

# Islam and Judaism - sister religions?

Sustainable Peace Education



**MACRO - The Center for Political Economics**

21 Pinsker St, 6342113 Tel Aviv, Israel  
Tel +972 3 5251057 / Fax + 972 3 5251058  
macro@macro.org.il  
www.macro.org.il

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## Islam and Judaism- sister religions?

Muhammad, the founder of the religion of Islam, met Jews during his travels in the Arabian Peninsula. At first, he even tried to convert them to the new religion. It is possible that as a result a considerable number of similarities can be identified between Judaism and Islam. Some see Islam and Judaism as sister religions, united around a co-founding father; Abraham, and around a similar conception of Mitzvah and Halakhah.

### (To the students) Think:

1. Do similarities between two religions indicate a mutual contribution of the two to each other, or do the believers of one religion “copy” and steal ideas from the other religion?
2. Should the similarity between these two religions improve the relationship of trust between Muslim and Jewish believers in Israel?

#### The pillars of Islam and Mitzvahs in Judaism

Islam has five major commandments known as the “Pillars of Islam” and in Arabic - “Arkan al-Islam”. Each of them can be identified with a parallel in Judaism. Try to think about what the equivalent is and what the source of the imagination is.

### The prayer

In Arabic “a-Salah”, prayer is a regular ritual that all Muslims must follow. Prayers are held at five regular times a day; Dawn, morning, noon, evening and night prayers. At least once a week Muslims should gather for public prayer in a mosque - on a Friday. The common Arabic word for mosque – Jami’e (meeting or gathering), is also the name of Friday. The Muezzin (who calls for prayer), calls for believers to come to prayer, usually from the top of the mosque spire, and now from public speaker systems.

The duty of prayer and gathering is imposed mainly on the men and in the mosque itself there is a separation between men and women. Although each mosque has its own religious leader - “Imam” and Islam treats the man as superior to the woman, women are allowed to hold an independent women’s prayer under the guidance of a woman who functions as an Imama.

### The testimony

The Muslim believer must testify to the two basic principles of the Muslim faith: the belief in the uniqueness of God, and the belief in the mission of Muhammad, the Prophet of God. The formula established for the purpose of this statement is called “testimony” (“Shahada”). The Muslim believer testifies that there is no God other than Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. In the Arabic source: “La Illah illa Allah waMuhammad Rasul Allah.” The believer repeats the testimony at prayer times, but also at specific ceremonies, such as the conversion ceremony for a non-Muslim person, before death or upon reaching adulthood, as well as states of excitement and test.

#### **To what mitzvah in Judaism do you think this duty is similar?**

Indeed, even in Judaism one of the main commandments is the prayer that takes place three times a day. And in Judaism, too, believers are expected to attend prayers in the synagogue. The prayer is led by a public messenger, often a cantor. In Judaism, too, it is customary to separate women from men in the synagogue. The demand of Jewish women to pray and lead the prayer is currently controversial.

## Is there a mitzvah or custom in Judaism similar to the testimony?

### Charity

The Muslim must give Zaka'ah- that is, obligatory charity- once a year. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of this basic commandment, which must be observed once a year. Eligibility also creates solidarity between rich and poor and elevates the person, who is immersed most of his days in material matters, to a level of spirituality.

Shari'a (Islamic law) stipulates that charity is the only fixed payment that can be charged of the Muslim. According to the Shari'a, Zaka'ah should be set aside for field crops, fruits, herds of camels or horses, and herds of sheep and cattle. Additionally, charity should be set aside from silver and gold and commodities. The Muslim must set aside 10 percent of the amount of grain and fruit in his possession, and two and a half percent of the herds, silver and gold and goods in his possession.

### The fast

In one of his revelations, Muhammad was ordered to instruct Muslims to fast in the month of Ramadan, which is the month in which the Prophet received his first revelation: "Ramadân is the month in which the Quran was revealed as a guide for humanity with clear proofs of guidance and the standard 'to distinguish between right and wrong'. So, whoever is present this month, let them fast. But whoever is ill or on a journey, then 'let them fast' an equal number of days 'after Ramadân'.... "

The commandment to fast the Ramadan is a basic commandment. The Qur'an stipulates that this fast will continue throughout the light hours of the month (which is the ninth month in the Muslim calendar), while eating will be allowed during the hours of darkness. Apart from fasting, smoking and married life are also prohibited during the day. Every Muslim must start performing the order gradually from the age of seven. Fasting is meant to express repentance, repentance for sins, self-control, closeness to God, and an attempt to feel the suffering of the poor.

It is interesting to note that in the beginning of Islam the Prophet Muhammad also fasted on the tenth day of the ninth month (corresponding to the Hebrew month of Tishrei) a fast known as Ashura. This fast became a choice fast after the Ramadan fast was set.

#### Is there a similarity between this duty and mitzvah in Judaism?

In the Bible, the commandment of tithing, dictates that all Israelites must set aside one-tenth of their agricultural crop each year for the benefit of God and the priests and the poor. Future generations of Israel were also required to distribute some of their food for the sake of the feast held on the pilgrimage holidays, and to allow the poor to enjoy the crop during the 'shemita' years.

#### Does it remind us of a mitzvah in Judaism?

Five days of fasting are scattered throughout the Jewish year: the origin of the first of them - Yom Kippur - is in the Torah. It is written there about Yom Kippur, beginning on the tenth of the month of Tishrei, that the children of Israel commanded thus: "And you tortured your souls" (Leviticus 16, no). Sages interpreted the commandment to "torture the soul" as a prohibition on eating and drinking, bathing, wearing leather shoes and having sex. Yom Kippur is a day of soul-searching and cleansing of sins. The Yom Kippur is the holiest time in the Jewish calendar - therefore, it is the only fast that must be observed on the appointed date - '10 Tishrei' - even if the fast falls on Shabbat. The Yom Kippur fast is the longest fast in Judaism - it lasts about 25 hours.

## The pilgrimage

The duty of the Hajj - the obligation to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime - is the fifth basic principle of Islam, and it applies to every Muslim who is healthy in body and mind: "97...) - Anyone who can set out ... "(Surat Beit Amram, 3 verse 97). When they reach the border of the holy area surrounding Mecca, the pilgrims must enter a state of "Ahram" - that is, a state of holiness. This situation, in which pilgrims must be present throughout the holiday period, requires several actions. The men among the pilgrims must purify themselves, perfume themselves, trim their nails, shave their mustaches, wear white clothes that are not sewn with thread and needle, and do not cover their heads. Women, on the other hand, must be purified, perfumed and wear ordinary clothes of some color and preferably white provided that their dress will not be similar to men's wear. After the 'Ahram' the pilgrim prays and declares his intention to observe the pilgrimage. It is also obligatory to say the "Talbiya" - prayers that mean the expression of submission to God.

The passages on this page are adapted from: Amir, D., Moskowitz, D. Suaed, C. (2006). To live together in the Holy Land. Tel Aviv: Center for Educational Technology

## Omar laws and the treatment of Christian and Jewish minorities

### Omar Laws

Christians and Jews received from the Muslim rulers security, protection for their property and body and permission to maintain their religious customs. In return, they accepted the status of sponsors (D'imi) and committed themselves to the following restrictions: We will not speak their language and we will not take their names or snore at our signatories in Arabic, and we will not teach our children the Quran.

### Historical evidence

For most needs, Hebrew and all the languages used by Jews in the past were replaced by Arabic, which became the language of science and philosophy, the language of government and commerce, and even the language of Jewish religious thought that began to develop under Islamic influence ....

Arabic and Hebrew are, as is well known, closely related languages, with an extensive stock of common roots... Educated Jews in the Islamic countries of the Middle Ages were proficient in both languages. A large part of the philosophical and scientific dictionary in medieval Hebrew was created in borrowed translations from Arabic - from which it was also transferred to modern Hebrew.

From Lewis, B. (1984) The Jews in the Islamic World. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar

### Does this duty remind you of a mitzvah in Judaism?

Pilgrimage to the temple is described in the Torah as such: "Three times a year you shall celebrate a festival to me. At-feast of Matzot [Passover]... at the time of first harvest ... And the feast of full gathering of fruit. Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord. "(Exodus 23, 14-17). According to Scripture, the children of Israel were commanded to make a pilgrimage to the Temple three times a year - on Passover in the month of Nisan (beginning in the spring season), on Shavuot (beginning in summer) and on Sukkot in Tishrei (beginning in the fall). The pilgrimages - from the Land of Israel and the Diaspora - took place until the destruction of the Temple. They expressed the Jewish religious cohesion and were accompanied by celebrations and prayers. Since then, the destruction of the Temple has abolished the obligation to make a pilgrimage, but even today many Jews go to Jerusalem and the Western Wall during these holidays.

*Has the closeness between the religions led to a better relationship between the believers?*

Introduction to the Kuzari book / Rabbi Yehuda Halevi

They asked me if I had anything to say to our opponents, who were of Greek wisdom, members of different religions, and members of sects who had retired (referring to the Karaites). I was reminded of the story of the friend who stayed with King Kuzor who converted about four hundred years ago. The history books describe how an angel appeared before him, and proved him: Your intention is pleasing to God, but your deeds are despicable. King Kuzor was such a great scholar in their religion that he would make sacrifices himself with a pure and whole heart. But in spite of all his deeds, the angel would appear to him at night and say to him: Your intention is good but your deeds are despicable. This caused him to study the different religions on their sects, and eventually he and his people converted to Judaism.

Silat amma andi from al-ahtagag ali makhalpina from al-plasfah and ohel aladian tam ali al-khwarag aladdin elihud mend 'arba maya' sneh ali ma shahad and ga phi katab althorich 'anna will be cherished by her roya here malacha yechtava vikul la ann nitach marchia end allah therefore amalek jir marchi and here yaghad gada pi altabad pi din alch' zer hati anna here will be revered as dema elichal and alkrabin in nafsa banya tzafia as elza. pachlama agathad pi telach al-amal ga al-malach pi al-yalil yakol la nitach marzia and amalekh ir marchi psebv la d'lech al-bahat 'n aladian val el-nahal and tahud akhra he and gamhor al-khazar.

*Arabic in Hebrew letters*

*Who could have written this and what can we learn from the language and writing?*



This lesson is part of a joint research project on sources of mutual distrust between Palestinians and Israelis, funded by the European Union.

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