

JUDAISM (PART 4 OF 4): SO VERY SIMILAR; SO WHY NOT THE SAME?

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Description: The similarities and shared histories of Judaism and Islam.

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By: Aisha Stacey (© 2012 IslamReligion.com)

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In the three previous articles about the religion of Judaism we have learned first and foremost that Judaism and Islam have much in common. The political landscape of the 21st century seems to paint a picture of Jews and Muslims being mortal enemies but this is not the case. The two faiths share a history and at times have lived worked and cooperated with each other. Many Muslims wonder why Jews do not automatically see Islam as an extension of their own faith and thus embrace Islam wholeheartedly. The fact is many do, but the majority do not. In this final article we will continue to look at the similarities between the two faiths and briefly explore their historical interaction.



Judaism and Islam share a joint legacy of traditions. The two faiths share many of the same prophets, all acknowledging a common parent in Abraham. All ascribe similar attributes to God, including Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Forgiver. The two faiths believe God is both Omnipotent and Omniscient. The kinship of these faiths continues through moral values, including respect for life, respect for parents, giving charity, doing good, and avoiding evil. Even their beliefs about the final moments of humankind's existence are similar. Judaism and Islam share the tradition that if the trumpet to signal the end of time is blown and you are holding a seedling in your hand, you should plant it. There is considerable and continued physical, theological, and political overlap between the two faiths.

The Torah records Abraham as the ancestor of the Jews through his son Isaac, born to Sarah fulfilling a promise made in Genesis. In the Islamic tradition Prophet Muhammad is a descendant of Abraham's son Ishmael. Jewish tradition also equates the descendants of Ishmael with Arabs. The so called Jewish prophets feature prominently in Islamic scripture and literature and the message is always the same – worship One God.

“Abraham was the father of the Prophets; no Prophet was sent after him but he was from among his descendents. He had two sons whom God chose to be Prophets. They were Ishmael the grandfather of the Arabs, from among whose descendents God

sent the Prophet Muhammad and Isaac whom God blessed with a son Prophet Jacob, who was also known as Israel, after whom the Children of Israel and their Prophets were called.”[\[1\]](#)

“And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, each of them We guided, and before him, We guided Noah and among his progeny David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good-doers. And Zachary and John and Jesus and Elias, each one of them was of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot and each one of them We preferred above the humankind and jinn (of their times).” (Quran 6:84-86)

Historically, Jews and Muslims have shared their cultures and prospered together, sometimes for centuries. This connection is best reflected in the 700 years of Muslim rule in Spain, at that time known as Andalusia. It was here that Jews held some of the most important political positions, were doctors to the Muslim rulers, and generated profound philosophical theories. Maimonides lived and wrote *The Guide to the Perplexed* (a discussion of some of the most difficult theories of theology) in Cordoba. A statue in his honour stands there still. Jews were able to make great advances in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and chemistry, and this era is sometimes referred to as the Golden age of Jewish culture. In 1492, when Andalusia was overrun by the Catholics and the Muslim rulers deposed, Jews and Muslims fled together to the safety of Muslim lands in North Africa and east toward Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Iraq.

“God does not forbid you from showing goodwill and dealing justly with those (of the unbelievers) who do not fight you because of your religion, nor drive you forth from your homes. God surely loves those who are just. God only forbids you respecting those who fight you on the basis of your religion, and expel you from your homes...” (Quran 60: 8 & 9)

The treatment of both Jews and Christians by Muslims is well documented. The Caliph Omar under whom Jerusalem was conquered about six years after the Prophet's death, not only issued an edict protecting the Christian religious sites, but also invited 70 Jewish families from Tiberias to take up residence in Jerusalem, from which they had been expelled by the Romans. Jews and Muslims have very much in common, the greatest doctrine being their belief in One God, indivisible and accessible.

With so many similarities one could easily ask the question, just why are more Jews not converting to Islam? As mentioned earlier, many are. In the early days of Islam many Jews did in fact convert to Islam and one in particular, Abdullah Ibn Salam, was a close companion of Prophet Muhammad. His story can be read in detail on this web site[\[2\]](#). The following is a short and list of notable Jews who converted to Islam.

- Rashid-al-Din Hamadani - 13th century Persian physician
- Yaqub ibn Killis - 10th century Egyptian vizier.

- Leila Mourad - Egyptian singer and actress of the 1940s and 1950s.
- Lev Nussimbaum - 20th century writer, journalist and orientalist.
- Jacob Querido - 17th century successor of the self-proclaimed Jewish Messiah Sabbatai Zevi.
- Ibn Sahl of Seville - 13th century Andalusian poet.

We actually know very little about the number of Jews who convert to Islam today. However their numbers may be higher than we imagine considering that Islam is, according to Pew,^[3] growing about 2.9% per year. This is faster than the total world population which increases about 2.3% annually. This site has collated what reliable statistical data there and it is available here.^[4]

Data from the state of Israel suggests that the conversion rate of Jews to Islam in Israel has doubled over the past several years. “Jews say they decided to convert after deepening their knowledge of Islam. Many are disappointed in Judaism,” a senior member of the Islamic court said. They are converting even though the Israeli Religious Affairs and Interior Ministries make it very difficult for them. According to one convert, “They are giving me the run around, sending me back and forth from office to office. They made me see a psychiatrist, to ‘make sure I wasn’t brainwashed.’ They did everything so that I would despair and return to Judaism.”^[5]

When you look at all the similarities it certainly appears that it is a small step, not at all a big cognitive leap, for a Jewish believer to slide effortlessly into the religion of Islam. Islam is however a gift from God, and God bestows it on whom He wills.

Footnotes:

[1]

From Usool al-Deen al-Islami by Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibraaheem al-Tuwayjri (with some grammatical amendments)

[2]

(<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/4703/viewall/>)

[3]

The Pew Research Centre is an American think tank organization based in Washington, D.C. that provides information on issues, attitudes and trends shaping the United States and the world.

[4]

(<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/4394/viewall/>)

[5]

(<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3274735,00.html>)

The web address of this article:

<https://webcache001.islamreligion.com/articles/5129/judaism-part-4>

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