UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM
האיחוד ליהדות רפורמית
SERVING REFORM CONGREGATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

We must reach out to our neighbors and listen for God's presence in their voices. Only in this way, speaking our fears while hearing the fears of others, will we build a shared commitment to a moral future.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie

Open Doors, Open Minds: Synagogues & Churches Studying Together

A Guide For Jewish – Christian Dialogue

I ask this Assembly to recommend that each of our member congregations invite a church in their community to participate in a dialogue during the coming year. This initiative will require the participation of rabbis, cantors, ministers, and priests, but is directed primarily at congregational members.

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INTRODUCTION

At the 2003 Biennial Convention of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ, formerly the Union of American Hebrew Congregations – UAHC), its president, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, called on all the synagogues of the Reform Jewish Movement to expand interfaith dialogues and cooperative work. This call arose from conversations with Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant leaders about the need for increased communication. Leaders of some of the largest Christian denominations in the United States have formally endorsed Rabbi Yoffie's call.

This guide is a seven-session adult education dialogue program that can serve as a foundation for synagogues and churches to engage in dialogue. The goal is both profound and simple: to foster mutual understanding and appreciation between Jews and Christians, and to dispel xenophobia and misunderstanding. It is aimed at helping participants understand how our faith is actively lived – to see how our beliefs, values, hopes, and doubts shape our individual and communal lives.

The sessions are organized as follows:

SESSION ONE – FROM OUR PAST TO OUR PRESENT: WHO ARE WE?

SESSION TWO – METAPHORS, IMAGES, AND STEREOTYPES

SESSION THREE – ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT: TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING

SESSION FOUR – ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

SESSION FIVE – THE MEANING OF ISRAEL FOR CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

SESSION SIX – ISRAEL: CURRENT CHALLENGES

SESSION SEVEN – TOWARD OUR FUTURE

Over the last century, and particularly in the last 40 years, Jewish–Christian dialogue has created better understanding between the Jewish and Christian communities. On the national and international levels, Jewish and Christian leaders have written statements and undertaken joint projects calling for understanding and healing. The atmosphere of the Jewish–Christian encounter generally has improved. A relationship that was once too often characterized by contempt and enmity now fosters mutual respect and concern. Strides have been made in the dialogue among national and international religious leaders. Rabbis, priests, and ministers have developed friendships in local clergy associations. Congregations have developed opportunities for lay people to learn with and from each other.

Still, there is much more to be done. The programs, while providing a strong foundation and many useful "best practices," touch too few. We must work harder to transform the cultural attitudes and build a sense of trust and understanding that will pervade our respective communities. Therefore, a conversation, as we envision it, cannot help but center on three central concerns:

A Discovery of Who We Are: In these conversations, we do not expect any person to "represent" his or her faith. There are no "Jewish representatives" or "Christian representatives," just caring Christians and Jews reflecting on how faith affects their lives. Since we meet as individuals, our own stories are important. Discoveries about what brought each individual to the table will reveal the rich complexity of each tradition. By the nature of the people involved in each conversation, it will be easy to discover that both the Jewish community and the Christian community are made up of a complex amalgam of personalities, nationalities, ethnicities, and, not surprisingly, ambiguities. There may be some around the table who come because of interfaith marriages or mixed religious backgrounds.

A Discovery of What We Think: Each person who sits at the table comes because of his or her faith, an integral part of one's identity. It will be helpful for participants to share with the group how their faith helps shape their character. Understanding what "my Christianity" or "my Judaism" means is critical to understanding the other and ourselves. Through this joint study and dialogue, the participants in the conversation will discover that there is no single Jewish or Christian way of thinking; rather, we will see how faith helps guide an understanding of our world and our obligations to ourselves, to our neighbors, and to our God.

A Discovery of How We Act: It is one thing to discuss how we understand an idea or text; it is far different to discover how those understandings influence people's actions. Take, for example, one biblical text on which two sessions of this dialogue program will focus. While many could recite the "Do's and Don'ts" of the Ten Commandments from memory, it is more complex and insightful to reflect on how the Commandments truly affect our actions. What does it mean to honor one's parents or remember the Sabbath? Why do these words seem so simple to utter, yet so difficult to understand and to follow?

* * *

This guide is set up so you can use all, one, or any combination of the sessions. You need not commit to doing all of them. You might well consider combining some of these sessions with some from other superb programs we describe in the text of the guide or the bibliography.

Each session should last about 90 minutes. Depending on the number of participants, some might last longer. Skipping discussion questions within a session will also help move the session along. Optimally, sessions would alternate between the synagogue and the church. Time could be set aside for tours or a chance to explore the sacred spaces. The program also can be held in participants' homes.

While the presence of clergy is strongly encouraged, it is not necessary for the success of this dialogue, since the sessions are designed to be led by lay facilitators. (Clergy, however, can be particularly helpful in understanding and wrestling with some of the more complex theological issues discussed in the sessions.) For each session, a different participant might be chosen to act as a facilitator, or you might rotate between two good facilitators from the two respective communities. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to contribute and for keeping discussion moving. The facilitator should feel free to allow more or less time for a section, according to group interest. Similarly, if there is insufficient time to discuss all of the topics in a session or all the discussion questions, the facilitator should feel free to skip topics or questions in order to give sufficient time to those that can be addressed effectively. The facilitator also should pay special attention to text in italics: while these passages are generally instructional and not meant to be read aloud, they will help the facilitator guide discussion and help the participants know what is expected of them.

* * *

Open Doors, Open Minds makes use of a wide array of resources. In preparing it, we have drawn upon the best work done by many who have made increasing interreligious understanding their life's work.

In particular, we ***highly recommend*** a new series of short films to trigger discussion. The series, *Walking God's Paths*, produced by the National Council of Synagogues (a partnership of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and the Rabbinical Assembly) in conjunction with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The series includes six 12 - 15 minute-long films, facilitators' discussion guides, and extensive background material. The six film segments are produced on a single VHS or DVD and can be ordered from the UAHC Press online at http://www.uahcpress.org. Extensive information about the series also is available on-line at http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/. These films are used in three of the sessions of this *Open Doors, Open Minds* guide. The suggested questions following the film presentations are adapted, with permission, from the film's facilitators' guide. We encourage the facilitators of each session to make use of the fuller discussion in the *Walking God's Paths* background materials.

We also recommend *I am Joseph, Your Brother*, a documentary film (59 mins.), broadcast on ABC-TV, which follows the dramatic changes in the relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people over the past half century, culminating in the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to Israel in the year 2000. That film, which has an excellent in-depth discussion guide, was produced by the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel and can be ordered from The Institute for Jewish Christian Studies in Baltimore (http://www.icjs.org/clergy/kronish3.html).

While both video presentations (*Walking God's Paths* and *I am Joseph, Your Brother*) focus on the growing relationship between Jews and Roman Catholics, the lessons in these films are instructive for Jewish–Protestant dialogue as well. One fundamental difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is the authority with which theological statements are made. In the Roman Catholic Church, theological statements come from one central authority, the official teachings of the Church. In many Protestant denominations, by contrast, there is a wider diversity of teachings due to the more decentralized authority structure. When using these videos in a Jewish - Protestant dialogue, it would be appropriate to ask a Christian representative to address whether the points made from the Catholic perspective accurately reflect the teachings of his or her Church.

Additional resources, including some that will be particularly useful in discussions with specific Protestant denominations, are included in a bibliography at the end of this packet. At the two sessions devoted to text, we encourage bringing a number of different translations, Jewish and Christian, and reading aloud different wordings of biblical passages.

Please note: this guide tries to use gender-neutral language generally. More specifically, it uses gender-neutral terms for God (the use of "Eternal" or the Hebrew term "Adonai" for "Lord," avoidance of "He," etc.,) including in its translations of Scripture and primary texts. While this may be the preferred choice for many, for many others, including those whose denominations or faith traditions have not embraced such changes, the language may feel strange and new. We ask participants to be respectful of the preferences of their partners; during discussions and readings, participants should feel free to use whichever translations or terms they are most comfortable with.

Within each Session, texts for discussion appear indented in a reduced sans serif font. Each passage is followed by a brief parenthetical citation; complete bibliographical information is available at the end of the packet. Where longer texts are used, the facilitator has several options. The texts might be assigned to be read as "homework" at the prior session, they might be read silently by each participant during the session, or they might be read aloud during the session, with each participant reading one paragraph at a time.

* * *

Some Principles for Interreligious Dialogue

(from the Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, adapted from Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20/1:1-4.)

1. Enter into dialogue so that **you** can learn and grow; not to change the other.
2. Be conscious of the need to allow people the space to enter the discussion. Some people are more sheepish about offering their thoughts, but will be encouraged to do so if more outspoken persons avoid dominating the exchange.
3. Be honest and sincere, even if that means revealing discomforts with your own tradition or that of the other. Assume that everyone else is being equally honest and sincere.
4. Everyone must be permitted to define their own religious experience and identity, and this must be respected by others.
5. Proselytizing or seeking to "convert" the conversation partner is not permitted in an interreligious dialogue setting. Participants should feel free to express their own faith traditions and beliefs, but not try to persuade others to assent to them.
6. Don't feel that you are the spokesperson for your entire faith tradition or that you ought somehow to know everything there is to know about it. Admit any confusion or uncertainty you might have if a puzzling question arises.
7. Don't assume in advance where points of agreement or disagreement will exist.
8. Everyone should be willing to be self-critical.
9. All should strive to experience the other's faith "from within" and be prepared to view themselves differently as a result of an "outside" perspective.
10. Trust is a must.

* * *

It is our hope that through this encounter and conversation, Jews and Christians might better learn to see each other as bearers of traditions worthy of study and understanding, to appreciate similarities and respect differences. This new era of engagement and hope can help in the ongoing process of eclipsing centuries of enmity, but only if the real work is now done in the pews and in our homes.

Session One:
OUR HISTORY, OUR PRESENT

Overview: The first steps are often the most important and most difficult in any journey. This program is a journey of self-discovery, not just of the ways differing faith communities look at a shared text. There is no expected outcome to this program other than mutual understanding and respect. Since, however, issues of faith and belief are highly personal, we must foster a safe environment so that all participants feel comfortable expressing their ideas and doubts.

I. Introductions

A. Names and Family History:
Naming can be religiously meaningful in both Judaism and Christianity. Our names offer insights into our personal family history and into our cultural and religious heritage.

Discuss the history of the participants' families by inviting each participant to share not only his or her name, but also any family stories related to that name, addressing such questions as:
Is your name a biblical name? Was your first name chosen in honor of a family member or other individual, or is the meaning of your name significant? If so, what significance does the biblical allusion have for you? Does your name provide a hint at where your family comes from or what their occupation was, going several generations back?

If possible, bring a large world map to the session. As each participant describes his or her family's journey to North America, use pushpins and thin string of assorted colors to illustrate where each family's journey began.

B. Religious Upbringing and Practice:
Ask each participant to describe his or her own religious upbringing and his/her current affiliation and practice.
How would you describe your religious upbringing and practice? How is your religious observance linked to or different from that of earlier generations in your family?

II. The Role of Study

Our encounters with our sacred texts often shape who we are. During this dialogue, we will explore a number of insightful and formative texts. In particular, we will return several times to one specific shared sacred text, which is one of the most influential and historically important religious texts in Western Civilization: The Ten Commandments.

Discuss the role that religious study has in each person's life and their previous understandings of Jewish and Christian study. Learning and study are central to both Jewish life and Christian life. What is the role of study in your life? What do you think of when you think about Jews studying? When you think about Christians studying? Are there stereotypes?

Just as our personal histories and studies shape who we are, so does our communal history. For the remainder of this opening session, we will turn to one particular moment in time that altered forever the history and theology of our traditions: the first century of the Common Era. The video to be shown focuses on the death of Jesus and the destruction of the Jewish Temple.

III. Video: Shared Origins, Diverse Roads

A. *Show video*[1]

B. Discussion Questions

1. Sometimes both Jews and Christians are surprised to learn that Judaism in the late Second Temple period was very diverse and included a variety of groups such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, the Qumran community, the Essenes, the Zealots, Diaspora Jews and others. Perhaps this is because in the 21st century people simply assume that rabbinic Judaism (which did not gain ascendancy until centuries later) was already established and dominant. What about your own faith community today? How are the various types of Jews and Christians distinguished? What are some things on which all Jews or all Christians agree?

2. In what ways was Jesus like and unlike his Jewish contemporaries? What about his ministry concerned the Roman governor and the Temple leadership?

3. The video describes some of the reasons why accounts of the execution of Jesus have set Jews and Christians against one another throughout the centuries. What are some of the relevant factors? Is it important for people today to know about these issues?

4. All Jews, including Jewish followers of Jesus, had to grapple with the destruction of the Temple by the Roman Empire. In the video, Rabbi Lehmann articulates the central issue how to maintain access to God. Professor Kimelman suggests that Christianity became, in a sense, a Christ-centered Judaism. How do you react to these ideas? How does Judaism today "maintain access to God?" How does Christianity today do so? What traces of the Temple system are evident in each community?

5. What are the implications of these questions for Christian-Jewish relations today?

[1] Or read script aloud. We strongly encourage synagogues and churches using this guide to purchase the videos of *Walking God's Paths*, available through the UAHC press (www.uahcpress.com). If, however, you are unable to use or obtain the videos, the scripts for each film segment are available online at http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/WALKING_GODS_PATHS/WGP_Users_Guide_Contents.htm. The scripts then could be used in a dramatic reading, with participants reading the parts of the scholars interviewed in the documentary.

Session Two:
METAPHORS, IMAGES, AND STEREOTYPES

Overview: Words sometimes fail to describe accurately our understanding of the way of the world. So we often resort to poetic or artistic forms – literary metaphor and physical imagery – to illustrate what escapes common description. In an attempt to make the complex simple, humans also have reduced descriptions to generalizations and caricatures. What are the metaphors, images, and stereotypes that we use when depicting each other, and how accurate are they? This session will help focus our attention on the words and images we employ to describe our relationship and each other.

I. Video: Metaphors for a Unique Relationship

A. *Show video*

B. Discussion Questions:

1. Rabbi Lehmann observes that a distinction must be made between images that described the Jewish-Christian relationship in past centuries from those that emerged in the last third of the 20th century. For centuries, Christians claimed that the Church had superseded Jews as God's chosen people, and this theology of "supersessionism" was reflected in Christian art and culture. How would you imagine Jews of earlier times pictured supersessionist Christianity, if only in their imaginations? How did Jews in medieval European cities feel as the great Gothic cathedrals were built? How might Jews have depicted the relationship of Synagoga and Ecclesia?

2. Your discussion group is a committee that has been appointed by the president of a secular university. The university is in the process of building on campus a small Christian (or Catholic) chapel and a small Jewish synagogue for religious services for its students. The buildings will be near one another and will be entered by means of a common courtyard or atrium in which it is hoped some common celebrations might be held (e.g., at Thanksgiving). Your committee has the task of developing the concept for a sculpture that will be placed in the center of this common space. It should express a positive relationship between Judaism and Christianity that will inspire both Christian and Jewish students to respect each other's traditions and work together in the world. Role-play that your committee is to give a report of whatever conclusions it has been able to reach thus far to the president after the meeting.

3. Many Jews and Christians have an image of centuries of unremitting hatred and hostility of Christians against Jews. Increasingly, modern scholarship points to a more complex and nuanced relationship. How does the following text compare with your impression of the history of Christian-Jewish relations?

> A number of rigorous studies of Christian and Jewish polemical texts have been published during the past generation. But since this literature is by nature composed of attacks on a rival community and its faith, it tends to convey the impression that the discourse between the two communities was entirely limited to such attacks and to imply that the leaders of Christianity and of Judaism conceived of each other solely as the enemy to be refuted or vanquished. Similarly, eloquent and thorough treatments of the history of anti-Jewish teachings have been produced by both Christian and Jewish scholars. But by selectively focusing on negative images, these studies often project a picture that is overly dismal and bleak. . . .
>
> There can be little doubt that Christians and Jews often viewed each other as less than fully human and sometimes even worse, although the complete history of the "demonic" conception of the Gentile that pervades classical texts of the Jewish mystical tradition has yet to be elucidated. What deserves attention, however, is that more positive perceptions existed as well. . . .
>
> All of this should not be taken to suggest that from 1096 on, Jewish life in medieval Europe was a series of uninterrupted persecutions. In most places and at most times, ordinary Jews seem to get along with ordinary Christians fairly well. Jewish cultural activity – biblical studies, law, philosophy, science and mysticism – continued to flourish, often including fructifying mutual exchange with Christian neighbors. In many countries, Jewish contributions provided the impetus for economic vitality. At times Christian preachers even pointed to the Jews as providing a model worthy of emulation, in their faithful observance of the Sabbath and the holy days of the festival calendar, their abhorrence of blasphemous language, their commitment to education, and their willingness to suffer and even die for their beliefs. Jewish writers similarly identified aspects of Christian society that their co-religionists should learn from, including an exemplary intellectual life, decorous behavior in church, fervent belief and ascetic piety, and honesty in business affairs.
>
> (Marc Saperstein, *Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn*, HUC Press; *Moments of Crisis in Christian-Jewish Relations*, Trinity Press.)

C. An Analysis of Some of the Metaphors Mentioned in the Video

Think of these as possible symbols of the relationship between Christians and Jews (some of which are found in the video, some of which have been suggested by Christians in other settings):

- mother and daughter
- siblings
- branches from a common root
- first and second blessing
- runners in a relay race (first handing the baton to the second)
- booster stages in a rocket (first gets the rocket off the ground then falls off)
- study partners
- partners-in-waiting for the Redemption
- travelers on a path through the woods who split up at a fork

The participants should reflect on these different relationships. Some explanations are provided below. Some of these metaphors are familial. The metaphors of mother and daughter, elder and

younger brother tend to minimize the changes of the rabbinic period and reflect much more of an identity between biblical Judaism and rabbinic Judaism; in this case, "Judaism" would be much older than Christianity and properly could be considered a parent or older sibling. The Pauline botanical metaphor of the good olive tree onto which the wild Gentile branches have been grafted would share this historical perspective.

The metaphors of siblings or cousins, which lack the age qualifier, acknowledge the revolution brought by the rabbis, and this emphasizes the rabbinic adaptations of the biblical tradition. Thus, Christianity and rabbinic Judaism are both post-Second Temple children of biblical Israel. "Sibling" stresses their close relatedness, while "cousins" places more stress on their distinctiveness. The botanical metaphor of branches from a common root shares a historical perspective that sees the rabbis as creative adapters of the biblical traditions in a world without a Temple.

The image of study partners focuses more on the present. It sees both communities as having legitimate religious traditions that are expressed in their respective sacred texts, some of which are shared. A very rabbinic image, this metaphor also asserts that both traditions will benefit by studying their sacred texts together.

The metaphor of the First and Second Blessing is also oriented toward the present. The word "blessing" more explicitly acknowledges a divine origin of the two communities.

Finally, the metaphor of Partners-in-waiting looks toward the future full establishment of the Rule of God. That hope for the future should shape the work of Jews and Christians in the world today.

Ask all participants:
Is there a consensus among the whole group as to which metaphor is most appropriate?

II. The Power of Personal History

A. Knowing "Others"

Martin Marty is a professor of the History of Modern Christianity in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, and one of the world's foremost scholars of contemporary religion. He participated in writing a series of excellent recommended discussion guides in Christian-Jewish relations, Interfaith Circles. *In a section called "Knowing 'Others'" he reflects on his own personal history.*

Knowing "Others"

> Throughout my childhood, I knew no Jews. I was born in sparsely populated small-town Nebraska. Yet, awakenings did come even in that uncrowded physical and spiritual landscape. I remember an evening in the 1930s when a man came through to show "lantern slides." He lived in what today we would call a mobile home, but what was then a trailer. The man would go from church to church and in two evenings would race through the Old and the New Testaments, giving the plan of salvation.

When he came to the scene of Jesus' trial, he made much of the way Jews shouted, "His blood be on us and our children." The man told us this was a curse upon the Jews that had led them to have to wander, to be punished. We had not heard that interpretation before. We were not to hear it reinforced soon again, for that evening our old and conservative pastor got up out of his seat and stopped the show. He had the lights turned on, and he told us that the Gospel had such an incident in it, but that it had nothing to do with Jews today. He knew some Jews in St. Louis who were "converted" and he knew some who were not, and neither of them bore a special curse for being Jews. He said the Bible did not say that "his blood" <u>was</u> on the people who shouted. Christians had made that all up later. God did not work that way.

Everyone in the small church was silent. We didn't know what would happen next. But the man who was showing the slides listened with respect! He had never thought of it that way before. He took the rebuke. I have no doubt he changed his narrative and his thinking. That old pastor, in a few sentences, set me on a course that never allowed for the "old stereotypes" to have their way.

* * *

Stereotypes are handy, but dangerous. They are images we inherit from those around us or that we create in our minds. With them we do not have to think about others as persons. We make "things" out of people, and then arrange our emotions to react to our creations. It is easy to love those for whom we create positive images, or to hate those for whom we inherit or invent negative images. If we are to see each other as unique persons, then, we are forced to rethink what the stereotypes are and examine them. Some of the old stereotypes we Christians have had of Jews are being corrected. In any case, most of us have plenty of fresh ones. For example, we Christians stereotype people called "scribes and Pharisees," because the Gospels show Jesus doing battle with them. But the scribes and Pharisees do not live down the block, and the synagogues are not run by them. For another example, we know that for centuries Jews were "Christ-killers" in the eyes of cruel Christians. That makes little sense to even slightly informed people today.

Negative stereotypes? Many of these have nothing to do with religion. You've heard some of them. Jews are alleged to be "pushy" and "moneygrubbers." They are said to "control the media, run the banks, be fanatic about Israel, mess up foreign policy." These negative stereotypes are diminishing. We have learned that in America Jews have never "run the banks." They are not all pushy and not alone pushy. Psychologists have to tell us why many people still use these stereotypes, against evidence.

My hunch is that American Christians tend to find two stereotypes most convenient. One is that religious Jews are too "legalistic." That is, some Christians think observant Jews live by "law" and not "love," that they busy themselves with trivial rules about what to eat and how to observe the Sabbath, that if they try to be religious, they have no way to experience God except through petty commandments and a life of scrupulous obedience, that they miss the big picture of God's love and goodness and grace. We should discuss how this stereotype got started, why it lives on, what it means, what to do about it. Jews in this conversation can help us here.

The other stereotype is of the opposite sort. If the religious Jew is too "religious" in the legalistic sense, some Christians consider the rest of the Jews too "secular," too godless. We assume that too few go to synagogue, not understanding that their observance is mostly in the home. We say that too many neglect or war against the God of their fathers and mothers. We see them as irreligious because they protest against Christian symbols in schools, on the media, in public life. We feel they disrupt our quiet communities by suing when we have something "harmless" like a crèche on the Court House lawn. We ask, "Why can't they be 'religious' like us"? We need to be reminded that when Christians were a minority they did not appreciate being made to observe the majority culture's sacrifices to the emperor.

Today Church bodies are changing their liturgies, their statements and their hymnals to incorporate a new understanding of Scripture, the continuing relationship of Jews to God, and a positive relationship between Jews and Christians.

(Marty, "Knowing Others." Getting Acquainted. Interfaith Circles. Interfaith Resources.)

B. Discussion Questions

1. Describe how you became aware of Christians using negative stereotypes regarding Jews.
2. What stereotypes do Jews hold about Christians?
3. **Explain the dangers of using stereotypes. How do they stand, or have they stood, between you and good friendships?**
4. *Complete individually the following sentence, and then compare your answers with the others:*
   To Christian participants: One thing I admire about Jews is . . .
   To Jewish participants: One thing I admire about Christians is . . .

III. Conclusion

Reflect on the conversation your group has experienced during this session.
Which of the ideas that were voiced at this session are common knowledge among members of your own community? Which would be highly debatable? What do these considerations suggest about future tasks for those concerned about deepening positive Jewish and Christian relations?

Attitudinal surveys show that the percentage of Americans holding anti-Semitic attitudes has consistently diminished since World War II. The ADL estimates that 12% continue to hold such attitudes. While this means that there are still some 30 million Americans holding such views, this percentage is a vast improvement from the situation 50 years ago. Back in the 1980s, some surveys asked Jews how many Americans hold such attitudes; their estimate was nearly twice the actual numbers. Assuring this pattern continues, what accounts for that discrepancy? What can be done about it?

Session Three:
ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT:
TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING

Overview: The goal of this session is to learn about Jewish and Christian study traditions, and the role of text in the religious life of the respective communities, and to develop a framework for talking about the Ten Commandments. Invite participants to read the texts aloud. Please note that in the texts below, the term "Torah" refers to the first five books of the Bible, while for Jews, "Bible," "Scripture," and "Tanakh" are synonymous and are approximately equal to what Christians call the "Old Testament."

I. Approaching Biblical Text

The following texts provide perspectives on biblical interpretation.

> The Bible provides a narrative framework that gives shape and meaning to the decisive moments in the life of the individual and the community. From birth to death, from winter to spring, in sickness and in health, Jews and Christians have traditionally taken their bearings from the Bible.
>
> (Pessah, Meyers and Leighton, "How Do Jews and Christians Read the Bible?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano and Leighton. Westview Press)

> There are distinctive ways in which Christians and Jews read their sacred stories. And yet, despite our irreducible peculiarities, both Christians and Jews face a similar problem. Sometimes these stories are like windows that allow us to see distant lands. Other times they are like mirrors that reflect back our religious assumptions. The problem shared by Christians and Jews is that we sometimes have difficulty knowing if the text is functioning as a window or a mirror. We don't always know if the text is simply reflecting our own theological convictions and the larger tradition to which we belong or if the story is pulling us outside of ourselves, demanding us to look anew at the religious perspectives which we have inherited.
>
> (Leighton, *The Old and New Challenges of Reading Noah in the Christian Tradition.* The Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies.)

A. Jewish Perspectives on the Bible

1. The Role of the Bible in Jewish Religious Life

> The Torah stands at the center of Jewish life, and the encounter with Scripture is integral to Jewish worship. . . . Equally important for Jews, though, is the study of the *Tanakh* and its commentaries. Indeed, in Judaism, study itself is an essential form of worship that shapes the inner character of both the individual and the community. By learning to enter into debate with commentators ancient and contemporary, Jews fulfill an essential sacred obligation. This disciplined encounter with Torah provides the platform on which ritual practice, ethical deliberation and moral action are built. Thus we read in Mishna Peah 1:1:
>
> > "These are things the benefit of which a person enjoys in this world, while the reward is reserved for him in the world to come: honoring father and mother, righteous deeds, and bringing peace between a man and his fellow. But the study of Torah is equal to them all [because it leads to them all]."
>
> . . . Studying the biblical text along with its commentaries is an invitation to join in the discussion (or the argument, since one commentator will often disagree vociferously with another) and, in the process, to become an interpreter oneself!

(Pessah, Meyers and Leighton, "How Do Jews and Christians Read the Bible?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano and Leighton. Westview Press.)

2. Jewish Biblical Interpretation

When Jews interpret the Bible, they study not only the written biblical text, but also a body of classic commentaries on the Bible. Although these commentaries were not part of the written Torah, they are seen as important teachings that complement the Torah and guide interpretation. The classical commentaries from the Talmudic Era through the early Middle Ages are called *Midrash*, compilations of exegetical material, often filling in gaps in the biblical text or expanding and explaining difficult biblical passages.

The following description of *Midrash* by Rabbi Jonathan Magonet illustrates a typical rabbinic interpretive approach:

> They called this work of interpretation *Midrash* from a Hebrew word meaning to "search," hence "to seek out" the word of God. . . . They divided *Midrash* into two types. The first is called *Halachah*, "law" – though the real meaning is much wider as it comes from a word meaning "walk," the way a person should walk and conduct himself/herself before God in the world. In *Halachic midrash* they expounded and developed the commandments contained in the Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses), interpreting them to fit every aspect of the life of the individual and community – for they saw as their task the building of a model society, an example of the kingdom of God on earth in which every individual had his/her particular role to play. But since "law" only covers one dimension of life, there was a second type of *midrash* – *Aggadah*, "narrating," which incorporated moral and ethical teachings, legends and stories of the Bible characters, folklore and custom, cautionary tales and jokes, all the multiple dimensions of mystery and wonder, drama, adventure, tragedy and humor, awe and love that make up the richness of a religious life . . .
>
> Any curious statement, unusual spelling of a word, gap in the narrative, became the excuse to fill in the story, point out a moral or indulge in some whimsical interpretation. . . . What was the real crime of the builders of the Tower of Babel? One suggestion that the Rabbis brought nearly two millennia ago is as apt a comment as any on the values of today's technological society. When a worker fell off the Tower during its construction, nobody noticed or worried, but when a brick fell off all went into mourning! . . . Every generation brought the best of its contemporary knowledge and wisdom to the task of interpreting the Bible for their time. . . .
>
> When the Rabbis said "There are seventy faces of *Torah*, they had in mind this infinite variety of interpretation and teaching stored up within it; every verse, word even letter being a potential source for enlightenment. Every letter? Why not? What is the first letter of the *Torah*? "Bet" ('b') at the beginning of the word "*bereshit,*" "in the beginning." And the last letter of the *Torah*? "Lamed" ("l") at the end of the word "*Yisrael"* at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. Put these two letters together and they spell "*bal*" meaning "nothing." Turn them around and they spell "*lev*" which means "heart." So if you serve God in the consciousness that you are "nothing" yet try to serve Him with all your "heart" – then it is accounted to you as if you had kept all the *Torah* between that first and final letter.
>
> (Magonet, "How a Rabbi Reads the Bible." *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Reader.* Ed. Fry. University of Exeter Press.)

B. Christian Perspectives on the Bible

1. The role of the Bible in Christian religious life

The most formative encounters with the Bible for Christians occur in the context of worship. Although many Christians analyze the Bible as literature or examine it in terms of history and archeology, the deepest meaning of the Bible comes into view through the rhythms of personal and communal prayer. The Bible provides the language and the grammar that enables Christians to speak with God. It offers indispensable instruction, modeling when and how to turn to others and to God, when and how to give praise and thanks, when and how to cry, to grieve, and to lament. . . . In the telling and teaching of the Bible, Christians discover how to pattern their lives in accord with their Scriptures. The Christian way of living is discerned in the light of Jesus who is seen as the embodiment of the core teachings of the Old Testament. In other words, Christians discern in their Bible a "lifestyle," a moral and spiritual guidebook.

(Pessah, Meyers and Leighton, "How Do Jews and Christians Read the Bible?" Irreconcilable Differences? *Ed. Sandmel, Catalano and Leighton. Westview Press.)*

2. Traditional Christian Bible Interpretation

To quote one of the preeminent church fathers, Augustine: "In the Old Testament the New lies hid; in the New Testament the meaning of the Old becomes clear."

(Leighton, *The Old and New Challenges of Reading Noah in the Christian Tradition.* The Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies.)

. . . [W]e [Christians] have our own complex traditions for interpreting Scripture, ranging from literalism to allegory, to devotional meditation, to mysticism, to moral instruction, to historical-critical analysis. Like those of our Jewish brothers and sisters, our traditions of interpretation grow and develop as we find God leading us in paths of obedience, faithfulness, and understanding.

*("*Questions Frequently Asked in Christian-Jewish Dialogue." *The Report of the Bishop's Advisory Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations*. Diocese of Maryland.*)*

The practice among Christians that has historically dominated the church is to read the "Old" Testament as a collection of promises. The glorious hopes of the Hebrew Scriptures find fulfillment in the "New" Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. The church fathers consistently mined the Hebrew Scriptures in search of texts that prophesied the coming of Christ, and they found "evidence" everywhere they looked. The ingenuity of the early church is reflected in its interpretations of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-6; 52:13-53:12). Less obvious passages were utilized to substantiate key doctrinal affirmations. Thus, the proclamation in Genesis 1:26 where God declares "Let **us** make humankind in **our** image" is enlisted to demonstrate the Trinity. The tendency to read the "Old" Testament as a prologue to the "New" remains a fixture in the liturgical life of the church. . . . In its struggle to establish its own legitimacy, the early church developed a polemical posture toward the Jewish people. The church caricatured the Jews as blind to the truth of their own Scriptures. Some Christians maintained that the Jews did recognize the spiritual treasure buried within their Scriptures but refused to accept it because they were in league with the devil. The process of laying claim to the Bible either dispossessed Jews of their Scriptures by writing them out of their own story or it demonized them as adversaries of biblical truth.

(Pessah, Meyers, and Leighton, "How Do Jews and Christians Read the Bible?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano, and Leighton. Westview Press.)

C. Video: *Common Texts, Different Scriptures*

1. Show video

2. Discussion Questions

a. After viewing the video, what questions do you have about the other tradition's understanding of the Bible?
b. Father Smiga notes that the meaning of texts changes if the world of their readers changes. Give examples from your own tradition of how Christians read the "Old Testament" through the lens of the "New Testament" or how Jews read the *Tanakh* through the perspectives of the rabbis.
c. Rabbinic commentaries always have valued a variety of interpretations of biblical texts. The video also mentions a 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission study that called rabbinic and Christian readings of the scriptures from ancient Israel "analogous" and "parallel" to each other. What are the implications of this acceptance of multiple interpretations for meaningful dialogue between Christians and Jews?
d. The video concludes that the Bible both unites and divides Christians and Jews. How do you think this is so? In what ways?
e. How do you feel about efforts today, discussed in the introduction, to change the translations of the Bible to make them gender-neutral (an approach generally, but not always, followed in the texts presented for this guide)?

II. Studying Biblical Text: A Focus on the Ten Commandments

Why discuss the Ten Commandments in this dialogue program? First, and most important, the Commandments are a familiar and foundational text for both communities. Second, the current public debate over the public display of the Ten Commandments – in an Alabama courthouse and in other government buildings provides a powerful "teachable moment" for our nation. Today public attention is focused on the political use and misuse of the Commandments, but, for the most part, not on their meaning. There is a "Hang Ten" movement that seeks to post the Commandments in public schools, and legislation is pending in Congress to "protect" the Ten Commandments. Not nearly so much attention is being paid to the role the Commandments play in our daily lives. The Commandments, after all, are not self-executing. As Rabbi David Saperstein has said, "If the words of the Ten Commandments are inscribed on the hearts and minds of our children by our families and houses of worship, they can make a real difference in those children's lives. If the Ten Commandments, however, become nothing more than visual Musak on the walls of our schools, they will make little difference for our children or for our nation."

Whatever one's views on the "Hang Ten" controversy, almost all would agree that the Ten Commandments are an essential part of the moral and ethical grounding of Western society. Christians and Jews can find much to agree upon in casual conversation. Yet these teachings are not as simple as they might first appear, nor are they universally understood in the same way in Jewish and Christian circles. In fact, Jews and Christians do not even enumerate the Commandments in the same way.

A. Discussion: The Ten Commandments and You

When was the first time you became aware of the Ten Commandments and in what context? What did the word "commandment" mean to you when you first heard it? When the word is mentioned today, does it have a different connotation?

B. Discussion: Issues of Translation

As you begin this conversation, it is a good time to turn to various translations of the Bible that you have brought to the dialogue. Read some of these translations of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 4.

In English, the words spoken by God at Sinai and inscribed on Moses' tablets are almost universally known as the "Ten Commandments," a phrase that is an approximate translation of *Aseret HaDevarim*, the Hebrew name used in Exodus and Deuteronomy for these words, and the similar term used in rabbinic sources including the *tannaitic Midrashim* and the Jerusalem Talmud, *Aseret HaDibrot*. The word *aseret* can be easily understood as meaning "ten," and the prefix "ha" means "the," but translating *devarim* or *dibrot* is more complicated. *Devarim* comes from the three-letter Hebrew root (D-B-R), which has the dual connotation of both "a thing" and "speaking." *Devarim* could thus be translated as "words," "things," "statements," "sayings," or "utterances" – but "commandment" is not a literal translation. This is also true for early translations of the Hebrew Bible used by Christians, including the Greek *Septuagint* and the Latin *Vulgate*, which use phrases that are close translations of the Hebrew and similarly do not directly translate as "commandment." The Hebrew word for "commandments," *mitzvot,* is used only in Exodus 20:6, when God promises to show "kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments (*mitzvot)*."

Which translation of the phrase *Aseret HaDevarim* best reflects your own understanding of the Ten Commandments? Which translation best reflects your understanding of the role of the Ten Commandments in our nation? Why might early English translators have described the *devarim* as "commandments"?

Does the way one translates the phrase reflect how we heed this biblical text? Is there a difference if one called this section, "The Ten Utterances," as opposed to "The Ten Commandments"?

C. Discussion: What Do the Ten Commandments Represent?

Traditionally, the Ten Commandments are viewed as regulations and commands. Indeed, in the Deuteronomy account of the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses refers to the Ten Commandments as "laws and rules" (Deut. 5:1).

Rabbi Harold Kushner has taught that when one reads a newspaper, one skims it; when one reads a mystery novel, one rushes through it to find out "whodunit"; when one reads the Torah, one reads it like a love letter. Protestant minister Ron Mehl uses the same metaphor: he teaches that the Ten Commandments are "ten-der" commandments and should be seen not as a harsh rebuke or threat, but as an affectionate love letter from a wise father.

It is possible to see the Commandments in the same light as one might look upon the directions a parent offers a child. The child might see the "rules and regulations" of life in a parent's house as punitive; but, any parent knows, that the rules are set to protect and shelter a child. A loving parent doesn't say to a child, "Do anything you want." Rather, the parent tries to provide rules that will help a child live a life of meaning and purpose in relative safety. God cares for God's creation in the way that a parent cares for a child. In this way, the Ten Commandments may be read as a love letter between a parent and a child.

Are the "Ten Commandments" a love letter or a legal contract? Does God command or cajole?

D. The Ten Commandments in Jesus' Preaching

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus addresses how the Ten Commandments should be lived by Christians.

> [17] Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them. . . . [20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. [21] "You have heard it said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council…. [27] You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." [28] But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29] If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. *30:* And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. . . . [33] Again, you have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn." [34] But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from evil….
>
> (Matthew 5:17 – 37)

How does Jesus' view of the commandments and law contrast with your understanding of the original text?

E. Text Study: Counting the Commandments

Although Christian and Jewish groups agree that God's words at Sinai included ten commandments, the biblical text does not clarify which verses comprise each commandment. As a result, different scholars have counted the Ten Commandments in different ways. Three major methods of counting the commandments were developed by traditional Jewish scholars, by the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches, and by the Greek Orthodox and Protestant Churches. See the chart on the following page for the differences in each system of counting.

Do the different ways of numbering the Commandments change their meaning? If so, in what ways? How does your translation of "*dibrot*" affect your decisions about numbering? If it were up to you, how would you choose to number the commandments? Why? You should feel free either to choose one of the three systems presented here, or to invent your own numbering system.

Finally, in terms of the controversy over the posting of the Ten Commandments in our public school classrooms, how do you think children feel when the version posted is not the one taught by their faith tradition?

Biblical Verse of Exodus 20	Traditional Jewish	Roman Catholic / Lutheran	Protestant / Greek Orthodox
[2] I am the Eternal your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage	1	Prologue	Prologue
[3] You shall have no other gods besides me	2	1	1
[4] You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Eternal your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, [6] but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments	2 (con't)	1 (con't)	2
[7] You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Eternal your God; for the Eternal will not clear one who swears falsely by God's name.	3	2	3
[8] Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Eternal your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. [11] For in six days the Eternal made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and God rested on the seventh day; therefore God blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.	4	3	4
[12] Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land which the Eternal your God is giving you.	5	4	5
[13] You shall not murder.	6	5	6
You shall not commit adultery.	7	6	7
You shall not steal.	8	7	8
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	9	8	9
[14] You shall not covet your neighbor's house:	10	9	10
[15] You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male and female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.	10 (con't)	10	10 (con't)

Session Four:
ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT:
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(Note: If you wish to focus a dialogue program just on The Ten Commandments, you should turn to the second half of Session Three where the discussion of The Ten Commandments begins.)

Overview: What are the Ten Commandments?

- *A foundational scriptural text: the Ten Commandments is one of the most central parts of the Bible for both Jews and Christians*
- *A set of ethical guidelines: the Ten Commandments provide rules and standards for morality*
- *A formative encounter with God: the giving of the Ten Commandments represents God's only direct speech to the entire Israelite community*
- *A reminder of a covenant: the reward mentioned in the Ten Commandments is living on the land of Israel that God has given*

This session will focus the discussion on several of the commandments.

I. Obligations to God

In the beginning of the Ten Commandments, the Israelites are introduced to God and to the commandments regarding worship of God:

> [2] I am the Eternal your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. [3] You shall have no other gods besides me. [4] You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Eternal your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, [6] but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.
>
> (Exodus 20:2-6)

> "These Exodus words of revelation paint a picture of a God who cares about people, whose kindness is infinite, but whose punishment is finite."
>
> (Cunningham and Katzew, "Do Christians and Jews Worship the Same God?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano, and Leighton. Westview Press.)

A. Encountering the Divine

Compare God's self-presentation to the community in Exodus 20:2-6 (quoted above) to the way God encounters the individual (Moses) in Chapter 3 of the book of Exodus.

> [4] When God saw that [Moses] had turned aside to look [at the burning bush], God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." [5] And God said, "Do not come closer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. [6] I

am," God said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" . . . [7] And the Eternal continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt . . . [10] . . . therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt." . . . [13] Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is God's name?' what shall I say to them?" [14] And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." God continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'"

(Exodus 3:4-14)

Both settings concern the enslavement and redemption of the Jews in Egypt. Compare the pronoun *Anochi*, the Hebrew word for "I," which appears throughout the Bible and is used to identify God in Exodus 20:2 and 3:6, with the name *Ehyeh*, which is used to identify God in Exodus 3:14. Rabbi Gunther Plaut points out that *Anochi* is the Hebrew pronoun common to Semitic and Hamitic languages. The rabbis in Midrash HaGadol believed that it was of Egyptian derivation so that God could be immediately understood by the former Egyptian slaves in their own language. The word *Ehyeh* is the first-person singular of the word "to be," but the phrase *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* leaves the tense of the verb ambiguous. It could be translated as "I am what I am," "I will be what I will be," or "I am what I will be."

What is the difference between the two introductions? Is there a difference between the way God is portrayed as speaking to Moses and to the whole community?

The following medieval text is another interpretation of the words chosen for God's introduction.

Why [is God's introduction] not "I am the Eternal your God, Creator of the world, its Governor and its Guide"?

The Rabbi: If you were told that the King of India was an excellent man, commanding admiration, and deserving his high reputation, whose actions were reflected in the justice which rules his country and the virtuous ways of his subjects, would this bind you to revere him?"

Al Khazari: How could this bind me, since I would not be sure if the justice of the Indian people is natural, independent of their king, or due to the king, or both?

The Rabbi: But if his messenger came to you bringing gifts that you know to be obtainable only in India, and in the royal palace, accompanied by a letter in which their source is explicitly stated, and to which are added medications to cure you diseases and protect your health. . . would this make you beholden to him?

Al-Khazari: Certainly. . . .

The Rabbi: This is why God began His speech to the assembled people of Israel, "I am the Eternal your God, whom you worship, who led you out of the land of Egypt." He did not say, "I am the Creator of the world and your Creator." This [self-description] was fitting for the entire people of Israel, who knew of this event first from direct personal experience, and afterwards through uninterrupted tradition, which is equal to the personal experience.

(Halevi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*.)

What are the implications of the primary self-description of God being as a force of liberation working in history?

B. When God Speaks

To whom did/does God speak? Does God speak to me (the individual)? Or, does God speak to the community of followers? Or, does God speak to all?

> "My" God? Surely Adonai is God of everyone and everything. Why then this surprising singular: "thy God?" Why this personal address to me – or not to me or any other individual, but to the people? Your reach here is clearly corporate, communal, national, but in all these Words, You address me/us individually. In pre-enlightenment days and certainly in Bible times, people did not suffer from today's fearsome gap between the self-legislating I and its society. Rather the self and its group so imperceptibly merged into one another that modern scholars must speculate whether the biblical poet's "I" refers to a person, the nation, or, more likely, both at once in shifting emphasis. So by meaning me, you mean all the children of the covenant, each one preciously an individual to You. Nonetheless, the singular 'thy" comes as a two-fold imperative. The nation, responding to Adonai, must not forget the supreme value of the single self. Only as individuals one by one, doing what Adonai requires of Israel, can the nation fulfill its covenantal responsibility….
>
> (Borowitz, *Broken Tablets: Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves*. Ed. Rachel Mikva. Jewish Lights Publishing.)

C. Modern Idolatry

What is the meaning of idolatry? Do we worship idols today – e.g. of wealth, possessions, power, fame, beauty? If so, are these idols that we can understand and do they stand in the way of a relationship with God? How does broadening our conception of "idolatry" affect our understanding of God?

D. The Sabbath

Observance of the Sabbath is one of the great gifts that the Bible has given to humanity. The opportunity to cease creating, to stop doing, gives us the chance to just "be." Recognition of one's parents reminds us that we are not alone – sole individuals, isolated egos. We are connected to those who have gone before us. This command seems to relate to our behavior toward others, but in many ways it is about how we think of ourselves. Finally, the prohibition against coveting reminds us to be satisfied with what we have.

The only "religious/ritual" behavior that the Ten Commandments mandates is observance of the Sabbath (praying, circumcision, observing festivals, are all absent from this text).

> [8] Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath of Adonai your God: you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements. [11] For in six days God made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, and God rested on the seventh day; therefore God blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
>
> (Exodus 20:8-11)

> Not do any work. Jewish tradition defined this in detail, developing a catalog of thirty-nine main types of prohibited labor. They include the main agricultural and domestic activities that qualify as work, and from these later categories halachic rules were developed.
>
> (Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. UAHC Press.)

> The Gospels say that Jesus observed the Jewish Sabbath. . . . Later, Christians continued to treasure the Sabbath commandment, along with the other nine commandments from Sinai. They also came to believe, however, that its meaning had changed within the new creation God began with Christ's death and resurrection. The holy day from now on, therefore, was not the seventh but the "eighth," the day on which the future burst into the present. The appropriate response was to celebrate each Sunday with a feast of Communion, looking back to Jesus' passion and resurrection and forward to the great banquet that would occur at the end of time. The result has been centuries of Sunday worship, usually crowned by the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
>
> Building on this shared heritage, different groups of Christians have shaped Sabbath keeping in different ways. The strict Sabbath observance of the New England Puritans, which gave rise to "blue laws" in many American cities and towns, influenced the structure of time for many groups in this society. Reformed churches of Dutch origin have anchored an American subculture within which Sundays are still filled with family visits and theological debate.
>
> On the other hand, some groups have been suspicious of Sabbatarianism so strict that it might seem legalistic ("If anywhere the day is made holy for the mere day's sake, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to feast on it, to do anything to remove this reproach from Christian liberty," Martin Luther declared) or have emphasized, like the Quakers, that all time is holy with God. Sunday mass has been and continues to be central to Roman Catholics. A few groups, including the Seventh-day Adventists, have made Saturday observance central to their identity.
>
> (Dorothy C. Bass, "Rediscovering the Sabbath." http://www.christianitytoday.com.)

What are the differences and similarities between Jewish and Christian observances of the Sabbath? Why is Sabbath observance so central? Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's book, *The Sabbath*, teaches that we must recognize holiness not so much in space, but primarily in time. How do we celebrate time and how does that impact on our lives?

II. Obligations to Others

The commandments dealing with honoring one's parents, murder, adultery, stealing, coveting, and bearing false witness center on our obligations to other people and focus our attention on respect for life, promises and property. Taken together, these commandments remind us that we are not alone, and that other people cannot be taken for granted.

Like most laws in the Bible, the Ten Commandments are not intended to provide a comprehensive legal code detailing varied circumstances, but rather core instructions of law and ethics on life's most crucial issues. It is left to later textual and legal interpretation to apply those commands to real situations, as it remains our responsibility to apply them to our lives.

A. The Taking of Life: The Commandments as a guide

> *Lo Tirzah*: Do not murder.
>
> (Exodus 20:13)

Contrast this commandment to a later discussion in the Bible.

> [3] You shall survey the distances, and divide into three parts the territory of the country that God has allotted to you, so that any manslayer may have a place to flee to. [4] Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: one who has killed another unwittingly, without having been his enemy in the past. [5] For instance, a man goes with his neighbor into a grove to cut wood; as his hand swings the ax to cut down a tree, the ax-head flies off the handle and strikes the other so that he dies. That man goes shall flee to one of these cities and live.
>
> (Deuteronomy 19:3-5)

The sixth Commandment in the Jewish enumeration, "*Lo tirzah*" in Hebrew, literally means: "do not murder." Think of the varied issues it does not deal with explicitly: e.g., manslaughter, killing in battle, capital punishment, suicide, euthanasia. Why does the commandment not say, "Do not take another human life."

Many of the Christian traditions translate this commandment as "you shall not kill" (e.g. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible* and *New American Bible*.) Some scholars have pointed to this difference in explaining why the minority traditions of pacifism have been more prominent in Christianity than Judaism; why Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek" does not accord with Judaism's ethical approval of the use of force for self-defense. How do you define murder, and under what circumstances might a killing not be considered murder? How do you apply *lo tirzah* differently to real situations in the world today depending on your translation?

B. Adultery

Although the concept of marriage has changed dramatically from biblical times, integrity, fidelity, and keeping sacred promises have been consistently upheld as proper behavior.

> *Lo Tinaf*: You shall not commit adultery.
>
> (Exodus 20:13)

Consider also a later text:

> [21] God says to Israel, as the prophet Hosea reports, "I betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and justice, with goodness and mercy. [22] I espouse you to Me with faithfulness."
>
> (Hosea 2:21-22)

The prophet Hosea understood Israel's relationship with God in covenantal terms and likened that relationship to a marriage. Hosea only began to understand God's pain when he went through his own in his troubled marriage. Thus, when a marital vow is broken, so are righteousness and justice, goodness and mercy and faithfulness.

In Judaism, marriage is *Kiddushin*, (from the word *kadosh,* holiness, that which is set apart or elevated). For Roman Catholics, marriage is a Sacrament (from the Latin root *sacr-* meaning "sacred"); for Protestants, it is a Holy Estate. All three traditions thus consider the promises made in marital vows to be sacred obligations. How do we understand this concept today? What does it mean to consider marriage vows considered holy? How is the marriage covenant like a covenant with God? In what ways can these vows be broken? Can a broken vow be mended?

Consider the following text:

> [2] Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch and strolled on the roof of the royal palace; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, [3] and the king sent someone to make inquiries about the woman. He reported, "She is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam [and] wife of Uriah the Hittite." [4] David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her – she had just purified herself after her period – and she went back home. [5] The woman conceived, and she sent word to David, "I am pregnant."
>
> …. [14] In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab, which he sent to Uriah. [15] He wrote in the letter as follows: "Place Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest; then fall back so that he may be killed." [16] So when Joab was besieging the city, he stationed Uriah at the point where he knew that there were able warriors. [17] The men of the city sallied out and attacked Joab, and some of David's officers among the troops fell; Uriah the Hittite was among those who died. . . .
>
> [26] When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she lamented over her husband. [27] After her period of mourning was over, David sent and had her brought into his palace; she became his wife and she bore him a son.
>
> (2 Samuel 11:2 – 27)

Was King David guilty of adultery and guilty of murder? What are the implications if one of the great heroes of the Bible violated two of The Ten Commandments?

C. Parents

The Fifth Commandment (according to the Jewish and Protestant countings) teaches us to respect those who were partners with God in bringing us into existence:

> Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land which God is giving you.
>
> (Exodus 20:12)

Contrast to:

> You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep my Sabbaths: I am Adonai your God.
>
> (Leviticus 19:3)

Why might revering parents and observing the Sabbath (Lev.) and honoring parents and enduring on the land (Deut.) be woven together as one command? Since we are taught that we are all God's children, perhaps we learn to treat God properly by the way we treat our parents. How do we best honor our parents? How do we understand ourselves better when we consider our relationships with those who gave us life?

D. Speaking the Truth

Is the commandment "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" a general command to tell the truth or a prohibition of perjury in legal proceedings?

The simple meaning of the text focuses on the legal application of the commandment. What is God's reaction to perjury in the following Biblical passage? How is perjury related to murder and stealing?

> [5] Jez'ebel [Ahab's] wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" [6] And he said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, `Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it'; and he answered, `I will not give you my vineyard.'" [7] And Jez'ebel his wife said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." [8] So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who dwelt with Naboth in his city. *[9]* And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people; [10] and set two base fellows opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, `You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him to death." [11] And the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who dwelt in his city, did as Jez'ebel had sent word to them.
>
> . . . [17] Then the word of the Eternal came to Eli'jah the Tishbite, saying, [18] "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Sama'ria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. [19] And you shall say to him, `Thus says the Eternal, "Have you killed, and also taken possession?"' And you shall say to him, `Thus says the Eternal: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."'" [20] Ahab said to Eli'jah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Eternal."
>
> (1 Kings 21:5 - 20)

But what of the related issue of what our traditions tell us more generally about truth-telling? Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* states that truthfulness is an unconditional duty. Must we tell the truth in every situation? What of seeing an unattractive child or person? What about sharing information about one's health in all situations?

1. Righteous Lying?

The Talmud (Ketubot 17a) recounts a debate between two groups of ancient Jewish scholars, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai. The debate erupted over the issue of how to praise a bride during the traditional song and dance at her wedding. When a bride is beautiful, singing her praises comes naturally to the guests – but the scholars disagreed about what the wedding guests should say to a bride who is not beautiful.

The scholars of the House of Shammai advised tactful honesty, citing the biblical injunctions against lying. They instructed guests to sing about each bride truthfully, "as she is." Still, the guests should avoid saying anything negative, and instead focus on the bride's good qualities.

The House of Hillel, however, advises treating every bride as if she were beautiful. To insult her would unnecessarily upset the bride and groom on such a joyful occasion, and pointedly avoiding reference her negative qualities could have the same effect. Later sages agreed, suggesting that "a person's disposition towards people should always be congenial."

Other scholarly voices question the very idea of objective truth. Studying the teachings of Hillel, some scholars point out that the reason the bridegroom is likely to be upset by the guests' negative comments towards his bride is that in his eyes, she may be very beautiful. Analyzing

the teachings of Shammai, some scholars argued that we should celebrate the bride "as she is" not merely out of politeness, but because we should find beauty in the way that God created her.

Which point of view do you find the most convincing? How do these issues play out in daily life?

2. Speech and Action

The Christian Scriptures stress the sinfulness of lying and the hurtful effects that lies can have. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Jesus' disciple Peter denies an association with Jesus in order to protect himself:

> [64] . . .all of the [chief priests] condemned [Jesus] as deserving death. [65] Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him . . . [66] While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. [67] When she saw Peter . . . she stared at him and said, "You were also with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." [68] But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." . . . Then the cock crowed. [69] And the servant girl . . . began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." [70] But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." [71] But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." [72] At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.
>
> (Mark 14:64 – 72)

Does Peter weep because of his own sin, or about the role he may have played in harming Jesus? What threats might Peter have faced if he had been honest about his relationship with Jesus? Should the severity of the consequences for telling the truth be taken into account, or are there situations in which it is never appropriate to lie?

Jesus' teachings suggest that when action comes into conflict with speech, it is actions that are to be judged. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus narrates a parable that emphasizes the importance of action over spoken testimony:

> [28] A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." [29] He answered, "I will not," but later he changed his mind and went. [30] The father went to the second son and said the same; and he answered, "I will go, sir," but he did not go. [31] Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."
>
> (Matthew 21:28- 31)

How do the values of righteous action and truthful speech strengthen each other? When they conflict, how can we decide which is the higher concern?

What are the similarities and differences in the situations of Peter, the wedding guest, and the two sons?

Because of the length of the readings in Session Five, you may wish to assign participants a homework assignmen:t to read that chapter prior to the next session.

Session Five:
THE MEANING OF ISRAEL
FOR CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Overview: Few words in the language of religion carry as many meanings as "Israel." From the name that the biblical patriarch Jacob receives after his interaction with God's messenger to the name his descendants take on, from the name given to the Land promised to Abraham and his progeny, to the name of the political and geographical entity known as the State of Israel – the name evokes myriad images and meanings. This session will allow the participants to examine the development of the notion of Israel and to compare understandings of how the People of Israel and the Land of Israel relate to one another and to our respective communities.

I. Video: *I Am Joseph, Your Brother*

If you have obtained a copy of this video, use it here. If not, go on to reading the texts below.

***Show video* (Seven-minute segment on Israel (from 24:00 to 31:00) from the ICCI video.**

II. "Meaning" of "Israel"

Ask participants to take turns reading the following paragraphs from "What is the Meaning of Israel."

A. What is the meaning of Israel for Jews?

The Meanings of Israel

The multiple meanings of Israel that grew out of this history are embedded in the Tanakh [i.e. the Bible].

Israel is the biblical name of the Jewish people. The Tanakh seldom uses the word *Jew.* The people are called Israel, the Children of Israel or Israelites.

Israel refers to the people with whom God has formed a covenant and to whom God has given Torah. They are the chosen people through whom God's revelation is given to the world. This covenant was initially made with Abraham and continues through the particular line of Jacob's offspring.

Israel is the land given by God to this people. It is not just any piece of land but a particular geographical location to which the people are called by God.

To understand how Jews and Christians use the term *Israel*, we start with the accounts in Genesis that record how Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and how Jacob and his descendants were called to a new destiny.

> **[24] Jacob was left alone: and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. [25] When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket: and**

Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. [26] Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." [27] So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." [28] Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed."

(Genesis 32:24-28)

[9] God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. [10] God said to him, "Your name is Jacob: no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." [11] God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply: a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. [12] The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."

(Genesis 35:9 – 12)

[Jacob's] name change is followed by a promise that has two parts. First, progeny, "A nation and a company of nations" shall spring from the newly named Israel. Second, Jacob is declared worthy of the land already promised to Abraham and Isaac. Abraham and Isaac spawn other nations, but Jacob-Israel is the father of the twelve tribes of the nation Israel. The land and the people become inextricably bound to the name Israel. Later, at Sinai, God establishes or, better, reestablishes the covenant with the Children of Israel and reaffirms the promise to give them the land. The covenant included the expectation that the Children of Israel would follow God's commandments and be a holy people. The story connects the holy land to a divinely covenanted people who come to be called the Children of Israel….

(Leighton, Dawe, and Weinstein, "What is the Meaning of Israel for Jews and Christians?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano and Leighton. Westview Press.)

Discussion Questions

a. What are the "other nations" that come from Abraham and Isaac?
b. What is/should be the significance today of the belief that people of different faith communities are all Children of Abraham?
c. Do you feel these promises have been fulfilled as of this moment in history? If not, do you think they will be?

B. What is the meaning of Israel for Christians?

Israel the People

[In the New Testament] Matthew's emphasis on continuity between Israel and the church led subsequent Christians to maintain that they carried forward the covenantal legacy, that Jesus brought to fulfillment what was only foreshadowed in Israel's Scriptures, and that the church therefore can confidently claim the title of "The New Israel."

Paul's thinking moves the church in a radically different direction and eventually leads to an emphasis on the discontinuity of Christian faith and Jewish practice. Paul's outreach to the Gentiles provides an alternative response to the question concerning how followers of the Torah-observant Jesus cannot live in accordance with the laws themselves. In his mission to the Gentiles, Paul insists that faith in Christ eclipses trust in the saving power of Torah….

This understanding of Paul coalesced in an ideology that increasingly captured the Christian imagination. "The new covenant in Christ has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear." (Heb 8:13-14). The appeal of this position,

which we have referred to elsewhere as supersessionism, resides in its power to resolve the inescapable question; "Why did not the Jews place their faith in Jesus Christ?" The response takes the following form; Jesus comes to the Jews: the Jews reject Jesus: so God rejects the Jews and turns to the Gentiles. These Gentile followers of Jesus are reconstituted as "the New Israel."

(Leighton, Dawe, and Weinstein, "What is the Meaning of 'Israel' for Jews and Christians?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano and Leighton. Westview Press.)

Discussion Questions

a. How does the singular term "New Israel" apply differently to Matthew and Paul's views of Christianity's relationship to Judaism?
b. How do you understand the idea of covenant as used in this text?
c. What kind of saving power does Torah have? How does it differ from the saving power of Christ?

Israel the Land

The process of unhinging the connections between land, Temple, and holiness is also evident in John's Gospel. In addressing the Samaritan woman, Jesus proclaims:

[21] Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. [22] You worship what you do not know: we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. [23] But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
(John 4:21-24)

In all likelihood, the attitudes of Jesus' followers were profoundly reoriented by the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Both Jews and Christians were compelled to redefine their religious practices without reliance on the sacrificial rights of the Temple. Many Christians adapted to this new situation by spiritualizing the idea of Temple and land. The sanctity once concentrated in the land of Israel is extended to all creation. Since God is the Creator, all lands bear the imprint of the divine. . . .

A denial of earthly attachments to the land of Israel, to Jerusalem, and to the Temple is intensified in the writings of some of the preeminent church fathers, particularly Origen. In reflecting upon the prophetic promises of Israel's restoration, these writings point beyond the reestablishment of the Jewish nation to a spiritual vision of eternal bliss in a "heavenly country."

The views of the land of Israel developed by Origen have continued to shape large segments of the Christian community, and the position still holds fast among liberal Protestants today. As a result, any attempt to attribute theological significance to the land of Israel is greeted with skepticism or criticism. The belief that the land of Israel holds a sanctity that does not exist elsewhere is all too frequently dismissed as an anachronistic and tribal attachment bordering on idolatry.

Although many Christians rejected the sacred significance of the land of Israel, others found in this land an irreplaceable connection to their foundation stories. No other place invited Christians to

occupy the same ground as their Lord and Savior. No other place enabled Christians to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors in the faith as pilgrims on a sacred journey….

(Leighton, Dawe, and Weinstein, "What is the Meaning of 'Israel' for Jews and Christians?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano and Leighton. Westview Press.)

Discussion Questions

a. Is some land more sacred than others? Why?
b. Are there places other than Israel which are sacred or holy for Christians? For Jews? Why?

C. Personal Encounters with Israel

Ask participants to complete the following statements and explain their answer.

1. I first knew about Israel as a geographic area from …
2. My experience of Israel while growing up was …
3. The things that surprise me most about Israel are …

D. Reflections for Jews and Christians regarding Israel the land.

Christian pilgrims walk the Via Dolorosa and visit other Christian holy sites when they go to Israel. For Christians, does the importance of the land of Israel lie in the fact that it is the place where Jesus walked i.e. from its function as a place of pilgrimage?

Consider the following passages:

The Jews of old revered the Holy of Holies, because of the things contained in it: the cherubim, the mercy-seat, the ark of the covenant, the manna, Aaron's rod, and the golden altar [Hebrews 9:3–5]. Does the Lord's sepulcher seem less worthy of veneration?

The land is accursed, you way, because it has drunk in the blood of the Lord. . . . Everywhere we venerate the tombs of the martyrs; we apply their holy ashes to our eyes; we even touch them, if we may, with our lips. And yet some think that we should neglect the tomb in which the Lord Himself is buried!?

Time forbids me to recount the bishops, the martyrs, the divines, who have come to Jerusalem from a feeling that their devotion and knowledge would be incomplete and their virtue without the finishing touch unless they adored Christ in the very spot where the gospel first flashed from the site of execution. . . . In speaking thus we do not mean to deny that the kingdom of God is within us [Luke 17:21], or to say that there are no holy men elsewhere. We merely assert in the strongest manner that those who stand first throughout the world are here gathered side by side. . . . They all assemble here [in Jerusalem] and exhibit in this one city the most varied virtues. Differing in speech, they are one in religion. . . .

(St. Jerome, Letter 46, "To Marcella.")

I write to tell you that your [canon] Philip has found a short cut to Jerusalem and has arrived there very quickly. He crossed the vast ocean with a favorable wind in a very short time, and he has now cast anchor on the shore for which he was heading. Even now he stands in the courts of

Jerusalem. . . . He is no longer an inquisitive onlooker, but a devout inhabitant and an enrolled citizen of Jerusalem. But not of that earthly Jerusalem to which Mount Sina in Arabia is joined [see Galatians 4:24-26], and which is in bondage with her children, but of that free Jerusalem which is above, and the mother of us all.

And this, if you want to know is Clairvaux [Bernard's Cistercian monastery]. She is the Jerusalem united to the one in heaven by whole-hearted devotion, by conformity of life, and by a certain spiritual affinity. Here, so Philip promises himself, will be his rest forever and ever."

(St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, Letter 67, "To Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln.")

Ask the Christian participants:
How do you understand the importance of the land of Israel?

What do you think makes it a "holy" place for Christians? What other places are "holy" for Christians, and why?

The following texts from the Jewish tradition provide some insight into a view on Israel.

A person should always dwell in the Land of Israel, even in a city where the majority are idolaters; and one should not dwell outside the Land of Israel, even in a city where the majority are Jews. For one who dwells in the Land of Israel is like one who has a God, and who dwells outside the Land is like one who has no God.

(Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 110b)

This is our Palestine; this city our Jerusalem; this house of God, our Temple.

(Rabbi Gustav Posnanski, 1841, at the dedication ceremony of Temple Beth Elohim in Charleston, SC)

At one end of the spectrum, there are those who hold that the Jewish people has no future if they are not connected to the land of Israel. At the other end, there are those who hold that the land of Israel, while special historically, is no more sacred than any other land; that wherever there are Jews, they can make that land holy. (Contrast the Posnanski and St. Bernard quotations above.)

Ask the Jewish participants:
Discuss your understanding of the land of Israel as having a unique status in Jewish thought. Is it sacred to you as a Jew?

Explain what having a country means to world Jewry.

Do you think that the future of the Jewish people depends upon the enduring reality of Israel as a sovereign political state?

E. Concluding Discussion Questions For All To Consider

Describe your childhood thoughts about the "Holy Land" and about your growing awareness of the State of Israel. What are your impressions either from travels there or from what you have seen from afar? Describe an incident that helped shape your feelings about Israel.

What do you think about the views of those not of your religious tradition on the land on Israel?

Session Six:
ISRAEL: CURRENT CHALLENGES

Overview: The modern political entity known as the State of Israel is the manifestation of the Jewish longing for a homeland that began with the promise God made to Abraham, as described in the biblical text. Yet, from the time that Theodore Herzl (the most influential figure in modern Zionism) articulated the dream of a biblical promise made real, debates within the Jewish community itself and the world community have raged as to the nature, policies, borders and society of the state established on this tiny plot of land. How Israel relates to her neighbors and the religious communities that lay claim to holy sites within her borders are disproportionably represented on the front pages of the world's newspapers when compared to the size of her land and the number of her citizens. How is Israel to be judged for her actions – against the backdrop of the religious principles upon which she was founded or compared to the rest of the world? How can Palestinian communities, Christian and Muslim alike, have their dreams and aspirations fulfilled? How do our own religious sensitivities and sensibilities come to bear on our understandings of the problems and challenges facing the modern State of Israel? This session will focus our attention on how the modern Israel can be understood by our respective communities.

Begin with a brief discussion of the following questions:

4. Should Americans have a special concern about Israel and about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Why?
5. *To Christian Participants:* What would you hope that Jews would appreciate more about your views on Israel or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than most seem to do now?
   To Jewish Participants: What would you hope that Christians would appreciate more about your views on Israel or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than most seem to now?

The readings below from Rabbi David Saperstein, Rabbi Marc Saperstein, Al Vorspan, and Peter Pettit explore Jewish and Christian perspectives on Israel and the context of the current conflict. They are not meant to parallel each other, but rather to offer a range of important insights into the context of the current debates. Go around the room asking each person to read a paragraph.

I. Are Jews a Nation?

It is often puzzling to Christians, and even to some Jews, to hear Jews spoken of as a people, a culture, or a nation. "Isn't Judaism a religion" they ask. In doing so, they envision Judaism as a religious tradition akin to Methodism, Unitarianism, or Catholicism. But the civilization of Judaism long predated most of religious traditions practiced today.

Judaism arose as one of the world's early civilizations. Were the other ancient civilizations – Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, and Egypt – religions? Yes. Each civilization had its own religion. Were they cultures with their own language and literature? Yes, that too. Were they nation-states with a national consciousness? Each possessed a powerful nationalist identity. Were they peoples with a distinct sense of unity that remained with them when they traveled beyond the borders of their own country? That as well.

The main difference between Judaism and these other ancient cultures is that most of them died out long ago while Judaism and the Jewish people endure. Jews today still reflect the characteristics that marked the Jewish people from their beginnings: a culture, a religion, a people, a nation.

Some Jews express their identity in non-religious cultural terms (hence the existence of so-called "secular Jewish" organizations) another paradoxical idea for many Christians). Other Jews express their identity in Judaism's religious beliefs and synagogue observance. Still others do so by embracing the nationalistic Zionist aspirations of our people. Indeed, for some, that is the only component of their Jewishness. Most Jews in the Diaspora related to all these expressions of Judaism. And the majority of Israelis equate their Jewishness primarily with their living in the historic homeland rather than with the Jewish content of their lives, although most of them integrate some degree of religious sensibility and observance into their Jewish identity.

All but a tiny minority of Jews affirm a central role of Israel in Jewish life. We are a proud people, and our peoplehood transcends our religious and racial differences. In moments of peril for Israel, as well as in moments of exaltation, we are not Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Yiddishist, Zionist, Orthodox, or atheist. We are Jews, a united people sharing a common destiny, knowing in our bones that what happens to Israel will shape much of our future as Jews. Jewish commitment to Israel is a powerful force, a fact recognized by the American people, our government, and the international community.

(Vorspan and Saperstein, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice*. UAHC Press.)

Often, Christians and Jews think of the other's religion as only a religion. To what extent is your own Christian or Jewish identity expressed in cultural, national, or ethnic terms? What are the general differences between the two faiths in this regard?

II. The Roots of Zionism

The Jewish people and the Jewish religion have always been bound up in a special way with the land of Israel. The story of our faith begins with God's commandment to Abraham to leave his birthplace for the land that God would show him – the land of Israel. Our national identity starts with a group of slaves leaving Egypt for the Promised Land. The laws in the Torah were primarily for the society that would be established when the Israelites crossed over the Jordan and took possession of the land, which God had pledged to give to the descendants of the patriarchs. In fact, as an Israeli scholar has pointed out, with the exception of a few books from the *Ketuvim* (Writings), the entire Bible can be said to be one long continuous story, telling how the Jewish people gained its land, then lost it, then gained it once again. The roots of the Jewish people are in Israel's soil; the most powerful memories of the Jewish experience are linked with its mountains, rivers, cities, and plains.

The Romans conquered the land, and put an end to Jewish political autonomy within it. The Jewish population was dispersed, and the center of creativity shifted away from the land of Israel – to Babylon, to Spain, to northern France and Germany, to Eastern Europe, to the United States. But at least until the beginning of the 19th century, Jews around the globe felt that they were in exile, in *galut*.

This central concept of *galut* had several dimensions. Geographically, it meant that they were far from the land of their origins and roots. Politically, it meant that their power to govern themselves was limited to those areas in which the rulers of the host country allowed them freedom. Psychologically, it meant that they were insecure and defenseless, that their fate depended on the interests of the sovereign or the whim of a demagogue, that they could be attacked, robbed, murdered, or expelled with little recourse. Theologically, it meant that there was something drastically imperfect about the world.

Indeed, love of Zion permeated much of Diaspora Jewish life over the centuries. In many ways, the 2,000 year dream of the Jewish people to return to Zion is one of the great national liberation dreams and struggles of all of human history. Often to the surprise of non-Jews and even Jews, there never was a point over the two millennia of Diaspora life, when some Jews did not live in Israel. In some periods and locations (e.g., Safed in the 16th century, Jerusalem since the 1860s), the Jewish population was the largest segment of the population.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the power of this hope for redemption, for the moment when God would enable the Jewish people to return to the land of Israel and build a Jewish state once again, can be seen in the liturgy. The traditional prayer-book is filled with petitions relating to this theme: "O cause a new light to shine upon Zion," "Sound the great horn for our freedom, raise the ensign to gather our exiles, and gather us from the four corners of the earth," "And to Jerusalem, Thy city, return in mercy. . . rebuild it soon in our days," "Lead us with exultation unto Zion, Thy city, and unto Jerusalem the place of Thy sanctuary with everlasting joy." Such petitions were repeated three times a day by the pious Jew.

Nor was the land of Israel forgotten in moments of special significance. The services for the Day of Atonement and the seder of Pesach end with the affirmation, "Next year in Jerusalem." The wedding ceremony is incomplete without the prayer "Soon may there be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." The special kaddish said by children after the burial of their parents begins "May God's great Name be magnified and sanctified in the world that is to be created anew, where God will revive the dead, and raise them up unto life eternal, will rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and establish Gods temple in its midst..." Through the traditional liturgy, the hope for a return to the land of Israel was instilled into the consciousness of every Jew who prayed.

Throughout the weekly biblical readings, that promise was reaffirmed. Even in the Ten Commandments, this theme is the only promise made for fulfilling the commandments. The Fifth Commandment concludes with a reward – the promise of living a long life on the land given by God.

(Saperstein and Saperstein, *Critical Issues Facing Reform Judaism*. UAHC Press.)

Discussion Questions

Were you surprised by anything you read in this last passage? If so, by which parts?

Why has Judaism placed such a significant emphasis on the national expression of Israel over the centuries?

How do you think that these long-held ideas might affect Jewish thinking on the conflicts in the Middle East today?

How does this reading compare to St. Jerome's letter (in Session 5)?

III. The Protestant Churches and Israel

The first key point about Protestants is that we are not Roman Catholics. That's not so much a theological crux, in this case, as it is an organizational one. While Eugene Fisher can (and will) tell

you that there is a diversity of Roman Catholic opinion on any given issue, including Israel, he can also tell you what the official Catholic position is – from the Vatican, the US Conference of Bishops, or whomever. There is a hierarchy and it speaks for the church.

Not so with Protestants. The official statements of any Protestant body carry only educational and persuasive value. That's not chopped chicken liver, but it's not authority, either. So when you hear a Jerry Falwell, or a Lutheran Bishop, or a Presbyterian moderator, or a Methodist board, or an Episcopal commission issue a statement, it's critical to realize that they only speak for those whom they can persuade to agree with them. And in any circumstance in the church, there will be plenty who disagree.

That said, what are you likely to hear?

From our conservative, "Bible-believing" wing, you are presently likely to hear a good deal of very strong support for Israel and the Jewish homecoming. While their particular timelines and scenarios vary, those who read the Bible as a handbook of prophecy for the present time and the end of time see the ingathering of Israel as a critical step along the road to eschatological glory. The plus here is that they will host Israeli market fairs and send solidarity missions and support Israel's policies, but the downside is that they're only in it for the ultimate triumph of Christianity. If and when that doesn't look to be the way it's playing out, there's no telling where allegiances will go or how the Jews will figure in the new scenario.

From the most liberal, liberationist wings of Christianity, the Middle East conflict is a classic embodiment of the struggle of the oppressed against colonial and imperialistic forces. The irony in this is that the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutuierrez and Jurgen Moltman and others (this is where Marc Ellis learned his hermeneutics) is grounded in a strong reading of the Exodus narrative as a paradigm of God's intervention in the affairs of history. In the current situation, of course, Israel is the Pharaoh that has enslaved, impoverished, exploited, and dehumanized the indigenous Palestinian population, who deserve the unwavering support of those who see the true lay of the land and are convinced of God's "preferential option for the poor." Some will countenance even violent rebellion, all will understand the roots and appeal of violence, even if they condemn its use, and few will openly criticize the Palestinians or hold them accountable until they are able to make free choices about their lives and their future. Until then, any immoral or counterproductive action on their part is the result of living under the oppression. The downside here is clear – with its strong denunciation of Israel's impact on Palestinian lives and society, usually tied closely to criticism also of the status and treatment of Israeli Arabs in an (near-) apartheid arrangement. The plus here is that human rights and respect for the dignity of the Palestinians will find no stronger advocates.

A third set of voices grew up in the post-Shoah era of interfaith dialogue and has come into the present arena with a keen awareness of the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism and a strong sympathy for the character of Israel as a haven, refuge, and homeland for the Jewish people. These folks recognize the problems of the territories, settlements, water rights, and the like, but they lay much of the plight of the Palestinians at the doorstep of the Arab nations that launched the wars and haven't dealt with the refugees, and they are willing to countenance a harsher Israeli security line in order to assure Israel's existence. The plus for Israel is a genuine and solicitous concern for Israel's national well-being; the downside is that the view of Israel and of Judaism is often romanticized, leaving these folks befuddled by the *realpolitik* that often drives policy in the region.

Among the mainline churches – Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Reformed – another key factor in shaping the perception and response is the fact that these churches have been involved in the lives of Arabs since the 19th century, if not before. Missionary projects aimed at development and health and education, as well as conversion, have their own histories and narratives, deeply woven into the fabric of North American church life. A natural sympathy and solidarity can be tapped that goes back to grandparents and great-grandparents who either were

missionaries or who met missionaries on their home-leave tours with photos and stories of Arab children and wells and schools and villages that became "ours" when we adopted them for our Sunday School global mission project. For many of the folks with those memories, there can be a real disconnect between Jews in their neighborhood and the Israel that is causing problems for their Arab friends; they see the issue in personal terms rather than political ones.

All these sources have their theological rationales and apologetics – any of the advocates of any of these admittedly extreme positions can quote scripture and deploy theological paradigms that support their analysis. As with any theology, the interplay of experience, ideology, intuition, and exegesis is highly dialectical – it can be very difficult to sort out where the "real" source of a position lies. Even for those of us who are regularly engaged in these matters, it takes a good deal of self-scrutiny to be clear about our motives and the influences that shape our understanding.

(Peter A. Pettit, Manuscript from an oral presentation. From a Panel on Israel and the Churches, Rabbinic Cabinet, GA, UJC.)

Discussion Questions

What is your general reaction to the Peter Pettit reading? What surprised you in this reading?

What impact does/should concern for the Christian communities in Israel and the surrounding countries have on Christian or Jewish approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Reflect on the similarities and differences of Jewish and Christian attitudes about Israel as you understand them.

IV. The State of Israel: The Current Conflict

In having meaningful dialogue on potentially contentious issues, it is always helpful to ask what the respective axioms and postulates are of the participants in the dialogue. When it comes to Israel, many Jews – Americans and Israelis, hawks and doves, supporters and critics of particular government policies – share an oft unspoken assumption: if the Arab countries and Palestinians believed that they could militarily destroy Israel today, they would not hesitate to do so and only Israel's strength enhanced by American support stands in the way of that happening. Support for Israel goes to core issues of the survival of the Jewish people that link most Jews – and many of Israel's non-Jewish supporters – together. Seen through the filter of that assumption, it is often painfully difficult for Jews to understand those who seem to be even-handed about the conflict or who take the side of the Palestinians in their dispute against Israel.

Many Christians, even those who consider themselves supporters of Israel, may not see the Middle East conflict through that filter. Rather, their underlying assumption is that this conflict is, at its core, a conflict of conflicting rights and moral claims; that actions that deny the rights of either side, including Israeli actions that thwart Palestinian self-determination or justice for the Palestinian people, should be condemned. In this context, criticism of Israeli policies, no matter how harsh, is not about Israel's survival or well-being.

Where do you fall in your own views on these assumptions? Do they accurately reflect the views of many in your community? Can you express other assumptions that you think underlie the public discourse on the Mid-East conflict? Is it possible to hold both assumptions at the same time?

The following are Christian and Jewish statements on the current conflict in Israel.

a. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people. The land of Israel has always been of central significance to the Jewish people. . . . Christian theologians can no longer avoid this crucial issue, especially in light of the complex and persistent conflict over the land. Recognizing that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own, we call for efforts that contribute to a just peace among all the peoples in the region.

(The Christians Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, "A Sacred Obligation.")

b. …An overwhelming majority of Jews see themselves bound in one way or another to the land of Israel. Most Jews see this tie to the land as essential to their Jewishness. Whatever difficulties Christians may experience in sharing this view they should strive to understand this link between land and people which Jews have expressed in their writing and worship throughout two millennia as a longing for the homeland, holy Zion. Appreciation of this link is not to give assent to any particular religious interpretation of this bond. Nor is this affirmation meant to deny the legitimate rights of other parties in the region, or to adopt any political stance in the controversies over the Middle East…

(National Council of Catholic Bishops, "Statement on Catholic – Jewish Relations.")

c. *I am a Palestinian. My people and I are experiencing injustice and military occupation, as well as the accompanying problems of hunger, illness, loneliness, imprisonment and being treated as strangers and interlopers in our land. What is my motivation in speaking out against these evils? Is it my personal or nationalistic feelings, or my political aspirations? No. I am not a politician; I don't understand politics. My motivation is that I feel with my people. I see and experience their oppression and pain. I cannot but cry and weep with them. It is because I walk with God and God walks with me that I speak the truth and the love of God into our difficult and critical situation. And I am not only speaking truth toward those who oppress us, but toward myself and my own nation – even my own government – when I see injustice. How can I sing "Hallelujah" or "Kyrie eleison" or "Gloria!" when people are suffering from injustice and the violation of human rights? It is because I walk with God and God walks with me that I can see the image of God in every human being, especially the oppressed. Rich and poor, old and young, Israeli and Palestinian, Christian, Jew or Muslim. With Micah I say that it is the Spirit of the Lord that fills me with the power to speak out despite the criticism and danger.*

(Rev. Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Vice President
of the Lutheran World Federation, "Bible Study #3.")

d. The fundamental prerequisite for Israeli-Arab peace is the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 which requires that Israel end its occupation of the land it conquered in 1967, as well as Arab acceptance of Israel's "right to live within secure and recognized borders free from threats or acts of force." Only this can bring Israel international legitimacy and security it needs – which it has failed to achieve by military might.

If the Israeli occupation continues, the two-state solution is impossible, dooming the Jewish and Arab p[people to a grim future in a region that is economically and politically stunted and religiously enflamed.

In the meantime, more Israeli and Palestinian lives are lost to gruemsome violence. During this period of turmoil, it is especially important that people with a faith-based commitment to justice and peace not give up on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. Polls continue to show that majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians want a negotiated resolution of the conflict and reject the extremist goal of eliminating the "other."

(Excerpt from Churches for Middle East Peace Newsletter article: "While Eyes are focused on Iraq: An Update from Washington on Israeli-Palestinian Issues)

e. … Notwithstanding continuing Palestinian terrorism, Israel's desire for peace has never diminished. What is so urgently needed to attain that goal and to bring stability to the region is a partner for peace. Those Arab leaders who have come forward over the years, such as Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Jordan's King Hussein, found a willing partner in Israel for negotiations and for a durable peace.

Our hopes for similar action from the Palestinian leadership, especially since the Madrid Conference and the signing of the Oslo Accords, have been met with repeated disappointments as Yasser Arafat continues to forsake the opportunities to achieve peace and to fulfill the aspirations of his own people. In the summer of 2000, Yasser Arafat spurned a generous, historic offer from former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, which had the backing of President Clinton. Arafat responded to that offer by unleashing a wave of terrorism. While a Palestinian state may be established one day, it cannot be attained through violence. Direct negotiations remain the only path to Arab-Israeli peace.

The Palestinian Authority, which has jurisdiction in areas where terrorist acts are planned and launched, has refused to honor its obligation to prosecute or extradite identified terrorists. … We support the Bush Administration's decision to reassess its relationship with the Palestinian Authority in the wake of its attempt to smuggle 50 tons of illegal weapons from Iran aboard the Karine-A. We also support legislation that would authorize the President to place sanctions on the Palestinian Authority for continued non-compliance with its signed agreements to bring an end to violence and incitement.

Moreover, the education for peace that is so necessary to lay the groundwork for a new era in the region regrettably is lacking in the Palestinian Authority. Instead, schools, the media, and mosques preach hatred of Jews and vilification of Judaism. We urge Palestinian educators, journalists and religious leaders to promote tolerance and reconciliation.

We welcome the strong support of the Bush Administration in taking steps to press the Palestinian leadership to combat terrorism and we appreciate the Bush Administration's continued firm commitment to Israel's security in a broader regional context.

(Jewish Council for Public Affairs Resolution on Support for Israel. Adopted at the 2002 Jewish Council for Public Affairs Plenum)

f. We still believe that the key to peace will be two states, Jewish and Palestinian, side by side, and a negotiated agreement that provides security for both sides…But while Israel will accept a Palestinian state, it will never accept a terrorist state. Today Israelis want, and deserve, to be reassured that America's fight against terror is determined and universal. They want to be assured that America will oppose terrorist murder not only when the victims are Americans in New York and Washington but also when they are Jews in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Israelis want to know that when their civilians are murdered, they can defend themselves without being chastised for "overreaction."

(UAHC, Resolution on Israel. Adopted at the 66th General Assembly, December 2001,

Boston, Massachusetts)

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you get information about the conflict in Israel? Do you feel like this is a good source of information? Do you think the information you get is biased toward one side or the other?
2. How do you feel when you turn on the television and see news of a terrorist attack in Israel? Is it different than when you hear about violence occurring in other parts of the world?
3. How do you feel when you turn on the television and see news of an Israeli military strike against a terrorist target in which innocent civilians are killed or wounded? Why?
4. Do you feel Americans manifest adequate concern about the plight of the Christian minorities in the Middle East? What can Americans generally, Jews, and Christians, do to better address the challenges these Christian communities face?
5. The Reform Movement believes that the only answer to the conflict is a two-state solution, with Israel and a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security. Why do you think the Reform Movement believes that this would be a better solution than one democratic state where Jews and Palestinians are treated equally under the law?
6. *To Christian Participants:* What might Jews do differently in addressing the challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would be helpful? *To Jewish Participants:* What might Christians do differently in addressing the challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would be helpful?

V. Concerns About Other Challenges Facing Israel Today

What *kind* of state do we want Israel to be? There are those who say that, since Zionism set out to cure the abnormal condition under which the Jewish people had previously lived, the Jewish state needs to aspire to be no more than a normal state, like any other state in the world. It is now a commonplace that one early Zionist leader expressed satisfaction when he heard there was now crime in the young Jewish state. "See," he said, "we have become a normal state. We have pickpockets and crooks and prostitutes like every other state."

But there is another view, which springs from the Jewish religious tradition. Israel is to be a *model* state, a *light unto the nations,* a messenger of peace, an example to the civilized world, an expression of God's covenant with the Jewish people. In this view, although Israel is a state with a Jewish majority, whether or not it is a truly *Jewish* state depends less on demographics than on the moral qualities of its citizenry.

Has Israel demonstrated moral leadership? In many ways, yes. No other small state has brought in millions of refugees, most recently over forty thousand black Ethiopian Jews and more than a million former Soviet Jews, providing sanctuary to persecuted and poverty stricken people from around the globe. No other small state has displayed the cultural vitality of Israel or provided such ambitious and selfless technical assistance to the poor nations of the world-especially those in Africa. No other small society has tapped the springs of science and technology for the common good, as has Israel. No other developing nation has reclaimed the desert for agriculture and committed so much of its limited resources to social welfare. None has maintained such extensive democratic institutions, free speech and free press, in the face of persistent warfare and terrorism.

But there is another side to the ledger, too. Like every other nation, including our own, Israel faces vexing social and moral problems. This side includes the failure to heal the "ethnic" rift between Ashkenazim and Sephardim; the second class citizenship of Israeli Arabs who are barred from the military and from a fair share of Israeli health, education, and housing benefits; the continued discrimination against non-Orthodox Jews; the infringements on the human rights of Palestinians living in the occupied territories; the failure to provide full equality for women; a variety of economic injustices, exacerbated by the floods of new immigrants seeking jobs and housing in the Jewish state**;** the inferior education that many Ethiopian children are receiving; and, above all, a failure to achieve a comprehensive peace with its Arab neighbors. Will a dramatic improvement in this last area allow Israel to better address its domestic challenges or will those problems be exacerbated once the outside threats, which allowed Israelis to put aside domestic differences, are alleviated?

(Vorspan and Saperstein. *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time*. UAHC Press.)

Discussion Questions

How would you respond to the question posed by the last sentence of the text?

Should Israel be treated as every other nation in the world? Explain.

What lessons can the United States offer Israel in addressing its social challenges?

VI. Israel the Ideal

The following is taken from the text of the Proclamation (Declaration of Independence) of the State of Israel:

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world. Exiled from Palestine, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom.

Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their Statehood. . . .

In the year 1897, the First Zionist Congress, inspired by Theodore Herzl's vision of the Jewish State, proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national revival in their own country.

This right was acknowledged by the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, and reaffirmed by the mandate of the League of Nations which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their national homeland. . . .

On November 29 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution for the establishment of an independent Jewish State in Palestine and called upon inhabitants of the country to take such steps as may be necessary on their part to put the plan into effect. . . .

The state of Israel will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion, will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants… will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed or sex, will guarantee

freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture: will safeguard the sanctity and inviolability of the shrines and Holy Places of all religions: and will dedicate itself to the Charter of the United Nations.

With trust in the Rock of Israel, we set our hand to this Declaration, at this session of the Provisional State Council, in the City of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the fifth of Iyar, 5708, the fourteenth of May 1948.

There is no Constitution in Israel, rather a system of Basic Laws. The Declaration is used at times by courts in Israel to judge the basic fairness of laws that are being appealed. What do you think of Israel's Declaration of Independence? How is it similar or different from your understanding of the U.S. Declaration of Independence or Constitution?

Session Seven:
TOWARD OUR FUTURE

Overview: In the past six sessions, we have had the opportunity to engage in wide-ranging discussions about our fears and hopes, our common values, and our sacred texts. Now, we assess what we have learned about ourselves and about our dialogue partners. From this point, we also begin to plan for opportunities to work together for common good and learn from each other about what drives us to do good in the world.

I. Reflections and Definitions

A. Commonalities and Uniqueness

Based upon the past six sessions, can we now define ourselves better as Jews and Christians? Compare the similarities and the differences. What are the unique elements of each group?

B. Our Learning About Each Other

Make up 3" x 5" cards listing separately the two most important things you learned about your own faith and the two most important things you learned about the other's faith (4 cards per person).

On separate sides of the room, place all the cards Jews wrote about themselves interspersed with the cards that the Christians wrote about the Jews. On the opposite wall, place all the cards that Christians wrote about themselves and the cards that Jews wrote about the Christians. Read each group together out loud.

Is there a group consensus that a reasonable set of facts and impressions are represented? Are the members of that group satisfied that they have been fairly represented? If not, what changes must be made for an accurate picture to emerge?

C. Truth Between Christians and Jews

Looking back on our discussions about the Ten Commandments, we understand that the commandment "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" reflects one of the central goals of this dialogue program: to confront the truth and falsity we share about each other.

How has this program changed your opinions of your own faith and of your dialogue partners' faith? How has it reinforced beliefs you already held?

II. Plans for Further Study

Dialogue is an essential foundation of any good relationship. But those who work in the field of interreligious and intergroup relations frequently suggest that a deeper sense of trust will emerge when groups go beyond talk and work together in common endeavors. Plans should be drawn up to meet again in order to undertake a social justice / social action project. The most important aspect of the action plan should be reserving time to look at Jewish and Christian texts that describe the action undertaken. *Thinking and Working Together: Study and Action Suggestions for Jewish and Christian Congregations*, published in 1993 by the Presbyterian Church USA, the National Council of Churches of Christ of the USA, and the UAHC might be used as a basis for future projects.

III. Video: Mending Relationships

A. Show video

B. Evolving Christian Views

In the past four decades, many Christians have radically changed their views about Jews and Judaism, which were based upon a centuries old way of reading Christian Scripture.

> The rabbis did make distinctions between Jews and Gentiles as a whole, and there are ample citations that reflect a negative view of the non-Jew. The picture that emerges from a comprehensive examination of Jewish views of the other, however, is one of a complicated relationship marked by a tension between the recognition of all humanity on the one hand and self-pride and xenophobia on the other. . . . Historical circumstances have also determined Jewish views of, and behavior towards, others. Christianity was the dominant political social force in Europe and other parts of the world for much of the last 2,000 years . . . [which] enabled the church to use the power of government to further its theological goals. This fact had particularly tragic ramifications for the Jews. In comparison . . . whatever potential there may be in Judaism for denigration and oppression of others was kept in check by its powerlessness.
>
> (Pessah, Meyers and Leighton. "How do Jews and Christians Read the Bible?" *Irreconcilable Differences?* Ed. Sandmel, Catalano, and Leighton.)

How can we recognize the legitimacy of alternative interpretations and spiritual paths without suggesting that "every interpretation is a subjective opinion, and therefore anything goes" (Pessah 72)?

> During his second stay on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32-34), Moses asks for a full disclosure of God's Glory, or Presence. He is told that this is impossible; no human can realize this goal. While humans can recognize God's Graciousness, they are told, "You cannot see My face, for humans cannot see Me and live." Moses is assured by God, "You will see My back, but My face will not be seen."

We are being taught that the highest spiritual moment does not lead to any absolute knowledge. Encounter with the Absolute is overwhelming and convincing but does not yield a whole description of the Divine. One sees God's back, but not God's face. Our attempt to know God remains incomplete. What was the Holy One's active response? . . .

Considering the possibility that a person may interpret his or her encounter with God wrongly, there is also the truth that even if one does so rightly, the experience and words are at best incomplete, finite and partial. The mysterious, infinite God can never be fully comprehended, but His goodness can be realized, and not from [only] one perspective but from an infinite number.

Human faith communities are built around the gracious moments in which heaven and earth meet. To each community its event and its articulation into living religiously through the ages is precious, sacred. There is much, therefore, that differentiates religions one from the other: event and interpretation, historical conditions and experiences, sacred literature, language and culture.

Each one of these perspectives can be a real apprehension of the divine, one of infinite ways in which God can be apprehended. This position treats seriously the particularities of each tradition, for the coherent meaning a community gives to the events and traditions to which it is heir is its truth. It has the authoritative support of its leaders and is acknowledged by the faithful. Through this truth they hope to get a glimpse of the divine and bring into their personal and communal lives the responsibilities of that vision. Theological humility, however, requires each faith community to remember that this is *its* truth. They are entitled to proclaim it from the rooftops and celebrate it with joyous devotion. But it remains theirs alone, a partial glimpse of the infinite.

One criterion for the truth of a religion might be theological humility, a recognition that the nature of any human understanding of the divine is finite. Must believers assert the superiority of their perspective over others? Must they believe that in order for their way to be true it must be true for all? Is it not enough for believers to rejoice, celebrate and witness within their own way?

Another criterion might be the lesson Moses learned on that first Yom Kippur day. One cannot comprehend God's ways and anticipate the manner in which God would be revealed, but we can recognize His goodness. In other words, wherever we find graciousness and compassion we are encountering the Presence, even if it be outside our own community. These criteria challenge us to avoid self-righteous criticism of other communities and to exercise humility, recognizing grace in others. Truly humble persons avoid arrogance and leave room for other perspectives; they learn from others, because they know they do not possess the whole truth, and they leave room for God's mysterious majesty to express itself in the world in ever new and unexpected ways.

(Howard Joseph, "The Challenges of Pluralism." Keynote address given at the International Council of Christians and Jews Colloquium in Montreal, 1988.)

Christian statements by both Protestant and Catholic leaders interpret the ninth commandment as a prohibition against perpetuating anti-Judaism. A Christian worship service celebrating Christian-Jewish Relations, published and distributed by the United Church of Canada, includes the following prayer:

…We acknowledge our part in a shameful history of prejudice:
we have used scripture to justify our sin;
we have perpetuated racism and violence;
we have been insensitive to suffering;
we have betrayed the Gospel call to love our neighbor.
Help us to reject all beliefs and practices that denigrate the integrity of Judaism and the faith of Jews….

B. Jews Rethinking Christian Relations

In a similar vein, the National Jewish Scholars Project released *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity,* a statement signed and endorsed by hundreds of Jewish leaders that called upon the Jewish community to deepen Christian-Jewish understanding.

> We believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honor Judaism. We believe that it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity….
> ….
> **A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.** An improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity. We respect Christianity as a faith that originated within Judaism and that still has significant contacts with it. We do not see it as an extension of Judaism. Only if we cherish our own traditions can we pursue this relationship with integrity.
>
> **Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.** Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God's, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world….
> (*Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity.*)

Looking ahead to the future, let us not forget how much we have to gain from renewed interfaith relations based on trust and understanding – and how much we have to lose if we miss the opportunity to build these bridges between our communities.

> Having wrestled with these lessons and clarified for each other what it is that gives us pain, Jews and Christians can begin to build on a more solid foundation an alliance for a common agenda of action in causes that require concerted effort by all people of good will: an alliance to ensure that human folly and greed will never destroy God's creation through nuclear catastrophe or a poisoning of our physical environment; to end once and for all the scandals of homelessness and hunger in an affluent society; to pursue the elusive goals of social justice and equal opportunity for every one of God's children; to affirm the claims of faith and the ideals of stewardship and accountability before the corrosive challenge of a militantly secular, hedonistic, self-indulgently acquisitive worldview.
> (Saperstein, *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations*. Trinity Press.)

Congregations have found that in moving forward from dialogue, some of the best interfaith programs involve working together on social service projects. This provides an opportunity for all of the participants to build better relations with one another, put their faith into action, and build the kind of trust and understanding that comes from common endeavor. Groups have found programs such as feeding the hungry, providing shelters to the homeless, engaging in literacy and tutoring programs, helping the environment, and working on projects like Habitat for Humanity are all excellent ways to move from dialogue to action.

There are wonderful models for such programs. A few examples of outstanding interfaith programs include the following Irving J. Fain award recipients (detailed information can be found at rac.org):

Interfaith Mitvzah Day, Temple Beth Zion, Buffalo, NY. The congregation worked with two other houses of worship and planned a volunteer day for their members.

Interfaith Program, Congregation B'nai Israel, Boca Raton, Fl. The Congregation reaches out to nine local churches through four events threaded together to create continuity, impact, and participation.

Interfaith Shelter, Temple Har Zion, Thornhill, ON. The congregation participated with a coalition of churches, community centers, and synagogues that provide a concrete, hands-on program to meet the needs of the homeless.

Shared Care, Temple Beth El, Boca Raton, Florida. Shared Care is an interfaith program of activities for the frail and elderly.

IV. Evaluation

Fill out the dialogue evaluation forms and give suggestions for improving the curriculum, "Open Doors, Open Minds."

What did you enjoy most / least about this program?
What would you have done differently?
Has this program sparked an interest in future dialogue opportunities?

Open Doors, Open Minds
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Open Door, Open Minds Evaluation

Names of participating congregations:

How did you use this material?

For each of the sessions what did you find most useful? What would you have changed?

Session One

Session Two

Session Three

Session Four

Session Five

Session Six

Session Seven

What suggestions would you have for another congregation using this material as part of a Jewish-Christian dialogue?

Please send this completed evaluation to: Open Door, Open Minds Evaluation
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Open Doors, Open Minds was prepared jointly by the Commission on Interreligious Affairs of Reform Judaism and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center, and Mark J. Pelavin, Director of the Commission on Interreligious Affairs, served as project coordinators. We are grateful to the following for their indispensable assistance: Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor; the entire staff of the Religious Action Center, especially Beth Kalisch, Rabbi Michael Namath, David Segal, Barbara Weinstein, and Daphne Price; Judith Hertz and Rabbi Michael Signer, co-chairs of the Commission on Interreligious Affairs; Dr. Philip Cunningham, Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning; Dr. Eugene Fisher, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Dr. Frank Sherman, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Dr. Jay Rock, Presbyterian Church-USA; Rev. Betty Gamble, United Methodist Church; Professor Marc Saperstein, The George Washington University; Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, National Council of Synagogues; Rabbi Charles Arian, Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies; Dr. Steven Fraade, Yale University; Rabbi David Sandmel, CCAR Task Force on Interreligious Affairs.