Sultan Orhan gave them permission to build the Etz ha-Hayyim (Tree of Life) Synagogue which remained in service until 60 years ago.

Early in the 14th century, when the Ottomans had established their capital at Edirne, Jews from Europe, including Karaites, migrated there. (Mark Allen Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and their Role in the 15th and 16th Centuries*.) Similarly, Jews expelled from Hungary in 1376, from France by Charles VI in September 1394 and from Sicily early in the 15th century found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. In the 1420s, Jews from Salonika then under Venetian control fled to Edirne. (Josef Nehama, *Histoire des Israelites de Salonique*.) Ottoman rule was much kinder than Byzantine rule had been. In fact, from the early 15th century on, the Ottomans actively encouraged Jewish immigration. A letter sent by Rabbi Yitzhak Safati (from Edirne) to Jewish communities in Europe in the first part of the century “invited his co-religionists to leave the torments they were enduring in Christendom and to seek safety and prosperity in Turkey.” -(Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*.)

When Mehmet II “the Conqueror” took Constantinople in 1453, he encountered an oppressed Romaniot (Byzantine) Jewish community which welcomed him with enthusiasm. Sultan Mehmet II issued a proclamation to all Jews, “to ascend the site of the Imperial Throne, to dwell in the best of the land, each beneath his Dine and his fig tree, with silver and with gold, with wealth and with cattle....” (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Volume 16 page 1532.)

In 1470, Jews expelled from Bavaria by Ludvig X found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. (Avram Galante, *Histoire des Juifs d’Istanbul*, Volume 2.) At midnight, August 2nd 1492, when Columbus embarked on what would become his most famous expedition to the New World, his fleet departed from the relatively unknown seaport of Palos because the shipping lanes of Cadiz and Seville were clogged with Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain by the Edict of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain. Sultan Bayazid II’s offer of refuge gave new hope to the persecuted Sephardim.

In 1492, the Sultan ordered the governors of the provinces of the Ottoman Empire “not to refuse the Jews entry or cause them difficulties, but to receive them cordially.” (Abraham Danon, in the Review Yossef Daath No.4.) According to Bernard Lewis, “the Jews were not just permitted to settle in the Ottoman lands, but were encouraged, assisted and sometimes even compelled.” Immanuel Abobab attributes to Bayazid II the famous remark that “the Catholic monarch Ferdinand was wrongly considered as wise, since he impoverished Spain by the expulsion of the Jews, and enriched Turkey.” (Immanuel Abobab, A Consolacam as Tribulacoes de Israel, III Israel.)

Over the centuries an increasing number of European Jews, escaping persecution in their native countries, settled in the Ottoman Empire. In 1537 the Jews expelled from Apulia (Italy) after the city fell under Papal control and in 1542 those expelled from Bohemia by King Ferdinand found a safe haven in the Ottoman Empire. (H. Graetz, History of the Jews.) In March of 1556, Sultan Sulayman “the Magnificent” wrote a letter to Pope Paul IV asking for immediate release of the Acona Marranos, whom he declared to be Ottoman citizens. The Pope had no alternative but to release them, the Ottoman Empire being the “superpower” of that time.

In his book, *More in Common Than You Think, Bridge Between Islam and Christianity*, Dr. William Baker elaborates about the fact that Muslims view the Torah and the New Testament as inspired revelations of God and that Islam neither targeted the Jews nor Judaism. He said, *“It is a fact of history that when the Jews were being persecuted in Europe during the middle ages they found peace, harmony, and acceptance among the Muslim people of Spain. In fact, this was the era of Jewish history that they themselves refer to as “the golden age.” In the famous treaties by Rabbi Minken, he described this era saying:*

It was Muslim Spain, the only land the Jew knew in nearly a thousand years of the dispersion, which made the genius of physician Moses Maimonides possible.

G – Rabbi Speaking at the First International Islamic Unity Conference

Perhaps, even in the 20th century, where there has been a lot of hostility between the Muslims and Jews over Palestine, there are many Jewish people who call for fraternity and “unity with diversity”. It was Rabbi Allen Bennett of San Francisco, in the interfaith session, at the Islamic Unity Conference, held in the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles California, August 1996, who admittedly thought that he had received the wrong call to speak at an Islamic conference. Yet at the conference, Rabbi Bennett expressed his enjoyment and unique experience with the Muslims’ hospitalities and manners. After he spoke about some Muslim and Jewish similarities and the possibility of Muslim/Jewish peaceful coexistence, Rabbi Bennett further said:

“The Jews in this country, who are such a small minority, have a tremendous obligation to make the Muslims feel welcome. It is a joy for me to go home not with a renewed respect but with increased respect, not with new hope but with more hope and I have a big job to do; I have to become a marketing agent for Islam.”

It is only here in America that we have this opportunity to hear people share their thoughts and hopes and to bring the religious communities closer together.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, The Muslims and Jews co-existed in harmony during the rise of Islam and beyond. Islam is a friendly religion to all “It was Muslim Spain, the only land the Jew knew in nearly a thousand years of the diaspora, which made the genius of physician Moses Maimonides possible.” Acceptance and virtue are indivisible parts of the Muslim’s faith. “The Jews of Banu ‘Awf are one nation with the Muslims; the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs.” These principles and historical events should create the foundation for better relations and more a peaceful future for both Jewish and Muslim Communities.