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Meylekh Viswanath is a professor of finance at Pace University. In addition to his interest in economic systems, he is also a student of languages and cultures. This article appears in issue 17 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Racism and Chosenness: What It Means to Be a Light unto the Nations

By Meylekh Viswanath[1]

One Shabbat, more than two years ago, a respected Israeli Rosh Yeshiva and a frequent visitor to our synagogue gave a speech from our shul pulpit in which he made some racist, demonizing remarks about Arabs. I was not entirely surprised because his remarks on previous occasions could not exactly be termed representative of a universalistic approach to Judaism, to say the least. Still, to hear him explicitly mouth racist rhetoric—particularly from our synagogue pulpit—shocked me. But what shocked me even more was that his remarks didn't seem to bother most of the congregants. To be fair, he had spoken in Hebrew and even though the Hebrew he uses is fairly simple and easy-to-understand, many people in the audience probably were not paying attention. But many were; and they found all sorts of ways of excusing this rabbi's words or explaining them away. At least one other person actually excoriated me vehemently for daring to criticize the rabbi's remarks. Of course, close-knit groups often exhibit hostile attitudes toward other groups with whom they are in competition, either for land, material resources, or even simply with respect to ideology. I suppose I thought the group I belonged to was special, that my friends were special; others might exhibit such behavior, but not my group, not my synagogue. I was clearly wrong! And so this whole business got me thinking. In this article, I would like to offer my ideas on why some people exhibit such enmity toward people of other groups, and why I think such a posture is contrary to the very essence of Judaism. I will try to demonstrate that the mission of the Jews is, in fact, to teach the world to be tolerant and accepting of strangers. Other groups, I will argue, have other missions assigned to them by God; but the Jews, because of their history, are uniquely positioned to be a role model for compassion and empathy toward strangers.

A Theory of the Origins of Racist Behavior

Why do people preach hatred against other peoples? Against other nations? I can understand why a person might feel hatred toward another individual who has done something bad to him. Even in such a

case, the Torah requires us not to exact revenge.[2] But in any case, one would not find it rational for such a person to feel hatred toward the person's son or brother or friend. And if this is so, it would certainly not make any sense to hate the entire nation or group of origin of this person. So then why do we have the Ku Klux Klan? Why do we have intertribal mass killings? Why do we have mass violence in Sri Lanka against the Tamils and in Myanmar against Muslims—both nominally Buddhist nations, both purporting to follow the precepts of the Buddha, the one who taught compassion toward all beings, the one who gave up the possibility of nirvana in order to stay and bring his fellow-beings to enlightenment out of compassion?

I think such behavior might originate in an initial act of irrational injury or violence that may be entirely out of the blue; or it may be an excessively extreme reaction to something that the victim might have said or done; or maybe even due to a misunderstanding. The target of an injury cannot understand, cannot accept that such an act might have been intentionally directed toward him or her, because to consider such a possibility is to consider the possibility that s/he herself or himself might have some shortcoming, might have done something bad. The possibility that the violence might have been irrational, i.e., without any understandable cause is even more difficult for people to accept, because that is so close to the notion that there is no order in the universe. As a result, such an offense might be rationalized as being prompted by antipathy against the target's group, which is then followed by a reactionary antipathy toward the assailant's group.

As we will see later, there is a rational tendency for groups to form as a way of reducing the free-rider problem. A very important characteristic of a group is group-stability and group-cohesion. This can be achieved in two ways: creating bonds between in-group members and creating distinctions and distance between groups. Such pre-existing between-group distance reinforces this creation of ill-feeling toward the other on the basis of his/her group affiliation. But the point I want to make is that individual experiences have an important part to play in the generation and maintenance of these anti-other group feelings, whether we term them racism or not. And if racism is an understandable result of individual experiences, then it is also easy to understand why the target of an unfortunate incident of violence or injury would want others to share his/her feelings. A feeling that is shared is a feeling that is validated. The unfortunate result of the sharing of such negative feelings toward other groups is that racist ideologies are taught to children and young people who, having learned such negativity at a young age, incorporate it into their world-view. Ideas learned at a young age are essential foundations of the individual's epistemological system and hence are difficult to remove later on.

If we wish to eliminate racism, it is important to teach tolerance to young people. It is equally important to not allow people who have been hurt to propagate their hostility toward other people. The Jewish community, unfortunately, has been the target of a lot of hate. The Holocaust is still fresh in our group-memory, and most of us know people who have suffered during the Holocaust and after the Holocaust, whether in Eastern Europe, in Germany or in the Middle East. It is completely understandable that such people have negative feelings toward Germans, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Arabs, Muslims or any of the other groups to which their assailants might have belonged. Some of these people have overcome their experiences and have come to teach love and tolerance even toward their assailant-groups.[3] Unfortunately, many other people have been pushed by their experiences into this cycle of the perpetuation of fear, mistrust, doubt, suspicion and violence. The purveyors of such negative sentiments are not necessarily fringe elements in our society; they are all too often, unfortunately, community leaders and even rabbis and yeshiva-teachers.

The Torah sometimes does mandate hatred against an entire ethnic group. For example, we are commanded to remember what the Amalekites did to us and to obliterate their name from under the Heavens.[4] But, as the Abarbanel says, Amalek's actions were directed against the weak and the feeble; they were committed out of baseless hatred and were perpetrated in a cowardly and furtive manner.[5] Such actions and ideologies are what we condemn in remembering Amalek. Similar, we condemn the Nazis, a group whose ideology was racist, eugenic and genocidal, completely lacking in

compassion toward the weak and infirm. However, it would be a mistake to declare and to teach hatred and mistrust toward Germans as a group, toward Arabs and Muslims as a group. There may be hate-filled and hateful Germans and Muslims. But Germans and Muslims do not choose to be born into their groups; and, furthermore, these groups are not defined by an ideology of hate.[6] Hence, it would be a denial of the positive traits of the nation of Abraham to declare of Palestinians, as a group, "*Yemmakh shemam*!" "May their name be blotted out!" Nevertheless, I have heard such racist preaching from pulpits in our own synagogues; I have heard of such declarations by Jewish day-school rebbes in our own communities. This kind of racist behavior is, frankly, perplexing to me, given that not so long ago Jews were on the receiving end of these attacks and diatribes. So even if we can understand the origins of such hate and even if we sympathize with the experiences that gave rise to this hate, we have an obligation to reject it and to speak out against it.
Most recently we heard R. Herschel Schachter, a respected and learned rosh yeshiva at the centrist Orthodox Yeshiva University, referring to African-Americans pejoratively as *shvartses*.[7] While Yeshiva University did put out a press release stating that "The recent use of a derogatory racial term and negative characterizations of African-Americans and Muslims, by a member of the faculty, are inappropriate, offensive ...," none of our local Orthodox community rabbis, to my knowledge, used the opportunity to condemn the use of derogatory terms.[8] Neither did R. Schachter, himself, apologize for his remarks.[9] The point is not that R. Schachter is a bad person;[10] rather, given R. Schachter's prominence and the likelihood of ordinary people learning from him, it is essential that rabbis speak out against the use of such derogatory expressions. When the Israeli rabbi with whom I started this article spoke in our shul, I am happy to report that our rabbi gave a derasha the following Shabbat distancing himself and our shul from such vitriol. On the other hand, this rabbi was once again given an opportunity to speak in our synagogue a couple of years later; worse, shul members were encouraged to contribute to his yeshiva. So from my point of view, we still have a long way to go in recognizing and redressing racist attitudes.

But it's not only rabbis and rebbes that have such anti-other views. Many ordinary Jews have highly biased views of non-Jews; my feeling is that such views have been inherited from their parents and grandparents who went through the Holocaust. I think it is important to make a distinction between *understanding* why somebody might have negative views of Eastern European gentiles and *allowing* that understanding to color one's own views of gentiles. I personally, though not of Eastern European extraction, have been on both sides of the fence. Many of my relatives in India have/had anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews, partly inherited from the English/Americans passing through India and partly due to the pro-Arab stance that the Indian government had for a long-time.[11] Many Hindu Indians have negatives attitudes toward Muslims as a group and against lower-caste Hindus; similarly Muslims think of Hindus as kaffirs—"idolators and polytheists," and educated Muslims are contemptuous of the inequality of the Hindu caste system."[12]

On the other hand, in the US, I have personally been on the receiving end of some unpleasant experiences both from Jews and from non-Jews, because of my skin color and my geographical origin. For example, many years ago, in Chicago, I sat down next to an elderly white lady on a city bus, whereupon she promptly got up and moved elsewhere—even though there was more than enough room for both of us on the seat. I understood that the lady might have inherited her attitudes from her upbringing and didn't hold it against her, especially given her advanced age, but I was certainly saddened by her action. Another time, I encountered a rather hostile reception while eating dinner with a white girlfriend at a restaurant in a Lithuanian neighborhood on the south side of Chicago.

I also know personally how easy it is to fall into racist behavior. I remember how at one time, I myself treated a Gideon New Testament with less than complete respect, and my children called me out on my behavior. I realized that I was wrong, that I had violated the very precepts that I had taught my children to follow. The point I want to make is that we have to be on our guard, lest we fall into such behavior. Our children should be taught that speech and behavior disrespectful of ethnic and religious groups is

not tolerated, even when it emanates from individuals we teach our children to respect. The Orthodox community has experienced several instances of sexual molestation by rabbis and other people respected in the community; even if we, as a community, have not yet taken sufficiently strong steps to prevent the recurrence of such behavior, we all agree that it is unacceptable. We need to take a similar stance against racist speech and behavior.

It has been suggested that part of the reason that racist attitudes exist in the Jewish community is the doctrine of the chosen people. I don't know if I agree entirely with this theory, because other communities without such explicit chosenness doctrines also exhibit racist attitudes. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it is easier for Jews to justify racist attitudes by casting such beliefs in the context of the doctrine of chosenness. I have long been bothered by this doctrine. It seems to go counter to the notion of monotheism.[13] Can God really have created a whole world with so many creatures in it and then decided that He's really only interested in a small part of this humanity? And not just that He gives preference to this small part of humanity, but that He's going to do so simply on a whim. Of course, we all know the problems of applying human logic and rationality to God and the question of whether that restricts Him. Nevertheless, we do believe in a just God—as Abraham asks in Genesis 18:25, "Will the Judge of the entire earth not perform justice?" Clearly, this is a human conception of justice, which the Torah accepts. Hence, if God wants us to "walk in His ways," and to walk with Him, [14] it has to be a walking that makes sense to us. So I think my question is a good question—can God really play favorites in such a whimsical way?[15]

Lo titgodedu: why do we have divisions in humanity?

I will come back to the question of the special nature of one group—the Jewish nation; but before I do that, I want to ask a more fundamental question—why do we have groups at all? Why do we have to divide people into Jews, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, etc.? Or into Americans, Italians, Chinese, Albanians? Why do we need to separate people from each other in such ways? There are people who call themselves Ethical Humanists. Such people focus on the common experience of human beings. The International Humanist and Ethical Union, on its website, describes Ethical Humanism as "acceptance of responsibility for human life in the world" and "affirms the unity of man and a common responsibility of all men for all men." Judaism, on the other hand, while not denying the unity of man, insists of dividing people as Jews and non-Jews; Muslims, as well, talk about believers and non-believers, about *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*. I believe there is a rational basis for the establishment of such groupings and I think it goes back to the question of the Prisoner's Dilemma.[16] The Prisoner's Dilemma can be complicated, but it can be explained very simply with reference to the problem of the commons. Suppose a hundred shepherds own a piece of grassland in common. Overgrazing this plot could be disastrous in terms of the long-term productivity of the plot; on the other hand, in the short-term, each individual shepherd who uses more than his proportional share of the grass benefits individually. Individual self-interest will lead to overgrazing and long-term loss for all of the shepherds; the only way to resolve this problem is cooperation. However, cooperation by itself, while retaining self-interest as the basis of individual actions can be expensive and sometimes infeasible because of the need to monitor everybody's actions.

This is the situation that mankind faces in many realms; in the case of the environment, of course, but also in almost every organization. Most organizations work on the basis of teamwork and collegiality. Most societies work on this basis, as well. For example, the American political system would collapse if people decided not to vote, a decision which would be rational for many people on a pure self-interest basis. Most of us depend on our neighbors' help and good intentions—to borrow a cup of sugar, to make sure that nobody breaks into our houses while we're away, to babysit our children, to keep an extra key handy; social interactions would break down entirely under pure self-interest. The

reason that such social systems work is that we have internalized benefits and costs that accrue to our neighbors. And the way in which such internalization is accomplished is manifold—partly it is biological, as for example when a parent is conditioned to worry about his/her children; partly it is social and religious—we internalize certain rules of ethics and religious morality, so that when we do something to hurt our neighbor, we end up hurting ourselves psychically to some extent. As should be obvious, the success of this system depends upon the subjective belief that the other is important to our own well-being. Believing that an all-powerful entity requires this, obviously makes it easier to believe in these ethical rules and thus contributes to the well-being of everybody participating in the system. However, simple belief manipulation of this sort will not, in and of itself, succeed. We also need to see the benefits of the system, now and then. The benefits of such cooperation are obvious, the smaller the group. Most of us would agree that inter-family cooperation is valuable and we act on this basis with very little prompting. Most of us would probably also agree that international cooperation is much more difficult. Why should I donate money to the Indonesian family that suffers in a tsunami, half a world away? Why should it matter to me that Muslim Rohingyas are being killed by their Buddhist compatriots in Myanmar? It is much more difficult to identify with people that are far away and very different from us. Nevertheless, ignoring the fact that our common survival depends on cooperation is foolhardy. The point is that tension between nearby ties and faraway ties, between centripetal tendencies and centrifugal tendencies, is something that we all live with, every day.

Religion is a way to create and strengthen ties between individuals, particularly where the benefits of such ties are not obvious. Thus, when the Qur'an says: "You [Muslims] are the best *umma* (nation) brought out for Mankind,"[17] it extends social bonds from a familial level, from a neighborhood level to the level of all believers. Islamic theologians extended this to a broader category called "ahl al-kitab" or people of the book, which used to refer to Jews and Christians, as well. Later on, this would be extended to other groups, including Zoroastrians and Hindus, on the basis of their possessing a holy book. Similarly, in Judaism, we have the sequentially expansive notions of family, tribe, Jew, ger-toshav (non-idolatrous resident alien), Noahide, non-idolater, man created in the image of God. Again, in the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metsia 71a), we learn: "R. Joseph learnt: If you lend money to any of my people that are poor with you: [this teaches, if the choice lies between] a Jew and a non-Jew, a Jew has preference; the poor or the rich, the poor takes precedence; your poor [i.e. your relatives] and the [general] poor of your town, your poor come first; the poor of your city and the poor of another town the poor of your own town have prior rights."[18] The problem is that sometimes, the establishment and strengthening of the narrower groupings emphasizes the otherness of the broader groupings. Thus, the verse quoted earlier from the Qur'an continues—"and if the followers of the Book had believed it would have been better for them; of them (some) are believers and most of them are transgressors." Similarly in Judaism, many of the ethical commandments are restricted in their application to Jewish behavior toward other Jews.[19]

In other words, while religion is an effective way to partially resolve the Prisoner's Dilemma problem, it does not do away with the need for us to work on our ethical obligations toward the distant "other." Religious systems, therefore, have more expansive principle-based ethical systems that go beyond specific rule-based systems. And for this to work, we have to strive at the individual level.[20]I will have more to say on this score, but at this time, it is appropriate to re-introduce the question of the role that the Jewish people play in humanity.

Chosen People(s)

As we noted above, the notion of chosenness seems to be a violation of this broader universalistic theme. In order to resolve this seeming contradiction, we have to ask what it means for the Jewish nation to be *chosen*. There are two ways in which this question can be answered. Most people think of it in terms of God's choosing the Jewish people to the exclusion of all other peoples, God's having a

special relationship with Israel, with Israel being a light to other nations, as it says in Isaiah (42:6) “I am the Lord; I called you with righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations.”

However there is nothing in this that is necessarily exclusive. The Qur’an, in the fifth chapter, in the sura of al-Ma’idah (The Spread Table or ShulkhanArukh, as it were), in verse 7, refers to a covenant of God with Muslims: “And call in remembrance the favor of Allah unto you, and His covenant, which He ratified with you, when ye said: "We hear and we obey": And fear Allah, for Allah knoweth well the secrets of your hearts.”[21] And, at the last Supper, Jesus says to his disciples, in Luke’s wording (22:20), “And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” So the followers of all the Abrahamic religions, at least, believe that they have a covenant with God. And, in fact, many other ethnic and religious groups also have similar beliefs.

Now, those Jews who believe in the exclusivity of God’s covenant with the nation of Israel can, of course, simply reject these other verses. After all, these are not Biblical verses, and can be dismissed as figments of the imagination. But even if these texts are not divinely inspired, the fact of the matter is that there probably are at least a billion non-Jews who believe that they have a special relationship with God. And, as one of my rabbis use to say “Fifty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong!”[22]At the very least, belief in such a covenant leads these peoples to live moral lives. In the words of the Rambam, “All those words of Jesus of Nazareth and of this Ishmaelite [i.e., Muhammad] who arose after him are only to make straight the path for the messianic king and to prepare the whole world to serve the Lord together. As it is said: 'For then I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech so that all of them shall call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord' (Zephaniah 3:9).”[23] I find it difficult to believe that God has allowed so many people to be misguided on such an important tenet of their existence.
My answer to this conundrum is to suggest that the chosenness of the Jews is not necessarily exclusive. There is no logical reason why chosenness has to be exclusive. There is nothing in Isaiah that says that if Israel is a light unto the nations, then the other nations cannot be a light unto Israel. Of course, the Talmud does teach that God’s relationship with Israel is special and that He does not have a similar relationship to other peoples.[24] Similarly, Islam and Christianity also claim exclusivity. I think such claims to exclusivity can be dealt with in two ways. One is that, from a functional point of view, it makes sense for each group to think of itself as having a special and unique relationship with God. This makes each group likely to work harder to fulfill God’s commandments; and most religions, if not all, have a lot of commandments/beliefs in common that advance the common weal. Second, God is not limited, as human beings are; the Talmud often contrasts the King of Kings with the more limited “king of flesh-and-blood.”[25] Human beings might be limited; a human being would find it difficult to have a very special relationship with more than one person. Even a mother is likely to find herself playing favorites with one particular child, at least in her own mind. However, God is not limited in this way; God can have very many special relationships. R. AdinSteinsaltz put it like this: “(E)ach of us has a personal relationship with God. My relationship is always personal and private; precisely because He is so infinite and unlimited, He relates personally and specifically to me. It always is a one-to-one relationship, when I am by myself as well as when I am in a crowd; somehow we are always alone together.”[26] So if this is true for every individual, can this not be true of every nation?

While this rings true on a philosophical level, we would also like to make sense of this on a logical level, on a level that we can relate to, more easily, as human beings. Here is the conclusion that I have come to—God has entrusted each nation with a special mission. By nation, I don’t necessarily mean an ethnic group; I mean simply any group that has shared values and beliefs, and whose members believe that they have a closer tie to members of their group than to non-members. And if this is so, each nation has to try and understand what its mission might be. It’s not very easy for an outsider to figure out what a particular clan’s mission might be. But here are some possibilities. Chinese culture exalts

filial piety; devotion to one's parents ranks very high on their system of moral values. God may have chosen the Chinese people to emphasize the importance of love for one's parents and one's ancestors. Hindu philosophy teach the unity of all existence; the system of Vedanta that is expounded in the Upanishads is extremely profound and is very helpful in understanding the constant contradictions that we experience in our daily life between finiteness and infinity. God may have chosen the Hindus to help the nations understand how the finiteness of the material world is consistent with His infinity. The Greek nation taught the world the importance of reason. Science in the Western world flowered after the introduction of Greek ideas. These are some suggestions that I have regarding the divine missions of various nations, based on what I know about them. Note that I am not saying that these nations have a monopoly on the knowledge or characteristics that I attribute to them as their specialty. All I am saying is that these nations have cultures where these characteristics have been developed to a much greater degree than in other cultures. But what I am really interested in, is the unique mission that I think God has for the Jews—that mission which makes them a chosen people.

The Jews as a Chosen People

The most remarkable thing about the Jews almost from their beginnings as a people is that they are peripatetic. The family of Jacob went down from Israel to Egypt; then they came back to Israel after a couple of centuries, following forty years of desert peregrinations. Then they stayed put for a while, but then—this time involuntarily—some of them were exiled to Babylonia, and others into an exile so permanent, we still don't know where they are.[27] Later on they came back to the land, but were once again exiled after the war with the Romans, this time to locations all over the world. And even then, they had to keep moving around. Britain exiled its Jews for several centuries, Spain and Portugal only recently rescinded the expulsion of the Jews, and, while the middle of the 20th century saw the establishment of the State of Israel, it also saw the expulsion of the Jews from Middle Eastern lands where they had been for centuries. Why would the Jews be condemned to such a wandering existence? Since this wandering pre-dates the death of Jesus, the Christian explanation is not very satisfying. And without that particular religious perspective to come to the rescue,[28] we have no real explanation for why God would have visited such a unique fate on one people. My answer is that this is part of the raison d'etre of the Jewish people.

As we noted above, in order to transcend the centrifugal tendencies of the Prisoner's Dilemma, people have to live in groups, so that the urge for group members to help each other can be nurtured. However, when a group becomes too large, the feeling of membership in a group is lost because it's no longer sufficiently close-knit. The bonds are too loose. So, the social solution to the Prisoner's Dilemma is the generation of many groups of people. At one time, these would have been tribes, more recently, they have been nations (at least in the Western world); at different times, they have been called different names and have taken different forms; let us call them simply clans. These relatively homogenous clans bound together by religion, language, food habits and a myriad of other characteristics create ties between their members. However, an unavoidable side-effect of this is a distancing between the members of one clan and those of another clan. As long as the clans do not intermingle then this emotional distancing doesn't matter as much. However, for various reasons and sometimes through accidents of history, clans come to live in proximity to each other; small clans live in the middle of other larger clans; and often members of one clan live in the midst of other clans. As a result, we need a way for these disparate groups to realize their interconnectedness; else inter-clan conflict would result in disastrous consequences for all clans. We need a way for people to understand that it is important to keep in mind the needs of individuals that do not belong to their clan.

We need a way for people in one clan to empathize with members of another clan. It is for this purpose, that the ideologies of each clan incorporate universalistic elements, in addition to the particularistic elements that they contain. However, stray sentences in law-books and religious texts are

not enough, people need living examples. In each civilization, there are living examples of such empathy; sometimes they are called saints, sometimes they are called mahatmas. These exemplars embody compassion for everybody—both within and without the clan. Jesus was one such being, the Buddha another; more recently, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi have been such examples. These examples work on the individual level and appeal as models to individuals.

What about at the national level? I believe that the Jews are an example of a nation that has been charged with showcasing the ideals of universal tolerance. I am not necessarily claiming that they have always done a good job of this, but their experience has crafted them to be such an example. The Jewish founding document is replete with such reminders. *Ki geyrim heyyitem be-erets mitsrayim* —"for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" is a phrase that is repeated over and over again. And a stranger shalt thou not oppress; for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 23:9). And a stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:20). And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt(Leviticus 19:34). Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt Deuteronomy 10:19). And it is not just that there are many such reminders. Rather, Leviticus 19:34 adds immediately afterward, "I am the Lord thy God." That is, care for strangers is a key element in the system of divine commandments to the Jews. The Jewish religion is an example of compassion, tolerance and empathy toward the stranger. As the Talmud says, the children of Abraham can be recognized because they are modest, merciful and full of loving-kindness.[29] I believe that their mercy and loving-kindness is commanded to be directed not only to Jews, but to all humanity.

The Jewish Bible and the rabbinic literature are vast; as the Mishna says in Pirkei Avot (5:24), *hafokh bah ve-hafokh bah d'kulah bah* "Turn it over and turn it over, for everything is within it." We can interpret it narrowly in a sectarian and particularistic way, or we can interpret it broadly and in a universalistic way. If we think of what the goal of the Jewish tradition, of the prophets and of the rabbis is, then I believe we will realize that Judaism is not simply a set of unfathomable laws, but that the message of Judaism is meant to bring us into harmony with the Universe and specifically with other living souls,[30] our fellow human beings.

[1] I want to acknowledge, at the very outset, that this is not a scholarly article. Rather, it is a personal appeal to my fellow Jews, a cri de coeur. I decided to write this article with R. Marc Angel's encouragement because I am very bothered by the hostility I see in the Jewish community around me, and particularly in the Orthodox community. Some may retort that other communities are also racist and hate-filled; that may very well be true. But, to me, it is beside the point. On the one hand, since I am an Orthodox Jew, it matters much more to me what happens in *my* house; on the other hand, others' being racist is not a justification for our being racist.

[2] Leviticus 19:18. The verse actually only prohibits the taking of revenge and the bearing of a grudge against other Jews. However, as the Sefer haHinukh explains the prohibition of taking revenge (prohibition 241), a man should realize that anything that happens to him, whether good or bad is ultimately from God; hence if somebody should inflict pain and suffering on him, it is because of his own sins. From this we see that even though technically the prohibition is only with respect to Jews, the logic of the prohibition applies to non-Jews as well. In fact, Prof. James Diamond has a fascinating analysis, where he claims that, at least according to Maimonides, the prohibitions of the Torah are simply minimum guidelines for human behavior (presentation at Congregation Ohab Zedek, North Riverdale on March 16th). What God wants is much broader, but for various reasons, he does not prohibit these extended actions outright. Prof. Diamond applies this with respect to slavery and argues that even though the Torah places stringent restrictions on the enslavement of a fellow-Jew, nevertheless, a Jew is bound by similar restrictions with respect to non-Jews, as well.

[3] I am thinking, for example, of Arnold Roth who established The Malki Foundation in memory of his daughter Malki, killed in a terrorist attack at a Sbarro's restaurant in Jerusalem in August 2011. The purpose of this Foundation is to help physically disabled children of all religions in Israel and Gaza. "We want the Malki Foundation to be the antithesis of terror," Mr. Roth has said.

[4]The rabbis agree that the actual tribe of Amalek can no longer be identified; the commandment continues to exist, nevertheless and we fulfill it in several ways, particularly in the reading of Parashat Zakhor; it is clearly a symbolic commemoration.
[5] Citation needed.
[6]I attended a couple of Muslim Friday afternoon *khutba* sermons, recently, and it was amazing to me, how similar the content of these sermons were to a Shabbat morning derasha.
[7] As a fluent speaker of Yiddish who uses it on a daily basis, I am well aware that the yiddish word for black and for blacks is shvartse, shvartses. If one were speaking in Yiddish, one would have few other options. However, in Jewish English, the word shvartse has a clear negative connotation. It is difficult to believe that R. Schachter, a posek who renders halakhic decisions and who is thus supposed to be aware of the social and environment, does not know this.
[8] The use of pejorative terms such as sheygets and shiktse/shiksa and goy is far from unknown in our community. Although the term goy is not necessarily pejorative, it is often used with such intent, cf. other terms such as goyishe kop. Sheygets and shiktse are, invariably, used as slurs.
[9] This is in contrast to other rabbis, who have apologized for errors of commission or judgment. For example, in 2003, R. MordechaiWillig, another rosh yeshiva at Yeshiva University apologized for mistakes in the handling of the Baruch Lanner case.
[10] In fact, even as I disagree with him on his use of such terms, I continue to believe that R. Schachter is a scholar from whom one can learn a lot; from whom I have learned a lot.
[11] Ironically enough, because of the nationalist Hindutva movement in India, many Hindus are now pro-Israel based on the notion that my enemy's enemy is my friend.
[12]Kana Mitra, "Exploring the Possibility of Hindu-Muslim Dialogue,", http://www.interfaithdialog.org/reading-room-main2menu-27/126-exploring-the-possibility-of-hindu-muslim-dialogue, viewed April 19, 2013.
[13] Some people have suggested that the religious doctrine taught in the Bible is monolatry, not monotheism, arguing that monotheism became accepted only during the Babylonian exile (see Robert Eisen, The Peace and Violence of Judaism, 2011, Oxford University Press, footnote 26). In a monolatrous system, there is one superior deity, but there could be other gods, as well. The superior Jewish God demands that his followers shun worship of any God other than Him, although other people might follow other gods. A chosenness doctrine is much easier to reconcile with monolatry, but as far as I am concerned, Judaism is a single religion, resting on the Bible, as expounded by the rabbis in the Talmuds. Hence the notion of chosenness is problematic, as I discuss further, below.
[14] Deuteronomy 28:9 "The Lord will establish you as His holy people as He swore to you, if you observe the commandments of the Lord, your God, and walk in His ways." Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord demands of you; but to do justice, to love loving-kindness, and to walk discreetly with your God."
[15] Consider the point that Robert Eisen makes in his book The Peace and Violence of Judaism (Oxford University Press 2011, p. 24) where he points out that God commands the annihilation of the Canaanites so that the Israelites will not be tempted by their idolatrous behavior! (See Deuteronomy 20:17:18) and Genocide in the cause of chosenness? I am not going to answer this question, here, and indeed Eisen discusses this at length, as have others. I just want to point out here that the question of Israel as the chosen people cannot be avoided.
[16] I have written about how the Bible deals with environmental problems as an approach to the resolution of Prisoner's Dilemma issues in "Examining the Biblical Perspective on the Environment in a Costly Contracting Framework," which appeared in Carmel Chiswick and Tikva Lehrer (eds.) , *Economics of Judaism*, Bar Ilan University Press, 2007. In that article, I also explain what this problem has to do with prisoners and why it is called the Prisoner's Dilemma.
[17] "You are the best of the nations raised up for (the benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and believe in Allah" (3:110; translation from http://corpus.quran.com).
[18]Translation from the Soncino edition. Similarly, the Tosefta on Gittin, chapter three, halakha 13: "A city in which there are Jews and gentiles, those in charge of the charities levy from both Jews and gentiles to maintain peace and disburse to the needy gentiles along with the needy Jews to maintain peace." This is also codified in halakha by R. Moses Isserles in the Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, 251:1.
[19]Such as the commandment to return lost objects.The Rambam in the Mishneh Torah, Laws of Theft and Lost Objects, Chapter 11, halakha 3, says: "It is permitted to keep the lost object of a gentile, as it is said (Deuteronomy 22:3): "[You are to return ...] the lost item of your brother." [And "your brother" implies a fellow Jew.] And one who returns such an item commits a transgression, because he is strengthening the hand of the wicked of the world." But he goes on to say "But if he returned it in order to sanctify the Name [of God], in order that they [the gentiles] should praise the Jews and know that they are trustworthy/faithful people, that is to be praised, and whenever the Name might be profaned, their lost objects are forbidden [to us] and we are obliged to return them." (Translation from http://www.kolel.org)
[20] One could say that this is really the entire message of this article.
[21] Translation from http://www.islamicity.com/quran/5.htm
[22] Apparently, according to many sources, a reference to the title of a hit song from the 1920s.
[23]See the article by Marc Shapiro, "Jewish Views on Islam," online at http://www.myjewishlearning.com/beliefs/Issues/Jews_and_Non-Jews/Attitudes_Toward_Non-Jews/Islam.shtml, viewed April 5, 2013

[24] Many Jewish commentators and halakhic authorities also believe that Judaism is superior and, according to many, the only acceptable religious system. For example, Shapiro says of the Rambam (in his *Jewish Views on Islam*), "He unequivocally accepts the talmudic view that any Gentile religious system is illicit and the only alternatives for Gentiles are conversion or observance of the Seven Laws of Noah which, by definition, exclude any other religious system [Laws of Kings 10:9]." According to most views, the Kuzari also teaches that Judaism is superior to other religions. The SeferhaKuzari is a very influential book, which was written in Arabic by R. Yehuda HaLevi in Spain in the 12th century.
[25] For example, Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zarah 11a, Talmud Yerushalmi, Berakhot 9:1, and Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh HaShanah1:3.
[26]http://www.thejewishweek.com/editorial_opinion/opinion/each_us_has_personal_relationship_god
[27] I refer to the ten lost tribes.
[28] Not the Jewish preferred solution, in any case.
[29]Yevamot 79a.
[30] Genesis 2:7, "And the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul." According to Rashi, the words "living souls" here refer to the fact that man has intelligence and can speak.