

Building Bridges Between the Faiths

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

Copyright © 2012 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

"Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity." (Psalm 133:1)

Why burn bridges when they can be built? Why debate on what we disagree instead of dialogue about what we do agree? Why confront with prejudice when instead we can in good faith expand education and understanding? If those who claim to love God truly desire to study the Divine Word, then why not let us do so together?

Do we have the courage to look at issues honestly, however uncomfortable? Can we look at long-held beliefs and review them in light of new (and some not-so-new) information? Or are we just destined to rant and rage at one another until finally violence spills out, and we "glorify" God's Name with another depraved bloodbath of racism, hatred, and evil?

I believe that this last scenario can and must be avoided, therefore I am going to do my share to stop it now, before it ever arises to happen again.

For close to two thousand years Christianity has been on the theological attack against the religion of Judaism. For its part, it did not take too long for Judaism to rise-up and to offer its own theological counterattacks. Let the scholars argue about which side started the conflict. Both sides turned to scripture, legend and other sources, that each proclaim to be accurate and unimpeachable, in order to validate and solidify their claims. Unfortunately, what has developed are closed loops of logic which make sense to the respective believers, but absolutely no sense to anyone else. Thus honest and sincere dialogue becomes impossible.

The closed loop of logic rationale goes something like this. *"My way is the right way, my sources are the right sources, so, whatever they say is what's right. If your way does not agree with my way, then your way is obviously wrong! And the proof for this is that my sources, which are always right, say that you are wrong. Thus, this proves that you are wrong, period!"*

One claims that their sources are correct simply because one's sources says so, and that's the end of the story. If this is indeed the case, then we are left with all too many conflicting "sources," none of which fully agree with one another. No one can ever come close to truth, and thus to the true Word of God, with such an arrogant closed mind.

Peoples of all walks of life have always had different belief systems. There is no one provable true religion, in spite of whatever individuals of each faith might say. Even within

individual religions, there are always differences. Which of the many paths in Judaism is the correct one? Which of the many Christian beliefs is the right one?

To argue points of doctrine, creeds, and beliefs can only lead to one inevitable conclusion, and this is division, strife, and eventual conflict. In my opinion, these are the antithesis of the Word of God, regardless of how it is viewed. I believe that such conflicts disgrace His holy Name, and certainly do not honor it.

We all have our different faiths. Faith is a matter of the heart, and not of the head! Throughout the Jewish scriptures God continuously commands that His Word be placed upon our hearts (Deut. 6:6). Nowhere is there mention of placing the Word in our minds!

God knows far better than do we mortal humans how limited is human intellectual capacity. God knows that our thoughts are all blemished as a result what the Bible calls “eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil.” As a result, all knowledge is blemished, and no one can intellectually conclude the absolute truth about God.

But what we can do, and all of us can do equally, is to follow God's Word with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our might. When we read God's Word, we find that we are instructed to follow a code that leads towards righteous behavior and moral goodness towards our fellow human beings. This code of moral conduct is generally agreed to and embraced by all. It is our greater common factor!

We all argue about what is in our clouded minds. Yet, there should never be any argument over what is in a contrite and open heart! And this is what unites us and makes us strong. This, in my opinion, is what is most pleasing in the Eyes of Heaven, that all of us, the children of God learn to live together in peace, in spite of our differences. Together, we fulfill the great commandment to “love our neighbors, as ourselves.” Together we live by, “what we ourselves do not want done to us, we do not do to another.”

God knows how we human beings cannot fathom all intellectual truths. Many scriptural teachings are called mysteries just for this reason. This is why we are never instructed to draw absolute and ultimate conclusions about things which we can never prove either right or wrong. This is why we have our faiths. Faith is a matter of the heart, not the mind! When we follow God in our hearts, we find Him there waiting for us. The righteous live by faith and faith guides us to righteous action. Faith and righteous action are two sides of the same coin.

When we follow our thoughts and minds, paying no attention to our hearts, we find waiting there Satan, the Devil, the lord of all controversy, strife and division. For me personally, I cannot walk this path. I will not argue faith, I will not argue doctrine, I will not argue sacred beliefs. I am willing to discuss and explore the differences that I may have with any other, but not in a spirit of conflict and confrontation.

Enough with divisions! Can't we see that what unites us will make us strong, and what divides us will make us all weak, and subject to attack from those who seek to harm us all.

For a long time I have desired to write an Orthodox Jewish commentary to the Christian Bible. I wanted to attempt to look at long-lost Jewish writings and to restore to them some semblance of Jewish insights. I have no intention of defending controversial Rabbinic teachings. I acknowledge upfront that the vast majority of Jewish/Talmudic references to Yeshu are clearly non-historical.

I want to write about how I, as a practicing Orthodox rabbi view and understand the Jewish authors of the Jewish literature that later became the Gospels of the Christian Bible. I believe I have keen insights into matters that may open up many venues of discussion that can help build the bridges of which I speak. Yet, I have not yet embarked on this course of writing.

The reason I have not done so is because I have been threatened by some anonymous emails and others that my endeavors are most unwelcome and would be interpreted as a hostile attack upon Christian beliefs.

I found a consensus of these few but strongly worded emails to be saying that no matter what I as an Orthodox rabbi write, I will always be wrong, and I will always be offensive, as long as I do not adopt the faith of my attackers.

So, what am I to do? I want so much to build bridges, yet, there are those out there who intend to interpret my every attempt as an excuse to fire up the flames of division and confrontation.

How can one speak when the other not only does not want to hear, but that they also deny you the right to speak, threatening you if you do?

So, I sit on some very good ideas and I wait. I pray that God in His infinite wisdom might guide me how best to perform a great service to many, without inciting the few who apparently always seek to create division and harm.

I invite any of my readers who wish to convey any constructive comments to please do so.